

The Works of William Jay

Volume I

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Volume I

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THE
WORKS
OF
WILLIAM JAY.

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THE
WORKS
OF
WILLIAM JAY,

COLLECTED AND REVISED BY HIMSELF.
VOLUME I.

MORNING AND EVENING EXERCISES.
JANUARY TO MARCH.

LONDON:
C. A. BARTLETT, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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AND CHARING CROSS.

**MORNING AND EVENING
EXERCISES,**

FOR

JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH.

BY

WILLIAM JAY.

“Never be without a book in daily reading, of a direct scriptural and devotional tendency.”

HALE.

“The testimonies of thy grace

I set before mine eyes;

Thence I derive my daily strength,

And *there* my comfort lies.”

WATTS.

LONDON:

C. A. BARTLETT, PATERNOSTER ROW.

ADVERTISEMENT.

MANY will bear the Author witness that he has not been forward in sending forth this “WHOLE SERIES OF HIS PUBLICATIONS”—It has been the result of much importunity.

There has been but one entire edition before. This was published in America, and comprised all, or nearly all, that he had written down to the year 1832, when it issued from the press.

With regard to this English impression, it will contain, besides all the Baltimore edition, some prefatory and explanatory notes, with considerable insertions and additions. With regard to the extent of these enlargements he cannot at present absolutely determine; nor, indeed, can he as yet positively ascertain even the number of volumes of which the whole will consist.

But it pleases him to think that persons may purchase anyone particular work, without ordering all the edition, and have it at a much less price than it could have been purchased before.

One alteration has been made in this edition, viz.,

the *uniting* of the Morning and Evening Exercises for every day: before they were in separate volumes. This is deemed a great improvement and convenience, both as to daily perusal at home, or in wishing to take the work as a travelling companion.

Though a volume will be published quarterly, the completion of the whole work will require time, and the Author ought not to forget his age; but, by Divine permission, as he has begun, so he will immediately proceed to finish the arrangement of all the materials, so that the execution may go on should he not live to witness the end.

Considering the haste in which (from the pressure of engagements and interruptions) the principal of the publications have been written, and the imperfections found in them (of which no one is more sensible than himself), and the ordeals they have had to pass in this critical age, wherein so many get their subsistence by detecting and by publishing faults,—the writer is not only surprised, but ought to be thankful that nearly all these works have had such an extensive and continued circulation and acceptance, both at home and abroad.

Though the series extends through no small period, he blesses God that the whole is free from novelities, and will not be found affected with the vagaries and whimsies, and lo! heres, and lo! theres (all

deemed divine at the time of their prevalence, and urged with exclusive zeal), through which he has frequently passed during a ministry of considerably more than half a century. This may be ascribed to prejudice, or to obstinacy of belief, or to the absence of metaphysical acumen, by which, as Bacon observes, a man, like an owl, can see in the dark, or the want of patience and ability to open the seals and blow the trumpets;—but whatever may be the supposed cause, he is not ashamed to acknowledge that, “having tasted the new wine,” he says “the old is better;” or, to change the metaphor, to “walk in the good old paths;” and to “go forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed his kids beside the shepherds’ tents.”

And may not the Author be justified in saying that the following volumes enlarge chiefly, yea wholly, on those general and important truths in which all the subjects of Divine grace nearly accord?

In such multiplied pages, a writer’s own more particular views on some subjects can hardly be concealed from a judicious reader. But he need not be afraid of this while he knows that he advances nothing intentionally to offend persons who differ from him, or which, indeed, from the manner of its announcement or implication, *can* give offence to *those* who subscribe cordially to a decision which settles all dis-

putes without terminating them, and which unites and harmonises by a better principle than sameness of opinion. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day regardeth it unto the Lord, and he that regardeth not the day to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth eateth to the Lord, far he giveth Gad thanks; and he that eateth not to the Lard he eateth not and giveth God thanks: far none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; far whether we live we live unto. the Lord, and whether we die we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

WILLIAM JAY.

*Percy Place,
9th Nov. 1841.*

TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
LORD AND LADY BARHAM,
THIS WORK,
WITHOUT ANY OF THAT ADULATION
WHICH WOULD LEAD *THEM* TO DESPISE THE AUTHOR,
AND THE
AUTHOR TO DESPISE *HIMSELF*,
IS

DEDICATED:

as a small testimony to personal amiableness,
relative excellency,
domestic virtue, and evangelical religion:
as a lively expression of hope,
that their offspring may call their parents blessed, in
following their example:
as a grateful acknowledgment of the instances of their
friendship, with which he has been favoured:
and,
as affording an opportunity
to subscribe himself thus publicly, with every
sentiment of respect and esteem,
his lordship
and her ladyship's
obliged and humble servant,

WILLIAM JAY

Bath; Dec. 26th, 1828

PREFACE.

A PUBLICATION is not rendered improper or needless, because works of a similar nature have preceded it. Little would ever issue from the press, if such a principle were admitted. For what new thing is, there under the sun? Neither is an author in this case supposed to undervalue the labours of those who have gone before him. He only adds to their number, with his own probabilities of excitement. And *he* may awaken fresh attention in the minds even of those who have made use of his predecessors; while he may fall into the hands of some who have to begin this kind of reading. Every author, too, has not only his own connections, but his own manner; and thus, as the tastes of readers vary, more individuals can be gratified.

The following pages, it is believed, will be found to differ a little from works of the same species; especially in making the Exercises always express more fully the import of the textual motto at the head of them; in the arrangement of a greater diversity of subjects; in the selection of more passages from the less observed and less improved parts of Scripture; and in the seizure of hints of instruction from the more indirect and incidental strokes of the Sacred Penmen.

The Author confesses the work was much more arduous in the execution than he had apprehended in, the prospect. The *chief* difficulty arose from the

necessity of so much compression and brevity. It was found no easy thing, in two or three pages, not only to secure the spirit of the passage, but to give it some illustration and effect, by glimpses of scenery, and glances at historical facts and traits of character—where diffusion and particularity were forbidden. While he makes no scruple to avow that this was his wish and design, he laments sincerely that he has not more perfectly succeeded in accomplishing them. Leisure, and an *exclusive* devoting of himself to the plan, for some months, or even weeks, might have yielded something more satisfactory. But complaint is useless, and apology vain. He has done, in his circumstances, what he could. And it yields him pleasure to think, that, besides some other works of a general nature for the religious public, and especially several for the use of families, he has now produced something more *particularly* for the Closet.

The writer has always been attached to publications of this kind; and, from his own experience, and observation, he is convinced of their adaptation to usefulness. He cannot but wish that Christians would read *the Scripture itself* more; and endeavour to *reflect themselves* on the passages, which, either in a continued course, or in selections at the time, come before them. The power of doing this would improve by the use; and the pleasure and advantage resulting from the facility, would amply reward any difficulty in the acquisition. But it is to be lamented, many do *not* reflect: and so the customary and cursory perusal, for *want of thought*, produces little impression; and the paragraph or chapter—or, it may be, even chapters—are immediately forgotten. But a verse or sentence, separately placed before the eye,

is more distinctly remarked; and, being illustrated in a brief and lively comment, is more easily remembered. To supply such assistance cannot be reckoned an attempt to lead people from the word of God, but to it: and it may teach those who use it, in time, to do for themselves, what it may be necessary at first in another to do for them.

As to the subjects of these exercises, the Author has aimed to blend doctrine, experience, and practice, together. There is danger of Antinomianism when the attention is *too exclusively* called to doctrinal points; of enthusiasm, when it is too exclusively attached to experimental; and of legality, when it is too exclusively confined to practical. It is the proportioned admixture of sentiment, feeling, and duty, that qualifies each; and renders them all, not only safe, but profitable. The writer, also, has not limited himself to the usual mode of making the subjects of such meditations always of the *consolatory* kind. Christians, in the divine life, want something besides comfort. They are to have their pure minds stirred up, by way of remembrance; to suffer the wore 1 of exhortation; to hear the reproofs of wisdom; to walk humbly with God, and wisely with men. Indeed, the best way to gain comfort is not always to seek it *directly*, but mediately: and the medium may require self-denial and patience. It is the same with comfort as with reputation; it is more certainly secured as a consequence, than by making it a mere design.

The writer has not often put the Exercise into the form of a soliloquy, or generally expressed himself in the language of the first person. He found the common mode of address better suited, especially to the explanatory and hortative parts of his design. Why

should not the reader consider himself the *addressed*, rather than the *speaker*? and, by immediate *application*, make, as much as possible, the reflections his own?

As to the style itself, what was principally designed for pious use in retirement could not be too clear, easy, forcible and pointed; too much abounding with terse briskness, and naïveté of expression; too free from the tameness and smoothness by which common, but important truths are aided to slide down from the memory into oblivion.

In no less than seven hundred and thirty exercises, there may be some coincidences; and the same thought, image, or example, may occur more than once—It was hardly possible to prevent it, as the whole series could not be kept in memory, or be continually compared. As the work advanced, the subjects too frequently *increased* in length, beyond the bounds he had prescribed himself—The case was: the printer pressed upon him—and he had not time to be shorter.

But enough of this. The Author commends the work to that part of the pious Public who love and practise retreat; who wish not only to *read* the Scriptures alone, but to observe their beauties, and advantages; who, while they neglect not their *own* meditations, are thankful to derive help from others—and often exclaim, “A word fitly spoken, how good is it!”—who wish to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long; who would not have their religion a visitor, but an inmate; who would speak of divine things, not by a kind of artificial effort, but out of the abundance of the heart; and who know how much it conduces to our sanctification to keep the mind filled

with good things, not only as these will exclude base intrusions, but will be sure to leave somewhat of their own tinge and likeness behind.

As to readers of *this* character, the Author trusts the materials here furnished will not be unacceptable, of whatever religious denomination they may be found. He considers the community in which, by the providence of God, he himself labours, not as a party, but only as a part; and he is not an enemy to the whole army, because he is attached to his own corps. He does not oppose, but co-operate. He has not attempted in these volumes to suppress the leading sentiments which he holds; but he has not harshly obtruded them: nor has he availed himself of opportunities to bring forward those particular views, in subordinate matters, in which he may think differently from others. He readily allows that every man has a right to state and defend the opinions which he has derived from conviction: but his love should be a bound in knowledge and in all judgment; and he should regulate the degree of his zeal by the importance of the subject. He is also persuaded that, in those cases, the statement and the defence should be effected in a work avowedly for the purpose; and not be introduced into a publication adapted to *general* edification. How much less circulation and usefulness would Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion*, and other good books, have obtained, had their authors inserted their own minor partialities, and attacked those of others! In reading a valuable volume where such things are found, we *should* resemble the ox in the meadow, who, when he comes to a tuft of grass he dislikes, does not grow angry, and attempt to tear it up with his horns and hoofs,

but placidly leaves it, and feeds on in the large and rich pasturage. But all have not this “meekness of wisdom.” The prejudices of many are powerful, and quickly excited; and, meeting with a passage in the beginning of a work—by no means essential to its design—they throw it instantly aside, and lose all the pleasure and benefit it would otherwise have afforded them.

The Work will meet the wishes of those who have not the command of much time for private engagements. And this is the case with many in our day, not only from the avocations of civil life, but even from the calls of religious beneficence. More leisure, indeed, in many instances, might be secured by earlier rising, and by more skill, and order, and diligence, in the management of all our affairs: yet the period in which we live is peculiar; and the calls of God to labour in doing good, in so many civil and sacred charities, leave it not *our* duty, to retire and read by the hour as our forefathers did.

He hopes a book of this nature will be a suitable companion to those whose advanced years and infirmities will not allow of deep, laborious, and lengthened perusals. What is preferable for them, is something easy, and short, and *very Scriptural*. It is observable how much more aged believers delight in God’s word than in reading any other works. It is their “necessary food,” and “their dainty meat,” when their appetite for other things fails. It is their solace when the evil days are come in which they have no pleasure. It is their support and their reliance in weakness and weariness; and they use it, not for amusement, but for relief only. Thus we have seen a man walling forth gaily in the morning, carrying

his staff under his arm, or twirling it in his hand: but, worn with the toils and fatigues of the day, we have seen him returning home in the evening leaning and pressing it at every weary step.

The Work also will suit the afflicted. Retirement and devotion seem congenial with trouble; and the sufferer naturally turns to them for succour and comfort. But many of the distresses of life prevent, or abridge the resources they render so desirable and needful. What changes have many experienced by losses and reductions! They are called from freedom and ease to the care of thought, the shiftings of contrivance, and the exertion of labour. Where now is the leisure they once enjoyed for their secluded employments of piety? Their hours of composure are fled, and have only left them hurried and broken moments. They can only sip of the brook in the way.

May the Author presume that he may be of some little service to some of his brethren in the ministry; not only by aiding their retirement, as Christians—and they have to save themselves, as well as those that hear them—but by throwing out hints that may lead them to think for the pulpit, and furnishing, occasionally, outlines of discourses, which they can have the merit of filling up?

He cannot also but wish to be useful to another interesting class—the sources of our future families, and the hopes of our churches. Here he is tempted to insert an extract from one of the letters he received, stimulating him to this undertaking. The name of the writer would add weight to his remarks; but it is concealed, because he is not apprised of the liberty now taken—and his hints were not intended to meet

the public eye. This excellent, learned, and judicious friend thus expresses himself—"I have ventured to put upon paper the idea I have conceived of a series of daily contemplations or reflections, which, among others, shall be adapted to be put into the hands of intelligent and educated *youth*. I have a sincere veneration for the intentions of Bogatzky, and other similar authors: but there is such a paucity of thought, such a poverty of expression, such a narrowed range of ideas, such a ringing of changes, incessantly, on a few topics, without gracefulness, or variety, as to render the books exceedingly unattractive to the present rising generation. In these cases I conceive we are bound to provide—as far as we can—that the food presented to their minds may not disgust, by the manner in which it is served up; and that, when we put important truth in their way, it should be encumbered with as few external obstacles as the case will admit.—Good sense, you have lately told us, is good taste: and that, I consider, is both good sense and good taste, in devotion, which would present to every mind—without the sacrifice of a particle of Divine truth—such an exterior as may invite, rather than repulse. He who has once been effectually gained over to the love of the Gospel, will retain his affection for it under a very homely form; but he who has yet to be won, will require of us, as to our first addresses, some attention to his understanding as well as to his heart.—My view, then, my dear Sir, is, that the selection of texts should involve the whole range of revealed truth; and should present it in that combined form in which the Scripture exhibits it: where doctrine, duty, and privilege, blend like the colours that form the pure brightness of light

where religion is never exposed to view, as a bare skeleton, but as endued with all the properties of life, and in actual existence. Pithy sayings; wise experiences; urgent examples; faithful warnings; should revolve daily beneath the eye, and shew the reader all that religion has done for others; all it aims to do for him; and all the evils that result from the absence of her beneficence. Testimonies, also, such as that of Chesterfield to the Vanity of the World, which he had so fully tried; dying experiences, such as that of Rochester; confessions of the value of religion, such as are found in the Letters of Burns; and passages from eminent and striking lives; might be introduced, in your own way, briefly prefaced, or commented upon. Thus the whole might allure, by its variety; interest, by the reach of thought to which it leads; and profitably keep before the mind of youth, amidst daily temptations, what religion *can* do for them, and what the world and other things never can do."

Perhaps, however, if I am not accused of vanity. in making this extract from my correspondent, I shall be chargeable with imprudence, in publishing a recommendation which, though I admire, I have so much failed in following.

Percy Place,

Dec. 26th, 1828.

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		Book.	Ch.	Verse.
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XXIV MORNING AND EVENING EXERCISES. JANUARY TO MARCH

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23	Morning—Confidence from knowledge	2 Tim.	1	12
	Evening—The Prince and his People.	Ezek.	46	10
24	Morning—Walking in God's truth	Psalm	86	11
	Evening—The devout Resolution	Psalm	5	7
25	Morning—The privileges of the Upright	Psalm	37	18
	Evening—The blessed Strait	Phil.	1	23
26	Morning—The willing Sacrifice	Phil.	1	24,26
	Evening—God's word and works	John	14	29
27	Morning—The Saviour's agency	Mark	7	37
	Evening—No Creature a substitute for God	Gen.	30	2
28	Morning—Satan disappointed	John	14	30
	Evening—Gentleness	Gal.	5	22
29	Morning—The gracious Purpose	1 Thess.	5	9
	Evening—Active resignation	2 Sam.	15	15
30	Morning—Departure of Christ desired	Matt.	8	34
	Evening—Faith, love, and hope	Col.	1	4,5
31	Morning—The Saviour's obedience	John	14	31
	Evening—Spiritual engrafting	James	1	21

MORNING AND EVENING EXERCISES.

JANUARY I.—MORNING.

“On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle.”—EXOD. xl. 2.

AND why was this period chosen for the erection? God has always reasons for his conduct; but he does not always “give account of any of his matters.” We may however make two remarks here. First. Things that are the same to God, are not the same to us. Our goodness extendeth not to him: religion regards the exigencies of man; and when these are subserved; its provisions will be needless. John saw no temple in the New Jerusalem. All places are alike to God; yet we never feel in a common dwelling the solemnity that seizes us in the sanctuary. The first day of the year was no more to God than any other; but it would render the service more memorable and impressive to the people. Therefore says he, “On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle.” Secondly. It is well to begin a new year with some good work; and to commence serving God after a new manner.

And have *we* no tabernacle to set up on this first day of this first month?

Let us begin the year with solemn reflection—and say, with Job, “When a few years are come, I shall

go the way whence I shall not return. Let me not only believe this; but think of it, and feel the importance of the sentiment. Yes; in a little time I shall be no more seen. How—where—shall I then be disposed of? The seasons will return as before: but the places that now know me will know me no more for ever. Will this be a curse? or a blessing? If I die in my sins, I shall return no more to my possessions and enjoyments; to the calls of mercy; to the throne of grace; to the house of prayer! If I die in the Lord, I shall, O blessed impossibility! return no more to these thorns and briars; to this vain and wicked world; to this aching head; to this throbbing heart; to these temptations and troubles, and sorrows and sins.

Let us begin the year with self-inspection—and say, with the chief butler, “I do remember my faults this day.” “We are prone to think of the failings of our fellow-creatures, and often imagine because we are free from *their* faults that *we* are faultless. But we may have other faults; we may have worse; and while a mote is in our brother’s eye a beam may be in our own. Let us be open to conviction. Let us deal faithfully with our own hearts. Let us not compare ourselves with others, and especially the more vile of our fellow-creatures; but with our advantages; with our knowledge; with our professions; with the law of God.

Let us begin the year with a determination to abandon whatever appears sinful—and say, with Elihu, “If I have done iniquity, I will do no more.” Should the evil course or the evil passion solicit, let it plead in vain while the Saviour—Judge says—“If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy mem-

bers should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

Begin the year with pious and personal dedication—and say, with David, “Lord, I am thine; save me.” Through him who is the way, yield yourselves unto God. It is your reasonable service. He has infinite claims to you. You will never be truly your own till you are his.

Begin the year with relative religion; and if the worship of God has never been established in your family, now commence it—and say, with Joshua, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” A family without prayer is like a house without a roof. It is uncovered and exposed: and we know who has threatened to pour out his fury upon the families that call not upon his Name.

Begin the year with fresh concern to be useful—and ask, with Saul of Tarsus, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Let me look at my condition; my resources; my opportunities. How can I glorify God and promote the welfare of my fellow-creatures? Is there not a Bible to circulate? Are there not Missionaries to support? Are there none perishing for lack of knowledge that I can myself instruct? Have I no irreligious neighbours to reclaim? Are there no poor to relieve? No widows and fatherless to visit?

Begin the year with more conduct in the arrangement of your affairs, and resemble Ezra and his brethren, who “did according to the custom, as the duty of every day required.” God has said, let everything be done decently and in order. Much of your

comfort will arise from regularity in your meals, in your devotions, in your callings; and your piety will be aided by it. Have a place to receive everything; an end to simplify it; a rule to arrange it. Leave nothing for the morrow that ought to be discharged to-day. Sufficient for each period will be its own claims; and your mind ought to be always at liberty to attend to fresh engagements.

Finally. Time—this short, this uncertain, this all-important time—upon every instant of which eternity depends, will not allow of our trifling away any of its moments. Resolve therefore to redeem it. Gather up its fragments, that nothing be lost. Especially rescue it from needless sleep: and if you have hitherto accustomed yourself to the shameful indulgence of lying late in bed, begin the new year with the habit of early rising; by which you will promote your health and improvement of every kind, and live much longer than others in the same number of days—and say, with David, “My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.”

And if this be your determination, the season will be the date of your happiness. God himself says, “From this day will I bless you.”

JANUARY I.—EVENING.

“And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.”—ACTS xx. 22, 23.

PAUL here speaks of himself as an Apostle. But the facts he expresses with regard to his official destination, will apply to our experience as men and as

Christians. And we may derive from them a reflection peculiarly seasonable, at the commencement of another annual period of our time—With regard to the future, he was both ignorant and informed; unacquainted with some things, but well apprised of others.

Though Paul sometimes prophesied, he could not command the attribute of foreknowledge when he pleased. The use of it was always a miracle, and limited to a particular subject. He was therefore left uninformed of the ordinary course of life, and had to learn the will of God by events. Hence he says to the Philippians, "I hope presently to send Timothy, as soon as I see how it will go with me." It is the same with us; and as he was now going up to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that would befall him there, so are we entering into another year, not knowing what a day may bring forth. But is this to be lamented? "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight." The concealment is wise and kind. We may judge of this by our past feelings. Had we been previously informed of the scenes through which we have passed, our hearts would have failed at the thought: yet when the dispensations came, we were able to bear them, and had been really, though unconsciously prepared for them. And suppose we were now informed of some of the changes we may be called to endure in the months before us,—we should be seized perhaps with an overpowering surprise and oppression, rendering us dead to all present enjoyments, and incapable of every present engagement. He therefore says, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known:

I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight: these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”

Let us trust in him. He claims the full confidence of the heart, not only by his goodness, but by his wisdom. Although we go out not knowing whither we go, he knoweth the way that we take. Nothing can deceive or perplex our Guide. Especially let us check the workings of a vain curiosity. To this we are naturally prone. All pant to draw back the veil, and pierce into futurity. But none are entrusted with its secrets. Even our Lord's own disciples were rebuked for wishing to know the times and the seasons which the Father reserved in his own power. This advice will be found to be not only our duty, but our privilege—our “strength,” here, “is to sit still.” We may consider the year before us, as a desk containing three hundred and sixty-five letters, addressed to us, one for every day, announcing its trials, and prescribing its employments—with an order to open daily no letter but the letter for the day. Now we may be strongly tempted to unseal beforehand some of the remainder; but this would only serve to embarrass us, while we should violate thereby the rule our Owner and Master has laid down for us “Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

But Paul's ignorance was not entire. Though he knew not *what* in particular would befall him at *Jerusalem*, yet the Holy Ghost testified that in every place bonds and afflictions awaited him; so that he was sure of one thing—sure of being always a sufferer, for the sake of the Lord Jesus. And thus it is

with us. Though the future is not laid open to our view, yet it is not concealed from us in every respect and degree. Though we know not what is to come in the detail, we can apprehend much of it in the mass. Indeed without some reliance on the general course of things we could not properly carry on the system of life. Many of our present duties derive their existence and importance from some future relations. Instinct, in the brute creation, teaches them to look forward: and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming; and the ant provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in harvest. And is reason given us in vain? Or is there nothing for it to operate upon beyond the present hour? "The prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself," says the Scripture. And the same authority adds, "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee."

With regard then to the future, in every period, relation, and condition of life, some things may be reckoned upon. Thus, in the natural world, we know that the seasons will come round in their time and place with little variation. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease."

We also know that the general state and usages of society will be what they ever have been. "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us."

We are sure no creature—possessions and enjoyments will fully meet our hopes and wishes. They never have produced satisfaction. They were never designed to do it—They are incapable of doing it.

We may certainly expect that trials of one kind or another will be our lot. They grow out of our very state and nature. “Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.”

We must be infatuated if we are not aware that all our connections here are precarious. Some may abandon us from insincerity; some may leave us from infirmity: some may be removed to a distance by events; some may be laid in the grave. Need we be informed that the desire of our eyes is mortal? That childhood and youth are vanity?

Can we be ignorant that with growing years we are to look for growing privations and weaknesses? That our senses will decay, that desire will fail, that the grasshopper will be a burden? It is the tax of age. “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow: for it is soon cut off, and we flyaway.”

For the living know that they shall die. It is the way of all the earth: and whatever may be doubtful when we look onward, there is not a human being but can say, “I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.” He knows also that the event cannot be far off—and may be very near.

And is this all that we are apprized of? No. We also know that God will be found the same he always has been—We know that he will always prove himself the hearer of prayer—We know that he will

never leave us nor forsake us—We know that our shoes shall be iron and brass; and as our days so shall our strength be—We know that he will guide us with his counsel, and afterward receive us to glory.

JANUARY 2.—MORNING.

“I will surely do thee good.”—GEN. xxxii. 12.

THIS is a blessed assurance with which to enter a new year, not knowing what a day may bring forth. But what have *we* to do with this promise? It was given immediately to Jacob: but it equally belongs to every Israelite indeed; for he never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain. Promises made on particular occasions are intended for general use and advantage. Paul, referring to the words with which God had encouraged Joshua, applies them to the believing Hebrews: “Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. So that *we* may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” And Hosea, alluding to God’s intercourse with Jacob even at Bethel, says, “And there he talked with *us*.”

The very brevity of the promise is a recommendation. We complain of our memories; but we can retain these six golden words, “I WILL SURELY DO THEE GOOD.” It is also the better for being indefinite. Some promises insure an individual blessing: but we are a mass of wants; and this assurance is a comforter that meets every fear, every anxiety, every wish. It sets the mind completely at rest with regard to any possible contingencies. It tells us to be “careful for

nothing." It enjoins us to "cast all our care upon him, for *He* careth for us." But though specifying nothing in particular, the promise leaves our hope to range at large—yet it is to keep within the compass of our *real* welfare. "They that seek the Lord shall not want any *good* thing." "I will surely do thee *good*."

Now the meaning of this assurance must be understood, or else it will not harmonize with experience. The people of the world have often reproached those, who profess to be the blessed of the Lord, with their poverty and distress; and have asked, "Where is *now* your God?" And they themselves have sometimes been perplexed and dismayed. Gideon said, "If God be with us, why then is all this evil befallen us?" And Jacob said, "All these things are against me." In an agreeable mansion, and enjoying all the comforts of life, no difficulty may be felt from the language of God: but what is Joseph in prison—what is Job among the ashes—what is he who says, All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning—what is *he* to make of the promise—"I will surely do thee good?" We must confide in the judgment of God, and distrust our own. We are short-sighted creatures, and easily imposed upon by appearances; and know not what is good for us in this vain life which we spend as a shadow. But *He* cannot be mistaken. A wise father will choose far better for his infant than the infant can choose for himself. We must always distinguish between what is pleasing and what is profitable. Correction is not agreeable to the child; yet it is so good for him, that he who spareth the rod hateth his son. Medicine is unpalatable; but it is good for the patient, and renewed

health will more than reconcile him even to the expense of it. The vine-dresser does the tree good, not by suffering the wanton shoots to grow on draining the sap, but by pruning it that it may bring forth more fruit. What said David? "It is good for me,"—that I have prospered? that I have risen from obscurity? that I conquered Goliath? that I gained a victory in the Valley of Salt? No: but it is good for me—that Doeg impeached me, that Saul hunted me like a partridge on the mountains, that Absalom drove me from my palace, that Shimei cursed me on the hill, that sickness brought down my life to the ground—"it is good for me that I have been afflicted." "We must also look to the conclusion of events. Things good in themselves, with regard to us may result in evil; and things evil in themselves may issue in good. Abraham spake according to our present estimations when he said to the rich man, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus evil things." But had we known them both before death, and been assured that the one would have been comforted, and the other tormented, so soon, we should have judged the poverty and distresses of Lazarus to have been the "good things," and the wealth and luxury of the rich man the "evil things." All is ill that ends ill. All is well that ends well.

But let us believe the truth of this declaration. There are four steps by which we may reach the conclusion. The first regards His sufficiency. He is *able* to do us good. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. There is no enemy but he can conquer; no exigence but he can relieve. He is able to do exceeding

abundantly above all we can *ask* or *think*.—The second regards his inclination. He is *disposed* to do us good, His love is not only real, but passes knowledge. He feels towards us as his jewels, his friends, his children, his bride. He rests in his love, and joys over us with singing.—The third regards his engagement. He is *bound* to do us good. We have not only his word, but his oath; an oath sworn by himself, because he could swear by no greater; and confirmed by the blood of an infinite sacrifice.—The fourth regards his conduct. He *has* done us good. We have had complaints enough to make of others, but of him we are compelled to say, “Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord.” His goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our lives. How often has he turned the shadow of death into the morning!

But when I look at the cross, I see not only proof, but demonstration. He *has* done already far more than *remains* to *be* done. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

JANUARY 2.—EVENING.

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”—2 COR. vi. 2.

THE importance of opportunity is readily acknowledged, and generally if not universally acted upon, with regard to temporal things. The seafaring man, with prudence and diligence, avails himself of the winds and the tides. The husbandman, when the precious produce of the field is to be secured, is all anxiety and eagerness, lest he should lose a shining

hour—and hence it early became a proverb, “He that gathereth in summer is a wise son, he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.” There are interesting conjunctures, and peculiar seasons, which never return; but, according as they are seized or neglected, decide the reputation and the condition of a man for life. But *here* we have an opportunity announced, as superior to every other opportunity, in its relations and consequences, as the soul is superior to the body, and eternity to time—an opportunity to gain acceptance with God, and salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ—“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

This “now” takes in the whole period of the gospel dispensation, or the duration of the mediatorial reign of Christ. At present he is exalted at the right hand of God to be a Prince and a Saviour; to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins. He is the great High Priest over the house of God, to introduce our persons and services; and while we are reconciled by his death, we are saved by his life. For he is now living a life of office, as well as of glory.—But this will not continue always. It is commensurate only with the continuance of the world. “Then cometh the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father.” This, in the whole of it, is a very extensive period. It has continued long, and will probably continue many ages longer. But this can only encourage us with regard to mankind successionaly. It is delightful to think that what those have found the Saviour to be who went before, those also will find him to be that shall come after us: for he is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,” But as individuals, our season is far less

lengthened. At death, the angel swears, with regard to us, that “time shall be no longer.”

This “now” therefore is to be considered as the period of life. Patients have been recovered when they seemed incurable, and have been sent back from the very borders of the grave. Persons have been resuscitated when the functions of nature had ceased, and the principle of life seemed extinguished. So some have been saved at the eleventh hour, and they have adored the longsuffering of God, which proved their salvation—But the redemption of the soul is precious, and after our present state ceaseth for ever. If there be hope to persons then, it is among the reserves of Divine goodness; he has not been pleased to reveal it. Origen and his brethren of the same sentiment were called the merciful doctors: but should their notion be a mistake, and those that rely on it be confounded for ever, *they* ought to be called the merciful doctors who, knowing the terrors of the Lord, persuade men to flee from the wrath to come. But in this view how precious and all-important is life—

“Life is the time to serve the Lord,
The time t’ ensure the great reward;
And while the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return.”

And how instantly and zealously should we avail ourselves of the only season! Especially when we consider how short, and how uncertain the continuance of it is. Another of the threescore years and ten, or of the fifty, or forty, or twenty, that measure the whole extent, is gone,—

“And every beating pulse we tell,
Leaves but the number less.”

And, O my soul! how many strokes remain! There is but a step between me and death—

“Great God! on what a slender thread

Hang everlasting things!

The eternal state of all the dead

Upon life’s feeble strings!”

But this “now” takes in, as distinguished from life at large, every period peculiarly favourable to religion. Youth is such a period. The young have fewer of the cares that perplex and engross us as we plunge deeper into the concerns of this life. Their hearts, though evil, are not yet hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Their consciences, though defiled, are not yet seared as with a hot iron. Their memories, though limited, are not yet choked up with the lumber of the world. Their affections are warm; their strength is firm; their connections are as yet optional: life is fresh; nature is inviting—and amidst all these advantages, Grace says, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth: while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.”—Such a period is the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man. It befriends his civil comfort, his bodily health, and his mental improvement. But it chiefly regards his spiritual and eternal welfare. What a gracious appointment, to draw us once a week out of the world for a whole day—to afford us leisure to examine our character and condition before God—to remind us, in the midst of all other engagements, that one thing is needful—and to urge us, by a thousand motives, to “choose that good part which shall not be taken away from us.” How many have found

“the holy of the Lord” an accepted time, and a day of salvation!—Affliction is also such a period. It matters not from whence our troubles arise; they are designed for our profit—“In their affliction they will seek me early.” They also naturally tend to impress the mind and soften the heart. They show us the evil of sin, and the vanity of the world; and the need we have of a better home than earth, and a better arm than flesh. Many have been chosen in the furnace of affliction beside Manasseh. How foolish to wish to get our trials removed without their being sanctified! How lamentable to lose the benefit of such a season!—Such is a period of religious excitement. It is said in the Gospel, “The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.” And when we see others seeking and finding; delivered from the stings of a guilty conscience, and the tyranny of their passions; becoming meek, and patient, and peaceful, and happy; does it not powerfully call upon us to “take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew;” and to pray to the God of all grace, “Bless me, even me also, O my Father?”—Such is the period in which conscience has been awakened and impressed. Perhaps you have had, more than once, such views and feelings, that it has been said of you, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” It was thus with Felix when he trembled. He felt then as he had never felt before, and as he never felt afterwards. But, instead of cherishing the conviction, he endeavoured to banish it—and succeeded. Go thy way, said he to the preacher, for this time; when I have a convenient season I will send for thee. That season never came. He saw Paul in-

deed several times afterwards, but not a word was said concerning the faith in Christ! Beware! your impressions may die away, and never revive. But can you complain? Did you not oppose or neglect them? Beware! All good is from God, but he will not be trifled with. "My Spirit will not always strive with man." "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

JANUARY 3.—MORNING.

"And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."—JOSH. v. 12.

THIS cessation of the manna is one of the several remarkable occurrences at the crossing of the river Jordan. God is everything to his people. In the wilderness they had no pathway; but he led them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They were in danger; but he was their defence. They had no abode; but he was their dwelling-place; They had no water; but he gave them streams in the desert. They had no provision; but he rained down manna around their tents. So that what Nature refused, Providence furnished; and what could not be derived from the ground, came from the clouds.

When the supplies they brought with them from Egypt were spent, they feared they were going to perish. They forgot the hand that had dried up the sea; and said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? But he gave them bread from heaven, and for forty years they did eat angels' food. What an abundance was necessary for such a multitude! And

what a display of Divine power was here witnessed!—Nor less was it a proof of Divine mercy. Had he dealt with them after their desert, fire would have come down from heaven. instead of food: but as the mother silences the fretful, angry child by giving it not the rod, but the breast, so did his gentleness indulge them. Hence, when they despised the manna as light food, it might have been suspended, and they might have been left to learn the worth of it by the want: but, day after day, year after year, it continued to attend them; and ceased not till the day after they had taken possession of their inheritance, and they had eaten of the old corn of the land.

At length it *did* cease; and wisely too. What was necessary before, became needless now: and what want had endeared, abundance would have despised. This teaches us not to look for extraordinary supplies when relief is to be had in an ordinary way. He who sustained Israel is as almighty as ever; but *we* must plough, and sow, and gather into barns. He who fed Elijah by ravens commands *us* to labour, working with our hand the thing that is good. If a man neglects the means of subsistence, he is not trusting Providence, but tempting it; and is likely to be reminded, by something more than Scripture, that if any man will not work, neither shall he eat. Even in miraculous achievements, what human agency *could* do, was not done supernaturally. When Peter was in prison, the angel of the Lord opened the door, and broke off his fetters—for this Peter could not have done: but he did not take him up in his arms, and carry him out; but said unto him, “Bind on thy sandals and follow me.” Miracles were never needlessly employed. Had they been common, they

would have ceased to be marvellous; the exceptions would have become a general rule. and the whole system of Nature and Providence have been deranged.

The manna was typical. "*I am,*" said Jesus, "that bread of life." As the manna came down from heaven, and preserved the Israelites from famine, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And the Saviour surpasses the emblem. The manna was for the body: he saves the soul. The manna could not preserve from death always: but they who partake of him live for ever. The manna was confined to *one* people: he gave his flesh for the life of the world. He, therefore, is the *true* bread.

And shall this cease? Far from it. You shall live by him, as well as with him, for ever.

Yet there will be a great difference between your present and your future experience. Many things now necessary will then be done away. Conjecture, opinion, reasoning, will give place to knowledge. Now we walk by faith; then we shall walk by sight. Now we are saved by hope; then hope will cease in fruition. Love will continue for ever; but charity and mercy can have no object, no exercise, there. We shall be still praising him; but prayer, and preaching, and baptism, and the Lord's Supper, will have no place. We can dispense with the channels when we are at the fountain-head; and with the types when we have the reality. We are now glad when they say unto us, "Let us go into the house of the Lord;" but says John. "I saw no temple there; but the glory of God and of the Lamb were the light thereof." When that

which is perfect is come, that which is in part will be done away. The fare of the wilderness will be superseded by the produce of Canaan.

JANUARY 3.—EVENING.

“Which things the angels desire to look into.”—I PET. i. 12.

HAD we only heard of such an order of beings as angels, with all the attributes the Scripture ascribes to them; and then have been told, that there were several subjects with which they were intensely anxious to be acquainted; how eagerly should we have inquired what these things were! And had we been left to conjecture, it is probable we should have been led astray—yea, it is certain we should have been led astray, had we conjectured under the influence of the spirit of the world. For what do they study? What do merchants, princes, statesmen, study? What do the sons of science and learning study? What are the acquirements by proficiency in which men are distinguished among their fellow creatures, and left on the pinnacle of fame?—But what do *angels* desire to look into? The arts of trade? The secrets of government? The researches of philosophy? The mysteries of nature? No. But the salvation of sinners; the grace of God; the sufferings and glory of Christ—“Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto

you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.”

Now this fact is announced, not for our amusement, but profit. It shows us what is the necessary condition of all creatures, however high in the scale of being. It is a state of dependence, deficiency, and progressive improvement. Some imagine, as soon as we enter heaven we shall reach an ultimatum beyond which there will be no additions to our knowledge or enjoyment. Such a stagnation of existence, devoid of prospect, energy, and excitement, would be far from desirable, if it were possible—but it is not possible. The future life is called “that which is perfect;” and it *is* perfect, compared with the present: but it is not absolutely so. There is only one Being who is absolutely perfect, whose duration is not lengthened by time, and whose knowledge is not increased by discovery. Nothing is past or future with him. His understanding is infinite. But angels are creatures, and therefore finite in their faculties as well as we. He chargeth his angels with folly. There are many things of which they are ignorant. Our Lord assures us they know not the day of judgment. The book in the Revelation, whatever were the mysteries it contained, was closed to angels as well as men: for no one in *heaven*, as well as in the earth, was able to open the book and to look therein, till it was unsealed by the Lord of All. Angels know much now of which they were formerly unconscious, and fresh springs of knowledge and enjoyment are continually opening to them, and calling for a new song of wonder and of praise.

Does it not also show us the vastness of the Gospel?

A very inferior master may teach the ignorant; but the honour is to be able to instruct the wise and learned. We should think very highly of one who could have improved Handel in music, and Milton in poetry, and Newton in philosophy. But angels are the flower of the creation: they are always spoken of in the Scripture as proverbial for their knowledge; they are the first beings in the universe for intelligence; and are as much above men in their faculties as the heavens are higher than the earth. If to these principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God; if the Gospel can teach *them*—if it can enlighten and enlarge *their* views—if it draws forth *their* wonder and astonishment; how well may it be called “the deep things of God;” “the wisdom of God in a mystery! “If after having been employed in the works of God, and the administrations of his providence, from the beginning; if after all the scenes which have passed under their review for so many ages; if after seeing dispensation succeeding dispensation, in the Patriarchal, the Jewish, and the Christian economies; if after seeing the fulness of time, and the divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost; if after all this—they were still, as Peter asserts, diligently exploring the Gospel, how does it aggrandize the system! This is the system which some suppose may be readily reduced into a form of words drawn up by a fallible man! This is the system whose bounds some imagine they can easily reach, and whose depths they can perfectly fathom! But were they angels, they would exclaim, “O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”

“We learn also the excellency as well as the vastness, the value as well as the immensity of the Gospel. Would such beings as these trifle? Does not their attention prove that the subject is worthy of all acceptance? Why do they study it, but because it is “the Gospel of our salvation;” but because it is “the glorious Gospel of the blessed God;” but because, in redeeming Jacob, he has glorified himself in Israel; but because they find displayed in this scheme more of all his perfections than is to be seen in all his other works? We cannot justly infer the worth of a thing from the attention paid to it by men. They may be compelled by authority, biased by interest, governed by vanity, or led astray by novelty. Even great men have had their follies. Nothing has been brought forward so absurd as not to have attracted to it some names of distinction. And we have always proof enough that to be learned and knowing is not always to be wise. But no objection can lie against the inference we here draw—If angels desire to look into these things, the things deserve to be looked into.

And therefore let us learn what is our duty with regard to them.—Is it not to be thankful that we are favoured with the dispensation of them? Blessed are our eyes, for they see; and our ears, for they hear.—Is it not to study them ourselves? We are deeply, we are infinitely concerned in them. The Being to whom they relate is our Saviour. His history is the record of our eternal redemption. He became poor; he died for us. Let us therefore turn aside from the little, the vain, the vexing, the debasing, the defiling things of the world, and contemplate the great mystery of godliness. Let us never be weary in reading,

in hearing of it. And let us not rest in a speculative acquaintance with it; but taste that the Lord is gracious; and walk in the truth.—Is it not to own them, and confess them, and glory in them before men? I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ—angels are my companions. Is it not to pray that the knowledge of them may be extended, and that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God together?

JANUARY 4.—MORNING.

“As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” DEUT. xxxiii. 25.

DR. Doddridge was one day walking much depressed, his very heart desolate within him. “But,” says he, “passing a cottage door open, I happened at that moment to hear a child reading, ‘As thy days, so shall thy strength be.’ The effect on my mind was indescribable. It was like life from the dead.” Much is often done by a word; and many can say, with Watts,

“And when my spirit takes her fill
At some good word of thine.
Not warriors. who divide the spoil,
Have joys compared with mine.”

And what does *this* word say to *us*? “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” There is strength bodily. The continuance of this is a mercy. How soon, how easily, can it be crushed or reduced, so that we may be made to possess months of vanity, and endure wearisome nights; and feel every exertion a difficulty, and every duty a burden!. But there is strength spiritual. This is very distinguishable from the former, and often found separate from it. The Lord does not always give his people a giant’s arm, or an

iron sinew; but *his* strength is made perfect in weakness. This is the strength here spoken of. For two purposes his people will find it necessary: *service* and *suffering*.

Every Christian has a course of duty common to him as a man. It is, to provide for his outward wants, and the support of his family. And this is done by labour, in which he is required not to be slothful. But there is a series of duties pertaining more immediately to him in his religious character. It is, to believe, to pray, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present evil world. The discharge of his high calling is sometimes expressed by a race, which he is to run with patience. Sometimes also by the life of a soldier. A soldier must not be effeminate, but endure hardness and fatigue. Even his preparations and exercises are often trying—how much more his actual services! And the Christian's enemies possess everything that can render them formidable—and so fights he, not as one that beateth the air.

Suffering is commonly connected with service, in the divine life. It was so invariably in the beginning of the Gospel. Then it was deemed impossible for anyone to live godly in Christ Jesus and not suffer persecution. Therefore no sooner was Paul converted than he was told how great things he had to suffer. As real religion is always the same, some degree of the same opposition may be always looked for; and the hatred of the world *will* be shown as far as they have liberty to express it, and are not restrained by law, or the usages of civilized life. But when the Christian has rest from such trials as these, God can subserve their purpose by personal and relative afflic-

tions, which are often severer than even the endurings of a martyr. They are called chastenings and rebukes, which he is neither to despise nor faint under. They have been the experience of all God's children from age to age. They are not wantonly inflicted; but there is a needs be for them, of which their heavenly Father is the unerring judge; and who—as far as their education and welfare will allow—will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

Now the prospect of all this, when he looks forward into life, is enough to awaken the Christian's anxiety; and nothing can effectually encourage him but the discovery of strength equal to his exigencies. And this he finds not in *himself*. The natural man has no sensibility of his weakness, because he is not earnestly engaged in those applications which require spiritual power. The Christian is. He knows that he is as destitute of strength as he is of righteousness. He feels himself entirely insufficient for all the duties and trials of the divine life. And the consciousness, instead of diminishing, grows with the experience of every day.

And he need not be afraid of this. Rather let him cherish it; for when he is weak, then is he strong. What he wants is provided and ensured by the promise of a God who cannot lie—"As thy days, so shall thy strength be." And as we have heard, so have we seen, in the city of our God. His veracity has been attested by all his people, not one failing. And what says our own experience? "Year after year I have been travelling in an enemy's country, and carrying with me an evil heart, prone to depart from the living God. I have often said, I shall one day perish. But where am I this morning?—Following hard after

God, his right hand upholding me. My prayers have not been always lively and delightful: but I have looked again towards his holy temple; and, through many a benighted hour, I have waited for the Lord. more than they that watch for the morning. I have had no might of my own, and have been often faint; but he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. This is my testimony to the praise of the glory of his grace; and, at the beginning of another year, I thank God, and take courage—

“Here I raise mine Ebenezer:

Hither, by thy help, I’m come;

And I hope, by thy good pleasure,

Safely to arrive at home.”

JANUARY 4.—EVENING.

“Joseph is not, Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.”—GEN. xlii. 36.

THIS was a very sorrowful conclusion. But no part of it was founded in truth. “Joseph is not”—yes, he is—and not only alive—but riding in the second chariot of Egypt. “And Simeon is not”—yes, he is—and only detained for awhile as an hostage for the return of his brethren. “And ye will take Benjamin away”—yes—but not to be destroyed—but to prove a deliverer—and to bring everything to a favourable issue. Let the lad go—and no evil shall befall him—and supplies for thyself and family will soon be brought—and the waggons shall accompany them, sent by Joseph, to carry thee and thy household down into Goshen—where he will nourish thee—and, after the storms of the morning and afternoon of life, thou shalt enjoy a calm and clear evening—and rejoice in the development of a series of

dispensations beyond all that thou couldest ask or think. And what say you now, Jacob? "I have spoken once. but I will proceed no further. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. So foolish was I, and ignorant. I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Just and true are all thy ways, O thou King of saints!—He hath done all things well."

The inference here so groundlessly drawn is not peculiar to Jacob. Nothing is more common than to hear the subjects of Divine grace exclaim, "All these things are against me," when yet "all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth;" and "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." Whence does it proceed? Sometimes they judge under a morbid physical influence. We are not only fearfully, but wonderfully made; and there are many things which would hardly appear credible were they not confirmed by frequent experience. How will a change of weather, or a redundancy or increase of some secretion or fluid, affect not only our feelings, but our views! How tenderly are some to be pitied! How much they constantly suffer from corporeal causes! They see everything through an injured medium; and there is no persuading them often but that the discolorations of the glass are the hues of the objects themselves.

They often err from a deficiency of knowledge with regard to the subject itself. It is not easy to determine what is against us or for us. "Who

knoweth what is good for a man in this life?" Can we always distinguish between appearances and realities? Between the beginning and the end of things? Do we perfectly know ourselves? Do we know what effects untried things will have upon our minds or our conditions? We go forward into futurity with our present views and feelings, not reflecting that other events will produce other views and feelings, and that by circumstances we may become a kind of Dew creatures, which, could they be presented to us in prospect, would occasion more than our wonder. This was the case with Hazael: he abhorred in imagination what he became in reality, by a transition from a private to a public station. What miseries did Lot entail upon himself in choosing the vale of Sodom, because it was well watered as the garden of the Lord! On the other hand, Ruth was early deprived of her husband, and reduced to the lowliness of a gleaner, but met with Boaz in the field, and became the ancestor of the Messiah. A man wished to sail in a particular ship, and to his extreme disappointment found, when he reached the port, that the vessel had just sailed—The next day it was wrecked! and his anguish was turned into joy.

We draw the conclusion also, because we are carnal, and walk as men. We regard our case and indulgence more than our spiritual advantage. If the hedging up of our way with thorns prevents us from going astray, if the sickness of the body secures the health of the soul, if the loss of a creature brings us to God,—surely we cannot say, these things are against us. They are greatly for us; and we should acknowledge this, if we were wise unto salvation, and had our conversation in heaven.

We also err by judging prematurely. "He that believeth maketh not haste." If a man engaged to accomplish a great work in ten years, would it be right to decide concerning it at the end of ten days, or ten weeks? God did not pronounce judgment upon his own Creation till it was done: "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." The end will not only crown all, but explain all; and produce not only satisfaction, but praise. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come. And the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. And blessed are all they that wait for him. In the meanwhile, there is a substitute for the explanations of heaven. It is, in the absence of sight, to walk by faith. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established. But by believing we enter into rest, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeps our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Under the influence of this faith, let us look at his promises; let us think of his perfections; let us review his wonders of old—above all, let us keep near the cross. All our discouragements and perplexities originate in our departure from this. God forbid we should glory in any thing else! It not only opens the kingdom of heaven to all believers, but it is the key to unlock the dispensations of providence. If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? God of love! Thou shalt have all the future confidence of our hearts—

"Our cares, we give ye to the wind,
And shake you off like dust;
Well may we trust our all with Him
With whom our souls we trust."

JANUARY 5.—MORNING.

“And they cast their crowns before the throne.”—REV. iv. 10.

RELIGION distinguishes and elevates. The possessors of it begin to rise on earth; but their dignity is perfected and displayed in heaven.

There they are *crowned*. Racers were crowned. Conquerors were crowned. Benefactors who had saved the life of a fellow-citizen were crowned. Bridegrooms were crowned—Solomon’s mother crowned him in the day of his espousals. Princes on their ascension are crowned. The saints on high are everyone of these characters in. themselves; and the crown each wears is called “a crown of righteousness;” “a crown of life;” “a crown of glory that fadeth not away;” a crown divinely superior to the prize of mortal ambition—“Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.”

Yet, if they are thus honoured, “they cast their crowns before the throne” they approach; testifying by this action from whom they have received them, and confessing that they deem themselves unworthy to wear the honour—all in conformity with the peculiar design of the Gospel constitution, “that no flesh should glory in *his presence*; but, according as it is written, he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord.”

It is no easy thing to bring a man to this temper of mind. It is not natural to him. Naturally, he is as proud as he is poor. Therefore he would be wise, though born as a wild ass’s colt. Therefore, though poverty itself, he says, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing. Therefore, though without strength, he trusts in his own heart; and, though guilty before God, he goes about to establish

his own righteousness. Therefore he is impatient under his affliction, as if he had a right to complain; and unthankful under his mercies, as if he deserved them.

The day of conviction is a day of self-abasement; and in that day the lofty looks of man are brought low. Then he submits himself to God, and begins to walk humbly with him: he admires the patience that has borne with him, and adores the abundant mercy that has saved and called him. The more he advances in the divine life, the more he sinks in his own estimation. "I, who am but dust and ashes." "Behold, I am vile." "Who am I, and what is my father's house?" "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies." "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." The "latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose." "I am not worthy to be called an apostle." "I am less than the least of all saints."—These have been the self-annihilations of men who were all great in the sight of the Lord: and these must be the best proofs, as they will be the certain effects, of *our* growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.

Ignorance is the pedestal of pride; throw down the basis, and the figure falls. But here our knowledge is not complete; hereafter we shall see things in God's own light. Then we shall have other views than we now have of the exceeding sinfulness of sin; of the number and aggravations of our offences; of the greatness of our guilt and desert; of the vastness of our obligations; of the wonders of that love that passeth knowledge in every part of our salvation. Thence will result that fine ingenuous feeling that shrinks back, and is ready to decline a distinguished privilege

—not from dislike, or unwillingness to be under obligation, but from a sense of unworthiness. Did Peter wish to be abandoned of Christ? Yea, he placed all his happiness in his presence: but it was under this feeling, on the sight of the miracle, he exclaimed, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, Lord!”

Some would not think of such abdications were they to enter heaven with their present principles and dispositions; they would rather view their crowns as, of their own deserving, and their own procuring: and feel the spirit of a late Emperor, who, too proud to receive *his* diadem from any other hand than his own, placed himself the crown upon his head. But that world is a world of humility and gratitude. All the dignitaries there cast their crowns before the throne of the Saviour, in whose righteousness alone they are exalted—still praising *him*, and saying—“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto *us*, but unto thy Name give glory, for thy mercy and thy truth’s sake.”

Now, whatever heaven is, we must be disposed and prepared for it before we can enter it. Has then God wrought us for the self-same thing? Has he brought down the pride of our nature, and made us willing to “submit ourselves unto the righteousness of God?” Are we saying, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ?” Is the leading sentiment of the BLESSED now living in our hearts and reigning in our lives —“BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM. NOT I, BUT THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH WAS WITH ME?”

JANUARY 5.—EVENING.

“Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not w hell the time is.” MARK xiii. 33.

It is the language of Jesus, to whom it behoves us always to say, with Samuel, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.” The Christian welcomes his voice, not only in his promises, but in his commands; and not only when he encourages and comforts, but when he reprovés and admonishes.

Here he tells us to take heed. We may consider the caution, First, as to the manner in which it is to be exercised—“Watch and pray.” Watchfulness is wakefulness, in opposition to sleep; attentiveness, in opposition to neglect; and perceptiveness, in opposition to stupidity. To watchfulness is added prayer. Vigilance will not do alone. We must not only be active, but humble. We must not only use means, but depend upon the influence that is necessary to render them effectual; and seek it of Him who never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain.

Secondly, as to the season for which it is to be a preparation, and by which it is to be enforced: H for ye know not when the time is.” Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time of *duty* is. Who can tell, when he leaves his home for a journey, or only for a day, what opportunities, before he returns, may arise to relieve the distressed, to comfort the feeble-minded, to oppose error, or to rebuke vice: opportunities which may never return, and should never be neglected? David therefore said, “On Thee do I wait all the day;” for he knew not what the great Master had for him to do.—Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time of *danger* is. If we consider

the enemy of our souls, the world in which we live, and the sin that dwelleth in us, we may safely conclude that we are never far from temptation. Joseph, in the court of Pharaoh, learned to swear by the life of Pharaoh. Moses, the meekest man upon earth, under irritation, spake unadvisedly with his lips. Even in old age, Solomon's heart, by outlandish women, was drawn away from God. Peter, immediately after the most solemn warnings and professions, denied his Lord with oaths and curses. Barnabas was carried away with the dissimulation of the Jews. Paul was likely to be exalted above measure, by the abundance of his revelations. We are sure to be in danger whenever we deem ourselves secure; for pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Blessed is the man that feareth alway.—Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time of *trouble* is. To this we are born; and therefore we cannot think our trials strange things. Who can tell what a day may bring forth? An accident, a disease, a loss in our circumstances, a family bereavement, may befall us, without warning—"For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." And what, if it finds us unprepared?—Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time of *death* is. The day of trouble may come, the day of death will come: and it is the most solemn and important of all days. For death is not the termination of our being, but only a change of the mode of it, or a transition from a mortal to an immortal state. Then the dust returns to the dust whence it was, and the spirit returns to

God who gave it; and is disposed of according to our character here; for after death, the judgment. The time of our dissolution is not a secret with God; and we are sure that it cannot be far off: but each of us must say, with Isaac, "I know not the day of my death." It may be in the evening, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning. What then is the language of wisdom? Be ye therefore ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!

JANUARY 6.—MORNING.

"Unite my heart to fear thy name."—Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

THE fear of God does not here mean a particular grace of the Spirit, but religion at large. It is common to all writers to express the whole of a thing by a part; but then it ought to be an essential, and a distinguishing part. And "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" and we "perfect holiness in the fear of God."

Religion is nothing without the heart. Yet naturally the heart is alienated from the life of God, and hangs off loosely and carelessly from all the spiritualities of his service. But it must be drawn and attached to divine things; and God alone can accomplish this union. Without his agency, indeed, there may be an outward and professional union; but the ligatures of faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus, will be wanting. To him, therefore must we give the glory of the work, if it has been effected, and to him we must repair if we desire to experience it; encouraged by the assurance, that he

will not fail to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.

But how may I know that he has united my heart to his fear? When we are attached to a thing, we love to hear of it: we think much of it; speak much of it; and delight to remember it. If we are cordially united to an individual, he shares our sympathy: we feel his interests to be our own; we weep when he weeps, and rejoice when he rejoices.. It is the same with a man that is cordially attached to religion; he feels himself to be one with it: when it is assailed, he will endeavour to defend it; when it is wounded in the house of its friends, he will feel the pain: the reproach of it will be his burden; he will pray for its success; he will exult in its prosperity. Are we cordially united to anyone? In the same degree we dislike absence, and dread separation. Thus the attached Ruth said to Naomi, "Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried." And what is the language of a soul under this Divine influence? "Why shouldst thou be a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" "Hide not thy face from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

But was not David's heart united to the fear of God before? It was. But he who has the dawn wishes for the day. He in whom the good work is

begun will always pray, "Perfect that which concerneth me." Who can say, I have attained? I am already perfect? David, as a backslider, prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me:" but there was no period in his life, or advancement in his religion, at which he would not have used the very same prayer—

"Whoever says. 'I want no *more*;

Confesses he has *none*."

The Christian, as long as he feels any reluctance to duty; any dulness in his work; any distractions in his worship; any law in his members warring against the law of his mind; any reason to sigh, When I would do good evil is present with me, and how to perform that which is good I find not—will not cease to pray, "Unite my heart to fear thy Name."

JANUARY 6.—EVENING.

"Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us."—JOHN xiv. 8.

How are we to understand this request? We can hardly suppose, with some, that he desired a kind of personal representation of the Deity. Surely he could not be so ignorant as to imagine that God was in his essence visible, or that he could be held forth under any corporeal form or shape; especially as the Jews—and Philip was a Jew—were forbidden every attempt to make any likeness of the Supreme Being. It is more probable that he wished for some glorious display of God's presence and perfections, as Moses had done, and which he called God's face. If so, he knew not what he asked. The exhibition might have been fatal. "No man," says

God, who knows our frame, “can see my face and live.” Such a display of himself as he makes to the saints in light, would be insupportable in this weak state of flesh and blood. It certainly might have been useless. The Jews *had* such an exhibition of God in the cloud of glory; but they corrupted themselves, and went after strange gods. Extraordinary and miraculous appearances, by their repetition, would lose their impression, yea, they would be extraordinary and miraculous no longer. This is not the way in which God is to be known. Yet let us not revile Philip, concluding that we have never been liable to a like mistake. Have we never wanted a kind of immediate and sensible conviction that would exclude all possibility of doubt? Have we never been ready to exclaim, “Oh! if, with an audible voice, He would say, go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee! Oh! if one who has passed the valley of the shadow of death would return; or some inhabitant of the world of spirits would assure me of a future state!” Ah! foolish wish. We have Moses and the prophets—Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.

But some, and among these is Doddridge, are disposed to commend rather than censure Philip. They take his meaning to be—“Oh! bring us to the knowledge of the blessed God, and we resign every other wish as nothing compared with this!”—much in the spirit of David, who had said of him, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.” Philip, therefore, only asks for a fuller manifestation and enjoyment of him—“Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.”

Yet can He be shewn? or, in other words, can He

be known? It is true, Zophar asks, "Who by searching can find out God?" But he adds, "who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?" He cannot be completely known: but he can be really known, savingly known; known as the strength of *our* heart, and *our* portion for ever. And this knowledge can yield satisfaction to the possessor. It will suffice for our happiness hereafter; and, therefore, the blessedness is expressed by our seeing God; and therefore David says, "I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." Yea, it suffices the Christian at present. He can now say, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches."

"When I can say, my God is mine,
When I can feel thy glories shine,
I tread the world beneath my feet,
And all that earth calls good or great."

It suffices—to teach him in whatsoever state he is therewith to be content—to embolden him in his work, in the face of all opposition and danger—to sustain him under every trial—and to raise him above the fear of death. Moses endured as seeing him that is invisible. Simeon was ready to depart in peace, because his eyes had seen his salvation.

But this knowledge is to be derived from the Lord Jesus. "No one knoweth who the Father is but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him." "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which was in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Some would rather look for God in the world of nature; but the Apostle tells us

that” He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” He shews us the Father by his person—He is the image of the invisible God. By his sacrifice—in which we see so fully and harmoniously displayed his wisdom, holiness, righteousness, truth, and love. By his word—The most illiterate Christian, with “the word of Christ” in his hand, knows more of God than all the philosophers of Greece and Rome. How much does he teach us concerning God as the God of grace by the parable of the prodigal son! And how much does he teach us concerning God as the God of providence by a single saying; “A sparrow falleth not to the ground without your heavenly Father; and the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” By the Spirit—This Spirit leads us into all truth; and it is the Spirit of Christ. We have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things.

Therefore to him we are to apply, as Philip here did, and pray, “Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” He requires it from us: and he assures us our application shall not be in vain. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find. He never has been, never will be, never can be wanting to the promise upon which he causes us to hope. “I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.”

JANUARY 7.—MORNING.

“Salute my well-beloved Epenetus, who is the first-fruits of Achaia unto Christ.”—ROM. xvi. 5.

PAUL here remembers many, and speaks of them all with affection; but he salutes Epenetus as his *WELL-beloved*. We are not bound to love all in the same manner, or in the same degree.

The Apostle calls this convert, “fruits unto *Christ*”—not unto *himself*. Yet he had been the means of bringing him to the knowledge of the truth. But Paul knew that *he* had not redeemed him; justified him; called him by *his* grace. And as to his conversion, he had only been the *instrument*, the Lord working with him, and confirming his word with signs following. In another place he says, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” If converted sinners are the seal and reward and glory and joy of the preacher; they are infinitely more so, of the Saviour himself. *He* sees in them his agency; his image; the travail of his soul; the recompense of his sufferings. As the author of it; he will enjoy their blessedness, and receive their praises for ever.

Epenetus is here said to be the “*first-fruits* unto Christ in *Achaia*.” Yet Paul says to the Corinthians, “Ye know the house of Stephanas, that *it* is the first-fruits of *Achaia*.” The apparent difficulty is easily solved by the fact, that the house of Stephanas was the first family that was converted, but that Epenetus was the first convert in the family. Christians at first were few in number, and driven together by persecution. They were therefore well known to each other, and to their ministers. They were marked characters. The conversion of a man to Christianity in a heathen

place must have been peculiarly *observable*. It was the production of “a new creature,” which would of course be greatly wondered at. It was displaying the “heavenly” where all was “earthly, and sensual, and devilish,” before. And we see it was *worthy* of attention. Earthly minds are most interested by the events of this life; by the policy of statesmen, the exploits of heroes, the discoveries of philosophers—but what Paul noticed in Achaia, was the first man that was called there out of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. He knew that the conversion of one soul far transcended in importance the deliverance of a whole kingdom from civil bondage. Kingdoms will soon be no more; but such a soul will shine a monument of grace and glory for ever and ever. “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

How long Epenetus in the place and in the family stood *alone* as a professed Christian, we know not; but it is no uncommon thing for an individual to be similarly situated. We have often seen single converts seeking and serving Christ, as the first-fruits of the neighbourhood or the household wherein they lived. The way in which, and the means by which these persons are brought forward before others, would, if stated, be found to be very various, and often remarkable. Hearing the Gospel while from home; visiting in a family where the worship of God is maintained; meeting with a good book; receiving a letter from a friend; a conversation with a stranger; an affliction that made the heart bleed, and laid bare the prospects of life—where shall we end? “Lo! all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of

the living!" For though the incidents upon which this mighty event hinged seemed perfectly casual, they were all arranged by his own purpose and grace.

And the circumstances in which these *first* converts are placed are interesting. They are a post of *trial*. Sometimes the trial is very severe. They have to take up their cross daily, and hourly too; and a cross too heavy to be borne without divine aid. Little do many who have been religiously brought up, and whose relations and friends, if not decidedly pious, are not hostile—little do they know what some have to endure, especially at the commencement of their religious course; when, instead of assistance and countenance, so much needed, they meet with neglect, and opposition, and sneers, and reproach, from all around them—and from all that are dear to them.

—They are also in a post of *duty*. They are required to be not only harmless and blameless, but most exemplary in their language, temper, and conduct. The reason is, that they will attract peculiar notice. Every thing they do will be canvassed by a shrewdness sharpened by enmity, and ready to magnify every failing. *They* will be judged by their profession; and their religion will be judged by *them*. And they are to put gainsayers to silence, and constrain them by their good works which they behold to glorify God in the day of visitation. They are to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; and by walking in wisdom to win those that are without. They are not to repulse by rudeness, or chill by disdain. They are never to betray a feeling that says, Stand by thyself; come not near to me—I am holier than thou. They are not, by stiffness and affectations in little and lawful things, to lead

people to suppose that their religion is made up of oddities and perversenesses. Yet, in things of unquestionable obligation and real importance, they must be firm and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: for not only will conscience require this, in the testimony they are always to bear for God; but such *consistency* alone will enthrone them in the convictions and esteem of others.

—For they are also in a post of *honour*. They have a peculiar opportunity of showing their principles. Later converts may be equally conscientious, but *these* coming after, when they have the sanction and co-operation of others, cannot so obviously appear to be on the Lord's side, nor so fully evince the purity and power of their motives, as those who come forward *alone*, and say to all others, however numerous, however influential, however endeared—Choose you this day whom you will serve—but as for me—I will serve the Lord. They have therefore the privilege of taking the lead, and of being examples instead of followers. And they may be, and are likely to be, the means of prevailing upon others. We have seldom seen an instance of failure. The effect has not always immediately appeared; but where they have been enabled to walk worthy of God unto all pleasing, after a while, they have no longer gone *alone* to the Cross of Christ, to the Throne of Grace, to the House of God; but in company—in company even with those who once stood aloof, or, before, even opposed. And “he that converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

JANUARY 7.—EVENING.

"*And the Apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.*"—
LUKE xvii. 5.

IF we consider these words—In reference to the *Being* to whom they were addressed—"The *Lord*:" they teach us that he is the source of grace; and the object of worship.—If in reference to the *persons* who addressed him—"The *Apostles*:" they teach us that even the Lord's disciples themselves have their imperfections; but feel them; and are concerned to be freed from them.—If in reference to the *subject* they express—"our *faith*:" they teach us that faith is not finished at once; it admits of degrees; and higher measures of it are attainable.—If in reference to the *occasion* which excited them—our *Saviour's preceding charge*: they teach us that an increase of faith is not only always desirable, but sometimes necessary. Observe what he had been enforcing. "Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him: and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."—"And the Apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith"—and thus enable us to do it. But why faith in particular? Why not, increase am humility? love? patience? Because faith is the root from which they grow, and as faith abounds, they will flourish. Because all things are possible to him that believeth. Forgiveness, so irksome to mere nature, will be practicable and easy as faith is in exercise, and we can believe not only the testimony that if we forgive not, we shall not be forgiven, but the assurance that God for

Christ's sake hath forgiven us. Can we, who have had remitted ten thousand talents, seize a fellow servant by the throat, who owes us only a hundred pence?

But there are many other cases, the pressure of which will make us feel that we want more faith than we have at present; and should induce us to pray for an increase of it.

Has the Saviour said that he will deny those who are ashamed of him and of his words? And does he require us to own and confess him before men? And will this give offence to our connections? and draw upon ourselves persecution and reproach? This is the work of faith; and will only be practicable and easy as faith increases—"We ought," said Peter and John, "to obey God rather than men." "We cannot but speak the things which we see and hear." "They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his Name." "By faith Moses feared not the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible."

Are you called to sacrifice an object that nature will never let go without violence? "By *faith*, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up *Isaac*."

Are you called to confide in God in great straits and difficulties—when his providence seems to oppose his promise—when means fail—and there seems no way of escape—when he says, "Come, follow me through this dark dispensation. You are ignorant; but I know the way that you take. Here is my arm, feel this; lean on this. The sorrow shall turn to your salvation, the trial shall be your triumph. The end will show that I am very pitiful and of tender mercy, and constrain you to say, 'It is good

for me that I have been afflicted.” What is all this without faith? “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

How solemn was the order addressed to Moses, “Go up and die, and be gathered to thy people!” By years, infirmities, and disease, God is calling you to the same service—The living know that they shall die. And what is it to die? We know not from our own experience, or the experience of others. But to bid farewell to every earthly scene—to be surrounded with weeping friends, whose presence we can neither dispense with nor endure—to bear sinking spirits, and a body full of pain—to feel perhaps our unworthiness and sin more than we ever felt them before—to enter into an untried and eternal state—to think of appearing before Purity itself—to be resigned and willing to go—to do well what can never be done again—to glorify God—to edify others—to be an example to the last, and above all at the last—“Lord—Lord! increase our faith.” “Count us worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of thy goodness, and the WORK OF FAITH WITH POWER.”

JANUARY 8.—MORNING.

“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” 3 JOHN 2.

It has been supposed from hence, that Gaius had an infirm and sickly constitution. This is probable; but it does not necessarily follow: for John might have wished him the continuance and increase of health, as well as the restoration of it.

However this may be, we learn from his language—That it is allowable for us to pray for temporal

blessings—and that, of all these blessings, health is the most valuable and necessary.

But is outward prosperity—is even health itself the chief good—that, “above all things,” John wishes his friend to enjoy? Some therefore have rendered it, “I wish above all persons;” others, “I wish in all respects;” that thou mayest prosper and be in health. But there is no need of criticism here. Gaius had grace already; and a high degree of it; and this one thing needful being secured, it was *then* supremely desirable that he should have health to enjoy and improve it—“even as his soul prospered.”

John makes, also, his soul-prosperity the standard and rule of his prayer for other things. This would be a dreadful rule with regard to many. Such praying if answered would ruin them. Yes, if they were to prosper in temporal things *as* they prosper in spiritual, they would become the poorest, meanest wretches on earth; for they are strangers to everything like the true riches. And if their bodies were to be as healthful *as* their souls, their dwelling would become an hospital; their bed of ease a bed of languishing: they would be blind, for they have no spiritual understanding; deaf, for they never hear the voice of God; dead, for the Spirit of the living God is not in them.

Yet this seems to be the only safe rule. For unless religion keeps pace with our outward good, our safety and welfare will be endangered by it. We are not afraid when we see Christians succeeding in life, if at the same time they grow in grace. But the peril is, when there is so much sail and so little ballast. What can be more awful than to see those who too

much mind earthly things, gaining abundantly; to see those who have a relish for the pride of life, enabled to be splendid; to see those much indulged, who cannot put a knife to the throat of appetite? If our plenty and dainties awaken in us no moral apprehensions; and if we can feast ourselves without fear; surely our table is likely to become a snare, and that which should have been for our welfare, to become a trap. The prosperity of fools destroys them; and the prosperity of those who have not *much* wisdom, injures them.

Let us therefore examine our wishes. Let us regulate them piously. Let us seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Let us ask for no more of other things than we can bear—ever praying for our friends and ourselves, that we may prosper and be in health even as our *souls prosper*.

JANUARY 8.—EVENING.

“He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.”—
ZECH. ii. 8.

How admirably adapted to popular instruction and impression is the imagery of the Scripture! It is not taken from the learned sciences, or even from the mechanical arts—unless from their most simple and common operations with which all mankind are familiar: but from the aspects of nature, the seasons of the year, the occurrences of life, and the parts, attributes, and functions of the human frame so fearfully and wonderfully made. Who does not in a moment understand and feel the allusion before us? “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.”

It reminds us of union. Sin had separated between God and us, and we were once far off: But we are made nigh by the blood of Christ. In him we are reconciled to God, reunited to God, and become one with God again. And so entire is the connection, that every kind of intimate union is employed to express it. We are one, as the father and the child, as the husband and the wife, as the head and the members, are one—yea, as the soul and the body are one—“He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” No wonder therefore that he that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye.

It shows valuation. Even a man's selfishness endears this member. The apple of his eye is a source of too much usefulness and pleasure not to be highly prized by him. He would part with a thousand things rather than lose this, or be injured in any part rather than be hurt in this. How precious to the Lord are his people! He calls them his portion, his jewels, his glory. They who attract him, am not the great but the gracious—“To that man,” says he, “will I look who is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.” He “taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy.” “He will rejoice over them with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over them with singing.”

It bespeaks attention. As a man values the apple of his eye, so will he assuredly take care of it, and endeavour to defend it. And it is worthy of our notice how the Creator has fenced and guarded this little, but inestimably precious member from evil, by the fluids and the coats, the lashes and the lids; and with what involuntary quickness nature teaches us

to cover and secure it when exposed. Yet all this falls short of the care which God exercises over his people. The apple of the eye is not half so liable to injury as they are; but how superior is their protection? Lest any hurt them, He will keep them night and day. In two places his vigilance is spoken of under the figure before us. In the one it is implored: "Keep me," says David, "as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings." In the other, it is acknowledged: "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." How well kept are those whom God thus keeps! "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places."

It expresses sympathy. The pupil of the eye is peculiarly delicate and sensible: and it is not necessary to run the point of a knife into it in order to make the owner shrink. A mote, or as it is here expressed, a touch, will offend, and instantly affect all his sensations. And is it not said, "In all their affliction he is afflicted?" A friend sympathizes in a friend's sorrow: a mother feels a more sensible interest in a child's suffering. Yet Job says, "My friends scorn me:" and Isaiah says, "the mother may forget" her sucking child, and "not have compassion on the son of her womb." But a man's feeling with an injured member of his body, especially the eye, and the apple of the eye, is not only exquisite, but absolutely unavoidable. And not less certain, as well

as tender, is the Lord's sympathy with his people—"He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." What a source of consolation is here! Especially when we remember that his sympathy is accompanied with boundless wisdom and almighty power. "He doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number—to set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety." "Nothing is too hard for the Lord."

Let the adversaries of his people learn their danger. They hate the godly, and endeavour to injure them; and though their malice is often restrained, the Lord looketh at the heart, and will deal with them according to their intentions, wishes, and endeavours. And he considers them as opposing *himself*: "Why," said he to Saul, "why persecutest thou *me*?" He did not injure him *personally*, but he was injuring his followers. The head was above his reach, but it felt the wounds he inflicted upon the foot. They who suffer for his sake, may well leave themselves to him, whose they are, and whom they serve. He will surely plead their cause—"He that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye."

Let this encourage us to do anything for the people of God—he feels it as done to himself. He "is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." "He," said the Saviour, "he that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward: and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's

reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.”

Let his people also learn their duty. They see how he regards them, and is concerned for their welfare—How should they regard him, and be concerned for his glory! They should feel his cause to be dear to them. They should be sorrowful for the solemn assembly. The reproaches of them that reproach him should fall upon them.

Those that represent strict piety as needless precision, should remember that nothing less is required of us than to avoid the appearance of evil, to walk circumspectly, and to be always abounding in the work of the Lord—We are to regard his word as we keep the tenderest part of the tenderest member of our body. “Keep my commandments, and live; and MY LAW AS THE APPLE OF THINE EYE.”

JANUARY 9.—MORNING.

“He will be our guide even unto death.”—Ps. xlviii. 14.

THIS assurance comes home to our case and feelings. We are strangers and pilgrims upon earth. We resemble the Jews in the wilderness; we are not in Egypt, and we are not in Canaan, but journeying from the one to the other. We are delivered from our natural state; but before we can enter glory,

“We have this desert world to pass;

A dangerous and a tiresome place.”

And as the Jews were not left to themselves, but had a conductor, so have we—“This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.”

How perfectly, how infinitely qualified is He for this office! In a journey, it is unnecessary for the traveller to know the road: but the guide ought to know it; and when *he* is well acquainted with it, and we have full confidence in him, we shall feel satisfaction notwithstanding our own ignorance. Abraham went out, not knowing whither he went; but he knew *with whom*: and Job, after expressing his perplexities, and the successlessness of his efforts to explore the dispensation he was under, relieves himself with this thought: "But he knoweth the way that I take."

"Oh, who so fit to choose our lot,

And regulate our ways,"

as He who sees the end from the beginning; who knows all our walking through this great wilderness; who cannot mistake as to what is good or evil for us; and who has said, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight: these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." If we had a wise and sure, but a sullen and silent leader, it would deduct much from the pleasure of the journey. But our Guide indulges us with constant intercourse. He allows us to address *him* whenever we please, and in everything by prayer and supplication to make known our requests; while he condescendingly addresses *us*, talking with us by the way, and opening to us the Scriptures. He is also equal to all our exigencies. Do we want food? refreshment? rest? He can supply all our need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Have we storms? "He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Are we exposed to enemies?

What David said to Abiathar, who had fled to him in his jeopardy, HE says to us, "Abide with me; for he that seeketh thy life seeketh my life; but with me thou shalt be in safeguard." I should not be afraid of the sights and howlings of the wood, if I had a lion at my right hand every step, and could depend upon his fidelity—A lion is the strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any. More than this is our privilege—

"A thousand savage beasts of prey
Around the forest roam;
But Judah's lion guards the way,
And guides the traveller home."

What human patience could bear with our manners and provocations? What creature-conductor is there, but would throw up his charge long before the journey's end? But he does not cast away his people. He *never leaves* nor forsakes them. This is their comfort; this is their hope; this is their security—the longsuffering of our God is salvation. "I, the Lord, change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

Yes—he will be our guide, "even unto death;" that is, till the journey is over, and all its cares cease. But is nothing more necessary? TO death is much—but THROUGH death seems better. When we come to the entrance of the gloomy passage, it is pleasing to think that he is at the other side, and will receive us to himself, that where he is, there we may be also. Yet how am I to get THROUGH? "My flesh and my heart faileth"—

"Oh, if my Lord would *come*, and MEET—
My soul would stretch her wings in haste;
Fly fearless through Death's iron gate,
Nor feel the terrors as she pass'd."

And this case is provided for. All is insured. He will be with us THROUGH—"Yea, though I walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou *ad with me*: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."—*Amen*.

JANUARY 9.—EVENING.

"Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness."

—Ps. lxxiv. 14.

WHAT creature in the animal world is intended by leviathan we cannot absolutely determine. We have a general description of him in the book of Job; but even this leaves the learned divided, some pleading for the crocodile and some for the whale. But it is not necessary to be a naturalist in order to be a Christian; and it is pleasing to think, that though in the Scripture there are things hard to be understood, they do not affect the foundation of our faith and hope. The truths contained in the sacred volume are plain in proportion as they are profitable; and we are at no loss for an answer to the question, What must I do to be saved? Though we know not where heaven is, we are clearly informed how we may attain it. Though we are uncertain about leviathan, we are sure of the Consolation of Israel—"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

Whatever be the animal intended, his name is here used to represent Pharaoh with all his policy and power, as we see from the verse immediately

preceding: "Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters." Then it is added: "Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness." Who were the people inhabiting the wilderness? First, the birds and beasts of the desert. These found a fine feast in the destruction of the king and his army, whose carcasses, thrown on shore and remaining unburied, were greedily devoured by them. Secondly, the Jews themselves. They might very properly be said to inhabit the wilderness, because it was their present residence, and because they were, instead of speedily travelling through it, to sojourn there for forty years. Now Pharaoh and his host became meat for them, literally and morally. *Literally*, as they derived from the spoils of the foe a supply of means to sustain them, of attire to clothe them, of weapons to defend them, of silver, and gold, and jewels, to enrich them. *Morally*, as they derived from the event food for their gratitude, faith, hope, and joy, not only for the time being, when they sang his praise, but in all future perils and exigencies. Hence, in the days of Isaiah we find the Church pleading with God in allusion to it: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall

obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”

There is a people now, inhabiting the wilderness. They are Christians. Whatever the world may be to others, and who are called “men of the world,” it is no better than a wilderness to those who are born from above, and bound to the land of promise. They feel and confess it to be such, not only from the privations and trials they meet with in it, but from the principles and dispositions of their new nature.

And is there no leviathan whose heads have been broken in pieces for them, and from which they have been furnished with meat? Are there no past deliverances, no former mercies, upon which their souls can feed? Let us think of the redemption of the cross. Here their Lord and Saviour seemed conquered; but he gained a complete victory. He bruised the serpent’s head; and through death destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil. Now, said he, is the judgment of this world, now is the prince of this world cast out; and I if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. Angels are not concerned here: and yet the transaction seems food for their minds, and fills them with admiration, love, and praise; and therefore they desire to look into these things. What relief and satisfaction then must it yield to those who live thereby! To see the curse not only defeated, but turned into a blessing; to see where sin abounded grace much more abounding, and the Fall made the occasion of improving their original condition—what wonder if they exclaim, God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We may also notice their deliverance from their natural state. He hath delivered us, says the Apostle, from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. And we are to look to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we are digged. The review will be every way useful. What can feed our *humility* more? or our *gratitude* more? or our *confidence* more? or am *rejoicing* more? or our *zeal* more?

There are also Providential interpositions. Who has not some of these to remember: in which God turned the shadow of death into the morning; and made a way the most strange and gracious for our escape? Whoso is wise, observes these things. In looking back upon life, he is able to see how many events, which perplexed and alarmed him at the time, afterward ministered to his faith and hope in God. David could say, It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Paul had a thorn in the flesh; but it preserved him from pride, drove him to prayer, and obtained for him the assurance of all-sufficient grace. What pleasure and profit must Joseph have derived from all the difficulties that tried him, yet issued not only in his release, but advancement and glory! He can break the heads of any leviathan; and out of the eater bring forth meat.

JANUARY 10.—MORNING.

“A devout man, and one that feared God, with all his house; which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.”—ACTS x. 2.

WE should beware of general and indiscriminate reflections upon communities and professions. They

are injurious; they tend to make and keep the parties what they are generally supposed to be. They are unjust; for there are always exceptions. And they are ungenerous; for the more temptations men have to resist, the more evils they have to subdue, the more difficulties they have to struggle with—the more deserving and commendable is the individual that succeeds: or, rather, the more is the grace of God glorified in him. Can there be no excellency connected with arms? In the New Testament we meet with no less than four centurions, and all are spoken of with approbation—the centurion who came to our Lord on the behalf of his servant—the centurion that watched at the Cross—the centurion that behaved so courteously to Paul in his voyage—and Cornelius, here spoken of.

He is supposed to have been a proselyte, but he was not. Yet he worshipped God, the knowledge of whom he probably obtained by residing with his men in Judea. He was a “devout man;” and three fine unions are mentioned in his character and conduct.

—A union of *personal* and *relative duty*: “He feared God, *with* all his house.” This was like Joshua, who said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord:”—not my house without myself, nor myself without my house; but I, *and* my house. If we are godly ourselves, we shall surely give evidence of it by instructing and admonishing and impressing those who are placed under our care. And in vain shall we use the means, if we counteract them by our own example. We must *do*, as well as *teach*.

—A union of *piety* and *morality*: he *gave alms* and *prayed*. Piety is more than prayer; and morality is more than alms: yet alms and prayer are

not only parts, but essential parts of them; and they can never be separated. Some talk of their love to the Gospel, and their communion with God, who are hard-hearted and close-handed. "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Others stand fair with their fellow-creatures, and are distinguished by liberality and kindness: yet they have no fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ; they live without God; they indulge their sensual passions, and imagine that charity covers a multitude of sins—"But pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep themselves unspotted from the world."

—A union of the *real* and *eminent* in religion: "He gave *much* alms to the people, and prayed to God *always*." There cannot be the eminence of grace without the reality: but there may be the reality without the eminence. We should be thankful for a day of small things; but we ought to seek after a day of great ones. We should add to the essentials of religion its excellences too. We should not only have life, but have it more abundantly.

As to our temporal condition, we should be content with such things as we have. But contentment does not become us in divine things. There we should be ambitious. There we should be covetous. We need more. And more is attainable. Let us, therefore, enlarge our desires and our hopes, and seek to be filled with all the fulness of God.

JANUARY 10.—EVENING.

“He is not far from everyone of us,”—ACTS xvii. 27.

Is there a God? This is the first question in Religion. And the proofs of his being are so numerous and convincing, that few are foolish and vile enough to deny it. The next question is, or at least ought to be, How does he stand related to us? Is he our friend or our foe? Is he inaccessible, or can we approach him? Is he near, or is he far off? To this inquiry we have here a full answer—“He is not far from everyone of us.”

He is not far from everyone of us, in his essence. “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.” “Well might David say, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.” Yet deism itself allows that he occupies universal space, and that it is impossible to confine him. Here is a broad, an infinite distinction between creatures and God. No creature, not even an angel, can be ever in two places at once. But God is everywhere, at the same time. And what a thought is it, that wherever we are, He is a God at hand, and not a God afar off, about our path and our lying down, and acquainted with all the imaginations of our heart! Do we believe it? If we reduced our faith to practice, what manner of creatures should we be in all holy conversation and godliness! Could we ever sin, with God standing by and looking on?

He is not far from every one of us, in his natural and providential agency—Therefore, adds the Apostle,

“For in Him we live, and move, and have our being.” And therefore says he again; “He never left himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” And says David, “That his Name is near, his wondrous works declare.” Can we behold the appearances around us—can we observe the vegetable world with all its variety and beauty—can we think of the myriads possessing animal life, visible and invisible, in air and earth, and sea—can we reflect upon the human race so fearfully and wonderfully made and endued—and know that not one of all these beings is self-produced, or self-sustained—that the eyes of all wait upon *him*, and *he* giveth them their meat in due season—that *he* openeth his hand and satisfieth the desires of every living thing; and be senseless enough not to see, to hear, to feel—that God is not far from everyone of us?

He is not far from everyone of us, in religious dispensation, In this sense the Gentiles were said to be far off: but the Jews were a people near unto him—For what nation is there, says Moses, that hath God so nigh unto them? He resided in the midst of them by his laws and ordinances. They could see his power and glory in his sanctuary. They could hear his voice in his prophets. To them were committed the oracles of God. In every perplexity they could consult him; and he communed with them from off the mercy-seat. Thus we are equally, yea, much more eminently privileged. Not that we have the same ceremonial splendour, or the same miraculous interpositions; but we have all their spiritual advantages improved and completed. We have the day of their dawn. Their prophets and righteous

men desired to see the things that we see, and did not see them; and to hear the things that we hear, and did not hear them. But blessed are our eyes, for they see; and our ears, for they hear. The Seventy therefore were to say even to Jews, the possessors of revealed religion, "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." We have his word in our hands. We have his Sabbaths. We have his house. We have the assemblies of his people, and he is in the midst of them. We have his table spread with more than angels' food, and the King sitteth at his table. We have his servants, and the sound of their Master's feet is behind them: for they come in his name, and he that receiveth them receiveth him.

He is not far from everyone of us, in his gracious influences. O that you could be made sensible of your fallen condition, and of your need of pardon and renovation! O that you were convinced that your understandings must be enlightened, and your hearts changed—and that all this must come from him who worketh all in all—and that you were disposed to apply to him! You would soon find that he is able, that he is willing, that he is near. Your cries or groans would instantly reach him. He is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

But in this sense He will not be always near. Therefore seek him *while* he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. And learn here also the true cause of your condemnation if you perish. It is not because you are lost creatures, and are unable to save yourselves; but because there is a Saviour within your reach, and you refuse to apply to him, and will not take hold of his strength. How came the man

without the wedding garment to be speechless? Could he not have said that it was out of his power to weave one, or that he was too poor to purchase one? This alone would have been some excuse. But the fact was, that garments were provided in the wardrobe, and he might have had one, as he passed by, for asking. But he neglected the provision, and was punished, not for his indigence, but presumption.

He is not far from everyone of us, as an approaching Judge. People imagine his advent is a great way off, and hence they are so little impressed by it. But "the coming of the Lord draws nigh." "The Lord is at hand." "The Judge standeth before the door." This was said almost two thousand years ago. What then is the fact now? Yet say some, it cannot be even now very near, for much remains to be previously accomplished. But God does not act according to our conclusions. He can cut short his work in righteousness. Yet let us allow the truth contained in the objection. His coming by death is the same to you in effect as his coming at the last day. As soon as you are dead,—as to *you*, the prophecies are all accomplished, and your state is fixed. There is no pardon, no prayer, after death—after death the judgment. And is death far off? The days of our years are threescore years and ten. Many never reach this general average. But allowing the term to be generally true. Take seventy years. Yet what right have many of you to think your Judge is far off? You are sixty-five, you are sixty-nine; that is within five, that is within one year of his coming. But take persons at any age—take them in middle life; take them in youth—yet, when you reflect upon the brittleness of your frame, and the countless acci-

dents and diseases to which you are exposed every moment, you must acknowledge that there is but a step between you and death—between you and the Judge of all!

JANUARY II.—MORNING.

“*Where dwellest thou?*”—JOHN i. 38.

THIS question was addressed to our Lord by two of John’s disciples. One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. Of the other we are ignorant; but they were now both following Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saith unto them, “What seek ye?” They said unto him, “Rabbi, Where dwellest thou?”

Let us consider, the principle of the inquiry. It was not curiosity, but regard. It was as much as to say, We wish to be better acquainted. John had spoken of him highly, and they had just seen him: but this, instead of satisfying them, drew forth their desire after more intimacy. Now this is common to all the subjects of divine grace. It arises from *their love to him*. For love longs to be near the object of attachment: separation is painful; distance is intolerable; while intercourse yields a pleasure words can no more describe, than paint can express light or heat. Hence the believer longs to be with the Saviour. “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside from the paths of thy companions?” The desire arises also from the *want of him*. What can I do, says the Christian, without him? He is my deliverer, my helper, my guide, my comforter. The earth can

do better without the sun, than I can do without him, the Sun of righteousness. The body does not depend so much upon the soul, as I do upon him the quickening Spirit. Who can screen me from the condemnation of the Law? Who can relieve my burdened conscience? Whose grace is sufficient for me, to sanctify me in prosperity, to sustain me in adversity, to enliven me in death? "Oh, cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." I must live in the same place, the same house, the same room where thou dwellest—"Where dwellest thou?"

But let us find if we can an answer to this question. "He saith unto them, Come and see;" and they went, and "saw where he dwelt." In a general way, he had not where to lay his head. It is not probable he had now a house to himself, but only an apartment hired or borrowed. But how was that lodging sanctified and honoured! They showed Alexander, when in Holland, a house where Peter the Great resided, and which is preserved in memory of him. Many have seen at Olney the alcove where Cowper wrote his "Task"—Oh, to have seen a dwelling where Jesus resided! But where dwells he now? He *is* everywhere, but he is not said to *dwell* everywhere. Dwelling, with regard to him, implies preference, and abiding with delight. First, then, he dwells in heaven. This marks the place, yea—this makes it. "Where I am, there shall my servants be." "Absent from the body, and present with the Lord." Secondly, He dwells in his Church. "This," says he, "is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it." Thirdly, he dwells in the sanctuary. "In all *places* where I record my

Name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.” “*Where* two or three are gathered together in my name, *there* am I in the midst of them.” And there his people have found him, and exclaimed, “Surely God is in this place.” Fourthly, He dwells in the heart. He will reject every other residence you may offer him. “My son,” says he, “give me thine heart;” and from every believer he obtains what he demands—Christ dwells in his “heart by faith.”

This may be called *enthusiasm* by some; but it is the language of Inspiration. “Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.”

Let me forbear to injure and insult a Christian. Let me revere and honour him. He is a palace of the Prince of Peace. He is a temple of the Lord of All.

Let me admire the condescension and kindness of Immanuel, God with us. If I am the subject of this residence, let me not only rejoice in the dignity and privilege, but be concerned to discharge every duty I owe to such a distinguished guest, to such a Divine inhabitant! “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”

JANUARY II.—EVENING.

“*For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.*”—HEB. ii. 11.

WHAT cause? Read the former part of the verse. “He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of *one*.” There is a spiritual union or oneness between Christ and Christians—They are of one God and Father. They are of one spirit. They are of

one taste; one aim; one pursuit. They have one destination; and will appear with him in glory—“Where I am,” says he, “there shall also my servants be.” But the meaning is here determined by the context—they are of one *nature*. “Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.” “In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.” “He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” This exception was not only necessary, but possible: and as Adam before his fall possessed truly the same nature with us, yet sinless; so provision was made for the Saviour’s participation of it, in the same immaculate way: and from the manner of his conception by the Holy Ghost, his humanity was the “holy thing” born of the Virgin Mary; and he is called the “holy child Jesus;” and it is said, not only that “he did no sin,” but that “in him was no sin.”

This becoming one with us in nature is without controversy a great mystery, but it is a mystery of godliness. It is the medium of our salvation. It is thus he speaks to us without making us afraid. It is thus he is capable of sympathizing with us, and gains our confidence. It is thus he becomes our example and goes before us in the path of duty and suffering. It is thus he can give his life a ransom for us, and put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Men unconvinced of their state, may treat the doctrine with neglect or contempt; but says Paul, “We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us *through the vail, that is to say, his flesh.*”

For this cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren—And why should he be ashamed, seeing he is of one nature with them? It will not be difficult to find a reason. Though he is truly a man, he is more than human. The Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word was made flesh. And there is a great difference between him and us in the same nature. There are not only degrees among angels, but also among men: and these distinctions are sanctioned by Scripture, which requires us to render to all their due; honour to whom honour is due, and fear to whom fear—“I said, ye are gods.” A king is of the same nature with the lowest of his subjects; is made of the same clay; and can no more dispense with food and sleep than they—yet does he call them brethren? Do we not deem it almost a miracle to see a prince condescend to men of low estate? A commander-in-chief will speak of his brother officers! but he does not call the common soldiers brethren. The judge in court will call a counsellor brother; but not the prisoner at the bar. Though Christ has our nature, he is so exalted and glorious, that he may well disavow the nearness of our relationship according to the feelings and usages of the world. Humanity in him is worthy, but in us undeserving. In him it is spotless, in us it is defiled. God is angry with us; in him he is well pleased. We are mortal, and crushed before the moth; but he dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him—he is at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high.

For we must consider not what he was, but what he now is. While all the members of a family are in obscurity, they all feel the same towards each

other; but if one of them be elevated, as David was, to the highest condition in the state, *he* may be easily tempted to shame, in acknowledging the rest who are left so much below him. But though Jesus is passed into the heavens, and angels, principalities, and powers, are made subject unto him, and every name that is named not only in this world but in that which is to come, he *is* touched with the feeling of our infirmities; he *is* not ashamed to call us brethren. It is indeed observable that it was after his resurrection he gave his disciples this name: "Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee." "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." And when he comes in his glory, and before him will be gathered all nations, even as the Judge of all, he will not be ashamed to say, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."

Let this thought dignify us. The honour will not make us proud, since by the grace of God we are what we are; and the more we have, the more we owe.

Let it console and encourage us. If he calls himself our brother, he will perform all that the relation implies and requires in its most perfect discharge. He will correspond with us. He will visit us. He will defend us. He will provide for us. Joseph supported all his father's house; and because he lives we shall live also.

And if he is not ashamed to own us—shall we ever be ashamed to acknowledge him? "He that is ashamed of me, and of my words, in this sinful and adulterous generation, of him shall the Son of man be

ashamed when he cometh in the clouds of heaven with the holy angels." But surely terror is not necessary here—surely ingenuousness, affected with a sense of our dependence and obligations, will be enough to induce us to say,

"Ashamed of Jesus! of that Friend
On whom my heavenly hopes depend!
It must not be—be this my shame,
That I no more revere his name."

JANUARY 12.—MORNING.

"And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea."—EXOD. xiii. 17, 18.

THERE were two ways which they might have taken to their destination. One was from the north of Egypt to the south of Canaan. This was short and direct, and would have required but a few days, as we see in the case of Jacob's sons when they fetched corn, and in the rapid incursion of a late military Chief. The other was very much farther and very indirect. Yet God took this; and, instead of leading them to the Isthmus of Suez, he conducted them to the border of the Red Sea. He therefore declined the common road which the people would have chosen, and which everyone else might have recommended, and selected the most unlikely.

For his thoughts are not our thoughts; neither are his ways our ways. And the promise is, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not: I will lead them in paths that they have not known." It is

well that we are under his guidance: for the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. We know not what is good for us; and, like children left to themselves, we should soon run into mischief. We are too ignorant, too selfish, too carnally-minded, to choose for ourselves safely. How was it with the Jews ill the time of Moses? They must have flesh—and God gave them their hearts' desire, but sent leanness into their souls. And was it not the same in the days of Samuel? They would have a king—and God gave them a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath. And how has it been with ourselves? Have we not often been imposed upon both by our hopes and fears? Have we not anxiously desired what we now see would have proved injurious? And have we not been eager to escape what we now know to be a blessing? If our bones have not been broken, have we not been bruised by the falls occasioned by our own rashness and folly? If we have not been thrown out of the vehicle, have we not endangered it enough to induce us to give back the reins into the proper hand? Surely we are not *yet* leaning to our own understanding; but committing our way unto the Lord. Surely we are *now* saying, The Lord shall choose our inheritance for us.

It is acknowledged that the course declined "was near." But, God being the judge, the nearest way is not always the best. Jacob, in obtaining the blessing, went the nearest way to work in imposing upon his blind father; but God's way would have been better, though it would have taken more time. Joseph's dreams might have been fulfilled by constraining his brethren to pay him immediate obeisance. But more

than twenty years must previously elapse, and he must be sold into Egypt as a slave, and be imprisoned as a criminal, and be released as an interpreter, and possess all the store of the land as a deliverer. The thing was true; but the time appointed was long. Yet the Lord's time is the best: and the fruit we covet will be much more rich and wholesome when ripe, than if seized and devoured while green. He that believeth, therefore, maketh not haste. "This world is a Mesech, and my soul is vexed with the conversation of the wicked—Why is not my taste gratified? And why am I not allowed to enter the region of purity and peace?" Because your principles are to be tried and exemplified. Because you are to serve your generation by the will of God. "How long have I waited for an answer to prayer, for a deliverance from affliction, for a sense of Divine favour!" And are you not told that "it is good for a man not only to hope, but quietly wait for the salvation of God?" and that "blessed are all they that wait for him?" The order of nature is not to reap as soon as the seed is sown. Weeks and months of varied weather, and some of them dreary and chilling, are introductory and preparatory to the harvest. It is the same with the order of grace—Be ye also patient.

God doth all things well. If he led them the longest way, it was the right way. He did not choose it arbitrarily, but for reasons founded in his wisdom and kindness. Some of these reasons are not mentioned, but they were afterward developed; and the motive here assigned is well worthy of our attention—It was to keep them from "seeing war"—especially "with the Philistines;" into contact with whom

they would have immediately come, the other way. At the present they were not fitted for serious conflict. Their spirits had been broken by oppression, and they partook of the timidity as well as meanness of slaves. They were raw recruits, shepherds, brick-makers. It was better for them not to fight for a while, or to have only a distant brush with Amalek, rather than be plunged at once into sanguinary contest with veteran foes inured to battle, and rendered courageous by victory. How instructive is this! What is the counterpart of it? He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. A bruised reed will he not break, and the smoking flax will he not quench. He gathers the lambs with his arm, and carries them in his bosom. He affords to young converts some peculiar encouragements to allure them on, till they have advanced too far to think of going back, whatever they may meet with. From a regard to their weakness and want of experience, for a time he restrains many of their enemies, and thus secures them from encounters with which more aged Christians are familiar.

“When will ministers and Christians learn to be followers of God? Under their guidance, persons who have but just left Egypt are often involved in disputes even with Philistines. They have scarcely entered the grammar-school, of repentance, before they are sent to the university of predestination. Babes, instead of being fed with milk, have strong meat given them, yea, and even bones of controversy. Their hope is shaken, and their comfort destroyed, because they have not confidence and the full assurance of faith.

But if we turn to the conduct of our Lord, we shall

see that everything is not to be advanced at once—everything is not to be exacted of all—and in all circumstances. Hear *him*. “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” “They said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?” “And he said unto them, “Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. And he spake also a parable unto them: No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old: if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles, else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved.”

JANUARY 12.—EVENING.

“In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.”—DAN. v. 30.

OBSERVE the person—the event—and the season. The person was Belshazzar. He is not easily identified in profane history, and little is said of him in the Scriptures of truth. He was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Merodach Baladin was his father. His mother was Nitocris, a woman of a masculine understanding, and to whose counsel he was much indebted. He appears in the sacred story like a man by the way-side, hung in irons. The memory of the just is blessed; but the name of the wicked

shall rot, or if preserved, it is perpetuated in disgrace. The noticing of some persons is renown, of others is infamy. Amyot, bishop of Auxyene, and great almoner of France, not long before his death, was urged to write the history of his country; "I love my sovereigns too well," said he, "to write their lives." Let us so live, as, when dead, we may yet speak, or be spoken of, to our honour, and the improvement of others.

The event—he "was slain." Though a king, and even called "The king of kings," he yields to "the king of terrors." I said, ye are gods; but ye shall die like men, and be as one of the princes. "Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish." The dwellers in dust, who had once trembled before him, are represented as insulting the king of Babylon. "Art *thou* also become weak as *we*? Art *thou* become like unto *us*? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee"—What a change!—But observe, not only his death, but the manner of it. He might have died in a good old age, and gradually, and in a peaceful bed—but he is cut off prematurely, suddenly, and violently—he was *slain*.

When? "That night." What night? The night of his festivity. He had made a great feast unto a thousand of his lords; and music, and dancing, and every kind of indulgence, filled the palace. How little did he suspect the vicinage of danger; of death! Marriage rites have sometimes been prevented, or immediately followed, by funeral solemnities. A man has built and embellished a mansion, and prepared an entertainment to crown his wishes; but,

instead of taking possession of it, he has entered the house appointed for all living. Another has planned a favourite journey; but, at the very commencement of it, he has been turned into the way of all the earth. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." That night was the king of the Chaldeans slain. What night?

The night of his wickedness. Festivity, and intemperance, and profaneness, generally go together. Job therefore, though he did not oppose the feasting of his sons in each other's house, yet feared for them; and prayed and offered sacrifices, lest they should have sinned, and cursed God in their heart. But what dreadful excess of riot was here! "Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, that the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." Sentence against an evil work is not always speedily executed; for God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish. But sin has frequently been instantly punished; as we see in the case of Lot's wife, and Gehazi, and Herod, and Ananias and Sapphira. And are there no instances of this now? What transgressor can be sure that he shall not die in the very act of iniquity? His breath is in his nostrils; there is but a step

between him and death. A liar has dropped down dead with a lie on his lips. A swearer has called for damnation upon his soul, and the prayer has no sooner been offered than answered. The drunkard, in the midst of his intoxication, has been brought to soberness in a place where a drop of water cannot be found to cool his tongue. Derangement also may be, in effect, the same as sudden death. "He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." What night?

The night of his visitation. "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another." The effect at first seems remarkable, as the import of the inscription was unknown. Yet what can be more alarming than strangeness and uncertainty? But why does he not suppose that the prodigy is favourable, containing an encomium, or a promise? Conscience forebodes the meaning. But Daniel explains it clearly; and admonishes him—but unavailingly. He had been warned before. This was the last address, and not designed for his salvation. Of what use, as to his moral state and disposition, were a few moments of confusion, and terror, and attempted resistance, or flight? And what better, for the purpose of repentance, are the hours or moments upon which many are suspending an attention to the things that belong to their peace? Death-bed alarms and prayers, and

the exercises which attend them, are most likely, if useful at all, to benefit the living rather than the, dead.

Well! where is he now? Where he has been ever since that night in which he was slain. What a length of duration! And yet after two thousand five hundred years he is not yet brought to trial! Ah! not the extinction of being, but the intermediate state, and afterwards the Judgment—this, this renders death so awful. O that we were wise, that we understood this, that we considered our latter end!

JANUARY 13.—MORNING.

“The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.”

—ROM. ii. 4.

REPENTANCE is indispensable to fallen creatures. And though it be from God, as well as the blessings annexed to it, yet there is an order in his operations. He must do some things for us, before he can do others. He must give grace before he can give glory: and before he makes us happy with himself, he must make us holy like himself. Hence we read of “repentance unto life.”

But let us observe the manner of his producing this repentance, We are *led to it by his goodness*—not driven by the terrors of the Almighty. Cain, Pharaoh, Judas, were all terrified into repentance: and there was nothing in their experience ingenuous or saving. Peter was led to repentance. He had sadly sinned, and denied his Lord with oaths and cursings. But the Lord turned and looked upon Peter; and the look broke his heart; and “he went out, and wept bitterly.” And says God, “Thou shalt remember and be confounded, and never open thy

mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done.”

In the Gospel, he draws with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love. And the repentance here spoken of, is the tender mother pulling her infant to her knee while chiding him, and constraining the little offender to hide his blushing face, and to sob out his heart into her bosom—not the stern father driving the transgressor from his face into distance, and concealment, and dislike, and falsehood. Or, if it be the father, it is the father of the Prodigal. Impatient of paternal restraint, the prodigal asked for his portion of goods, and went away into a very far country. Soon all he had was spent; and there arose a mighty famine in the land, and he began to be in want; and he went and hired himself to keep swine—And oft he looked at his grovelling charge, and said, “O that I was one of you; and could eat and die and be no more.” He even fed upon their vile fare: for no man gave unto him. At length he came to himself; and the thought of home struck him—“There is bread enough in my father’s house and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go unto my father.” While he was yet a great way off, hovering about and afraid to draw nigh, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him. He had prepared a confession, acknowledging the vilest guilt; and a petition, imploring the meanest favour: but forgiving, overflowing love prevented the expression of either. “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring forth the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be

merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

He felt his unworthiness before; but he was a thousand times more penitent now. “What a father have I sinned against! What excellence have I contemned! What love have I abused!” How would he blush and weep, as he was not only clothed, but adorned; and not only fed, but feasted? How, as the ring touched his finger, and he was conducted into the room of mirth, prepared for *him!*—how, almost sinking under the weight of obligation, would he be ready to say—“How can I bear all this?” And would not the father be more endeared to him by forgiveness, than by relation? And after all this—would he be able to stab this father to the heart? To offend him? To grieve him? Must he not delight to obey him? and every moment ask, What wilt thou have me to do?

Despair hardens; but we are saved by hope. Threatenings may make us afraid to go on; but goodness makes us unwilling. Terrors may wrest the weapons of rebellion out of our hand; but goodness induces us to hate them—and throw them down—and weep over them—and return and vow—“O Lord, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us; henceforth by thee only will we make mention of thy Name.”

How mistaken then are many with regard to Christian repentance! It is not legal, but evangelical. It is not slavish, but filial. It is not degrading, but connected with the noblest feelings of the heart. It is not desponding and miserable, but lives in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. And “blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.”

JANUARY 13.—EVENING.

“And Joseph called the name of the first-born Manasseh: for God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim: for God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.”—GEN. xli. 51, 52.

THERE was nothing extraordinary in this. It was usual in those, early ages to attach names to things, places, and persons, in order to mark any particular occurrence, and to be a memento of it. Thus, after the victory between Mizpeh and Shen. Samuel took a stone and called it “Ebenezer,” saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. Thus, when God had appeared for his deliverance, Abraham called the mount “Jehovah Jireh;” the Lord will provide. Thus Pharaoh, upon the promotion of Joseph, called his name “Zaphnath-paaneah,” the revealer of secrets.

But what others do from custom, a good man does from principle. In a common observance, he has a motive peculiar to himself. And therefore we see Joseph not only thus naming his children, but doing it “after a godly sort.”

We learn from his conduct, first, that it is desirable to secure the remembrance of interesting events. “God requireth that which is past;” and our improvement requires it. We can only be affected and influenced by things as they are present in the mind. Forgetfulness is temporary ignorance or unbelief: “By which,” says the Apostle, “ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you.” He therefore admonishes his hearers to give the more earnest heed to the things which they had heard, lest at any time they should let them slip. God calls

upon his people "to remember what Balak consulted" against them: and to "remember all the way the Lord had led them in the wilderness." Let us therefore say, with Asaph, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High; surely, I will remember his wonders of old." Was he once powerful, and is he now weak? once wise, and is he now ignorant? once true, and now faithless? once gracious, and now unkind? He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. How many of our failures, especially in thankfulness and confidence, are to be traced back to a bad memory!

Secondly, what a marvellous change is sometimes produced in the condition of God's people! What does Manasseh signify? "Forgetting." Why did Joseph give him this name? "For God," said he, "hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." That is, the hardships by which he had been exercised, the sufferings he had met with from his own brethren, the anguish he had felt when torn so young from a home so endeared, the wretchedness of his slavery and imprisonment. Did he then banish all this from his memory? This would be perfectly inconsistent with his design in imposing the name. The meaning is, that his circumstances were so changed, that no trace of his former difficulties and distresses remained. We often say, In heaven, we shall forget all our sorrows. Shall we then have no remembrance of the Hand that sustained us under them, and delivered us from them? Yes: but all sorrow and sighing will cease; and all tears will be wiped from our eyes. Few had ever been so tried as Joseph; and for a number of years the clouds returned after the rain and fell heavier than before.

At length he was not only delivered, but advanced. "Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; and he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt." Thus every thing of his former degradation and misery was effaced as if it had never been—the change proclaiming that nothing is too hard for the Lord.

Thirdly, the afflictions of the saints do not hinder their fruitfulness. What means Ephraim? "Fruitful." Why does Joseph impose this name upon him? "For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction," His dying father remarks this under a beautiful image: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall." This includes, no doubt, a reference to his outward condition. Egypt had been the land, how truly! the land of his affliction: but he had succeeded in life beyond all example and expectation, and was made to flourish in all his estate. Here is surely an allusion to godliness, as well as to wealth, and honour, and offspring. "What indeed in the eye of a good man is growing in every thing else, without growing in grace? What is it to abound in business, unless our soul prospers? What is it to be blessed With "the blessings of heaven above, the blessings of the deep that lieth under, the blessings of the breasts, and of the womb," if we are not blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ?" Paul prays for the Philippians

that they may “be filled with all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.” Christian, what is this world to you but “the land of your affliction?” You have found it a vale of tears: but has it been a fruitful vale? Your trials need not prevent your fruitfulness; yea, they are designed to secure and promote it: and though they are not joyous, but grievous, they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. What have they done for us? It is sad that we should need them; but sadder still that we should lose the benefit of them. Can we say, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted?”

Lastly, The hand of God is to be acknowledged in all our concerns, especially our mercies. Whether they are temporal or spiritual, they have the same source—every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights. Joseph therefore says, *He* has done all things for me. If my condition has been changed, *he* changed it—“*God* hath made me to forget all my toil and my father’s house.” If I have been fruitful, in *him* was my fruit found—“*God* hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” It is the office of faith to lead us to God, and to show us his agency where others only see instruments and second causes. It is the business of humility to teach and enable us to say, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake”—Both furnish evidence that we are in a course of preparation for that world where “God is all in all.”

JANUARY 14.—MORNING.

“And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.”—GEN. xl. 20.

IF the chief butler had been falsely, and the chief baker had been justly, accused, the providence of God was now seen in the clearing of the one, and the punishment of the other. If both were either equally innocent or guilty, here was an instance of the arbitrariness of a prince who probably prided himself in his absolute authority, and in having it said, “Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive.” Or perhaps he designed to show his subjects that he would be known both in the exercise of mercy and judgment. And hence the *season* was his birthday.

The birthday of princes has been anciently and generally solemnized as a token of the respect due to their sovereignty; but it has often been abused, and given rise to wickedness and mischief. We see this in the case of Jeroboam. At the commemoration of his birth intemperance rioted; and the intoxication of the king himself injured his health, and made him forget his dignity in his joining familiarly with low buffoons and jesters: “In the day of our king, the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine? he stretched out his hand with scorners.” And how was it, on a similar occasion, with Herod? “Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates in Galilee”—the daughter of Herodias danced—the king was excited—and John was beheaded!

But, in almost every rank of life, the usage prevails, of persons observing with some degree of festivity the

day of their birth. The thing is lawful in itself if it be used lawfully. It may be used profitably. But our pious forefathers made it, if a day of relative intercourse and congratulation, yet a day also of pious feeling and regard. And surely it should be made

—A day of thanksgiving to the Author and Giver of life—For our being—for the rank we occupy in the scale of creation—for the country and family in which we were brought forth—for our civil and religious advantages—and for our preservation through so many perils—and when so many have been cut off.

—A day of humiliation—That we were shapen in iniquity, and in sin did our mother conceive us—that we went astray from the womb—that our transgressions are innumerable, and our trespass is gone up into the very heavens—and that we have not improved, as we ought to have done, any of our privileges—“I do remember my faults this day.”

—A day of reflection—That, as there is a time to be born, so there is a time to die—that so much of life is already passed away as a shadow, that, when a few years are come, we shall go the way whence we shall not return—that our continuance here is as uncertain as it is short—that we may never see this day again—and if we do not—where shall we be when it returns?

—A day of prayer—That we may so number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom—that we may obtain pardoning mercy and renewing grace—that we may be prepared for all the duties and trials that lie before us—that, whether we live, we may live unto the Lord; or, whether we die, we may die unto the Lord; so that, living and dying, we may be the Lord's.

Happy they who, without complaining of their lot, or being impatient to be gone, yet know the day of their death is better than the day of their birth. Though for them to live is Christ, to die is gain. Every returning birthday tells them, "So much nearer your heavenly home."

But how dreadful the state of those who know—and, if they consider, they must know—that every year advances them so much away from all they love; and brings them so much nearer a world in which, as they have no hope, so after which they can have no desire. If conscience be not stupified, and all thought banished by company and gaiety—a birthday to them is far from enviable. Verses may be written; addresses may be received; smiles may be put on: but even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.

What a difference in the two following references to the birth of the individuals—

"Who," says Voltaire, "can, without horror, consider the whole world as the empire of destruction? It abounds with wonders; it also abounds with victims. It is a vast field of carnage and contagion. Every species is without pity pursued and torn to pieces through the earth, and air, and water. In man there is more wretchedness than in all the other animals put together. He loves life, and yet he knows that he must die. If he enjoys a transient good, he suffers various evils, and is at last devoured by worms. This knowledge is his fatal prerogative: other animals have it not. He spends the transient moments of his existence in diffusing the miseries which he suffers: in cutting the throats of his fellow-creatures for pay; in cheating and being cheated; in

robbing and being robbed; in serving, that he might command; and in repenting of all he does. The bulk of mankind are nothing more than a crowd of wretches equally criminal and unfortunate: and the globe contains rather carcasses than men. I tremble at the review of this dreadful picture to find that it contains a complaint against Providence itself; and I WISH I HAD NEVER BEEN BORN."

Now let us hear the language of the excellent Hallyburton, who died as he lived, full of confidence in God. "I shall shortly get a very different sight of God from what I have ever had, and shall be made meet to praise him for ever and ever. Oh! the thoughts of an incarnate Deity are sweet and ravishing. Oh! how I wonder at myself that I do not love him more, and that I do not admire him more. What a wonder that I enjoy such composure under all my bodily pains, and in the view of death itself. What a mercy that, having the use of my reason, I can declare his goodness to my soul. I long for his salvation; I bless his name I have found him, and die rejoicing in him. O blessed be God that I WAS BORN! O that I was where he is. I have a father and mother, and ten brothers and sisters, in heaven, and I shall be the eleventh. Oh! there is a telling in this Providence, and I shall be telling it for ever! If there be such a *glory* in his conduct towards me now, what will it be to see the Lamb in the midst of the throne! Blessed be God that—ever I WAS BORN."

JANUARY 14.—EVENING.

“This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.”

—2 TIM. i. 15–18.

ONE of the most painful trials to which we are exposed in this vale of tears, is the failure of those friends, on whose professions of attachment we had placed dependence. But it is not a rare exercise. Witness the complaints of Job, and David, and especially Paul. Paul was additionally distressed to think that those who had left *him*, had not only forsaken a man and a friend, but a minister, and an apostle of Christ. Hence *their* desertion was nothing less than an abandonment of the faith of the Gospel. Defections in religion were foretold from the beginning. They early took place in the first churches. They frequently occur still. Many promise fair, and run well for a time; but are hindered. The blossoms are pleasing; but they are not certain pledges of fruit. Ministers can only rejoice in the day of the Lord Jesus that they have not laboured ill vain—unless they rejoice with trembling. The end proves and crowns all.

The defection here was awfully general: it included “all they which were in Asia.” Two of them, Phygellus and Hermogenes, the Apostle mentions by name; doubtless because they were leaders, and had been very instrumental in the revolt. This is all we know of these men: it would have been better for

them had we known nothing. "The name of the wicked shall rot." Only some of these sinners rot, like malefactors in irons and gibbets: while others rot under it, they rot above ground; known only by infamy; and suspended for warning and terror.

But "the memory of the just is blessed." How honourably is Onesiphorus brought forward! What an exception to the general apostacy! He is one against two—against many—against all in Asia. We are not to follow a multitude to do evil. Numbers can never turn evil into good, or truth into error. Community in sin is no excuse, and will be no preservation: though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished. Fellowship in suffering is no alleviation: it may be a bitter enhancement. There will not only be weeping, but gnashing of teeth, among those who accuse and execrate each other. This will be the case at the meeting of the seducer and the seduced; Voltaire and his pupils; the faithless minister and his deluded hearers. But to advance without support, in the face of opposition; to brave the torrent of example, and the influence of the crowd, concerned only to approve ourselves unto God, shews a Divine nobleness and purity of principle and motive: and "them that honour me," says God, "I will honour; but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

He therefore is not unrighteous to forget the work and labour of love which Onesiphorus had shewed to his Name, in the relief and assistance he had afforded his servant. Paul records here in the book of life, the tenderness of his liberality; his courage in owning him though a prisoner; his zealousness in searching him out in Rome; and the many things

wherein he had, before this, ministered to him at Ephesus.—Was he then a man of leisure and wealth? It is probable he was not. The servants of Christ have seldom been much indebted to the rich. In a general way, the disposition for beneficence diminishes as the capacity increases; and the greater part of what is done for the Gospel and the poor, is done by people in common life. But he had a public spirit: his heart was in his work: he did what he *could*—and whoever does what he *can*, will do, not only comparatively, but really, much. And was he a loser? Was Obededom injured by accommodating the ark? The ark, says Henry, is a guest that always pays well for its entertainment. None ever, repented that they had done too much for the cause of the Redeemer. And none ever will, while the promise remains, “The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand.” “There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.”

Thus Onesiphorus obtained a name and a place among the worthies in the Scripture. Wheresoever the Gospel is preached, that which he did will be told as a memorial of him. Thousands bless him at this hour for the part he acted. He lived in the affections of Paul; and constantly shared in his prayers. And was this a light thing, to be remembered by a man who had such power with God? “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

In this way the Apostle expressed his thankfulness. He had a very humble, and, therefore, a very

grateful disposition: and the favours shewn him in his straits and distresses always made a deep impression upon him. Hence he prays for “the house” of his benefactor; that is, for his wife, children, relatives, servants, and outward estate. He prays also for his benefactor himself—“The Lord grant that *he* may find mercy of the Lord in that day.” What! would such a man as *he*, with all his good works, need *mercy*? This would have seemed strange to some; but it would not be surprising to Onesiphorus himself. He knew that when he had done all, he was an unprofitable servant; and that if God entered into judgment with him, he could not stand. It is the conviction of every man who is perfectly acquainted with the law, or the Gospel, or himself. He feels his need of mercy; mercy to the last; and, above all, mercy at the last. When he examines himself, he sees enough, not only in his sins, but even in his duties, to make him tremble and despair. But he looks for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

And he will find it. He will then be spared; absolved; acknowledged; applauded; and glorified. What mercy! How free! How rich! And how will it be prized—in that day! If we find mercy then, we are made for ever. But woe to those who will be left to the justice of God, without a Mediator! If we have not fled for refuge, to lay hold on the *hope* set before us; and have not a *friend* in the Judge; we are undone for ever. If we find not mercy then, it can never be found afterwards.

JANUARY 15.—MORNING.

“Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.”—Ps. xxv. 1.

It is not easy to do this. We are naturally sluggish and grovelling. Who has not reason to acknowledge, with shame and sorrow, “My soul cleaveth unto the dust?” It is easy enough, in duty, to lift up our hands, and our eyes, and our voices: but it is another thing to come even to his seat, to enter into the secret of his tabernacle, and to hold intercourse with the God of heaven. And yet, without this, what is devotion? And how unanswerable will all our services be to the requisition of him who is a Spirit, and seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth!

And without this, a real Christian is no more satisfied than God. He will not, indeed, from a principle of duty, undervalue the means of grace, and neglect private and public devotion; but he is disappointed unless he can lift up his soul unto God in them.

And this marks the spiritual worshipper. He is not distinguished by always enjoying liberty and fervour in his holy exercises; but he mourns the want of them—while the formalist looks no further than the performance itself, and returns from the house and throne of God without ever inquiring whether he has had communion with him.

It is the spirituality of religion that befriends enjoyment. Nothing yields us pleasure but in proportion as the heart is engaged in the pursuit. How dull and how tiresome are those tasks, in which

“In vain to heaven we raise our cries,
And leave our souls behind.”

But it is good to draw *near* to God. Then there is a sacred charm that keeps our thoughts from wandering. Then we attend on the Lord without distraction. Then we feel no weariness of spirit. We call the Sabbath a delight. We find his words, and eat them, And our meditation of him is sweet.

And when such a worshipper comes forth, he will be ready to say to all he meets, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." And *his* recommendations are likely to have some effect. For his profiting will appear unto all men. His face shines. His heart speaks. His life speaks. His character speaks. He *must* be impressive and influential. He *will* be felt—in the family—in the church—and in the world. He cannot but do good, even without pretension—without effort—

"When such a man, familiar with the skies,
Has filled his urn where those pure waters rise;
And once more mingles with us, meaner things;
'Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings—
Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide,
Which tells us whence his treasures are supplied."

JANUARY 15.—EVENING.

"*The gentleness of Christ.*"—2 COR. X. I.

DOES the Apostle mean, by the gentleness of Christ, the gentleness he requires, or the gentleness he displayed? In fact, they are the same; not indeed in degree, but in quality. As "the precious ointment," poured upon the head of Aaron, ran down to the skirts of his garments, so Christians have an unction from the Holy One. The same mind which

was in him, is in them; and so essential is this oneness, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." But let us attend to this gentleness as it is personally exemplified in himself.

According to the prophecies going before, there was nothing by which he was to be more distinguished than by this attribute or character. To mention a few instances. It was said of him, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee—having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass—and he shall speak peace unto the heathen." "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth." "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy." And if we go forward from prophecy to history, and see him as he goes about doing good, what so constantly and strikingly shews itself as this lovely distinction? What was his emblem? A Lamb. How did the Holy Ghost descend upon him? In the form of a dove. What was the angelical report of his religion? "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." How does he employ the supernatural energies with which he was invested? It is true, he once cursed a fig tree, and immediately it withered away. But it *was* a tree, and not a person; and a tree un-owned; and growing by the way-side; and a barren

one; and the malediction was intended to be an instructive emblem and warning. It is true also that he destroyed the herd of swine belonging to the Gadarenes. But this was only an animal sacrifice: and it was in love to their souls; and it was to bring their sin to remembrance, and to rebuke them for an unlawful traffic: and what was the loss of their swine to the benefit he conferred upon them in the restoration of two of their neighbours and relations from the most wretched estate to the possession of reason and the enjoyment and usefulness of life? All the other miracles he performed were entirely and directly acts of kindness and tenderness. Thus he made the hungry multitude to sit down on the grass, and fed them—opened the eyes of a blind beggar—raised to life the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. Where shall we end? Yea, he turned the water into wine at the marriage of Cana in Galilee, to perpetuate the innocent festivity of the scene, to save the new-married pair from mortification, and to crown them with honour.

It is true, he repeated again and again the exclamation, “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” But they *were* hypocrites of the vilest complexion. Under a reputation for the strictest godliness, they were full of extortion and iniquity. They sinned against knowledge and conviction. They really believed his miracles, yet ascribed them to the devil: made their devotions pander to their depravity; and with their public and long prayers devoured widows’ houses. How could he avoid exposing and condemning these unprincipled wretches; and disabusing the common people of all confidence in such guides? What should we have thought of him if he

had not? What esteem could we have felt for him? Does mercy require the absence of righteousness? Is meekness connivance at crime? Does gentleness renounce all the exalted feelings of wisdom, rectitude, and dignity?

But observe him with regard to others. There was nothing censorious in his disposition; nothing distant and reserved in his manners. He was always easy of access, charitable in his constructions, mild in his rebukes, and tender in his invitations. How did he address the people at large? "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." What said he to the transgressor, exposed by a number of accusers, all guilty of the same crime, and wishing to have their fellow-sinner stoned? "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and silt no more." How did he express himself towards infants? "They brought young children to him, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put *his* hands upon them, and blessed them." See his conduct towards his friends. At the grave of Lazarus "Jesus wept." See his feelings in death towards his mother. "When Jesus, therefore, saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith

unto his mother, Woman behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." How gentle was he in all his dealings with his own disciples, bearing with their mistakes, apologizing for their infirmities, loving them unto the end, and blessing them in the very act of departure into heaven! And was he wanting in this temper towards his enemies? Did he not weep over the city whose inhabitants were going to imbrue their hands in his blood? Did he not heal the ear of the servant of his bitterest foe? What did he to those who came to apprehend him? He could have annihilated them with a frown, but he only impressed them with his glory, and caused them to go backward, and fall to the ground, and readily consent to the escape of his followers. He veiled the sun, and shook the earth, and rent the rocks, as he suffered; but he punished no one. Yea, he prayed, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

He has the same heart now. Though he is passed into the heavens, he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. His gentleness is now displayed in four things. First—in relieving our wants. How harshly are many treated, when they apply to their fellow-creatures for succour! and if they succeed, how ungraciously is the relief afforded! What a difference is there between bounty and kindness: between giving and the feeling of benevolence. Here females excel. There is a tenderness and a delicacy in their doings which men can rarely reach or exemplify. So would it be with angels if they were incarnate, and lived among us. How gentle would be the manner of their beneficence! They now bear us up

in their hands, lest we dash our foot against a stone: but it is so softly, that we are not suffered to be conscious of it. But the Lord of all! how he bows down his ear, and hearkens to all our tales of distress, and gives to all liberally, and upbraideth not—

Secondly—in teaching us. We usually think only of ability in a teacher; but temper and patience are equally necessary. Without gentleness, the pupil, especially if sensible of his defects, will feel either confusion or despondency. But who could ever bear with a scholar as Christ the great Teacher bears with us? With what long-sufferings does he endure our dulness and mistakes! What various expedients does he employ! How often does he repeat the lesson—year after year; line upon line; precept upon precept! Thirdly—in chastising us. He corrects us in measure. He stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind. “He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” Fourthly—in employing us!

“And will no heavy loads impose

Beyond the strength that he bestows.”

He “will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”

Let us not abuse his gentleness. Nothing would be more vile, and odious, and provoking. But let us improve it by losing everything like dread and slavishness in dealing with him; by confiding in him; by admiring him; by following him—till we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

JANUARY 16.—MORNING.

"I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."—JER. XXIX. 11.

WHAT can the people of God desire more? They are here assured by himself—that he *thinks* of them—that he *knows* his thoughts towards them—that they are *kind* in their nature; thoughts of *peace*, and not of *evil*—and that they regard an *end* allowing and requiring *expectation*—to bring them to an *expected end*.

He designed and procured the Jews good in Babylon: but the ransomed of the Lord were to return and come to Zion. "After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." Here we see what was *their* expected end. And what did it prefigure, but "the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls"—"The end, everlasting life?"—The Christian is now on the sea, encountering many a wind, and feeling many a fear: but the voyage will end; and he will be brought into the desired haven. He is now on a journey; and he is often discouraged because of the way; but it will end in a better country, and at his Father's—house. He is now in a warfare; and, though it be a good one, it is trying and painful: but the strife will soon end; and the head exchange the helmet for the "crown of glory that fadeth not away."

But what characterizes the posture of the believer's mind with regard to this end? Expectation. He is looking for that blessed hope. He is waiting for the Saviour from heaven. For he is now saved

by hope. Every thing now leads him forward. Creatures; ordinances; his connexions; his experience; every thing in his painful, every thing in his pleasing, feelings—all, all says, "Arise, and depart hence, for this is not your rest." Human expectation is seldom justified by the event. If the votary do not miss his aim, he is disappointed in his object, and his heart sighs in the midst of his success. But let the Christian's expectation be as great as even the Scripture can make it, the blessedness itself will be much greater; and the fruition will induce the acknowledgment, "The half was not told me."

Yet the expectation is very distinguishable from the confidence of the presumptuous. Natural men find it a very easy thing to hope: because they hope, without any proper sense of their unworthiness and guilt; they hope, without examination, without evidence; they hope, uninformed and unauthorized. It is one of the first works of the Spirit of God to break up this state of mind; and then the man can say, with Paul, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Yet, while he for ever shuts this door of hope, he opens another: he turns him from the Law to the Gospel; from self to the Saviour; from going about to establish his own righteousness, to embrace the righteousness which is of God.

Hence arises what the Apostle calls, "*a good hope through grace*:" and the goodness consists not so much in the strength of the confidence, as in the solidity of the foundation, and the clearness and fulness of the warrant. Our Lord speaks of two builders: the one he calls a fool; the other, a wise man. But the difference between them was not so much in the edifices

themselves, as in the groundwork. Both structures looked fair enough to the passenger: but the house of the former was built upon the sand, and the storm carried it away; while that of the latter stood every assault, for it was founded on a rock. What a sandy base has the hope of many! How certainly and easily will it be overthrown—the expectation of the sinner, the worldling, the hypocrite, and the Pharisee! But the Christian's hope maketh not ashamed: it rests on the foundation laid in Zion; and the possessor cannot be confounded, unless God can become a liar, and be chargeable with perjury—for he has not only promised, but sworn: and, “because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself.”

Keep much alive this expectation. Let nothing shake its confidence. Let nothing obscure the object, or the ground of it. It can do wonders; and will produce a thousand advantages in proportion as it is realized.

I repair to the believer who is fully exemplifying it; and I find him dead to the world, and “all that earth calls good and great.” And what is the cause? “An expected end.” He has looked within the veil, and seen the glory that excelleth. The sun has rendered invisible the glowworms—and the stars too.

I find him satisfied with an inferior condition in life, and though denied many indulgences with which the children of this generation abound. And what is the reason? “An expected end.” They are at home, says he; but I am not. I am a stranger and a pilgrim. I am at an inn; it yields me but few entertainments, or even accommodations—so much the better. It might otherwise tempt and detain me. It now urges me on.

And what makes him so cheerful in his trials? "An expected end." This hope, says he, I have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast; and "I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed." This expected end, also, says he, animates me in all the difficulties attending a course of obedience. If hope actuates to such exertions, hardships, and sacrifices, the sons of learning, fame, and wealth; should *I* ever be cold, or discouraged, with the certainty before me of an eternity, an infinity of all good?—This too, says he, composes me in the prospect, and reconciles me to the approach of death. In itself it is far from being pleasant; but it is the right way to a city of habitation, a departure to be with Christ, which is far better. He also can make the exit as gentle as the issue is glorious. However this may be,

"'Tis there for ever I shall dwell,
 With Jesus in the realms of day;
 When I shall bid these fears farewell.
 And he will wipe my tears away."
 "Jesus, on thee our hope depends,
 To lead us on to thine abode;
 Assured our home will make amends
 For all our toil upon the road."

JANUARY 16.—EVENING.

"My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me."—Ps. lxxiii. 8.

HERE are two acknowledgments, dissimilar in their expression; but the second relieves the first—and the first is as evidential of godliness as the second.

There are many that say, Who will show me any good? and follow hard after the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life. But who says, "Where is God my maker, that giveth songs in the night? Who "stirreth up himself to take hold of God?" Yet there always have been such, and the number is now increasing, whose souls follow hard after *Him*. But it may seem strange that this should have been the case with David. Few ever succeeded in life like him. He rose from great obscurity into splendour, and affluence, and power; and was even seated upon a throne, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. What, some might be ready to say, what can the indulged mortal hope and wish for more? Yet he prays to be delivered from men of the world, who have their portion in this life; and exclaims, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." He was also a good man, and had enjoyed much of God. But this, instead of contenting him, makes him long for more; and therefore he says, "to see thy power and thy glory, so as I *have* seen thee in the sanctuary." We cannot pursue an unknown good, and we shall not pursue an unvalued one. But the knowledge of Divine things, which results from the teaching of the Spirit, is always influential in the affections: experience gives a relish which can never be forgotten; enjoyment increases hungering and thirsting after righteousness. When we have tasted the first-fruits, nothing will satisfy us but the whole vintage. When we have sipped at the streams, we *must* drink at the fountain-head. God therefore, God in Christ, God in covenant, the God of *all* grace, is the object of the believer's attraction and pursuit simply

and supremely; and though heaven and earth are very comprehensive, and contain a thousand endearments, he can say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." "It is good for me to draw near to God."

But the *soul's* following, and following *hard* after God—what means this? Surely it intends much more than a languid, inert inclination; or "the desire of the slothful which killeth him, because his hands refuse to labour." It evinces an intenceness of concern that quickens and rouses the man into life and earnestness—that draws his very "soul" along with it—that reconciles him to every needful exertion and sacrifice, however trying—and urges him to persevere, whatever difficulties or discouragements he meets with in his course. And sometimes the distance is long—and the progress up hill—and the road rough—and the weather unfriendly—and enemies would thrust us back—and sometimes we lose sight of him, and ask those we meet, "Saw ye him whom my soulloveth?"—And when we spy him again, he seems to advance as we advance—and when we gain upon him and get nearer, he seems to look back and frown, and tell us to retire. The exercises and feelings of Christians in the Divine life, will enable them to explain these allusions. Who among them all has not, like the Jews, been sometimes "discouraged because of the way?" Who has not resembled Barak's adherents, "Faint, yet pursuing?" Who has not frequently said, "My soul followeth hard after thee?"

And who among them all has not had reason also to say—"Thy right hand upholdeth me?" For if

God is before his people in one respect, he is with them in another. While he tries them by apparent neglect, he secretly sustains them. While he seems to forsake them, he really supports them, and renders their strength equal to their day. His right hand means, the influence of his gracious power, employed to preserve and animate them to go forward in their arduous course, cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart, according to the promise, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God:

I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Thus his right hand upholds them three ways. First—as to sin; lest they should fall by it. Secondly—as to suffering; lest they should sink under it. Thirdly—as to duty; lest they should decline from it.

Thus the believer's experience is now a kind of dawn, neither day nor night—a mixed estate of pains and pleasures, fears and hopes, struggles and triumphs. He resembles the bush burning with fire, but not consumed: or the ship suffering from the winds and waves, but not sinking. He may be troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; cast down, but not destroyed. In his lowest circumstances he can chide and encourage himself in the Lord his God—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."

JANUARY 17.—MORNING.

“*The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.*”

—GAL. iii. 24.

WHAT law? Three kinds of law were given to the Jews. It is not necessary to exclude either, though the last is principally intended.

The *Judicial*. This regarded their policy as a nation; regulated their conduct towards each other; and determined their civil crimes, and penalties. Even this led to Christ: especially the right of redemption, which lay with the nearest of kin. So did also the provision of the cities of refuge, and happy they who have fled for shelter and relief to him that was pre-figured by them.

The *ceremonial*. This prescribed their worship, and enjoined a multitude of services and sacrifices which were all shadows of good things to come, but the body was Christ. It would be endless to particularize. The tabernacle, the mercy-seat, the altar, the table of shewbread, the paschal lamb—all these led to him, and derived their importance from the relation. And hence those who deny their typical use, have always spoken depreciatingly of them. The Jews were in the infancy of the Church; and these ceremonies were like pictures placed over the child's lessons: or the whole economy may be considered as a star to the travellers in search of the Consolation of Israel, going before them till it stood over where the young child was—and then disappearing.

The *moral*. This was of universal and perpetual obligation; being founded, not on any positive appointment or authority, but in the nature of man, and

the relations subsisting between him and God, and between him and his fellow-creatures. The substance of it is, to love God supremely, and our neighbour as ourselves. Is this unreasonable? Can God himself dispense with it? Can he require less?

Now this leads us to Christ, First, by convincing us of sin: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. It is owing to men's ignorance of this law that they think so well of themselves. Did they know that it ranks all omissions of duty in the number of sins: that, it extends to the state of the heart, as well as of the life; and to our motives and principles as well as our actions: self-abased and despairing, they would be constrained to cry out, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified."

Secondly, by showing us our danger. This results from transgression: for the curse enters with all sin—"cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." If you were in a room where there was a dead lion, you would not be afraid. But if, while you were walking by, he should come to life, and rise upon his feet, and glare his eyeballs, and begin to roar;—as he revived, you would die with fear.—So it was with Paul—"I was alive," says he, "without the law; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."

Thirdly, by gendering despair of life by it. Here again the Apostle tells us, that his death *to* the law was also *by* it. "I *through* the law am dead unto the law, that I might live unto God." Thus the extremity of the danger makes us call out for a deliverer. Famine lectured back the Prodigal to his

father's house. Disease drives the patient to apply to a physician, which he would otherwise neglect, and to submit to a remedy which he would otherwise reject.—“The law is our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.”

The law, therefore, is good if it be used lawfully; and ministers ought to preach it. Some pass under a greater law work than others; but let none question the genuineness of the relief they have obtained from Christ, because they have not experienced much terror and distress, This terror and distress are but in the order of means; and the design of them is answered if we are brought to Christ, and acquiesce in *his* salvation.

—Everyone therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto HIM, and can find encouragement nowhere else.—And him that cometh unto me, says the Saviour, I will in no wise cast out.

JANUARY 17.—EVENING.

“And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen RIGHTEOUS BEFORE ME IN THIS GENERATION.”—GEN. vii. 1.

WE have here a striking representation of the character of Noah's piety. It was distinguished by singularity and sincerity. If considered in reference to his fellow-creatures, it was singular; if in reference to the Supreme Being, it was sincere—“Righteous,” says God, “*in this generation:*” “righteous,” says God, “*before me in this generation.*”

“Righteous,” says God, “*in this generation*”—a generation universally depraved: “for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.” Noah therefore

had none to accompany him, none to countenance him; but all opposed him. Never was there before, and never has there been since, one so singular in his religion as he. He not only differed from his neighbours, but from all the earth. Here was the danger, and here was the triumph of his piety. The force of opinion and example when on the side of the multitude is inexpressible. When a man is *alone*, conscience and reason will sometimes speak; and he will form many a good purpose, especially when trouble lays hold of him, or he is laid on a bed of sickness. But when he goes forth again, and again enters the crowd, he becomes another man. His resolutions fail him; his impressions wear off; the course of this world lays hold of him, and the stream carries him down. Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound, Herod, when he saw that it pleased the Jews, proceeded to take Peter also. Many of the Pharisees believed in Jesus, but feared to confess him lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. And who has not been influenced by the smiles or frowns of his fellow-creatures to act against his judgment and convictions? Who has not been holden back from the performance of many things, which he knew to be duties, by the inquiry, What will my friends think of me? What will the world say of me?

It would be well for us, seriously to reflect in private; to search the Scriptures without prejudice or partiality; to lay down certain rules of conduct, and go forth in the strength of the Most High, and follow them wherever they lead us, through evil report, or good report.

“But I shall be singular.” You will be singular; and while the world continues what it is, every Christian *must* be singular. Let any man, actuated by the Spirit, and governed by the precepts of the Gospel, pass through the various walks of life, and whom will he resemble? The majority? What says the Divine command? “Follow not the multitude to do evil.” “Be not conformed to this world.” “Come out from among them, and be separate.” “But I shall be singular.” And suppose you are. In everything else that is deemed excellent, persons wish to be singular. They would be singularly beautiful, singularly rich, singularly wise. But the righteous, in all these, is more excellent than his neighbour. Religion is always praiseworthy. To be religious among the religious is commendable; but it is far more so to be godly among the ungodly, What is innocence where there is no danger? or success where there is no contention? But to be surrounded with evil, and to be steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord—this is the heroism of piety. This shews a knowledge of its infinite importance; a real love to its nature; a purity of motive; a nobleness of mind, asserting its own freedom, and daring to think and act for itself.

But his piety was as sincere as it was singular—“Righteous,” says God, “*before me* in this generation.” Much more is necessary to render us religious before God than before men: and frequently that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. Human legislation is satisfied with actions; but the law of God is spiritual, and regards our principles as well as our practice. The Lord looketh to the heart. Hence we read of

“pure and undefiled religion *before God and the Father.*”

Bad goods require dark rooms; and as many articles of merchandize seem valuable till taken into the light, so there are many things which appear fair till they are set in the light of God’s countenance. Before him the friendships we often profess are nothing but instances of selfishness; and the prayers and praises we engage in are only the forms of godliness. We may come to his house as his people come, and sit and hear his words, and commend the preacher, and with our mouth shew much love, while he sees our hearts going after our covetousness. And how dreadful to think that he will hereafter develope all, and divulge all respecting us; and that what we have always been *before him*, we shall be made to appear before an assembled world! Could many now be seen by their fellow-creatures as he sees them, they would blush to leave their dwelling—To what everlasting shame and contempt must they awake and arise at the last day

It has been said, a man has four characters: one with his friends; another with his enemies; a third with himself; and a fourth with his God. The two last should agree; and they frequently do agree; and if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. We often confound hypocrisy and self-delusion. But hypocrisy has nothing to do with deceiving ourselves; it is only a deceiving of others. It is wearing a mask, instead of shewing our own face; it is acting a part which does not belong to our character. This, we fear, is too common. And what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? But self-delusion

is more rare, especially among those who live in the midst of the light of the Gospel. The decisions of the Scriptures are so explicit, and the marks and evidences of real religion are so plain and many, that it is not an easy thing for a man to be ignorant or uncertain whether he loves God, or does not; whether he walks by faith, or by sight; whether he minds earthly things, or sets his affection on things above. Yet a man may be deceived, as well as be a deceiver, as to his spiritual state, and think himself to be something when he is nothing. Yea, it would seem that it is possible for persons to carry the delusion in their favour to the very door at which they will knock with confidence, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he will say, I know you not. Let it therefore be our solemn concern to inquire what character we sustain in the sight of God, on whose decision our destiny depends, and whose judgment is always according to truth. It was the honour of Zechariah and Elizabeth that they were both righteous before God—And of Noah God said, he is righteous *before me* in this generation. He was not perfect; but his piety bore the eye of God.

JANUARY 18.—MORNING.

“And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; FOR THEE HAVE I SEEN righteous before me in this generation.”—GEN. vii. 1.

WE have viewed the character of Noah's piety, let us now consider the *Divine observation* of it. “*Thee.*” says God, “*have I seen* righteous before me in this generation.” It means, that He had discerned, noticed, remarked him. Men may suppose them-

selves unobserved; but they are not only God's creatures, but subjects. He is their moral governor; and inspects and examines them. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. His eyes are upon the ways of men, and he pondereth all their goings.

And what is his aim in the exploring of the human race? Is it to ascertain whether they are rich or poor, bond or free, learned or illiterate? These are distinctions of inferior importance; they will soon drop off from their possessors, and we shall enter eternity only under personal characters. The grand thing is, whether we are wise unto salvation; whether we are free indeed; whether we are rich towards God; whether we are men of the world, or heirs of the grace of life: whether we are wicked or righteous? And he is able to determine this, without the possibility of mistake. He is not far from anyone of us. He needs not the aid of testimony to inform him. All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. He understands our thoughts afar off. Yea, the darkness hideth not from him, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to him, Hence he knoweth them that are his. He sees them, however intermixed with others; and in his eye they are as separate now as they will be hereafter.

Here was only one holy man in the world of the ungodly; but the Lord saw that single grain of corn in a heap of chaff; and that particle of gold in a mass of dross. It was too precious to be overlooked or disregarded. And Noah continued to engage his attention. Having seen him, the Lord never lost

sight of him. A prince cannot be acquainted with all the conditions of his subjects. A father cannot always have his children in view. But the Lord withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: their walls are continually before him. He sees all their external difficulties, and all their inward anxieties. Do they wander? He telleth all their wanderings. Do they weep? He puts their tears into his bottle. Their desire is before him, and their groaning is not hid from him.

He is not unrighteous to forget their work and labour of love. If they speak one to another, he hearkens and hears, and it is recorded in the book of his remembrance. Much of their religion is private. But he seeth in secret. Much is defective. But where there is a willing mind, he accepts, according to what a man has. Where the means of execution are wanting, he takes the purpose of the generous heart for the deed. Their wishes lie open to his view, and he judges of their services by them, and thus renders double unto them.

But when he says, "Thee have *I seen* righteous before me in this generation," he means to express not only discernment and notice, but also approbation. "For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright." He taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy. They blush and weep over their duties; but he applauds them. The world often counts their life madness, and their end to be without honour; but the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous.

Noah, as a preacher of righteousness, had laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought among the

disobedient; but his work was with the Lord, and his judgment with his God. While the ark was preparing, he met with nothing but ridicule and contempt. How often would they go in parties and insult him—"Well, old dotard, how come you on with your folly? So you are going to swim on dry land! Do you intend to make a sea as soon as you have made the ship? Where are your sails and rudder?"—Who knows not the force of cruel mockings?

But the work was the obedience of faith: and while men scorned, the Lord admired. How delicious is the approbation of God! His smile; his voice, saying, Well done, good and faithful servant, is enough to disarm reproach and persecution, to sweeten all the bitternesses of life, and to commence heaven on earth.

JANUARY 18.—EVENING.

"And the Lord said unto Noah, COME THOU AND ALL THY HOUSE INTO THE ARK; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation."—GEN. vii. 1.

WE have seen the character and the observation of Noah's piety; and here we see *the privilege of it*—"Come thou and all thy house into the ark." It is needless to inquire how the invitation was conveyed, whether in a vision, or a dream, or by an impulse on the mind, or a voice in the air—Noah knew that it came from God. But the manner of expressing it is observable. He does not say, "Go thou and all thy house into the ark;" but "Come." As if God was there. And he was there, and would have his servants and his family with him, to be safe in the day of evil.

To understand the greatness of the privilege, you

must recal the danger in which he now was, and endeavour to realize the scene. The time was arrived to fulfil the threatening. "The end of all flesh is come before me, And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die." All nature seems aghast at the frown of its Maker. As Noah steps into his welcome refuge, he looks, and sees every thing foreboding a gathering storm. The winds hurtle, the sky is covered with blackness; the windows of heaven are opened, the clouds pour down torrents, and the fountains of the great deep are broken up. The rivers swelling over their banks, and the seas invading the land, soon drove the inhabitants from the valleys and the plains. For awhile the hills and mountains afford them a retreat: and higher and higher they ascend up their sides. But no provision having been made, where will they find supplies of food? They look hungry at each other—and the weaker are slain and eaten with voracity. The devourers, according to their strength, survive one another. Their last hope are the trees, to whose branches they cling with despair, till, weakened or benumbed, they loosen their hold, and plunge into the flood. Then the stillness of death reigns over the universal watery grave. Many, before they perished, saw and heard the misery of thousands, and in the doom of their fellow wretches realized their own. Many too perished in view of a place of safety they could not reach; and tortured with the thought that they had refused to enter while it was in their power, and so brought upon themselves destruction. Ah! how

would they envy now the man they had derided!—And what were *his* feelings! his reflections! What were his apprehensions of the evil of sin, of the severity of God's justice, of the majesty of his power, of his goodness towards his people, of his caring for them, of his resources on their behalf! What pleasure would he feel; what thankfulness; what resolutions to love and serve him!

The Apostle Peter teaches us the use we should make of this dispensation. If he "spared not the old world, but saved Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." The present is not entirely a state of retribution; here we walk by faith, and not by sight. Another period is approaching, and "then shall we return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not," Yet even now he puts a difference between the Egyptians and the Israelites; and sometimes at least induces the exclamation even from unholy lips, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth."

And this interposition on their behalf is often spoken of in the Scriptures. He ordered a mark to be impressed on the forehead of those who mourned for the abominations that were done in the land, that the executioner when he approached Jerusalem might pass them by John heard the angel crying with a loud voice to them who had power to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of

our God in their foreheads." And, says the Saviour to the church of Philadelphia, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." "Come, my people," says God, "enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." If we distinguish ourselves for God, we shall be distinguished by him; or, as Henry expresses it, "If we keep ourselves pure in times of common iniquity, he will keep us secure in the times of common calamity." If we suffer with others, we shall not suffer like them. He can indemnify us with inward supports and consolations, and render it good for us to be afflicted. He can turn enemies into friends; and losses into gains. And if they suffer temporally, there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus—and soon all tears will be wiped from their eyes. The Lord's people should therefore not be afraid of evil tidings. Their hearts should be fixed, trusting in the Lord.

But the privilege here was not personal only, but relative. He was allowed to bring "his *house* and *all* his house, into the ark." It is good to belong to the godly. We share in many outward and spiritual advantages owing to the relation. If God's servants are blessings to others; if they are called the repairers of the breach, the restorers of paths to dwell in; if they keep off judgments, and bring down blessings upon the country in which they live; no wonder they

are profitable to their own connections. Abraham obtained a portion even for Ishmael. Thou hast spoken, says David, also of thy servant's house for a great while to come, And when Solomon was threatened for his transgressions with the rending of ten tribes from the empire, he was assured it should not be done in his days, for the sake of his father. Parents should fear the Lord, for the good of their children. The best provision they can make for them is not a hoard of silver and gold, but entailing upon them the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it. It is true that real religion does not descend by inheritance. Yet the family of a good man has many spiritual advantages, derived from his instructions, example, and prayers. If they do not improve these, the sin is their own, and their punishment will be the greater. Ham was in the ark; but without repentance, though he experienced a deliverance from the flood, he perished for ever. "Many shall come from the east and west and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

We shall have reflected to little purpose upon all this unless this impression be left upon the mind, that we cannot serve God for nought. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." He who inhabiteth eternity, and has other worlds to show himself in; and He who is the possessor and governor of this, can never be at a loss to fulfil his own word, "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

JANUARY 19.—MORNING.

"I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed."—GEN. xlviii. 11.

THIS was the language of the dying Jacob, when Joseph presented to him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

We behold in it his *piety*. He owns God in his indulgences—*He* has shewn me. Our comforts are sanctified and rendered doubly sweet when we receive them all from *his* hand. Let others live without God with them in the world; I would acknowledge him in all my ways. Let them ascribe their successes and enjoyments to chance, or to the power of their friends, or to their own diligence and skill; I would give him the glory that is due only to *his* Name. I would remember that, whatever be the medium of my comfort, he is the source; that, whatever be the instrument, he is the author—"The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it."

Observe also his *surprise*: his expectation was more than exceeded. We remember the sad relation of the loss of Joseph, and the garment dipped in blood, by which his grief was deluded, though not relieved. "He knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons, and all his daughters, rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him." For many years he never dreamed

of his survival: but added, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and will ye take Benjamin away? all these things are against me." In process of time, however, all this gloomy conclusion was contradicted: "They told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw: the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: and Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die." By-and-by this was fulfilled: "and Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."

Something, however, was still wanting. Joseph had sons; and these would be peculiarly endeared to Jacob. At length he embraces *them*, as well as the father—"I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy *seed*."

Is this the only instance in which God has not only frustrated the fears, but surpassed the hopes of his people? When Moses was in the ark of bulrushes, all his parents could have hoped for would have been his preservation, or falling into the hands of some kind individual, who, affected with his infancy and suffering, would have taken care of him—though they should never have seen him more. But Pharaoh's daughter finds him; and adopts him; and his mother becomes his nurse; and he is educated

in all the learning of Egypt; and he appears the deliverer and leader of Israel! David said, I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul: but, after a number of hairbreadth escapes, he was saved from *all* his enemies, and sat down upon the throne, “a wonder unto many.”

What numbers are there in whose experience this remark has been exemplified as to temporal things! They once had no inheritance, no not so much as to set their foot on: all they hoped to gain by their humble efforts was, only bread to eat and raiment to put on: and, lo! he has given them not only subsistence, but competency and affluence. And as to spiritual things—the penitent remembers how, when awakened out of his sleep, and he gazed on the horrors of his state, there seemed nothing left but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation. How hard did he find it to hope even for deliverance? But the Lord appeared to his joy; and not only spared and pardoned him, but enriched and ennobled him: and took him not only into his service, but into his house and into his bosom.

But in nothing has this observation been more frequently verified than in the last experience of believers, They had all their lifetime been subject to bondage through fear of death; a thousand comforts had been embittered by the apprehension. This did not affect their safety then: but when their departure was at hand, they were filled with peace and joy; and had an abundant entrance ministered unto them into the Saviour’s everlasting kingdom. Some, who had trembled at the shaking of a leaf before, have then displayed a courage amounting to more than heroism; and those who had shrunk back from

speaking, especially concerning themselves, have shouted aloud upon their beds and sung of his righteousness. "Ah!" says Dr. Goodwin, "is this dying? How have I dreaded as an enemy this smiling friend!" To die is gain.

When the Queen of Sheba, though accustomed to royal magnificence, witnessed the glory of Solomon, she exclaimed, The half was not told me. So the believer, after all the reports of the Scripture, all the earnest and foretastes of heaven, finds it to be a glory yet to be revealed; and when he arrives at the possession, he will acknowledge that eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor had entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him.

Let all this scatter our doubts, and lead us to say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him." Especially let us view, through the force of this truth, all our future duties and difficulties. We are not to limit the Holy One of Israel. What is impossible to us is easy to him. His thoughts and ways are as far above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth: and he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. We have read of an Emperor who said, he delighted to undertake enterprises deemed by his counsellors and captains impracticable: and he seldom failed in them. God cannot fail. But he loves to surprise. He turneth the shadow of death into the morning. At eventide, says he, it shall be light.

JANUARY 19.—EVENING.

“And Noah walked with God.”—GEN. vi. 9.

THE Apostle gives us a fine representation of religion, when, speaking of God, he says, “with whom we have to do.” We have to do with our fellow-creatures in various relations; but morality must be supported by piety and flow from it. It is with God we have principally to do. Our connexions with him, our expectations from him, our obligations to him, are all supreme.

Three expressions are observable as to our walking, with regard to God.

First, we read of “walking *after* the Lord,” This supposes him to be our leader and example: and requires us to be followers of him as dear children. “They shall walk after the Lord,” says Hosea.

Secondly, we read of walking *before* God. This supposes him to be our observer and witness—we are thus always in his sight. “Walk before me,” said God to Abraham, “I will walk before the Lord,” says David, “in the land of the living.”

We also read of “walking *with* God.” So did Noah. So did Enoch. So does every partaker of divine grace. This seems to hold him forth as our companion and friend. This may seem surprising: but so it is. There is an intercourse between us—we have fellowship one with another. In order to this, reconciliation is necessary: for “how can two walk together except they be agreed?” And this reconciliation must be mutual. It is not enough that God is reconciled to us through the blood of the Cross; we must be also reconciled to God, and love his presence, and choose his way.

For walking *with* God implies a oneness of course; and supposes that we advance together towards the same end. God's aim is his own glory: and we are enjoined, "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God." As far as we observe this rule, we walk with God; as far as we neglect it, we leave God, and go in another direction.

If we are familiar and conversant with anyone, we unavoidably catch something of his spirit and his manners. Hence it is said, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." If I walk with God, I shall resemble him; and all will take knowledge of me that I have been with Jesus.

How envied would the man be that was allowed to walk with the king—But I walk with the King of kings and the Lord of lords—"Such honour have all his saints." What security have I in nearness to him!—"He is at my right hand: I shall not be moved." What can I want if I have him?—"My presence shall go with thee; and I will give thee rest."

JANUARY 20.—MORNING.

"And praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him."

—LUKE iii. 21, 22.

WE may consider this descent three ways: as an answer to prayer; as a miraculous testimony; and as a significant emblem.

—He had just been baptized; and was now going to enter on his public office; and we are told he

prayed. Whether he prayed vocally or only mentally, we know not: but he prayed really. And if prayer was necessary for him, can it be needless for us? And he prayed exemplarily; and has taught us, like himself, to pray after we have been engaged in any ordinance, and before we enter on any undertaking. Nor did he pray in vain. Indeed the Father heard him always, because he always prayed according to the will of God. And how prompt was the answer! It reached him in the very act of devotion: "And praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him." It was the same in the Transfiguration: "As he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening." The prayer of faith is always immediately heard, and if it be not always immediately answered, it is not from a want of disposition in God to bless us, but because he is a God of judgment, and waits to be gracious. But if we consult the Scripture; and appeal to our own experience; and especially observe, not only the benefit we have derived *from* prayer, but *in* it; we shall know that he is a God at hand and not afar off; and verify the truth of his own word: "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

It is to be viewed also as a miracle; and *so* it was an authentication of his divine mission. Hence the voice that accompanied it—"Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Hence John was previously informed of this confirmation. For, though his relation, yet, to preclude all thought of collusion and management, John had not seen Jesus before

this event; but was taught, when they met, to recognize him by it: "John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." John, therefore, could not but be instantly and perfectly *convinc*ed: "And I saw," says he, "and bare record, that this is the Son of God." Nothing, therefore, could have been more unsuspecting and decisive. The sign was foretold—its brilliancy, form, and descent, were obvious to sense—it remained on him for a considerable time—and all was in the presence of a multitude of spectators! How different are the miracles of the Gospel from the prodigies of Heathenism, and the lying wonders of the Church of Rome!

In whatever visible form the Holy Ghost had alighted upon the Saviour's head, the miracle would have been the same. But the symbol would not have been the same. His descending in "a bodily shape *like a dove*," was intended to be an emblem. First, an emblem of the dispensation he had to announce. The law is called a fiery law; and it worketh wrath to every transgressor. The nature of it was intimated even in the very manner of its promulgation. The mount shook and burned with fire. There were blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words. The people could not endure that which was commanded. And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. And how? The moment he is inau-

gured, and is stepping forth to preach the kingdom of heaven, the heaven opens—not for the thunder to roll and the lightnings to flash, but for the Holy Ghost to descend in a bodily shape like a dove upon him!

Did the dove return into the ark with an olive branch, thereby announcing that the flood had subsided? And has he, with a leaf in his mouth, ever since been viewed as the image of a messenger of peace? Who came and attested deliverance from the wrath to come? Who came and preached peace to them that were afar off, and to them that were nigh? What says the Church? “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over, and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.” But who was the harbinger of another spring; of a nobler renovation?—Who cries, “Come, for all things are now ready?”

Secondly, an emblem of his personal character. All the love, tenderness, gentleness, mildness, for which the dove seems always to have been considered as a kind of representative, were to be found in him. So the prophecies going before had described him. And if we observe his miracles, if we enter into his life, his whole life, on earth, we shall see him going about doing good. How kind to friends! How merciful to the distressed! How gracious to the guilty! How ready to forgive! How patient under provocation! He was compassion alive and embodied.

Thirdly, an emblem of the temper of his disciples. For there must be a conformity between him and them. In all things he has the pre-eminence; but if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. He

that is joined to the Lord is of one spirit—and how did the Holy Ghost descend upon him? As a *dove*.

Estimate, therefore, your religion by your resemblance of this image. Do not judge of your having the Spirit, by opinions, but principles; by impressions, but dispositions; by gifts, but grace. Some fear they are strangers to the Spirit, because they have not received it in a particular way: that is, after great terror and anguish of soul. This is indeed sometimes the case; but it is not always so. In this manner the jailer's religion commenced: but it was not thus with Cornelius, nor with Lydia.

Whatever distress or horror of conviction we have felt, they are nothing if they have not brought us to Christ: and if we *have* been brought, let us be thankful, and rejoice, "if by any means." The best thing is, to judge, not by the manner of the operation, but the influence itself, and its effects: or by the fruit of the Spirit—And "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

JANUARY 20.—EVENING.

"The law is good if a man use it lawfully."—I TIM. i. 8.

DOES the goodness of the law then depend upon our conduct? By no means. It is good *in itself*, notwithstanding our ignorance or our wickedness. Yea, it is good, though it even increases our wickedness by irritation. And as a dam thrown across the river augments it by resistance, causing it to rise higher,

to spread wider, and rush more impetuously; so “the strength of sin is the law.” This is the case admitted by the Apostle: “When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.” What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid! “But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.” Yet he concludes, “the law is holy, and just, and good”—It is founded in the nature of God and of man; and in our relations to himself and to each other. It requires nothing but what is reasonable, and conducive to our happiness—God himself could not have given any other law—this law can never be abolished or changed.

The Apostle means to say, that it is good or evil to *us*, according to the use we make of it.

What then is the unlawful use of the law? It is when we go to it as a covenant of works, seeking from it acceptance before God, and peace of conscience. It is wholly unable to answer such a purpose with regard to the fallen and the guilty. A law fulfilled indeed justifies; but a law broken can only condemn. It was never given for such a design. And such a use of it is therefore not only vain but sinful: it is striving against God; it is opposing the plainest revelation of his will; it is robbing Him of his peculiar glory; it is frustrating his grace, and making Jesus Christ to be dead in vain. Yet this use of it is too natural, and it is with difficulty men can be drawn away from it, and made to *submit* themselves to the righteousness which is of Gael.

It is also improper to repair to it for another pur-

pose. It can no more sanctify than justify. We may go to Sinai for the rule and the requisition; but we must go to Calvary for encouragement, motive, and strength. A sinless being can love God by seeing him in his law, but a guilty one never can—*He* must first know that there is forgiveness with him. Terror and even authority cannot produce *love*. Love is the only source of love; and without love there is no true obedience. The law therefore can do no more towards our renovation than our remission. Its threatenings and commands may induce an outward and constrained service, but will not bring us cordially to his feet, asking, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? They may make a hypocrite, or a slave; but says Cowper,

“To see the law by Christ fulfill’d,
And hear his pardoning voice,
Changes the slave into a child,
And duty into choice.”

We use the law lawfully when,

First, It is made to convince us of sin. For sin is the transgression of the law; and therefore we must judge of the one by the other. As we perceive the crookedness of the workmanship by applying the straitness of the rule, so by the law, says the Apostle, is the knowledge of sin. I had not known sin, says he, but by the law: for I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

Secondly, when it urges us to the Saviour. Indeed nothing else can kill the self-righteous confidence which keeps man naturally alive to a vain hope, but an acquaintance with the spirituality of the law. For this extends not only to the outward conduct, but the state of the heart, and our very motives. It demands

nothing less than an obedience perfect in its principle, extent, and duration: for “cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” How then can any flesh living be justified? Therefore says the Apostle, “I, *through* the law, am dead to the law.” And how *through* the law, but by the law’s shewing him his peril and danger? by its stripping him of all pretension to goodness and righteousness in himself? by its awakening his conscience with a sense of wrath, and driving him like the avenger of blood into the city of refuge? “For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” While therefore we dislike legal preaching, there is a preaching of the law which is allowable and necessary; namely, when it is preached, not as a substitute for the Gospel, but to shew its absolute importance, and to induce us to believe on him that justifieth the ungodly, and whose faith is counted to him for righteousness.

Thirdly, we use it lawfully when we regard it as a rule of life. Many vain things have been said upon this part of our subject. But it is a fact that the Apostle—and surely *he* was not mistaken—did refer to the moral law as the rule of life to believers. He enforces love, as “the fulfilling of the law,” by which he unquestionably means the moral law, which says, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” And he calls upon children to obey their parents in the Lord, because “it is the first commandment” of the second table “with promise.” And if this be not the rule of life, what is? Produce any other rule of sin or duty—If it be *less* perfect, it could not have come from Him who is the *same* yesterday, to-day,

and for ever—If it be *more* perfect, then He gave a *defective* law before. But what rule can we conceive equal to this? It binds man to God and to all his fellow-creatures by love. And what can we think of those who view a deliverance from an obligation to love God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves, as a *privilege*? A real Christian would regard such a state of exemption as the vilest bondage. He does not complain of the law, but of himself. He does not wish to bring down the law to his depravity, but he longs to rise into full conformity to its requirements. The more God does for him, the more does he feel himself bound to serve God. He also finds it every way useful to apply to this perfect rule. It humbles him by shewing him his deficiencies. It makes him prayerful to obtain grace to do the will of God. It makes him long for heaven, where he will be completely happy, because he will be completely holy, and that law which is now put into his mind, and written in his heart, will have expelled every kind and degree of adverse principle, and filled him with all the fulness of God.

JANUARY 21.—MORNING.

“The Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered.”—NUM. xxvii. 12, 13.

REFLECTIONS on death can never be unseasonable while we are in a dying world, and a dying church; and are conscious that we ourselves are dying creatures.

It is said, God sees no iniquity in his people. But

he has threatened to visit their transgressions with a rod. Some tell us, that sin never hurts a believer. But it injured David. It degraded Eli. Moses was also severely chastised. He was very dear to God, and could plead great provocation: but because he rebelled against his commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, he was excluded the land of Canaan; and though he was very importunate, he could not obtain a repeal of the trying sentence. Yet in judgment God remembers mercy. He here orders him to die. But the order is attended with three softenings to reconcile him to it.

First. He must die—but he shall previously go up, and “see the land which the Lord hath given to the children of Israel.” Some might suppose that this would tantalize him, and add to his affliction at the loss. But it was designed as an alleviation; and it was accepted by Moses as a favour. For this purpose, his natural sight continued uninjured; and his extent of vision was perhaps also enlarged. Thus, not only was his curiosity gratified, but he saw, with gladness and praise, the goodness and truth of God’s promise to his people. He also, in type, saw and hailed the prospect of a better country, even a heavenly; and which he was going to enter. “Oh!” say many, apprehensive now of the solemn event,

“Oh! could we make our doubts remove,
 These gloomy doubts that rise,
 And view the Canaan that we love
 With unbeckled eyes—
 “Could *we* but climb *where Moses* stood,
 And view the landscape o’er;
 Not Jordan’s stream, nor death’s cold flood
 Should fright us from the shore.”

And they are generally indulged. And often those have been peculiarly favoured, who all their life-time have been subject to bondage through fear of death.

Secondly. He must die—but this will be “a gathering unto his people.” To Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and the Israel of God. These he so prized on earth, that he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Some had departed that he had known: and numbers that he had not known:—but he was to join them—not in the same grave; for he was buried alone, and no one knows of his sepulchre unto this day; but in heaven—not as to his body, but as to his soul, which was to be united with the spirits of just men made perfect. The believer expects a family meeting.

Thirdly. He must die—but “only as Aaron his brother was gathered.” And are we better than those who have gone before us? And is there any reason why we should be exempted from their lot? The previous removal of the pious, especially those of our own relations, tends to render death more familiar. It comes near enough for us to view it. It enters our very apartments. It also tends to diminish our forebodings and despondency. We have seen that God was better to them than their fears. He was with them in the Valley. Their end was peace. They were supported. They were comforted. And *we* thank God, and take courage. Why should it not be so with *us*? It also weakens our attachment to life. We have fewer detentions below, and so many more attractions above. Who has not felt the sentiment, “Let us also go away, that we may die with him?”

Surely the bitterness of death is past.

“I could renounce my all below,
 If my Creator bid;
 And run, if I were called to go,
 And die as Moses did.”

JANUARY 21.—EVENING.

“As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarryeth by the stuff: they shall part alike.”

—I SAM. xxx. 24.

THE Amalekites had burnt Ziklag, the place of David's residence, to the ground, and carried the people away captives. Having inquired of the Lord, David was encouraged to pursue after the marauders, and was assured that he should recover all they had taken. And so it fell out, But in the pursuit two hundred men, being too faint to proceed, had been left at the brook Besor. These, when David returned, re-possessed of his own property, and also laden with the riches of the enemy, these went forth to meet him; and David came near, and saluted them. But the men of Belial, who were with him, said, “Because they went not with us, we will not give them aught of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and children.” Then said David, “Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord hath given us. For who will hearken unto you in this matter? *But as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike:* and from that day forward he made it a statute in Israel.”

The equity of this statute is obvious. Let us pass to a higher order of things, and see how far David's

conduct on this occasion is sanctioned by a greater than David.

All the Lord's followers are not alike circumstanced or employed. They differ in their conditions, offices, talents, opportunities, exertions, and trials. Some of them peculiarly require courage, others patience; some energy, others prudence. Some go down to the battle, others tarry with the stuff; some are called to act offensively, others defensively; some move in public, others in private life; the duty of some lies at a distance, others are keepers at home—

“—Thousands at his bidding speed,

And post o'er land and ocean, without rest—

They also serve, who only stand and wait.”

But this difference does not affect their acceptance and recompence. They shall part alike; that is, provided they are engaged in the Lord's service, and willing to do what is in their power. This was the case here. These men were as much disposed to go as their brethren; but they were unable; and when detained, they were not useless, but aided David in another department: they guarded the baggage while their comrades chased the foe. Why then should they have been forgotten or overlooked? Had it been otherwise; had these men refused to march or fight, and feigned excuses for their indolence, while their fellows toiled and bled; it would have been unrighteous for them to have fared alike in the spoil. In the battle of the Nile, one of the ships, in trying to take its ordered station, went aground, and could not be loosened in time to share in the heat of the action. This prevention, however, was purely accidental, and nothing could have been more trying to

the feelings of the brave commander and his men: and who sees not that their claims were equal to those of their brethren, though their services were not? But reason could have urged nothing in their favour, had they, averse to the conflict, sailed away, or purposely have rendered their engagement impossible. And does not this apply to many professors of religion? The words of the Apostle, “where there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not,” are very encouraging to some, but they are often abused by others. God never accepts a good inclination in the room of a good action, without inability: but the will is taken for the deed, where the deed cannot accompany the will. No excuse, therefore, is allowed for those who do not exert themselves according to their capacity and means. And he knows, unerringly, whether the impediments we plead are real or pretended. And how often does self-indulgence, or sloth, or cowardice, create difficulties and obstructions! “I cannot dig,” says the unjust steward—why not? Had he no hands? or could he not procure a spade? Yes—but day labour was a harder kind of livelihood than a dash of the pen. Call upon a covetous hearer of the Gospel with a case of distress: and he tells you, “I cannot give.” What is the hinderance? A greedy desire to hoard whatever comes within his grasp. Others are crippled by profusion and excess in food, furniture, and dress. They live to the extent of their income, or beyond it, and so have nothing to spare for the poor, or for the cause of Christ.—But how are they disabled? Who requires them to live thus expensively? Surely not *he* who says, “if any man will be my disciple, let

him deny himself." "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world," But, where the desire is to the Lord, he estimates the services of his people, not by what they do, but by what they would do, were they not prevented, David wished to build a house for his name, but was forbidden; yet the Lord told him it was well that it was in his heart, and promised to build *him* an house.

Is this a curious or a useless speculation? It is adapted to keep us from pride and disdain. Let us not undervalue others because they have not our distinctions or advantages while they are doing service in other ways. God smiles upon them, and we should respect them. Let not the eye say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Even those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary. Hence Paul's caution to every man, "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching: or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."

It should also keep us from leaving our own sta-

tions, and intruding into places for which we were not designed. The temptation is often usefulness; but if we are unprofitable, the fault is not in our condition, but in our principles and dispositions. We may serve our generation, and have the testimony that we please God, in whatever state his providence places us. Let every man, therefore, abide in the calling in which he is called of God.

And in the same way it should silence the discontent or discouragement that often arises from the obscurity and limitation of our circumstances. Why do we murmur or despond because we have not the situations and resources which others command? The Lord who withholdeth them, looketh at the heart. "If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" What said he of Mary? "She hath done what she could." Many put into the treasury; and the rich gave largely; but the poor widow who gave only two mites, gave more than they all. The man who occupied with five talents, heard the same sentence as the man who had improved his ten—"Well done, thou good and faithful servant," And the man who was cast into outer darkness would have had the same commendation had he not been negligent: he was rejected, not because he had only one talent, but because he hid it in a napkin, It is well to see the rich generous, and humble, and thankful: but the same degree of grace may appear equally in the poor when they refuse to steal, and take not God's Name in vain. The man who knows how to be abased is as divinely instructed as he who knows how to abound.

Some go to the house of God with the multitude to keep holy day: others are detained by accident, sickness, or infirmity; but “in their hearts are the ways of them;” and therefore they shall see his power and glory alone, as others see him in the sanctuary. One has leisure to go forth on a week day evening to hear the preaching of the word; another abides by the stuff. That female edifies the public with her pen; this is engrossed in rearing her infant family, and performing the most important duties of life without notice—they are equally respectable and valuable in their places, and shall part alike. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.”

Moral greatness does not consist in doing extraordinary things, but in doing ordinary things with a great mind; that is, with a desire to please and glorify God. It therefore lies open equally to all. The servant may be as great in the sight of the Lord as his master. In a word, the excellency of individuals depends not upon the eminence of their station, or the splendour of their calling, but in the fidelity and zeal with which they answer to their claims and duties; just as the perfection of an actor appears, not in the kind of character he represents, but in the manner in which he performs it.—

“Honour and shame from no condition rise;

Act well your part—there all the honour lies.”

JANUARY 22.—MORNING.

“And they said one to another, Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?”—LUKE xxiv. 32.

THAT is—we have *now* discovered him. How was it that we did not discover him earlier? and find him out upon the road? Why did we not distinguish him by his very speaking—the manner of it—the effect of it—in touching and animating the heart?

Ah! my soul, it is thus his teaching is to be known—it is always FELT. And while other teachers reach only the ear, he penetrates the heart; and causes it to burn with ingenuous shame, with abhorrence of sin, with holy revenge, with love to his Name, with zeal for his glory, with earnestness to save sinners.

He *now* converses with us by the way, and he opens to us the Scriptures; and he does it in three ways.

First, by his dispensations. As the word explains Providence, so Providence illustrates the word. How many passages are there in the Bible, the beauty of which we should never have seen, the sweetness of which we should never have tasted, the force of which we should never have felt, had it not been for certain events; and those chiefly of an afflictive kind. These drive us to the Book, never so valued as in the day of trouble, and enable us to read with other eyes and feelings than before.

Secondly, by the labours of his servants. He replenishes his ministers, that they may dispense to others; he gives them the tongue of the learned, that they should know how to speak a word in season to

him that is weary. It was in the temple David wished to inquire. It was when he went into the sanctuary of God that he seized a clew which enabled him to unravel a mystery which had so confounded and distressed him before. And while hearing the word preached, have not *our* doubts been often solved, our fears dispelled, our faith and hope strengthened? That which was general before, has been particularized; that which was distant, has been brought home to our apprehensions; that which was read without impression or notice, has become significant and interesting. How often has the Angel of the Church, like Hagar's angel, opened our eyes, and shown us the well!

Thirdly, by the agency of his Holy Spirit. "He shall lead you into all truth." Means do not render his influence needless; revelation itself does not. David had the word of God; but he kneeled and prayed, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." The dial tells us the time but the sun must shine upon it. The compass enables the mariner to steer, but not if it be placed in the dark. "In thy light we shall see light."

Here is the promise, at once to direct and encourage—"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." What is the reason why many, in the greatness of their folly, for ever go astray? They do not trust in the Lord with all their heart, but lean to their own understandings. But the wayfaring man, though a fool, errs not, because, made sensible of his ignorance and insufficiency, he in all his ways acknowledges God, and God himself directs his paths; and is his guide even unto death.

JANUARY 22.—EVENING.

“Deborah Rebekah’s nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.”—GEN. XXXV. 8.

SHE was one of his mother’s servants. When Rebekah married, she took Deborah along with her. She had therefore attended Jacob in his infancy; and after his mother’s death he seems to have sent for her, and she came and lived with him, and rendered herself useful to his own children. She must now have been very aged. In those earlier days domestics retained their relation to their masters and mistresses much longer than they now do: and unless they married—and sometimes, even then, they commonly died in the families in which they lived. Now, the connection is frequently but for the year or month. “Ah,” it is said, “servants are not now what they were formerly.” “We believe it; but the principal reason perhaps is, because their masters and mistresses are not the same. Corruption, like every other stream, does not run upward, but downward. Fashions descend from the high to the low; and morals do the same. From the state of the hall, we may generally ascertain the previous state of the parlour.

Old domestics, who have been faithful and useful in their generation, should not be disregarded as hirelings who have filled their day, but be treated as humble relations—“Thine own friend and thy father’s friend forsake not.”

No mention is made of Rebekah’s dissolution or interment; but we are informed of the death and burial of her nurse. As all could not have a place in his word, the pleasure of God is seen in the distin-

guished notice taken of some individuals above others. Yet he has not acted arbitrarily in this case. He bestows his favours freely; but honour is dispensed according to rule, and that rule he has himself laid down—"Them that honour me, I will honour." And this may be done in any station, or condition of life. And the Lord is no respecter of persons. He seeth not as man seeth; and often chooses things that are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh may glory in his presence.

The weeping here was so great, that it gave a name to the place. Nothing could more strongly shew the worth of this old female, and the place she held in the esteem and affection of the whole family. Every tear that dropped from every eye said, "Well done, good and faithful servant." There are some who draw forth no blessing while they live, or tears when they die. A dry funeral is a hateful sight.

She was buried upon the spot, under "the oak of weeping." Burying-places are of natural, not of religious consideration. Where the tree falleth, it may lie. But let us not fail to observe how little we know of the circumstances in which we may be called to die—whether among careless strangers or sobbing friends—whether at home or abroad—whether in the chamber or on the road. Therefore says Wisdom, "Be ye *always* ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man may come." We can ascertain where we began life, but there is only one Being who can tell where we shall end it. But we may well leave it to our Heavenly Father to choose the lap of earth on which we shall repose. Wherever it may be, it will be alike safe and comfortable, if we fall asleep in Jesus.

JANUARY 23.—MORNING.

“*Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*”—LUKE xi. 9.

It is needless to prove, that by this action our Saviour intends prayer. But see the simplicity and familiarity of *his* comparisons; and wonder not that the common people heard him gladly. Volumes have been written upon the subject of prayer: but he who spake as never man spake, comprises every thing in one word—*knock*. The allusion is to a person who wishes to excite attention, in order to obtain relief—he knocks.

Where are we to knock? “I am,” says the Saviour, “the door.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

When are we to knock? “Evening, and morning, and at noon,” says David, “will I pray and cry aloud.” “Pray without ceasing,” says Paul. And says our Lord, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

For *what* are we to knock? We may in every thing, by prayer and supplication, make known our requests unto God. But we are supremely to implore all spiritual blessings, because these are blessings for the soul and eternity. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

How are we to knock? *Importunately*—we cannot knock too loud. Prayer is nothing, unless it be sincere and earnest. God will not regard the address we ourselves do not feel. Jacob said, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me;” and he prevailed.—How? *Perseveringly*. The Lord does not always immediately appear to our joy. “I waited patiently for the Lord,” says David; “and” at last “he inclined his ear unto me, and heard my cry.”

And, "blessed," It is said, "are all they that wait for Him." But though it be a good thing for a man not only to hope, but quietly wait for the salvation of God, it is often no easy thing. The delay is trying in itself; but circumstances may render it more so. While standing at the door, the weather may be foul; or those passing by may laugh and insult—for they are full, and have need of nothing; or the applicant may be weak, and ready to faint. And what, while *thus* exercised, can *keep* him knocking and waiting? Nothing, but a sense of his wants. They are so pressing, that he *must* succeed, or perish. Nothing, but hope. This hope may be sometimes very weak. But a degree of it, if it only amounts to a mere possibility, is necessary to preserve him from abandoning his suit, and saying, "What should I wait for the Lord any longer?" More, however, is desirable and attainable: and here is enough to say to him, "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Here is the *command*—"knock." Here is the *promise*—"it shall be opened."

But how shall I plead? I knock, and long for audience—and yet I draw back, and seem afraid to be seen. For what can I say?—What does the BEGGAR say? He is not at a loss. He knows a fine address is not necessary—it would be contemned. Yet he can express his meaning: and his wants and feelings make him eloquent. Begin, then, and say—

"Encourag'd by thy word
 Of promise to the poor,
 Behold, a beggar, Lord,
 Waits at thy mercy's door!
 No hand, no heart, O Lord, but thine
 Can help or pity wants like mine."

Yet add—

“The beggar’s usual plea,
Relief from men to gain,
If offered unto Thee,
I know thou wouldst disdain;

And pleas which move thy gracious ear
Are such as men would scorn to hear.”

There are five of these pleas mged by others,
which *you* must completely reverse.

How often does the beggar plead his former condition—“He has seen better days: and once had a sufficiency for himself and others.” But *this* must be your language—

“I have no right to say,
That though I now am poor,
Yet once there was a day
When I possessed more:

Thou know’st that from my very birth
I’ve been the poorest wretch on earth.”

How often does the beggar plead his innocency or goodness—“I have been reduced, not by my fault, but by misfortune; and deserve pity rather than censure,” But *your* language must be—

“Nor can I dare profess,
As beggars often do,
Though great is my distress,
My faults have been but few;

If thou should’st leave my soul to starve,
It would be what I well deserve.”

How often does the beggar plead the unusualness of his application—“This is not my practice: it is the first, and shall be the last time of my importuning you.”—But *your* language must be—

"’Twere folly to pretend
 I never begg’d before;
 Or, if thou now befriend,
 I’ll trouble thee no more:
 Thou often hast reliev’d my pain,
 And often I must come again."

How often does the beggar plead the smallness of the boon—"A very little will suffice me: I ask only a trifle." But *your* language must be—

"Though crumbs are much too good
 For such a dog as I,
 No less than children’s food
 My soul can satisfy.
 O do not frown and bid me go,
 I must have all thou canst bestow."

Men, so limited are their resources, are afraid of more applications than they can relieve; and, therefore, enjoin the petitioner secrecy; and he promises concealment. But *your* language must be—

"Nor can I willing be
 Thy bounty to conceal
 From others who, like me,
 Their wants and hunger feel:
 I’ll tell them of thy mercies’ store,
 And try to send a thousand more."

And he will be delighted with this. He commands you to spread his goodness, and to invite all the ends of the earth!!

"Thy thoughts, thou Only Wise,
 Our thoughts and ways transcend,
 Far as the arched skies
 Above the earth extend:
 Such pleas as mine men would not hear;
 But God receives a beggar’s prayer."

JANUARY 23.—EVENING.

“Clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.”—REV. i. 13.

THE dress was sacerdotal. Our Lord's appearance in this attire was to remind John that he was the High Priest of our profession. This is one of the three grand offices he sustains and executes in the economy of our salvation—He who is the prophet that was to rise like unto Moses, and the King in Zion, is also an High Priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. And we make no scruple to say, that the first and second of these offices derive their efficacy and even their existence from the third.

The High Priest under the law was a very remarkable and important character. He was the medium of all intercourse between God and the people. Thus he was a striking emblem of the Lord Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant. But in tracing the resemblance we shall pass by his personal qualities, the mode of his consecration, the oil that was poured upon his head, and his vesture to the skirt of which were attached the golden bell and pomegranate—in all of which truth may find some analogy and fancy more: and notice only the three actions he had to perform. These were,

First, expiation. He offered not only gifts but sacrifices: and we know the design; it was to atone for the sins of the people. The slaughter of the victims shewed at once the penalty of sin, and the way of deliverance from it—life for life—for without

shedding of blood there is no remission. Herein the High Priest typified the Saviour: but see how the former is surpassed by the latter! The one offered for his own sins as well as for those of the people: the other was harmless, holy, undefiled, separate from sinners. The one repeated his sacrifices often, because they could not make the comers thereunto perfect; the other, by the one offering up of himself, perfected for ever them that are sanctified. The one made atonement only for the congregation of the children of Israel; the other taketh away the sin of the world.

Secondly, intercession. We know not whether the High Priest used any words; but what he did spake loud enough. For, after slaying the victim, he took the blood in a bason, and, wearing the names of the tribes of Israel on his breast, he entered into the holiest of all, and sprinkled the mercy-seat, and burnt incense; while he who sat between the cherubim smelled the sweet savour. And thus Jesus, after bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, and obtaining eternal redemption for us, entered into heaven itself, with his own blood, there to appear in the presence of God for us, presenting and pleading his sacrifice, and founding on his satisfaction his claims in favour of his people, "Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins."

Thirdly, benediction. While he was burning incense within, the whole multitude of people were praying without, and did not depart till he came

forth and pronounced the blessing. The very words he used are recorded: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." This language was more than a mere wish on the part of the High Priest; it was the blessing of Him whom they had offended, and was nothing less than an acknowledgment that God was pacified towards them, that they were in favour with him, and might go away joyful and glad of heart. So his Church had not long to wait, when they saw him enter within the vail in his accession to glory, before he came forth in the effusion of his Holy Spirit, and commanded the blessing, even life for evermore, in the preaching of the Gospel, which assures us that we are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, that we are accepted in the Beloved, and shall be satisfied early with his favour. "Happy art thou, O Israel." "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance; in thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted."

JANUARY 24.—MORNING.

"Thy blessing is upon thy people."—Ps. iii. 8.

—HE has a people: and we need not ascend into heaven, and examine the decrees of God, to know who they are. The Bible is our book of life; there the heirs of glory are written, if not by name, yet by character; and "we are the circumcision," says the Apostle, "who worship God in the spirit—and re-

joice in Christ Jesus—and have no confidence in the flesh.”

By the Scripture, therefore, let us judge ourselves; and be anxious to ascertain whether *we* are in the number of his people—for they are the most important and enviable people upon earth. They are not commonly distinguished by any worldly greatness; and they have many enemies who consult their injury—But the blessing of God is upon them.

—Upon their *mercies*. This takes the curse out of them, and gives them a relish never tasted in the comforts of others. “I will bless thy bread and thy water.”

—Upon their *trials*. And they as much need a blessing upon their daily rod, as upon their daily bread. “Without this, our afflictions will do us no good; yea, they will prove injurious; they will leave us more careless and impenitent. But, by his blessing, they will turn to our salvation; and yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised therewith.

—Upon their *labours*. “Thou shalt eat the labour of thy hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.” Without this, in vain we rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows: it is He that giveth his beloved sleep. It matters not what we sow, if he does not give the increase; or what we bring home, if he blows upon it; or what we gain, if we “put it into a bag with holes.” “The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.”

—Upon their *families*. The house of Obed-Edom was blessed for the sake of the ark; and the thing was publicly known. “I have been young,” says

David, "and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." The generation of the upright shall be blessed.

—Upon their *souls*. Thus they are blessed with light, and liberty, and strength, and peace, and joy; yea, they are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

O Christian! is this thy experience and portion? Rejoice and be grateful. What can equal the blessing of God?

But remember how it comes upon you. The source is his free and boundless grace. The medium is the Lord Jesus: he is the way from God to us, as well as the way from us to God.

Remember how it is insured—by the truth of his promise and his oath. You may therefore remind him of his engagement, and plead, as Jacob did, "And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good."

Remember also how it is to be enjoyed—in the use of means, and in obedience to his will. "Blessed are they that do judgment, and keep his commandments at all times."

O my soul, put in for a share. "Bless me, even me, also, O my Father." Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance."

JANUARY 24.—EVENING.

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight."—Ps. xix. 14.

ALL human beings should have a governing aim to influence and regulate them. And all have such an

aim: but all have not a proper one. All wish to please. We may divide them into three classes. Some please *themselves*. Whoever is offended, they must be indulged. Whatever be the claims of others, they *will* have their own way and humour. Some strive to please *men*. And this is not in all cases improper. A condescending and obliging behaviour is lovely; and, therefore, enjoined. "Let every one of us please his neighbour." But it must be "for his good to edification;" and in things lawful; otherwise, "if I seek to please men, I shall not be the servant of Christ." Some endeavour to please *God*. These are, indeed, comparatively few; but we hope their number is increasing. Such were Paul and his companions: "We labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him." And such was David: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight."

By a figure of speech, all authors frequently use a part for the whole. David wishes to dedicate to God all his powers and actions; and to walk before him in all his commandments and ordinances, blameless. But if we take the expression as it is, we see how he extends his pious solicitude. A natural man may regard his conduct, especially as it falls under the observation of his fellow-creatures. But does he make conscience of his *speech*? Does he make conscience of his *thoughts*? David's care reaches to the words of his mouth, and the meditations of his heart; and he prays that both may be acceptable in God's sight.

The prayer shews his humility. "When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants. A faithful examination of our holiest things will destroy all con-

fidence in them, and prove that they need forgiveness, rather than deserve recompence. "My performances are so poor, so imperfect, so unworthy, that it must be an act of grace in Thee to regard them. Deign, O Lord, to smile upon them. View them in the Son of thy love; and for his sake forgive the evil and accept the good—

"I cast them at thy feet: my only plea

Is what it was, dependence upon thee."

The prayer shews his affection. All must acknowledge the importance of loving God. But what is the best evidence of it? "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." And the Christian delights in his law. It is enough for him to know what he forbids, or what he enjoins. This, says he, will please him; therefore I will pursue it. This will offend him; therefore I will forbear. David was anxious that not a word or a thought should displease his God.

The prayer shews a consciousness of duty. We are all under an indispensable obligation to please God, both on the ground of gratitude and justice. Who called us into being? Who has fed us all our life long? Who sought us when lost, and ransomed us from death and hell? We are not our own. For we are bought with a price. He is our Father, our Master, our King. And without a concern to please him, can we be good children, good servants, good subjects? There may be a time when an obligation to please an earthly superior may cease to be binding upon us. He may require of us what is unreasonable and unrighteous. But God's perfect will demands nothing but what is wise, and holy, and just, and good,

The prayer shews a regard to self-interest. David was not mercenary; but he knew he could not serve God for nought. In serving God we most effectually serve our own welfare: and as God himself has placed the advantage before us in the Scripture not only as a truth, but as a motive, it cannot be improper to regard it. Many will entreat the favour of the prince, and everyone is a friend to him that giveth gifts. But if we are sure of gaining his approbation—than which nothing is more uncertain—yet what is it when obtained? But if we study to please God, success is not only sure, but glorious. The friendship of the mightiest monarch can do very little for us; our greatest exigencies lie far beyond the reach of human aid. But God can supply all our need. He is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we are able to ask or think.

It would be endless to specify all the benefits attached to pleasing God. Is preservation from sin a blessing? “Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.” There is nothing too vile for us to fall into if we provoke our Defender to withdraw from us. Is safety and concord a blessing? “When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him,” Is the answer to prayer a blessing? “And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” Is a removal to heaven desirable? “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” He went indeed in a chariot of fire: but an apoplexy, an acci-

dent, a dropsy, a fever, will not be amiss, that takes us from a vale of tears into the joy of our Lord.

JANUARY 25.—MORNING.

“And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons. Manasseh and Ephraim. And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed.”—GEN. xlviii. 1,2.

AFTER a very cloudy day, Jacob has a clear and calm evening. And it is but an evening. He is now called to go the way of all the earth: but his end is peace. Some die suddenly. But the more common road to the house appointed for all living is down the narrow, miry, dark, and dismal lane of sickness. The former is a privilege to the individual himself, as it saves him from “the pains, the groans, the dying strife;” but the latter befriends his usefulness more, by affording him opportunities to exercise the graces of the Holy Spirit, and showing how religion can sustain when every other supply fails, and refresh when every other spring of comfort is dried up. But we are not to choose for ourselves: and if we can hope that the Saviour will receive us to himself, we may well leave—the when—the where—and the how—to his wisdom and love.

When sickness seizes persons in early life, and removes them in the midst of their days and usefulness, we seem surprised. Yet wherefore? Are not all our days vanity? And if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, is not their strength labour and sorrow? What then can we expect at one hundred and forty-seven?

Jacob had some time before kept his bed, and Joseph had visited him; but, seeing no immediate danger of death, he had returned. Now the case assumes a more threatening character, and he is recalled. Doubtless they had sent to another Being, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." But they do well to inform Joseph; and Joseph immediately leaves his public affairs, and hastens to visit him. To visit the sick is a duty. If it affords the sufferer no effectual relief, it is soothing to show our regard, our sympathy, and our readiness to help. It is always profitable to ourselves; and far better than going to the house of mirth. For here the heart is made better; more serious and more soft. Hence the dying bed is shunned by infidel and worldly companions, who love not to be reminded how soon the condition of others may be their own.

How affecting is it to visit a fellow-creature, the progress of whose disorder is saying to corruption, thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister. But to see a dear friend, a beloved relation, a revered parent, sinking under the decays of nature and the violence of disease! It is a sick dying *father*, who had trained him up under an affection too partial, that Joseph visits. Though death does not follow the order of nature, but the appointment of God; yet, while parents are living, there seems to be something between us and death; but when they are removed, his course seems open to us, and we naturally deem ourselves the next objects of assault.

Joseph goes not alone, but takes his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him. It was wise and well in Joseph to take these youths away from the

splendour of a court to see the end of all men; to view a dying bed dignified with more than a palace could bestow; to show them, at their entering the world, a servant of God departing out of it; to enable them to receive his admonition and blessing; and to be reminded that, though born in Egypt, Egypt was not to be their home; but, while incorporated with strangers, they were to seek the heritage of Jacob, God's chosen.

How much wiser and better was this, than the conduct of many parents, who, instead of bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, conduct their children into scenes of gaiety and dissipation, exciting and feeding the pride of life, and making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. We mourn over children that are bereaved of their parents: yet we are sometimes tempted to wish the removal of some wretched fathers and mothers—hoping, that if these examples and teachers of evil were withdrawn, their children would find it good to bear the yoke in their youth, and that the Lord may take them up. The worst orphans are those who have wicked parents alive! What a dreadful meeting will there be hereafter between their offspring and those fathers and mothers who not only neglected their souls, but taught and encouraged them to go astray!

—Not that we would have children confined to religious prisons, or even cells. Hinder them not from seeing and enjoying whatever is pleasing and instructive in the world of nature, and the wonders of art. Keep them not in a frozen region, that shall chill and check every harmless budding of mind and affection. Let your piety itself be inviting, not re-

buking and repulsive. But, O ye parents, keep them from infidel books; from vicious associates; from every path of the Destroyer. Allure them to the Bible, to the Throne of Grace, to the grave of friendship, to the chamber where a dying Jacob is waiting for God's salvation—to every place where they are likely to meet Him, who says, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me."

JANUARY 25.—EVENING.

"We are the Lord's."—ROM. xiv. 8.

By the Lord here we are to understand the Lord Jesus: witness the words immediately following: "For to this end *Christ* both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living."

Now if we examine, we shall find that he has every kind of claim and right to us.

He has a right, derived from his creative power. If "all things were made by him," he made us, and not we ourselves. In consequence of this, he has a propriety in us, not only such as no man can have in a fellow creature, but such as even no father has in his own children. They are his in a subordinate and limited degree; but we are the Lord's absolutely and entirely. He brought us out of nothing; framed our bodies; covered us with skin and flesh; fenced us with bones and sinews, and formed our spirits within us. Suppose we were to return to him all that we received from him—what would be left as our own?

He has a right, derived from his providential care. He has not only given us life and favour, but his visitation hath preserved our spirits. Why died we

not from the womb? Who sustained us when we hung on our mother's breast? Whose mercies have been new every morning? Who has given his beloved sleep? Who has inspired our connections with all the tendernesses they ever expressed towards us? Whose are we but *his*, in whom we live, move, and have our being? How vile and mean to enjoy the light of his sun—to breathe his air—to eat constantly at his table—to be clothed from his wardrobe—and not own and acknowledge our obligations to him!

He has a right, derived from his redeeming mercy. We are not our own, but bought with a price, and he paid it. To feel the force of this claim, it will be necessary for us to weigh three things. First, the mighty and dreadful evils from which he has delivered us; sin, the power of darkness, the present evil world, death, and the wrath to come. Secondly, the state to which he has advanced us; its blessedness, its glory, its safety, its duration, its immensity. Even the beginnings of it here, its earnest and foretastes, are indescribable and inconceivable—even now the joy is unspeakable and full of glory; and the peace passeth all understanding. Thirdly, the way, the infinitely expensive way, in which he has thus ransomed us, All comes free to us; but what did it cost him! Owing to our slight views of the evil of sin and the holiness of God, we are too little struck with the greatness of redemption and the difficulties attending it. It was easy to destroy man; but to restore him, in a way that should magnify the law which had been broken, and display God as the just, as well as the justifier, was a work to which the Lord Jesus only was adequate—and what does it require

even of him? Not a mere volition—not a mere exertion, as when he delivered the Jews from Egypt, and spake the world into being. He must assume flesh and blood. He dwelt among us. For thirty-three years he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Let us go over his history; let us survey his sufferings; let us meditate on his agony in the garden; his shame on the cross; his abasement in the lowest parts of the earth: and all this for enemies; and all not only without our desert, but without our desire—till we feel we are drawn, and bound with the cords of a man and the bands of love—a love that passeth knowledge. Hence

He has a right, derived not only from what *he* has done, but from what *we* have done; a right derived from our dedication. If Christians, we have ratified his claims, and have actually surrendered ourselves to him, renouncing every other owner, and saying, "Lord, I am thine, save me. Other lords beside thee have had dominion over me; but henceforth by thee only will I make mention of thy Name." Thus the Corinthians "gave their own-selves unto the Lord." In this surrender, the main thing is the heart; for if this be given, nothing will be withholden. This therefore is the Lord's demand:—"My son, give me thine heart." And perhaps some can remember the particular time when this surrender was first effectually made. Perhaps they had been pressed by an affliction that had threatened their frame, or laid bare their earthly hopes. Perhaps a friend had urged—perhaps a sermon. But the surrender *was* made—"Here, Lord, I give myself to thee, with all I have, and all I am. My understanding shall be thine, to know thee,

my will, to choose thee; my conscience, to fear thee—

“If there be passions in my soul,—
 And passions. Lord, there be,—
 I yield them all to thy control,—
 My Jesus all to thee—”

My tongue shall shew forth thy praise. My time, my property, my influence, shall all be employed for thee. And this dedication you have of tell renewed since—in the hour of retirement—in the field of meditation—in the house of prayer—at the table of the Lord—

And having opened your mouth unto the Lord, you cannot go back. And do you wish it? To whom could you go? He hath the words of eternal life—it is your highest privilege to belong to him. If you are the Lord's, he will take care of you. He will provide for you. He will guide you with his counsel, and afterward receive you to glory—“If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

JANUARY 26.—MORNING.

*“He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God,
 who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.”*

—2 COR. v. 5.

THIS self-same thing is nothing less than the final blessedness of the righteous: which, though it doth not yet fully appear, is partially revealed, and expressed in the Scripture by various names and images. It is called, in the preceding verses, “a building of God; an house not made with hands,

eternal in the heavens;" and also "life"—"Mortality shall be swallowed up of *life*."

With regard to this, the Apostle reminds us of God's work, in our preparation for the whole; and of God's gift in our possession of a part.

The preparation is not natural to us. We are not born Christians, but made such: and the operation is no less than divine. Creatures have not done it; nor have we done it ourselves. It is above the power of education, example, and moral suasion—*He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God*. But the work is as necessary as it is divine, In vain should we have a title to glory, without a meetness for it. Every office, every state, requires a qualification for it; and the higher the state and the office, the more important and difficult the qualification becomes. Happiness is not derivable from anything without a suitableness to it. It does not depend upon the excellency of the object, but the conformity of the disposition to it. The acquisition must be *wanted, desired, hoped for*, before it can gratify and content.—Have I, then, anything in me that could find happiness in the heaven of the Scriptures?

If He has wrought us for the whole, he has bestowed upon us a part—*He has given us also the earnest of the Spirit*. The earnest is not only to insure, it is a portion of the payment; and so is distinguishable from a pledge, which is returned at the completion of the agreement: for the earnest remains, and goes on as a part of the bargain. This is very instructive. It tells us that what the believer has here, in the possession and influence of the Spirit, is not only indicative of heaven, but like it—and a degree of it.

Is heaven perfect knowledge? The eyes *of* his understanding are now opened: already he spiritually discerns; and in God's light sees light.

Is it perfect holiness? He is already delivered from the power and love of every sin; he is renewed in the Spirit of his mind; he delights in the law of God after the inward man,

Is it perfect happiness? exceeding joy? fulness of joy? pleasures for evermore?—But, even now, blessed are the people that know the joyful sound. There remaineth a rest for the people of God—but “we which have believed do enter into rest.” They shall enter into peace—but now they have “a peace which passeth all understanding.” They shall enter the joy of their Lord—but now, “believing, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” They will then join the spirits of just men made perfect—but the saints are now their companions and their delight. They will then dwell in his house and be still praising him—but they are already attempting and commencing this work: “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”

Such experience it is that weans them from the world, and makes them willing to depart. Heaven is not a distant, unknown good. They are come to the city of the living God. They are partakers of the glory that shall be revealed—They *have* everlasting life.

JANUARY 26.—EVENING.

“*They have forsaken the right way.*”—2 PETER ii, 15.

WE shall leave the persons of whom the Apostle here speaks, and call upon you to think of yourselves.

Religion is, very properly, held forth by the “right way;” and we have accordingly six admonitions to bring forward concerning it.

First—Inquire what this right way is. If you err here, the labour of advancing will be in vain; your progress will only lead you astray, and terminate in disappointment, regret, and woe, And Solomon tells us, “there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” How surprising and terrible to fall from the expectation of heaven into the depths of hell! Yet this will be the case of some, yea many, who will carry their confidence to the very door, “saying, Lord, Lord, open to us; and he shall answer and say unto them, I know ye not whence ye are.” In a case of so much importance, where there is reflection, there can be no satisfaction of mind without certainty; and certainty is attainable. Go forth by the footsteps of the flock. Search the Scriptures, and search them for the purpose they were given to accomplish, “that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that, believing, we might have life through his name.” If you are anxious to know how you may come before the Lord, and what you must do to be saved, you will find the Prophets and Apostles all ready to shew unto you the way of salvation. Especially pray to the Father of lights, and plead the promise; “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” Thus you will be taught of the Lord; his Spirit shall lead you into all truth; and as a wayfaring man, though a fool, you shall not err therein.

Secondly—Enter it, and walk therein. There is a

form of knowledge as well as of godliness; and it is lamentable to think how many there are who rest in it. They are familiar with every thing the preacher advances, and admit readily the truth of it into their judgment; but while they hear his words; they do them not. They acknowledge themselves to be sinners, but never cry for mercy. They believe in the divinity, atonement, and righteousness of the Saviour, and that there is salvation in none other; but do not come to him that they might have life. But “if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” The knowledge of a remedy will never cure you without an application of it. Your knowledge of a way leading to a place will never bring you there, unless you set off, and hold on till you reach it. Yea, your acquaintance with Divine truth, if it has no influence over you, will be worse than nothing: “for to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.” “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” Therefore, saith the Lord, not only “stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way;” but “walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.”

Thirdly—When you are in it, turn not aside to the right hand or to the left. There are mistakes and miscarriages of an opposite description; and we must not suppose that in going from one side we are in no danger from the other. All extremes are dangerous; and truth and duty lie in the middle. So Bunyan

taught: representing a lion on each side of the road, but restrained by their chain from approaching the middle—the only safe passage was between. And Inspiration long before had said, “I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.” Courage lies between rashness and dread; and patience between despising the chastening of the Lord and fainting when we are rebuked of him. Parents are not foolishly to indulge their children, neither are they to provoke them to wrath, lest they should be discouraged. We may not know what manner of spirit we are of; and be either too candid or too severe. Did not Doddridge err in the former, and Toplady in the latter? Some carry the tenderness of conscience into weakness; and some, its allowances into licentiousness. Some are too exclusively for privilege; and others for duty: but faith and works have both their claims in the Gospel; and from the Saviour’s side came thereout blood and water.

Fourthly—Get as many as you can to accompany you. How can you bear to see the destruction of your kindred? Begin therefore with your relations, as Moses addressed Hobab: “We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” But extend your concern, and, as you have opportunity, say to all, and let your temper and life enforce the invitation: “O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” Many in families and neighbourhoods have begun

alone—for we are not to wait for others; but after awhile their prayers and endeavours have been crowned with success; and those who neglected, or even opposed them before, have taken sweet counsel together, and walked in company with them to the house of God. And to be the instrument of winning one soul! “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth!”

Fifthly—Go on your way rejoicing. So did the eunuch after Philip had preached unto him Jesus. And what source of joy had he, which is not open to you? You may indeed reckon upon difficulties and trials; but the Lord of the way hath said, “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass. and as thy days so shall thy strength be.” “My grace is sufficient for thee.” “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

Finally—Think much of the end; “the end of your faith;” “the end, everlasting life.” Who can describe or conceive the blessedness and the glory that await you! And the attainment is sure and near! A few more paces, and your Father’s house will appear in view—

“Soon shall you hear him say,
 Ye blessed children, come.
 Soon will he call you hence away,
 And take his pilgrims home.”

JANUARY 27.—MORNING.

“And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick.”—ISA. xxxiii. 24.

WHO can say so here? How many of our fellow-creatures, the subjects of infirmity, languor, and nervous apprehension, are saying, “I am made to

possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day"—Another is "chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: his flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen, stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers." There are few—perhaps none—who never feel indisposition or sickness.

Sickness is the effect of sin, which brought death into the world, and all our woe. It now (under the providence of God, which is not only punitive, but salutary,) subserves various purposes. It is taken into covenant, so to speak, with the godly, and is one of the paths of the Lord, which are *to them* all mercy and truth. It checks them in going astray, It frees them from many a temptation, arising from more intercourse with the world. It gives them the most sensible proofs of the care, and kindness, and fidelity of their Lord and Saviour. He knows their frame, and has promised to be with them in trouble; and to comfort them on the bed of languishing; yea, to comfort them as one whom his mother comforteth; and she, while none of her children are neglected by her, will be sure to pay the most tender attentions to the poor little ailing invalid.

Yet sickness is an evil in itself, and it is trying to flesh and blood. It not only deducts from the relish of all, and prevents entirely the enjoyment of some, of our outward comforts; but it injures, it hinders, the performance of a thousand duties, relative, civil, and religious. It also often brings a gloom over the

mind, and genders unworthy apprehensions of God, and misgivings of our spiritual condition. It not only shuts us out from the loveliness of nature, but from the public means of grace, and fills us with a mournful pleasure at the thought of seasons when we went in company to the house of God, with the voice of joy and gladness, to keep holy day. Hence Hezekiah, anxious to ascertain his recovery, asked "What is the sign that, I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" How feelingly has Watts described the Lord's prisoner, when the Sabbath comes—

"Lo! the sweet day of sacred rest returns:
 But not to me returns
 Rest with the day. Ten thousand hurrying thoughts
 Bear me away tumultuous, far from heaven
 And heavenly work: alas! flesh drags me down
 From things celestial, and confines my sense
 To present maladies. Unhappy state!
 Where the poor spirit is subdued t' endure
 Unholy idleness; and painful absence
 From God and heav'n, and angels' blessed work;
 And bound to bear the agonies and Woes,
 That sickly flesh and shatter'd nerves impose."

Well—soon the warfare with the body will be accomplished; and we shall put off the flesh, and be in joy and felicity. And as there will be no more sin, neither will there be any more pain; for the former things are all passed away.

A union with the body, were it to rise as it now is, would be dreaded, rather than desirable. But the body will not only be raised, but improved. improved beyond all our present comprehension, but not beyond our present RELIEF. For we can trust Him who has assured us, that though it be sown in weakness, it shall be raised in power; though it be sown a natural

body, it shall be raised a spiritual body. This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. We shall bear, not the image of the earthly, but of the heavenly. Our bodies will not be made like the body of Adam in Paradise, but like the Saviour's own glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. No burdens, no depressions then! No clogs! No confinements! No animal wants! No debasing appetites! No unruly passions! No fluttering heart! No aching head! "The inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick."

JANUARY 27.—EVENING.

"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."—I JOHN iv. 4.

How desirable was it. to inform them of their relation to God—"Ye are of God, little children," So in a sense are all: for he made us, and not we ourselves, As men, we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. He clothed us with skin and flesh, and fenced us with bones and sinews. He not only framed our bodies, but formed our spirits within us But there is something more peculiar in the relation here spoken of. Believers are of God, not only as they are the creatures of his power and providence, but as they are the subjects of his grace. They are of him, not only by formation, but renovation also. This people, says he, have I formed for myself They are his workmanship. They are new creatures They have a new being, a new heart, a new life; all things are become new—and in all this they are of

God—"Born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

How encouraging was it to announce their victory—"And ye *have overcome* them." They had not only resisted and withstood, but had vanquished. How was this? Were their foes all slain? Had they taken off the helmet, and sheathed the sword? Had they left the field, and were they now returning home with songs of triumph? Do not Christians find the spiritual life a warfare to the last? And, as long as they continue here, are they not armed? Are they not engaged? And yet John speaks as if the warfare were achieved. The reason is, because it *is* partially accomplished. They have fought and gained. many a battle; and have said, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me." And the remainder of the conquest is *sure*. Now where there is certainty, the future is spoken of in the Scripture as if it were past. Thus Isaiah, ages before the incarnation of the Messiah, said, "Unto us a Child *is* born; unto us a Son *is* given!" Well, therefore, may the believer say,

Thanks be unto God, who *giveth* us the victory:"
"Yea, *in* all these things, we *are* more than conquerors,"

How wise was it to remind them of the cause of their success—"Because *greater is he* that is in you, than *he* that is in the world." It was not owing to themselves—*they* were not greater—yea, they were nothing to their enemies. But if they were nothing to their enemies, their enemies were nothing to their Friend and Keeper. The chief of them, the prince of this world, the god of this world, is nothing to the Lord of all, who is *for* them, and *nigh* unto them, and in them, in all that they call upon him for—If the one is mighty, the other is Almighty. He is

therefore not only greater, but infinitely greater: and not only greater in himself, but greater in his agency—greater in his residence—greater in his subjects. He produces in them principles more powerful than any of the principles which their enemies would maintain, though *they* have the advantage of an earlier being, and derive aid from every thing around them. How else would they ever have *obtained* possession of the heart? “When a strong man, armed, keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour, wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.” And how else could they *retain* the possession, when every effort will be made by the mortified foe to recover his former sway? But truth is stronger than error: grace is above nature; and the Spirit of the living God, that dwelleth in his people, can easily subdue the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Let this regulate your gratitude. You have seen many fall, who once seemed much more likely to stand in the evil day than yourselves—but here you are: and though, from the time you commenced your religious course, you have been constantly opposed by all the powers of darkness, your heart has not turned back, neither have your steps declined from his ways. To whose name are you to give glory? You have often said, “I shall one day perish;” and you would have perished long ago, had you been left to yourself—But here is the secret—“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”

The same truth that accounts for your standing as to the past, will shew what you have to rely upon as to the future. If the one demands your praise, the other justifies your confidence. When you look forward, you feel your need of strong consolation; and there is enough to inspire it. Renounce self-dependence; but be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Look to his grace for your all-sufficiency; and you shall never be confounded. Every thing else may, and must give way—But “he that is born of God, overcometh the world.” “Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace,” “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet, shortly.”

JANUARY 28.—MORNING.

“In the wilderness thou hast seen how the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went.”—DEUT. i. 31.

THE image is parental. In another part of this book, the reference is to a parent *bird*: “As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him.” Here the allusion is to a *human* parent; and it is worthy of remark, how often the allusion is made in the Scriptures. Thus; to mention a few of them—“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” “I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” “If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father,

who is in heaven, give good gifts to them that ask him!" The softer sex is also adduced, and *maternal* tenderness supplies feeling as well as thought. "As One whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget; yet will not I forget thee."

Observe the image which Moses here employs. It regards a child, a young child. It is too weak to go alone—it is borne. The father is here mentioned, not the mother: for the action of bearing requires strength, rather than tenderness. The mother may have been dead. When one parent is called to supply the place of both, an increase of care and kindness becomes necessary, and is soon felt. Imagine, therefore, an Israelite—deprived, in his journey through the wilderness, of the companion of his life—perhaps as soon as she had brought him forth a son—perhaps in consequence of it. The child, thus bereaved, is endeared by the decease of the mother, and *he* takes it, and bears it. How? Sometimes in his arms, and often in his bosom. How? Tenderly, softly,—now pressing it to his lips—now soothing its cries—now lulling it to repose—feeding it—defending it—supplying all its wants!

All this God does in reality, and infinitely more—What is the goodness, the gentleness, the care of the tenderest being on earth, compared with the disposition and kindness of God towards his people? When an image is applied to God, we must separate from it all its imperfections. A father may be unable to defend a child. He is sometimes absent from it. He cannot be always awake, and inspecting it. He may be

ignorant of the cause of its complaint. He may not know what is good for it. He may decline in affection, and become heedless and negligent. He may become cruel, and abandon his charge. But nothing of all this can apply to Him, who bears us in all the way that we go.

Yea, we must not only strip the image of imperfection when we apply it to God—but we must attach to it Divinity. Every human relation, however complete, is yet *finite* in its exercise and excellence: but his attributes are *infinite*. His love passeth knowledge. “He is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.”

Well—hast thou *seen*, in the wilderness, how the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went? Let the sight affect your admiration, and induce you to exclaim, “Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” We talk of condescension: yet what is the difference between one creature and another; one worm and another—But what is God! What are we! how mean, unworthy, guilty!—Let it draw forth.

Your gratitude; and call upon your soul, and all that is within you, to bless his holy Name. “To him that led his people in the wilderness; for his mercy endureth for ever.”

—Let it encourage you.

You are not yet come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you: but he is with you in the way; and with you as your father; engaged to do all that such a relationship requires. He has said, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” Reason from the past to the future; and, “because

he has been your help, therefore under the shadow of his wings rejoice.”—Let him be

Your example. Job was a *father* to the poor, not a tyrant, or an overseer. Be *kind*, as well as bountiful. Be ye followers of God. In him the fatherless findeth mercy: let him find it in you also. “Be ye merciful, even as your Father which is in heaven is merciful.”—Recommend him to others, and say to them, “Come with us, and we will do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.”—Oh! that the young, who are entering this wilderness world, would place themselves under his care, and beseech him to be the guide of their youth.—Oh! that the bereaved would think of Him, who can more than repair the losses which make them bleed. “When my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.”

JANUARY 28.—EVENING.

“And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand.”
—REV. viii. 3, 4.

THE ablest expositors consider this angel as the Lord Jesus. There were two altars attached to the Jewish temple. But the altar here spoken of was not the altar of burnt-offering which stood in the inner court, but the altar which stood in the holy of holies, called the golden altar; and at which, the high priest, after he had sacrificed the victim, and sprinkled the blood, burnt incense, while the people were praying without. The censer was a small

chafingdish, filled with burning coals, upon which the high priest threw the rich perfume, whose fragrance then ascended in a cloud of odour, of a sweet smell, to God, who sat above upon the mercy-seat, between the cherubim. This was typical of the High Priest of our profession, who, having put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, entered into the holy place, not with the blood of bulls and of goats, but with his own blood; not to burn incense, but to make intercession for his people, while they are praying in this lower world. Four things are observable.

First, his people are saints. So they are called, not only here, but throughout the Scripture. The term is not confined to a few official and extraordinary characters. We affix the title to the immediate disciples of the Lord Jesus; and say, Saint Matthew and Saint John: but the Apostle inscribes several of his Epistles “to the saints that are in Christ Jesus”—that is, the whole body of the Church. The name is therefore applicable to all real Christians. They are called to be saints; called unto holiness; and holiness is not only the design, but the tendency of all their principles and privileges, when properly understood. They are not saints by nature, but are made so by grace. And how does grace accomplish this work? It makes them saints, not by imputed holiness—there is no such phrase in the Bible, nor in the vocabulary of common sense. Nor by imputed righteousness—this makes them *righteous*, and justifies them before God. But they are made *holy* by the operation of the Spirit of grace and truth. In consequence of which, there is a renovation of their nature, and a consecration of all they are, and all they have, to the service and glory of God.

Secondly, the saints are all men of prayer. "The prayers of *all* saints." They are the generation of them that seek him. For this shall everyone that is godly call upon him. The Spirit of grace is always the spirit of supplication; and praying is as essential to the Divine life, as breathing to the natural, Vain therefore is every pretension to religion, without a devotional temper. The wicked restrain prayer before God. The hypocrite will not always call upon him. The formalist, who does not decline it, cries, "What a weariness it is to serve him! How is it with us? Do we live without God? Do we only pray when urged by fear or affliction? Do we feel the duty a drudgery rather than a privilege? *All* saints pray, in the temple, in the family, alone, habitually, as long as they live: and find it good to draw near to God.

Thirdly, many imperfections attend their services. Hence we read of "much incense offered *with* the prayers of all saints." In this book mention is often made of the worship of angels, but we do not read of a mediator for them; nor of incense being presented with their devotion. Nor was this the case with the services of Adam and Eve in Paradise. But we are fallen creatures. "We are vile, what shall we answer him? We pollute every thing we touch. Our Sabbaths would condemn us, as well as our week-days, were we to be tried by them. Our good works deserve rejection, rather than reward. Our repenting needs repentance; and our weeping, tears. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants; and the innumerable sins of our holy things constrain us to cry, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no flesh living be

justified." Can this be prayer? Is this worshipping him who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth? What wandering of thought! What distraction of mind! What coldness of affection! What a want of fervency and faith!—How can I offer this to the only wise and holy God? If I see so much that is defective and defiled in my services, and am so dissatisfied with them—how must they be viewed and regarded by him who charges his angels with folly? in whose sight the very heavens are not clean? who sees more depravity in our duties than we see in our sins!—But,

Fourthly, there is hope in Israel concerning this thing; and relief is to be found in the Mediator between God and man. "And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." We inquire not whether his intercession be vocal—we are not informed whether the high priest said any thing when he officiated at the golden altar. But we know that his intercession is real; and founded on his suffering and death, which were an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweetsmelling savour. Hence, his blood speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. It cries not for revenge, but pardon. "Be merciful to their unrighteousness—I have borne their grief, and carried their sorrow. I have magnified the law; and redeemed them from the curse.—Keep, through thine own Name, those whom thou hast given me. Sanctify them through thy truth. Let them be with me where I am, to behold my glory." These are *his* pleadings for us, who is infinitely worthy. And we are assured of the result—The Father heareth him always.

This same shall comfort us. He is the consolation of Israel. If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins. If we love him, we shall not, we cannot abuse this encouragement: but let it give us boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Let us unite hope with humility; and rejoicing in Christ Jesus, with having no confidence in the flesh. And when we think of passing through the valley of the shadow of death, to enter the immediate presence of the Eternal, let us say, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of his righteousness only."

JANUARY 29.—MORNING.

"And shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."—JOHN xvi. 32

THERE is a relation between Christ and Christians, and a conformity founded upon it; so that what *He* says, *they* may subordinately adopt as their own language.

There are cases in which they *may* be alone—and there are cases in which they *ought* to be alone—and there is one case in which they *must* be alone: and yet they are not alone, because the Father is with them.

They *may* be alone, by the dispensations of Providence. By death, lover and friend may be put far from them, and their acquaintance into darkness; and bereavements may force from solitude the sigh, "I watch, and am as a sparrow upon the housetop." They have often been driven out of society by the wickedness of power. Their connexions have

abandoned them through falseness, or deserted them through infirmity. And this is no inconsiderable trial. Our Saviour felt the desertion of his disciples; and said, "I looked for some to take pity, and there was none, and for comforter and found none;" but looking upward, he said, "I am not alone, for the Father is with me." Joseph was separated from his family, and sold into Egypt; but the Lord was with Joseph. John was banished into the isle of Patmos; but there he had the visions of the Almighty, and was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, "At my first answer," says Paul, "no man stood by me, but all *men* forsook me; notwithstanding the *Lord* stood by me, and strengthened me." Yes; whoever dies, the Lord liveth. Whoever fails us, He is firm. "He is faithful that hath promised. He hath said, *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.*"

They *ought* to be alone, by voluntary solitude. Not that they are to become recluses, by abandoning their stations, and shunning intercourse with their fellow-creatures. The Christian life is a candle; but a candle is not to be placed under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house: and our light is to shine before men; and they are to see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven. But *occasional* and *frequent* retirement for religious purposes is a duty; and it will be found our privilege. We shall never be less alone than when alone. "Go forth," says God to Ezekiel, "into the field, and there will I talk with thee," Isaac, at eventide, was meditating in the field, when the Lord brought him Rebekah. Jacob was left alone, when he "obtained power with God," and with man, and prevailed. Nathanael

was seen and encouraged under the fig tree. Peter was by himself praying upon the house-top when he received the Divine manifestation. If the twelve Patriarchs, or the twelve Apostles, lived near us, and their presence drew us from our closets, their neighbourhood would be a serious injury to us. No creature can be a substitute for God. And it is *alone* we hold the freest and fullest communion with him. It is there the secret of the Lord is with us, and he shows us his covenant. There we become acquainted with ourselves.—There we shake off the influence of the world. It is good to be there—

—Men may live in a crowd, but they *must* die alone. Friends and ministers can only accompany us to the entrance of the passage. None of them can speak from experience: none of them can tell us what it is to die. And it is a way we have not gone ourselves heretofore. But the Christian, though alone, is not alone even *here*. “Yea,” says David, “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for *thou* art with me: *thy* rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”

Oh! to have a God, the God of all grace, at hand, a very present help in that time of trouble; laying underneath his everlasting arms; shedding around the light of his countenance; communicating the joy of his salvation; and insuring the glory to be revealed—in ways beyond all our present experience and thought!

“O my God, what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire

beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

JANUARY 29.—EVENING.

"He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."—PSALM cv. 14, 15.

HE did this to the Patriarchs. He did it when they were but few in number, yea very few, and strangers in the land: and when they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people: and so seemed to invite hostility and injury from the powerful and unprincipled. He did it sometimes in dreams and visions, and sometimes in words and deeds: as we see in the rebuke of Pharaoh with regard to Abraham when in Egypt; and of Abimelech with regard to Isaac in Gerar. Also when by the destruction of the Shechemites. Jacob's sons had rendered him odious to all the surrounding clans: yet, when he journeyed, "the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after them." "He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

Here we see that God's servants are dearer to him than kings. The world knoweth them not. They are often poor and afflicted. And therefore those who judge after outward appearance make little account of them. "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers: the work of the hands of the potter!" Yet of such the world is not worthy. In their state and

character they are more excellent than their neighbours, wherever they may be placed, or however they may be endowed. To them the Lord looks; in them he takes pleasure. "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life."

We learn also that his servants are never without a divine Guardian. When first they flee to him for refuge, he encourages them as David did Ahimelech escaped from the fury of Saul: "Abide thou with me; fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard." They may sometimes lose dependences; they may feel helpless and friendless; they may be hated and opposed: but there is no enchantment against Jacob; no weapon that is formed against them shall prosper. Are they travellers? The Lord is their keeper, the Lord is their shade upon their right hand. He shall preserve them from all evil. Are they useful? They are immortal till their work is done. Have they reached the days of privation, and infirmity, and depression? He will not cast them off in the time of old age; but will bear and carry them even to gray hairs. He will *never* leave them nor forsake them—

"Though I should walk through death's dark shade,

My Shepherd's with me *there!*"

Once more. All creatures are under the Lord's control; and when he does not renew them, he can restrain. The noblest agency of God is his spiritual agency: and nothing can be more delightful than to contemplate his gracious dominion over the souls of

men: opening their understandings, enthroning himself in their hearts, changing their views and feelings, and making them new creatures. Are we the subjects of *this* agency? But, distinguishable from this, there is another agency of God, and which we may call providential. Solomon alludes to it when he says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." The husbandman can form a new channel for the water, and the stream shall flow as freely as before, yet retain the same qualities. Esau left home armed, and resolved to kill Jacob; but the Lord softened, though he did not sanctify his heart, so that when he met him he fell upon his neck and kissed him: for when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. The spirit of Cyrus, though a heathen, was stirred up to favour Israel, and to let go the Lord's captives, not only without ransom, but even enriched for their journey. At the three festivals of the Jews all the males were to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem. Thus the country seemed drained of its defence; and surrounded as the people were with enemies ready to seize every advantage against them, they might have been tempted to say, "What will become, in our absence, of our fields, and vineyards, and houses, and wives, and children? But says God, who has all hearts as well as all events at his disposal, "I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year."

If I have any thing to do with my fellow creatures, let me commit my way unto the Lord. Let me follow

my convictions wherever they lead me. If I am reviled, let me not revile again, but commit myself to him that judgeth righteously. Who is he that will harm us if we are followers of that which is good? If God be for us, who can be against us?

JANUARY 30.—MORNING.

“And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa,”—ACTS x, 7, S,

SUCH was his obedience to the heavenly vision. It was immediate, and well executed.

He did not himself go for Peter, This he would have readily done; but he was ordered by the angel to *send*. His presence was proper and necessary at home. He was a man in office; and in command. He had a weighty trust reposed in him: and we are to abide with God in our callings.

The messengers he employed were “two of his household servants,” This shows him to have been a man of some estate besides his profession: and a “devout soldier of them that waited on him continually.” Observe here—the officer himself was a devout man, and he has not only devoted, but devout soldiers. The master was godly, and the servants are the same: for it is said, Cornelius feared God with all his house; like Joshua, who said, “As for me, *and* my house, we will serve the Lord.” This correspondence between the head and the members of the family may be accounted for two ways. First; such a man will choose, as far as he can, those that

are religious to attend him—saying, with David. “Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.” And, Secondly; he will be likely to render them such, if they are not such when he engages them. For he will be sure to use all the means in his power: and his own temper and example will harmonize with his efforts: and the grace of God, which he will never fail to implore, will honour him. Thus, they who are blessed, are also blessings, and for them the desert rejoices as a rose. Some are favoured, by their opportunities and talents, to cultivate a large expanse of barrenness: but let us see, let us all see, whether we cannot convert a small spot, at least, from waste, to smiling verdure: and cultivate, if not the neighbouring moor, yet a cottage garden; and let the traveller say, as he passes by, “The blessing of the Lord be upon thee.” Many a domestic has been thankful that he ever entered a pious family: there he has been made wise unto salvation, and has become a child of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. What a disgrace is it, for a Christian master and mistress to let a servant leave their family unable to read the Bible, or without a Bible to read!

“So, having declared these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.” Here we have not a harsh injunction to a trembling slave; not a bare order, couched in a few unexplained terms; not the sealed instructions, the orders of a tyrant, who is to be implicitly obeyed, and is afraid to trust. Here is intercourse: openness. Here is confidence in the

master, reposing on principle in the servants. How happy, where the distinctions of life are preserved—and they are to be preserved—and yet there is union and harmony; and condescension; and kindness; and unreserve, on the one side, and respect and obedience, without encroachment, on the other. How happy where authority is softened by gentleness, and submission by love: where indulgence breeds nothing like irreverence, and goodness is rewarded by diligence and fidelity. And in what connexions, in what families, is all this most likely to be found? “Men do not gather grapes from thorns, nor figs from thistles.” Piety is the spring; the guard; the refinement; the glory of morality.

JANUARY 30.—EVENING.

“Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance.”—Ps. cv. 16–21.

GOD promised the Patriarchs much more than he performed for them here. The relation into which he entered with them necessarily involved a future state; yet he was far from disregarding them in this life. The former words show us how he preserved them in danger: when they were very few, and strangers in the land of Canaan; “When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people; he suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproveth kings for their sakes;

saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." And the words before us prove how he supplied them in distress.

They suffered from one of the sorest judgments that can ever befall humanity. The whole staff of bread was broken, and famine was sore in the land, and prevailed in all the neighbouring countries, and continued seven years, But *the Lord called for it*. The expression not only reminds us that evil cometh from the Lord as well as good, but shews us the sovereignty and ease with which he brings it. All calamities are at his disposal; and if he speaks, they must obey him. Practical infidelity is often connected with nominal faith. People talk nationally of inexhaustible resources, of invincible armies and navies; but there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord. If he calls for an enemy, his way will be made prosperous: every thing will favour him. If he calls for continued rain, the precious grain perishes in the earth. It is the same with continual sunshine; as they knew by experience who procured themselves ceiled houses, while the house of God lay waste: "And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands."

But, before the famine commenced, God had arranged things for the relief of the sufferers. Joseph was the man sent before them to be the succourer and the saviour, and his mission was from God. *He* sent him. It seemed to be entirely the affair of his brethren who hated and envied him: but the hand of

the Lord was in the whole; and Joseph himself acknowledged it when he disclosed himself: "And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for Gou did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt." Thus, though they sold him, God sent him. They were the instruments, but he was the agent. They acted wickedly, but he was righteous—

Yet, what was the character under which he was sent to provide? Was he employed as an ambassador? A commissioner? A corn-factor? *No*. He was sold as a *servant*. His brethren sold him for a servant to the Ishmaelites—and little did the purchasers know with what a precious charge they were entrusted; little did they think that the lad they saw weeping as he walked, or rode on the camel, was to be the saviour of Egypt and Canaan. And the Ishmaelites sold him for a servant to Potiphar—and little did his master imagine that he was ever to bow the knee to one he had bought for money. There is nothing out of hell equal to the malice and rage of "an imperious whorish woman." His mistress, disappointed of her desire, in her cruelty accuses him, and he is imprisoned. And a circumstance is here mentioned which the history omits: "Whose feet

they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron." Look at that slave in the dungeon, galled with his heavy chains. Will he ever stand before Pharaoh? And ride in the second chariot of the kingdom? And be lord of all the land of Egypt? There seemed to be no prospect of this. There he lies, day after day, month after month, year after year, with no probability of the fulfilment of his dreams, which he had been taught to regard as prophetic—"until the time that" Pharaoh's "word came," to deliver him, "the word of the Lord tried him;" that is, the promise of God, by which he engaged to advance him. The accomplishment was delayed; things waxed worse and worse; and thus his confidence, patience, and resignation, were sorely exercised. Note, As we try God's word, so God's word tries us; and happy if, when we are tried, we come forth as gold; and the trial of our faith proves more precious than that of gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire. This was the case with Joseph. His destination secured him, and the merciful mediation for which he was designed required, not only his enlargement, but his elevation. Therefore the king not only released him, but "made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance"—one of the most remarkable events recorded in all history.

We may consider this dispensation two ways. First, as an instance of the wonder-working providence of God on the behalf of his people. "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy." Let those that live more immediately as dependents on his care remember that they have no reason to despond. The world is his and the fulness thereof. Who has seen the

righteous forsaken, or their seed begging bread? Ravens fed Elijah. And. the widow's oil and meal wasted not. We are not indeed to look for such miracles; but he who performed them is not far from anyone of us, and he is as powerful as ever, and sooner all nature shall change than one of his promises fail.

Secondly, as a representation of the Saviour's grace with regard to our spiritual straits. In view of these, he was set up from everlasting. In the fulness of time he came to his own, but they received him not. They despised and rejected him, and sold him for thirty pieces of silver. But he was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. He made himself of no reputation, but took upon him the form of a servant, and actually died upon a cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him. What was the elevation of Joseph? Jesus has all power in heaven and in earth. Many others were relieved by Joseph's advancement; but it was peculiarly designed for the salvation of his father's house. Jesus is the Saviour of all men, but especially of them that believe—He is the head over all things unto his body the Church. It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. Therefore to him let us go, and from his fulness receive, and grace for grace. For a time Joseph's brethren knew not that he was the governor, and had all the corn at his disposal; otherwise they would have gone down earlier, and have appealed to a brother's heart. Yet perhaps one thing might have checked them—a consciousness of their baseness towards him. How can we ever look him in the face? But suppose they had known that he had more than forgiven them; and when he saw

them would fall on their necks and kiss them: then they would have gone down, confident, yet feeling much more of their unworthiness than before. Thus should we apply to the Lord Jesus; with hope, but rendering us more sensible of our vileness. But let us not keep away from him. He invites us near. He assures us that while he has plenty we shall not want. Because he lives we shall live also. Let us remember the relation in which he stands to us; and see where and what he now is. In what distress will not this encourage us? "Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

JANUARY 31.—MORNING.

"And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet."—EXOD. xv. 25.

It is useless to inquire what kind of tree this was, and whether the effect was produced by a quality inherent in the wood, or by a miraculous application. The latter is far the most likely. But it has been disputed, whether this transaction was designed to be an evangelical type. Perhaps it is impossible to determine this—and it is unnecessary. We shall only derive from it an illustration of a very interesting subject, in which we are fully justified by the words of the Apostle to the suffering Hebrews: "Consider him that endureth such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

We, like these Jews, are travelling through a wilderness. In our journey we meet with bitter waters. These are the troubles of life, personal and relative. These are very distasteful and offensive to flesh and blood. But they may be rendered drinkable. In other words, we may be able to endure the afflictions of life—yea, we may even acquiesce in them; and not only so, but glory in tribulation also.

—But how can this be done? Here is the secret—

“The Cross, on which the Saviour died,
And conquer’d for his saints,—
This is the tree, by faith applied,
That sweetens all complaints.
“Thousands have proved the bless’d effect;
Nor longer mourn their lot:
While on his sorrows they reflect,
Their own are all forgot.
“While they by faith behold the Cross.
Though many griefs they meet,
They draw a gain from every loss,
And find the bitter sweet.”

Let us see how the Saviour’s sufferings will alleviate ours. It is some relief in distress that others are exercised in the same way. Individuality of woe looks ominous—it is appalling to be singled out like a victim deer from the whole herd, and suffer alone. Thus the Apostle tells the Corinthians that no temptation had taken them but such as is common to man—and Peter also tells the sufferers he addressed, that the same afflictions were accomplished in their brethren that were in the world. So it is—whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. This has been the case with even his most eminent servants, And even his “dear Son,” in whom his soul delighted—He,

even he, did not escape. And shall we dread the fellowship of his sufferings?

But if there is something to affect the mind, even in the reality of his passion, there is much more in the greatness of it. In general, our groaning is heavier than our complaint; and we are prone, from our selfishness and ignorance, to imagine our trials pre-eminent. *He* could say, Behold, and see if ever there were sorrows like unto my sorrow. In our sorrow we have alleviations. Ours are not perpetual; but his continued through life. Ours are not universal; but he suffered ill every part that was capable of suffering—he was a man of sorrows. Ours are not foreknown; but his were all laid out in prospect, and he suffered in apprehension, as well as reality. No tongue can express, or understanding conceive, what *he* bore when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground!

We must also think of the dignity of this sufferer. We commonly and properly feel more for those who are reduced in life, than for those who have never enjoyed a better state, because the penury is embittered by previous affluence. Job considers his former greatness as an enhancement of his fall, and contrasts, with the honours shewn him in his prosperity, the insults now offered him by those whose fathers he would have set with the dogs of his flock. "They were children of fools: yea, children of base men: they were viler than the earth. And *now* I am their song; yea, I am their by-word. They abhor me, they flee far from me, and spare not to spit in my face." Jesus was the Lord of all; and all the angels of God worshipped him. Yet was *he*

despised and rejected of men; he was buffeted, scourged, spit upon; and not only the Scribes and Elders, but the soldiers, the common rabble, and the very thieves, set him at nought, and vilified him. But who and what are we? Om foundation is in the dust. Man is a worm. It is condescension in God to have any thing to do with him, yea, even to chastise him. "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?"

But the great may render themselves *worthy* of their humiliations; and often have been *righteously* punished. We suffer justly, because we suffer the due reward of our deeds. Good men themselves cannot complain, or even wonder, at their afflictions, when they consider their years of irreligion, and their sins since they have known God, or rather have been known of him—for who can understand his errors? In the sudden and awful death of his two sons, Aaron held his peace—he had just before been aiding to make the golden calf. David had been recently guilty of adultery and murder; when therefore Absalom, his own son, as well as subject, rose against him, what could he but say of his offended God, Here I am, let him do to me what seemeth good unto him. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because, says the Church, I have sinned against him. But this man did nothing amiss. He was harmless, holy, separate from sinners. He could make the appeal to all his adversaries, Which of you convinceth me of sin? Yet he suffered—suffered, though *innocent*; and was led as a lamb to the slaughter.

His sufferings, therefore, were *for us*, only and entirely *for us*—and what can be more relieving, in our sorrows, than to consider the *benefits* we derive from his? Such is the benefit of an atoning Sacrifice; by which we are delivered from all condemnation, and have peace with God, and access to him. What are trials, when there is no wrath in them? when they are only the effects of a Father's care? Then the bitterness of death is past. Such is the benefit of a sympathizing friend; who, from his own experience, can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities—for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able also to succour them that are tempted. Such is the benefit of an Example; which shews us how to act and how to feel in the hour of trial—for he also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps. Such is the benefit of Divine Influence; for, by dying, he obtained for us the dispensation of the Spirit, which is therefore called his Spirit, and without the supply of which, we must fail and sink—but his grace is sufficient for us.

How encouraging, too, is it to remember the issue of his sufferings! For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the Throne of God, Our sorrows will also have an end—and the same end. It is a faithful saying; for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him. If we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together.

JANUARY 31.—EVENING.

"In many things we offend all."—JAMES iii. 2.

To exemplify this in our conviction, we must estimate our offences according to the mind of God, and not by a human judgment. When David says, "Who can understand his errors?" he means to intimate that no one can be fully acquainted with them. We are too full of self-love to be willing to dwell on the discovery of our faults, The heart is not only desperately wicked, but deceitful above all things; and has a thousand artifices to delude us into a more favourable opinion of ourselves than we deserve. Hence we excuse many evils: we question the guilt of others; and as to those we consider really sinful, we do not condemn them according to their aggravations. From various causes, therefore, we see only a small part of our sins; and we must not suppose we appear in the eyes of God as innocent as we are in our own—In his sight the very heavens are not clean. And does *he* set our iniquities before *him*, our secret sins in the light of *his* countenance?

Neither must we judge of the number of our offences only by our remembrance of them. We are affected with recent transgressions; but we are not struck with those we were guilty of ten or twenty years ago. And wherefore? Though they are past as to us, they are not so as to God. Nothing is future, nothing is past, with him—With him every thing is present—and we are at this very moment committing those sins with him with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day. Though we have forgotten a countless multitude of our offences, God has forgotten none of them. They

are all recorded in the book of his remembrance—and could we consult this awful register of our lives from the beginning, with all the sins of youth and manhood, of secrecy and openness, of infirmity and wilfulness, of purpose and accomplishment; and could we peruse one chapter, or one verse only, we should exclaim—we cannot answer thee for one of a thousand of our transgressions. “Innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me.”

Have we not in many things offended all—First, in our disregard of the Lord Jesus? Secondly, in the neglect and formality of our devotion? Thirdly, in the coldness and contractedness of our charity? Fourthly, in the non-improvement and mis-spending of our time? Fifthly, in our behaviour under the discipline of the rod? Sixthly, in our “temper-flaws unsightly?” Seventhly, in the licence of our tongues? It would be easy to multiply the counts in the indictment. Surely a little reflection upon each of these will convince us of the guilt here acknowledged.

But in what manner should we utter the confession? For the words are not always used as James and his brethren used them. Some use them as a kind of censure upon others rather than as a reflection upon themselves: yea, their aim is to screen themselves as culprits in the commonness of the delinquency. Hence, when their conduct is accused, or a monitor reminds them of their misdoings, O, say they, none are exempt from failings; even the best err; in many things we offend all. Others use them without perhaps a bad design; yet they use them

vaguely and unimpressively—it is mere lip-service—it comes from nothing—and leads to nothing. But if we properly feel the sentiment we utter, it will be accompanied with deep repentance and godly sorrow—It will make us sensible of our need of the Saviour, and endear to our souls the cross and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—It will hide pride from us, and fill us with self-abasement—It will dispose us to receive and invite reproof—It will keep us from murmuring and repining under Divine correction—It will make us tender towards the infirmities of others—It will elevate our views to heaven; and send forth our desires after a state in which we shall never, never sin—and—It will awaken us to caution, carefulness, and zeal: for though we cannot attain perfection here, we may much reduce our imperfections; and should be concerned to make all possible progression in the divine life. Here, as all our offences arise from the depravity of our nature, our business must be to seek for more grace to mortify the principle of sin—for how can we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? And as grace uses means, we must inquire where we have most frequently erred, and how we have been most easily overcome; and watch and pray lest we enter into temptation.

FEBRUARY I.—MORNING.

“Do ye now believe.”—JOHN xvi. 31.

THIS was in reply to the profession of his disciples. They had said unto him, “Now speakest thou plainly. *Now* we are sure that thou knowest all things: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.”

It is not easy to lay the emphasis with perfect certainty; and yet, according as it is laid, the language will strike us with some shades of difference.

We may consider the words as an *inquiry*. "Do ye now *believe*? I have a right to ask, and I do ask." He is not inattentive to our condition, and our experience; our deficiencies, and our improvements.—And though he needed not that any should testify of man, because he knoweth what is in man, yet he will know these things from ourselves; that we may be urged to consider, and be affected with our own communications.

We may regard them as a *censure*. "Do ye *now* believe? Ye ought to have believed long ago; yet hitherto, it would seem, according to your own avowal, you have not—that is, as you ought to have done, and as you might have done. How strange and blameable, that, with all your advantages, you have been, even down to this hour, filled with hesitation and doubts!" For he can reprove, as well as encourage. Do ye not remember? Do ye not yet understand? After his resurrection, he upbraided them with their unbelief, and hardness of heart.

We may consider them as a *check to presumption*. "Do ye now believe? You think so; but have you not expressed yourselves with too much confidence? You now consider yourselves confirmed believers; and you suppose that you shall never err again; fail again. I know you better than you know yourselves. Imagination is not reality. Events will prove, that you have much less faith than you now suppose." "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone."

There is a difference between hypocrisy and instability. We may feel what we utter at the time: but emotions are not principles; impulses are not dispositions. There may be goodness: but it is like the morning cloud and early dew, that soon passeth away. How of ten do we become a wonder, as well as a grief, to ourselves! How little do we know of our own hearts, till we are tried! The little ants disappear in the cloudy and rainy day: and the observer might suppose they were all dead. But let the sun shine forth; and they are again all alive, and in motion. There is the same mud at the bottom of the water when calm; but the waves thereof cast up the mire and dirt.

Let us not, therefore, make too much of frames and feelings. Let us not imagine, because we are now walking in the light of God's countenance, that we shall never again mourn his absence. Behold, the hour cometh when we may consider all our present joy as only a delusion. Do we now believe? A change in the weather, a depression of animal spirits, may renew all our doubts and fears; and we may be all apprehension again.

Therefore let us rejoice with trembling. Let us remember our own weakness; and, instead of depending on the grace that is in us, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

“Beware of Peter's word;

Nor confidently say,

I never *will* deny thee, Lord;

But, Grant I never may.

“Man's wisdom is to seek

His strength in God alone;

And e'en an angel would be weak

That trusted in his own.”

FEBRUARY I.—EVENING.

“At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.”—2 TIM. iv. 16.

THIS was a very trying case. He was a prisoner, and had appealed unto Cæsar. He had to appear before the tribunal of Nero, the greatest and the most cruel monarch of the earth, to defend himself against a charge, for which he had suffered as an evil doer even unto bonds. His friends should have rallied around him, encouraging him by their kindness, emboldening him by their presence, exculpating him by their testimony, or softening his judges by their tears and entreaties. It was the custom among the Romans for the connections of the accused to appear in court in mourning, to show their regard for the prisoner, and to influence the tribunal by their depositions, or their importunity; and sometimes the train that attended them was very large and imposing. But Paul appeared on the day of trial like an outcast, entirely disowned—when he looked around, he saw no one in his favour—the abandonment was extreme—*no* man stood by him—but *all* forsook him. Yet this gives the Apostle an opportunity to display the excellency of his principles and temper—“I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.” Hence we may observe,

First—It is no unusual thing for a man to be deserted in the hour of trial. The rich have many friends; but the poor useth entreaties, and often uses them in vain. Some seem to act as if they thought a brother was born for prosperity, instead of adversity. Thus the garden is not forsaken while it abounds with flowers and fruits, but in the dreariness of winter.

Are you suffering under such desertion? Remember, your brethren have drunk of this bitter cup before you. In his deep distress, David heard that Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom. And what was the complaint of Job? "My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away; which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid: what time they wax warm, they vanish; when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place." Is it the Scripture only that is continually saying to us, "Cease from man?"

Secondly—See the frailty of good men, For such the persons complained of were, notwithstanding their infirmity on this occasion; and therefore Paul distinguishes them from the hardened persecutor and blasphemer of whom, as an Apostle, he speaks in the verse preceding: "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: of whom beware thou also; for he hath greatly withstood our words." Men may be backsliders and not apostates; they may act weakly and not wickedly, or so as to do despite to the Spirit of grace. Thus these persons were friends at heart: their defection was only temporary; and they would soon grieve over it. But the best of men are *but* men. The agency that makes them holy leaves them human. There is nature in them as well as grace. And what affecting and humiliating changes do they sometimes betray! Who could have thought that Elijah, after telling Ahab to his face of his abominations, and slaying all the false prophets, should flee at the threatening of Jezebel, and pray to be released from life? 'Who, that had seen Peter in the presence

of the Roman soldiers draw his sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant, could have believed that the very same man, a few hours after, would be so overcome with fear, at the question of the damsel in the judgment-hall, as to say, with oaths and curses, I know not the man? So these brethren, when they heard that Paul was coming to make his appeal, went down to meet him as far as Appii-Forum and the three taverns: and when Paul saw them he thanked God and took courage: yet consulting with flesh and blood, and thinking how many had lately suffered, they yielded to apprehension, and not one of them justified the hope they had excited. Lord, what is man!

Thirdly—How becoming and lovely is a forgiving disposition! However leniently the conduct of these forsakers of Paul may be treated, they were very blameworthy. There was much in their defection to irritate his mind, especially considering what was their duty towards one who was suffering for the cause they professed, and the pretensions of friendship which they had made. Nothing is more felt, more resented, than injury in the hour of want and distress, contrary to every kind and degree of just expectation—yet the bleeding heart here only says, "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." Imbibe the same spirit, and follow his example. In provocations and complaints dwell not upon the enhancing, but upon the extenuating. Be not implacable, but tenderhearted; forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you. It is the glory of a man to pass by a transgression. It is the noblest of all victories—Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. So the suffering Ste-

phen, under a shower of stones, cried, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Thus Jesus, as they were nailing him to the cross, prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

FEBRUARY 2.—MORNING.

"Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."—2 TIM. iv. 17.

To the loss of his friends he opposes the grace of the Saviour—"Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me." He was not visible to the assembly; nor did Paul himself perceive him by the eye of sense. His presence was real, but spiritual; and he was with his servant not as a mere witness, but as a helper—He "strengthened me." He confirmed his courage, and gave him self-possession, and freedom of thought and expression. This was no more than Paul had reason to expect, from his own promise; "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." "Ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in the same hour what ye shall speak."

See how he differs from others! They forsake us when we are in distress: he is a present help in trouble. When human dependence fails, he is sure to hold forth his own arm, and to say, "Trust, and be not afraid." Thus he was with Joseph when sold into Egypt, with Jeremiah in the dungeon, with the

three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, and with Paul when abandoned of all before Nero!

And what a substitute was He for Paul's friends! They would have been nothing without him; but he was every thing without them. If we walk through the valley of the shadow of death with *Him*, we need fear no evil. He is all in all.

What was the design of this interposition? "That by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear." The preaching intends the Gospel; and the meaning is, that in this trial he had an opportunity to publish it most advantageously and extensively. What he delivered would spread through the palace and the city; and pervade much further. For at this time Rome was the metropolis of the world; so that what his auditors heard would be reported to others, and extended through all the provinces. How true is it, that though his servants may suffer as evil-doers even unto bonds, yet the word of God is not bound. It can no more be restrained than the flowing of the sea, or the rising of the sun. Yea, the very efforts designed to injure it, have been overruled to aid its progress. Persecution has always turned out to the furtherance of the Gospel.

What was the issue? "And I was delivered from the mouth of the lion." Does he refer to the enemy of souls? He is called a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour: and he hoped to prevail with Paul to deny the Saviour's name. Or does he refer to Nero? The Scripture frequently compares wicked men, and especially tyrants, to beasts of prey: and it was impossible to disgrace such a monster as now filled the imperial throne—a wretch who killed his preceptor, had his mother ripped up before his eyes,

and entertained himself at supper by the burnings of Christians at the corners of his pleasure-grounds. Yet this hardly agrees with Paul's manner of writing, and the respect he considered due *officially* to his sovereign. The expression therefore is to be considered rather as a phrase significant of a narrow escape from a very pressing jeopardy. Hence David had said, "Save me from the lion's mouth." Paul's case was looked upon not only as dangerous, but desperate. He was considered a dead man. Yet the emperor and the senate did nothing against him; but after a hearing, he was sent back simply as a prisoner.

The sufferings of God's servants depend not on the fancies and passions of men, but the providence of God. Their enemies are chained; and wherein they think to deal proudly, he is above them. He restrains or diverts them by his power when he does not govern them by his grace. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; he tumeth it whithersoever he will."

He often permits his people to fall into the greatest extremities, and *then* appears for them, to shew his power and glory, and to teach them never to despair. Therefore, ye seed of Jacob, hope in him and wait for him. He whom you serve is continually able to deliver you. He can deliver you not only from the lion's paw, but from the lion's mouth.

FEBRUARY 2.—EVENING.

"And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."—2 TIM. iv. 18.

HERE he expresses his full assurance of hope, after the trial he had experienced from the desertion of his

friends, and the succour he had received from the presence of his Saviour. What he expected, however, was not exemption from trials. He looked for suffering. He knew that bonds and afflictions awaited him. But he knew also that the Lord would *deliver*

him from every evil work—and that, far from allowing him to apostatize or backslide, he would enable him to resist temptation, to hold on his way, to finish his course with joy—and *preserve* him unto his heavenly kingdom.

What a destination! Nothing less than a *kingdom*, a *heavenly kingdom*, *his* heavenly kingdom, procured by him, prepared by him, the same he himself enjoys, and which his followers are to possess with him, according to his promise; “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me.”

But what is the prospect of such a glorious estate, if we are destroyed before we attain it? It is obvious the Apostle believed in his own perseverance and final salvation. The expressions he uses are not the language of a man in doubt, floating between hope and fear; but of a man fully convinced and assured, And it is delightful to find him expressing the same certainty of mind with regard to all the subjects of divine grace: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Yes, Christians; you may equally rejoice in hope of the glory of God. He has provided for all your wants. He will secure you in every danger. Sin shall not have dominion over you. The God of peace will bruise Satan under your feet shortly. You have overcome them, because

greater is he that is in you, than they that are in the world. Yea, in all these things you are more than conquerors.

It is obvious the Apostle derived encouragement in his expectation from his former experience: the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, and I *was* delivered from the mouth of the lion; and the Lord *shall* deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom. The proofs we have had of his mercy and grace should animate us in our dependence: for he is always the same; and one blessing is the pledge of another. The victories of an old soldier feed his courage. David was filled with confidence in his dreadful conflict, by such recollections and reasoning.

But this expectation was founded on the Lord Jesus, as his deliverer and his preserver: the *Lord* shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom. He is engaged to do it. He is able to do it. He is able to save unto the uttermost. I can trust him for every period, and with every result. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

What wonder therefore that he should exclaim, "To whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen." And will you not, Christian, make this Amen your own? It becometh well the just to be thankful. Praise is comely for the upright, It is the most unselfish exercise of your religion; it will be the most durable. It will be the work, the enjoyment of heaven.

You say, "I hope I am grateful." You hope you are! As if there was any difficulty in determining the thing! Would similar conduct towards an

earthly benefactor be deemed grateful? What are the sentiments of your mind? The affections of your heart? The language of your lips? Above all—What is the language of your life? Actions speak louder than words.

Like Paul, be enlarged in your gratitude. Be concerned that his praise may be as lasting as his goodness—that his glory may be *for ever*. Do what you can to advance it, not only while living, but when dying, and even when dead. I mean, by the institutions you have established or supported—by the examples you leave behind you—by the children you have instructed—by the sinners you have converted from the errors of their ways to be a seed to serve him, and which shall be accounted for a generation, and who shall come and declare his righteousness to a nation that shall be born, that he hath done this.

FEBRUARY 3.—MORNING.

“Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.”—Ps. lv. 6.

WHOSE exclamation is this? It is obviously the language of a man *not* at rest. And if we read the preceding and following verses, we shall find that the complainant was, indeed, really in trouble. And so are many. It seems inseparable from humanity. Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble,

But who was *this* man? One of those deemed the darlings of Providence: a man who had experienced one of the most marvellous revolutions recorded in history. For he was originally nothing more than a

shepherd; but rose from obscurity, and became a hero, a renowned conqueror, a powerful monarch. God had given him the necks of his enemies and the hearts of his subjects; and we might have supposed him sated with victory, and glory, and dominion, and riches. But, from the midst of all this, he sighs, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flyaway, and be at rest." For, with all his aggrandizements, how much did he suffer from implacable malevolence! How much also from some of his own officers, and especially his nephew Joab, the commander-in-chief! After rearing his fine palace of cedar, he could not for a length of time take possession of it: for he was sick nigh unto death; and, week after week, saw the graves ready for him. And suppose they had then brought out his crown, and imposed it upon him—would this have eased an aching head, or have relieved the anguish of a disordered body? What is an ornamented room in the rage of a fever? His own house also was not so with God. What a distracted and wretched family! His daughter is humbled. The incestuous brother is murdered. The murderer becomes a traitor, and drives his father, as well as king, into exile. In his flight, he is told that Ahithophel, his bosom friend and counsellor, is among the conspirators with Absalom. Who can tell what other sorrows corroded him! The heart knoweth his own bitterness. There are griefs that we cannot pour even into the bosom of intimacy. There are thorns in the nest that pierce through the down that lines it, but are known and felt by the occupier. Did David never regret the loss of the privacy of Bethlehem?

The spirit that is in us lusteth to envy. We are

prone to think that, though *generally* men are born to trouble, there are some exempted individuals; and that though, commonly considered, this earth is a vale of tears, there are some privileged spots. And it is worthy our observation, that these exceptions always belong to *others*, and always to those who are *above* us. Is the servant happy? He will when he is master. Is the master happy? He will when he is rich. Is the rich man happy? He will when he is ennobled, and has distinction as well as gold. Is the nobleman happy? He will when he is king. Is the king—the *king* happy? “Oh,” says *he*, “oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flyaway, and be at rest.”

Let us remember this, and not be afraid when one is made rich, and the glory of his house is increased. Let us check the risings of ambition, and not seek great things to ourselves. Let us learn, in whatsoever state we are, to be content; and follow the moderation of the Patriarch, who asked only for bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and a safe return to his father’s house in peace.

Felicity depends not upon external condition, but the state of the mind. Paul was happy in prison; Nero was miserable in a palace. Haman, after telling his wife and his friends all his promotion and glory, adds, Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate. On that night could not the king sleep—

“Tired Nature’s sweet restorer, balmy sleep—

He, like the world, his ready visit pays

Where fortune smiles”—

But is this true? Sleep, sound, wholesome, refreshing sleep, has least to do where fortune smiles. His

ready visits are paid to the early rising, the temperate, the diligent: the sleep of a labouring man is sweet. "The wretched," indeed, "he forsakes." But where does he find them? Here is one of them—the ruler of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces—on that night could not the king sleep. Ahab, the monarch of Israel, is melancholy and sick, and cannot eat, because he cannot obtain Naboth's little parcel of ground for a garden of herbs; and neither his happiness or health could go on till his worthy helpmate taught him to gratify his wish by the destruction of the noble-minded peasant. How wise was the answer of the Shunamite, when Elisha offered to speak for her to the king—"I dwell among my own people." If we are not content with such things as we have, we shall never be satisfied with such things as we desire. If there is a difference in outward conditions, it lies against those who fill the higher ones. Their want of occupation—the listlessness, far worse than any labour, they feel—the little relish they have of natural refreshment—their sufferings from weak nerves and timid spirits—their squeamish anxieties about their health—the softening of their disposition by indulgence and ease, so that they are unable to endure—their sensibility under trifling vexations, which others despise—their leisure to brood over a progeny of dangers—the envies to which they are liable—their cares, fears, responsibilities, and dependence—the unreasonable things looked for from them, and their inability to give satisfaction to expectants—Where shall I end? These, and a thousand other things, should be enough to show the poor and the busy that those who are placed above them are taxed in the same proportion.

Neither, however, is the opposite state the most desirable, As far as happiness depends on an outward condition, there lies—between the extremes of prosperity and adversity, penury and affluence—the most eligible choice. If life be a pilgrimage, man, the traveller, is best prepared for advancing, not when the shoe pinches, or when it is large and loose; but when it fits—not when he is destitute of a staff to lean upon, or when he has a large bundle of such articles to carry; but when he has one which affords him assistance without incumbrance. Pray we therefore, “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”

FEBRUARY 3.—EVENING.

“Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee thence”
—DEUT. xxiv. 18.

THE bondage of Egypt, under Pharaoh’s tyranny and task-masters, was nothing to the bondage of corruption in which sinners are naturally held, and the power of darkness, from which we are translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. And the freedom the Jews obtained, when they were delivered by a strong hand and a stretched-out arm, was not to be compared with the glorious liberty of the sons of God. If the Son makes us free, we are free indeed.

And this redemption is what we are called to remember. The admonition may seem needless. For can such a deliverance be ever forgotten? We should once have deemed it impossible; but we are prone to

forget his works, and the wonders which he has shown us. The event indeed can never be forgotten completely. But we need to have our minds stirred up by way of remembrance. And for four purposes—We should remember that we were bondmen in the land of Egypt—but the Lord our God redeemed us thence—

First, for the purpose of humility. We are prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think: but with the lowly is wisdom. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. And surely we have enough to hide pride from us, if we reflect properly. If we are now wise, we were once foolish; if we are now justified, we were once condemned; if we are now the sons of God, we were once the servants of sin.—Let us look to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we were digged.

Secondly, we should remember it for the purpose of gratitude. We are affected with the kindnesses shown us by our fellow-creatures: yet they are under obligation to relieve us. We had not forfeited our lives to them. They did not deliver us from the lowest hell. They did not become poor to enrich us, and die that we may live. And shall we overlook our infinite Benefactor? We have no claims upon *Him*, for the least of all his mercies? and therefore should be thankful for *all* his benefits—But *herein* is love. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift! Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people.

Thirdly, we should remember it for the purpose of confidence. David argued from the past to the future; and said, Because thou hast been my help, therefore,

under the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. But here we have a peculiar reason for encouragement. For what were we when He first took knowledge of us? Was he not found of them that sought him not? The want of worthiness was not a bar to his goodness then—And will it be so now? Is there with him any variableness or shadow of turning? Is there not the same power in his arm, and the same love in his heart? Did he pardon me when a rebel, and will he cast me off now he has made me a friend? “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

Fourthly, we should remember it for the purpose of pity and zeal. How many are there all around you, in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity, ready to perish! You know the state they are in; and you know the blessedness of a deliverance from it. You are witnesses for God, and can tell of what he is able and willing to do. You can speak from experience. Invite, therefore, the prisoners of hope to turn to him. Say to the destitute, That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

FEBRUARY 4.—MORNING.

“And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be lumbered for multitude.”—GEN. xxxii. 9—12.

WE cannot too much admire the conduct of Jacob, on this trying occasion: when he had to meet his enraged brother Esau. The religion that, aiming at something uncommon and preternatural, disregards the plain dictates of reason and revelation, is always to be suspected. On the other hand, caution and exertion, unaccompanied with a devout dependence upon God, is the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness with him; and he will take the wise in their own craftiness. Therefore, prudence and piety should always be connected together.

Accordingly, Jacob sends forward a deputation, with a soft answer that turneth away wrath; and a present, which makes way for a man; and arranges his company and cattle in the wisest order for escape—But what does he *then*? When we have done all that we can do—to what does the whole amount? “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain:” and unless he gives his beloved sleep, “in vain we rise early and sit up

late, and eat the bread of sorrows." When we have planned, and are setting all our measures in motion, *then* is the time to take hold of God, and say, "O Lord, I beseech thee, send *now* prosperity." Jacob, therefore, now prays; and as this prayer was heard, and He who teaches us how to pray is our best friend, let us glance at the particulars which God has here noticed.

Observe the relation under which he addresses the Supreme Being. "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac." As much as to say, my family God; and my God in covenant. This was laying hold of his faithfulness, as well as goodness, and asking *in faith*. We have another title under which to speak attention—The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This inspires more abundant hope; and involves more exceeding great and precious promises. It reminds of a covenant made with *him*, and *so* with us, everlasting, ordered in all things, and sure.

He appeals to the will of God in his present difficulty. "Thou saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee"—I am now in a strait, but I have been brought into it by following thee. This was wise. They that suffer according to the will of God, may commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing. It affords great relief to the mind, and much aids our confidence, when we are conscious that the embarrassments we feel have not been brought upon ourselves, but have befallen us in the path of duty. And how does it add to the pressure of the burden, and the bitterness of the cup, when God asks, "What dost thou here, Elijah?" and conscience cries, "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself?" Let no man, therefore, suffer as a murderer, as a thief, or as a busy-body in

other men's matters. We complain of the world; and there are many unavoidable ills in life; but there is a large multitude of evils entirely of our own producing, and God is no otherwise accessory to them, than as he has in the nature of things and the course of providence, established a connexion between folly and misery.

He shows his humility. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." This temper is not natural to us; but grace brings us down, and keeps us from thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. We cannot have too much of this self-abasing disposition: it will restrain us from exercising ourselves in great matters, and in things too high for us; it will keep us from murmuring under our trials; it will teach us, in whatever state we are, therewith to be content; and it will dispose us in everything to give thanks. Only in proportion as we are humble, can we be thankful.

Jacob, therefore, acknowledges the kindness of God towards him. More than twenty years before, he had crossed the same river where he now was. At that time he had no inheritance; no, not so much as to set his foot on. He was going forth, a poor pilgrim in search of subsistence; and all that he stipulated for was, bread to eat, and raiment to put on; and a return to his father's house in peace. From this condition he had been raised to affluence; and his family and his flock had equally multiplied. Therefore, says he, "For with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands." We should do well often to review life; and to mark the changes which have taken place in our stations and circumstances. Have not many attained conditions,

which would once have appeared the most improbable? Yet the Lord has made windows in heaven—and such things have been. Yet he has brought the blind by a way that they knew not; and made darkness light before them. Those born in the lap of ease, and whose course has been always even, cannot enter into the feelings of those who have found themselves advanced, without any designs formed by their friends, or expectations indulged by themselves. But how sad will it be, if they want the disposition of Jacob; and, forgetting that the blessing of the Lord maketh rich, sacrifice to their own net!

Observe this petition. “Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.” Here nature speaks; and we are allowed to feel, and even to desire the cup may pass from us, with submission to the will of God. How much was there here to awaken anxiety and dread! not only his own death, but the destruction of each of his wives—and each a mother too—and of his children also—and of the mother *with* the children; or, as it is in the margin, the mother upon the children—So it would have been. On the approach of the executioner, she would have thrown herself upon them, to cover and defend them; and in vain would he have endeavoured to pull her away—she would have been slaughtered upon their bodies.

Finally, his argument. “And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.” He had mentioned this before—Thou saidst, I will deal well with thee: and now he repeats it. It was a sweet morsel, and he rolls it under his tongue. It

was a breast of consolation, and he sucks till he is satisfied. It shows us that promises do not supersede prayer. If God has engaged to do a thing, it will indeed be accomplished, but in his own way; and he has ordained the means, as well as the end. The promises furnish us both with matter and encouragement when we pray; and we cannot do better than to repeat them, and to plead them with God. This, says an old writer, is suing God upon his own bond. "Remember thy word unto thy servant, on which thou hast caused me to hope."

FEBRUARY 4.—EVENING.

"Then came David to Nob."—I SAM. xxi. i.

WHAT an extraordinary character was David! How large a portion of the sacred history do his memoirs occupy. And how profitable are they for "doctrine, and reproof, and correction, and instruction in righteousness."

He was now informed by Jonathan of Saul's determination to kill him. He is therefore compelled to flee for safety. The tabernacle being at Nob, he repairs thither, in his confusion and distress, both to take an affectionate leave of the house of God which he despaired of seeing again for a long time; and also to obtain succour. He asks Ahimelech the priest whether he can give him any food for his hunger, or weapon for his defence. With regard to the former of these, Ahimelech told him he had nothing under his hand but the sacred loaves. These, however, he gave him; and our Saviour fully justifies the action: "Have ye never read what David did, when he had

need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?" Teaching us—that the ceremonies of religion are to give place to the substance; that positive institutions are to yield to moral obligations; that God requireth mercy and not sacrifice. Upon the same principle, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, though the Pharisees condemned our Saviour for healing on this day: and we have known some who have opposed Sunday schools as breaking in upon the command of God.

—With regard to the latter, Ahimelech told him that he had nothing but the sword of Goliath, which was wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. What a curiosity was here! How highly it was prized we may learn from the preservation of it in such a place and with such care! Nothing could have been more welcome to David than this weapon—"Give it me," says he; "there is none like it." It had been drawn against himself, and had been taken by his own hand—no one therefore seemed to have a greater title to it than David. It would strengthen his faith more than his arm. It would call to remembrance his former victory, and encourage afresh his confidence in God, being able now to add, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear," and—"from the uncircumcised Philistine," will deliver me from every evil work. So he ought to have reasoned always, and so he sometimes did reason. But, alas! two things occurred here worthy of our remark.

First, the manner of application was blameable. For, to obtain these supplies, he dissembled, affirming that he was employed by the king in a business that required haste. Is this to be justified because it came from a good man? It is the more to be censured. He should have maintained the character of an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile, and who is always to choose suffering rather than sin. But we see how well afflictions are called *trials*, and how difficult it is to act consistently in some conditions. How becoming is candour in judging others! Who knows that he should have acted better under the same pressure of circumstances? How necessary the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Secondly, the issue was tragical. For while the parties were having this intercourse, a man named Doeg happened to be there "detained before the Lord." This wretch, instead of minding his devotion, observed them, and resolved to ingratiate himself with his master Saul by an impeachment of Ahimelech. And so it fell out. "Then answered Doeg the Edomite, which was set over the servants of Saul, and said, I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine." Behold, first, the deceitfulness of this villain. Like other slanderers, he does the business by a mixture of fact and falsehood. He ought to have told Saul that David had deceived Ahimelech, and made him believe that he was acting for the king; and therefore that what Ahimelech did was really in honour of the king. The whole truth would have entirely excul-

pated the high priest, but Doeg suppresses the most essential part of it. And behold, secondly, the cruelty, as well as falseness of this informer. "And the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house." There was something venerable in the character and office of a priest, and as Ahimelech and his brethren stood dressed in their sacred robes, Saul's footmen shrunk back from slaying them. "And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword."

But see upon what little occurrences surprising coincidences and great consequences often depend. The word of the Lord had denounced the house of Eli: but the threatening could not be fulfilled without the destruction of these priests: but these priests would not have been destroyed but for the malice of Saul; Saul's malice would not have been excited but for the infamy of Doeg; and Doeg would not have informed against Ahimelech had he not been detained at the tabernacle the day when David entered it. All this seemed accidental; but it was not. All parties acted freely, yet necessarily too. What was unjust in Doeg was righteous in God. He knew how to accomplish his word by human falsehood and cruelty, and yet he was of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Nothing was more certain as well as important than the death of Christ, and he was delivered according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God;

yet by wicked hands the Jews crucified him. Ask me not for a solution, I only know the fact. I see the two ends of the chain, but the middle is under water: yet the connection is as real as it is invisible. By-and-by it will be drawn up. In the mean while, we must walk by faith, and not by sight. Judge nothing before the time. We know that Messiah cometh which is called Christ; when he is come, he will tell us all things.

FEBRUARY 5.—MORNING.

“That, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”—I THESS. v. 10.

How well does the Apostle call the Redeemer “our life.” There are three modes of expression by which our relation to him under this character is held forth: and they all furnish matter for the most important meditation. We are said to live *by* Him—“He that eateth me, even he shall live *by* me.” We are said to live *to* him—“They that live, should not live unto themselves, but *unto* Him that died for them, and rose again.” And we are said to live *with* Him—“That, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together *with* him.”

To judge of this state, we must consider where he lives; and how he lives; and what he is; and how far he is able, by his presence, to bless us, and make us happy. For though our happiness, with such a nature as ours, must be social, it is not a privilege to live with everyone. With some it would be a misery to dwell even here: and to have our “portion with

the hypocrites and unbelievers,” and to be with “the devil and his angels,” will be a dreadful part of future torment. But oh! to unite with those who will be all loveliness! To embrace, without any fear of separation, those who were endeared to us on earth! To sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God! To join the innumerable company of angels! But, above all, to live with Jesus! To be with him, where he is, to behold his glory! To walk with him in white! To reign with him! For ever and ever!—This is far better.

The season for enjoying it is—“whether we wake,” that is, live; or “whether we sleep,” that is, die. It takes in, therefore, time and eternity; our living with him on earth and in heaven; in the communion of grace, and in the fellowship of glory. These are inseparably connected, and are essentially one and the same condition with regard to him; but they differ in degree, as the bud and the flower, the dawn and the day, the child and the man, differ. His people live with him now, but not as they will live with him hereafter. Now he is invisible—then they will see him as he is. Now their intercourse with him is mediate, and often interrupted—then it will be immediate, and free from any annoyance. Now they are with him in the wilderness—then they will be with him in the land flowing with milk and honey. Now they groan, being burdened with infirmities, and cares and troubles—then they will be presented faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy. Yet, whether they *wake* or *sleep*, they live together with him.

And does not this more than indicate his divinity? How else can they live with him *now*? He is no

more here, as to his bodily presence—for the heavens have received him. Yet, where two or three are gathered together in his Name, he is in the midst of them. Yet he said, Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Yet, says the Apostle, We live with him even while we *wake*! At the same time, others live with him when they sleep—The dead are with him above, while the living are with, him below! How? unless he pervades all periods? Unless he occupies all places? How? unless he can say, “Do not I fill heaven and earth?”

Here is your happiness, Christians, It is your union with Christ. This prepares you for all seasons, and all conditions. Do you think of life? This is sometimes discouraging; especially when you contemplate the prospect in a moment of gloom. But why should you be dismayed? If you *wake*, you will live together with him. If your continuance here be prolonged, you will not be alone. He will be always within your call. He will render every duty practicable, every trial supportable, every event profitable. And therefore, whatever be your circumstances, you may boldly say, “Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”—Do you think of death? This is often distressing, and there is much in it to dismay—if viewed separate from him. But if you *sleep*, you will live together with him. Death, that severs every other bond, cannot touch the ligatures that unite you to him—As you leave others, you approach nearer to him—you get more perfectly into his presence—you are for ever with the Lord.

Voltaire more than once says, in his Letters to,

Madame Duffand, "I hate life, and yet I am afraid to die." A Christian neither hates nor fears either of these. He is willing to abide: and he is ready to go. Life is his. Death is his. Whether we wake or sleep, we shall live together with him.

FEBRUARY 5.—EVENING.

"WHEN I AM WEAK, then am I strong."—2 COR. xii. 10.

CHRISTIANITY is not only mysterious with regard to doctrine, but also experience. Christians are men wondered at. They are a peculiar people; and the world knoweth them not. Some of the effects and advantages of their religion indeed, may be palpable to others; but its principles and resources are among the deep things of God, which the natural man knoweth not, because they are spiritually discerned. How strange to many must the language of Paul appear—"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." "Most gladly will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me—I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for *WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG.*"

As this expresses his experience not only or principally as he was an Apostle, but a Christian, let us in this exercise consider the weakness to which he refers; and in the next see how it becomes an accession of strength.

The weakness is spiritual. But we must distinguish between the reality of it, and the apprehension. The Fall has deprived us not only of righteousness, but of strength. By nature we are

weak, as to all the purposes of the Divine life. But all are not sensible of this. In general, men are far from believing it; and will sooner acknowledge their guilt than their inability. They will confess that they have not been what they ought to have been, or done what they ought to have done; but they always presume upon their competency for these things, and resolve by-and-by to accomplish them. But Paul speaks of the *apprehension* of our weakness. This is effected by the Holy Spirit; who convinces men of sin, and makes them acquainted with their true character and state before God. But the sense of their weakness is *increased* by observation and experience. They hear of many falling around them who once seemed much more likely to stand than themselves; and each of these declensions cries, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." And when they read the Scriptures, they see the falls of good men there, and men whose grace was very superior to their own: and can they help fearing for themselves, when they find Abraham betrayed into dissimulation by unbelief; Moses speaking unadvisedly with his lips; Job cursing the day of his birth; Solomon playing the fool; and Peter acting the coward? The events of life also enlarge their self-acquaintance. Who knows what he is till he is tried, and till he meets with his own trial? For everyone is not discovered in the same way: and as Joab adhered to David in the rebellion of Absalom, yet turned aside after Adonijah; so we may be firm in one peril, and fail in another. Afflictions are frequently called temptations, because they try and prove us: and where is the Christian who, in consequence of these experiments, has not

been led, if not to question the reality of his religion, to mourn over the deficiencies of it? Thus fresh and painful secrets are constantly coming to light; and the knowledge of their depravity, which they could not have borne at once, is produced by little and little. "And where," says the Christian, often appalled, "where will the mystery end? Who can understand his errors? Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" Thus he often seems worse, because he is wiser. There is not more in him of unbelief, and impatience, and vain thought; but he sees and feels more of them.

And how far does this sense of the Christian's weakness extend? He feels that he is unable to do what he *ought*. His work is laid down in the Scripture. It requires him to run the race that is set before him; to fight the good fight of faith; and to perform a thousand duties with regard to God, his neighbour, and himself—the view of which forces him to exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?" He feels that he is unable to do what he *would*. To will *is* present, but how to perform that which is good, he finds not. He would gladly flee, but the wires of his cage tell him that he is a prisoner. He attempts to sing, but his voice is untuned; and his harp is hung on the willows, and sometimes too high for him to reach. He feels that he is unable to do what *he did*. His former experience humbles him. "O that it was with me as in months past! I fear I shall never pray again as I have prayed. Never trust in the promises as I have trusted. Never kneel before the cross again as I once did, and said—

'Here it is I find my heaven,
While upon the Lamb I gaze.'

He feels that he is unable to do *the least duty*. He always thought himself inadequate, were he called to die at the stake, or to offer up an Isaac: but he is beyond this now. He now feels that he cannot order his speech properly in company; nor endure, with christian temper, the trifling vexations of the hour—yea, that without Christ he “can do nothing.” He feels unable to preserve himself from the *greatest* sins. He once thought that he was in no danger from these; and supposed that reputation, and common prudence, would secure him from *such* mis-carriages. But he now prays with David, not only, cleanse thou me from secret faults, but keep back thy servant *also* from presumptuous sins.

And what is there to meet all this weakness? When he examines, he finds nothing that is sufficient. He cannot depend on the *grace he has received*—He can no more live without fresh supplies of the Spirit than he can see with the light and respire with the air of yesterday. He cannot depend upon his *present frames*. These may be lively and delightful; but they are of the nature of cordials, not food—he cannot live by them. He knows too how variable they are; and how often rapture has ended in gloom. He cannot depend upon his *resolutions* and *vows*. He has seen their vanity in binding his depraved heart. Though they seemed invincible, they have yielded in the hour of temptation: and before the assaults of the enemy, they have been no more than a hedge of cobwebs, or a wall of vapour. He cannot depend upon *means* and *ordinances*. He values these, and will be found in the use of them; they are his privilege as well as duty. But unless the Lord give the increase, Paul plants and Apollos waters in vain.

We are to wait *only* upon God. His influences and communications can alone relieve and elevate, refresh and strengthen the soul. This seems a discouraging state of mind to be in—but what follows?

FEBRUARY 6.—MORNING.

“When I am weak, THEN AM I STRONG.”—2 COR. xii. 10.

THE consciousness of our spiritual weakness becomes the accession of strength three ways.

First, as it inspires us with diffidence and caution. It will keep us from *venturing* into the company of the infidel and the wicked, lest we learn of their ways, and get a snare to our souls. It will restrain us from scenes and places of dissipation where there is so much temptation, and we feel we have so little power of resistance. He who knows how much tinder he has about him will not invite sparks. The humble will always be self-diffident. He will not vainly think that he can withstand where others are overcome. Therefore he will not make haste to be rich lest he should not be innocent, but fall into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. He will perfectly tremble at the thought of the love of money, since God tells him it is the root of all evil. He will not exercise himself in great matters, or in things too high for him; he finds himself unequal to the difficulties and dangers of superior offices and employments. If God calls him into an arduous and perilous situation, the call ensures his safety and assistance; but presumption has nothing to plead. He will therefore look for his commission; and follow God, instead of going before

him. The Jews would go up the hill—but the ark remained behind, “That was the consequence? The enemy easily discomfited them, and chased them like bees. The self-sufficient are never safe, because no one can warn them of danger without giving offence: but the man who knows himself, and is not high-minded, welcomes admonition and even reproof; and says, Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

Secondly, as it makes us more prayerful. When a man, concerned for his safety and welfare, finds that he cannot rely upon himself, he will naturally look after another to rely upon. So did Jehoshaphat in the pressure of his straits: “We have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.” And thus, when the weak sees an adversary approaching, he will not go forth to meet him alone; but hasten and call upon the Captain of his salvation to come to his succour: and thus he succeeds. What is prayer but an application to the strong for strength? And as in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength, but we cannot hope for its aid without asking and seeking; it follows, that nothing can strengthen us like prayer. It is availing ourselves of Omnipotence. It is our being strong in the Lord and the power of his might. The babe cannot support himself: yet he is not abandoned. Provision is made for him in another: and what his little hands cannot accomplish for him, his cries and tears can effect. The mother hears him, and flies to relieve and indulge. She, even she, may indeed forget; or prove unkind or unable: but the God of all grace never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain. Therefore,

Thirdly, as it encourages and animates the soul by

bringing us under the certainty of Divine promise. There is something very winning and endearing in confidence. Who could take away the life of a bird that fled to his bosom from the pounce of the hawk? or who could take advantage of having him in his hand to deprive the little trembler even of his liberty? Nothing is ever lost by trusting in the ingenuous and noble minded: they always feel a responsibility to repay the confidence reposed in them. What then may we not expect from the God of all comfort? But not only does the honour of his goodness incline him to succour those who rely on him, but also the honour of his truth. For has he not said, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble? He filleth the hungry with good things; but the rich he hath sent empty away?"

Therefore you need not be afraid to know the evil of your spiritual condition; since suitable relief of every kind is provided—And we see what is indeed the most enviable state and frame of mind you can be in. The best evidence of prosperity in the divine life is not great knowledge and ecstasy; but lowliness of mind. "He that abaseth himself shall be exalted." "A man's pride shall bring him low; but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit." "With the lowly is wisdom," "With him also is affluence and might"—"when I am weak, then am I strong."

And let it comfort us that our resource is not future only, but immediate. We cannot doubt of our being strong in heaven. There our powers will be fully equal to every demand upon them. There we shall be able to serve him day and night in his temple, feeling no languor, and requiring no repose. But we are strong not only after weakness, but in it—

“*when I am weak, then am I strong.*” “As thy day so shall thy strength be.” “I will water it *every moment.*”

Thus, out of weakness I am made strong, “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.”

FEBRUARY 6.—EVENING.

“And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village named Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.”—LUKE xxiv. 13–15.

THE name of the one was Cleopas; of the other, we are ignorant. We are also unacquainted with the design of their journey—But it betrayed the imperfection of these disciples. For is it not astonishing, that they could leave Jerusalem *before* they had *ascertained* an event so interesting as his resurrection; especially as he had more than once assured them, that he should rise again the third day; and certain women, early at the sepulchre, had reported that the body was missing, and that they were informed by a vision of angels, that he was alive: and also some from among themselves had gone to the grave, and found it even as they had said?—yet they walk off into the country, in the midst of all this perplexity! Such is our impatience! Such is our fear! Such is our despondency!—But he that believeth maketh not haste.

Yet a drop *is* water, and a spark *is* fire: and a little grace *is* grace, and perfectly distinguishable from mere nature. And we have here not only infirmity, but excellency. Their minds cleave unto him still. They can talk about nothing else.

And how joins them in the way. Let me not pass over this without remark.

It shows the Saviour's kindness and tenderness. He does not despise the day of small things, nor cast off those who have a little strength. I know not what kind of person he had. But if he had not bodily beauty; in his mind, he was fairer than the children of men. I am sure of his temper—I can look into his heart.—I see that it is made of love—“A bruised reed will he not break; and the smoking flax will he not quench; but will bring forth judgment unto victory.”

It shews me the truth of the promise. “*Where*”—let it be where it will; in the temple, the private dwelling, the field, the road: “where *two* or three”—if there are no more; for, as he is not confined to place, so neither to number—“are gathered together in my Name, *there* am I in the midst of them.”

I also learn, that the way to have him for our companion, is to make him our theme. No theme ought to be so dear—no theme can be so excellent—so profitable.

Let worldly minds pursue the things of the world. But let Christians abundantly utter the memory of *his* great goodness; and mention the loving kindness of the Lord. And then he will always be found of them.

“We'll talk of all he did and said,

And suffer'd, for us here below;

The path he mark'd for us to tread,

And what he's doing for us now.

“Thus, as the moments pass away,

We'll love, and wonder, and adore;

And hasten on the glorious day

When we shall meet to part no more.”

FEBRUARY 7.—MORNING.

“Take up thy bed, and walk.”—JOHN v. 8.

WE are too prone to overlook the circumstantial and incidental instruction of the sacred writers—forgetful that every word of God is pure; and that whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning. Let us not lose any of this hid treasure, for want of observing, and applying what we read.

Our Saviour met with this man at the pool of Bethesda; but no sooner had he pronounced the word of healing, than he orders him to *take up his bed* and walk. We can see four reasons for this command.

First, it was to evince the perfection of the cure. His walking, indeed, would prove this; but his taking up his bed, and being able to carry that in which he had been carried, would display it still more, as it shewed his strength as well as health. We often refer to miracles; and they are the witness of the Spirit. But the question is, were they true? Never could any thing have been more remote from imposition, than the miracles recorded in the Gospel. Examine them. They were many—they were public—they were performed before witnesses interested in their detection, had they been false. The circumstances, too, were always corroborative. Does he raise the dead? The young man was carrying to his burial, attended with much people. Lazarus was in his grave, and had been dead four days. Does he recover the infirm and the diseased? The man whose eyes he opened, was born blind, And this paralytic had been afflicted thirty-eight years: and in

a moment he was made whole; and was seen by all going home with his bed upon his shoulders.

Secondly, it was to teach him to be careful, and to waste nothing. The bed probably was not very valuable, but he was not to throw it away. In correspondence with this, after the miracle of the loaves and fishes, even then, when he had shewn with what ease he could multiply resources, and support his creatures, he said, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." Christians should avoid closeness and meanness, lest their good be evil spoken of. But there is another extreme they should be anxious to avoid: it is profusion, negligence, carelessness. They ought not to love money: but they should know the use and worth of it; and remember that they are responsible for all they have. How needy are many: and how ready would they be to call down the blessing of Heaven upon you for a few mites; for the remnants of your wardrobe; for the refuse of your garden; for the crumbs that fall from your table! Be examples of economy yourselves. Teach your children to be prodigal of nothing. You would dismiss a servant that purloined; keep no one that wastes. How unfrugal often are the poor! How few of them seem to know how to make the most of any of their pittances! Let them be instructed personally and by tracts.

Thirdly, as a memento of his deliverance and duty. When at home, and looking on his bed, he would say—Ah! there I lay, a poor enfeebled creature; and said, "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord: remembering mine affliction and my misery. the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I

recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." It is a sad charge against Israel, that they *soon* forgot his works, and the wonders he had shewn them. We are prone to the same evil; and need every assistance to aid recollection, Joseph and Moses made the very names of their children remembrancers. Samuel set up a stone, and called it Ebenezer. Some have set apart particular days. Some have kept diaries.

Fourthly, to try his obedience. Carrying his bed was a servile work; and it was now the Sabbath, on which day no burden was to be borne. He seemed therefore to oppose the law of Moses: and accordingly the Pharisees were offended, and murmured. But works of necessity and mercy were *always* proper; and the Sabbath was made for man; and the Son of man was Lord even of the Sabbath-day.

And it is pleasing to find that the man's mind was informed, while his body was cured. Hear him reasoning with the objectors. "He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk." How fine, how instructive is this!—We are not to judge the Lord's commands, but to follow them. His orders may be trying, and in obeying them we may give offence: but we need not regard the revilings of men, while we can plead his authority.—It is our deliverer, our benefactor, who enjoins; and what has *He* said unto us? He that died for us, and saved us from the wrath to come—what will *He* have me to do? He that made me whole, the *same* says unto me, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

FEBRUARY 7.—EVENING.

“Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.”—1 THESS, iii. 11.

IN order, as it is said, in the foregoing verse, to “see their face, and perfect that which was lacking in their faith.” But two remarks arise from the words.

The first is of a doctrinal character, and regards a leading article of the faith once delivered to the saints —“Our Lord Jesus” is here addressed in prayer, as well as “God himself and our Father,” and even with him. This cannot be confounded with the practice of the Romish Church in praying to the Virgin Mary, and a multitude of patron saints. Such prayers have no authority from the Scriptures; and the persons to whom they are addressed, being mere creatures only, can have no knowledge of the wants and feelings of thousands that may address them at the same time. But the manner in which the Saviour speaks of himself, before he left the earth, shews the reasonableness of our addressing *him*: “Lo,” said he, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” “Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.” “He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” He therefore, though unseen, is accessible; omnipresent; knows all things; is able and engaged to manage all our concerns: and because he lives, we shall live also. Hence the first Christians are described, as “calling on the Name of the Lord Jesus.” Hence Stephen, when dying, and full of the Holy Ghost, invokect him. And Paul, not only in the text, but in various

other places, is chargeable with the same idolatry, as it certainly must be deemed, without conceding his divinity.

Indeed he begins all his Epistles with this salutation and benediction "Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." In one instance, he has even reversed the order before us, and in his supplication, places the Saviour before the Father: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." And if we pass from the Church below to the Church above, where, though their prayers are ended, they are still praising; how are their praises expressed? "I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." Is this adoration confined to the saints? "I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Is there no exception? "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that

sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever." Be not therefore faithless, but believing; and in all your dependence and hope, exclaim, with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!"

The second remark is of a practical nature: "Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, *direct our way unto you.*" Does not the example of Paul and his brethren in this case teach us, that we ought to consider our visits and journeys as under the influence of a special Providence? We are not to confine religion to extraordinary occasions; but to acknowledge God in all our ways; and in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, to make our requests known unto him. We are to love the Sabbath, and remember to keep it holy: but we must serve God every day, and be in the fear of the Lord all the day long. We are to repair to the sanctuary, and to enter the closet: but we must abide with God in our calling; and whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, do all to the glory of God. Paul speaks of "a prosperous journey by the will of God;" and John enjoins his friends to bring "the brethren on their journey after a godly sort."

And what is the truth of the case? "The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." "A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps." Have we a journey or a visit in prospect? We must ask the permission, and implore the blessing of Him in whom we live and move and have our being. He can stop our breath; or lay us on a bed of languishing. If we achieve our undertaking, he can subvert the design of it, or mar all our satisfaction in it. How much

often depends upon a single excursion! It may terminate in a friendship the most important, or a connection for life. It may lead us into temptation; and we may be ensnared by error or vice. It may produce trials and losses the most painful; and we may return, compelled to say, "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Perhaps, when we leave home, we unconsciously take leave of our house, and field, and garden, to return no more; and the places that once knew us will know us no more for ever!

Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help. Happy he who can rejoice in the promise; "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest."

FEBRUARY 8.—MORNING.

"And he was there in the prison."—GEN. xxxix, 20.

—YET he was not there *criminally*; but under an imputation as false as it was infamous. How little can we judge of character from outward condition! At one time, the best people in this country were to be found at the stake, or in prison. But it is the cause, and not the cross, that makes the martyr. Let us see, that, like Daniel, we are accused only in the law of our God: and resemble Paul, who suffered *as* an evil doer, even unto bonds, but *was* so far from being one. Let us beware of drawing upon ourselves deserved reproach or persecution, by imprudent or immoral conduct: "What glory is it, if, when ye are buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently?"

“And he was there in the prison”—But he was not *alone* there. The Lord was with Joseph—He hath said, “I will *never* leave thee nor forsake thee.” No situation can exclude God from access to his people; or keep them from intercourse with God. Jeremiah found him in the deep dungeon; John, in the isle of Patmos; and Paul, on the sea. His people sometimes wonder at this; the experience is beyond their expectation; and they say, with Jacob, “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.” Yet they might know it—especially if it be a scene of distress; for has he not said, “I will be with thee in trouble?”

“And he was there in the prison”—But he was not *miserable* there, All was peace within, His rejoicing was this, the testimony of his conscience. How much happier was he in this respect, than his vile mistress, who had knowingly belied him; and his brethren, who had cruelly sold him—how galled often would they be by reflection and self-reproach! How much happier was he, the suffering slave, than Potiphar, his prosperous master—yea, than Pharaoh upon the throne! Strange as it may seem, this prisoner, in this wretched confinement, was by far the happiest man in Egypt. But he had the presence of God. This presence makes the fulness of joy above; and this presence here, turns a prison into a palace—into a temple. The world marvels to see how Christians are sustained and consoled in their afflictions; but the reason is, they cannot see all; they can see their burdens, but not the everlasting arms underneath them: they can see their sorrows, but not the comforts of the Holy Ghost shed abroad in their hearts—But they themselves know, that as the suf-

ferings of Christ abound in them, the consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

“And he was there in the prison”—But he was not there *in vain*. He was a witness for the God of Israel: and the very manner of his suffering; his temper; his carriage, if he had said nothing; would have impressed all that beheld him. But he would also speak a word in season; and his addresses, enforced by his example, would carry weight with them. He taught the master of the prison; and his fellow-sufferers; and explained the dreams of the chief baker and butler; and thus raised wonder, and gained confidence, which he failed not to turn to advantage.—There, also, he was himself at school; and gained much useful knowledge, while “the word of the Lord tried him.” His tribulation wrought patience, and patience experience, and experience hope. In the prison he was prepared for the palace. By his adversity, he was made meet for prosperity. He could well say, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted.”

“And he was there in the prison”—But he was not there *always*. Nothing could detain him when the word of the Lord came, and commanded his deliverance. Till then, he relied on God’s promise; but his confidence was sorely exercised. The event was not only delayed, but seemed to grow less probable, and the gloom thickened. But he found, that it is good for a man not only to hope, but quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. At length, and not a moment beyond his own appointed time, and not a moment beyond the best time, the Lord appeared; and from prison he steps into the second chariot in Egypt.

Christians, the God you serve is continually able to

deliver you. If you have his word, lay hold of it; and let it keep your mind in perfect peace, being stayed on him. You have nothing to do with difficulties. Indeed there *are* none where the truth of God is concerned. You believe in God the Father *Almighty*, Maker of heaven and earth—He turneth the shadow of death into the morning. At evening time it shall be light.

FEBRUARY 8.—EVENING.

"The body is dead because of sin."—ROM. viii. 10.

THE language is striking. The Apostle does not say, the body *will* die, but the body "*is dead.*" The reason is, because the sentence is passed, and when the judge has condemned the criminal, we say, he is a dead man, In the case before us too, the execution of the sentence is commenced. And when a man is old, or infirm, or diseased, we say, he has one foot in the grave; he is as good as dead. Owing to the casualties of our condition, and the frailties of our frame, there is but a step between us and death. We are not only mortal in destination, but in state. We decay while we receive support. Before we reach our journey's end, our strength is weakened in the way, our senses lose their efficiency, and desire fails. Before the tabernacle is completely taken down, some pin is taken out, some cord is loosened, some rents or wearings away in the canvass are visible. We talk of a dying hour; but we die daily. When a bottle is discharged of its contents, there is a last drop, but every preceding drop emptied it as well as the last. Young says, "our cradle rocks us to the tomb." And Watts tells us, "the moment we

begin to live, we all begin to die." Who thinks of this?

But how profitable would the meditation be! Pamper not that dying body—"meats for the belly and the belly for meats, but God will destroy both it and them." Be not proud of thy beauty and charms. The coral is leaving thy lips; the tints are fading from thy cheeks; the grave, the worms are ready for thee, The body *is* dead—insult not the poor carcass by dressing it up in vanity and gaiety of attire. The pilot goes to the end of the vessel to steer it: and you must repair to the end of life to conduct it. Hence the exclamation, and the prayer of Moses; "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

But the Apostle remarks the cause or the reason of the event. "The body is dead because of sin." Death is not therefore, as it is foolishly called by some, a debt due to nature, but to the justice of God. Sin is the introducer of death. We die not from any physical necessity, like plants and animals: God indeed could have rendered these ever during, but he did not make them to be so. Man only was made immortal, but he forfeited his immortality; and therefore, though all creatures die as well as man, he only is called mortal (for we never speak of a mortal bird or beast), as if in reproach for his becoming so by disobeying the command of God, and voluntarily incurring the penalty threatened: "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." What a murderer is here! Survey all the myriads of the dead, and ask, "Who slew all these?" And hear the de-

cision of Truth itself: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death hath passed upon all men because all have sinned."

But in the case of a Christian, and of such Paul is speaking, there is another reason for the assertion, and the body is dead not only because of the desert of sin, but the removal of it. During life there is an internal war in believers; the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that they cannot do the things that they would. Death ends the strife, by killing one of the parties, and making the other more than a conqueror. The Apostle speaks of the sin that dwelt in him: and such is the inherency of this evil, that the body, which is the residence of it, resembles the house of leprosy which was to be taken down to get rid of the infection. And this will serve to explain a difficulty. For it may be asked, if Christ has redeemed them, bearing their sin in his own body on the tree; and they are justified by his blood, and saved from wrath through him; why do they yet die? To which we answer, they die, as they suffer affliction. Affliction is not a judicial process, but is only corrective and medicinal; and though, like all natural evil derived originally from sin, is, as God employs it, the effect and token of his love. So Christ has abolished death as far as it is a curse: and thus the Christian does not die: there is nothing penal in his death; yea, death is a privilege, a deliverer. It delivers him not only from a world lying in wickedness, but from the plague of his own heart, from his inbred corruptions, and even from the flesh and blood which cannot without change and renovation inherit the kingdom of God. Thus the

enemy is converted into a friend. The sting is taken out of the bee, but the honey remains. The lion is not only slain, but out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness,

Ahasuerus issued a decree, that all the Jews should be destroyed, and as no law of the Medes and Persians could be changed, the decree could not be revoked: but it could be superseded. The people were apprized of their danger, and called upon to defend themselves, and furnished with the means of safety and victory; and thus the day of their destruction was turned into a day of triumph and joy, and they made it a festival which they still observe. Thus it is appointed unto men once to die; and the sentence is irreversible, Believers themselves cannot escape the decree, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." But by the resources of the Gospel the curse is turned into a blessing, and to die is gain. And if there be a period on which the spirits of just men made perfect reflect with peculiar pleasure and praise, it is the time of their escape from earth to heaven. The approach of it had often alarmed them: but the consequences are inconceivably great; and *these* they always viewed with desire—

"O glorious hour, O blest abode!

I shall be near, and like my God;

And flesh and sin no more control

The sacred pleasures of the soul."

FEBRUARY 9.—MORNING.

“My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.”—Ps. xxxiv. 2.

WE are prone to boast; and there is scarcely anything that does not call forth the tendency. Some boast of their beauty—Some, of the multitude of their riches—Some, of their pedigree and rank—Some, of their genius, and learning, and knowledge. Some boast of their wickedness; which is glorying in their shame. Some boast of their goodness, when, too, they *have* none; for there is a generation who are pure in their own eyes, and are not washed from their filthiness. But they who have “the root of the matter” in them—Have *they* any right to boast? Is their religion derived from themselves? Is it self-sustained? Is it perfect? Where is boasting, then? It is excluded. By what law? The law of faith—for “it is of faith, that it might be of grace.” And this is its language: “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise: and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, ‘who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.’”

But here we see, that we may glory in Him, though we are forbidden to glory in creatures, or in ourselves. Accordingly, David says, “My soul shall make

her boast in the Lord." And there are moments and frames, when, surveying him in his works, and perfections, and promises, the believer can exult with joy unspeakable and full of glory—

"What a Friend have I! a tried, kind, almighty, everlasting Friend: a Friend who loveth at all times, and has sworn that he will never leave me nor forsake me—'This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, o daughters of Jerusalem.' What a Shepherd have I! The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. What a God is mine! The God of truth; the God of all grace; a God in covenant; a God in Christ—This is my God for ever and ever; he will be my guide even unto death. What a portion is mine! The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

But not only is included here, the elevation of joyous feeling, arising from the view and possession of magnificent good; but also the breaking forth of gratitude and praise. The selfish and the proud dislike the thought of dependence, and wish every acquisition to be considered as of their own procuring: "therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag." But pious minds ever delight to own, that they have nothing hut what they have received. It is very painful to be under

obligations to an enemy; but how pleasant is it to be indebted to one we admire and love! They who, therefore, supremely love their God and Saviour, make their boast in the Lord. They will hereafter cast their crowns before the Throne; and their language now is, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

David supposes that his doing this would be known—"The humble shall hear thereof." They would possibly hear it from others: for the godly have their observers, and are "men wondered at." They were likely to hear it from himself. Therefore says he, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his Name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue." Spiritual sadness seeks seclusion and concealment. Then, as the stricken deer leaves the herd, the man sitteth alone and keeps silence, because he has borne it upon him. Peter went out and wept bitterly. But spiritual freedom and joy soon discover themselves. Like the return of health, and of day, it says to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. When Hannah was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore, it is said, she prayed in her heart: only

her lips moved, but her voice was not heard, But when she had succeeded, she broke forth into a song, and said, "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord; mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies: because I rejoice in thy salvation."

David also inferred the effect this knowledge would produce in them—"The humble shall hear thereof, and be *glad*." He could reckon upon this, from his own disposition; and from the connection there is between all the subjects of divine grace. They are all one in Christ Jesus. They belong to the same family: they are parts of the same body; and if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; and if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice. They who have prayed for me, will not refuse to praise—a Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy Name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me." "What sight can be so gratifying to a good man, as to see a convert leaving the world and entering the Church: a back-slider returning into the path of peace: a believer walking worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called: a dying saint joyful in glory, and shouting aloud upon his bed?—They that fear Thee, will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in thy truth.

—The Lord's followers are supposed to be mopish and melancholy: but they have a thousand sources of joy which others know not of. How great is the pleasure they derive *even from others!* Indeed they can often rejoice on the behalf of their brethren, when they fear things are not going on well with themselves. But what a proof is this feeling, that their heart *is* right with God!

—Envy is the rottenness of the bones, and the temper of the Devil. To rejoice in another's good, is christian—angelical—divine. God is love. And he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.

FEBRUARY 9.—EVENING.

“So fight I, not as one that beateth the air.”—I COR. ix. 26.

BEHOLD the boxer in the Grecian games. First, he often practised in feigned combat, exercising and extending his arms and hands with his gloves on, to acquire greater agility and skill. This was comparatively easy: this required no fortitude, and produced little exhaustion. But see him afterwards, when actually engaged with his antagonist—How he agonizes! How he stretches every muscle, and strains every nerve! *Here* was the trial. Who does not perceive what a difference there was between these? Between the feigned and the real combat? Between beating the air, and beating the adversary? But, says the Apostle, I resemble the combatant not in the former, but in the latter of these—“So fight I, not as one that beateth the air.”

So it is with every Christian. He has to fight; and whatever erroneous or defective notions may obtain concerning it, he finds it to be, not an imaginary, but an actual conflict; the most serious and trying in which he can ever be engaged. The enemy he encounters has every quality that can render him formidable. The struggle is constant, and admits of no interval of repose or relaxation. The consequences are inexpressibly momentous and interesting. Salvation or damnation, hell or heaven, everlasting happiness or woe, depend on his success or failure.

It is no easy thing, therefore, to be a Christian indeed. Those who think otherwise, prove that they never made the trial in earnest; and are strangers to the language of the Scripture. There we read of striving to enter in at the strait gate; of pressing into the kingdom of God; of the violent who take it by force; of running the race that is set before us; of enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. It is admitted that these are metaphorical expressions: but they must be founded in truth; and what is the truth intended by them? If it be taken from the lowest interpretation, it is enough to condemn many: for surely *they* must fall short of the requirement who have a name that they live, but are dead; who wear the form of godliness, but deny the power; whose religion allows them to be at ease in Zion, retaining every evil passion, every worldly indulgence, and is distinguished by nothing like exertion or sacrifice. "But then real Christians are few." And says not the Saviour the same? "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Men would be happy without being holy; without diligence; without contention. But no sluggard, no coward, ever entered heaven. "Win and wear it," says Latimer, "is the motto inscribed on the crown for which we strive." And, says the Amen, the faithful Witness, "If *any* man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."

And, therefore, a religious course should be entered upon with solemn thought and deliberation. We should sit down and consider the difficulties, dangers, and exertions, that will attend it: for if we begin under a mistaken notion, and reckoning only upon

what is pleasing and peaceful, we shall peradventure repent when we see war, and return into Egypt. Hence many have taken up a profession of godliness, and soon laid it down again, to the disgrace of the cause of Christ, and the enhancement of their own condemnation; for the last state of such men is worse than the first.

But this should not discourage those that are heartily disposed for the warfare. There is enough to justify their choice, and to animate them to go forward, notwithstanding all they ought to look for in the Divine life.

And if you are already engaged, and you are constrained to say, Whatever others find it, I feel it to be a conflict truly serious and trying: I *feel* daily and hourly the sentiment of Paul: "So fight I, not as one that beateth the air:" remember that it is the same with all your brethren in the world, and has been so with all the glorified now before the Throne—

"Once they were mourning here below,
And wet their couch with tears;
They wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins, and doubts, and fears."

It would be awful if you were not acquainted with this conflict. But your experience is a token for good. The strong man armed keepeth his palace and his goods in peace. It is the delivered soul that is the subject of this contest. Say not, why am I thus? You are thus, because the Lord hath chosen you to be a soldier; because his grace has produced in you principles alien to nature, and which have roused all the powers of darkness. And you shall be furnished with supplies and succours. And as your day, so shall your strength be. And armour is pro-

vided for you the most tried and complete. And it is a good fight in which you are engaged: it will bear examination; every review will afford you pleasure; every good being in the universe is on your side, and wishes you success. And your victory is sure and near. Earth is a tiresome place; but you are not to live here always. Now, if one temptation is overcome, another succeeds. But the warfare will soon be accomplished. Death will proclaim the triumph. How sweet will rest be after toil; and peace after such a fight!

FEBRUARY 10.—MORNING.

“Be sober.”—I THESS. v. 8.

THIS stands opposed to bodily excess, and especially to drunkenness. It is painful to think that it should be ever necessary even to mention such a subject among those who ever profess to be Christians. The Spartans presented to their children intoxicated slaves, that, seeing their beastly demeanour, they might detest the vice.—Some Pagan legislators inflicted a double punishment upon crimes committed in a state of drunkenness. Christian lawgivers and judges are not equally wise and just; for how scandalous is it to hear men in a court of justice allege their intoxication to extenuate, if not to justify, their conduct! Drunkenness takes away the man, and leaves the brute. It dethrones reason. It covers the wretch with rags. It reduces his wife and children to want and beggary. It impairs appetite; produces trembling of the limbs; and such sinking of spirits, as compels to the repetition of the

offence: so that, physically as well as morally, it is almost impossible to cure it.

Let me, therefore, guard against it; and not only in the *grossness*, but the *guilt*. Some professors of religion seem to think they are *not* chargeable with the sin, if they can keep their eyes open, and walk from the dining-room to the tea-table, not considering that every indulgence beyond natural relief and refreshment is vicious; and that the Scripture peculiarly condemns those who, by gradual training have made themselves *strong* to drink wine, and to mingle strong drink. Let me, therefore, beware of the encroaching *degree*. Let me put a knife to my throat if I am *given* to appetite. And instead of being filled with wine, wherein is excess, let me be filled with the Spirit.

But the pure and holy religion of Jesus, when it says, "Be sober," forbids much more than this vile and offensive practice. It enjoins temperance in *all* our appetites, desires, and affections. It extends even to business. As a man may be entangled, so he may be intoxicated with the affairs of this life: and how often do the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. *A Christian* may be too mindful of earthly things: too alive to fame; too anxious to join house to house, and add field to field, and to load himself with thick clay. As a man inebriated is unfit for the duties of his station, and is obliged to be confined; so it is with those who set their affection on things below. They are unqualified for their high calling; and cannot walk as becometh the Gospel.

"Seekest thou great things unto thyself?" says Jeremiah unto Baruch; "seek them not." Let me

reflect, in the light of Scripture and observation, on the vanity of worldly things; their unsatisfactoriness in possession; their perishing in the using; the many and hurtful lusts to which they expose the owner; and let my conversation be without covetousness; and let me be content with such things as I have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.

Sleep is a natural and necessary refreshment. But we may be excessive in this as well as in any other indulgence. And, alas! how often are we so, even to the injury of our health, as well as the waste of our time.

Recreation is allowable and salutary. But we may exceed the bounds which the redemption of time, and the repairing and refitting us for duty, can only allow.

Paul exhorts Timothy to be “sober-minded.” How intemperate are some in their opinions; and opinions, especially in religion, that regard inferior truths; and subjects concerning which the understanding meets with the greatest difficulties. Some are eager, and rash, and positive, in all their judgments; and nothing is too absurd, or ridiculous, for their adoption.

Again, let me hear the Apostle. “I say to every man that is amongst you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.” Let him not overrate his station, his connections, his abilities, his usefulness, his performances. “If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”

Finally, let me not forget how *obviously*, as well as extensively, I am to discharge this obligation; nor

lose sight for a moment of the *argument* by which it is enforced—“LET YOUR MODERATION BE KNOWN UNTO ALL MEN.” “THE LORD IS AT HAND.”

FEBRUARY 10.—EVENING.

“For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely, in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.”

—PSALM xxxii. 6.

DAVID knew there was a general sameness of views and feelings in the subjects of Divine grace. Hence from his own experience he inferred the disposition and conduct of the godly in all future ages—they would do what he had done, and find the same relief. He refers, however, to the *result* of his case when he had been brought into a proper state of mind, and not to the commencement of it—This he himself censures. For we are here furnished with a fact which does not appear in the history of David. It is commonly supposed, that after his grievous fall, till Nathan reproved him, he had been careless and stupified; and this has often been adduced as a proof of the hardening nature of sin. But the thing was far otherwise, He was all the while tortured in his mind, yet unwilling to humble himself before God, and condemn himself before men, as he ought to have done—He kept silence, and endeavoured to pass off the distress by time, palliation, and excuse. But the repression and concealment of his anguish preyed not only upon his peace, but his health, and endangered life itself. At length he was reduced to the deepest penitence, and threw himself, by an unqualified confession, on the compassion of God. This was a wise course, and we shall do well to follow his example.

Under a sense of guilt we should not keep away from God, but enter his presence, and cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." This will melt the heart into "godly sorrow" better than all legal terrors; and we know who hath said, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Hence says David, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

He then adds: "For *this* shall everyone that is godly pray unto thee." Here we see not only that all the godly pray, but everyone of them prays for pardon. This is the very thing which our Saviour teaches his disciples: "When ye pray, say—forgive us our trespasses." And this praying does not only regard the manifestation of forgiving mercy, as some would have it, but the exercise of it. For in many things we offend all; yea, in every thing we come short of the glory of God. If he should mark what we do amiss, we could not stand before him, even for the sins of our holy things. A faithful examination of the most innocent hour of our lives, and the devoutest act of our worship, must bring us upon our knees, crying, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified." From the beginning to the end our hope must be a "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

But here is a season of audience—"In a time when

thou mayest be found." There is a time, therefore, when he will not be found. Hence the force of the admonition, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." Life is the time not only to serve, but to seek the Lord—

"There are no acts of pardon pass'd

In the cold grave to which we haste."

At death, the bridge is drawn: the door is shut. Yet, during life, there are some periods more favoured than others. Paul sought the Lord thrice for deliverance before the promise of all-sufficient grace was given him. God heard Moses at one time, and refused him at another. How long did Abraham and Isaac pray before they received the answer! But the time of finding, when we pray for pardoning grace, is the hour in which David found it; which was the moment he entirely condemned himself and justified God—God is always more ready to pardon than we are to confess.

And blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven. He is free from all condemnation; and in whatever condition he is found, he dwells safely, and may be in quiet from the fear of evil—"Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him." Floods of great waters mean numerous and pressing calamities, from which few are exempted in this vale of tears—But how is it said, they do not come nigh unto the godly? Are not the afflictions of the righteous many? Did they not come nigh Joseph when he was cast into the pit, and when in prison he was fettered with irons? "Not come nigh me," says many a living Christian; "they have washed away half my comforts already, and I fear my heart will be

overwhelmed within me.”—The language of the Scripture is bold, and often requires to be qualified; but it is always founded on truth. It is undeniable that God in public and general sufferings has frequently secured his servants; as we see in the case of Noah, and Lot, and the Jews in Egypt. And God is always *able* to do this for his people. And nothing *shall* befall them without his permission and appointment. Nothing shall *injure* them. Yea, every loss and trial shall conduce to their welfare. But hear David’s own explanation subjoined; “Thou art my hiding-place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.” Thus the believer is like a man in a stronghold built upon a rock. In the flood, the water may surround him, but does not touch him. It will also roll off, and he will walk abroad again. Thus it is said, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed.” And in the final disaster that will carry away every thing, it shall not come nigh unto him, but only with his eyes shall he see the reward of the wicked—

“When desolation, like a flood,
 On the proud sinner rolls;
 Saints find a refuge in their God,
 For he redeem’d their souls.”

FEBRUARY II.—MORNING.

“*The children of the day.*”—I THESS. v. 5.

THREE distinctions may be here made. The first regards Heathens. The second, Jews. The third. Christians.

Heathens are the children of *night*. With regard to them, darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. What did *they* know of God? of themselves? of their origin? their fall? their recovery? their duty? What did they know of a future state? A few of their philosophers spoke of the immortality of the soul; but none of them thought of the resurrection of the body, unless to turn it into ridicule. And what they expressed concerning the soul was but conjecture; they could prove and establish nothing. And they held it in unrighteousness; it had no influence over them as a motive; for, wanting the certainty of a principle, it wanted the efficacy. And they kept it from the people at large; and employed no means to inform the multitude, who, as quite sufficient for *them*, were abandoned to every kind of superstition.

Jews were all children of the *dawn*; an intermediate state between night and day: better than the former, and very inferior to the latter. Hence the Saviour, alluding, not to the state of Pagans, but to the disadvantages of Judaism, said to his disciples, "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things that ye see, and have not seen them." They had the Law, which was given by Moses: but we have grace and truth, that came by Jesus Christ. They had the shadows; we have the substance. They had the types and the promises; we the realization and the accomplishment, To them the Sun of righteousness was below the horizon: on us he has risen with healing under his wings—God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Christians are the children of the *day*. It is their

privilege to have the system of revelation complete; and to be blessed with the full dispensation of the glorious Gospel. They have the servants of the Most High God, which shew unto men the way of salvation.

Every thing with us is made clear in proportion as it is important. And with regard to the acceptance of our persons with God, the renovation of our nature, our title to eternal life, our meetness for glory, our supplies of grace, and all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; the darkness is entirely passed, and the true light now shineth—and we are the children of the day.

Therefore let us hail it with gratitude. And what thanks can ever equal the benefit? A mud cottage, with the Scripture in it, is more ennobled, in the view of an angel, than the palace of the richest emperor upon earth. David would have descended from his throne, and have passed his days in a poor-house, to have enjoyed our advantages. Abraham, at the distance of near two thousand years, rejoiced to see our day, saw it, and was glad.

Therefore, let us receive it with joy. Nature shews off her beauties: the lambs play; the birds carol their notes—every thing seems to welcome the approach of day. Truly light is sweet; and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. And shall the Gospel, this day of good things, inspire us with dread and gloom? Is it not intended, is it not adapted, to make even our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour? And was it not thus always regarded among the first Christians?

Therefore, we should improve it with diligence. The sun ariseth, and man goeth forth to his work,

and to his labour, until the evening. The night is for inaction. They that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunken, are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober. And, knowing the time, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Advantages infer obligations, and produce responsibility. Where much is given, much will be required. What do ye more than others? asks the Saviour. And he has a right to ask—

He also says, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you. Blessed Jesus! possess me with thy own Spirit; and, henceforth, repelling every interruption, and crushing every indecision and delay, may I make thy purpose and zeal my own: "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day—the night cometh wherein no man can work."

FEBRUARY II.—EVENING

"The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness."—JER. xxxi. 2.

THE expression, "the people which were left of the sword," refers to the perils the Israelites escaped before their journey began. In Egypt they were in danger of being cut off by excess of toil, and the bloody decree which doomed all their male children to destruction. They were also likely to be cut off at once, when Pharaoh pursued them to the Red Sea. From all these jeopardies the Lord's hand saved them. "But," you say, "he brought them into a wilderness." He did—Yet they had no reason to complain of their condition: they "found grace in

the wilderness." And such, Christians, has been your experience.

What the Jews did not derive *from* their condition, they yet received *in* it—They "found grace in the wilderness." This was essentially the presence of God with them, according to the prayer of Moses; "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth." Hence no nation was so great, because they had God so nigh unto them in all that they called upon him for.

They found in the wilderness, providing grace. And have not you? The cup of some of you has been running over. You have had all things richly to enjoy. Others have been more sensibly dependent. Yet he has not suffered you to want. In his feeding and clothing you, there has been less of miracle, but not less of reality, than in feeding and clothing the Jews. You have not had the widow's cruise of oil and barrel of meal; but your supplies have not failed you. Ravens have not sustained you; but you have had relief from the most unlikely characters. You have also had comfort in your temporal blessings; you have tasted the love of God in them. He has blessed your bread and your water; and hence the little you have had has been better than the riches of many wicked.

They found in the wilderness, pardoning grace. And have not you? It was said of them, "How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! But he, being full of compassion,

forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." And has not this been your case? In many things you have offended, and in every thing come short of the glory of God. How ungrateful, forgetful, distrustful, incorrigible, have you been! Reflect for a moment on the sins of your holy things. Review your Sabbaths, your communions, your omissions of duty, and the imperfections of your motives when your actions have been materially right—Has he dealt with you according to your desert? Has he not spared you according to the greatness of his mercy?

They found in the wilderness, conducting grace, And have not you? They had a fiery cloudy pillar to go before them, to determine all their journeyings, and which left them not, till it had guided them to the rest which the Lord their God gave them. And you know the way of man is not in himself. How ignorant, how short-sighted, how easily imposed upon, have you been! How mistaken have you been, when most confident! How deceived have you been in your hopes and fears! How often have you wished to escape things which have proved a blessing; and to obtain things which would have proved your bane! Into what embarrassments would you have fallen, had you been left to lean to your own understanding! But he has fulfilled the promise, "I am the Lord thy God, that teacheth thee to profit, and that leadeth thee in the way that thou shouldest choose." And he will be your guide even unto death.

They found in the wilderness, preserving grace. As he led them about and instructed them, so he kept them as the apple of his eye. And have you not found the same grace? Why have not your enemies, so superior in every respect to yourselves, triumphed over you? The Lord has been on your side. You have been kept by the power of God.

They found in the wilderness assisting grace. What was said of Asher applied to them all; “as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” He made them equal to their travels and their trials. He gave them his Sabbaths. He sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, before them. They had the services of the Priests; the messages of the Prophets; the communings of the mercy-seat. And has he not sent *you* help from the sanctuary, and strengthened you out of Zion? You have had his ordinances. You have heard his word. You have known him in his palaces for a refuge. His Spirit has helped your infirmities. When you have said, “I am cast out of his sight,” you have been enabled to look again towards his holy temple. You dreaded the day of trouble; but when it arrived, there arrived with it the grace to help in time of need—Where shall I end?

But remember—First, that *all* you have possessed and enjoyed, deserving the name of good, has been *grace*. Secondly, you would have seen much more of this grace in the wilderness, had you been more observant: for “whoso is wise, and will *observe* these things, even *he* shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.” Thirdly, how much more of this grace which you have found in the wilderness will you see hereafter than you are aware of now! Then the Divine dispensations concerning you will be finished;

your capacity for reviewing them will be complete; and you will fully perceive the bearing of them all upon your welfare—Then for the song—“O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever—TO HIM THAT LED HIS PEOPLE THROUGH THE WILDERNESS; for his MERCY ENDURETH FOR EVER!”

FEBRUARY 12.—MORNING.

“And he said, Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes.”—NUMB. x. 31.

SUCH was the language of the Jewish leader to Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law. In whatever condition we are found, how numerous are our wants! We need food to nourish us, apparel to cover us, sleep to refresh us, friendship to succour us. We need the heart of one of our fellow-creatures, and the hand of another. One must be feet to us; another, eyes. Who is self-sufficient? Who, but under the delusion of pride and vanity, would ever affect independence? The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee. Nor, again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body which are feeble are necessary. Though above others in circumstances, we may be inferior to them in grace, or experience, or some particular attainment. David was superior to Jonathan in divine things; yet “Jonathan went to David in the wood, and strengthened his hands in God.” I long to see you, says Paul to the Romans, that I may impart unto

you some spiritual gift, that ye may be established: but they aided and confirmed him first: for they came down to meet him as far as Appii Forum and the Three Taverns; and when he saw them, *he* thanked God, and took courage.

Here we see the advantage of society. A God of knowledge and truth has said, It is not good for man to be alone. If it was so with regard to a Paradise, how much more with regard to a wilderness! Half the pleasure of solitude, it has been remarked, arises from our having a friend at hand to whom we can say, How delightful this retirement is! Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth a man his friend by hearty counsel. Why, but to encourage social devotion, did our Saviour say to his disciples, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them." Why did he send forth the seventy, two by two, in their mission through Judæa, but to comfort each other in distress? to confer with each other in cases of perplexity? to stimulate each other in cases of languor? to check each other in cases of temptation? "Two are better than one; because they have good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."

Let none despond. As all are required to be useful, so all may be serviceable, if they will: and often far beyond the probability of their condition, or their own hope; for humility makes a good man modest in his expectations, as well as in his pretensions.

We also see here, that confidence in God is not to lead us to disregard any advantages we can derive from ordinary resources. Moses had the engagement of God, and was even under a miraculous guidance: yet he does not overlook the assistance he could derive from his father-in-law, as to his advice in difficulties; and those instructions which, from his knowledge of the wilderness, he could give him, with regard to particular situations, and their conveniences or inconveniences. The religion of the Bible is always treasonable service. It does not keep a man's eyes upon the stars, while he falls over every stumblingblock in his way; but says to him, "Let thine eyes look right on, and thine eyelids straight before thee: ponder the path of thy feet, that thy goings may be established." It places our dependence upon God; but that reliance is favourable to activity, and is the spring of it. In him we live, move, and have our being; but this does not supersede eating and drinking. He teaches us; but we are to read and hear his word. He promises; but he will be inquired of for the performance. And none of the aids he affords us render needless the exercise of prudence, the exertion of our faculties, the offices of friendship, or the means of grace, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you."

FEBRUARY 12.—EVENING.

"And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision."—1 SAM. iii. 15.

EVERY thing in the history and character of Samuel is attractive and interesting. His birth was in answer to prayer. He was sanctified from the womb; and

was dedicated to the service of the sanctuary as soon as he was weaned. Among the Jews there were three weanings. The first was at the end of three years; this was the weaning from the mother's breast. The second was at the end of seven years; this was the weaning from the dry nurse. The third was at the end of twelve years; this was the weaning from childish manners. At the latter period the Jewish children began to attend the public solemnities; and at this age therefore we find our Saviour in the midst of the doctors in the temple. This we presume was the season when Hannah left Samuel at Shilo, under the care of old Eli; for we see that he immediately "worshipped the Lord there;" and was capable of rendering himself useful in the services of the tabernacle.

Some length of time after this, the Lord addressed him in the night, and delivered to him an awful message concerning Eli. "And Samuel lay until the morning." He seems to have had none of those apprehensions which other children suffer from the dread of darkness, and apparitions, and sounds deemed ominous. But did he, sleep during the watches of this night? We presume not. The wonderfulness of the occurrence, the divinity of the Speaker, and the import of the message, would be likely to hold his eyes waking, and fully employ his thoughts and meditations.

But he "opened the doors of the house of the Lord." Though distinguished and dignified by such a vision, he does not feel himself raised above his humble office, but repairs to his usual employment with alacrity. He that is not faithful in little, will not be faithful in much: but principle, diligence, and

cheerfulness, in a private and inferior condition, are the best preparatives for, and the surest pledges of, good behaviour in higher and more public situations. And why should any kind of labour be considered as low, or degrading? Why were our hands given us, but to be used? Every kind and degree of usefulness is respectable, is honourable. The most despised character in the community should be the man who does nothing, and has nothing to do.

We here see that the call of God does not draw us away from our stations, and make us indifferent to the ordinary functions of life; but should dispose us to act more wisely and piously in the discharge of them. "Let every man," says the Scripture, "abide in, the calling in which he is called of God." The sun is as regular as he is beneficent: he daily rises and descends, and pursues his course always in the same way. The comet breaks forth for awhile, and then disappears; yet it excites more notice for the time than the orb of day. Some we fear are tempted to step aside from their own proper sphere by the attention they attract; and they will endeavour to justify themselves by appeals to their usefulness. And they may do good; but God has not required this at their hands, and every man is not only most respectable, but most useful, when he keeps within his own circle, and fills it to advantage. Religion is the most orderly principle in the world. It teaches us to give every thing its place, time, and importance. The most zealous of its advocates was as wise as he was warm; and could say, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on

our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching: or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

We always suspect those who, looking after something new and extraordinary, are carried away from the plain path of revelation, reason, and common sense. “The wisdom of the prudent is to understand *his way*.” Let wives remember this, who gad about after favourite preachers, and forget their domestic arrangements, and unbelieving husbands. Let servants think of this, who by religious gossipings render themselves unpunctual in the claims of their places. Let those who are too devout to be moral; too fervent in spirit to be diligent in business: let the proud, the unruly, the roving, the idle, weigh well the language of the Apostle to the Thessalonians: “When we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.”

Some entrusted with such a secret could not have contained it without swelling and bursting. They would have risen, and rushed forth, and have proclaimed at least to their connections the privilege by which they had been honoured. There was nothing of this in Samuel. He was not elated or vain. He rises only at the usual hour, and performs his accustomed work; and is not eager to announce the transaction even to Eli. Empty vessels sound loudest;

and shallow brooks babble most. A man of learning will not, like a smatterer, be always referring to the original, or quoting scraps of Latin and Greek. Modesty and diffidence always attend true greatness, in nature and in grace. Though Paul had a vision that rapt him into the third heaven, and he knew not whether he was in the body or out of the body, he concealed it for fourteen years, and then divulged it by compulsion. Luther said, "Though I am an old man, and have preached so long, I never think of preaching without trembling." How unlike the carelessness, the forwardness, the boldness of many a novice in the ministry! What a contrast between the reserve, the retiringness, the humility of the lovely Samuel; and the self-conceit, and assurance, and arrogance, and talkativeness of many of the young in our day! "Exhort young men to be sober-minded." "And let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak."

But why was he "afraid to shew Eli the vision?" Had Eli treated him with distance and harshness, so that he dreaded to offend him by the communication? Far from it. Eli always erred on the side of softness and indulgence, not severity. And we may be assured that he loved Samuel, and treated the little Levite as a son that served with a father. His fear, therefore, arose from the tenderness of his disposition, from his regard to the High Priest, and his veneration for his age and office. Hence he was pained, and shrunk back from the annunciation of the judgment threatened. It is said, bad news never wants wings. But the reason is to be found in the tempers of men: it affords them gratification; and therefore out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Evil would spread slowly if people were likeminded with

Samuel. What some call faithfulness is the indulgence of their harsh feelings. They are at home, and in their element, when they censure and condemn. They often say, "I am very sorry to mention it;" when they are conscious of pleasure, and their very manner betrays it to others. Never reprove without cause; and then do it in the spirit of meekness, as a surgeon probes the wound of his child. When Paul tells the Philippians of some who were the enemies of the cross of Christ, and whose end was destruction, he does it "with weeping," And Jesus "wept" when he foretold the doom of Jerusalem, where he was going to be crucified. If ministers deal in the menaces of Scripture, let them shew that they speak with concern—*having compassion*—and, knowing the terror of the Lord, *persuade men*.

FEBRUARY 13.—MORNING.

"Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses. Look upon mine affliction and my pain: and forgive all my sins."

—Ps. xxv. 16–18.

SURELY this book is addressed to the heart; and requires sensibility, rather than talent, to understand and explain it. How tender here is the language of David. And how instructive too. He was a sufferer, though a king, and a man eminently godly. And his sorrows were not superficial, but deep and depressing—"the sorrows of the heart." And, while hoping for their diminution, they were "enlarged."

—But he is a petitioner, as well as a sufferer: and

those sorrows will never injure us that bring us to God. Three things he prays for.

First. Deliverance. This we are allowed to desire, consistently with resignation to the Divine will. But we must seek it, not from creatures, but from God, who has said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee." Nothing is too hard for him—He can turn the shadow of death into the morning—Therefore says David, "O bring thou me out of my distresses."

Secondly. Notice. A kind look from God is desirable at any time, in any circumstances; but in affliction and pain, it is like life from the dead. Nothing cuts like the neglect of a friend in distress; nothing soothes like his calls and inquiries, and sympathy, and tears. But to say, Thou God seest me; thou knowest all my walking through this great wilderness—to be assured that he is attentive to my condition, and is smiling through the clouds, fills the heart, even in tribulation, with a peace that passeth all understanding—Therefore says David, "Look upon mille affliction and pain."

Thirdly. Pardon. He does not think himself sinless: and trials are apt to revive a sense of guilt, and to make the sufferer fearful; and to induce the prayer, "Do not condemn me." We will also venture to say, that however a Christian may feel his sorrows, he will feel his sins much more. These, these are the burden and the grief—Therefore David says, "Forgive all my sins."

This was his meaning; and I hope I can make it my own,—If it be thy pleasure, release me from my complaint.—If not, and the distress is continued to try me, be near to afford me a sensible manifestation

of thy favour; let me see thy countenance; let me hear thy voice, saying, "I remember thee still."—Or, if this be denied, and I have no claim upon thee for such an indulgence, let me, for the Redeemer's sake, be absolved and justified. Remove my guilt, whatever becomes of my grief—grief *then* cannot be penal cannot be injurious.

FEBRUARY 13.—EVENING.

"Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."—MATT. X. 31.

HERE is obviously an implication of something going before. Our Saviour is speaking of the doctrine of Providence, and he would establish not only the truth but the *extent* of it. Some conceive of God as presiding over whole systems, but regardless of individuals, and the minute concerns of his creatures. This philosophical or half infidel notion, if designed, so to speak, to relieve the Supreme Being, only dishonours him; as if an infinite understanding was perplexed, or an almighty power wearied—"Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" Besides, a general providence involves a particular; as a whole is made up of the parts, and a universality is only the aggregate of the particulars. The truth of the case too is also proved by facts; for we actually find that nothing *is* overlooked, but every thing, however small and apparently insignificant, presents undeniable indications of Divine power, contrivance, and care. And this is what our Saviour here teaches his disciples. And to impress them the more, he has two references. The one is taken from themselves. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." What

could express more strongly the minuteness of Providence? According to this assertion, God takes more care of us than we take of ourselves: for if we number our books, our cattle, or our houses, we never think of numbering our hairs; and if one of these fall off, we never observe or feel the trifling loss. And if he attends to the least, will he neglect the greatest of our interests? The other is derived from the inferior creatures. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of *them* shall not fall on the ground without your Heavenly Father." How natural and unavoidable then the inference: "Fear *ye* not, therefore, *ye* are of more value than many sparrows."

The estimation is comparative—"ye are of *more* value than many sparrows." Sparrows therefore have *their* value; and we are reminded that we are no more to despise than to abuse any of the animal tribes. They have all their place and uses. No angel in heaven could produce one of the meanest of them. They are the work of God's fingers: all praise him; and he deems none of them beneath his regard. But there is a gradation in his productions; and he himself ranks some of them above others. Thus he magnifies his word above all his Name; and tells us of his creating new heavens and a new earth, so superior to the old, that the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind. A plant is above a pebble; a bird above a plant; a man above a bird. The supremacy of man appears in his being made the lord of this lower world, and having had all creatures put under him, and given him not only for service but food. Hence he said to Noah, "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that

moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb." Though man is now a fallen creature, and he cannot think too meanly of himself before God, yet he has physical endowments which place him only a little lower than the angels. He is capable of a thousand operations inconceivably above the reach of the beasts that perish. How superior is *his* reason to *their* instinct! *They* soon reach the extent of their ability, beyond which there is no advance or improvement: but what wonders have *his* faculties achieved! and what bounds can be fixed to their expansion and progress? He teaches us more than the beasts of the field, and makes us wiser than the fowls of the air; for there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. And this spirit in man is not only immaterial, but immortal. The body dies; but the spirit returns to God who gave it, and will behold the heavens and the earth pass away, survive the dissolution of all things, and live for ever. He is therefore not only of more value than many sparrows, but of more value than the material universe. He would be an infinite loser were he to gain the whole world and lose his own soul.

But if the disciples, as *men*, were so valuable, how much more were they so as *Christians*, under which relation and character he viewed them! Thus they were not only superior to all other species of creatures, but to their own. Christians are the excellent of the earth, and, whatever their outward circumstances may be, are more excellent than their neighbours. The world knoweth them not: but they are

princes in disguise; they are ransomed with a price of infinite value; they are the temples of the living God; they are partakers of the divine nature: and of such importance are they, that they cannot be spared. from any place without danger and detriment; they have power with God; they are the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof; they are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world—Their value is indescribable.

And they may without pride be conscious of this. Our Lord would have his disciples feel confidence as the result of it—"Fear ye not, *therefore*, ye are of more *value* than many sparrows." There were two fears which this consideration was designed and adapted to prevent. The first regarded their defence. In proportion as things are valuable, we are concerned to secure them. And will not God preserve those who are precious in his sight? They were going forth as lambs among wolves; and would be hated of all men for his Name's sake. Yet they were to be safe in all their dangers: their enemies could do nothing against them without Divine permission; and if they suffered, they were to be more than indemnified. A sparrow cannot be destroyed or injured without his providence; and shall you! "Fear ye not, *therefore*, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

The second regarded their support. "Provide," said he, "neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves." Yet you need not mead want. He who employs you will supply you. Does he suffer any of his creatures to famish? It is pleasing to contemplate his care; to see how he sus-

tains the various classes of animals, especially in the more dreary parts of the year. Some for months he lulls to sleep. He reduces the appetites of others, or changes their food. The more domestic and useful he supports by the instrumentality of man. How, when viewing the foddering of cattle, have I said, "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season!—And shall they that seek the Lord want any good thing? Their bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" Christians! Be not fearful, but believing. Your Lord and Saviour is concerned for your safety and welfare. He would have you careful for nothing, but, casting all your care upon him that careth for you, go on your way rejoicing.

FEBRUARY 14.—MORNING.

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

—JOHN XV. 14.

HE does not say, ye are the subjects of my love: but, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." You may love an animal, a slave, an enemy; but neither of these can be your friend: for friendship implies and requires what their condition does not admit. It is a remarkable expression that Moses employs, when he says, "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy FRIEND who is as thine OWN SOUL." It seems to place a friend above all the

relations of kindred: and Solomon does not scruple to say, "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Friendship has always been deemed essential to the happiness of human beings, and, indeed, to their very honour: for it would be thought as disgraceful, as it is disconsolate, not to have a friend. No peculiarity of condition, or elevation of rank, sets a man above the attraction and utility of friendship. Kings have laid aside their royalties to indulge in it; and Alexander would have found a conquered world a kind of desert without an Ephestion.

It is needless to enlarge on the excellency and value of this blessing. Who is not ready to acknowledge that friendship is the delight of youth; the pillar of age; the bloom of prosperity; the charm of solitude; the solace of adversity; the best benefactor and comforter in this vale of tears? But the question is, where a friend is to be found? It will be allowed that many who wear the name are unworthy of the title; and that even those who are sincere in their professions, may be chargeable with infirmities. Yet even human friendship is not an utopian good. He who says, all men are liars, says it in his haste, or from a heart that judges of others by itself. They who complain most are commonly the most to be complained of. There is *real* friendship to be found on earth. But there is better in heaven. And in our text we have the advantage in the highest of all examples. In others, we may have the truth, and even the eminency of friendship; but in the Lord Jesus we have the perfection, the divinity, of it.

But what is necessary to our claiming it? Ye are my friends, says he, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." By this he shews us, that though he is the

friend, he is also the lawgiver. Under whatever character he reveals himself, we are never to lose sight of the Sovereign. His goodness is to display his greatness, not to weaken it.—He is the Prince, as well as the Saviour—He “commands” his friends. And nothing less than obedience to his will is required of us. It is not enough to read it, and hear it, and know it, and talk of it, and profess it—we must “do” it.

And our obedience must be impartial: we must do “whatsoever” he commands us.” Obedience may be sincere, without being perfect in the degree; but it cannot be sincere, without being universal in the principle and disposition. For if I do some things which he enjoins me, and not others, it follows, that what I do, I do from some other motive than his authority—for this would lead me to observe *all* he enjoins. True obedience will not suffer me to select, any more than to dictate—its only inquiry is, “Lord, *what* wilt thou have me to do?” He who commands me to enter his gates with thanksgiving, tells me also to enter my closet. He who forbids me to steal, tells me to speak evil of no man. Can I say, with David, “I esteem *all* thy commandments concerning all things to be right, and I hate *every* false way?”

With regard to the connection, however, between this friendship and this obedience, let it not be supposed that it is a meritorious one—as if the practice deserved the privilege. This is impossible: and the notion subverts the Gospel of Christ. Yet it is a certain connection; and as certain, both in its exclusion and inclusion, as the nature of things, and the word of truth, can make it. And it is an encouraging connection. Had the requisition turned on

worldly honour, or wealth, or genius, or science, many must have despaired. But the essential is not derived from condition, but conduct. It is therefore within the reach of the poor, as well as of the rich; and of the illiterate, as well as the learned. All may be great in the sight of the Lord; and he is the greatest, whatever be his circumstances in life, who best obeys his Lord and Saviour. Mary was blessed in being his mother; but this was a privilege necessarily confined to one individual. He, therefore, when he heard the exclamation of the woman, Blessed be the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked! instantly mentions a way to a higher privilege, and which lies open to every one—"Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."

Pray, therefore, "O that my feet were directed to keep thy precepts!" "Many will intreat the favour of the prince, and everyone is a friend to him that giveth gifts." But when you seek the regards of the great, what base compliances are often necessary to please them—and you are never sure of succeeding; and when you succeed—what have you gained? But His work is honourable and glorious. If you seek, you are sure to find. And whoso findeth him, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. However unobserved or neglected among men you may be, no one can pass your door, and say, "There dwells a friendless person."

Lord Brooks was so charmed with that rare and accomplished personage, Sir Philip Sydney, that he would have no other inscription on his tomb than this—"Here lies the friend of Sir Philip Sydney."

Ah! says the Christian, I envy not those whose

sepulchre will be adorned with the trophies of war, the pride of heraldry, or the renown of science. Let my humble grave tell, and tell truly—"Here lies the friend of Christ."

FEBRUARY 14.—EVENING.

"Felix trembled."—ACTS xxiv. 25.

"FELIX trembled"—not *Paul*. Yet Felix was the judge, and Paul the prisoner. But the prisoner was not guilty. Though he suffered as an evil-doer even unto bonds, he had a conscience void of offence; and knew that he was suffering in the best of all causes, and for the most excellent of all masters. Therefore none of these things moved him. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear. The audience might have intimidated him. It was a trying thing to speak before persons of such reputation, and rank, and influence, as Tertullian the orator, Felix the Roman governor, Drusilla his wife, and other individuals of quality, whom the occasion had drawn together. Yet he trembled not; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. Creatures are all reduced to their proper level, when by faith we realize the presence and the eye of God. The fear of man would have brought a snare. It would have subdued or restrained his fidelity. And as Ahab's four hunched chaplains, when called in before the king, addressed themselves to his vanity, and only flattered him, so Paul would have endeavoured to ingratiate himself with those who had power over, them; or, at least, have studiously avoided whatever would tend to make them feel unpleasantly. But what was the nature and manner of his address? He

was acquainted with the characters of those before him. He knew Felix was cruel and oppressive. He knew that he was addicted to bribery and corruption in his office. He knew that he was living in adultery; for this Drusilla, now united to him, had been seduced by him from her own husband Azigus. And what does he? He not only gives his views of the faith in Christ doctrinally, but he applies them practically. He reasons of righteousness; and shews that there is such a thing as justice between man and man. He reasons of temperance; and shews the evils of unbridled appetites and passions. He reasons of judgment to come: and shews the awfulness of that day when the great as well as the small will stand before an impartial tribunal, and whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. Yet *he* does not tremble. Wherefore? He has truth on his side, He has God on his side. He has nothing to do with consequences; but by manifestation of the truth commends himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. "Such a man," said James the Sixth, "always preaches before me as if death stood at his elbow." It does really stand at the elbow of every minister; and therefore he should be able to use the words of Baxter:

"I preach as if I ne'er should preach again;

And, as a dying man, to dying men."

"Felix trembled"—not *Drusilla*. He was a Pagan; she was a Jewess; and had even induced her former husband to submit to the rite of circumcision, as the condition of her marrying him. She therefore seemed more likely to be affected than Felix. How was it she escaped, and left all the

emotion to him? Was her insensibility derived from the thought of her Jewish extraction and privileges? “We should have deemed this impossible; but we know that the Jews, when they were most wicked, emboldened and encouraged themselves by this consideration. You steal, says God by Jeremiah, and murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and bear incense unto Baal; and come and stand before me in the house which is called by my name, and say, we are delivered to do all these abominations: yet they trusted in lying words, and said, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are we. Severely as John censured many of those who came to his baptism, he knew under all their iniquity they were saying in themselves. We have Abraham to our father. But Abraham calls the rich man in hell his son: and God says, I will punish the circumcised with the uncircumcised. The unconcern of Drusilla is rather to be traced to these two things. She had been accustomed to these subjects. Though they were novel to Felix, they were not new to her. The noise of the waterfall that almost deafens strangers, does not even prevent the sleep of those who reside near it. The sparks do not terrify the animal that lies hard by the anvil. Familiarity with Divine things takes off from the power of their impression, and exceedingly tends to harden the heart they have not softened. Hence it is that many in our assemblies now hear, hardly awake, those awful truths which once alarmed themselves, and now make others tremble. She had also sinned under great obligation, and against clearer light; and it is natural for such to wax worse and worse. Having known the way of righteousness,

and turning from it, they become tenfold more the children of hell than before, Their peculiar guilt provokes the displeasure of God, and he judicially and generally gives them up to strong delusion, and to their own hearts' lusts; and withholding the influence that can alone render means effectual, and withdrawing his restraining grace, he says of them as he did of Ephraim, "they are joined to idols, let them alone."

How serious is the state of many of the children of the kingdom! We have more hope of those that come from the east and from the west. The first shall be last, and the last first.

FEBRUARY 15.—MORNING.

"Felix trembled."—ACTS xxiv. 25.

"FELIX trembled"—See the vanity of worldly greatness. We can judge very little of persons by their outward circumstances, As "the mind is the standard of the *man*;" so it is the standard of his *state*, as to happiness or misery. Had we seen a prisoner in chains, and a governor on the bench, we should have been disposed to pity the one, and envy the other. Yet had we known all, our pity and our envy would have changed sides: for we should have found the prisoner possessed of the peace of God which passeth all understanding; while the governor was devoured by anxiety and fear, notwithstanding his office, his rank, his authority, wealth, and luxury—Felix trembled.

"Felix trembled"—See the power of conscience.

Conscience is a bosom friend, or a bosom fury. It is God's vicegerent on earth; his tribunal within; the quarter sessions before the grand assize. Paul speaks of "the conscience bearing witness, and the thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." Is this principle ever entirely suppressed? Some have boasted of the attainment. But there is a difference between pretensions and reality. What are men—not in company, but alone? Whence their dislike and dread of solitude? What are men—not in life, but in death? "Fools men may live, but fools they cannot die." Yet, even in life, how hard is it to resist particular apprehensions! And apprehensions which cannot be ascribed to the danger of human detection, or punishment, because there is no fear of either. As the winter-frozen serpent seems lifeless, but is only benumbed, and, when brought to the fire, again feels and uncoils, and stings; so, when conscience is asleep, it is not dead. And it is easily awakened by a particular reflection: the sight of a funeral, or sudden death, or a threatening sickness. The wicked, though not always actually in it, are all their lifetime *subject* to bondage, through fear of death. Madame de Stael observes, that misfortune has the power to make the strongest minds superstitious. It would be better to say, it has a tendency to revive a belief of moral Providence, and to remind us of the connection there is between sin and suffering. We see this in Jacob's sons when in the ward: there seemed to be nothing to lead them to think of Joseph, yet "they said one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon

us," So Belshazzar's knees smote one against another when he saw in the midst of his feast the handwriting on the wall. The inscription was unintelligible: it might therefore have contained something favourable to him: but guilt was the interpreter. Herod, hearing of our Lord's fame, said, it is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead: and mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. If, as Josephus says, he was a Sadducee, he denied the existence of spirits and the resurrection of the body—But his conscience was too strong for his creed.

"Felix trembled"—See the energy of Divine truth. The word of God is called "a hammer," and "a fire;" and is said to be quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The noblest instance of its efficacy is when it is the power of God to salvation. But where it does not work effectually, as in them that believe, it often produces great effects for the time. Many were astonished at our Saviour's doctrine, and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his lips. The stony ground hearers heard the word with joy, and endured for a while. Herod revered John, heard him gladly, and did many things; performing curious duties, and breaking off from some of his vices. We little imagine, when the Gospel is plainly and faithfully preached, what feelings are excited even in natural men, and which will serve to render them inexcusable. For they that preach the truth as it is in Jesus have a witness even in the experience of the unconverted. When these come from curiosity, or to ridicule, and are made to tremble; when they

have forced upon them a remembrance of their sins, as if the preacher had been privy to all they have said or done; when the very secrets of their hearts are made manifest; when, notwithstanding their self love, the doctrine makes them dissatisfied and uneasy with themselves; when they cannot but own secretly the necessity of the change they strive to deny or ridicule; and when, though offended and determined to go no more, they cannot but be found again and again in the assembly—What is this but a voucher of the divinity of their mission? and a testimony which God gives to the word of his grace?

“Felix trembled”—See the deceitfulness of the human heart. If what Paul said was not true and important, why did he tremble? If it was, why did he tremble only? Why did he not follow out his conviction? Yea, why did he endeavour to get rid of it?—But what does he? He has recourse to *delay* “Go thy way for *this* time.” This is the common device of Satan, and ruin of souls. It is not positive refusal, but putting off the thing for the present. Then he pleads another frequent delusion, *engagement*—“when I have a more *convenient* season I will send for thee.” A more free and leisure period to attend to the things of the soul is not likely to be found as we advance further in life and get more into the world. Yet suppose it *could* arrive—it *did* arrive to Felix. But the opportunity came without the disposition. He saw the preacher, but said nothing about the faith in Christ now. He saw him frequently, but no trembling now—The good feeling was gone for ever! “He hoped that money should have been given him;” and, disappointed in his avarice, and “willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left

Paul bound.” Behold another deception. If men reach what they have looked forward to as the most favoured period, they are not the same they once were. They are less disposed to that which is good and has been disregarded so long. Evil propensities have grown by continuance. The disease has gained strength by neglect; and the shrub by being left has become a tree, and is too radicated to be removed.

Bless God if you tremble at his word; but remember, conviction is not conversion. Depend not on excitement in religion, without principle. Pray that you may tremble to purpose. Let your fear induce you to flee for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before you. Beware of losing your burden on the wrong side of the hill. Lay it down no where but at the feet of him who cries, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burdfu is light.”

FEBRUARY 15.—EVENING.

“And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which—sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the Temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.”—ACTS iii. 9, 10.

HIS walking was a proof of the reality and perfection of the cure. His praising God was the proper improvement of it.

But what an attestation was here to the Divine mission of the Apostles, and so to the truth of Christianity itself! We *speak*, said they, in his Name

who was crucified—and if you ask for a proof of it, we will *act* in his Name. Bring forth your dumb, and we will give them speech; your blind, and we will open their eyes; your sick, and we will heal them; your lame, and we will make them leap as an hart. This was evidence adapted to persons of every rank and capacity. It required no laboured process of reasoning and eloquence. It was the broad seal of Heaven, which all could see and understand.

And there was nothing like artifice or collusion in these miracles. Take the case before us. The patient resided, not in a remote place, but in Jerusalem; that is, in the midst of the enemies of the Apostles. He had been lame from his mother's womb. He was now upwards of forty years old. He was well known: he was a beggar. Multitudes had seen him: many had relieved him; and many had handled him—for he was carried daily to the place of begging. And this was not an obscure corner, but the entrance into the Temple. And the thing was not done in the night, but at nine o'clock in the morning, when there was a concourse of people.

Put all this together; and then ask whether any thing could have been fairer? Could any thing have been more open to detection, had there been any imposture? Compare such an achievement with the prodigies of Heathenism, and the miracles of the Romish Church.

And see, also, what can equal the *credulity* of unbelievers! What is the faith of a Christian, to *their* belief? Christians believe difficulties, because the truth of them is abundantly confirmed; but *they* admit improbabilities and impossibilities. Their rejection of the Gospel cannot arise from an intellectual,

but a moral cause. They do not want evidence, but disposition—they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. Therefore, how can they escape, if they neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto them by those that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost according to his own will?

Need I tremble for the cause of Christianity?
Need my reason be ashamed of my faith?

“Hence, and for ever, from my heart,
I bid my doubts and fears depart;
And to those hands my soul resign,
That bear credentials so divine.”

FEBRUARY 16.—MORNING.

“*They serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*”—DAN. iii. 12.

THE refusal of these three young men was as trying as it was noble. The resolution has immortalized them. Let us observe how much they had to overcome in adhering to it.

They could plead *authority*. Here was the command of their sovereign; and good men are to be good subjects. They honour principalities and powers; they obey magistrates; and are ready to every good work. But there is a difference between civil and spiritual claims. We are, indeed, to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s; but we must also render unto God the things that are God’s. If any being requires us to do what is opposed to the

revealed will of God, we are prevented by an authority from which there can lie no appeal; and we ought to obey God rather than man. Thus the midwives did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men—children alive: “And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses.”

This conscientiousness, however, has often given the conduct of God’s servants an appearance of insubordination and revolt; and their enemies have not failed to seize it, and turn it to their discredit. Jesus was not Cæsar’s friend; and stirred up the people. The Apostles turned the world upside down. And, doubtless, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were censured and vilified for their disloyalty.

They could plead *obligation*. Nebuchadnezzar was not only their sovereign, but their friend and benefactor. He had educated them in a princely manner, and advanced them to the most honourable charges. And nothing tries like tenderness. Benefits attract and attach the heart; and good men are the most susceptible of grateful impressions. One of the most painful things in the world to an ingenuous mind, is to refuse the wishes of one who has done much for him; for there is nothing in which he would more delight, were he not restrained by principle. Suppose a dutiful child. He loves and honours his parents; and he ought to honour them. These parents, in other respects, are kind and good—but they are worldly, and require him to go into the dissipations of life; they are irreligious, and forbid him to attend what, according to his conviction, is the truth of God—and, instead of threatening, they weep over him, and beseech him by every tender motive

not to break their hearts, nor bring down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Now, to loosen from such embraces and entreaties, and act a part that *looks* like disrespect—at the hearing of a voice that cries, “He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me,”—here is a trial hardly supportable. And much of this these young men would feel, at the thought of the favours which had been heaped upon them.

They could plead *universality of compliance*. All besides obey; and why should they stand alone, and affect to be better than everyone else? How often is this objection thrown out! Singularity, for its own sake, argues a little and a vain mind: vain, because it seeks notice; and little, because it can attain it in no better way. In things harmless and indifferent, we may lawfully conform to the usages of the day and place wherein we live; but where truth, and duty, and conscience, are concerned, we must be steadfast and immoveable, though deserted, opposed, ridiculed, by all; and, by unsought, but indispensable, singularity, evince the purity of our motives, and the dignity of our principles. So did Abdiel,

“—Faithful found

Among the faithless, faithful he

Among innumerable false, unmov'd,

Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified;

His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal.

Nor number, nor example, with him wrought

To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,

Though single.”

So did Joshua, and Caleb, and Lot, and Noah. And all Christians are required not to be conformed to the world. And Jesus died to redeem and purify unto

himself a peculiar people; and peculiar they must be while the multitude do evil. Well, said these sufferers, if all yield, we must not—we will not—whatever be the consequence.

And they could plead the *dreadfulness of the penalty*. We are often ready to justify or excuse our conduct by the pressure of circumstances; and to allege that the trial is too great for our virtue. And what is the trial? What are our difficulties and perils in the path of duty? If we follow such a course—Well, shall we be bound to the stake? or thrown into a den of lions? or a fiery furnace? No. Shall we then be deprived of our liberty? and confined in a prison? or be stripped of our property? and reduced to beggary? No such thing—Blessed be the laws of this happy land. Behold our jeopardies and sacrifices! We may lose a trifle of our profit by not selling or working on the Sabbath. We may have less to hoard by giving alms to the needy. If we follow our convictions, we may lose the smile of a friend, or incur the sneer of a companion. By the redeeming our time, we may even be constrained to leave the bed of sloth a little earlier in the morning—These are our tribulations because of the word! These are the martyrs of our day! Ye professors of religion, who can exercise no self-denial, who can take up no cross; “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” Look at these youths! What had they to lose! What to suffer! A fiery furnace before their eyes! Into which they were to be instantly thrown!

FEBRUARY 16.—EVENING.

“Ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”

—HEB. X. 34.

THE righteous is more excellent than his neighbours. He is above them in character, in condition, and in prospect. He is more happy; more wise; more honourable; more free; more safe; more affluent. He has much in hand; but he has far more in hope. Hence says the Apostle to these Hebrews, “Ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.” But

How came Christians to be possessed of property? They were originally destitute: they were by nature poor even as others. For a time indeed they were proudly deluded, and said, “I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” But when they were brought to a knowledge of themselves, they confessed with Paul, “In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.” And they also now acknowledge, that whatever they have gained has not been earned by their exertions, or procured by their worthiness; but was provided for them by another, even by him who said, “I will cause them that love me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasure.” And the way ye know. Yes, Christians; ye “know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” Here you see the liberality of his design—It was not only to relieve you, but to enrich; not only to clothe you, but to adorn; not only to draw you from the dust and the dunghill, but to set you among princes, even the princes of his people. And now all things are yours.

You also see the expensiveness of the medium—It is through his poverty you are enriched. He was in the form of God: but in this form he could not be your redeemer, your sacrifice, your sympathising friend, your example in duty and suffering. He therefore “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Thus he abased himself that we might be exalted, and emptied himself of his glory that we might be filled with all the fulness of God. And if such a medium was expedient and necessary (and the fact itself is the proof), what an idea must we attach to the greatness and difficulty of our salvation! and what ought we to think of the Saviour’s “grace?”

But let us examine the wealth of his people. It is substance characterized by three things.”

By its residence. It is substance *in heaven*—The abode of the glorified, the habitation of angels, the dwelling-place of God himself. Whether this is either of the shining worlds over us, or any other invisible to the eye, we cannot determine. But said Jesus, “I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also.” Since he is there, our hope is said to be laid up for us in heaven; for we are blessed with all spiritual blessings “in heavenly places in Christ.” And no wonder we have our conversation in heaven; for where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.

By its pre-eminence—It is *better* substance. Better than what? Better than the goods which the Hebrews

had lost; and of which the Apostle speaks, in the words immediately preceding: ye “took joyfully the spoiling of your goods.” He allows that the things of which they had been deprived were *good* in themselves, though often abused. But he says, this substance is better: Better in its nature. It is spiritual; and so suited to the wants of the soul. Better in enjoyment. It yields satisfaction; while, as to worldly wealth, a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses: and in the midst of his sufficiency he is in straits. Better in acquisition; Worldly riches are commonly the mammon of unrighteousness. Few acquire them without some moral injury or degradation. He that maketh haste to be rich, says Solomon, shall not be innocent; and Paul says, “they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” But in the pursuit of this substance there is no need of meanness and hypocrisy, of running down others, of hating rivals, of wishing people dead. The love of this wealth refines, enlarges, elevates, and ennobles the possessor, and does this in the same degree in which he is covetous after it.

By its permanency—It is *enduring* substance. This is an attribute that attaches to nothing here. Riches make to themselves wings and flee away. They are therefore called “uncertain riches.” They are destructive in themselves, and they are liable to a thousand outward disasters; storms, floods, fires, war, wicked and unreasonable men buyers who never mean to

pay, and borrowers who never mean to restore. Hence the exhortation of our Saviour: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break—through nor steal." Here then are durable riches with righteousness. There is in them no principle of decay; and they are safe from external invasion and injury. A Christian therefore does not feel like men of the world, who have their portion in this life. *They* are alarmed and miserable at the changes which endanger "all the happiness they know." But the Christian is calm, and his soul dwells at ease, because whatever befalls him, he knows his treasure is secure; independent of the body and its diseases, the world and its revolutions, time and its vicissitudes. The heavens may pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, may be burnt up—but he is no loser even then—"For, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

"All, all on earth is shadow; all beyond
Is substance—The reverse is folly's creed.

How solid all where change shall be no more!"

"So teach us to number our days that we may apply
our hearts unto wisdom."

FEBRUARY 17.—MORNING.

“Rejoice the soul of thy servant.”—Ps. lxxxvi. 4.

THE queen of Sheba not only admired Solomon, but hailed his attendants. “Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy servants that stand continually before thee.” What then is it to be a servant of the King of kings and Lord of lords!

A servant of God, however, is not one that only subserves his designs—this, by an overruling Providence, *all* do, even the wicked themselves—but one, who, from conviction and disposition, resigns himself to his will, and holds himself at his disposal—one who always asks, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” always prays, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”

And can such a man as this want spiritual joy? Yes, even David himself, that eminent servant of God, prays, “Rejoice the soul of thy servant.” We ask, If I am his, why am I thus? We think our course of experience singular; but while we complain, we are passing by the very landmarks which those who have gone before us have set up to tell us that we are right. Our state is one thing, our joy is another: the former remains always the same, the latter often varies.

Our safety does not depend upon our knowledge; but our comfort is much affected by it; and sometimes a servant of God has but very imperfect views of those glorious truths which make us “free indeed.” Sometimes he may be depressed by his bodily frame and infirmities. Sometimes, too, he is under Divine rebuke for sin—for this it is that separates

between God and the soul. We should therefore search and try our ways. Is there not a cause? If the consolations of God are small with us, is there no secret thing with us? Is there no worm at the root of our withering gourd? No Achan in the camp, the troubler of Israel? Joab besieges Abel, and threatens to destroy it. A woman cries out to him to know the cause. He answers, There is one Sheba, the son of Bichri, a traitor to the king. Cast him over the wall, and I will withdraw. And so it was. And thus, if we would have peace with God, we must sacrifice every usurper, saying,

“The dearest idol I have known,
 Whate'er that idol be,
 Help me to tear it from thy throne,
 And worship only Thee.”

—But a servant of God will value what he may want. He prizes it, not only because God has commanded and promised it; but because he knows, from experience, that the joy of the Lord is his strength. He has seen how it once emboldened his profession, and enlivened his zeal, and weaned his heart from the world, and revived him in the midst of trouble. He has tasted its sweetness. He can never lose the relish of it; and this excites him to pray, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.”

For he is sure that God is alone the source and giver of it, and therefore to *Him* he goes—“Rejoice the soul of thy servant.” It is very desirable to see the morning after a dark night; and the spring after a cold, barren winter. But what makes the morning and the spring? Not all the lamps or fires in the world; but the sun. And the Lord God is the sun, as well as the shield of his people. All our light and life,

and bloom, are from him: and in him is our fruit found. He is the God, not only of all grace, but of all comfort.

It is He that comforts us in any of our common mercies; otherwise our sleep would not refresh us, nor our food nourish us, nor our friends cheer us. And what would the means of grace be, if he was not in them? God, says the Apostle, comforted us by the coming of Titus—not Titus, but God *by* Titus. Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers *by* whom ye belie;yed, even as *God* gave to every man? Luther says, it is as easy to make a world, as to ease a troubled conscience.—But

“The troubled conscience knows Thy voice:
Thy cheering words awake our joys;
Thy words allay the stormy wind,
And calm the surges of the mind.”

FEBRUARY 17.—EVENING.

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”

—ACTS xiii. 1.

THERE were no less than sixteen Antiochs in Western Asia, founded, in honour of Antiochus, by Seleucus Nicator his son. The Scripture only mentions two of them. The first was the capital of Pisidia; the second, the capital of Syria. The text alludes to the latter of these. Its situation, extent, honours, riches, trade, and the freedom and privileges the Jews enjoyed in it, may be easily ascertained from history. We have other things to notice. The most important fact ever connected with it was the

arrival of the Gospel. This was occasioned by the persecution that arose about Stephen: for some of those who were scattered by that event reached so far, and there preached the Lord Jesus. "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem; and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch: who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." There has been much dispute here; and it is not perhaps possible to determine, whether this name was imposed by way of reproach, or by a divine intimation. But the name was obviously derived from the Founder of Christianity; and we wish his followers had never been called by any other.

God has his *set* places, as well as times, in which to favour Zion. This church at Antioch, though of recent formation, flourished abundantly. It was remarkable for members and ministers. There were in it "certain prophets and teachers." Do these signify two classes of officers? or the same men exercising two functions? That is, not only preaching the word, but occasionally foretelling events?

Five of them are here mentioned by name. First, Barnabas. He was a Levite of Cyprus; a man of property: but who sold his estate, and threw the

money into the common stock. He was first called Joses, but afterwards Barnabas; which signifies the son of consolation: because he refreshed the bowels of the poor, was tender in his disposition, and preached affectionately. He was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost; and the father of many converts.

The second was "Simeon, that was called Niger." This must regard his complexion. He was probably a negro. We trust he was; for we love every thing that sheds a ray of comfort, honour, or hope over that sinfully degraded race of our brethren—if some will allow us to call them so. If not, he was a man of very dark and swarthy colour. Many a fair and beautiful form has enshrined a truly ugly mind. And on the other hand, a lovely soul has sometimes inhabited an ungracious body. Let us learn to value intellectual and moral qualities above corporeal—"As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman without discretion." "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."

The third is "Lucius of Cyrene." Of him we know nothing more, except his being mentioned by the Apostle among his saluted friends, in the close of the Epistle to the Romans: "Timotheus my work-fellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you." Some have thought whether he was not Luke the physician and evangelist, and the writer of this book.

The fourth was "Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch." This Herod was not Herod the Great, who massacred the infants in Bethlehem, but his son. To him Manaen was foster brother; that is, he was the son of his nurse; and

therefore in his infancy reared along with him. Let us not pass this slightly over. What different courses do men take who were once in the same condition! Here we see Herod and Manaen, brought up together in the same house: the one becoming a profligate, a persecutor, the actual murderer of John, and who died in exile, which Herodias shared with him; the other becoming a disciple of Jesus, and a preacher of the Gospel—So diverse were the characters of these two individuals, brought up together, playing in the same room, hearing the same voices, and surrounded with the same examples, during the most impressive period of life! Why did Herod reject Christianity? and why did Manaen embrace it? The one was perfectly inexcusable; the other had no reason to be proud, but much reason to be thankful. Men destroy themselves, and will feel guilty in their ruin. But by grace are we saved. The Lord makes us to differ from others; and we have nothing but what we have received.

Manaen therefore was a person of some distinction and quality; and had probably renounced considerable worldly advantage for the sake of religion. Had he joined with his young and royal companion in sin, he might it is likely have gained a place under government, as every kind and degree of relationship is provided for in such cases at the expense of the public; but he resembled Moses, who when he was come to years refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. And was he a loser? He *could* not be a loser. The lips of truth

have said, "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

God generally chooses the poor of this world to be rich in faith. Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But there have been always a few; and we should be thankful when we meet with such instances: for though their souls are no more precious than the souls or the vulgar, they are so placed and circumstanced as to be able to be more serviceable in their generation. Thus, as Manaen was a man of education and address, these advantages were now sanctified; and he was therefore immediately and advantageously employed.

The fifth was "Saul;" a character endeared to us as the Apostle of the Gentiles; and one of the most extraordinary individuals recorded in history. We know much concerning him; much from his own writings; and much from the narratives of Luke. When we consider his pharisaism, his persecutions of the Church, his conversion, his zeal, his journeys, sufferings, and services, we readily join him in the acknowledgment; "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was exceeding abundant to me ward." And we glorify God in him. What an assortment! What an assemblage was here!

FEBRUARY 18.—MORNING.

“Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established.”

—ROM. i. 10, 11.

AT this time Paul had not seen Rome. But how natural was it in a man of his taste and intelligence to wish to see it! Nothing had made such a figure in history as this imperial city. From a kind of village, it extended in a course of years till it became the mistress of the nations, and the metropolis of the world. How powerfully must curiosity have been awakened—by its extent, its majesty, its edifices, its institutions, its laws and customs! Paul was also a citizen; and, while some, with a great ransom, purchased this privilege, he was free-born. Yet his longing to see it was not to indulge the man and the Roman, but the Christian and the Apostle—He longed to impart to the beloved and called of God there, some “spiritual benefit.”

But see the order of divine grace. Before *he* was useful to them, *they* imparted some spiritual benefit to him; and established his wavering confidence. For when he had landed at Puteoli, and advanced towards Rome, the brethren came to meet him as far as the Appii Forum and the Three Taverns: “whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.” Here we see, that the most eminent servants of God may be depressed and desponding; and that it is possible for them to derive assistance and comfort from those who are much inferior to them in office, condition, abilities, and grace. There is no such thing as independence. Let none be proud. Let

none despair. The Christian Church is a body; and the body is not one member, but many. "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

But how was this prosperous journey according to the will of God, for which he made so many requests, accomplished? How little did he imagine the way in which he was to visit this famous city—He enters it indeed—but in the character of a prisoner, driven thither by persecution; and after being shipwrecked upon a certain island! So high are God's thoughts above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways! So little do we know what we pray for! So often by strange, and sometimes by terrible things in righteousness, does he answer us as the God of our salvation! So fulfils He the promise—"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

FEBRUARY 18.—EVENING.

"And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake."—GEN. xxx. 27.

LABAN knew and acknowledged the true God, yet had idols in his family. His character was a compound of selfishness, cunning, meanness, and cruelty. He even turned his daughters into articles of traffic; and inveigled his son-in-law into discord

and wretchedness, polygamy and incest. All this is perfectly credible; for he was *covetous*; and “the love of money is the root of all evil.” He is here addressing Jacob, who, after serving him with diligence and fidelity for many years, and meeting only with injury and insult, resolved to leave him. The resolution was not the effect of feeling only, but of Divine command; for the Lord “had said unto him, return unto thy country and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee.” At the thought of losing such a prize, “Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake.” Whence we remark,—

That *God is the author of all our successes and comforts*. Even Laban owns this—“*The Lord has blessed me.*” No wonder therefore Solomon should say, “The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich.” Moses gives Israel the admonition, “Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for he it is that giveth thee power to get wealth.” Yet they soon forgot, and drew upon themselves the reflection, “the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” “For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal.” Let us beware of this, and not sacrifice unto our net, and burn incense unto our drag, because *by* them our portion is fat, and our meat plenteous.

God may bless a bad man—The Lord hath blessed *me*, says Laban. He maketh his sun to rise upon the evil, as well as upon the good; and sendeth rain, not only upon the just, but upon the unjust. If we look

over their gardens and fields, we shall not be able to distinguish by their fertility or barrenness those which pertain to the friends or the enemies of God. "All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked." "No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them." "The sure mercies of David" are peculiarly appropriated; but the good things of Providence are bestowed indiscriminately. God may heal the bodies of those whose souls are not saved: and he may elevate in life those who have no inheritance among them that are sanctified. Yea, the wicked often prosper in the world beyond others, and have more than heart can wish. This will not perplex us when we understand their end, and see in what slippery places they are set. Who envies the ox that is fattening for the slaughter in the greenest pasture? Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, and the glory of his house is increased. Do not imagine that God approves of you because he bears with you, and even indulges your desires. Pray for the favour which he bears to his people; for the heritage of those that fear his Name.

God blesses some for the sake of others—"The Lord hath blessed me for *thy* sake." See another instance of this in the case of rotiphar. "It came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed. the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field." Upon this principle Moses pleaded: "Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to

their sin." And when Jerusalem was besieged, God said, "For I will defend this city to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake." We are bound to religion, not only by personal, but also by relative considerations. We are in a sense responsible for others as well as for ourselves. We can injure or benefit those with whom we are connected. One sinner destroyeth much good, while the godly are blessings to all around them. How much should we value such benefactors! They are the light of the world; the salt of the earth; the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof. They stand in the gap, and hold back invading judgments. They are the repairers of the breach, the restorers of paths to dwell in. "Thus saith the Lord, as the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all."

Persons may derive advantage from their inferiors. The stream of goodness and usefulness seems naturally to run downwards: but here the less is not blessed of the greater, but the elder of the younger; the master of the servant. None are independent of others. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those parts of the body which seem to be most feeble are necessary. The king is served by the labour of the field. Parents have derived spiritual life from their children. Ministers may learn from those they are appointed to teach: and Christians superior in circumstances may be improved by those who, though poor in this world, are rich in faith, and deeply versed in the things of God. A little captive girl was the instrument of

making the God of Israel to be honoured in Syria, and of obtaining a miraculous cure for her master—Call nothing common or unclean.

Men, however irreligious, are sometimes constrained to bear testimony in favour of the godly. Laban, who disliked Jacob, and would have injured him had he not been divinely restrained, cannot avoid thus honouring and extolling him—"If I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake." Balaam had no love for Israel, and died fighting against them; yet exclaimed, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Such a difference is there between belief and practice; conviction and disposition. So men hold the truth in unrighteousness. So they own the reality of the conversion, and "gaze and admire and hate the change." When Saul was spared by David, he could not help lifting up his voice and weeping and crying, "Thou art more righteous than I." When Christians act consistently, they enthrone themselves in the minds of their observers, and though their enemies may outwardly reproach them, they cannot but inwardly revere. They may dislike the nature of religion, but they can judge of its moral and relative advantages. The difference between the partakers of Divine grace and others, in their conduct and their condition, is too great and obvious to elude notice. "Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed."

FEBRUARY 19.—MORNING.

“And when he thought thereon, he wept.”—MARK xiv. 72.

DODDRIDGE supposes that this is intended to express, not only the immediate sensibility of Peter, but his feeling through life; and that he always wept at the thought of his vile and ungrateful conduct. His sin was certainly very aggravated; and, with all his failings, he was a man of very tender affections, and great ingenuousness.

But sorrow arising from such a source is not peculiar to our Apostle. All the people of God should feel a penitent disposition at the review of their sin.

And who, when they look back, can be at a loss for materials of self-accusation and contrition? There are the sins of our unregenerate condition. There are the sins we have been capable of, since we have been called to the knowledge of the truth. All these we are to judge of, not by their grossness, but by their guilt. In the number of our sins, we are to rank our omissions of duty; our non-improvement of our time and talents; the defectiveness of our aims and motives; and the departures of our heart in love and confidence from the blessed God.

Some would prevent the effect of such self-inspections, by the notion, that there is no evil in the sins of God's people. But their sins are worse than those of others, by reason of the nearer relations in which, and the greater obligations under which, they are committed. They have also, in sinning, greater difficulties to overcome. They have not only to sin against greater love, but greater light: and they have been convinced of the evil and bitterness of sin; and have had a wounded spirit which they could not bear.

Their sins, also, are more injurious with regard to others: distressing the strong; stumbling the weak; confirming the prejudiced; hardening the wicked; causing the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, and the way of truth to be evil spoken of. And is all this nothing? Did Micah think so? 'Who, says he, is a Godlike unto him, who passeth by even the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?

But suppose the Christian is led to see, that his standing is secure; and that God is pacified towards him. Will he weep then? Yes; he will weep the more. The goodness of God will lead him to repentance; and he will sorrow after a godly sort, like a dying saint, who being asked why he wept? answered, I weep—not that my sins may be pardoned—but because I hope they are pardoned.

Let us, then, never be ashamed or afraid of such tears as Peter shed. Nothing is so becoming and reasonable. Other grief may be excused; but this can be justified. Other sorrow may render us amiable in the eyes of our fellow-creatures; but this is extolled of God: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, a God, *thou* wilt not despise." This brings us within the reach of the promises—"They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy;" "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." It is not easy, or perhaps possible, to make others comprehend this—but there is a pleasure even in the frame itself; and they who are the subjects of it well know, that their happiest moments are their most tender ones; and, with Augustine, they can bless God for the "grace of tears." Here is a proof of our being under the renewing of the Holy Ghost. If the heart of stone was not taken

away, how could I feel and grieve? And if there was nothing in me but nature, how could I feel and grieve for sin? There is nothing more useful in the divine life than this disposition. It endears the Saviour and his atonement, and his righteousness, and his intercession, and his grace. It makes me cautious and circumspect: in this temper of mind I cannot expose myself to temptation, or trifle with sin; but be always watchful and prayerful. Blessed is the man that feareth always.

FEBRUARY 19.—EVENING.

“I John am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.”—REV. i. 9.

By calling himself their “brother,” John shews how well he remembered the admonition of his Lord and Saviour: “Be not ye called masters; for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.” The first ministers of the Gospel never thought of “lording it over God’s heritage, but were ensamples to the flock.” “We have no dominion,” said they to their hearers, “over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.” Every man is a brother: but the name is peculiarly applied to the subjects of Divine grace. Whatever differences prevail among these, they are only the distinctions of children—they are all of the same family—the same household of faith—and to claim kindred with them, is the supreme desire of everyone who is a child of light. John valued his relation as a Christian more than his office and endowments as an Apostle. He might have been an Apostle, and have perished. Judas was an Apostle; yet he hanged himself, and

went to his own place. But “he that believeth hath everlasting life, and shall never come into condemnation.” So much better is it to pray than to prophesy; and to have our names written in heaven, than have the spirits subject unto us.

When he speaks of his being their “companion,” he does not mean what we might at first suppose—one who had free and familiar intercourse with them: from this he was now debarred, being banished to the Isle of Patmos. As we need and are formed for society, and as religion sanctifies the social principle, Christians love the presence and conversation of each other. “My goodness,” says David, “extendeth not to thee; but to the saints that are in the earth, and the excellent in whom is all my delight. I am a companion of all them that fear thee.” Their intercourse with each other is instructive, and relieving, and enlivening. Solomon compares it to the refreshment of ointment and perfume; and to the mutual sharpening of instruments. Yet some are entirely denied this privilege; and are placed in neighbourhoods and families where they can have no sweet counsel together, or go to the throne and the house of the Lord in company. Others lament the little access they have to those whom they most love and esteem. So it is—as if God would wean us from hence, and make us long for the general assembly; where, in heaven, we shall enjoy the fellowship forbidden us on earth. In the mean time, as a substitute, we can be present in spirit, and now and then peruse the welcome epistle, and be thankful that we are joint-sharers in all their rights and blessings in “the communion of saints.”—But John means, that he was a fellow-partaker with them—In what?

“Your companion,” says he, “in tribulation; and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” A just and striking representation of the state of Christians while in this world.

They are called to *suffer*: and many are the afflictions of the righteous. But never imagine you are alone in your trials. The same things have happened to your brethren. See your companions—“Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth *every* son whom he receiveth.”

But if you suffer, you are also called to *reign*: and are receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved; the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour; a kingdom not of this world, but infinitely surpassing all the glories of time and sense.

Hence *patience* is indispensable. It is necessary to both the former; to the tribulation—to bear it: and to the kingdom—to wait for it. For though you are already entitled and anointed, you are not yet actually crowned; but resemble David, who, after much tribulation and years of hope, entered his kingdom.

FEBRUARY 20.—MORNING.

“*Ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*”

—MAL. iv. 2.

THEY were before in *darkness* and *disease*; both of which *confine*. But the Sun of righteousness arises, and with healing under his wings: and thus, the true light now shining, and health being restored, they become free and active—They go forth, and—grow up as calves of the stall.

For even now they have not attained; they are not already perfect. Nor are they to remain what they are, but to increase with all the increase of God. Some tell us there is no growth in grace—As if Christians could not be more wise, more humble, more patient, more zealous, than they are—As if Paul's commendation of the Thessalonians was a falsehood, when he told them that their faith grew exceedingly, and the charity of everyone of them towards each other abounded—As if Peter enjoined an absurdity when he admonished Christians to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour—As if God himself mocked or trifled when he said, "The righteous shall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger!"

We are not to deny what God has done for our souls. Yea, we ought to be thankful, if we have only light enough to see our darkness, and feeling enough to be sensible of our hardness.

"Cold as I feel this heart of mine,
Yet, since I *feel* it so,
It yields some hope of life divine
Within, however low."

But though we must not despise the day of small things, we are not to be satisfied with it. A day of greater things is attainable; and if we do not aspire after it, we have reason to suspect even the reality of our religion. Spiritual principles may be weak; but if they are divine, they will evince it by a tendency to growth.

The sacred writers express this progression by every kind of growth.—By human growth—We read of babes, little children, young men, and those of full

age, who have their senses exercised, by reason of use, to discern both good and evil.—By vegetable growth—Thus we read, first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear: they shall spring as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses; they shall grow as the lily, they shall grow as the vine.—Here we have animal growth—They shall grow up as calves of the stall. No creatures perhaps increase so rapidly and observedly as these, especially when, as here, they are well attended and fed, and for the very purpose of fattening.

We have sometimes been reminded of the truth of this image, by the spiritual reality. We have seen those, who, in a little time, have surprised all around them, by their progress in the divine life. So clear and full have been their views of the things of God. So established have their hearts been with grace. So simply and entirely have they depended upon the Saviour. So decided have they been in their separation from the spirit of the world; and yet so concerned to be useful in it. So spiritual have they been in their conversation; and yet so free from all religious grimace and affectation. So ready have they been to do good and communicate in the cause of the poor, and the cause of Christ. Such a living sacrifice have they presented in their bodies and spirits. So have they adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

But, alas! as to many of us, we have reason to exclaim, “My leanness, my leanness!” How little progress have we made in religious knowledge, experience, practice, and usefulness, though we have possessed every advantage, and long enjoyed the

means of grace. After all the discipline of his family, the instructions of his word, the ordinances of his house, how dull are our ears of hearing! how slow of heart are we to believe! how much do our souls cleave unto the dust! how affected are we with the things of time and sense! and how little actuated are we by the powers of a world to come! At present the comparison reproves us.

But let it also excite and encourage. It not only reminds us of our duty, but of our privilege. This growth is not only commanded, but promised—It is therefore attainable. And we know the way to our resources. Jesus came, not only that we might have life, but have it more abundantly. “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

FEBRUARY 20.—EVENING.

“Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.”

—PSALM xxvii. 11.

DAVID had enemies. So has every Christian. And perhaps we should have more if we more fully resembled *him*, who said to the Jews, “The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify that its deeds are evil.”

But the margin reads, “because of mine observers.” Let us see who these observers are, and how concerned we should be to walk properly, hav-

ing so many watchers over us, and many of them regarding us with no friendly mind.

The world are observers, and they mark us with a keen and malignant eye. When David had slain Goliath, and drawn forth the gratitude of his countrymen, it is said, "Saul eyed David from that day and forward." And it is also said, "And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him. "Wherefore, when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him." How well if it had been always so! At length he yielded to temptation, and one of the effects which he had to mourn over all his days was the triumph he gave to his adversaries. Thou hast caused, said Nathan, the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. To blaspheme here means, to speak reproachfully against his God, his religion, and his experience. So Paul says, "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." Wonder not that this is addressed to servants and even slaves; for, professing Christianity as they did, they were able to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, or disgrace it. Let us remember that we have many lookers on who watch, not to find something to admire, but for our halting. And they are not so ignorant as we sometimes imagine. They know generally what we profess, and they know what line of conduct becomes us; and if we act inconsistently with it, they will be sure to despise us. But if we are inflexible, and follow out our principles, and are always and everywhere the same, we shall commend ourselves to their consciences, and they will be constrained to respect

those to whom they are not attached. What a noble testimony was borne to Daniel, when his accusers said they could find nothing against him, unless in matters pertaining to the law of his God! Some do not mind what people say of them: but they ought to mind. "Ought ye not," said Nehemiah, "to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?" And says Peter, "So is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." "Avoid," says Paul, "the very appearance of evil."

Saints are our observers. They observe us from love; and a sense of duty. They are commanded not only to "admonish," and "exhort," but to "consider one another"—not curiously, but to warn; and rebuke; and restore; and to provoke to love and good works. Woe to those who shall offend one of God's little ones! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he tlu'own into the depth of the sea. Let us be careful, even if they are ignorant and infirm, not to offend against the generation of the upright. Let us make straight paths for our feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Ministers are our observers. They are to take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers. When we act unworthy our calling, their minds are perplexed, their hearts are discouraged, and their hands are slackened. But they live when we stand fast in the Lord. They can refer to us, when our conversation becomes the Gospel, as arguments, proofs, and commendations; and we are their glory and joy

Angels observe us. We are a spectacle to angels, as well as to the world and to men. And Paul charges Timothy, not only before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, but also the elect angels, to do nothing by partiality. They are therefore witnesses of our conduct, and can see us, though we cannot see them. When persons are tried, witnesses are called in to depose. So will it be at the day of judgment. Parents will be called upon to testify against their children; and ministers against their hearers. Angels also will be employed. Some sins, and the temptations leading to them, are unknown to all human beings but the parties themselves. And these accuse each other. And who is to determine which is the seducer, and which only the seduced?

Above all, God observes us. He is the most perfect observer, for nothing eludes him; he seeth our thoughts afar off. He is also the most concerned observer: they are his laws which are violated or honoured by our temper and conduct; and he records all we speak and do; and will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil. Therefore said he to Abraham, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." And what manner of persons should we be, if we believed and considered that he was always looking upon us!

Let us remember therefore that we are never in secret, but always acting on a stage. We are observed by foes, by friends, by men, by angels, and by God the Judge of all. Surely we need wisdom, and strength, far above our own. Lord, be our guide and our guard, even unto death.

FEBRUARY 21.—MORNING.

“And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.”—NUMB. xxi. 4.

THE people of God are held forth under various characters in the Scriptures: and no one of them all is more common, more just, more pleasing, more instructive, than the image of strangers and pilgrims upon earth. And who knows not what a beautiful use Bunyan has made of it?

But what is there in the way to discourage the soul of the travellers heaven-ward? Much. Sometimes they are affected by the length of the way. For hope deferred maketh the heart sick. This was the case with Israel at this time: for, instead of passing through the land of Edom, they had to fetch a compass all around the borders; and all this in a wilderness too, and under a burning sky. If a traveller, after supposing he was near his journey's end, was to learn that it was yet many miles off—all worn and weary, his heart would be ready to faint; and utter the cry of despondence, “I shall never reach it!” What Isaiah says, “They shall behold the land that is very far off,” may be applied to the experience of Christians with regard to heaven. It is often remote in fact: that is, it is frequently long before they arrive there. For they are not removed hence, as soon as they are converted; but detained here to be made meet for their destination, to honour their Redeemer, and to serve their generation. Hence many of them are longer on earth after they are called by grace, than the Jews wandered in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. But we refer to the slowness of their progress, the smallness of their attainments, and the nature of their apprehensions. “Once,”

says the soul, "I was ready to seize the blessing; but now it seems to recede as I advance: yea, the distance between me and the attainment seems to increase daily." "How long wilt Thou forget me, o Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning"—"O when will it dawn—When wilt thou come unto me?"

Sometimes they are discouraged because of the way, owing to the enemies that infest it. In the rebuilding of the second temple, we are told, that every man with one hand wrought in the work, and with the other held a weapon—this was sore labour. And the Christian's life is a warfare, as well as a pilgrimage: he moves on, bearing his sword, as well as his staff. Now to walk and fight too—and to contend every step of the way—and with adversaries possessing every thing to render them formidable—and as soon as one is vanquished, to see another rising up—this is arduous and trying. And what wonder, if, when without are fightings, within are fears?

Then the way shews many that are turning back in it; and this is often discouraging. We had heard of their setting off. Some of them had passed us, near enough to be observed. They soon left us, seeming to surpass us, not only in gifts, but grace—and we not only hailed, but envied them. How wonderful and grievous to see them returning; vicious, or infidel, or lovers of this present world. We instantly remember, and apply to *them* the awful declaration, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." But who can help think-

ing of *himself*? And what am I? And may not I also prove a cast-away?

Besides, these revoltors never come back silent. They solicit us to return too. They assure us the way is impassable. They have tried it; and hope their experience will make us wise. Once they thought certain notions to be erroneous; and certain indulgences to be sinful; but they are more enlightened and liberal now. Such persons too, never subside into neutrals. From friends they necessarily become enemies. They persecute, if it lies in their power. They always reproach and vilify, even in their own defence—defaming the party and the cause—to justify their secession from them.

It is often discouraging, also, to find the way so narrow—"Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life." The difficulty, therefore, of getting on, is great. A way is made narrow by the near approximation of the sides, whether walls, ditches, or hedges; so that we have to press through; and can hardly do it without some injury on the right hand or on the left. In the exercise of every grace, and the performance of every duty, a Christian has to keep between two extremes. As to the use of the means of grace, he must neither neglect them nor idolize them. As to connections and relations in life, he may sin by not loving them enough; or by loving them too much. Courage lies between rashness and fear; and frugality, between profusion and niggardliness; and confidence, between presumption and despondency; and patience, between despising the chastening of the Lord, and fainting when we are rebuked of him. And is it easy always to go, not only in the way of righteousness, but in the *midst* of the paths of judgment?

So far, generally, of the road. But there are particular parts that are peculiarly trying: such as, the Slough of Despond—the Valley of Humiliation—the Hill Difficulty with the lions—and the deep cold River to be waded through, before the Shining City can be entered. A Christian knows what all this means; and sometimes finds it hard to believe that the way to glory lies through it all.

Am I then setting out for the heavenly world? Let me not prepare myself for surprise and disappointment, by expecting that everything will be smooth, and flowery, and delightful. I cannot, indeed, look for too much from the promises of God—they are so exceeding great and precious; but I must look for it in God's own order. I must deny myself, and take up my cross. I must not be slothful, but be a follower of them, who, through faith and patience, have reached the prize of their high calling.

Have I professed, and hoped that I am a Christian? Let me not conclude, that I have no part nor lot in the matter, because my soul is sometimes cast down and disquieted within me. Have not those who have gone before me wept and groaned also? Are not the subjects of divine grace represented by their fear, as well as their confidence? by their sorrow, as well as their joy?

Yet let me endeavour to go on rejoicing, Let me remember, that there is much to encourage me because of the way. An unerring guide—an almighty guard—companions—strength to hold on, refreshments along the road—and the end of it perfect rest, and peace, and glory, and joy.

FEBRUARY 21.—EVENING.

“And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”—ACTS vi. 15.

THERE was nothing unaccountable in their beholding him as they did. He was a remarkable character; and had excited much notice by his office, and the wonders and miracles which he did among the people, and the victory he had gained over a number of able opponents who had challenged him to the dispute. He also now appeared, upon his trial, under some heinous accusations. When a prisoner enters a court, every eye is naturally drawn towards him; and the judge and the jury frequently observe his countenance, as a kind of index of his conscious innocency or guilt. *All that sat in the council looked stedfastly on Stephen, wishing and hoping, perhaps, to gaze him into confusion and tremor. But he could bear looking at—They saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. But filled with envy, and malice, and fury, and gnashing upon him with their teeth; how did their faces appear? What a contrast between him and his persecutors! Here was a lamb among wolves; an angel before devils, and the High Priest the chief of the devils!*

“They saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” But how could they tell what an angel’s face was? They had never seen one. Angels had indeed formerly appeared to men: and many instances of it are recorded. But as the design of the Scripture is to edify, and not to amuse, it tells us little concerning these things. Yet all it relates goes to establish one thing—their superiority to the human race. Thus we read that man was made a little lower than

the angels. They are spoken of as flying very swiftly. They are said to excel in strength. To be exceedingly wise, is to be wise as an angel of God. The glory of their appearance was such as commonly to overpower the senses of those to whom they were sent. At the sight of Gabriel, Daniel's comeliness was turned into corruption, and he retained no strength. The human voice is a wonderful instrument; and we find what it can achieve in singing and eloquence. Yet Paul speaks not only of the tongues of men, but of angels: and it would seem that one of these is to awaken the dead; the voice of the archangel is the trump of God. A human countenance is an astonishing display of perfection; yet it is intimated that the face of an angel is much more so. These celestial beings are the flower of the creation; and from our inferiority to them, we see more fully the excellency of God's power, in putting the treasure into earthen vessels, and employing as ministers men, and not angels—The vastness of the Christian's obligation, who is raised from his low estate, and placed above these angels in blessedness and glory—The humility and kindness of these angels, that, though now so much higher than we, they are all our ministering spirits, and despise not even our little ones—And, far more still, the grace and condescension of the Lord Jesus, who took not on him the nature of angels, but was made in the likeness of men; and, because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, also took part of the same.

But what was the nature of this appearance in the face of Stephen? and how is it to be accounted for? The visage is sometimes very impressive and striking by natural beauty. There is nothing in the world so

admirable as “the human face divine.” How greatly does it display the workmanship of the Creator, and how often has it been the instrument of his providence in effecting great designs! How much depended upon the life of Moses! But he was hid three months because he was a goodly child. Daniel and his three companions were preferred because they were well formed, and there was no blemish in them. Esther was an orphan, supported by her uncle, with no dowry but her charms: yet she becomes the saviour of Israel, and the queen of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces.

The face is rendered powerful and striking by intellectual qualities. The former may be found without these; but the features, however fine and regular, will be tame and insipid, unless something of *mind* beams through; and the countenance will only captivate fools and sensualists. “Wisdom,” says Solomon, “maketh the face to shine.” What expression is there in the looks of some speakers when they are animated and lighted up! Much of the force of Lord Chatham’s eloquence arose from the fire of his eye, and the majesty of his features.

The face is rendered interesting and striking by social and moral attributes. These constitute the chief grace, the principal charm. It is of these we think when we conceive of our Lord in the days of his flesh, and by which alone perhaps he was personally fairer than the children of men. We imagine his face beaming with peace, gentleness, compassion, kindness, readiness to pardon and relieve, the image of the invisible God, who is love. How is a countenance injured by the want of humility, modesty, diffidence, tenderness! How lovely are infants while

insensible of their cherubic charms! How lovely is youth while they are unconscious of their attractions, and full of innocence and simplicity, and devoid of design and attempt—for the impression is gone when the wearer is perceived to be acting upon it; and study, art, and decoration are employed and managed as substitutes and expedients. What a difference is there between two countenances, one of which is inherited by vice and bad humour, and the other by goodness and amiable temper! How angelic does one man look! How rude, tyrannical, insolent, unfeeling, and cruel another! How desirable is it that persons should be religious early, while the face is susceptible of impression and improvement, and the features may be modified by its benign and heavenly influences! When they are older, a change of character cannot change the countenance; and if envy, and malignity, and pride, and disdain have ruled in it before, they will leave deep and dismal traces for life. Religion, we are persuaded, is not only “the health of the countenance,” but the comeliness too!

But when Stephen’s face was seen as it had been the face of an angel, was the aspect natural or supernatural? He might have had a corporeal loveliness. We know he was at this time full of wisdom and faith. His countenance was not pallid with guilt, nor distracted by care, nor troubled with fear, but full of confidence, serenity, mildness, and joy. Yet there was something supernatural here. And why should this be deemed incredible, or even wonderful? The occasion was worthy a divine interposition. It was an age of miracles. A few hours afterwards, Stephen said, I see the heaven opened, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. In

the transfiguration, as he prayed. the fashion of his Saviour's countenance was changed, and his raiment was white and glistening. It is said of Moses too, as he came down from the Mount, that his face shone so that the Israelites could not behold him for the glory of his countenance. And how remarkable was it, that at the very moment Stephen was accused of being an enemy to Moses, God should have honoured him in the very same way, shedding a radiance upon him that might serve to remind them, and perhaps did remind them, of the illustrious legislator himself!

FEBRUARY 22.—MORNING.

“And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”—ACTS vi. 15.

THE design of the Lord in this appearance was to distinguish and dignify his servant. He saves and pardons sovereignly; but he administers honour according to a rule which he has himself laid down: “Them that honour me, I will honour.” Enoch was translated that he should not see death; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. “Come thou and all thy house into the ark,” said God to Noah, “for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.” Stephen was not ashamed of the Redeemer. He went forth to him without the camp, cheerfully bearing his reproach; and was determined that Christ should be magnified in his body whether by life or by death—and the Lord stood by him, confessing him before men, and putting a visible glory upon him. We are not to

look for miracles, wonders, and signs; but the Lord has not forsaken the earth: and the promise is still true, "If any man serve me, him will my Father honour." And he cannot be at a loss for means to do this, not only beyond the grave, but through life. There is a moral glory in their character and conversation, which shews that they have been with Jesus. It adorns the doctrine of God their Saviour; inspires beholders, with reverence and awe; and more than puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men. He whom they serve has often brought their enemies to their feet; and puts such a difference between his people and the Egyptians as to constrain the most unthinking to say, "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; verily, he is a God that judgeth in the earth." When they have suffered, especially for his Name's sake, "the spirit of glory and of God has rested upon them." And how has he owned them in their last hours! A radiance has been thrown around them that has rendered the dying chamber the house of God and the gate of heaven; and induced the exclamation from all beholders, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"—What then is the glory that shall be revealed in them, when he shall change even the vile body of his people, and fashion it like unto his own glorious body; and they shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!

We here see the truth and faithfulness of the Lord Jesus, and how worthy he is of our confidence. He had said to his disciples; "they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues: but when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be

given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist." And did not Stephen find it so? Perhaps he had his fears previously to his appearance in the council. Nothing is more intimidating than to appear before lawyers, magistrates and judges. Many well know how they felt when they had to enter a court only to give evidence, and when they had persons to introduce and support them. But Stephen was alone and unfriended, and his judges were filled with hatred and fury. Yet he had a reasonable and an adequate relief to rely upon; and he found the assurance true. Perhaps he was astonished at his own self-possession, and force of argument, and promptness of recollection, and fluency of words.

Yea, more was done than was engaged for. The promise only regarded the tongue, not the face; only how they should *speak*, not how they should *look*—but behold an irradiation of countenance that draws and fixes every eye—"All that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face AS IT HAD BEEN THE FACE OF AN ANGEL." The Lord is never worse, but he is frequently better than his word. Though his promises are exceeding great as well as precious, they do not exhaust all the love of his heart, or power of his arm. He has yet reserves for extraordinary purposes; and indulges, and surprises. He loves to exceed expectation; and do for us exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think.

What was the effect of this scene? With regard to Stephen, it does not appear that he was aware of it

himself. This too was the case with Moses in a similar distinction. He knew not that his face shone, till he saw the Israelites were dazzled, and he was obliged to take a veil and soften the lustre. Good men are not the first to discover their excellences: nor are they forward to publish them. But from others they cannot be concealed: their profiting will appear unto all men. Though Stephen was unconscious of the honour, none of the council were ignorant of it; *all* looked stedfastly, and *saw* his face as it had been the face of an angel. And how were they all affected? They were enraged the more: and “*then* said the High Priest, are these things so?” What a proof was this of the perverseness and impenitency of these men, that they could go on, and persecute to the death, a man whom God himself was honouring before their eyes! But it is a fact every way instructive. It shews the truth of the declaration, that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It shews that all belief is not, as some say, influential. It ought to be so, and would be so if we were in a right state: but we are fallen creatures; and the powers of the soul are thrown into disorder. Hence we see and approve better things, and follow worse; and the clearest convictions of the judgment are counteracted by our passions and appetites.

We talk of the evils of ignorance: but while some are destroyed for lack of knowledge, others perish by the possession of it. To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is sin. Numbers, like these beholders of Stephen, derive from their opportunity and advantages only an increase of guilt and condemnation.

We talk of miracles. They were useful, as evidences and proofs; but as moral means, they failed, as well as other means. We are ready to think that those who were not properly influenced by them, could not believe them: but they did believe them. The Pharisees believed our Lord's miracles, but feared to confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. And we find the council at Jerusalem admitting fully the notable miracle that had been done upon the cripple: we cannot say they deny it—yet they apprehend, and beat, and imprison the doers of it, and command them to speak no more in the name of Jesus!

Men pretend inability, when only inclination is wanting. They are not strangers to the truth, but hold it in unrighteousness; and will not let it go free in their conduct. They think their irreligion is the creature of circumstances; and that if they had other situations and conditions, they should be godly. Vain supposition! They are ready to wish some overpowering dispensation or calamity may befall them, that what is not done by conviction may be done by impression, and what is not done by the means of grace may be done by events. If one came unto us from the dead, we should repent. Vain hope! If you hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would you be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

FEBRUARY 22.—EVENING.

“Ye shall serve the Lord your God, and he shall bless thy bread and thy water.”—EXOD. xxiii. 25.

OUR chief concern should be to secure those bless-

ings which will supply the soul and endure for ever. He only is truly blessed who is blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Our Saviour, therefore, says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"—yet he does not scruple to say, "And all *these* things shall be added unto you." Temporal benefits are not beneath the attention of our kind Father. He knoweth that we have need of these things before we ask him. He knoweth our frame; and he knoweth our fears. And not only under the Law, but under the Gospel, godliness is profitable unto all things; and has promises of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

The promise before us extends to all the temporal support of his people: but there is wisdom in the language. In another place it is also said, "Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure." Is not the specification designed to check not only anxiety, but ambition and avarice? Does it not say, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have."

Nothing can do us good without the blessing of God; but his blessing commands what it announces: and what he blesses, *is* blessed. Hence a *little* that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. It is more *sufficient*. It goes further: as Philip Henry was wont to say to his family—"My dear children, the grace of God will make a little go a great way." It is surprising to see with what a slender income many Christians keep up a decent appearance, owing no man anything, and even giving

to him that needeth. The thing is, “The secret of the Lord is upon their tabernacle.”

But while he blesses the habitation of the just, his curse is in the house of the wicked. And then nothing prospers. They seem a wonder to themselves and others. They get much and gain nothing. So it was with the selfish and illiberal Jews when they came back from Babylon, and built their own ceiled houses, while the house of God lay waste. Had they minded his affairs, he would have minded theirs; and have proved that we cannot serve God for nought. But now, says God, “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink: ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.”

It is also more *satisfying*. For the state of the mind conduces to the relish of every outward comfort; and in the Christian this state of mind is grateful, and peaceful, and cheerful, arising from a hope of reconciliation, with God. His frown would darken a thousand suns. But every thing smiles when he smiles.

“How sweet our daily comforts prove,

When they are season’d with his love!”

And we see the dear medium through which they come as covenant blessings:

“*He* sunk beneath our heavy woes,

To raise us to his throne:

There’s not a gift his hand bestows,

But cost his heart a groan.”

—The wicked feast without fear. But there is reason enough why they *should* fear. Neglecting the

service of God, they are strangers to his blessing. Left to themselves, every advantage and indulgence operating upon their depravity, contributes to their guilt and misery. Their table becomes a snare; and that which should have proved for their welfare, becomes a trap. The prosperity of fools destroys them. Now consider this, ye that forget God. And, without delay, seek to be numbered with the seed which the Lord hath blessed.

FEBRUARY 23.—MORNING.

“Let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”—JAMES v. 20.

AND can *we* convert the sinner from the error of his way? Yes—or the language would be futile. But *how* can we do this? Not meritoriously—this would invade the office and glory of the Lord Jesus: for He only delivers us from the wrath to come: He only saves his people from their sins. Not efficiently—this would invade the work and honour of the Holy Spirit: for we are saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. There is, therefore, only one way in which *we* can convert a sinner; and that is instrumentally. But this does not detract from Divine agency: there is no inconsistency between agency and instrumentality. A pen is nothing without a hand to use it. An instrument always supposes and requires an agent.

But is the converse of this proposition true? Does an agent always require an instrument? It is so with us; but not with a Being whose will is efficiency; and who said, Let there be light, and there was light.

Yet what God is not compelled to do from weakness, he chooses to do from wisdom. He therefore works by means. We know of nothing that he does immediately. He fans us by the breeze, and warms us by the sun, and refreshes us by sleep, and sustains us by food. And, as it is in nature, so it is in grace. Among the Corinthians, God gave the increase; but Paul planted, and Apollos watered. Their faith came not *from* them; but Paul and Apollos were ministers *by* whom they believed. We mean not, however, by this reference, to confine this work to ministers. James alludes not only or chiefly to them; but to Christians at large. All may be useful here; and in a thousand ways exert themselves to accomplish till's blessed and glorious design.

For he who effects it is the greatest of all benefactors—for “he saves a soul from death, and hides a multitude of sins!” And what is every other achievement compared with this? Nothing, less than nothing, and vanity. So will all those judge who walk by faith; and believe the testimony of God concerning—The value of a soul! The dreadfulness of eternal death! And the absolute necessity of forgiveness, in order to the man's escape from the damnation of hell!

The work therefore is its own reward. Spurious beneficence always wishes to excite notice: and the man, in some way or other, aims, or he will do nothing, to make it conducive to his own interest. But true charity seeketh not its own, but the welfare of the object: and if *that* end be answered, the benefactor is satisfied. James knew this; and mentions nothing else by way of motive—but the thing itself. He does not tell his brethren, that if they convert a sinner they

shall be applauded here, or recompensed at the resurrection of the just—It is true that they *will* derive honour and advantage from their usefulness. They that water, shall be watered also. The sinners they save will pray for them; and, if they die first, when they fail, will receive them into everlasting habitations; and in the day of the Lord Jesus they will be their joy and crown. But this is the effect, and not the principle of their zeal. It is enough if they succeed—enough if they can save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.

And the prospect of success in such a case, however *limited*, should be sufficient to animate us. Some may be privileged to bless numbers. But James speaks of “*the sinner*,” and “*a soul*.” This agrees with the language of our Lord, who tells us, “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over *one* sinner that repenteth.” This brings the encouragement home to all. All cannot be Luthers, to reform countries; or Whitfields, to preach to thousands; or Careys, to translate the Scriptures into other tongues. But can we do nothing? Surely some one soul is thrown in our way to whom we may be useful—a child—a servant—a relative—a neighbour.

James would have us *think* of this; and think *much* of it. “Let him *know*, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” And who does not know this? Yea, were we to judge from their practice, we should be ready to ask, Who does know it? What is the knowledge that answers no end? It is not enough to believe: we must remember and reflect; we must follow out our

convictions. This fine sentiment must be present to the mind—at all times—and in all conditions—when we are alone and when we are in company—when we pray and when we speak—when we sit in our house—and when we walk by the way—and when we lie down—and when we rise up—we must bind it as a sign upon our hand—and wear it as a frontlet between our eyes—and write it upon the posts of our door and upon our gates—“Let him KNOW, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

FEBRUARY 23.—EVENING.

“Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”—MATT. xxviii. 20.

IT is needless to ask who is the speaker. Every believer will exclaim, as soon as he hears the words, “It is the voice of my Beloved.” *His* voice is always welcome to the ear of faith: welcome when it enjoins a duty; welcome when it demands a sacrifice—How welcome then when it announces that he will never leave us nor forsake us!

But we may ask on what occasion he spoke? It was on the verge of glory, a few hours only before he entered the joy that was set before him. It was in the nature of a parting address. O to have seen him! to have glanced at the features and emotions of his countenance just as he was ascending to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God! He could not go without something that should keep from despair even the minds of those who had crucified him. Preach, said he to his Apostles, repentance

and remission of sins in my Name among all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem*. Let those that smote the Rock, have the first offer of the stream! Tell those that shed it, that there is redemption in my blood, even the forgiveness of their sins! If such was his concern for enemies, what says he to encourage those who had forsaken all to follow him? No wonder sorrow had filled their hearts. How *we* feel at the loss of a dear relation, or beloved friend, or useful minister! *They* were as lambs among wolves. They were left in a world that hated and persecuted them. What will they do for defence, counsel, and comfort, when their defender, and counsellor, and comforter is gone? Ye shall see me again, says he—I will not leave you comfortless—I will come to you—“Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. When you were on the lake, and a storm arose, and you seemed ready to perish, I awoke and rebuked the sea, and there was a great calm. When at another time, the wind was contrary, and you rowed in vain, till your strength failed, I came at the fourth watch of the night, and immediately the ship was at the land whither ye went. And when I sent you forth without purse, and scrip, and shoes, you had many anxieties and fears; but lacked ye any thing? In every want I will provide. The latest watch shall find me near. Every storm shall bring me in its bosom—Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”

But how could this be? Did they live always? Did they not all leave the world more than seventeen hundred years ago? He spake to them, not so much personally; as relatively and representatively. Had he intended themselves only, it would have been

enough to say, I am with you always, even to the end of life; but as he intended the Church whom he addressed in them, he says, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. There is nothing unusual in such a mode of address. Speaking as Englishmen, we say, things have been so and so with *us*, ever since the Reformation or Revolution. No river has the selfsame particles of water it had a year or an hour ago: yet because it flows in the same banks, and from the same sources, we always call it by the same name. The Church of Christ is one community, and the unity is not affected by the variety of parts, or succession of time. We look backward to the days of his flesh, and say, "*We beheld his glory:*" we look forward to his coming again, and say, "*We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.*"

There is a world, the Lord prepare us for it! that will never terminate: but "this present world" is not only seen, but temporal—It will have an "end;" and we know it. "We know not indeed when it shall take place; but we know that" the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." Then "time shall be no longer." But, O delightful assurance! we know that *till then*, Jesus will be—must be—with his people.

Yet how is the assurance to be understood? How can he be with them always, even to the end of the world? O, say they who only consult to cast him down from his excellency; by his word, and ordinances, and ministers. But he speaks of his own

presence: and he does not say, I *shall* be, but I *am* with you. Yet it could not be as to his bodily presence: for he said, “the poor ye have always with you; but me ye have not always.” “Now I am no more in the world.” And no more will he be corporeally in the world, till he shall appear a second time without sin unto salvation. It is impossible to explain these things consistently, without the admission of his divinity. It is absurd to suppose that a mere creature could be always with millions of persons at the same time. A man, an angel, cannot be in two places at the same moment.

Yet, even allowing his divinity, some distinction is necessary. His omnipresence is an essential attribute by which he fills heaven and earth, and thus he is as near to the wicked as to the righteous. When his presence is spoken of in a way of privilege, it must be distinguished from a perfection of his nature, and refer to the agency of his grace, or the influence of his Spirit. So he had explained himself to his disciples: “I will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever: even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”

Let us realize this promise as the promise of One that cannot lie. And while it fills us with wonder and admiration, and induces us to exclaim, “Will God in very deed dwell with man upon the earth?” let it induce us to seek the blessedness of a union with his people, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you. And if we have reason to hope that we are in the number of his followers, let the promise establish our hearts with

regard to the security of his Church, and the permanency and success of his cause. Let it animate us in every duty. Let it be a source of consolation in every trial. Are we reduced in circumstances? deserted? bereaved? looking into the valley of the shadow of death? Let us hear him saying, "Fear not; for I am with thee." And may we be enabled to answer—

"If THOU, my Jesus, still art nigh,
Cheerful I live, and cheerful die:
Secure, when mortal comforts flee,
To find ten thousand worlds in THEE."

FEBRUARY 24.—MORNING.

"They shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land."—ZECH. ix. 16.

HERE we see the dignity of the Lord's people. They are "stones," precious stones, set in the "crown" of the King of kings. For such is the infinite goodness of God, that he not only spares, but pardons and justifies them. In his righteousness they are exalted. They are not only saved, but ennobled. "With kings are they upon the throne. They are, naturally, in a low estate, and are viler than the earth; but he raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill. And though the world knoweth them not, and they are little and low in their own eyes, and it doth not yet appear what they shall be, yet now are they the sons of God; and since they have been precious in his sight, they have been honourable; and he calls them his jewels, and a peculiar treasure unto him. And

all those who in his light see light view them in the same way. They remember the time when they began to honour them that fear the Lord; when they took hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew; when they prayed to see the good of his chosen. Then they seemed to regard them as more than human beings; and while, above all things, they desired communion with them, they felt unworthy of their presence and notice. And though, since then, they have found that they are not already perfect, yet they know that they are the excellent of the earth, and that they are more excellent than their neighbours. There is often more real virtue in their failings than in the very devotions of others: “the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim is better than the vintage of Abi-ezer.”

Here is also their exhibition—these stones of a crown are “lifted up.” They are not to be concealed. Our Saviour compares them to a city set, not in a valley, but on a hill which cannot be hid; and to a candle placed, not under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house. And when he calls them by his grace, he says to the “prisoners,” “Go forth; and to them that are in darkness. Shew yourselves: they shall feed in the *ways*, and their pasture shall be on all *high* places.” Christians need not be concealed: every thing in their religion will bear examination, and challenges the eye of all, whether infidels, philosophers, politicians, or moralists. They ought not to be concealed: every thing in their religion is adapted to do good; but for this purpose it must be known. They cannot be concealed: their principles must operate: the sun cannot shine without shewing itself.

Here is also their utility—these stones of a crown are to be lifted up “as an ensign upon his land.” An oriflamme suspended over the royal tent; and designed to attract and aggregate followers to the cause in which he is engaged. Thus the Saviour himself is spoken of: “In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.” But what Christ is, Christians are, subordinately indeed, yet really. Hence their calling, to hold forth the word of life. They are placed and displayed, to reprove, and convince, and excite, and encourage others to seek and serve God. They are witnesses for him. They are trophies of the power, and greatness, and riches of his grace. They proclaim what he is able and willing to do. And, saved by him, they are all employed for him; and, whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they do all to the glory of God.

FEBRUARY 24.—EVENING.

“And he said, It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.”—I SAM. iii. 18.

ELI had many failings; but his behaviour on this occasion does him honour. Samuel had feared to shew him the vision. But though Eli foreboded that it was against him, he adjured the young Levite to “hide nothing” from him. This was well. But it was better still when having heard “every whit,” he exclaimed, “It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.”

We need not push this resignation to every extent. Eli considers the message as a temporal judgment,

designed to degrade his family from the priesthood, but not as necessarily consigning them all to endless perdition. Some of the mystics have carried the principle of submission so far as even to include their future destruction; and have said, "If thou send me to hell, I shall continue to praise and love thee." The thing is impossible. It is not in our power to love a being that would, without compensation or hope, make us miserable. By the law of our nature we are bound to pursue our welfare and happiness: and our resignation to be lost for ever, if it were a possible feeling, would oppose the revealed pleasure of the Almighty, "who will have all men to be saved," and "commands us to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ." Neither should we suppose that the state of Eli's mind at this time excluded sensibility. A man of his tenderness must have felt—and he ought to have felt—and he could have exercised no resignation without feeling. Our Saviour himself said, "Now is my soul troubled;" and he prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" and so may you, consistently with the most perfect submission, if you can add, as he did; "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

But Eli humbles himself under the mighty hand of God without murmuring and complaining. He does not accuse him of injustice or severity, but meekly accepts the dispensation—"It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." Two things contributed to this. First, a sense of his guilt. He had connived at the conduct of his son, and thereby had dishonoured religion, and offended God. This he felt, and therefore said, "why should a living man complain; a man for the punishment of his sin?"

“I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him.” Let the afflicted compare their sufferings with their sins, and they will see that they have no right to repine: God has punished them less than their iniquities deserve. Secondly, a recognition of Divine agency. Natural men live without God in the world. They do not perceive and acknowledge him in their successes and comforts, but sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their own

drag. And so in their disappointments and trials they exclaim, “It was that unfortunate event; it was that unlucky servant; it was that malicious neighbour; it was that perfidious friend.”—But Eli says, “It is the Lord,” and therefore “let *him* do what seemeth him good.” A man like-minded with Eli does not stop at second causes, or think only of instruments. Instruments may inflict the injury, and we are not required to justify them in their conduct; but they could have no power against us unless it were given them from above. David did not excuse the malice and profaneness of Shimei, when he said, “Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him.” But he saw the providence of God in the permission and concurrence of the event. And is there an evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it? Does not he make darkness as well as create light? Does not he wound as well as heal? And what can tend more to produce submission to his will than the sight of his hand? Therefore David said, “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, *because thou didst it*”—“It is the Lord;” whose power is almighty, and who cannot be resisted. “It is the Lord;” who has a sovereign propriety in us, and may do what he will with his own. “It is the Lord;” who is righteous in all his

works—shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? “It is the Lord;” whose understanding is infinite, and whose wisdom is unerring. “It is the Lord;” whose mercy endureth for ever; who does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; who loves while he chastens, and chastens because he loves; who will be with us in trouble, to sustain, deliver, and sanctify us; and make all things work together for our good—The cup which *my Father* giveth me, shall I not drink it?—“Let Hur do what seemeth him good.”

FEBRUARY 25.—MORNING.

“Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nercus, and his sister, and Olympas, Itnd all the saints which are with them.”

—ROM. xvi. 15.

ADMITTING that the Bible be the word of God, we might have inferred, from his wisdom and goodness, that no part of it can be useless. But we are expressly assured, that “all Scripture *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Therefore this long postscript, this catalogue of particular salutations, has its uses.

It certainly shews us the principle that actuated the first Christians—all men were to know that they were the disciples of Christ by their loving one another.

It shews, also, how mistaken they are who think the New Testament does not sanction private friendship.

It also proves how impossible it was to forge this Epistle: abounding as it does with so many specific allusions: for these not only render detection pos-

sible, but easy. Hence Paley much avails himself of this chapter in his *Horre Paulinæ*—a work of uncommon excellence; and which deals only in the argument derivable from *incidental* evidence.

—Neither is it improper to observe from it, the error of Popery. Papists say, that Peter was the bishop of Rome. But, had he been there, is it credible for a moment that he would have been overlooked by our Apostle? The probability indeed is, that he never was there. There is no evidence of it in the Scripture: and we know for what purposes of delusion it has been pretended—the Roman succession of Bishops from him.

—But who can help observing how many females are mentioned here? Phebe. Priscilla. Mary. Junia. Tryphena. Tryphosa. Persis. The mother of Rufus. Julia. The sister of Nereus.—All these, with the exception of two, are not only mentioned, but commended: and these two would not have been saluted by name, unless they had been persons of religious excellence; for Paul valued no other qualities compared with this. But all the rest of these worthies have ascribed to them some attainment or service “in the Lord.”

Let not, therefore, females suppose that they are cut off from usefulness; and usefulness, even in the cause of Christ. The most eminent servants of God have acknowledged their obligations to them; and ascribed no little of their success to their care and kindness. The public ministry is not indeed open to them; neither is the army or navy, or the senate: and good sense will acquiesce in the distinctions and determinations of Heaven, especially when it is seen, that they are not founded on any principle of degra-

dation, but in the obvious proprieties of life. If they have not authority, they have influence, which is far better, and more deeply effective. Servants have blessed God for pious mistresses. Children have been prepared for the preaching of the word, and the devotion of the sanctuary, by the earlier, but important efforts of a mother. How much does even the religious public owe to the mothers of Newton and Cecil: and a thousand more; from whom the churches have derived such able ministers! To Hannah we owe a Samuel; and to Lois and Eunice, his mother and grandmother, we owe a Timothy.

They are at home in almsdeeds, like Dorcas, who made garments for the poor; and are peculiarly adapted to visit the sick and the afflicted. The wife may win the irreligious husband without the word: and fan his devotion, and give speed to his zeal, when he is in the way everlasting. Who would keep them from those public meetings where feelings are to be excited, which they will be sure to carry away, and improve at home. In a word, women have the finest heads, and hearts, and hands, and tongues, for usefulness, in the world. Who does not wish to see them always under a religious principle? Who would not have them, *appropriately*, more encouraged and employed as workers together with the servants of Christ? "Help," therefore says the Aposle, "those women that laboured with me in the Gospel, whose names are in the book of life."

FEBRUARY 25.—EVENING.

“Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord.”—I SAM. xxi. 7.

THIS fact is not without its usefulness. It shews us that, in Divine worship, we appear *before God*. We are indeed always in his view; and should continually impress our minds with Hagar’s conviction, Thou God seest me. But he is in some places as he is not in others: and a peculiar presence of God belongs to the sanctuary. David believed this; and therefore, longing for the ordinances of his house, he exclaims, “When shall I come and appear before God!” And surely Christians have not less reason than Jews to expect the special presence of God in their assemblies. Has he not said, “In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee; and I will bless thee?” The tokens of his presence are less sensible under the Christian, than under the Jewish dispensation; but they are no less real. They saw the cloud of glory, and heard the answers from the mercy-seat. And we see the beauty of the Lord, and inquire in his temple, and hear what he says concerning us. How often has he been found there, in his converting power, in his enlivening grace, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost! How often has he been known in his palaces for a refuge!

Again. We see that persons may attend the means of grace, not from inclination, but constraint, What brought Doeg to the tabernacle at this time,—whether it was to purify himself from some uncleanness, to perform a vow, or for any other purpose, we cannot determine: but he would rather have been elsewhere. He was not doing his own business, nor finding his

own pleasure there—he was not at home there—not at ease there—He “was *detained* before the Lord”—as a bird is detained in a cage from the liberty he loves; or as a man is detained by complaisance in a party he dislikes; or as a traveller is detained under a shed from the rain, but longing to be gone. There is no judging of men fairly, unless you observe them when they act freely. It is said of Peter and John, that “being let go, they went to their own company.” Unless he goes out of the world, the Christian must mix with others: but they are not his companions: he is a companion of all them that fear God; in them is all his delight. He does business with others, but he takes hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew; saying, I will go with you, for I have heard that God is with you. On the other hand, many things short of disposition may detain persons in their attendance on the means of grace, and but for which we should see them no more in the house of God.

Some are detained by reputation. Though we are not a country of Christians, we are a Christian country; and though few feel the power, all comparatively respect the forms of godliness; and to abandon these, would excite remark and censure, even among the worldly and indifferent. Some also are influenced by their connections: children by the authority of their parents; servants by the requisition of their masters; husbands by the importunity of their wives. Some, and this I fear is frequently the case in the upper ranks, are attendants for the sake of example; and to sanction the thing in the eyes of the common people, who *do* want religion, and cannot *well* be managed without it. Some are urged by the uneasiness of their minds, arising from conviction and fear.

They feel no concern to please God, and have no desire to hold communion with him; but they want an opiate to allay the wakefulness of conscience. Some are attracted by a kind of entertainment which they find in the psalmody of the place, or the eloquence of the preacher. This was the case with Ezekiel's hearers: "Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not." If the Sabbath to some be not an irksome day, it is because they divert it from its sacred purposes—otherwise they would exclaim, What a weariness it is to serve the Lord! when will the Sabbath be gone? Yea, so irksome are religious exercises to some, that they feel perhaps more of the carnal mind that is enmity against God in their devotions, than in any other engagements; because they are irritated by restraint.

Let us bring home this matter to ourselves. We attend, and perhaps have long attended the services of the sanctuary. But let us ask, from what principle or motive? Is it to obey God? Is it to seek his face? Is it to obtain the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ? A Christian can say, "It is good for me to draw near to God," "I have loved the habitation of thy house." "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand." We have no piety unless we regard religious duties as religious privileges; and are able to say, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me."

We are too prone to err in judging of persons by their presence in our holy assemblies. It is a positive proof against a man if he neglects them: but his attendance is not a decisive evidence in his favour.

Solomon saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy. And many a one, unless deprived of reason and reflection, will at a dying hour exclaim, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly." Thus Doeg, while remaining demurely in the Divine presence, instead of minding his devotion, was observing the intercourse between David and Ahimelech, doing mischief, and determining by lies to achieve murder! Lord, what is man!

FEBRUARY 26.—MORNING.

"When he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it."—LUKE xix. 41.

AN ordinary mind would have been engrossed and elated by the actions and acclamations of the multitude, who cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way; and spread their garments on the ground for him to ride upon; and filled the air with Hosannas, crying, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord! But he wept—wept at the sight of Jerusalem, whose visitation was now closing, and whose judgment was hastening on—saying, "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! but now are they hid from thine eyes."

Surely these tears teach us, that there is nothing degrading in sensibility. Indeed, all true greatness is tender and sympathetic. Jonathan and David,

the heroes of the age, one of whom had slain a whole garrison, and the other Goliath, both wept, till each exceeded. Homer, that exquisite painter of Nature, considers Ulysses as excelling all men in wisdom, yet represents him as weeping three times in six lines. He describes Achilles, too, so extraordinary in courage, as weeping often and plentifully. Let not, therefore, the unfeeling pride themselves, as superior in fortitude and philosophy. Feeling is the noblest distinction and ornament of humanity: and in proportion as we lose it, we cease to be men. There is a moral ossification of the heart, as well as a physical; and the one is as pitiable as the other. He who was fairer than the children of men, was often known to weep.

As these tears were honourable, so they are exemplary. For whom did he shed them? The inhabitants of Jerusalem, who, after every kind of insult, were going to put him to death. At the grave of Lazarus he wept for friends; here, for adversaries. And does he not, by this, tell us to be tenderhearted? To weep with them that weep? That we should bewail the miseries of others? And not confine our compassion to our own connections, but love our enemies, bless them that curse us, and do good to them that persecute us? And does he not enforce this, not only by precept, but example? And can we be his disciples, unless we follow him? "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself so to walk even as he walked!" "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

These tears are encouraging. Tears are generally considered proofs of concern. Human tears, indeed, it will be allowed, are not infallible tokens; but the

tears of Christ may be safely trusted. They shew his compassion; the sincerity, the greatness, of his compassion. They tell us, that his love passeth knowledge; and, therefore, they call upon us to repair to him, assured that he is not willing that any should perish; and that he has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.

Finally, they are awful and foreboding; admonishing us of the dreadfulness of their doom on whose behalf they are shed. It is affecting to see a man weep, and especially a great man. You would naturally suppose that something vast and momentous was necessary, to move to tears such mighty minds as those of a Bacon or a Newton. And could a trifle move the Son of God to weep? And if the temporal calamities coming on the Jews affected him, how much more would their eternal perdition! What were the Roman eagles, compared with the wrath to come? Oh, these tears say, plain enough, "There is something divinely, infinitely pitiable in the loss of a soul! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! Who knoweth the power of his anger?"

May we not fairly infer from hence, what his feeling is in the recovery of a sinner? If he weeps over those who are ready to perish, surely he will rejoice over those that are saved. "He will rejoice over them with joy; he will rest in his love; he will rejoice over them with singing."

FEBRUARY 25.—EVENING.

“Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.”—PSALM lxxiii. 7.

MAN is called a rational creature; but he deserves the character for the possession of reason, rather than the exercise of it. He has powers; but his depravity leads to the neglect or perversion of them. Thus he is able to reflect, and to anticipate; but, governed by things only present to his senses, he never regards the past and the future, unless in connection with the body and the life that now is. *There* indeed he often displays a prudence that forms a lamentable contrast with his indifference and inattention in the concerns of the soul and eternity. *There* he rises early, sits up late, compasses sea and land, and recalls all his former miscarriages or successes for his after use and improvement. But how foolish is he, and ignorant, and like a beast before God, in things that accompany salvation! It is otherwise with the follower of Jesus. He is renewed in the spirit of his mind. He regards religion as the one thing needful, and never imagines himself prospering unless his soul prospers. His reason is enlarged and directed by faith. He thinks for moral and spiritual purposes of the past and the future—he looks backward with humiliation and gratitude, and—forward with prayer and hope. Therefore David said, “Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.” Let us make his words our own.

Let us make his acknowledgment our own—“Thou hast been my help.” In what have we not required his succour, and in what have we not expe-

rienced it? Has he not helped us in our temporal exigencies? and yet more in our spiritual concerns? Has he not seasonably and constantly helped us in our *duties*? We have had much to do; our work has been the most serious, important, and difficult; and we have had no sufficiency of ourselves. But the Lord we serve is not an Egyptian task-master, enjoining us to make brick without straw. His grace has been sufficient for us. His Spirit has helped our infirmities; and he has worked in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. Has he not helped us in our *sufferings*? We have not only had much to do, but also to bear. Our personal and relative trials have been many and various; and the bitterness of some of them, the heart only has known. But how true are the words of the sweet Psalmist of our Israel!

“Our sorrows and our griefs we pour
 Into the bosom of our God:
 He hears us in the mournful hour,
 And helps us bear the heavy load.”

We have found him a very present help in trouble. He has afforded us support, so that we have not sunk in the day of adversity, and been swallowed up of overmuch sorrow. He has commanded for us deliverances, and sometimes in cases in which we were troubled on every side, and could see no way of escape. He has also saved us from the sins of the condition; enabled us to glorify the Lord in the fires; taught us to learn obedience by the things we suffer, and to gather from our chastenings the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

Let us make his resolution our own—“In the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.” God has no

wings: but he has perfections. He has wisdom, power, goodness, and truth. He has made with us an everlasting covenant. He has given us exceeding great and precious promises. His providence performeth all things for us. The allusion is to a bird. The hen has wings, and gathers her chickens under them from harm when the hawk hovers near and the storm approaches, and the night comes on. The image seems low when applied to God: but every figure falls infinitely short of his glory. Yet they have their use, and aid the understanding, the impression, and remembrance of Divine truth. And the wings afford not only concealment and defence, but a warm, soft, pleasing, and delightful retreat; and the feathered mother loves to cover her infant brood, and feel them at her side. So God saves his people: and rejoices over them with joy, and rests in his love: so they rejoice under the shadow of his wings.

A situation is nothing unless we make use of it. The security results from our application of the advantage; and David was aware of this, and therefore cries, "I flee unto thee to hide me." Hence says Solomon, "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe." And, by rejoicing under the shadow of God's wings, he can intend nothing less than his having recourse to it—But he includes much more—That he would repair to it from choice, and realise it with thankfulness, and use it with complacency and exultation. It is what he enjoins upon others when he says, "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." It is what the Church resolves to do when she exclaims, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful

in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

Let us make his reasoning our own; and derive, as he did, confidence from experience—"Because thou *hast* been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings *will* I rejoice." It is needless to observe how frequently this mode of arguing and acting is exemplified in the Scriptures. And what can more naturally tend to encourage us in the Lord our God than the proofs we have had of his power, faithfulness, mercy, and grace? The fisherman is the more inclined to repair to the place where he has been successful. The beggar feels no excitement to revisit the door where he was insulted or repulsed; but he hastens to the house where he has always met with kindness and relief. He may indeed feel some hesitation arising from the thought that he has frequently been there before. But the oftener we come to God; the more welcome we are. The beggar too, when after an absence he applies again, may find a change in the benefactor as to his disposition, or even his ability. But the Lord changeth not. What he has been, he is, and will be for ever. His hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear. And one of the designs of God in his kindness towards us is, not only by his benefits to relieve our present wants, but to excite our future applications and embolden our future hope.

If we have *never* addressed God, we are authorized to do it: yet our encouragement in our first approach must be derived only from faith. But some have

believed, and have now the witness in themselves. They have made the trial. They go to a known God—and they that know his name will put their trust in him. Nothing is more becoming a Christian than a lively, cheerful confidence. And in order to maintain and increase it, we shall do well to consider not only God's word, but his works; and to remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. "For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

FEBRUARY 27.—MORNING.

"Increasing in the knowledge of God."—COL. i. 10.

DOES this mean, the knowledge of which God is the author, or the knowledge of which he is the subject? In reality, this is the same thing. The Gospel contains the knowledge which God has communicated to the children of men; and this principally discovers *himself*; so that it is at once a revelation *from* God, and a revelation *of* him. All his works, the largest and the least, praise him. If we take up the telescope, or the microscope, we soon find reason alike to exclaim, "This is the finger of God."—But we take up the Gospel, and say, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Here we look into his very heart, and see that it is the dwelling-place of pity. Here we know the thoughts he thinks towards us, and find that they are thoughts of peace, and not of evil.

With regard to this knowledge, we may make out four classes.

—Some are *destitute of this knowledge* of God. Some! There are at present more than five hundred millions lying in darkness, and the shadow of death! These have never heard of the Name of Jesus, and know not that there is such a Being in the universe. Yet Christians have it in their power to inform them; and a few are exerting themselves. Prosper, O God, their endeavours. Let thy way be known on earth, thy saving health among all nations.

—Some *reject it*. This is one of the things we should deem incredible; but we have undeniable, as well as mortifying evidence of the fact. How many refuse to hear! How many never read the word of God! Others even sneer at its inspiration, and ridicule its contents? Whatever difficulties may attend the doom of the former class, justice admits of none with regard to the second—“How can we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”

Some *hold it in unrighteousness*. They profess to know God; but in works deny him. Not a few of these have clear views of the way of salvation, and even contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. The Gospel seems to have taught them every thing, except to deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow the Saviour in the regeneration. They would be offended to be placed near the former class. “We are not un-believers.” No—you have denied the faith, and are—“worse than an infidel.”

—Some *receive it in the love and the influence of it*. Their faith is not a notion: their worship is not formality: their hope is not delusion. They live in

the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit. Though these are still comparatively few, yet, blessed be God, their number is daily and greatly enlarging; and the Lord add to his people, how many soever they be, a hundred-fold!

Art thou, my reader, one of them? Remember four things.

That thou hast *any* of this knowledge—should make thee thankful.

That thou hast *so little*—should make thee humble. That more is *attainable*—should encourage thy hope.

That it is attainable only in the *use of means*—should awaken thy diligence.

Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

FEBRUARY 27.—EVENING.

“Behold, we count them happy which endure.”—JAMES V. II.

THIS seems a strange judgment; and we may ask, Who are they that draw such a conclusion?

There is a sense in which men in general make this estimate. They commonly admire those that suffer well; and are struck with instances of prudence in difficulties, and magnanimity in dangers; calmness in a storm, and firmness under an operation. There is a tameness in the character of one who has always sat in the lap of ease and indulgence. The most striking and interesting materials for biography are derived from those sudden changes and painful occurrences which tried, discovered, and improved the sufferers who had to encounter them.

Yea, men, even natural men, have often admired

those who have endured for the sake of religion. For it has been the strange lot of many of God's people to be hated and persecuted while living, and to be praised and extolled when dead. Thus the Scribes and Pharisees painted and garnished the tombs of the prophets their forefathers had slain, at the very time they wished to crucify the only begotten Son of God. And thus many now talk highly of the noble army of martyrs, who revile some of their fellow-creatures for displaying a little of the same spirit by which they were actuated. Deceased saints are beyond our envy. They are no longer seen or heard. They no longer reproach us by their conversation and temper; no longer incommode us by disturbing us when we wish to sleep, or by flashing upon us truths of which we are willingly ignorant.

We should therefore inquire, not what we think of dead saints, but how we feel towards living ones. These are scoffed at by many: are they with us more excellent than their neighbours? Is all our delight in them? Are they our brethren and companions? "Everyone that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him."

The Apostle however attests here, not the judgment of men, but of believers. These differ widely from each other in their sentiments with regard to a thousand subjects—especially misery and happiness. Men call the proud happy: but God resisteth the proud. Men bless the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth. Men are afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; but God tells us a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth. And faith confers not with flesh and blood. It does not estimate things

by time, but eternity. It does not view them through the reports of sense, but through the decisions of unerring wisdom; and echoes back the testimony of God; "Blessed are the poor in spirit—Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness—Blessed are they that mourn—If ye suffer for the sake of Christ, happy are ye."

When we believe the principle from which their afflictions are sent; the designs they are to accomplish; the evils they prevent; the peaceable fruits of righteousness they yield; the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory they work out; and even the supports and consolations enjoyed under them: we shall feel little difficulty in the decision—"Happy is the man," not who escapes the rod, but "whom the Lord correcteth." Therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Lord. Nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.

FEBRUARY 28.—MORNING.

"Having loved his own which were in the world, he roved them unto the end."—JOHN xiii. 1.

THESE words refer immediately to the twelve disciples of our Lord. But what said he in his intercessory prayer? "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." And what part of the statement before us will not extend beyond his first followers?

Is it the *relation*? They are called "His own"—and they were indeed his own, by extraordinary office; but they were far more importantly his own,

by saving grace. And thus he has a propriety in all Christians. If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed. They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh. He has a peculiar right to them, from covenant donation, and the execution of his trust. They were given him as so many sheep to feed; as so many scholars to teach; as so many patients to heal; as so many captives to redeem. They are, therefore, not their own, but bought with a price: and the ransom was no less than his own blood. The connection between Him and them is so intimate and entire, that they are called his heritage, his children, his bride; the members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones: yea, they are joined to the Lord, and of one spirit with him.

Is it the *condition*? They "were in the world." He was leaving it, and they were to be left in it: and, from what it had been to him, they could judge what it would be to them: according to his own intimation, "The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." They found themselves, therefore, as lilies among thorns; as sheep among wolves. And he prayed not to have them taken out of the world, but only kept from the evil. And thus it is with his people now. They are in the world; and this is their field of action; and this is their sphere of duty and trial for a season. There they are to serve their generation; there they are to glorify God, by doing and suffering his will. The world has advanced much in science and civilization; but it retains the same disposition towards real godliness as formerly: and is more perilous in its smiles than in its frowns; in its treacherous embraces than in its avowed hostili-

ties. But if you are "His own," while you are "in the world," you will not be of it; and He, whose you are, will not only keep you from falling, but render you useful in it, and bring you honourably out of it—Be of good cheer, says He, I have overcome the world.

Is it the *reality of his regard*? "*He had loved his own which were in the world.*" What other principle could have actuated Him in selecting them? Calling them? Informing them? Employing them? Adopting them? Honouring them? Blessing them with his constant intimacy? They had not chosen him, but he had chosen them, and ordained them, that they should go and bring forth fruit. He treated them not as servants, but as friends; and all things that he had heard of the Father he made known unto them. He could say, As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you. And is not this true of all his people? Who said, Deliver them from going down into the pit? Who bore their sins in his own body on the tree? Who shut the mouth of hell? Who opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers?—O Christian, who sought thee? And who saved thee? Whatever you are, whatever you have, is the effect of the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge.

Is it the *permanency of this affection*? *Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.* They tried him, and proved themselves very unworthy of his continued attachment. Yet he bore with their dulness and imperfections. He chided and reprov'd them indeed; but this was not only compatible with his constancy, but resulted from it: for as many as he loves he rebukes and chastens: and faithful are the wounds of this Friend.

And now we see him at the last, all alive to their welfare; teaching and comforting them; washing their feet, and praying for them. In the garden, when he found them sleeping, he extenuated the infirmity—The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Whell he surrendered himself to his enemies, he stipulated for their exemption—Let these go their way. He died with them in his heart. He rose, and appared to them; and, though they had all forsaken him and fled, in the hour of trial, he said, Be not afraid, Peace be to you. He laid his hands upon them, and, while he blessed them, he was taken up into heaven. And did he forget them then? He sent them another Comforter that should abide with them for ever. And was this peculiar to them? He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He rests in his love. He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. A true friend loveth at all times. There arc indeed few such friends to be found. But he abideth faithful. Job's brethren proved like a summer's brook. One told David, in his distress, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. At my first answer, no one, says Paul, stood by me, but all men forsook me: but he adds, nevertheless the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me. So will it be with all those who trust in him: "They shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end."

FEBRUARY 28.—EVENING.

"Ye have heard of the patience of Job."—JAMES V. II.

THERE was therefore really such a man to be heard of; and the book that bears his name is therefore not a parabolical representation, but a true history. Eze-

kiel mentions him more than once, with Noah and Daniel. *They* were real characters; and would Job have been specified with them had he been a fictitious one? Noah and Daniel, and a metaphor! James also associates him as an example with the prophets, who were not imaginary, but real beings.

But how came we to hear of this man at all, seeing he lived more than two thousand miles off, and more than four thousand years ago? "He was the greatest man in the east." But his estate would never have been noticed, had he possessed nothing else: a man is nothing the more to God for the number of his sheep and oxen. "The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy." But he was as good as he was great; and his accuser was told that he was "a perfect and an upright man." Yet we should have known nothing of his moral and spiritual worth but for his afflictions. His calamities were his trial, and his triumph: these have filled the earth with his renown. Many names in the book of martyrs would have perished in oblivion but for the sufferings that raised and immortalized them. The servants of God are never so remarked, so impressive, so useful, as when they are called forth by trouble to be his witnesses, and to glorify him in the fires: and little do they frequently imagine what personal and relative, what public and remote consequences may result from their enduring. What would Joseph have been, what would he have done, but for the persecutions and hardships through which he rose to eminence, influence, and fame? And thus you have heard of the patience of Job—

—Not his *insensibility*. Patience is not stoicism. There is no patience in a stone; there is no virtue in

bearing what we do not feel. Job is never senseless under his woes. When he said, "My friends scorn me," he adds, "but mine eye poureth out tears unto God." With what earnestness does he call for commiseration! "Pity me, pity me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me." And when he heard of all the evil that had come upon him, "he rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell upon the ground, and worshipped." You have heard of the patience of Job—

—Not his *impatience*. And yet he cursed the day of his birth, and prayed for death, and said, I loathe it, I would not live always. O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave! There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary are at rest.

But not a word of this is here mentioned. No. He had repented of it, and it had been forgiven him: and the sins and iniquities of his people God remembers no more. No. It was not the display of his habitual disposition; but a partial and temporary emotion, issuing not from his principles, but opposing them. And does not this omission of his fault by an Apostle teach us—That a man is to be judged of by his general character and conduct?—That we should be peculiarly lenient towards a person in great sufferings; when, by the violence of the storm, reason and religion for a moment may be upset; and, in the anarchy, nature involuntarily utters things which grace will afterwards be sure to condemn?—Yea, that we should *always* speak of our brethren with candour and kindness. The wicked watch only for their halting: they would make them offenders for a word; they overlook a thousand good things, and

greedily seize upon a single failing, and magnify this into a crime—But charity covereth a multitude of sins. It will allow and require us indeed to be severe towards ourselves; but it will induce us to make the best of things in others, not only because from our infirmities we may need the same tenderness, but that we may be followers of the God of all grace. Yes,

You *leave* heard of his *patience*; and you have been accustomed from your infancy to consider him as the most patient of all men. And this is just, if his patience is to be estimatcd, as it ought to be, by his sufferings. Miseries of *every* kind fell upon him—and they fell upon *all* his comforts. They fell upon his estate—and deprived him of all his substance: upon his family—and his servants were slain; and all his children were crushed to death; and his wife urged him to curse God and die; and his friends mistook his case, and reproached him with hypocrisy and wickedness: upon his body—and he had no ease from pain; was covered with sore boils from head to foot, so that he said, "I am made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. "When I lie down, I say, Where shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome." All this came upon him at once—and it was all enhanced by his previous condition: for he had seen better days: he had been indulged by every kind and degree of prosperity; and he presumed he should "die in his nest,"—vain hope! How well could he say, "My complaint is bitter; my stroke is heavier than my

groaning.” “I was not in safety—neither had I rest—neither was I quiet—yet trouble came.” And, Yet, “in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” Yet he said, “the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Yet he said, “what! shall we receive good at the Lord’s hand, and shall we not receive evil?” Yet he said, “though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”

But by nature he could not have thus endured. And we here see what the grace of God can effect. Let us remember that he is called “the God of patience”—and not only because he requires it; but because he produces it, sustains it, perfects it. With him is the residue of the Spirit. Look to him; repair to him, ye sufferers. Honour him not only by your application, but by your confidence. Despair! YOU HAVE HEARD OF THE PATIENCE OF JOB.

MARCH I.—MORNING.

“And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee.”—NUMB. x. 32.

WHILE this invitation is founded in benevolence, it also displays humility. Christians are convinced, that *they* can only give according as they have received. But, from God’s communications to them, they know that they *can* be useful, and that they *ought* to be useful, to others. They never receive grace for themselves only. If the glory of the Lord has risen upon them, they are to arise and shine. If they are converted, they are to strengthen their brethren. If they

are comforted, they are to comfort those who are in trouble. If they are rich in this world, they are to do good, and be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate—"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."—Hence says Moses to Hobab, "If thou go with us, what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee."

—And he repeats the assurance: "It shall be-yea, it shall be." And was it not so? Did he repent of his adhering to Israel? See what is said in Judges, and in Samuel, of his descendants. And was Obed-edom a loser by the ark? Did not the sacred Guest more than pay for its entertainment? "It was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God." Who is likely to be injured by casting in his lot with the followers of the Lamb? "Will his family suffer? Many a wretch has reduced his wife and children to penury and ruin by his vices; but every principle of a good man will lead him to provide for his own: and the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Will his substance? The play-house, the ale-house, the gaming-house, the house of her who lives in the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death, will injure a man much more than the house of God. "Will his health? Is *this* likely to be injured or benefited by temperance, and calm temper, and cheerful confidence, and benevolent feelings! Religion must befriend reputation, as it produces and guards all the elements from which it is derived; but the name of the wicked shall rot.

Therefore, come with us, and we will do you good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. We cannot promise you great things in the world; but the Lord will bless your bread and your water: and a little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked. We cannot promise you exemptions from affliction; but nothing shall befall you but what is common to man: and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way for your escape. We cannot secure you from privations and sacrifices; but we can promise, that you shall be more than indemnified for every thing you do, or lose, or suffer, for the cause of God. He will not be unrighteous, to forget your work of faith and labour of love. A cup of cold water, given to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall not lose its reward. "There is no man," saith the Saviour, "that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." We can assure you, that if you travel with us, you shall feed on the manna, and drink of the rock, and be guided by the cloud, and behold the glory of the Lord, in the wilderness: and then you shall share with us, beyond Jordan, in the land flowing with milk and honey. How blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven! who have peace with God! who are delivered from the sting of a guilty conscience, and the torment of fear! who walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost! who rejoice in hope! who know that death is their friend, and heaven their home! who have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting

life! “Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.”

Lord! I have often heard this invitation—I now accept it. I am a companion of them that fear Thee, and of them that keep thy precepts. “Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.”

MARCH I.—EVENING.

“Ephraim shall say. what have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir-tree. From me is thy fruit found.”—HOSEA xiv. 8.

THE announcement represents Ephraim in his return to God: and God in his reception of Ephraim.

In his return to God, Ephraim should say, “What have I to do any more with idols?” The language owns his former attachment, while it expresses his present aversion and rejection—“I have had too much to do with them. O how degrading and painful to look back on years of folly and of guilt! Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. O Lord, other lords besidethee have had dominion over me: henceforth by thee only will I make mention of thy name.”

This was very proper for *him*. But what is this to *us*? Are persons here chargeable with idolatry, even before conversion? Not indeed as to the grossness of the offence. When we consider idolatry literally, it would seem impossible that a rational being should bow down, not only to the sun, moon, and stars, but

to his fellow-creatures, to animals, to reptiles, to wood and stone, to the work of his own hands. Yet what says all history?—And not only were the heathens thus besotted, but the Jews also. Ephraim worshipped the calves. And if we advert to the refinement of these abominations, and pass from literal to spiritual idolatry, every man by nature is an idolater. What was the Fall but a defection from God? What is sin, but the transfer to the creature of the regard due to the Creator? And it matters not whether the rival and engrosser be a worm, or an angel. Whatever we fear or value more than God, is to us an idol. Thus we read of “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.” We read of some “who make gold their hope, and fine gold their confidence;” and of others “who make flesh their arm.” God alone can heal us; and yet we seek to the physician, and not to God. His blessing alone maketh rich; and yet we form our plans without him, and ascribe our successes to our own skill and care. He is the God of our salvation; and yet we depend on our own worthiness and strength, instead of saying, In the Lord I have righteousness and strength. “Little children,” says John, “keep yourselves from idols.” We may make idols of our relations, idols of our opinions, idols of our religious parties, idols of our ministers, idols of the means of grace—What is heaven? A state in which God is all in all. What is the effect of growing sanctification? Our waiting on God all the day. What is conversion? A turning away from the world to God, saying, “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee”—“It is good for all to draw near to God”—“What have I to do any more with idols?”

And observe the disposition of God towards the repenting Ephraim.

He observes the *workings of his heart*—"I have heard and observed him." This is to be restrained to the nature of the case. It is an awful reflection, that God is in every place: he hears and observes all his creatures. But much more is here intended than mere observation: it is observation accompanied with approbation and delight. Such a penitent is either disregarded or despised by the world. At best he is considered as the subject of a weak mind or a disordered imagination. But truth assures us that he is now coming to himself; that the angels rejoice over him; while God himself says, "to that man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

He *presents himself as his shelter and refreshment*—"I am like a green fir-tree." Is not this image below God. So is every comparison. Figures taken from the sublimest objects in nature come infinitely short of his glory. Yet such allusions are useful and necessary. In the east too, a fir-tree is far more than we see it here; beautiful in its appearance, growing to a great height, yielding a fragrant scent, spreading very widely, and affording a desirable retreat to the traveller. But a metaphor must not be pressed. The

import of it is often purely relative to some one thing rendered valuable by the present circumstances of the individual. Such is cold water to a thirsty soul. Such is a cloud in harvest. So the simple idea here is shade and perpetual verdure: the fir-tree being an evergreen, the same in summer and winter—Thus God is the same to the soul that trusts in him at all times and in all conditions; and if we should be raised above the influence of fear and trouble, we must sit beneath the shadow of the Almighty, and realize his perfections, presence, promises, and providence, as unchangeably concerned for our welfare. Creatures may all fail us; but he is the same. “My salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.”

He engages to produce in him *fertility*—“From me is thy fruit found.” This supplies a deficiency in the former image. A fir-tree, though always green and affording shade, yet yields no fruit: but the Lord affords repast as well as repose. These are united in the acknowledgment of the Church: “I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” This fruit is to be taken two ways. First, for the fruit they enjoy. What is this but all spiritual blessings; pardon, peace, the comforts of the Holy Ghost, the foretastes of heaven? This is the believer’s fruit, because he is the possessor of it: but in me, says the Lord, it is found as the source and giver. Let us seek it alone in him. Paradise had nothing like it. Secondly, for the fruit they bear. This includes their graces, duties, and good works. To these our Saviour refers when he says, “Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit.” This is ours because we are the subjects of

it; but he is the author. We receive the influences, but he imparts them. We exercise the principles, but he produces them. We render the obedience, but he inclines and enables us. We repent and believe, but the repentance and the faith are his gifts. We work out our salvation, but he works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. They are therefore called "the fruit of the Spirit:" and "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God"—FROM ME IS THY FRUIT FOUND."

MARCH 2.—MORNING.

"*But Peter followed him afar off.*"—MATT. xxvi. 58.

THIS, too, was better than forsaking him, and fleeing, as the rest did. Here was the working of some degree of principle. Here was some love to the Saviour, or he would not have followed him at all. It was the lingering of that affection which may be seemingly smothered in the Christian, but can never be extinguished; and will soon be blown again into a flame.

But he was overcome by fear. His Lord was apprehended, and going to be tried and crucified. What if I, said Peter, should be found in the same doom! The fear of man bringeth a snare. Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life.

Yet this was very unbelieving in him. He had seen his Lord's miracles, and knew what he could do. He knew that he had actually stipulated for their release in the garden, as the condition of his own surrender. He knew that he had assured them,

that, after he was risen from the dead, he would appear to them, and employ them as his witnesses; which involved their preservation. What a difference between Peter and Paul—Paul, who said, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy.” And between Peter and Luther—Luther, who, when informed of his dangers, said, If there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles upon the roofs of the houses, I would go. But Peter followed him afar off!

This was also very ungrateful. The Saviour had done much for him. He had healed, by a miracle, his wife’s mother—He had called him to the Apostleship, the highest honour on earth—He had singularly distinguished him with James and John on several occasions—He had saved him by his grace, and enlightened him from above, and—was now going to suffer and die for him. And a friend is born for adversity. Then, instead of keeping at a distance from us, we look for his attendance and sympathy. Peter could have unequivocally testified in favour of suffering innocence; but he hangs off! And Patience itself complains, “I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none!”

All this, too, was in violation of his own profession and vows—that he was willing to follow him to prison and to death—that he would die with him rather than deny him—and all this had scarcely left his lips—and was uttered just after our Saviour had so solemnly forewarned him. Yet Peter followed him afar off.

This led to something worse; and I wonder not at

the sequel. His after conduct, in denying him; and thrice; and swearing with oaths and curses; was only the continuance and the increase of his present reluctance. So it is: the way of error and sin is always down-hill; and, once in motion, who can tell where a man will stop? You follow him afar off this hour; the next you are ashamed of him. You trifle with the Sabbath to-day; to-morrow you profane it. You now endure evil company, you will soon choose it. So true is it—"They proceed from evil to evil."

And yet, who of us can cast a stone at him? Are not we verily guilty, as well as Peter? Let us see whether, though as yet we have not begun to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man, we have not been following him afar off. Here let us not depend upon the opinion of our fellow-creatures; we may stand fair with them: but what do they know of us? of our inward state? of our principles and motives? What says the *heart*? "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." Yet even on this testimony we must not absolutely rely—"God is greater than the heart, and knoweth all things." The Laodiceans were satisfied with themselves at the very time when He charged them with everyone of the evils from which they supposed themselves free. Has *He* not somewhat against us? May we not continue to read and hear his word, and keep our places in the sanctuary, and even at his table; and yet feel very little of that sacred fervour and delight that once accompanied our devotions? Attendance upon the Saviour in the means of grace is very distinguishable from spiritual worship. We may draw nigh to him with our mouth, and honour him with our lips, while the

heart is far from him. Does the *heart* lag behind? Then are we following him afar off.

His people are himself. He that receiveth them receiveth him: and what we do not to the least of all his brethren, we do not to him. In the distance of our regard to them; and especially in our backwardness to notice and relieve and visit the poor and afflicted; are we not following him afar off?

Above all, does not the evil appear in the remoteness of our resemblance? We are commanded to follow him; and our conformity to him is essential to all religion; and we may always judge of the degree, as well as the reality of our religion, by it. How far short of the model do we come! How distantly do we resemble that condescension, which washed the disciples' feet; that self-denial, which led him to please not himself; that fervour, which induced him to say, *The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*; that delight in obedience, which enabled him to acknowledge, *My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work—*

And thus, by our negligence and indifference, we grieve his Holy Spirit. And thus we rob our own souls. For he is all in all. He is the fountain of life; and it is good for us to draw *near* to him. But when we follow him afar off, we cannot see him; and hear him; and converse with him. And woe unto us if trouble befalls us, or the enemy meets with us—and he is most likely to do so then, or death assails us, when we are absent from him.

MARCH 2.—EVENING.

“*All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*”—2 COR. i. 20.

THERE is some difference between God’s purposes and promises. Both of them, so to speak, are gold: but the one, gold in the mine; the other, gold in the mint, impressed and prepared for currency and use. God could have blessed his people without previously announcing it, and bringing himself under an engagement; but in this case his design could not have been known, believed, expected, pleaded. But the promises give rise to a life of faith, and hope, and patience, and prayer.

Let me contemplate these promises in their relation to *Christ*—They “are *in* him.” All their contents are found in him: indeed he himself is the substance of the whole. In the Covenant of Grace he is the Covenantee; and the promises of it are made, not immediately with us, but with him, as our head, representative, and surety. He performed the awful condition on which they were all founded; and has ratified them by his own blood. He is also the pledge of their existence and accomplishment. They might seem too great to be believed were it not for *himself*, who is greater than any thing God has promised. But he *has* been given; and “he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” If the promises are in him, the way to possess and enjoy them all is to receive him—“He that hath the Son hath life.”

Let me also view them in their *certainty*—“All the promises of God in him are *yea*, and in him *Amen*.”

All the promises of Satan are falsehood. Human promises are not always truth. David indeed erred when he said, in his haste, All men are liars; yet too commonly “men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie.” But even Balaam could say, “The Lord is not a man that *he* should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent: hath *he* said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” Men fail in their promises through forgetfulness, or changeableness of mind, or inability of performance. But can *He* forget whose understanding is infinite? Can *he* change his purpose who is in one mind, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? Can any thing be too hard for the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth? Let us therefore honour God by our confidence. If we have a word from him, let it satisfy us, whatever difficulties oppose the accomplishment—these are for *him* to consider who has promised. Abraham, therefore, having received the Divine assurance, though there were improbabilities, and even natural impossibilities in the way, “staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.” Hence,

Let me observe them in their *design*—“To *the glory of God.*” God is glorified in them as they are all yea and amen; for nothing can be more honourable to God than the impossibility of impeaching his veracity. He is therefore called “the faithful God.” “His faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds;” and far beyond them—his “faithfulness is established in the very heavens;” and the fame of it there draws forth the acclamation, “Just and true are all thy ways, O thou king of saints!” But his wisdom and

power also are glorified in the time and manner of their accomplishment. Above all, how does not only the fulfilment but the donation of these promises display the exceeding riches of his grace! For what but the most undeserved favour and boundless mercy could have led him to remember us in our low estate, and, instead of threatening us with destruction, promise us eternal life and all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ!

Finally, let me remark the *instrumentality* of this design—"To the glory of God *by us*." By us as *ministers*—publishing, explaining, applying them. A promise is often like a box of ointment, very precious; but the fragrance does not fill the room till the preacher breaks it. Or it is like the water that was near Hagar which she saw not, till the angel of the Lord opens our eyes and shews us the well. By us *believers*—realizing the excellency and efficacy of them in our character and conduct. It is when these promises are reduced to experience—when they are seen cleansing us from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, making us partakers of the divine nature, leading us to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, filling us with kindness and benevolence, supporting us cheerfully under all our trials—it is then they glorify God *by us*.

How responsibly should they feel, and how carefully should they walk, who are entrusted with the honour of God in his word—which he magnifies above all his Name!

MARCH 3.—MORNING.

"Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar."—ROM. iii. 4.

BUT cannot God be true, and man be true also? Does the veracity of the one infer the falsehood of the other? Not absolutely; but in particular instances. There may be, and there often is, an opposition between their testimony: and when this is the case, we are not to hesitate a moment by whose claims we shall be decided—If the whole world was on one side, and He on the other—Let God be true, but every man a liar. And, comparatively, the credibility of the one, must always be nothing to that of the other. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. And this will appear undeniable from four admissions.

The first regards the ignorance of man, and the wisdom of God. Man is fallible. He not only may err, but he is likely to err. He may be deceived by outward appearances; by the reports of others; by his own reasonings. His powers are limited; his researches, in every direction, are soon checked; there are depths which he cannot fathom, heights which he cannot scale, complications which he cannot unravel. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. How much of it is mere opinion and conjecture! With what follies have the greatest minds been charged! Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolishness the wisdom of this world? But His understanding is infinite. He knows all things. He cannot be mistaken.

The second regards the mutability of man, and

the unchangeableness of God. Creatures, from their very being, are mutable. Many of the angels kept not their first estate. Adam fell from his original condition. Who needs to be told, that man never continues in one stay? New views gender new feelings, and these new pursuits. What pleases to-day may offend to-morrow. Many are unstable as water. No one is unchangeable. But God changes not. What he thinks now of any subject he always thought, and always will think; for with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

The third regards the weakness of man, and the all-sufficiency of God. Man may threaten in fury, but be unable to execute. He may promise sincerely, and his promises be vain words—he *cannot* fulfil them. In this respect, he is not always to be judged of by his conduct. There are cases in which we censure, when, if we knew all, we should only pity. The man struggles with difficulties which have unexpectedly come upon him; and yields to dire necessity; and provides things honest in the sight of the Lord—who has seen all his heart and his hardships—though not in the sight of men. But God is Almighty. He who made and upholds all things by the word of his power, speaks every thing, in the Scriptures.

The fourth regards the depravity of man, and the rectitude of God. Man goes astray, from the womb, speaking lies. He often knowingly deceives. It is his aim and study; and he rejoices in his success. Even men who are influenced by religious principles, may be overcome of evil, and occasion our saying, Lord, what is man! How far from truth was the sentiment of Jonah—"I do well to be angry, even

unto death." How lamentable was the falsehood of Abraham, when he said of his wife, She is my sister! How dreadful was the perjury of Peter, when he swore, "I know not the man!" But God is holiness itself. He is incapable of a wrong bias—He cannot be tempted to deceive.

When, therefore, we look at man—ignorant and fallible—varying according to his excitements—often unable to make good his engagements—yea, accessible to the influence of evil motives: and then contemplate God, in all the glories of his wisdom, immutability, almightiness, and rectitude—each being an everlasting and infinite preservative of truth—who can view these competitors for our belief, and not join with the Apostle—"Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar."

The use to which this fact should be applied is, to reduce our confidence in man, and increase our confidence in God.

And yet the reverse of this is our practice. We yield where we should be cautious, and we hesitate where it is impossible for us to err. We turn from the Rock of ages, and lean on the broken reed. What is the consequence? "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall

not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

Let us cease, then, from man. Not that we are to become universally suspicious, and suppose that there is no sincerity in the world. It was David's error to say, in his haste, All men are liars. And when the Scripture says, There is no faithfulness in them; men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; it must be taken with qualification. Yet instances of inflexible integrity are not abundant. And we should not implicitly rely upon anyone, especially in divine things. Let us respect great and good men, but not be enslaved by them. Let us not pin our faith to the sleeve of any authority merely human. Let us suffer no man to have dominion over our conscience; always searching the Scriptures to see whether these things are so in the word of truth.

For God is entitled to our absolute confidence. “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” Let us trust him as he deserves. Let us always place a ready and unshaken reliance on his Word. Let God be true, in its doctrines; and let us receive them, however mysterious. Let God be true, in its threatenings; and let us flee from the wrath to come. Let God be true, in its promises; and let us be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Let God be true, in its predictions; and, whatever difficulties stand in the way, believe that the whole earth shall be filled with his glory. YEA, LET GOD BE TRUE, BUT EVERY MAN A LIAR.

MARCH 3.—EVENING.

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”—ACTS xvi. 30.

WE may imagine the manner in which the jailor had addressed Paul and Silas before, from the manner in which he treated them: for, having received them in charge, he thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks, while their backs were bruised and bleeding from the scourge; for their wounds were not dressed till some hours after. Doubtless, bad words and reproachful names were added to the cruelty. But, however he had insulted them before, he now reveres them more than kings; and, calling for a light, he springs in, and comes trembling, and falls down before them in the inner prison, and brings them out, and cries, “What must I do to be saved?”

This was obviously the language of apprehension. He saw he was in danger of being lost. But how lost? Some have supposed that he refers to his temporal danger. The Roman jailor was made answerable for his prisoner; and if the prisoner escaped, the jailor bore the punishment the prisoner was doomed to endure. At first therefore the keeper *was* thus alarmed; for, upon the earthquake, which shook the foundations of the prison, so that the doors were opened, and every man’s bands were loosed, he awaked out of his sleep, and drew his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had fled. But his alarm on *this* account must have been removed as soon as ever Paul cried, with a loud voice, “Do thyself no harm, for we are all here.” And the answer given to this inquiry shews that he did not refer to temporal death; for though

faith in Christ saved him from hell, it would not have saved him from the penalty of the Roman law had he incurred it.

His anxiety, therefore, regards his spiritual and eternal state. It is in vain to argue against this, and say, how could this be, as it supposes a knowledge which this Pagan could not possess? For the heathen generally had some sense of a future state; and were all their life-time subject to bondage through fear of death. Often their uneasinesses were such, that, to obtain something like peace of mind, they would endure the greatest privations and self-inflicted tortures, and give the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul. God indeed has a witness in every bosom. Every man is a sinner; his conscience condemns him; he feels his need of pardon. Were he guiltless, he would be fearless. The innocent do not tremble when they hear the trumpet announcing the entrance of the Judge; but only those who are to be tried. The earthquake had roused the jailor's dread of the power and anger of God. Perhaps he had heard Paul and Silas singing in the stocks. Perhaps they had dropped something while he was misusing them that had impressed his mind. Perhaps he had been informed of their preaching; and doubtless he had been told of the language of the Pythoness, who for many days had cried, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, which shew unto men the way of salvation." To which we may well add, how soon the Spirit of God can reach the heart, and enter the conscience like a conqueror at the head of an army. No wonder his apprehension made him cry, "What must I do to be saved?" It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. If a

man were any way exposed to it, we should think it impossible that he could enjoy a moment's ease; or be capable of feeling a lighter sorrow, in hazard of such a tremendous doom. When I was awakened, says Bunyan, nothing so astonished me as to see how my fellow-creatures were affected with their outward troubles—I had many of these; but I could only cry, How shall I escape the damnation of hell?

His language contains a desire of information. In such a state as this, ignorance is dreadful, and perplexity intolerable. And in vain you address the man concerning any other subject. Tell me, says he, how I can flee from the wrath to come? How I can obtain acceptance with God? How I can be renewed in the spirit of my mind? Is there balm in Gilead, and a physician there? And *what* is that balm? *Who* is that physician? He also dreads imposition. Tell me the true state of my soul. If there be hope, announce it; but do not flatter me. Nothing will now satisfy the mind but certainty. And the man has it not in his power to be his own instructor or comforter. He distrusts himself, and suspects every thing like comfort that comes from his own heart which has so often deceived him. Now therefore he prizes the means and the source of information. He reads the Scripture—and for the purpose for which it was written. He hears the word—and for the purpose for which It is preached. How beautiful now are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings! How endeared the throne of grace where the prayer is heard, “Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.”

Here was also a readiness to submit to the method prescribed for his deliverance. Some, when they

are alarmed, think of building a shelter rather than of fleeing for refuge. They indulge in a legal bias, and human reasonings; and, going about to establish their own righteousness, do not submit themselves to the righteousness of God. The simplicity of the scheme of gospel grace pays no homage to the idol self; and the spiritual Naaman is ready to turn away in a rage, because the mode of relief is not such as he "thought." The scheme is additionally offensive, because it demands the destruction also of every sin; and men love independence, and to walk according to the way of their own hearts. But bring a man into the state of the jailor, and he will be willing to yield-willing to be led. Tell him the way, and he will walk in it. Tell him the remedy, and he will submit to it, however it may require him to stoop, or whatever it may require him to sacrifice. Dr. Chyne was an eminent as well as a pious physician. But he was supposed to be severe in his regimen. When he had prescribed, and the patient began to object to the treatment, he would say, "I see you are not bad enough for me yet." Some are not bad enough for Christ yet—we mean, in their own apprehension. But when they find and feel that they are entirely lost, and have no other help or hope, they will cordially acquiesce in his recommendation, however mysterious, however humbling, however trying—"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

Let me not think this inquiry was proper for the jailor only. All have sinned. And the soul that sinneth it shall die. It should therefore be the inquiry of every man. O my soul, let it be thine!

What is the answer?

MARCH 4.—MORNING.

“And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”—ACTS xvi. 31.

THEY overlook his injurious treatment of them. They do not take advantage of his present distress to insult him, as the council did Judas, who, when he cast down the pieces of silver, confessing he had sinned and betrayed innocent blood, said, “What is that to us? See thou to that.” Yea, they heard with delight his exclamation, “What must I do to be saved?” Such cries as this are music in the ears of those who long to save souls from death—“Your case is bad, but it is not hopeless. You are guilty and condemned, and there is only one way of deliverance—But there *is* one. We have tried it ourselves, and have found it effectual. and recommend it to you. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Here is the advantage of knowledge and of experience in those who have to deal with souls *in* spiritual distress. They can speak readily and clearly; and with confidence and earnestness—“Lo this, we have searched it; so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.” What could the heathen philosophers have done with this question? Or what the Scribes and Pharisees who sat in Moses’ chair? What would a modern infidel make of it? How many called Divines would answer: “Be not too much distressed. You are not worse than others. All are frail. God knows our frame. He will not be severe to mark what we do amiss. Guard against these gloomy notions which drive people to distraction or despondency. Take exercise. Go into company. Moderately indulge in the amusements of life.” Or,

if any thing more religious be said, it would be, "Reform whatever may have been vicious: and in proper time prepare yourself for a worthy reception of the Lord's Supper." How different was the language of Paul and Silas! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

This teaches us that awakened souls are to be led immediately to Christ. There are some who are slow to bring forward the glad tidings of salvation, fearing that such persons are not yet distressed and humbled enough. But it is obvious that a long process to prepare for an application to the Lord Jesus was not deemed necessary by the Apostles. They presented him at once: through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified. He did the same himself: "Come unto me"—"Look unto me." No other recommendation can be available. Every other direction will turn the sinner aside from safety and relief. All the peace obtained by any other means is only a temporary delusion. "Why should I wait? I want a mediator between me and God, but I do not want a mediator between me and Christ. I *must* come to him as I am. And I *may* come—'all the fitness he requireth is to feel my need of him.'"

The answer shews that there is salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that he came into the world to save sinners. He is now exalted at God's own right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour. With him is plenteous redemption; free deliverance from the guilt, the pollution, and the consequences of sin; and for ever—

The way to realize this is believing. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth

the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness. Unless we begin here, we commence at the wrong end. Good works do not produce faith, but faith produces good works. If we see a fellow-creature wrecked and ready to sink, the first thing is to get out the life-boat. It would be absurd to go to the bed of a dying man, and begin to admonish him how he ought to walk and to work—The man is dying. Send for the physician—Bring a remedy. When recovered, admonition will be reasonable and needful. God gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish: and however salvation is represented in the Scripture, we see faith is essential to it. Whatever Christ may be in himself, he can be nothing to us without it. He is indeed the refuge: but a refuge cannot secure us unless it be entered; and it can only be entered by faith. He is indeed the bread of life: but food cannot nourish us unless it be eaten; and it can only be eaten by faith. The grand thing therefore is to believe the record concerning him; and to trust in his Name; to rely upon his grace; to apply to him for all the purposes he is revealed to accomplish; and to receive him as he is held forth to us in the Gospel.

This course will not fail. Salvation is insured to believing. As without faith we cannot be saved, so with it we cannot perish. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

If therefore you feel your need of salvation, repair to him, and say, “Let this ruin be under thy hand.” He is mighty to save. He is able to save to the ut-

termost. And while his power enables him to save, his goodness inclines him to save. His soul is the dwelling-place of pity. His heart is made of tenderness; his bowels melt with love. And while his goodness inclines him to save, his promise binds him to save—He cannot deny himself. He has said, “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”

“My soul obeys the Almighty call,
 And runs to this relief:
 I would believe thy promise, Lord;
 O help my unbelief.”

MARCH 4.—EVENING.

“*All his saints are in thy hand.*”—DEUT. xxxiii. 3.

THESE *holy ones* are distinguished by many things from each other. Some of them are in public life, and some in private. Some are rich, and some poor. Some are young, and some old—But *all* are equally dear to God; and partakers of the common salvation; in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. They pass under various denominations among men: and these too often keep them at a distance from each other, and lead them to mistake and censure each other: and often they would seem to wish to draw *Him* along with them, and confine his influences within their respective exclusiveness. But no. He owns them *all*. They are all children of the same family, and going to the same temple to worship; and however they may differ in dress, or age, or stature, they all stand in the same relation to each other, and to himself. Some of them

are strong, and others are weak in faith. He has in his fold lambs as well as sheep; and in his family babes as well as young men. But a bruised reed will he not break, and the smoking flax will he not quench, but will bring forth judgment unto victory. This honour have *all* his saints—“*All* his saints are in thy hand.”

—In his fashioning hand. They are the clay, and he is the potter, and he makes them vessels of honour, prepared unto every good work. He fearfully and wonderfully made them as creatures. But they are his workmanship by another and a nobler creation—“This people have I formed for myself: they shall shew forth my praise.”

—In his preserving hand. For now they are precious, they are the more exposed. They are called a crown and a diadem; and the powers of darkness would gladly seize it; but observe where it is placed. for security: “Thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God”—and there they are safe, perfectly safe: safe, not owing to their strength, but to their situation. By another image the Saviour establishes the same confidence. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”

—In his guiding hand. To lead a blind man, you take him in your hand—Thus the Lord leads his people. *He* knoweth the way that they take; but *they* do not. I will bring the blind by a way that

they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known. You take a little child in your hand to lead him. Though God, says Bishop Hall, has a large family, none of his children are able to go alone: they are too weak, as well as too ignorant. But fear not, says God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

—In his chastening hand. They are sometimes alarmed at their afflictions, and cry, Do not condemn me—as if they were in the hand of an enemy. But he is their Father; and not like fathers of our flesh; for they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. Luther therefore said, Strike on, Lord; strike on; for now I know I am thy child. We deserve to lose the rod, and by our improper behaviour we forfeit all claim to his correction; and we may well wonder and exclaim, Lord, what is man, that thou shouldest magnify him, that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him, that thou shouldest visit him every morning and try him every moment? But he does not deal with us according to our desert. And, therefore, rather than leave us to make flesh our arm, or the world our portion, he will remove every stay of support, and dry up every spring of comfort. But he does not afflict willingly. If needs be only, we are in heaviness: and when we mourn our faults, the rod drops upon the ground, and he hastens to wipe away our tears. “Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.”

Whatever, therefore, Christians have to distress and perplex, here is enough to comfort and to satisfy them; “For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works—are IN THE HAND OF GOD.”

MARCH 5.—MORNING.

“So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God: but with the flesh the law of sin.”—ROM. vii. 25.

So ends this chapter, concerning which there has been much dispute. For some have contended that the Apostle does not here speak of himself; but personates another. They suppose that he refers to a Jew—under the Law, but not under Grace—awakened, but not renewed—convinced, but not converted.

Yet can any unregenerate person, with truth, say—not only, “I consent to the law that it is good;” but, “With my mind I serve the law of God?” and, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man?”—an expression of godliness that characterised the very temper of the Messiah himself. *He* could say nothing more than this—“I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.”

At first view, the language of complaint may seem much too strong to apply to the experience of a real Christian. But what real Christian would find it too much to utter—when placed in the same state, and occupied in the same way, with the Apostle? That is—viewing himself before a God, in whose sight the very heavens are not clean, and who charges his angels with folly; and who sees more pollution in

our duties, than we ever see in our sins—That is, comparing himself with the rule of all rectitude, the Divine Law, whose spirituality is such as to extend to the thoughts and the desires of the mind, as well as the actions of the life, and which considers anger as murder, and the lust of the eye as adultery. What must the highest attainments of mortals be, compared with this absolutely perfect standard of holiness? yea, or even with the elevated and vast desires of a renewed soul!

We need not wonder that many are astonished and perplexed here. “The spiritual judgeth all things; but he himself is judged of no man.” They who are strangers to the warfare in which he is engaged can never clearly comprehend his language, or enter into those feelings which produce such a depth of confession and abasement. Those who have never been in the field, may be surprised at many things related by a veteran, in describing the campaigns he has passed through; but his old scar-worn comrade can attest the truth of them. In religious matters, more than in any other, the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with his joy. But the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.

We allow that this chapter has been much perverted. There is no part of the Bible that Antinomians so much delight in, or which ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness so often quote. Such persons wrest also the *other* Scriptures to their own destruction. And are we to argue against the use of a thing from the abuse of it? “What good thing is not abused? We do not refuse raiment to the naked, because there are some who

glory in what ought to remind us of our shame; nor food to the hungry. because some make a god of their belly. And shall we refuse to sincere and humble souls, mourning over the evils of their own heart, the instruction and consolation here provided for them, for fear the interpretation should be applied to an improper purpose? No one, really taught of God, *will* abuse it; nor *can* he be more reconciled to his corruptions, or more satisfied with his deficiencies. in consequence of being able to adopt the language as his own.

For shall they continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How can they who are dead to sin, live any longer therein? We are not to make sad the hearts of God's people, but to comfort them—for the joy of the Lord is their strength. And only the last day will shew how much this section of Scripture has strengthened the weak hands and confirmed the feeble knees of those who were deeming their experience peculiar, and concluding that they had no part with the Israel of God—till they heard Paul bewailing and encouraging himself thus—For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, with the mind, I MYSELF serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

MARCH 5.—EVENING.

“And Ekron as a Jebusite.”—ZECH. ix 7.

THE prophecy in which these words are found shews, that God in judgment remembers mercy; and can punish her enemies without injuring the Church; and can even increase her welfare by means of it. Desolations were coming upon the Syrians, and Tyrians, and Philistines; but a remnant should be saved and *converted*, so as to become the worshippers and people of the God of Israel! This is exemplified in the latter of these powers: “I will cut off the pride of the Philistines: and I will take away the blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite.” The Philistines were the most constant and implacable of all the adversaries of the Jews. Ekron was one of their greatest capitals. It was the residence of Beelzebub the chief of the devils; and is put by the poets for hell itself. Jebus is the old name for Jerusalem. Hence we read that “David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus; where the Jebusites were the inhabitants of the land.” The meaning of the words therefore is, that the inhabitant of Ekron should become as the denizen of Jerusalem; no longer an enemy, or a stranger and foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God. Two remarks arise from this promise.

First,—It is a great thing to be a Jebusite. The Apostle speaks of it as the highest of all privileges, that we “are come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and to the heavenly Jerusalem;” and

that "Jerusalem, which is above, and which is free, is the mother of us all." Of this city of our God, glorious things are spoken, and they are not vain words. What a Governor have these citizens! He is fairer than the children of men; he is the King of glory. What a charter have they! What can equal their defence and safety? What can equal their liberty? What their commerce and wealth? What their happiness? Their peace passeth all understanding—Their joy is unspeakable and full of glory—"as well the singers, as the players on instruments, shall be there: all my springs are in thee."

Secondly,—Jebusites may be derived from Ekronites. Here we have the evidence of fact. The thing has been done; and the most unlikely characters have furnished pious converts. We can make an appeal to Manasseh, who had sinned away all the effects of a godly education, and had become the most daring idolater; and such a murderer, that he made the streets of Jerusalem to run down with innocent blood—yet he, even he, sought and found the Lord God of his fathers. We could appeal to the dying thief, blaspheming with his companion one moment, and praying the next, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." We could appeal to the murderers of Jesus, so soon washed in the blood which they themselves had shed. What could surpass the guilt and depravity of the Corinthians? Yet they were washed, they were justified, they were sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. And what says Paul of himself? "I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy"—and "for this

cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ should shew forth all longsuffering, as a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on him, to life everlasting.”

Here, from what he has done, we see what he *can* do. We see also what he *must* do; for he has bound himself by his word. And who are the heirs of promise? From whence are they to be brought; and from what materials are the subjects of his grace to be formed? “Princes shall come out of Egypt.” “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” “Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.” “The beasts of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls.”

Much of these announcements is indeed highly figurative, but the meaning cannot be mistaken, and the truth of it is perpetually accomplishing. For, blessed be God, these changes are not imaginary representations. The pictures are from real life; the originals are to be found. We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen. We have seen the profligate becoming not only moral but holy—the proud clothed with humility—the niggard and the churl learning to be bountiful and kind—the earthly-minded seeking the things that are above—the curses of the neighbourhood going about doing good. Well may the Author of all good say, “This people have *I* formed for myself; they shall shew forth my *praise*”—What displays, what triumphs are

they of the freeness, the riches, and the power of his grace!

Let none despair. However desperate their case is with regard to their own resources, there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

Neither let us despond with regard to any of our fellow-creatures. We may be tempted to think that some of them are beyond the possibility of reclaim. But God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Let us not abandon them, but persevere in the use of means—animated by prayer—and strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

MARCH 6.—MORNING.

“Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee: fear not, neither be discouraged.”—DEUT. i. 21.

WE may, and we ought to transfer what is here said to the Jews concerning Canaan, to ourselves, with regard to a better country, that is, a heavenly: for the one was designed to be typical of the other.

Observe the exhibition: “Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee.” Where? In the Scriptures. Not in its full development, for so it is a glory to *be* revealed, for it doth not *yet* appear what we shall be; but in its general nature; and in a way adapted to our present apprehensions; and likely to take hold of our mind. Hence so many figures are employed: all of which, while they fall short of the subject, aid our conceptions.

But does he place it before our eyes to tantalize us, by awakening our notice, and drawing forth our admiration, and exciting our desire, when the boon is not within our reach?

Observe the command: “Go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee.” This supposes it to be attainable: yea, it makes the attainment our duty. Our missing it, is not only our misery, but our crime. We shall be punished for neglecting so great salvation. It is our guilt—the guilt of the vilest disobedience to the most gracious authority: for he not only allows, but he enjoins us to seek first his kingdom and righteousness—and commands us to believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ. Are we doing *this*? For *He* is the way: and we come *unto God by Him*.

Observe the encouragement: “Fear not, neither be discouraged.” To this we are liable on two accounts. First. By a sense of our unworthiness. The greatness of the blessedness, when combined with a sense of our desert, astonishes the mind into a kind of incredulity; and makes hope seem no better than presumption. But every thing here is free, and designed to shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us. We are as welcome as we are unworthy. Why then should we refuse to be comforted?—Secondly. By a sense of our weakness. Who is sufficient for the distance, the difficulties, the dangers? The Jews were dismayed by the report of the spies. The towns, said they, are walled up to heaven. There are the Anakims; in whose sight *we* were but as grasshoppers. The people were disheartened. But, said Caleb, “Let us go up at once and possess it, for we

are able.” Did he mean, without God? No. But with him; with him as their leader—and keeper: and this he had promised. And is he not with you? Has he not said, “Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness?” We cannot be too sensible of our weakness; but let us remember that his grace is sufficient for us. Has it not been sufficient for all those who have gone before us? They had their fears; but they overcame. They are now more than conquerors through him who loved them.

—But Jordan rolls between. So was it with the Jews; and it was even overflowing its banks at the time. But the ark divided the waters. They went through dry-shod. And their enemies were as still as a stone—till they were clean passed over—and the land was all their own.

MARCH 6.—EVENING.

“*Do not all go to one place?*”—ECCLES. vi. 6.

WHAT place? There are four places; and a universality of passengers is approaching each of them. An absolute universality with regard to the two first; and a specific universality with regard to the two second.

There is the *grave*. Do not all go to *this* place? Yes. “All go to one place—all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.” No one denies this. Yet no one seems to believe it, at least with regard to himself! Who would suppose that thousands around us ever said, “I know that thou wilt bring me to death,

and to the house appointed for all living." What a proof is this, that convictions however clear, and belief however firm, may be paralyzed and rendered uninfluential!

There is the *Judgment-seat*. Do not all go to *this* place? Yes: "We must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." The high will not be excused; the low will not be overlooked. "I saw the dead," says John, "small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened." And the Judge himself tells us, that" before him shall be gathered all nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left—and these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

Now therefore a separation takes place, and what before applied to all with regard to *nature*, will now apply to all only with regard to *character*.

There is *hell*. Do not all go to *this* place? Yes, all the wicked: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God." Their sin is very diversified; and though all go astray like sheep, they turn everyone to his own way. The covetous and the cruel, the hypocrite and the profligate, the scoffer and the formalist, the swearer and the slanderer, are all in various directions going the downward road, and will meet in the same place of torment. There is something inexpressibly dreadful in the thought of mixing with such society. And when we consider the number of the damned, their malignity, their mutual accusations, their hatred of each other, their freedom from all the restraints which check the bad and vile while here, their power to

curse and tear each other, under the empire too of the devil and his angels—who would not cry, “Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men.”

There is *heaven*. Do not all go to *this* place? Yes, all the *righteous*—all who are justified by faith, and renewed in the spirit of their mind. We need not ask where this place is; it is enough to know that Jesus has said, “I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also.” There, out of every period of time, and out of every kindred, and nation, and people, and tongue, he will gather together in one, the children of God which were scattered abroad. Here they differed in their outward condition, in their religious opinions and usages, and in the degree of their grace; but they were all one *in* Christ Jesus, and now they are all one *with* him. Is this candour and comprehensiveness in heaven an excellency? Let us approach it as much as possible; and as we are all going to one place, let us not fall out by the way. Let us pray, “Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;” and let us shew by our freedom from bigotry, that our prayer is not hypocrisy or formality. Many a persecuting and many a censorious spirit has had liberality enough upon his oily lips, especially at public meetings, who has only scowled hate or dislike towards his differing brethren at all other times. But the Master says, “Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee, thou wicked servant.”

MARCH 7.—MORNING.

"I have called you friends."—JOHN xv. 15.

WHAT condescension, and kindness, and grace, are here! For these must be the principles of this friendship, whether we consider his greatness, or our meanness and unworthiness. Lord. what is *man*, that *Thou* art mindful of him? and the *son* of man, that *Thou* visitest him? Yet he *is* mindful of us; he *does* visit us—yea, he calls us his FRIENDS. And names and things, professions and realities, are the same with him. If he calls us friends, he will treat us accordingly; and we may expect from him whatever the most perfect friendship can insure.

For instance. He will honour us with his confidence—the very thing he here mentions—"Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." A servant is entrusted, not with secrets, but orders; and he is seldom informed of the reasons, even of these. Turning him into a confidant, is one of the ways to exemplify Solomon's observation: "He that delicately bringeth up a servant, shall have him for his son at length;" and he will take greater liberties than a child. There is, indeed, respect due to a servant; but it is respect of another kind. We do not like a master or mistress who disdains speaking to a domestic, unless in the language of menace or authority—But good sense will find out a happy medium between distance and fondness; between haughtiness, and a familiarity that inspires no deference. But unreserved confidence is for friends. Nothing is concealed between them.

Abraham is called the friend of God; and, says God, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" How did our Lord unbosom himself to his disciples! To you, said he, is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. When he was alone, he expounded all things unto them; he manifested himself to them, and not unto the world. And so now; the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant.

If he calls us friends, he will give us freedom of access to him. The distance and ceremonies, which may be necessary to regulate the approach of others, are laid aside with a friend; the heart, the arms, the house, are all open to him. And does the Lord keep us at a distance? All his language is invitation—"Come unto me." He allows us to come even to his seat; and to enter into the secret of his pavilion. He permits us, at all times, to spread our most minute affairs before him: yea, he indulges us to live in his house, to sit at his table, to walk with him, to lean upon his bosom—Such honour have all his saints.

—If he calls us friends, he will reprove us. When—ever friendship is founded on proper principle, reproof will be one of its chief duties, and privileges too. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. So David valued them—"Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness:" And let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayers also shall be in their calamities. "Moses makes the omission the proof of hatred—"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." But the Saviour will never incur this reproach: As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.

—If he calls us friends, he will counsel us. There are passages in the life of every man sufficient to confound a single understanding. But how pleasing is it, in doubts and perplexities, to fetch in aid from the judgment or experience of another, and who is concerned for our welfare! But He is “*The Counsellor.*” “Counsel,” says he, “is *mine*, and sound wisdom.” He is a light to them that sit in darkness. He is a dissolver of doubts. The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way—and they that follow it will find it to be pleasantness and peace.

—If he calls us friends, he will sympathize with us. There is no true friendship, unless we make the pleasures and the pains of our connections our own; rejoicing when they rejoice, and weeping when they weep. To him that is afflicted, pity should be shewed from his friend. The natural language of the sufferer is, “Pity me, pity me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me!” Hence the complaint of the Saviour—“I looked for some to take pity, and there was none; and for comforter, but I found none”—for even all the disciples forsook him, and fled. But he will never inflict what he endured. In all our afflictions he is afflicted. To exemplify this, he assumed our nature. He became a man—to be a friend. For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is also able to succour those that are tempted. And therefore, though he is passed into the heavens, we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmity. Yea, “He that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye.”

—If he calls us friends, he will afford us assistance

and succour. And this is the grand test of friendship. A friend loveth at all times; but is born for adversity; and *he* has forfeited all claim to the character, who says, in the hour of application, Go in peace, be ye warmed, and be ye filled, while he gives not the things that are needful! Yet, how often is this the case! How often are the words of Solomon verified—"Confidence in an unfaithful man in the time of trouble, is like a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint!" Many are very friendly when you want not their aid; especially while you are imparting, instead of receiving. You are their garden: they walk in it in summer, but abandon it in winter—then it has no flowers or fruits. You are their scaffold: they build with you—but when the work is done, they take you down and lay you aside. But though the Saviour will never leave us nor forsake us, he has emphatically said, I will be with you in trouble. And his people have always found him a present help, when every other resource has failed. Some may really feel for us, but be unable to help us. But nothing is too hard for the Lord. Even in death he will be the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever.

Thus he treats his friends—How do they treat him? Have we never given him cause to say, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" Have we never betrayed a want of confidence in him? Have we never been ashamed of him? Never denied him before men? Never preferred our own ease and honour to his cause and glory? We can never make him adequate returns for his goodness. But have we made him suitable returns? Rather, will not an honest review of our temper and conduct constrain us

to blush and say, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer?"

MARCH 7.—EVENING.

"Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me."—LUKE xxii. 28, 29.

THE dying Patriarch said of Reuben, "unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Stability is essential to excellency. Without it no reputation can be acquired, no confidence can be supported, no usefulness can be insured. Even obstinacy, which is ignorant resolution, is more allied to excellency than versatility. You may build upon a rock; but what can be done on shifting and sliding sand? If a man be one thing to-day and another to-morrow; if he yields to every fresh impression like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed; and is governed by circumstances instead of principles; he can never display *character*, for character is the effect and fame of habit.

Nothing recommends a man more than steadfastness in friendship, especially when the adherence has to struggle with difficulties. This is what our Lord here commends in his disciples—They had "continued with him in his temptations."

If the enemy ever left Christ, it was only for "a season;" he soon returned again to the assault; and urged him even to infidelity, presumption, suicide, and idolatry—How well is it said—

"He knows what sore temptations mean,
For he has felt the same"—

But our Lord does not here refer to *such* temptations, and especially those he endured in the *wilder-*

ness. In these his disciples were not present—he was alone—of the people there was none with him. In the Scripture temptations do not always, nor most commonly signify enticements to sin; but any events that morally try us in the way of duty. In such trials his disciples continued with him. They found him poor and despised; bearing the contradiction of sinners against himself; slandered; menaced; and in danger of death: and they were willing to share in the same treatment. They denied themselves, and took up *their* cross and followed *him*. They deemed it enough for the servant to be as the master, and the disciple as his Lord.

There are trials now to which they who are with him are exposed. They are called, “the sufferings of Christ;” “his reproach;” and here *his* “temptations;” as they accompany his cause, and are endured for his sake. They are not all of a painful nature, or consisting in various degrees of persecution. His followers are often tried in other ways. There are the dangers of prosperity as well as of adversity. The world has its allurements as well as frowns, and is more perilous in its friendship than its enmity. There must be heresies, that they who are of a contrary part may be made manifest. There will always be many who will turn again to folly from the holy commandment delivered them, and will endeavour to draw away others. Happy they, who while the Saviour says, “Will ye also go away?” can answer, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” For, “blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive a crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

Observe, O my soul, how he insures and amplifies the privilege: "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me." The grant is not an estate, a province, a principality, but a kingdom! And observe two things with regard to it. First. See the Saviour's authority and dominion: "*I* appoint unto you a kingdom." The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: and he has given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him. The fulness from which he should dispense to the myriads of the saved all the blessings of grace and glory, was the joy set before him, for which he endured the cross. It is the fruit of the travail of his soul, and it satisfies him; it yields infinite delight to his benevolent heart. And how must the gift be endeared to the receiver when it is conferred by his own dear hand—

"The righteous Judge at that great day
Shall place it on my head."

Secondly—he is not only the appointer, but the model of the appointment—"as my Father hath appointed me." The *ground* of the Father's appointment of *him* was indeed peculiar—He deserved it and could claim it. He fulfilled the high and awful condition on which it was suspended, his suffering and death. The cause of the Saviour's appointment of *us* is nothing meritorious; it is mercy and grace, though founded in his own claims. But the one is as real as the other; and as certain in the accomplishment; and terminates in the same state: and as far as our nature will allow, we shall partake of the same blessedness and honour with himself, though con-

scious that we have not reached the elevation in the same way. The Scripture cannot be more decisive than it is—"we are quickened together with Christ, and raised up and made to sit with him in the heavenly places." "When he who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon his throne." And herein again we rejoice—as all our happiness and dignity will be received from him, so it will be enjoyed *with* him—"Where I am, there shall also my servants be"—"We shall live together with him."

MARCH 8.—MORNING.

"Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy."—Ps. xxxiii. 18.

THIS is a very encouraging character. They who cannot claim the higher distinctions of religion, may surely know that they "fear God, and hope in his mercy."

Some may wonder at the combination; and suppose that the qualities are incompatible with each other. But the first Christians "walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost." They may think that the fear will injure the hope, or the hope the fear. But these are even mutually helpful: and they are, not only never so beautiful, but never so influential, as when they are blended. The fear promotes hope, by the evidence it affords; and by keeping us from loose and careless walking, which must always affect our peace and pleasure. And hope no less befriends this fear. For never is

God seen so glorious, so worthy of all our devotedness to him, as when we hope in his mercy; and even the more assured we are of his regard, the more we shall inquire, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?—The more we shall tremble at the thought of offending and grieving him; the more we shall continue upon our knees, praying, Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, *my* Strength and *my* Redeemer. It is called “a lively hope:” and Christians know, by experience, that upon all their principles and duties it has the same influence as the Spring has upon the fields and the gardens.

Despondence of mind has the same effect upon our feelings and obedience as frost upon the stream; it chills, hardens, and stagnates. But Divine love dissolves the ice, and the waters flow

God is a Spirit, and has none of our senses and members; but, in speaking to us, he makes use of language that we can understand—His *eyes* are upon them that fear him, and hope in his mercy.

—The eyes of his *knowledge* are upon them. Every thing in their affairs comes under his notice. He knows all their walking through this great wilderness. Nothing befalls them without their Heavenly Father. Parents cannot always have their eye upon a child. They may be engaged, they may be afar off, they may be asleep. But He is always at hand: He is never diverted or perplexed; He never slumbers or sleeps.

—The eyes of his *affection* are upon them. The eye not only affecteth the heart, but follows it. It turns with the object of attachment; it sparkles with delight while dwelling upon it; and, when deprived

of the sight, continues looking in the direction of departure—as the disciples stood gazing. up towards heaven after their beloved Saviour. Oh! to be the object of God's love! To be precious in his sight, and honourable! But He “takes pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.” “He will rest in his love: He will joy over them with singing.”

—The eyes of his *providence* are upon them. Therefore it is added—“To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.” That is—for a part is put for the whole—to secure them from all danger, and to supply all their wants. In cases the most perilous and extreme, He is able to do for them exceeding abundantly above all they can ask or think. We are not to look for miracles; but it is only because the power and truth of God can do without them.

“For sooner all nature shall change
 Than one of God's promises fail.”
 “How safe and how happy are they
 Who on the good Shepherd rely!
 He gives them out strength for their day:
 Their wants He will surely supply.
 He ravens and lions can tame;
 All creatures obey his command:
 Then let me rejoice in his Name,
 And leave all my cares in his hand.”

MARCH 8.—EVENING.

“And when Rachael saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachael envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.”—GEN. xxx. 1.

HERE we see a little of the evils of polygamy. How hard is it to maintain an equality of satisfaction

where there are different claimants feeling alike in their pretensions! Yet if there be a partiality of regard, either real or supposed, what can be expected but discord and wretchedness? How much more agreeably did Isaac and Rebecca live together, according to God's original appointment, than poor Jacob with his two wives! 'What could ever justify a practice at war with morality and the happiness of domestic life, the fountain-head of society?

Observe Rachael's ill-humour. Bodily charms with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit would be irresistible; but a pretty face and a gentle temper are seldom found together. Rachael was beautiful; but because she bore Jacob no children, like her sister, "she envied her." There is nothing against which we should more guard ourselves than envy. It is a quality the most unlovely and diabolical. Envy is grief, not at another's woe, but another's welfare. It is the rottenness of the bones; it is the bane of self enjoyment; it is quarrelling with God for making another to differ from us. It is awful to think how naturally prone we are to this vice—"The spirit that is in us lusteth to envy."

See her intemperate desire. "And she said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die." There was no harm in the wish for offspring. They are the natural privilege of marriage. Many have supposed that the Jewish wives wished so much to be mothers, as the promise of God entailed the richest blessings on the posterity of Abraham, and because from his seed according to the flesh, the desire of all nations was to descend. This probably had some influence; but the principal thing was the respect attached to fruitfulness. In a more refined and improved state

of society, intellectual and moral qualities are sufficient to obtain distinction; but in the earlier and ruder ages outward and corporeal attributes are chiefly regarded. In *their* modes of living too, children were an advantage and a defence. Hence the language of Scripture: "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." Hence the conception after barrenness in the cases of Sarah and Manoah's wife, and Hannah and Elisabeth, drew forth such joy and praise—But what could be so censurable as the inordinate language of Rachael—"If my wish be not gratified, I shall offer violence to my life, or fret myself into the grave. In some way or other it will prove my death."

But ah! what ignorance of the future, and of her real welfare, does she here betray! "Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?" How little was Lot aware of the fearful consequences arising from the indulgence of his wish in the choice of the vale of Sodom well-watered, and looking like the garden of the Lord! The Jews obtain quails in answer to their pettish request; but He gave them their hearts' desire and sent leanness into their souls: while the flesh was between their teeth, the wrath of God came upon them, and they died of their intemperance. They would have a king; and he shewed his resentment not in denying, but gratifying them. "He gave them a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath." So here; Rachael says, "Give

me children, or else I die”—and she died not in the failure of her desire, but in the accomplishment of it, falling a victim to her second pregnancy: “And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachael travailed, and she had hard labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died,) that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin. And Rachael died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Beth-lehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachael’s grave unto this day.” And among other things engraven upon it is this—Let your desires be under the government of reason and religion. Extort nothing from God.

As to spiritual blessings indeed we cannot be too importunate; but with regard to temporal we cannot be too resigned. We are allowed to ask for any comfort pertaining to this life but we must ask submissively and conditionally. We must implore it only if it be good for us; and we must leave the determination of this to him that knoweth all things. This *too* is the surest way to succeed. God sees that while we are in a high fever of desire he cannot safely indulge us; but he is never unwilling to gratify us when he can do it without injury—For he “hath pleasure in the prosperity of his people.”

MARCH 9.—MORNING.

“Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”—

EPHES. vi. 10.

TO this we must be brought. Nature can never do the work of grace. Reason cannot be a substitute for faith. Education cannot render needless the teaching of the Spirit. Vain must all our exertions be, without his agency. Without his influence, we may have the form of godliness, but not the power; we may be reformed, but not renewed; we may become other creatures, but not new ones.

What is the use we are to make of this admission? Are we to derive from it ease in sin? self-justification? excuses for indolence? reasons for despair? Self-despair, indeed, grows out of it; but no other. There is hope in Israel concerning this thing. We *have* a resource: and it is *accessible*: and we are commanded to “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

When we plead for this doctrine, we are often charged with enthusiasm. But the Scripture asserts, that we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus: that it is God who worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure; that hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us.— And we retort the charge upon those that would exclude this influence. For what is enthusiasm, but visionary hope; groundless expectation? And what can be more delusive, than looking for an end without suitable and adequate means? a mighty effect, without a more powerful cause? a practice, the most alien from our depraved nature, without a Divine principle? a gathering of grapes from thorns, and figs from

thistles? And this is the case with those who deny the operations of that grace which is alone sufficient for us. We allow that we draw the character of the Christian high; and expect from him great things: that he should be renewed in the spirit of his mind; that he should walk by faith, and not by sight; that he should overcome the world; and have his conversation in heaven.—But we have means answerable to all this. We have a principle adequate to the practice. We have a cause far superior to all these grand results. We allow that the work of a Christian, as it is described in the Bible, looks fitter for an angel than for a fallen, weak man; but this fallen, weak man has more than the sufficiency of an angel for the discharge of it—his sufficiency is of God!

Such a discovery, such an assurance, is necessary. We are depraved creatures, and we cannot be ignorant of it. We have inward repugnances to spiritual duties. We are surrounded with outward difficulties. On the side of sin there is number, example, constant solicitation. Our slothful heart cries, “There is a lion in the way; I shall be slain in the streets.”—With all this known and felt, who could enter a religious course with pleasure or vigour, without the certainty of effectual aid? Possibility, probability, is not enough. Mere hope is not enough. Our hands hang down, our knees tremble, our very souls are chilled, unless we have a full and express persuasion, that God will be with us, and bear us through. And here, therefore, he meets us, and says, “Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Rely on me. Nothing is too

hard for the Lord. I can enlighten the darkest understanding. I can turn the heart of stone to flesh—Take hold of my strength, and be more than a conqueror—I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

At the sound of this animation, every thing revives in me, like vegetation at the call of Spring. I am filled with confidence and courage—weak in myself, I am strong in another—and almighty in the God of my salvation.

And is it not better for me, that I should be a constant suppliant at the mercy-seat, than have no reasons for calling upon God, being able to do without him? Is it not better for me to depend upon the God of all grace, for the continual supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, than to have a fund of my own? The sufficiency lodged in me must have been limited and finite; but in the Lord Jehovah I have everlasting strength. I could not trust in my own heart—but I can rely on his word. I can never be so willing to supply myself, as he is ready to succour me.

“Though in ourselves we have no stock,
The Lord is nigh to save
The door flies open when we knock,
And 'tis but ask and have.”

MARCH 9.—EVENING.

“*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*”—
—REV. xxi. 4.

UNLESS we know something of the world of glory, we could not desire it or prepare for it. Yet what we know is comparatively little: and it is rather of a

negative than positive kind. In our present state our liveliest feeling of good is the absence of evil; and of pleasure is the cessation of pain. And therefore, conformably to an experience well understood by every child of Adam, the happiness of heaven is held forth to our hopes as an exemption from every kind and degree of sorrow, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Tears and sorrows do not always go together. Some people have a plenitude of tears, whose emotions are by no means deep and durable. Others can seldom weep; yet they feel, and feel the more, because their grief wants utterance. Persons in great anguish are commonly beyond weeping. This is seen in criminals preceding their execution.

When it is said, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," it is taken for granted that the eyes of his people are no strangers to them now. Grace does not exclude the sensibilities of our nature, but increases as well as refines them. We read of "them that mourn in Zion." And it is said, "they shall come with weeping. Religion costs a Christian a thousand tears in addition to those which he inherits as a man—for "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards."

Of the tears they so frequently shed, we may remark in particular, five sources. Those which arise from secular afflictions—such as difficulties, perplexities, and failures in business; and changes, reductions, and privations in outward circumstances. Those which arise from social trials—whether sympathy in sorrow, defections in friendship, or relative bereavements. Those which arise from bodily pains, indispositions, and decays. Those which flow from

moral imperfections, and which are the most distressing to a pious mind. And those which spring from the sins of others; for rivers of tears run down their eyes, because men keep not God's law.

But of whatever kind their tears may be, the promise insures the removal of them. The removal has three characters. It is *Divine*—"God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." He alone can do it. But he is all-sufficient, and the God of all comfort. Even here, "when he giveth quietness, then who can make trouble?" It is *complete*—"God shall wipe away *all* tears from their eyes."—Who can tell what will be the last drop of the briny flood? But it *will* be shed. "And there shall be *no* more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

It is *future*—"God *shall* wipe away all tears from their eyes." He wipes away many even now: but the days of their mourning are not yet ended. Whatever be their indulgences, earth will always be distinguished from heaven. They are now in the warfare; the triumph is to come. This is their seed-time, and they sow in tears; but they shall reap in joy.

Let us learn our obligation to the Redeemer of sinners. Our tears would never have been wiped away, but a miserable life would have been followed by a more miserable eternity, had not he interposed on our behalf, and bore our sins in his own body on the tree. "These are they that came. out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; *therefore* are they before the Throne—"

Christians! in the multitude of your thoughts

within you, let this comfort delight your souls. Life is the date of *all* your griefs. If the one be short, the other cannot be long. Not a single tear beyond the grave! Bear up, faith, hope, and patience, a little longer, and the eye shall see evil no more."

What folly and madness to resign this prospect, and when the blessedness is within our reach to sacrifice it for a thing of nought! Yet are *we* in the number of those whose tears will be thus wiped away? It is certain that many are not heirs of this promise; and therefore whatever be their present distresses, they only feel the beginning of sorrows. Poor as their pleasures now are, they are the best—they are *all* the happiness *they* will ever know. And the vanity and vexation of spirit here will issue in outer darkness hereafter, where there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

MARCH 10.—MORNING.

"*Will a man rob God?*"—MAL. iii. 8.

—Is it probable? Is it possible?

Can he be so disingenuous? What! rob a father, a friend, a benefactor! The best of all fathers! The kindest of all friends! The most generous of all benefactors!

Can he be so daring?—To rob a Being so high and sacred; and whose glory so enhances the offence! To injure a fellow-subject is felony, but to injure the king is treason. To steal from a man is injustice, but to steal from God is sacrilege. The

wretch adds profaneness to violence when he breaks, not into a house, but a temple, and takes off things dedicated to the service of the Deity.

Can he be so irrational?—To rob a Being, not when he is absent, for he never is absent: but when he is present—not in the night, but in the day; and darkness and light are both alike to him—not when he sees not, observes not; but while he is looking on, and *must* look on—for his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he pondereth all his goings!

Can he be so desperate?—To rob One who can, who will, punish; and whose wrath is not only unavoidable, but intolerable? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

Yet says God—and he cannot be mistaken; or accuse unrighteously—“Ye have robbed *me*.” But on whom falls the charge? A Pharaoh only, who would not let the people go? a Nebuchadnezzar, who carried away the vessels of the sanctuary? a Belshazzar, who profaned them? an Ananias and a Sapphira, who kept back part of the property they had sold? a Herod, who beheaded John? or a Nero, who slew Paul? Alas! the criminals are less obvious characters, and are found much nearer home—they are to be found in our own houses—they are to be found in the house of God!

Who has not robbed God of *property*? Our wealth is not our own. We are only stewards. It always looks suspicious when a gentleman's steward becomes very rich, and dies affluent. It is even so with professors of religion. It would be better for: them to die *comparatively* poor; it would be better for their reputation; it would be better for their relations. A little, honestly obtained, would be

better than a large accumulation embezzled from God; it would be more sweet: it would be more efficient. Substance is entrusted to its occupiers, for certain purposes plainly laid down in the Scripture; and the providence of God is perpetually calling upon you for it. Do you discharge these claims? or do you alienate from them, by hoarding or extravagance? How much do some *unjustly* expend; in table luxuries, in costly dress, in magnificent furniture! And they are fond of displaying these. They have little reason—They glory in their shame. These are all robberies: they are purloined from God's cause, or God's poor.

Who has not robbed God of *time*? The *Sabbath*, he expressly claims for himself, and it is called the Lord's-day. Have we not often robbed him of much of this—perhaps of all—by worldly accounts, by evil company, by idle visits, by doing our own ways, and finding our own pleasures? *Youth* is the morning, the spring of life: it is our best season; and, therefore, God has a right to it, and calls upon us to remember his demands. But have we not partially, or wholly, robbed him of these days; have we not squandered them away in vanity, folly, and vice? *All* our moments and opportunities are his; and he commands us to redeem the time. But who lays to heart the brevity and uncertainty of life? Who values it as "the day of salvation?" Who seizes it as the only season of usefulness? Who rises early?

"Where is that thrift, that avarice of time,

(O glorious avarice!) thought of death inspires?"

Where is *He* in all our ways, who said, "I must work the work of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh wherein no man can work?"

Who has not robbed him of the *heart*? This was made for him; and he demands it—"My son, give me thy heart." But the fear of the heart, the confidence of the heart, the gratitude of the heart, the attachment of the heart—we have transferred to the creature from the Creator, God over all, blessed for evermore.

And may not the same be said of our *talents*—of our learning?—of our powers of conversation? of our retentiveness of memory? of our influence over others?

Let us not affect to deny the charge, and ask, as the accused here did, Wherein have we robbed thee? But let us repair to the footstool of Mercy, and cry, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

"But there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared: and with him there is plenteous redemption:" And we may, and we ought, to approach him with the encouragement of hope. But this hope must be founded on his own invitations and promises. It must bring us "unto God *by Him*," who said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." To pray to God to save such creatures in any other way, is to disobey his dearest command. It is to affront and insult him, by beseeching him to be untrue and unrighteous; to frustrate his grace, and to make Jesus Christ to be dead in vain. But in him he can be just, and yet the Justifier. He can redeem Jacob, and glorify himself in Israel.

We must also be turned away from all our iniquity; for he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy. We shall also sorrow after a godly sort; and, instead of complaining of any of the

methods of his grace and providence, we shall cheerfully acquiesce in them all—and remember, and be confounded, and never open our mouth more, because of our shame, when He is pacified towards us for all that we have done.

MARCH 10.—EVENING.

“When the people of the land shall come before the Lord in the solemn feasts, he that entereth in by the way of the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he that entereth by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate; he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it.”—EZEKIEL xlvi. 9.

To preserve the remembrance of his mighty works; to attach the people to the true religion by the frequent use of public and instructive services and ceremonies; to allow them seasons of rest and pleasure; to promote their acquaintance with their brethren; and to prefigure good things to come under the dispensation of the Gospel; God appointed various “solemn feasts” among the Jews. There were more especially three; the feast of the Passover or of unleavened bread, the feast of Pentecost or of weeks, and the feast of Tabernacles. Each of these was annual; and all the males were required to attend upon them in Jerusalem, where alone they could be celebrated.

In doing this, they “came before the Lord.” For his dwelling-place was in Zion. There he sat between the cherubim, and communed with the worshippers from off the mercy-seat. Of his presence there, he gave not only real but miraculous proof, in the cloud of glory, and in the answers from the holy

oracle. Though his manifestations are less sensible, he is as truly present in the Christian as in the Jewish sanctuary. It is insured by his promise, and confirmed by the holy and happy experience of all his people. Hence they feel this to be the principal attraction when they assemble together in his name. They love the habitation of his house, because it is the place where his honour dwelleth.

But what means this law of the temple to regulate the attendants in their ingress and egress? "He that entereth in by the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he that entereth by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it."

First, it was to prevent confusion, and to keep order in their comings and goings. God is not the God of confusion, but of peace. He has not deemed it beneath him to enjoin, "Let every thing be done decently and in order." He is the example of what he requires—order pervades all his works. The heavenly bodies are called "the army of heaven," to signify not only power but discipline; not only multitude but arrangement—"He brings out their host by number, he calleth them all by names." When Peter went into the sepulchre, he saw "the linen clothes lie, and the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself." This proved how unlikely it was that the body could have been stolen away in haste and fear, either by foes or friends; and shews the presence of mind and calmness with which our Saviour left the tomb—but does it not also shew that

he did nothing negligently and disorderly? All greatness in proportion to its degree, demands order. Surely not only holiness but decorum becomes God's house for ever. How far this is often displayed in our assemblies, especially in entering and departing, we leave observers to judge.

Secondly, to express respect and reverence. It is deemed only polite and becoming for persons in leaving a room not to turn their back on the company. Courtiers always leave the presence of the king with their faces towards him—The very thing God here requires for himself. He "will be sanctified in all that come nigh him." "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." The prohibition here, by an outward and visible sign, shews the inward and spiritual obeisance and homage his infinite majesty demands and deserves. He complains of the want of it: "They have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction." Therefore, says he, to express their punishment under the same image with their sin: "I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity."

Thirdly—That you are not to turn back in serving God, but to go forward. "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." "But," says the Apostle, "we are not of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul"—that is, who "continue in the faith," "to life everlasting." We are not even to look back; but to say, with Paul, "Forgetting the things that

are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Fourthly—That we never go out of God’s house as we go in. This was true of the Jews locally, it is morally true of us. As the departure of these worshippers was remote from the place of their entrance, so we withdraw from his ordinances further from heaven or hell than we entered in; less meet for the former, or more prepared for the latter. Ministers are a sweet savour of Christ, both in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one they are the savour of life unto life; but to the other they are the savour of death unto death.

Who believes this? Who trembles at the thought? Who earnestly, constantly prays, that our coming together “may be for the better and not for the worse?”

MARCH II.—MORNING.

“I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord.”

—ISA. lxiii. 7.

THERE are three ways in which we should resolve to do this.

We should mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord to *others*. We should do this in a way of conversation. “Let no corrupt communication,” says the Apostle, “proceed out of your mouth.” Where there is nothing immoral or indcent, there may yet be much that is trifling and vain: he therefore adds, “But that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.” And here is a

subject for discourse, not only innocent, but profitable: a *saying*, not only faithful, but worthy of all acceptation; and such as Moses and Elias would delight to join in, were they in company with us. We should also mention them to others, in a way of recommendation. Some are convinced of sin, and ready to despair; and nothing but the exceeding riches of divine grace can keep them from it. And some are seeking happiness where we know they can never find it. Let us, therefore, say to them, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him." This, coming from our own experience, und enforced by our own example, may save a soul from death. Especially, too, if we can bear a *final* testimony to the truth, and say, with the departing Henry, "You have heard the dying words of many—These are mine: I have found a life of communion with Christ the 'happiest life in the world.'"

—We should also mention the lovingkindnesses of God to *ourselves*. There is such a thing as self-converse; and would God it were more common! It is said, fools talk much to themselves: but wise men will talk more. David enjoins this: "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." And he also was an example of it: "I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search." "Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me." Hence he chides his own soul:

“Why art thou cast down, O my soulo and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” Are you discouraged by your unworthiness, and the greatness of your guilt? Bring before your minds the freeness and the fulness of his mercy, and his lovingkindnesses to others, who had no more claim upon him than yourselves. Are you in trouble? Recall his goodness in former difficulties: and say, O my desponding soul, because he has been my help, therefore under the shadow of his wings will I rejoice. Mention them also to yourselves, to excite you to imitation. Has he been so ready to forgive; and has he daily loaded me with his benefits? and shall I, O my soul, be implacable and uncharitable? Let me be a follower of God. Let me be merciful, even as my Father, who is in heaven, is merciful.

—We should mention his lovingkindnesses to *God* himself, in the various exercises of devotion—In expostulating with him: “Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards me? are they restrained?”—In pleading with him. If we fill our mouth with arguments, they must be fetched from his own goodness: “For thy Name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.”—In praying for ourselves: “Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul

unto thee. Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will: for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.”—In interceding for others—the conversion of our kindred, the salvation of sinners, the prosperity of the Church: “Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion, build thou the walls of Jerusalem.”—In thanksgiving: “O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me.”

Alas! how seldom does God hear this from us! There was a time when this heavenly exercise commenced—a that it had been earlier! But it will never end. They that dwell in his house will be still praising him.

Because my finite capacity will not admit of blessedness infinite in the degree, it shall be infinite in the duration; and, by happy reviews of the past, and unbounded prospects of the future, I shall feel perpetually growing beatitudes, and shall be always singing a new song. My weeping days; and my warring days; and my waiting days; and my watching days; and my praying days; will soon be past—But

“My days of praise shall ne’er be past,
While life, or breath, or being, last,
Or immortality endures.”

MARCH II.—EVENING.

“The rich and the poor meet together.”—PROV. xxii. 2.

WHEN we think of the universe, we are immediately struck not only with the number of creatures in it, but the variety. If we enter heaven, instead

of sameness we find “thrones and dominions, principalities and powers,” angels and archangels. “There are also celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory.” “All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.” What an amazing diversity is there ill the human species! No two persons are so perfectly alike in voice, form, and feature, as to be undistinguishable by close and accurate comparison. And yet all these constitute one and the same kind of beings, and the accordances among them are far superior in number and importance to their inequalities. Solomon remarks this, and says, “The rich and the poor meet together.”

He mentions “the rich and the poor,” not exclusively, for there are many other human distinctions; but specifically. He specifies these for two reasons. First, because “the rich and the poor” are the most common and general division of mankind. They are everywhere to be found; and comprehend many more than any other discrimination. Secondly, because they are also the most influential division. What is there the multitude dread so much as penury, or desire so much as affluence? How many are there who would rather be wicked than poor, or rich than pious! How much cleverer, and handsomer, and even younger, is a woman with a fortune than without one! How much more is a man listened to, whatever folly drivels from his lips, if he has a large income! How do the revolted tribes of Israel wor-

ship the golden calves! But “the rich and the poor moet together;” and if it be asked, how? and where? we answer,

In their original. Hence Solomon adds, “the Lord is the maker of them all.” We are the clay, and he is the potter, and we are all the work of his hands. When Job speaks of his man servant, he therefore asks, “Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?” We have not only “one Father,” as God is the sole Creator, but as Adam is the only founder of our race. Some have talked of Preadamites: but the Apostle speaks of “the first man Adam;” and says, “God has made of one blood all the nations of men.” This is not a mere truth, but a useful one. It renders us all intimately related to each other. It is the cure of envy, pride, unkindness. Wherever I see a human being, I see a brother.

In their dependence upon God. In him all live, and move, and have their being. This is as true of the rich as of the poor. Yea the more we possess, the more depenent are we.

In their mntual need of each other. If the poor need the wages of the rich, the rich need the service of the poor. The king is served by the labour of the field. “And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary.”

In their fallen condition. They have turned every one to his own way; but all have gone astray. All have sinned. There is none righteous, no not one. All therefore are guilty before God: all are unfit for

his kingdom without being made new creatures; and all are equally incapable of recovering themselves from their lapsed estate.

In the work of their salvation. There is only one Name given under heaven among men whereby they must be saved. All are washed in the same fountain. All are healed by the same remedy. All are justified by the same blood. All are renewed by the same Spirit.

In the means and ordinances of Divine grace. The rich and the poor meet together in reading the same Bible; in kneeling before the same Throne of Grace; in hearing the same servants of the most high God; in surrounding the same table of the Lord, and partaking of the same emblems of the body and blood of Christ. In the holy communion, the rich receive no better bread and wine than the poor; and as there is no preference in the sign, so there is none in the thing signified—"It is the common salvation."

In liableness to the same calamities of life. Family bereavements, bodily pains, eclipses of reason—how numerous the ills that flesh is heir to!—befall the high as well as the low. Yea, if there be any difference, there is, on the side of the former, more exposure to assault, and more acuteness in enduring.

In the sentence of mortality. In this war there is no discharge. Death is the way of all the earth. The grave is the house appointed for all living. "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master." "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

In the proceedings of the last day. None are so little as to be overlooked; none are so great as to be excused. I saw, says John, the dead, small and great, stand before God. We must all, says the Apostle, appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.

MARCH 12.—MORNING.

“The rich and poor meet together.”—PROV. xxii. 2.

WHAT is the inference to be drawn from this fact? The subject is capable of abuse, and fertile of improvement.

It would be foolish to conclude from it that all conditions are alike in themselves, or with regard to us. As if a man was no more favoured who resided in a comfortable dwelling, than one who had not where to lay his head. Our Saviour himself said, “it is more blessed to give than to receive;” and surely this shews at least one advantage the possessor has over the destitute. We teach our children to say,

“Not more than others I deserve,
Yet God hath given me more”—

And are we not to be thankful for the exemptions and indulgences by which we are distinguished? On the other hand, if we are deprived of certain outward comforts, we are required to submit to the will of God: but the submission does not imply indifference of mind; yea, the submission would not be a virtue, unless we were allowed to value what we are called to resign. The religion of the Bible is never enthusiastical; it never demands the sacrifice, but the sanctification of humanity and common sense.

But there is the inference of faction as well as of fanaticism—"The rich and poor meet together"—"Therefore give up the ranks of life, and let us have an equality." A certain equality if you please; that is, an equality of right to unequal things. Let the cottage have as full a right to protection as the mansion; and the peasant's cart be as sacred as the nobleman's carriage. This is reasonable and righteous, and this privilege we enjoy under the laws of our wise, just, and happy constitution. But it is far different with an equality of condition and possession. Indeed the advocates for this doctrine do not plead for it in all cases. You never find them zealous to level up, but only to level down. They would reduce those above them, but leave unraised those that are below them—Their servants must remain servants still. The absurdity of this principle is so great and obvious, that it seems unworthy of being reasoned with: otherwise we might observe—That such an equality is impossible: if men were made equal to-day, they would be unequal to-morrow, owing to the difference in their understandings, their diligence, and their self-denial—That it is clearly the will of God that distinction of rank and circumstances should prevail: hence in his word he has described the duties of superiors and of inferiors; and commanded us to render to all their due—And that it is better there should be such distinctions, as they call upon men for many virtues, the exercise of which would be impossible in a state of equality.

Yet it is desirable that these distinctions should not be excessive or carried to their extremes. The welfare of the community consists much in the various gradations between the very rich and the very poor.

And surely it is not favouring the levelling scheme, to oppose a state of things in which some have every thing and others nothing. Let there be poor as well as rich, but let them not only exist, but live; let there be poor, but let them have employment, and food, and clothing. Where this is not the case, a country has retrograded, something wrong has entered, and till it be rectified there can be no solid and lasting peace or safety.

The truth should always lower the impression of these distinctions upon our minds. This should be felt, First, in judging others. Let us not only or principally regard them by outward and adventitious claims, but by their moral and religious worth. Character is independent of circumstances. In our eyes let a vile person be contemned, however rich; and let us honour them that fear the Lord, however poor. Yet, says Solomon, the poor is despised of his neighbour, but the rich hath many friends. Secondly, in judging ourselves. Let us not suppose that we are nothing if we are poor. A proper self-respect is as far from pride as it is from meanness, and is even a source of duty. If we are poor, let us remember we are not overlooked; that we are not excluded from any thing essential to our happiness; that we are not prevented even from acquiring greatness and dignity. We can be great in the sight of the Lord. We can gain the unsearchable riches of Christ. We can be greater conquerors than Alexander. We can appear in a glory that will eclipse the splendour of the universe. The poor have the Gospel preached unto them.—Let us not imagine we are every thing if we are rich. There are many foolish as well as hurtful lusts which attend wealth. Let us beware of them,

and not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. We may be rich, and yet weak, and mean, and wicked, and miserable. Let us not be proud of our condition. Who made us to differ from others? He who can easily bring us down; he who will soon call us to give account of our stewardship. Shall we disdain others. He that despiseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that hath pity on the poor happy is he. Our wealth is not designed for hoarding or extravagance; but that we may give to him that needeth in all good things. If the clouds be full, they empty themselves upon the earth.

MARCH 12.—EVENING.

“By love serve one another.”—GAL. v. 13.

THIS admonition implies our connection with, out dependence upon, and our obligation to, each other. The service it enjoins is levied upon all, without exception; and is to be displayed in every way in which we can afford mutual assistance.

But let me observe what it requires as the *principle* of the practice—Love—“By love serve one another.”

The principle may be wanting where the service is not. And this may be easily proved and exemplified. A man has a sum of money to dispose of; he hears of a person by whom it is desired, and to whom it will be useful; and he advances it on proper security. But is the borrower's need, or his own gain, the motive?—A hospital is built for the reception of poor patients. A rich man in the neighbourhood becomes a subscriber and a patron. “He is so

charitable! “Nay; he wishes to maintain the character of a man of liberality; and he fears appearing to a disadvantage, when compared with his wealthy neighbour. Hence many who give, give in a way that will be sure to make it known: they, therefore, impart it through the medium of some other—in spite of the admonition, not to let the left hand know what the right hand doeth. Some would never give, if the name was not printed. Some connect themselves with public institutions, and labour to establish and enlarge them, who would individually do nothing—but here they are put upon the committee, and gain distinction. But love seeketh not her own—It regards only the good of the recipient. There are four reasons why we should serve one another from *this* principle love.

First. Without it the service has no value or excellency in the sight of God. It may be useful to the beneficiary; but it will be nothing to the benefactor—Though I speak with the tongue of men and of angels; and give aJlmy goods to feed the poor; and even give my body to be burnt; and have not love; it profiteth me nothing. The Lord looketh to the heart. If this be right, the least service is regarded by him; and where it is Hot, the most costly sacrifices are disdained. “If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be

great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”

Secondly. This will render the service pleasing to the performer. It is the nature of love to make even difficult things easy, and bitter ones sweet. This made the seven years of hard labour, which Jacob served for Rachael, seem to him as so many days. Every thing follows the heart, not only really, but cheerfully.

Thirdly. What is done from love, will excel in the manner. Being done willingly, and pleasantly, it will be done more gracefully, and welcomely. What a man does grudgingly, he does disagreeably, harshly, repulsively. He puts on a sullen face; turns himself half round; murmurs and complains; perhaps reproaches too; and, if he yields at last, you feel no more obliged than if he refused. The ungracious, unfeeling mode spoils the thing. Men may act the hypocrite; but it is almost impossible, without love, to act *courteously* and *kindly*. But where love actuates, the sufferer is not insulted while he is relieved. Alms are not flung in his face, instead of being given. The wound of distress is not torn open, but gently touched with an angel-hand. I have seen, I have heard, some refuse entirely, or in a degree, in a way that has soothed, and even satisfied, the unsuccessful petitioner—“I wish it *was* in my power—I lament my inability—I wish this trifle was ten times more—Such as it is, the blessing of God go with it.” I wonder not that love is called a *grace*—I am sure it deserves the name, not only for its origin, but for its carriage and behaviour.

Lastly. This will make the service more efficient. It will constantly excite us; and we shall think we have done nothing while any thing remains to be done. For love is generous. It does not stand conditioning. It will not be stinted by rules, and set measures; it does not want urgings and excitements, like reluctance and taskings. The person influenced by love, cannot, without shame, sit and enjoy the luxuries of his table, while Penury and Distress are his next-door neighbours. He cannot go out of his road to preserve his sensibility from being shocked at the sight of a bleeding traveller. He will let his eye affect his heart. He will not say to the hungry and naked, Be ye warmed, and be ye fed, while he gives them not such things as are needful. He will give to his power; yea, and—if some were to judge—beyond his power. He will not incapacitate himself for beneficence by indulging extravagance of any kind. He will labour with his own hands, and guide his affairs with discretion, to increase his means. He will not grow weary in well doing; and when he meets with instances of ingratitude, though he laments the evil, he will not suffer them to justify illiberality.

This sweet little verse, if universally acted upon would immediately turn this earth into a paradise—“Owe no man,” therefore, “any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the Law”—he hath also fulfilled the Gospel too—for the “end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.”

—You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—How did He—in the face of our unworthiness—and, foreseeing our sad returns—How did He—look at

Bethlehem, and Calvary—how did He, by love, serve us? “Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as dear children: and walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweetsmelling savour.”

MARCH 13.—MORNING.

“When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them; for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”

—DEUT. XX. I.

ISRAEL was now a camp, rather than a nation. Though Canaan was given them, they were to take and defend it by force of arms. Hitherto they had seen little of war, having had only a few brushes in their journey with inferior adversaries. But things would soon become more serious; and they would “see horses, and chariots, and a people more than themselves.” Hence they would be liable to alarm; and it was necessary for them to know what they had to embolden them. Moses, therefore, admonishes and encourages them; and both the admonition and the encouragement will apply to ourselves.

Religion is a state of conflict. All Christians are soldiers. They wage, indeed, a good warfare. It will bear examination. Every thing commends it; and every thing *requires* it. It is not only a just, but a *necessary* war—all that is valuable is at stake—and we must conquer or die. But it is a *trying* warfare. It continues through every season, and in every condition. It is here admitted, that the forces of their

enemies may be very superior to their own, in number, wisdom, vigilance, and might.

Hence the danger of apprehension and alarm. And fortitude is the virtue of a warrior; and none needs it more than the man who wrestles with all the powers of darkness. And none has more grounds for courageousness than he. If he considers his foes and himself only, his confidence must fail him: but he has something else to consider—

First, The Divine presence: “For the Lord thy God is with thee.” And, “How many,” said Antigonas to his troops, dismayed at the numbers of the foe; “How many do you reckon me for?” But God is all-wise and almighty. Nothing is too hard for the Lord—and if He be with us, “they that be with us are more than they that be with them.”—“Greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world.”

Secondly, His former agency: “Who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” This, to the Jew, was not only a proof, but a pledge: It not only shewed what he *could* do, but was a voucher for what he *would* do. For he is always the same: and will not suffer what he has done to be undone. It would have been strange, after opening them a passage through the sea, to have drowned them in Jordan. What would he have done for his great Name, after placing himself at their head to lead them to the Land of Promise, if he had suffered them to be overcome by the way? He who begins the good work, is not only able to finish, but begins it for the very purpose. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” “For

if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

“Grace will complete what grace begins,
To save from sorrows, or from sins
The work that Wisdom undertakes,
Eternal Mercy ne'er forsakes.”

MARCH 13.—EVENING.

“I withheld thee from sinning against me.”—GEN. XX. 6.

So said God to Abimelech the king of Gerar, when he sent to take Sarah, Abraham's wife. But it will truly apply to every individual of the human race, though not in the same circumstances.

All sin is against God—There is a propensity in man to the commission of it—and God's agency is necessary to restrain us from it. Some of our fellow-creatures have gone great lengths in iniquity; and have acted more like incarnate demons than human beings. These shew us what our depraved nature is capable of, when placed in conditions favourable to temptation, and affording both opportunity and power. And yet even these have *some* restraints. The worst characters that ever lived never committed a thousandth part of the wickedness they would have committed had they not been checked and hindered. If God did not interpose, there would be no living in a state of society. And the interposition of God is to be seen even in the laws and provisions of civil government. A magistrate is a terror to evil-doers. The gallows, the prison, the pillory, the stocks, are not only instruments of justice, but means of grace; and while we lament the necessity, we are thankful for the use of them.

Various are the ways in which God withholds us from sin. He has numberless providential precautions. Sickness has interrupted a course of iniquity which health would have continued. Worldly losses have led to the abandonment of schemes which vanity and pride had been devising. What Christian has not in some instances gone astray? and whose experience has not enabled him to explain the threatening, or rather the promise; "Behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them: and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now?" A thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, saved Paul from being exalted above measure through the abundance of his revelations. David had been insulted by Nabal, who was such a son of Belial that no one could speak with him. He deeply felt the provocation, and was upon the road resolved to avenge himself. But Nabal had a wife who was as kind and prudent as she was beautiful; and upon the report of the approaching danger she hastened to meet David with a present, and a soft answer, which turneth away wrath. And what was the happy result? "And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand."

How much evil has often been prevented by a wise and seasonable reproof! Faithful are the wounds of

a friend. How many have had reason to bless God for a pious education! How much do they owe, in their preservation from sinful courses or actions, to the impressions of early sentiment, the influence of a father's example, the recollection of a mother's tears, and the Scriptures which had been lodged in the memory! There are restraints from domestic discipline and devotion. Can a man who says, with Joshua, "As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord," and who performs family worship every morning and evening, act like others? Does a man make a profession of religion? He is bound to avoid things which others may think themselves at liberty to indulge in. Is he a minister or an office-bearer in the Church? What a safeguard becomes the reputation, the consistency that he *must* maintain! Some persons are averse to things which gender an increase of moral obligation; but we ought to value a state or a station in proportion as it tends to rescue us from sin. How often have men been checked on the brink of evil by a passage in some book, or by the address of a preacher in a sermon!

How does God withhold men from sinning by the power of conscience! The advantage of this principle which it is so difficult to subdue or to silence is unspeakable. It operates in a thousand instances where human legislation has no effect. Tyrants who have found themselves above law, and secret transgressors who have trusted in their concealment, have yet trembled before this monitor of God within. But the chief and the best way in which God restrains us from sin is by the operation of his grace. If a man has a thievish inclination, it is well to put him out of the way of temptation; but this does not make him

honest in design, though it keeps him innocent in conduct. The great thing is to have the disposition to sin mortified; and this is the experience of those who are renewed in the spirit of their minus. They are made to abhor that which is evil, and to cleave to that which is good. Some who avoid sin would be glad to indulge in it if their safety or advantage would allow of it. But how shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein? "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

We know not how much we owe to God for his preventing and restraining grace; nor can we know while we are in this world. But we surely know enough for two purposes: to make us candid, and to make us thankful. Who can tell us how far we should have resembled those we now condemn had we been placed in the same circumstances, and been exposed to the same excitements; or had God left us to ourselves? "There goes John Bradford but for the grace of God." "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake."

MARCH 14.—MORNING.

"That I may win Christ."—PHIL. iii. 8.

Is this the language of Paul? Is *he* the candidate for Christ? How well might he say, that, in the subjects of divine grace, old things are passed away, and all things are become new! What a change

must have taken place in his own experience! Compare the man with himself. Now a blasphemer of the Name of Jesus—and now asking at his feet, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Now persecuting his followers—and now preaching the faith that once he destroyed. Now living a Pharisee, and boasting of his Jewish privileges and attainments—now saying, What things were gain to me, those I count loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung—that I may *win* Christ.

Yet *had* he not won him *already*? For many years he had known, and served, and enjoyed him. But intense affection makes us think that we are never sure enough of the object. Intense delight in any good makes us long after more fruition. There is this difference between a convinced sinner, and an experienced believer in Christ: the former desires, only from a sense of want; the latter desires also, from the relish of the enjoyment. For *he* has tasted that the Lord is gracious. And hence he the more earnestly cries, Lord, evermore give me this bread. Taste provokes appetite. Advancement in knowledge produces humility and dissatisfaction. Hence the nearer anyone approaches completeness in any thing, the more easily he discerns, and the more mortifyingly he feels, his remaining deficiencies. And no wonder, therefore, the Apostle should here say, “I have not attained, I am not already perfect:” for here, so immense is the blessing, that what is possessed will never bear a comparison with what remains: and as the object is infinite, and the faculty

finite, there will always be a possibility of addition; and the happiness derivable from the Saviour will not only be eternal, but eternally increasing.

But is this prize attainable by us? In answer to this—How is He placed before us in the Scripture? Is he exhibited only to our view? or proposed to our hope? Are not *all* allowed, invited, commanded, to seek him? and all *without exception*? And could *any* be condemned for rejecting him, if he was not placed within their reach?

But what is necessary to make him our own? Not *desert*? Witness the characters of those who are encouraged to hope in him. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He died for the ungodly. Indeed, if any meritorious qualifications were to be possessed, or conditions to be performed, in order to our obtaining Him, our case would be desperate.

But *desire* is necessary. Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find. Warrant is one thing, disposition is another: unless we are convinced of our need of him, we cannot long after him; and unless we value him, the blessing could not gratify and content us, if acquired.

Sacrifice is therefore needful; and when the desire is supremely urgent and active, and nothing can be a substitute for the object, we shall be ready to part with whatever stands in competition with him. Hence we read in the Scripture, of selling all to buy the pearl of great price. Buying, here, does not signify giving an equivalent for him—for who could think of this? But, as in buying, to acquire something, something is parted with: so it is here. And whether it be the pride of reason, or self-

righteousness, or our worldly connections and interests, or our sins, that keep us back from him, we must forsake them all: and follow him. And shall we not be more, infinitely more, than indemnified—if we *win Christ*?

MARCH 14.—EVENING.

“That I may win Christ.”—PHIL. iii. 8.

—AND what a prize is He! The tongue of men and of angels would infinitely fail to do *Him* justice. The sacred writers, though inspired, labour for language and imagery to aid us to conceive a little of *his* worth. He is the hope; the Saviour; the consolation: the glory of his people Israel. He is Lord of all. In him all fulness dwells. In winning him, we gain all pure, spiritual, durable, satisfying good. We gain a way to God; a justifying righteousness; a sanctifying Spirit; a sufficiency of grace to help in time of need; a peace that passeth all understanding; a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory—we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

If an ancient philosopher had been asked, what one thing would entirely have met all his wants, and satisfied all his hopes and desires, he would have been at a loss for an answer. But ask a Christian this question, and, without a moment's hesitation, he replies, All I need, all I wish, is to “win Christ.” Let me attain him, and I shall—I can look no further.

How blessed, then, is the winner! He is happy now. Happy alone. Happy in trouble. Happy in death—How much more happy will he be here—

after! By this acquisition he is raised above the condition of Adam in Paradise—above the estate of angels in heaven. His portion is to be judged of by what *Christ* is; and by what *Christ* has. For he has won *Him!*

But how foolish is the despiser! How poor! How wretched! How miserable in time! How much more miserable in eternity!

How *can* we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?

O my soul, hear him and live—“He that findeth me, findeth life; and shall obtain favour of the Lord: but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me, love death.”

MARCH 15.—MORNING.

“I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe.”—JOHN xi. 15.

HERE we see not only that our Saviour is alive to the welfare of his disciples, but that there is nothing he is so much concerned to promote in them as their faith. Some undervalue faith; yea, they seem to be afraid of it, as if it were injurious to holiness and good works! But we here see our Lord’s estimation of it. He knows that it is the source from which flow all the streams of consolation and obedience; the tree which bears all the fruits of righteousness. Every thing in religion flourishes only as this prospers.

We are also reminded—that we are slow of heart to believe—and that faith is no easy thing. They who think otherwise evince that they have never yet

seriously made the trial. There is not a Christian upon earth, but in the attempt has often cried out with tears, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Even the Apostles, who had been so long with him and had seen his glory, said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

These disciples had already believed, or they would not have left all to follow him: but it seems they did not believe sufficiently. Faith therefore admits of degrees. Accordingly we read of "little faith," and of "great faith;" of those that are "weak in the faith." and of those that are "strong in the faith." We should be anxious that our faith, like that of the Thessalonians, should grow exceedingly, becoming more and more clear in its views, and firm in its reliance, and bold in its professions, and active in its agency, and heroic in its sacrifices—unto the perfect day.

The Saviour can accomplish his purposes in a manner peculiarly his own. "I am glad for your sakes I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." They would have said, he ought to have been there and succoured so dear an object. All the friends of Lazarus would have supposed that as soon as ever he was informed of his affliction he should have hastened to the scene of distress, and at least have expressed his sympathy. How eagerly did the sisters long for him! How did their hearts bleed over his delay! How often, wringing their hands, did they look out of the window; and send a servant to look down the Galilean way—"Where is he? If he comes not soon, it will be too late"—And now he has breathed his last—and the house is filled with wonder, perplexity, and grief. Even when he arrives they can hardly for-

hear reflection—"Lord," said Martha, "if thou hadst been *here*, my brother had not died"—Mary also complained in the same way. But hear him. "All has been proper and necessary. I know what I have done, and why I have done it. *I* know it now; and you will know it soon. Then *you* will be glad with me. Then you will see that it was far better that Lazarus should be raised from the dead after he had lain in the grave four days, than have been only recovered from a bed of sickness."

Thus he brings the blind by a way that they know not. His thoughts are as much above our thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth. Joseph's case at first seems very hard; and many would have expected that the Lord's love to him would have kept him from being thrown into the pit and sold into Egypt. But I am glad it did not, for his own sake, and the sake of his father's house, and the surrounding countries, and the Church of God in all ages. What would have been lost by the prevention of his calamity? The God they served continually was able to save the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace. But I am glad he did not—and they are glad now—and were glad after their escape—and were glad even while they were walking loose in the midst of the fire with the Son of God. The same may be said of Job. We have seen the Lord, to use his own language, taking him by the neck, and shaking him to pieces: but we have also seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is very pitiful and full of tender mercies. And with regard to ourselves—Is it not well for us that things were not always according to our mind? Has he not often advanced our welfare by events which seemed perfectly adverse to it? We were

tempted to charge him foolishly and unkindly; yet after a while we perceived how in the dispensation his wisdom and kindness were peculiarly at work for our good. And what we know not now we shall know hereafter.

Let us therefore, when our notions and his schemes disagree, distrust our own judgment and confide in the rectitude of his conduct. Let us not think of regulating his sun by our dial, but our dial by his sun. Let us not judge of his word by his providence, but of his providence by his word. Let us not judge of his heart by his hand, but of his hand by his heart. Where can we find his heart to judge by? In the promises—in the cross—he loved us and gave himself for us. Before we undertake to amend, let us be assured that there is something wrong; and before we censure, let us at least understand. Who knows what is good for a man in this life? How liable we are to err, from pride, from worldly-mindedness, from impatience, from unbelief! Let us judge nothing before the time. He will give a good account of himself at last; and bring us over to his own mind. But till we walk by sight let us walk by faith, and believe now what we shall know then—that “his work is perfect, his ways are judgment.” “He hath done all things well.”

MARCH 15.—EVENING.

“I have set the Lord always before me.”—PSALM xvi. 8.

DAVID could only set the Lord before him mentally, or as an object of contemplation; for “no man hath seen God at any time.” And when he says he had *always* done this, the meaning is, not that he was

always actually thinking of him. This would have been impossible. Our powers are limited. We have bodies, we have connections, we have callings; and these demand a share and a large share of our attention. And we are not to be slothful in business. And we are not to abandon society, and retire into cells to be always praying in sight of a skull and a crucifix—This is not to fight the good, fight of faith, but to flee from the field; this is not serving our own generation, but deserting it; this is not letting our light shine before men, but putting it under a bushel. Yet it implies the prevalence of a fixed belief of the being and nearness of God—a frequent excitement of ourselves to take hold of God—and the regular use of the means which bring God to remembrance, such as prayer, reading the Scripture, hearing the word, and meditation. By these, under the Divine influence, a state of mind is produced, in which the spirit of devotion actuates us even in the absence of its forms, and we habitually and easily recur to God in our thoughts, wherever we are, and however we are engaged—Thus we can set the Lord always before us. And there are four ways in which you should do this.

First, Set the Lord always before you as your protector. This is the peculiar though not the only reference of David, and therefore he adds, “He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” The word virtue, which at first signified bravery, valour, is now used for all moral excellence; and the reason is, because it is necessary to it. You have no hold of a man who is destitute of it, either in avoiding evil or doing good. Bunyan, therefore, with as much truth as genius, places all his pilgrims for the shining

city under the conduct of greatheart. Courage is not only necessary for a martyr: every Christian is called to suffer and do the will of God in a thousand cases where cowardice would fail. Perhaps there is not a simpler maxim, or one more readily and universally admitted, than this, "we ought to obey God rather than men;" and yet who could fully act upon it for a day together in a world like this without moral heroism? Our religious course is a constant warfare; and when we think of our own weakness, and the number and qualities of our enemies, we should tremble: but trembling unfits for action; a soldier must have courage. How is firmness and confidence to be obtained? Set the Lord, in his presence and perfections and covenant-engagements, always before you; and hear him saying, Fear not, for I am with thee—and out of weakness you will be made strong—and, like Moses, you will endure as seeing Him who is invisible

Secondly, Set the Lord always before you as your leader. Your way is not only dangerous, but perplexing: and you are not only weak, but ignorant—How much you need a guide! How earnestly did David pray for Divine direction: "Lead me in thy truth, and guide me." How did he rejoice in the prospect of it: "This God is our God, for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death." The Jews left to themselves could not have found their way in a large pathless desert: but "the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them in the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day or night." Thus his goodness met their necessity, and relieved them from all anxiety. This Guide determined the direction and

the continuance of all their journeyings; nor ever disappointed till, by a strange and varying but always a right way, it brought them to a city of habitation. Events are not this pillar to us, but the written word. This is "the lamp unto our feet, and the light unto our paths;" to which we do well to take heed. How much depends upon a wrong step! How liable are we to err! How often have we gone astray! How much have we suffered from our perverseness or rashness! How much more should we have suffered had he dealt with us according to our desert in not asking counsel of him! Let us not lean to our own understanding. Here is the commandment with promise; "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Thirdly, Set the Lord always before you as your example. The advantages of example are great: and God himself comes down and condescends to go before us, calling upon us to be holy as he is holy; to forgive as he forgives; to be merciful as he is merciful. We were made in his likeness, and our renovation in Christ is our being renewed after his own image. Our happiness results from the perfection of our nature; and the perfection of our nature consists in its resemblance to the Divine—"Therefore be ye followers of God as dear children."

Fourthly, Set the Lord always before you as your observer. Nothing escapes his notice. All he sees he records; and all he records he will bring into judgment. Do we believe this? It is true, whether we own it or deny it, that he is about our path and our bed, and understands our thought afar off—But do we believe it? Surely faith in such a truth must have some influence. And how useful must that in-

fluence be! A heathen philosopher admonished his disciples to imagine that the eye of some illustrious personage was always upon them. What was the eye of Plato, or Cato, to the eye of God? If while you were careless in company some prominent individual should enter, whose approbation it would be important for you to acquire, how would his presence regulate your behaviour, and correct your speech! What a stimulus would it be to zeal! what a check to sin! what a motive to sincerity! what a relief under reproach! what a solace in affliction! what a duty! what a privilege—to realize Hagar's conviction, "Thou God seest me!"

MARCH 16.—MORNING.

"When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace."—GAL. i. 15.

PAUL is here referring to two events—his natural birth, and his spiritual birth—the one connecting him with the world; the other, with the Church. The former of these is common to all men; the latter is confined to few. The former affords us no security from the wrath to come—"Because they are a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour." The latter makes us heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Both these, therefore are important. But the one is far more momentous than the other. The multitude are not thus minded. They keep the day of their birth, and are thankful for the continuance of

life; but never inquire—has he who separated me from my mother's womb called me by his grace? Has he made me not only a creature, but a new creature? Am I, not only a partaker of that life whose days are few and evil; but of the life which the just live by faith, and which shall endure for ever?

This is the main thing. And you will deem it so—when conscience shall be awakened; when heart and flesh shall fail; and the cold hand of death lays hold of you, to bring you into the presence of the Judge of all. To this therefore attend; and regard it without delay. We would not have you indifferent to the beauties of Nature, and the bounties of Providence: but let it be your chief concern to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Say, with David, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works: and that my soul knoweth right well." But oh! rest not satisfied till you can say, with Paul, "He called me by his grace."

Regeneration is necessary. The nature of religion demands it. The nature of God demands it. The nature of heaven demands it. Ye *must* be born *again*. Observe, *again*. Paul, you see, had been born twice: and if you are not born twice before you die once, it had been good for you if you had never been born. Those born once only, die twice—they die a temporal, and they die an eternal death. But those who are born twice, die only once—for on them the second death hath no power.

Paul was as fully persuaded of his being called by grace, as he was of his having been separated from his mother's womb. What a satisfaction must this be

to the assured individual! All are not equally privileged. Some have fears concerning their conversion. But even this anxiety is a token for good. And let them remember, that there is a certainty *attainable* not only in Christian doctrine, but in Christian experience; and let them give all diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end. Let them wait on the Lord, and keep his way; and read the things that are written unto them that believe on the Name of the Son of God, that they may know that they have eternal life.

—Little, when Paul was born, did any know what he was destined to be. The father embraced him; the mother forgot her anguish, for joy that a man was born into the world. His birth was no way distinguished from any other birth. His religious friends could not look into the future, nor conjecture the powers he was to develope, the space he was to occupy in history, the labours he was to perform, the advantages he was to render the human race to the end of time—nothing of all this could they foresee in this helpless babe. But here was the acorn of the oak. God saw the end from the beginning. Gamaliel's pupil, the zealous Pharisee, the bloody persecutor, the praying penitent, the Christian disciple, the inspired apostle—all, all were present to His view when he separated him from his mother's womb. And even then he had done virtually what he did actually in the journey to Damascus—called him by his grace. Time is nothing with Him. Design is accomplishment. Every thing has its season. All the circumstances of life, and godliness; of our birth, and our conversion; are arranged by Infinite Wisdom and Goodness. Just

and true are all thy ways, O thou King of saints,
He hath done all things well.

“Heaven, earth, and sea, and fire, and wind,

Show me thy wondrous skill;

But I review myself, and find

Diviner wonders still.

“Thy awful glories round me shine;

My flesh proclaims thy praise:

Lord, to thy works of Nature join

Thy miracles of Grace,”

MARCH 16.—EVENING.

*“Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious:
and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.”*

—I PET. ii. 6.

“BEHOLD,” is a note of attention and wonder. It shews that the subject introduced is worthy of our regard. The subject here is a representation of the importance of the Saviour, and the advantage his people derive from him. He is laid in Sion for a foundation—

“A chief corner stone.” Such a stone is designed to sustain, and on him depends the salvation of the whole Church. It also unites as well as supports. And in him are united deity and humanity, the Old and New Testament, Jew and Gentile; we are all one in Christ Jesus—

“Elect”—Chosen for the place and the purpose. Nothing is casual in the common affairs of life, much less in the restoration of sinners. All here, especially as to the accomplisher, is transacted according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. God knew what the immensity of the undertaking required, and found it only in the Son of his love—

“All things are of God, who hath reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ”—

“Precious”—Deserving of the destination and the honour. Here is the difference between him and us. He chooses us, not because we are precious, but to make us precious; not because we are holy, but that we may be holy: and if ever we enter heaven, it will be upon terms of mercy. But his appointment resulted from his fitness. He entered heaven upon terms of merit, pure and absolute merit: and therefore the angels proclaim with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” But if the word “precious” is significant of excellency, it also imports endearment. Hence it is said, “Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth.” “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hands.” And as he is dear to God, so he is dear to all his people. “To them that believe he is precious.” They have their imperfections, and mourn over them. But if he asked them individually, “Lovest thou me?” They could all answer—

“Yes, thou art precious to my soul,

My transport and my trust;

Jewels, to thee, are gaudy toys,

And gold is sordid dust.

“All my capacious powers can boast,

In thee most richly meet;

Nor to mine eyes is light so dear,

Or friendship half so sweet.”

Such is the foundation. Observe the builder: “He that believeth on him.” We might have supposed that the metaphor would have been continued,

and that Peter would have said, he that buildeth on him. But he conveys the same meaning without the figure. For as stones, as long as they continue in the quarry or remain loose upon the ground, are not actually parts of the edifice, neither indeed can be till they are placed on the foundation; so faith, and faith alone, connects us with Christ, and enables us to derive benefit from him. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Observe the blessedness he claims: he that believeth on him "shall not be confounded." He shall not be like the foolish man, "who built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell." An emblem of those who hear the Saviour's sayings, and do them not; that is, of Antinomians: and an emblem of those who rely upon their own worthiness and works; that is, of self-righteous Pharisees. How confounded will these be when their hopes fail them, and they are rejected at the very door of heaven—But when they "begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us;" he shall answer, "I say, I know you not whence ye are." It is the emblem also of those who seek happiness in the world. They are sure of disappointment, if not in obtaining their desires, which is frequently the case, yet in possessing them, and in the loss of them. Not so the believer. He is sure of gaining what he seeks after: the prize when enjoyed will exceed all his hope; and the good part which he has chosen shall never be taken away from him.

In the original passage from which the words before us are a quotation, Isaiah says, "He that belieyeth on him shall not make haste"—That is, he shall not be like a person overtaken and surprised by calamity, and in perplexed and tormenting eagerness to escape. Thus it was with the world of the ungodly at the Deluge. They despised the warnings of Noah while he was preparing the means of safety; but when the torrents began to fall, and the waters to overflow, in what hurry and confusion did they run to knock at the ark! How did they rush to the hills and mountains for safety! How climb the trees, and cling to them in despair, till they could retain their weakened hold no longer, and dropped into the abyss! Into what haste and confusion are the men of the world thrown when those losses befall them which threaten their only portion! But the believer, though he feels affliction, does not faint under it; and his mind is kept in perfect peace, being stayed upon God. Into what haste and confusion are the wicked thrown when they apprehend a messenger of death has laid hold upon them—But Simeon says, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Into what confusion and horror will the tribes of the earth be thrown when the Judge of all shall appear in the clouds of heaven! But the Christian shall have "confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." Filled with self-condemnation and self-reproach at the consequences of their vile and infatuated conduct, in having sacrificed their eternal all for what was worse than nothing, "many will rise to everlasting shame and contempt"—But "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation;

they shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end." O visit me with this salvation!

MARCH 17.—MORNING.

"The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."—ROM. x. 12.

POWER and benevolence are rarely united in our fellow-creatures. Here is one who has abundance; but he has no disposition to do good: he turns away his ear from hearing the poor; and seems to live as if he was born for himself only. Yea, the disposition often decreases as the capacity grows: so that there are some who not only give less comparatively, but less really, than they did when they were poorer. Then it hardly seemed worth their while to be covetous and to hoard; but now they have the means, and the temptation conquers them. On the other hand, there is many a one who has bowels of mercies; but he can only pity, and shed unavailing tears over victims of distress. He is compelled to say only, Be ye warmed and be ye filled, for he has it not in his hand to give such things as are needful for the body—his hand is shortened that it cannot save, though his ear is not heavy that it cannot hear. But some few there are, in whom the means, and the mind to use them are found united. The Lord increase their number! These are little images of Himself, in whom we equally find greatness and goodness, the resources and the readiness of compassion. "He is over all; and he is rich unto all that call upon him."

"Let me look at his greatness.—He is over all. All beings of every rank are under his absolute

control. He rules over all *material* agents—over all *animal* agents: over all *human* agents: over the best of men: the greatest of men; the worst of men—over all *invisible* agents: over devils; over angels; over departed spirits. He is Lord both of the dead and the living. How astonishing then are his possessions and his dominion! A nation seems a great thing to us. But what is the greatest nation, to our earth? And what is our earth, to the luminaries of heaven? Many of these are discernible by the naked eye. When this fails, art assists nature: and Herschel sees innumerable more. When the telescope fails, the imagination plunges into the immensity beyond, and we exclaim, Lo! these are parts of his ways—But how small a portion is known of Him—

Yet—for his mercy equals his majesty—the *same* Lord who is over all, “is rich unto all that call upon him.” His goodness has three characters.

First. It is plenteous—He is *rich* unto all that call upon him. Some, if they are bountiful, are poor in bounty. And this appears not only in the smallness of their gifts, but in the mode of giving. It seems done by constraint, not willingly and of a ready mind. It does not drop from them as honey from the comb, or flow like water from a spring—it seems an unnatural effort. You feel no more respect when they give much, than when they give little—every thing like nobleness is destroyed by the manner: the meanness of the disposition is betrayed; and the poor-spirited mortal can no more give kindly and generously, than a clown can dance gracefully. But the Lord God is a sun—He gives grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold. He is abundant

in goodness and in truth. He abundantly pardons
And while he gives liberally, he upbraideth not.

Secondly. It is impartial. He is rich *unto all* that call upon him. For there is no difference between Jew and Greek. And the same will apply to sex, and age, and calling, and condition, and character. The proclamations of divine grace exclude none, whatever be their circumstances—and it is well they do not. If *any* were excluded, awakened souls would be sure to find themselves among the exceptions. But what exceptions can any find when they read—“Preach the Gospel to every creature?” “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely?” Evangelical mercy is like Noah’s ark, that took in the clean and the unclean—only with this difference in favour of the truth above the type: there all the beasts came out as they went in; whereas, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. He changes all he receives, and sanctifies all he saves.

Thirdly. It is wise—He is rich unto all that *call* upon him. This is required, and cannot be dispensed with. Not only because God wills it; but because it seemeth good in his sight. He knows that we should never praise him for blessings which we do not value: and he knows that we never could be made happy by them. For that which gratifies, is something that relieves our wants; fulfils our desire; accomplishes our hope; and crowns our endeavours. God’s way, therefore, is to make us sensible of our state, and to cause us to hunger and thirst after righteousness; and then we shall be filled: for whoso asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

God reveals himself, not only for our encouragement, but imitation; and vain is our confidence in him, without conformity to him. Therefore, says the Apostle, Be ye followers of God, as dear children. How? In what?—and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweetsmelling savour. Men would be like God, as the greatest of beings; but we are to be like Him, as the best of beings. They would resemble him in his natural perfections; but we are to resemble him in his moral. They would, as He is, be over all, and gladly have everything at their own disposal—but we are to be holy, as he is holy; and true, as he is true; and patient, as he is patient; and forgiving, as he is forgiving; and tender, as he is tender; and, according to our resources, to be rich unto all that call upon us.

MARCH 17.—EVENING.

“Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.”—GEN. v. 24.

—TOOK him from time to eternity, from earth to heaven, from the world of the ungodly to the innumerable company of angels, from a vale of tears to fulness of joy: took him immediately to himself without dissolution—“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”

But what was this privileged being who was saved from the way of all the earth and the house appointed for all living? who, excused suffering “the pains, the groans, the dying strife,” was changed in a

moment, in the twinkling of an eye? who, instead of being unclothed, was clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life? When an event so surprisingly and entirely singular takes place, it is natural and useful to inquire after the cause. And the Holy Ghost meets our wishes, and places before us the quality of a life that terminates so differently from that of all other men—ENOCH WALKED WITH GOD.

And here we see that the best characters are the most easily recorded, and often furnish the fewest materials for history. There are not many particulars in the life of any individual very worthy of publicity and perpetuation; and generally if it be faithful, the larger the account of the actor, the greater the display of weakness, or sin, or suffering. Hence the folly of the voluminousness of modern biography. Hence the wisdom of the sacred writers in not drawing us after them through a thousand minute and uninteresting occurrences, but fixing the mind upon a few and important articles. The history of an Alexander, a Cesar, a Napoleon, would fill many a page, and curse many a volume; while the simple, noble life of a man honoured above all humanity is comprised in one sentence—ENOCH WALKED WITH GOD.

And do we not here see wherein lies the true dignity of man, and what it is that supremely attracts the Divine approbation? It is not woddly grandeur, riches, or power—Enoch is not famed for these. It is not even gifts—Enoch was indeed a prophet, and announced the Lord's coming to judgment. But his greatness in the sight of God arose not from his inspiration, but from his moral excellency, holiness, and grace. The low estimation in which God holds

great talents and endowments may be inferred from his imparting them so sparingly. Were they so necessary as some imagine in the affairs of the world and the Church, he could easily furnish them—and he *would* do it; for, in his economies, things are common in proportion as they are indispensable. It also appears from the character of those on whom they are frequently conferred. They are not dear to God, nor can he take pleasure in them though he employs them. What was Balaam with his sublime predictions? or Judas with his miracles and signs? “Though,” says Paul, “I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.” Here we are always erring. We covet earnestly those gifts which are confined to a few, and are seldom sanctified to the possessor; while we are careless of those graces which are accessible to all, and which always accompany salvation. That life which was so distinguished by the Judge of all; that life which was only one remove from glory; that life which opened at once a passage for soul and body into the heaven of heavens, was not placed in circumstances above our reach, nor did it consist in any thing unattainable by the poorest and meanest among us—It was WALKING WITH GOD. Real greatness does not depend upon the things we do, but upon the mind with which we do them; and the Lord looketh to the heart. The career therefore of true glory lies open to all; to the servant as well as to the master; to the subject as well as to the

monarch. All cannot be learned; but all may be taught of the Lord. All cannot enjoy civil freedom; but all may possess the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And the poor of this world may be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

Yet the life of Enoch by no means passed in abstraction from society and business, or favoured that superstitious sanctity which refuses the allowed enjoyments of nature and providence. A proper use of our creature comforts is compatible, not only with the sincerest, but the strictest godliness; and falls in with the design of Him who giveth us richly all things to enjoy. Enoch, who sustains such an exalted character, was not an ascetic, or recluse; he married earlier than any of his patriarchal brethren, and had sons and daughters. It is not the religion of the Bible that drives men into caves and dens of the earth, or that teaches them to counteract the destinations of Providence, or to oppose the nature that God has given them—It is the religion of anti-christ that represents as impure what God has declared to be pure; it is a seducing spirit that decries what God not only permits, but enjoins as honourable in all; it is a doctrine of devils that forbids to marry, and commands to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thankfulness of them which believe and know the truth—Is a wretched dronish monk in his cell, with his horsehair, skull, and hour-glass, a more amiable, a more useful, a more *holy* being than Enoch at the head of an early family, filling up his station, and serving his generation by the will of God?

If however some entertain ideas of his life too rigid, others may have views of it too lax, limited,

and low. His religion was not confined to morality. Morality is not to be undervalued. There is no piety without morality, but there may be morality without piety. We commend a discharge of the duties we owe to our fellow-creatures: but this is only our walking with *men*. Our greatest relations connect us with another Being; with him we have principally to do—Godliness consists in our walking with *God*. Some are not vicious; but they never reverence the Sabbath, or engage in public or private devotion. They owe no man any thing; but they rob God. They are good neighbours; but God is not in all their thoughts. They have no confidence in him, no communion with him. They are not renewed after his image. They are not followers of him as dear children, nor walk in love as Christ also loved us.

Such was the religion of Enoch. And blessed are they who like him walk with God. They must not indeed expect to be translated as he was. Yet, as to its sting and its curse, Jesus has abolished death. He tells his followers, “If a man keep my sayings, he shall never see *death*.” With regard to him, death is so changed in its nature, and so blessed in its effects, that it does not deserve the name—No, he shall not die, but only go home; only fall asleep in Jesus; only depart to be with Christ which is far better. His body also will be changed and fashioned like the Saviour’s own glorious body; and so will he be for ever with the Lord. The issue therefore is the same—And this is the grand thing. And if I am not to reach the blessedness by a miraculous transformation, but by an accident, or a disease—it is enough. “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.”

MARCH 18.—MORNING.

“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.”—ACTS iii. 1.

THE associates here were Peter and John. We should not have noticed this particularly, had we not found them so frequently and constantly together in the Scripture. The instances will readily occur to all attentive readers of the New Testament. But the reasons of this peculiar intimacy are not mentioned. Each of the two had a brother among the Apostles. But there is an amity superior to relationship: there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. It is commonly supposed, that those who attract each other and unite, very much resemble each other: whereas, Peter and John seem to have been more dissimilar than any other two of the Apostles that could have been selected. Yet may not the unlikeness be considered as one of the causes of this friendship? Peter knew the excellences of John were the opposites to his imperfections, and would tend to rectify them. Peter was eager and severe. John was more patient and affectionate. Peter was the hand, John the eye. But they were the more mutually necessary to each other.

Peter had denied his Lord, and rendered his attachment to him questionable. Perhaps John had been more compassionate towards him after his fall, and more ready to restore him in the spirit of meekness. David, after his backsliding, prayed, “Let them that fear Thee turn unto me”—and some do this much more freely than others.

But connections and intimacies are not always to

be accounted for. They often depend on things impossible for us to describe. They come from God, who has peculiar purposes to answer, and link us together by invisible chains. See an instance of this —“It came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.” Though an heir apparent, Jonathan was at once attached to a man who was to exclude him from the succession. But the thing was of the Lord. How often do we read of God’s giving a man favour in the eyes of another!

We have here a word in recommendation of friendship. It is sanctioned by Scripture and example. It is not good for man to be alone; but we are not required to put even everyone we love into our bosom. Peter had many colleagues; but one companion, one friend.

Their friendship was religious; and, instead of leading them to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of the scornful; it took them to the house of God, in company. Those connections are the most valuable, in which the Bible is a witness between us; in which another world. is not forgotten; in which we are bound by faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; in which we walk together as heirs of the grace of life, that our prayers be not hindered.

We see that public devotion has claims upon us.

God has commanded us not to “forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is;” and he has said, “In all places where I record my Name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.” The worship of the sanctuary enlivens our feelings; endears us to each other; and keeps the distinctions of life from becoming excessive. There the rich and the poor meet together; and seek and serve a Being, with whom there is no respect of persons. Happy they who love the place where his honour dwelleth! Let me always avail myself of the duty; the privilege; and be glad when they say unto me, Let us go up into the house of the Lord.

MARCH 18.—EVENING.

“Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield.”—PSALM xxxiii. 20.

THERE may be the form of godliness without the power. But the religion of the Bible has to do with the “soul.” The true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

In noticing the subject of the exercise here encouraged, it may be observed that it is said—not our souls—but “our soul”—as if they all had only one. And what is the language of God by the prophet? “I will give them one heart and one way.” And thus the two disciples going to Emmaus exclaimed, upon their discovery and surprise, “Did not our heart burn within us?” And thus in the beginning of the Gospel it was said; “The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” We have seen several drops of water on the table, by being brought to touch, running into one.

If Christians were better acquainted with each other, they would easily unite. What wonder that those should be one-minded who, under the same influence, are feeling the same wants, pursuing the same good, employing the same means, looking for the same destination? And how suitable and wisely enforced is the admonition—"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

But the exercise itself is "waiting for the Lord"—an exercise frequently mentioned in the Scriptures, and well understood by all believers. Their character as the heirs of promise, is derived from it—"blessed are all they that wait for him." It includes conviction—a persuasion that the Lord is the supreme good, the fountain of life, our exceeding joy; all in all. It includes desire—it is expressed by hungering and thirsting after righteousness, by panting after God, by fainting for his salvation. It includes hope—the degrees of this may vary, but some measure of it is necessary to the commencement and continuance of the exercise; and the exercise will be always influenced and enlivened accordingly as our hope is possibility, or probability, or confidence. It also includes patience—God is never slack concerning his promise. He never tarries beyond his own time; but he is often beyond ours: and, in a state of expectation, hours seem days, and days seem weeks, especially if we are pressed with difficulties, and our eagerness for enjoyment is great—Then hope deferred maketh the heart sick. Here is the trial; and here

is the need of patience. But patience will restrain us from the hasty use of improper means of relief; and preserve us from charging God foolishly, censoriously, or unfaithfully; and from sinking in the day of adversity; and from abandoning the throne of grace; and saying, why should I wait for the Lord any longer? Hence “it is a good thing that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord: for the Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him”—

And thus the Church is here encouraged: “He is our help; and our shield.” He is

Their *help*. They need aid; and they feel their need; and they increasingly feel it as they advance in their religious course. They do not complain of their duties, or murmur at their trials; but, with the knowledge they have of themselves, they often fear whether they shall ever discharge the one, and endure the other, as becomes their profession. And they would not if left to themselves. But they are not left to themselves. They have a *Divine* helper whose resources are infinite. Through his strengthening of them they can do all things; and as it is with their work, so it is with their sufferings; he is “a very present help in trouble”—easily found—always near them—always within sight—or within call—and while they call, he will answer—and say, “Here I am.”

He is also their *shield*. They are not only weak, but exposed. They are in an enemy’s country. Their adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour. He is yet more dangerous as the serpent; and we read of his depths, wiles, and devices. They are surrounded with the errors and vices, frowns and allurements, of

a world lying in wickedness: while, owing to the remaining corruption of their nature, all their passions, appetites, and senses, may prove inlets to evil. But their defence is of God, who saveth the upright in heart. The Lord is their keeper, and he is able to keep them from falling—Faith can realize this, and preserve the mind in perfect peace, being stayed upon God. “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?”—Thus he is their benefactor as to good, and their preserver as to evil. What can they want more?

And can such an experience be kept to themselves? Impossible—“If these should hold their peace, the stones would cry out.” “O Israel, trust thou in the Lord: he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield.”

MARCH 19.—MORNING.

“Ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.”—DEUT. xxxii. 7.

THERE is much truth in the proverb, He that will learn of none but himself, is sure to have a fool for *his* master. The way to advance in knowledge, is to be sensible of our own deficiencies, and willing to avail ourselves of assistance. The cause of all errors is pride; for though we are ignorant, and unable to guide ourselves, there is an infallible Instructor, under whose teachings we may place ourselves—“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to

all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

And there are others that may be subordinately consulted: they possess and can impart a little of his judgment; for in his light they see light. The priest's lips should keep knowledge; and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. And not only ministers, but private Christians, may be useful—yea, and unlearned Christians, and poor and afflicted Christians, who walk much with God, and draw in their irradiations immediately from the Scriptures. Indeed there is hardly a being, however inferior to ourselves in some respects, but, being better versed in others, can teach us something. A wise man will learn more from a fool, than a fool will learn from a thousand wise men. The Scripture sends us even to the brute creation: “Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee.” “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.”

But I said, days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. It is true, great men are not always wise, neither do the aged understand judgment: yet they must have had many more opportunities for observation and decision than others; and God obviously intended to place some under the tuition of others. We were designed to live in a state of connection with, and dependence upon each other: and while the old need the strength and activeness of the young, the young need the prudence and counsel of the old. Therefore, says Peter, “Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder.” In the young nothing can be more offensive than self-suffi-

ciency. Surely, they must acknowledge, that those who are much older than themselves have at least the advantage of *experience*, which is commonly the slow growth of time. and is the most valuable of all knowledge. And when young people so often err in the connections they form, and the steps they take, and the hazards they run into; is it not from that self-confidence which deems advice needless? They are not sober-minded; but think more highly of themselves than they ought to think.

But what advantage do we derive from writing and printing! The birds and beasts are no wiser now, than when they went to Noah for shelter, and to Adam for names. It is nearly the same with savage life: knowledge is not preserved, transmitted, and increased, for want of books. But, in consequence of these helps, the improvements of one age flow into another, and the stream is continually enlarging by the influx of additional discoveries. By means of them, we can consult the dead, as well as the living: for though dead, they yet speak. And we can hold converse with Bacon, and Boyle; with Luther and Leighton: and can be *alone* with them; and be with them in their best moments; and when they are most ready to communicate. Yea, by the Scriptures, we can associate with Paul, and Isaiah; with Moses, and the Patriarchs; and can sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.

MARCH 19.—EVENING.

“And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”—REV. xix. 16.

THE name is expressive of dignity, greatness, and

dominion. A more elevated idea of him could not be given comparatively, than to say he was higher than the highest, and governed those who governed the earth. The title has been worn by princes and popes; but the assumption was always founded in ignorance, pride, and impiety. To Jesus it truly and perfectly belongs. It may be considered two ways. First, as importing the *extensiveness* of his empire. His kingdom ruleth over all. There are no beings in the universe but are either his subjects or slaves. Secondly, as referring to his connection with the personages here mentioned. He is “the King of *kings*, and the Lord of *lords*.” They are all amenable to his authority, and will be judged at his bar. They are all raised up by his power. They are controlled by his providence. They all sub serve his designs.

But where is the name worn? “Upon his vesture and upon his thigh:” that is, upon the part of the vesture which covered the thigh. His ways are not our ways. This is not the place where we should have looked for his *name*—the thigh is the place where hangs the *sword*. It is—and this is the very reason why his name is found *there*. It reminds us that his kingdom is not of this world: then would his servants fight: but now is his kingdom not from thence. And therefore, says the Apostle, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. He had a sword; and John saw the sword; but it was a sword “going out of his mouth.” This intended his word, and shewed—not that he does not make war, but by what kind of instrumentality his victories are to be achieved. He meets with opposition both in gaining and in maintaining his dominion; and he rules in the midst of his enemies. But how? By

the rod of his strength—the Gospel of Christ, which is the power of God to salvation to everyone that believeth. “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

And how was it impressed? It was “written.” As the vesture seemed dipped in blood, and appeared as of a deep crimson colour, the letters of the name, it is probable, were white and glistening. We know not in what language the name was inscribed. It was legible to John. Might it not be like his title on the cross, written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin? However this may be, it was written in order to be read and known. Many individuals pass us of whom we are ignorant. A nobleman may be ascertained by his livery or his arms. But he who has his name written even upon his vesture and upon his thigh must assuredly wish to be read and known of all men. Paul earnestly desired to know him; and esteemed all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. The reason results from two things—He is of unspeakable importance to the case of fallen man: no one can supply his place in any thing pertaining to our recovery: there is salvation in no other—And we can derive no advantage from him without knowing him. Without knowing him, how can we love him? How can we put our trust in him? How can we repair to him for refuge or help? Therefore says God, “by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.” It is true that we are justified only by faith. But “how can they call upon him in whom they have not believed;

and how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard?"

Hence the expediency, the necessity, of making him known. Hence it is said, "I will cause thy name to be remembered in all generations;" and "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas." Hence the Scriptures so clearly reveal him; and ministers so constantly cry, "Behold the Lamb of God." Hence his people pray, "Send out thy light and thy truth;" "that thy way may be known on earth, thy saving health among all nations." Hence parents are required to teach him to their children; and every partaker of Divine grace to say to his neighbour, "O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusteth in him."

Let then this name written upon his vesture and upon his thigh be known and read of all men. Let the proud read it and admire his condescension. He who stoops to our mean affairs, allows us to walk with him, tells all our wanderings, puts our tears into his bottle, makes all our bed in our sickness, is "the King of glory," and "the Lord of all."—Let

His enemies read it, and tremble. Who ever hardened themselves against him and prospered? "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is King of kings and Lord of lords."—Let

His friends read it, and dismiss all their fears. He is for them and with them. Their Redeemer is mighty; and will plead their cause. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day"—And what is there else that he is not able to

keep? My reputation? my business? my health? my family? Is there a loss but he can turn into a gain? He can make all things work together for good to them that love him.—Let

Those who are tempted to deny him read it, and go forth to him without the camp bearing his reproach. Let them remember not only their danger in being ashamed of him and of his words; but of their folly and weakness. Who is he they blush to own? and whose cause, and whose followers they deem it disgraceful to espouse? The King of kings and Lord of lords!

Let us all read it, and invite him to go on conquering and to conquer till his title is as fully acknowledged as it is justly deserved, and he shall reign for ever and ever. “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.”

“Great King of grace, my heart subdue;
I would be led in triumph too:
A willing captive to my Lord,
And sing the victories of thy word.”

MARCH 20.—MORNING.

“*Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily.*”
—Ps. lxxxvi. 3.

So David, though a man after God’s own heart, and perhaps the greatest proficient in experimental and devotional piety before the coming of Christ, felt *his* need of mercy, and sought it daily. Let us follow his example, and cry daily.

—For pardoning mercy. It is well for us that He is ready to forgive. Who can understand his errors? In many things we offend all. What omissions of duty are we chargeable with! If our actions are materially good, how defective are their principle and motive! The sins of our holy things would condemn us. Usher, one of the best as well as one of the greatest of men, therefore said, he hoped to die with the words of the publican in his mouth, God be merciful to me a sinner; and he died pronouncing them. And Paul, after eulogizing Onesiphorus so highly for his good works, adds, “The Lord grant that *he* may find mercy of the Lord in that day”—he, even he, would need mercy—to the last, and, above all—at the last. And where is the man, who in prospect of *that* day, must not fall upon his knees, and pray, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified?”

—Let us cry daily for sanctifying mercy. We cannot be in a proper state of mind if we only see the guilt of sin, and not the pollution also: if our fear only be excited, and not our aversion: if we are concerned to be delivered from the wrath to come, but not to be “saved by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” “I want,” says the Christian, “true holiness. I want to bear more of the image of the heavenly. I want to be purified even as He is pure.”

—Let us cry daily for assisting mercy. What can we do *alone* in our trials and our duties; in our calling as men, and our vocation as Christians? We cannot see to-morrow with the light of to-day; nor will our present food yield us future support—we must have fresh supplies of light and of food. And

we must have fresh supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, to help our infirmities, to renew our strength; and to enable us to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. We must live in the Spirit, that we may walk in the Spirit.

—Let us cry daily for preserving mercy. Our reputation, our substance, our business, our health—every thing is exposed; and He is the preserver of men. But the great thing is the soul. To what dangers is not this liable! And he who knows his perils and himself will not only watch, but pray, lest he enter into temptation. He knows that God alone can keep him from falling, and that without him he can no more stand than a staff when the hand is withdrawn. Therefore his language will be, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.”

—Let us cry daily for providing mercy. He has taught us this—When we pray, say, Give us day by day our daily bread. Bread signifies sustenance at large: but the word employed is wisely chosen; it is to teach us moderation. We are not to pray for dainties, but to be fed with food convenient for us. Our necessity, as well as safety, if properly consulted, will keep us from seeking great things to ourselves. Nature wants little; and grace less.

—Let us cry daily for guiding mercy. How much depends, not only upon a wrong course, but even a wrong step! It may give a new character to my condition. It may quarter upon me repentance for life. And the way of man is not in himself. It is, not in man that walketh to direct his steps. What a privilege that. He, who cannot err, is as willing as he is able to lead me! To him alone let me repair, and on him alone depend, saying, as the language both

of choice and of confidence—*Thou* shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.

Then daily prayer will be turned into ceaseless praise; and I shall sing of the mercy of the Lord for ever.

MARCH 20.—EVENING.

“Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.”—GEN. xlix. 2.

PRECIOUS in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints; and the scene is peculiarly worthy of our contemplation. It shews us the power of divine grace, and the value of the religion of Jesus in sustaining the possessor when every other support gives way, in comforting him when every other source of consolation dries up, and in irradiating him when every other sun of glory sets. Therefore says David, “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace. “And even Balaam exclaims, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.”

Jacob is here dying. He feels perfectly composed and satisfied as to the issue. We see him between two worlds, weary of time, and welcoming eternity; rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, and saying, “I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.” It seems to have been common in the patriarchal age for men, when dying, to pronounce a benediction on their offspring; and which, in many cases, not only admonished them of their duty, but foretold their destination—Thus “Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together; that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and

hearken unto Israel, your father.” The words of dying men, especially of dying parents, are impressive, and ought to be remembered. We have met with instances in which they have proved the power of God to salvation.

—Jacob begins with Reuben. Reuben signifies, “see a son.” It was the exclamation of the joyful mother at his birth. So children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. But how little does a parent know in what disappointments his wishes and prognostics are to terminate! Reuben was his first-born, but he had forfeited the prerogatives of birth; and Jacob mentions them only to degrade his son from them. He shall have the privilege of a son, but not the rights of primogeniture—“Reuben, thou art my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father’s bed, then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.” It may seem strange and unkind in Jacob to revive this scandal now, when Reuben was weeping at the side of a rather’s dying bed; but he spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. The sin had indeed been committed more than forty years before; but as nothing is future, so nothing is past, with God. We should hope he had long before repented of the deed; but there are crimes, the consequences of which are irreparable in this world. It was well if the guilt of his conduct was removed from his conscience—and with the Lord there is mercy; but the stain was indelible on his person and family. We are under a moral economy, and the wisdom of God has established connections which even his good-

ness does not destroy. "Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent. Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away." It is useless to murmur at the Divine dispensations. Forgiveness is attainable upon repentance; but they who trifle with character must not expect to retain esteem and honour. They will be sure to hear of it again; and, by providential corrections, the rebukes of friends, the upbraidings of enemies, and galling reflections of their own minds, they will often have reason to say, "My sin is ever before me."

Reuben had fits of good feeling, and was naturally tender-hearted. When therefore his brethren were going to slay Joseph, he urged them to cast him into a pit, hoping to deliver him. And when they had left the place, and he to accomplish his purpose went secretly round to it and found him not, "he rent his clothes; and returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?" And when they were all put in ward, and conscience led them to say one to another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother;" Reuben made this appeal; "Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold also his blood is required." When too they were in danger of perishing for want, through Jacob's unwillingness to let Benjamin go, "Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will

bring him to thee again.” And had we a fuller history of his life, we should doubtless meet with many instances of a similar nature. But his goodness was as the morning cloud and early dew that soon passeth away. He had no self-government. He was the slave of his appetites and vile passions—“unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.” No; without stability there cannot be excellency. Without stability there can be no character: for character is the effect and force of habit; and habit is produced only by constancy and consistency in acting. The proverb says, a rolling stone gathers no moss. A tree that is every year transplanted will not rise high, and grow strong, and bring forth much fruit. Even obstinacy is preferable to versatility: the one may perchance be well guided, and then it will firmly go on; in the other, there is nothing to guide. You may build upon a rock, but what can you do with a mound of sand?

In the next exercise, we will inquire wherein we should seek to excel; and in the following, wherein we should guard against instability.

MARCH 21.—MORNING.

“*Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.*”—GEN. xlix. 4.

—*Wherein should we seek after excellence?*

Let us seek to excel in *knowledge*. For the soul to be without knowledge it is not good. It is like a vessel without rudder or compass; or a body without an eye. Bacon is admired for saying, knowledge is power. But Solomon had said, ages before; “Wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life

to them that have it." We are to have the innocency of the dove, but our Saviour himself requires us to combine with it the wisdom of the serpent. And while the Apostle tells us in malice to be children, he adds, but in understanding be ye men. And "henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." It is lamentable to think how little judgment many professors of religion exercise, and how little information they have acquired after enjoying so many advantages and for so long a season: so that when for the time they ought to be teachers, they have need that one teach them again which be the first principles of the oracles of God. How cloudy, and confused, and inconsistent, are the views of some even with regard to the leading articles of the truth as it is in Jesus; by which, if their safety is not affected, their comfort and welfare are injured.

Let us seek to excel in *sanctity*. Without obedience, vain is our knowledge—"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." What is it to understand all mysteries, and not bridle the tongue or govern the temper? To be orthodox, and not moral? To be taught by the Gospel every thing except to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world? Holiness is the beauty, the dignity of the soul. It is the radiance of the Divine image. The design of God, in all his commands, promises, dispensations, and influences, is, to make us "partakers of his holiness."

Let us seek to excel in *charity*. "Covet earnestly the best gifts," says the Apostle; "and yet I shew

unto you a more excellent way:" and this he immediately explains to be our acquiring and exercising the best graces, and principally charity; for the greatest of these is charity—love to God, and to our fellow-creatures, and especially to them that are of the household of faith. By this all men are to know that we are the disciples of Jesus; and by this we ourselves are to know that we have passed from death unto life. This is that which the Apostle so commends in the Thessalonians: "As touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia." Yet he adds; "But we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more." And after many admonitions to the Colossians he says, "and, above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."

Let us seek to excel in *usefulness*. If the unprofitable servant be a wicked one; and if every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit be hewn down and cast into the fire; what becomes of the religion and the hope of many? What good of any kind or of any degree do they perform—or even endeavour to perform? The endeavour indeed is execution with him who looketh to the heart, and says, where there is first a willing mind it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. It would be well if they deserved the commendation pronounced upon Mary; "she hath done what she could." But is this their case? Is there one of their powers or resources which they fully tax? What good work at the end of a day or a week have they ever to review: we do not mean with self-exultation,

but with thankfulness to God that they do not eat, and drink, and sleep, and live, in vain? In a world like ours, if we are disposed, we can never be at a loss for opportunities or means of doing good. And if we have no profession or business, we are the more bound to be useful, because we are the more free from care. Has not God promised that he will not only save his people, but make them a blessing? Is it not most delightful and honourable to resemble him who went about doing good? Be teachers of babes in our Sunday schools. Be eyes to the blind. Let the blessing of him that is ready to perish come upon you. Cause the widow's heart to sing for joy. Serve your generation according to the will of God; and "seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the Church."

Seek to excel in *reputation*. A bishop must have a good report of them that are without; and Christians are to be blameless, as well as harmless. They are not to be unconcerned about what people say of them, but to take heed that their good be not evil spoken of. A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. It is valuable as an instrument of usefulness. It gains a man esteem. It procures for him confidence. It gives force to his advice, authority to his reproof, and influence to his example. If the world does not love some men, it cannot despise them. If it speaks against them, it is only in matters pertaining to the law of their God—which is their glory; or by magnifying infirmities from which no one professes to be free, or by misrepresenting their actions or motives—and against this it may be impossible to guard. But commonly after a while a consistent Christian puts to silence the ignorance of

foolish men, and constrains those around him to bear their testimony in his favour. Demetrius had a good report of all men, as well as of the truth itself. And where the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost—he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men.

Much has been said upon the subject of emulation; and it has been often disputed whether it should be encouraged or repressed. It is certain that a disposition to excel others in beauty, dress, learning, riches, power, and honour, may prove very corrupting, and gender envy, hatred, falsehood, and strife. But there is a principle of this kind in our nature; and there is a course in which you may seek to surpass, without danger to yourselves or injury to others. We have placed it before you—Pursue it. Be ambitious to be great in the sight of the Lord. Be not satisfied with the reality of religion, but go from strength to strength; and be changed from glory to glory. Increase with all the increase of God. Do not compare yourselves with low models, but with the highest examples. Pray that you may do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven—And be ye perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

MARCH 21.—EVENING.

“Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.”—GEN. xlix. 4.

—*Wherein should we guard against instability?*

We should guard against it in our *governing aim*. If a vessel at sea is steering for no port, who is to determine whether the direction of the wind be favour-

able or unfavourable? If we are travelling at random, we move, but we do not journey: and it is a matter of indifference whether we turn aside or draw back; we make no progress unless we advance towards some end which we wish to reach. When a man has fixed his aim, his aim will simplify his conduct, arrange his actions, and give every thing a relation. Paul says, "This one thing I do." He does not speak of a oneness of exertion, for he did a thousand things; but a oneness of purpose, which combined them all, and gave them the same direction. Now our determinate aim should be to please and serve God according to the injunction, "whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." If here our eye be single, our whole body will be full of light. But if other aims also sway us, we shall be perplexed, distracted, and often at a stand. "Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty." "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Let us guard against instability in our *views of divine truth*. Some have no fixed sentiments in religion; they are struck with every novel opinion; and are led after every "Lo! here; or lo! there." But says Paul, "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." By grace he means the Gospel. We would not plead for bigotry or prejudice. We should be open to conviction, and judge according to evidence; but it is absurd to suppose we must remain all our days in uncertainty and doubt. If the

poor have the Gospel preached unto them, it cannot be, if they are to receive it, very difficult as to its leading principles. And we are told that the way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. Surely it is a reproach and not a commendation, that some are ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. It is desirable and necessary that we should be able early to decide what is truth, that we may make use of it, and live upon it, and enjoy it. Who has ever seen a sound experience and a consistent practice in connection with a loose creed? We should distinguish between what is circumstantial in religion and what is essential. With regard to the former, we cannot be too candid and liberal. But with regard to the latter, let us be inflexible—Here “take hold of instruction; let it not go: keep her, for she is thy life.”

Let us guard against instability in *church fellowship and attendance*. Some belong to no religious community. They are mere birds of passage, fleeing from one congregation to another. They enter no school, and therefore are subject to no rules of instruction. They are attached to no corps in the army of heaven; and therefore they have no discipline or drilling. They are not fellow-citizens with the saints, but spiritual vagrants. If all were like-minded, there would be no such thing as a church state in which the members give up themselves to each other as well as to the Lord, communing together in privilege, co-operating together in exertions, and walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. They are also inconstant in their attendance on the means of grace in the same sanctuary. We would not have the house of God turned into a prison, and have

people fettered to their own walls. Yet it is desirable, and for the promotion of godliness, for persons to have a spiritual home of their own. Some on the Sabbath-day morning have to determine where they shall go, and whom they shall hear. They are actuated by novelty and curiosity, rather than a simple desire to profit: and, unwilling to endure any course of tuition which would do some justice to the word of God at large, they “heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” Unstable as water, *they* never excel.

We should guard against instability even in our *temporal concerns*. This is inferior in some respects to the former articles, but it has a considerable degree of importance. People will judge of you in other things by what comes under their observation: and you will be sure to lose respect in proportion as you appear to be versatile. Yet in some what variableness is there! What instability with regard to friendship—every month or year yields a new favourite, at whose shrine some old connection is sacrificed. What instability with regard to domestics—what changes of servants! What instability with regard to residence—what changes of abode! What instability with regard to business—what changes of employment! What instability in the management of their affairs—what violations of engagement and punctuality—what confusion, what delays, what excuses—nothing is done decently and in order—“Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.”

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” And “the God of all grace,

who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

MARCH 22.—MORNING.

“*The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy.*”—ZEPH. iii. 17.

IT is obvious He *can* save—for he is in the *midst* of them, and *mighty*. Here is nearness and power:

He is therefore able to save to the uttermost—whatever be the heinousness of guilt, or the depravity of nature, or the extremity of danger, or the depth of distress.

But he *will* save—He is inclined, he is engaged, he is bound by promise, and oath, and blood—

—Neither does he repent of the obligation under which he has been pleased to bring himself—neither does he perform the work with reluctance—He will save, he *will rejoice over them with Joy*.

—Are they his vineyard? I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. Are they his sheep? “The Lord shall save them in that day, as the flock of his people: neither shall the beast of the field devour them; but they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.”

But what is this Salvation? It does not exclude temporal preservation and deliverance. He knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation. If he does not find a way, he can easily make one. Thus he saved Joseph from prison; and David from the

paw of the lion and the bear, and the uncircumcised Philistine; and Elijah from famine; and Jonah from the belly of hell.

We are not to look for miracles, but we may look for Him who performed them; and who has said, I will be with thee in trouble. He has all events at his control. He is always the same. His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. A distinction, however, is to be here observed. Temporal deliverances are promised *conditionally*. He could not have promised *them* otherwise. It would be rather a threatening than a promise, were he to engage to relieve and indulge you, whether it be good for you or evil. And it *might* be evil; and though you may not be aware of it, he can foresee it, and will prevent it. He has therefore said, They that seek the Lord shall not want any *good* thing. As to your property, he can make a hedge about all that you have. As to your reputation, he can hide you in the secret of his pavilion from the strife of tongues. As to your body, he can keep all your bones so that not one of them shall be broken; and if it be good for you, he will—he must do it. But if it should be otherwise, he will disappoint your wishes and hopes, and make the privation the privilege.

But as to the *soul*! Ah! what did you mean when you first asked, “What shall I do to be saved?” When you first prayed, “Save me, and I shall be saved?” You thought of nothing earthly then—but—of redemption from the curse of the Law; of deliverance from the powers of darkness; of freedom from the sting of death; of release from the dominion and being of sin. And it was said unto you, “Believe on

the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” And *this* salvation is insured. *This* salvation is begun. You are already justified by his blood, and saved from wrath through him. You are already renewed in the spirit of your mind. You have already the earnest of your inheritance; and taste some of the grapes of Eshcol. And as to the completion, now is your salvation nearer than when you believed. The night is far spent: the day is at hand.

And what is every thing beside! All well with the soul! All well for eternity! A smiling God! An opening heaven!—

“A hope so much divine
May trials well endure.”

MARCH 22.—EVENING.

“Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.”

—I PET. iv. 12.

ARE we then, before we really suffer, to suffer in imagination; tormenting ourselves with gloomy fears, and embittering present comfort by future apprehension? No.

But neither are we to indulge presumption. We are to consider difficulties as well as advantages; and though light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun, yet we are to remember also the days of darkness, for they shall be many. If we do not admit the possibility of disappointment and distress, we shall, when they occur, be dismayed, and confounded, and say, If I am his, why am I thus? What is unexpected is overpowering: it does not leave us, for the time, the use either

of reason or religion; and we resemble a soldier, who, while seeking his weapons, gives the enemy an advantage against him. But to be fore-warned, is to be fore-armed: and what we reckon upon in the course of an enterprise, confirms, by the event, the reasonableness of our scheme. The Apostle would not have us to be surprised, or deem it a strange thing, even if our trial should be fiery. A strange thing is a thing unlooked for, and which we had no reason to expect. But is this the case with our afflictions?

—Think of the ordinary state of humanity. Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward; and is it strange that he should inherit? How numerous and how delicate are the organs of the body! yet they are constantly in use and in danger. To how many accidents are we exposed! How many seeds of disorder are lodged within us! Every possession makes us capable of loss; every connection, of bereavement; every enjoyment, of grief; every hope, of fear. The wonder is, that we are ever free from trouble.

—Hear the declarations of Scripture: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous.” “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” “Through much tribulation you must enter the Kingdom.” Are these the true sayings of God?

—Trace the history of his people. However dear to God, or eminent in grace, which of them escaped?

“The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown:
No traveller e'er reach'd that bless'd abode,
Who found not thorns and briars on the road.”

Is this only the language of poetry? “What son is

he," asked the Apostle, "whom the father chasteneth not?" "As many as I love," says God, "I rebuke and chasten."

Consider the disposition of the world—"Marvel not if the world hate you." If they hate the light, they are not likely to love those who diffuse it. The principles and walk of the Christian reproach and condemn, not only the profane, but many who would pass for religious, but who deny the power of godliness, while they have the form. The mere moral and pharisaical are often the bitterest enemies of evangelical piety. The rule was once deemed without exception: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." The absence of it now is owing, not to the want of disposition, but power. Many things restrain it: yet it is restrained only in the degree. The hand is tied; but the tongue is free—and how does it deal with the decided followers of the Lamb? And what is the carnal mind, but enmity against God?

—Survey the Christian's spiritual imperfections and necessities. Without suffering, how can they resemble the Saviour? And be weaned from the world? And be witnesses for God? And be prepared for usefulness? Can the welfare of the year dispense with winter? Is it a strange thing for the husbandman to plough up the fallow ground, to receive the seed? or for the vine dresser to prune the vine? or for the refiner to put his gold into the furnace? Such a needs be is there for all our afflictions: and he only who is ignorant of it can wonder at the event.

But, Christian, while you look for the fiery trial, so as not to be astonished at the experience—remem-

ber, you have enough to encourage you. He who died for you, and rose again, and rules over all, has made provision for every condition in which you shall be found. As thy sufferings abound, thy consolation shall abound also. If the way be rough, thy shoes shall be iron and brass: and as thy day, so shall thy strength be—till the last tear is wiped away—and all shall be peace, and quietness, and assurance, for ever.

MARCH 23.—MORNING.

"I know whom I have believed."—2 TIM. i. 12.

—OR trusted, as it is in the margin. This is preferable. The Apostle is referring to an act of confidence rather than of belief; and which was expressed by his entrusting the Saviour with a deposit, or committing his soul into his hands.

The knowledge of which he speaks is not only, or principally, the knowledge he had of the Lord Jesus *before* he believed on him. He had indeed such a knowledge, and he *must* have had; for how can we believe on him of whom we have not heard? And who would commit a jewel to a stranger? Who would walk over a deep abyss without inquiring whether the plank was sound or rotten? Ignorance in such a case would render confidence the act of a fool; whereas faith in Christ is wisdom; and when a man commits his eternal all to him, he has the highest reason in the world for so doing. This previous Knowledge, however, is derived entirely from testimony.

But there is also a subsequent knowledge derived

from experience: and he that believeth hath the witness in himself. He knows the bitterness of gall, and the sweetness of honey, not from report, but from taste. My conscience, says he, was burdened, and I found no relief till I applied to the blood of sprinkling. Without Him, I can do nothing: but I know that his grace is sufficient for me; for I have made the trial of it, both in duty and in distress. I have read and heard much of his excellency: and I have put it to the proof—He is now a tried friend and benefactor. I have tried—much—and often—his power, faithfulness, and care; and have found them trustworthy. I therefore feel satisfaction in reviewing what I have done. I have often been imposed upon, often played the fool; but not here. Of many things I have repented; but the longer I live, the less am I disposed to repent of this transaction. I have examined it, in the retirement of the closet; in the light of Scripture; in the view of death and eternity: and the more I consider it, the more I approve and glory in the deed. And I will recommend the same to others,—and I can speak with the boldness and earnestness of conviction—for I know whom I have believed.

And here we see the value of this knowledge. It increases reliance and confidence. Hence says David, “They that know thy name will put their trust in thee:” that is, they win trust with more ease and more firmness. Whence arise many of the doubts and fears of Christians, but from their living more upon their frames and feelings than upon the clear and full views of the truth as it is in Jesus? As soon as ever you have committed a valuable treasure to anyone, you become alive to his character; and,

unless you are well acquainted with it, every surmising, every loose report, every dark and unexplained circumstance, may trouble and terrify the heart—even though the deposit may be secure. For, though the safety of the deposit depends on the goodness of his character, your satisfaction depends upon your knowledge of it.

Let me, therefore, be concerned to grow in grace; and also—and for this very purpose—in the knowledge of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let me search the Scriptures, for they are they that testify of him. Let me attend his house, and the preaching of his word. Let me converse much with those who have been much with him. Let me earnestly implore the influence of the Holy Spirit, who, says the Saviour, shall glorify me, for he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. Paul, after such a length of acquaintance, and such a depth of intimacy, not only said, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord—but that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.

MARCH 23.—EVENING.

“And the prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in; and when they go forth, shall go forth.”

—EZEK. xlvi. 10.

THIS refers immediately to the temple worship. Read the verse preceding: “When the people of the land shall come before the Lord in the solemn feasts, he that entereth in by the way of the north gate to worship, shall go out by the way of the south gate;

and he that entereth by the way of the south gate, shall go forth by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it." This regulated the attendance of the *people*. Then follows an order for the *prince*. He was to appear in the house of God as well as others; and, regardless of his civil prerogatives, feel himself in sacred things on a level with his people, observing the same ordinances, entering the sanctuary at the same time, and continuing as long in as they. "And the prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in; and when they go forth, shall go forth."

Various are the gradations of life, and it is not for the benefit of society that they should be abolished. But religion is not, as some imagine, for the lower classes, or only a proper and necessary expedient to keep *them* orderly and obedient. Its institutions and exercises are binding upon the rich as well as the poor; upon the noble as well as the vulgar; upon masters as well as servants; and upon sovereigns as well as subjects. It is very *pleasing* and *becoming* in persons of quality to be seen going to the temple of God with their domestics, tenants, and poor neighbours, about them. And superiors *ought* to be constant and devout in their attendance on public worship: yea, they are under *peculiar* obligations to do it. They are under an obligation arising from *gratitude*: for duty grows with benefits: and if they are more distinguished and indulged than others, they owe the more to their Benefactor, and should be the more concerned to please and serve him; and not resemble vapours exhaled from the earth that only darken and hide the sun that raised them.

They are under an obligation arising from *influence*. They are more seen, observed, and followed, than persons in lower life. If they are irreligious and vicious, they take away shame and fear from others; and by their example they sanction, excite, and encourage imitation. Morals as well as fashions are sure to work downwards. They are under an obligation arising from *self-interest*. Did they consider things aright, they would be sensible that none need the means of grace more than themselves. Their duty is great: and here they would find instruction, encouragement, consolation, and support, amidst all that is difficult and trying in their stations. And their danger is great. They are set in slippery places, and the prosperity of fools destroys them. They are in jeopardy from self-indulgence, and flattery, and vanity, and pride, and forgetfulness of God and eternity: and here they would be admonished and armed; here they would be reminded amidst their temptations of their original, their dependence, their mortality, their end, and of the account they will have to render at the judgment-seat of Christ—But this page is not likely to reach many of the great—Otherwise we would thunder in their ear; “Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

But some suppose a reference here to another Prince, even he who was to be ruler in Israel. The allusion is possible and pleasing. We say *possible*; for God’s aim in his word is so comprehensive as to

include all the lawful purposes to which any part of it is applied; and it is lawful to avail ourselves of every thing that will teach and preach Jesus Christ. And we say *pleasing* as well as possible; for so must the assurance be felt, *if* significant of him. And there is a conformity between him and his people; and in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren. Yet in all things too he has the pre-eminence: and is anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. He could say, In the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto thee: but he is more than their fellow-worshipper, more than their companion, more than their example, more than a man—He is Lord of all.

—Observe his *title*—“The Prince.” He is the only King in Zion: but he is “Messiah the Prince;” a the Prince of peace;” “the Prince of life;” “the Prince of the kings of the earth;” “a Prince and a Saviour”—

Observe his *residence*—“In the midst of them.” This situation agrees with all the representations we have of him, and the state of his people requires it. He was in the midst of the burning bush; and hence it was not consumed. He was in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I will, says he of Zion, be not only a wall of fire round about them, but the glory in the midst of them. Sometimes kings reign over a country in which they do not reside, and which they seldom or never visit: and no earthly prince can be in the midst of his people so as to be heard, and seen, and approached, at the same time, by all. But the Lord Jesus is nigh unto all them that call upon him; and has said, Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. And

Observe therefore his *agency*—Wherever they go he attends them graciously, and the angel of his presence saves them. “When they shall go in, he shall go in; and when they shall go forth, he shall go forth.” It is so as to their devotions. Do they enter the temple? When they go in, he shall go in—and they shall see his beauty, and behold his goings: for where two or three are gathered together in his Name, there is he in the midst of them. Or do they enter the closet? ‘When they go in, he shall go in—and manifest himself unto them.

But they cannot be always in devotional engagements. They have many other duties to discharge; and must go forth to meet the claims of civil and relative life—But when they go forth he shall go forth; and be with them in the farm, the shop, the road, as well as in the church and the closet. It is true therefore as to the common concerns of life. If in the evening they retire to rest, or in the morning go forth to their work and their labour; if they enter their calling or withdraw; if they begin or finish an enterprise: he is still with them. Hence they are in the fear of the Lord all the day long; they acknowledge him in all their ways; they are safe, sanctified, and happy. “The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul.” Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.”

It is also true with regard to their sufferings. When they enter these, they often fear they shall sink; but they do not enter alone—“I will,” says he, “be with him in trouble. And he comes forth with them, or they would not come forth as gold, or be able to retain the lessons and impressions they

received, and to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" Wise Christians feel more need of his presence and grace when they are coming out of a trial, than when they are going into it; though in both they are indispensable.

And is there before them the valley of the shadow of death? It often dismays them. But they need fear no evil, for he is with them. Their friends indeed can attend them only to the entrance of it. But he will go with them into it, accompany them through it, and bring them out into a wealthy place. "When they go in, he shall go in; and when they go forth, he shall go forth."—He hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." One place seems an exception. They shall enter Immanuel's land, the rest that remains for his people: but when he goes in with them *there*, he will *not* go out. But the reason is, because *they* shall go no more out. They shall be for ever with the Lord.

MARCH 24.—MORNING.

"I will walk in thy truth."—Ps. lxxxvi. II.

EVERY resolution expressed by a good man, in a proper frame of mind, will be founded, not in self-confidence, but in dependence on divine grace. *Then* it will be useful; it will tend to stimulate and to humble; to bring to remembrance, and to bind—it will be like a hedge that defends the field; or like the hemming, that keeps the robe from raveling out.—"I will walk in thy truth," is a noble resolution, and worthy our imitation.

Walking, in the Scripture, takes in the whole of

our conversation or conduct: and to walk *in* any thing, intends a fulness of it. For a man to *walk in* pride, is something more than to be proud: it says, that pride is his way; his element; that he is wholly under the influence of it.

Four ways we should thus walk in God's truth.

—We should walk in the belief of his truth. It deserves our credence. It is a faithful saying, as well as worthy of all acceptance. If we receive the witness of man, the witness of God is greater. Men are very tenacious of the honour of their word. If their veracity be denied, they instantly demand satisfaction for the insult. How often is God made a liar! How slow of heart are we to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Lord, increase our faith.

—We should walk in the practice of his truth. This is as necessary as the former, and the evidence of it; for we are to shew our faith by our works. Faith without works, is as the body without the soul; there is nothing vital or operative in it. The Gospel is a doctrine according to godliness. Every part of it has a practical tendency: and we are required to obey it from the heart. It is well to hear; but hearing is to be viewed in the order of means, and not as an end. Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and *keep it*. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them.

—We should walk in the enjoyment of his truth. For it is not only of a sanctifying, but a consolatory nature; it brings us glad tidings of great joy; it is all written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scripture, might have hope. If, therefore, our conversation *becometh* the Gospel, it will be happy, as well as holy. Thus it was with

the first Christians: they walked not only in the fear of the Lord, but in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. They were not free from trouble; but, as the sufferings of Christ abounded in them, the consolation also abounded by Christ. They were not free from complaint and self-abhorrence; but in his Name they rejoiced all the day, and in his righteousness were exalted. Of themselves they felt they could do nothing; but they were strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and through him they could do all things. They knew not what a day would bring forth; but they were careful for nothing, casting all their care on him who cared for them. The Gospel did not shut them up in a dungeon of doubts and fears; they knew the truth, and the truth made them free indeed; and they walked in the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

—We should walk in the profession of his truth. If we know the joyful sound so as to be blessed by it, we shall feel *this* yoke easy, and this burden light. We shall not act to be seen of men; but we shall have no objection that men should see us. Praise will not draw us out of a corner; and fear will not drive us into one. We shall be willing for all to know that we are not our own, but his who bought us with a price; and that we are not only bound, but determined, to glorify him in our bodies and spirits. For his love will constrain us not only to confess him with the mouth, but with the life; for actions speak louder than words: despising in our eyes a vile person, but honouring them that fear the Lord: attending only where his truth is preached, and his glory is maintained; and going forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

If we are thus governed, we shall be a credit and a comfort to our ministers, who have no greater joy than to hear of their children walking in the truth. We shall hold forth the word of life, and cause them to rejoice in the day of Christ, that they have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain. We shall adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. We shall be fellow-helpers to the truth. And the Judge will *graciously* say—“They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.”

MARCH 24.—EVENING.

“But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.”—Ps. v.7.

LET us make this noble resolution our own; and in order to this let us endeavour to understand it. Observe the *singularity* of the resolution. “Let others take their course, I have chosen mine. It is good for me to draw near to God. Him will I seek and serve. And though it is desirable to have company in religion, and I wish to bring all my fellow-creatures to walk with me in the way everlasting, their determination will not influence mine—As for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.” Let us not be peculiar in little and lawful things; nor affect singularity for its own sake. But where truth, and duty, and conscience are concerned, singularity is a noble virtue; and no one shews such dignity or principle, and pureness of motive, and simple regard to the authority of God, as the man who goes forward according to his conviction, without the company and

commendation of others, and especially when reproached and opposed by them. And them that honour me, says God, I will honour.

Mark the *object* of the resolution. It regards the service of God in the sanctuary. I will come into thine *house* in the multitude of thy mercy, and in thy fear will I *worship* towards thy *holy temple*. David was fond of retirement, and was much alone in meditation and prayer. Yet he knew the closet was not to exclude the sanctuary, but to prepare for it; and therefore he could say, I have loved the place where thine honour dwelleth; a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. Though a king, he did not think it beneath his greatness to sanctify the Sabbath, and attend the gates of Zion; yea, he knew he was the more bound to do it, from the eminence of his station, and the influence of his example. Though a man full of employment, who had to give audience to ambassadors, orders to officers, and instructions to ministers; and had to manage the affairs of a large and distracted empire; yet he had time for God's ordinances—for he rose early—and—loved order: and such beings have leisure for every thing. Though a genius, a very wise man, a prophet, he did not neglect the institutions of religion, and say, I cannot learn more than I know already. Humility attends profound knowledge. Teach a wise man, and he will yet be wiser. He was a godly man: but, under a notion of superior piety, he did not despise the means of grace; like some who say they never had so much communion with God in their lives as they now have; every day now being a Sabbath, every place a temple, every creature a preacher—Believe them not. God knows what is in man, and what is needful to him,

and has appointed his ordinances for our welfare: and though a painted man does not want food, a living one cannot dispense with it. A real Christian feels his necessities and deficiencies; and knows by experience where his heart has been enlarged, and his strength renewed. He has found God for a refuge in his palaces. Strength and beauty are in the sanctuary.

The *manner* in which he would accomplish the resolution is worthy our notice. It includes two things. He would do it impressed with a sense of the Divine goodness. I will come into thine house in *the multitude of thy mercy*. How can we reflect and not feel this? The worship itself is a privilege. It is a mercy that we have a sanctuary—It is a mercy that we have liberty to assemble together—It is a mercy that we have health, and strength, and leisure for Divine worship—It is a mercy that we have a disposition to avail ourselves of the privilege—It is a mercy that we repair to the service, knowing that it is not a vain thing to seek the Lord, and able to plead the promise, I will make the place of my feet glorious. But we need not confine the subject. To creatures so unworthy and guilty as we are, every thing is mercy: the air we breathe; the water we drink; our food; our sleep. Let us think in what a multitude of mercies we come together: public and private; personal and relative; temporal and spiritual: redeeming mercies, justifying mercies, renewing mercies—Let us dwell on the plenitude of his undeserved favours, that we may not murmur at a few trials, but come before his presence with singing and praise.

He would also do it filled with holy veneration.

And in *thy fear* will I worship toward thy holy temple. This fear is not dread, and therefore comports with the cheerfulness of which we have been speaking. The first believers walked in the fear of the Lord, *and* in the comforts of the Holy Ghost: and we are commanded to serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. We are to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long—but God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of them that are about him. Nothing more becomes his majesty and purity, his omniscience and omnipresence. Nothing more becomes our meanness and vileness. Nothing more becomes the importance of the work in which we are engaged; and the consequences depending. We sing, and pray, and hear, for eternity. We are responsible for all our opportunities. We never leave the house of God as we enter it—How dreadful is the place! It is none other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven—and of hell too! To some the word preached will be the savour of life unto life; to others it will be the savour of death unto death. Nothing is so likely to secure our edification by the means of grace, as a solemnity of mind in our attendance. And where it prevails, the eyes will not rove all over the place. Sleep and drowsiness will be excluded. We shall not leave the sanctuary with levity, and fall into vain and idle discourse. Nor shall we ever come to it without reflection and prayer.

MARCH 25.—MORNING.

"The Lord knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever."—Ps. xxxvii. 18.

EVERY thing here requires attention—

—The *persons*—"The upright." The upright mean those who are sincere; sincere in their dealings with their fellow-creatures; with their own souls; and with their God. The character is equally rare and excellent. It admits of imperfection, but not of partiality; and is never found separate from the renewing of the Holy Ghost.

—The *period*—"Their days." These are "known of God." This knowledge being spoken of as a privilege, something more than mere intelligence must be intended; for, in this sense, He knows the days of the wicked, as well as of the upright. The meaning is, that he knows them kindly and graciously; that he feels and will acknowledge his concern in them; and make them all work together for their good. He knows their number—This is with him. He has appointed it: friends cannot enlarge, enemies cannot reduce it. They are immortal till their work is done. He knows the nature of them—and he determines it.

—Have they days of affliction? He knows them: knows their source, their pressure; how long they have continued, the support they require, and the proper time to remove them.—Have they days of danger? He knows them; and will be a refuge and defence in them.—Have they days of duty? He knows them; and will furnish the strength and the help they require.—Have they days of inaction, when they are laid aside from their work, by accident or

disease? He knows them; and says to his servants, under every prevention, "It is well that it was in thy heart."—Have they days of privation when they are denied the ordinances of religion, after seeing his power and glory in the temple, and going with the voice of gladness to keep holy day? He knows them; and will follow his people when they cannot follow him; and be a little sanctuary to them in their losses.—Have they days of declension and of age, in which their strength is fled, and their senses fail, and so many of their connections have gone down to the dust—evil days, wherein they have no pleasure? He knows them; and says, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth. Even to old age I am he, and to hoar hairs will I bear and carry you."

—The *portion*—"Their inheritance shall be for ever." So was not the inheritance of many of the angels in heaven; for they kept not their first estate. So was not the inheritance of Adam in Paradise; for the Lord drove out the man. So was not the inheritance of the Jews in Canaan; for the glory of all lands was made a desolation. So is not the inheritance of the man of the world: his portion is in this life. And what is this but a vapour, a shadow? Yet, at the end of it, he is stripped of all, and departs as naked as he came. Yea, and before the close, his hopes and comforts may be all laid bare. For—

"Short-lived as *we* are, yet our pleasures, we see,

Have a much shorter date, and die sooner than we."

But the Christian has not only being, and health, and riches, and honour, and peace, and joy, and friendship—but all these for ever!

Indeed, the more important and valuable the acquisition, the more miserable he would feel if there was any uncertainty in the continuance. The thought of loss, and even of danger, would embitter all. But it is for ever—for ever! Yea, it will be always increasing. After millions of years we shall be singing a new song.

In the world we may have losses, but they cannot affect our estate. "I, one day," says Mr. Newton, "visited a family that had suffered by a fire, which had destroyed all the house and the goods. I found the pious mistress in tears. I said, Madam, I give you joy! Surprised, and ready to be offended, she exclaimed, What! joy that all my property is consumed? I give you joy that you have so much property that no fire can touch. This turn checked the grief, and she wiped her tears, and smiled like the sun, shining after an April shower." Thus the Hebrews took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that in heaven they had a better and an enduring substance.

MARCH 25.—EVENING.

"I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better."—PHIL. i. 23.

NOTHING is more trying and distressing than a state of uncertainty, indecision, and perplexity—or being in a strait between opposing claims, one of which only can be chosen. What a strait was David in when he had to choose between pestilence, and war, and famine! And what a strait was Jacob in between his wish for relief and the fear of sending Benjamin!

Paul is here in a strait; but it is between two things, each of which is agreeable and inviting. We might have been sure that whatever weighed with *him* would be something pertaining to Christ. Accordingly *his* drawing was, on the one side the enjoyment of his Lord's presence in heaven; and on the other, the serving of his people on earth. Let us notice the former of these—"Having a desire to depart to be with Christ, which is far better."

The Apostle means death. But he avoids the name, and calls it a *departure*. We are much more influenced by *words* than we may imagine; and as there is so much to render death formidable, we should, as far as possible, soften it even in the representation. And the Scripture does this. It tells us that if a man keep the sayings of Christ, "he shall never see death." Is he then exempted from the law of mortality? No: but death is so changed with regard to him, that it does not deserve the name. It is therefore a gathering to his people, a falling asleep, a putting off this tabernacle, a departure—"I long to depart." Does the Apostle refer to a mariner loosing anchor from a foreign shore to depart for his own country? or to a traveller departing from an inn to which he has turned aside for a night to go on his way? or to a prisoner departing from his dungeon and chains to enjoy his freedom? or to a soldier departing for his peaceful home after his warfare is ended? The death of a Christian furnishes all these images and fulfils them. But how surely does the representation remind us of the complex nature of man! If nothing survived at death, death would be a cessation not a departure. We do not say, an animal departed this life. If we buried a beast, we

should not inscribe on a stone, "Here lies his body"—Here lies the whole of *him*. But over the grave of a man we say, "Here lies the body"—or, "Here repose the remains"—For "there is a spirit in man:" and when "the dust returns to the dust whence it came, the spirit returns to God who gave it."

The *effect* of this death is "to be with Christ." It is obvious the Apostle supposed that a separate state immediately followed the dissolution of the body, as he says in another place expressly, "absent from the body, and present with the Lord." Had he expected that he should not be with Christ till the resurrection, his dying would have been of no advantage to him. It might have freed him indeed from his sufferings: but he is not speaking of what he should leave, but of what he should reach. In a blessed sense Christ was with him here; and this, with all his trials, was better than annihilation till the last day. It is useless to say, the period would seem only as a moment to the individual—for this is not the question—the difficulty lies here—that let the term be long or short, such inaction and insensibility *could* not be better than the presence of Christ with Paul even in this life.

I love the very words the Holy Ghost useth. Paul does not say, I long to depart to be in heaven. This is his meaning: but he speaks in a way that, while it expresses the blessedness, characterizes it also at the same time. To be in heaven is to be with Christ. Our Lord affirms this himself in his promise to the thief—"This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." And in his prayer for the disciples—"That they may be with me where I am to behold my glory." Is this our heaven? Could such happiness make us happy?

Whatever that state be, we must be prepared for it by a conformity to it in our views and feelings here. What a delightful prospect is the social intercourse of that world! If Socrates could comfort himself that he was going to Museus and other worthies that had lived before him, what is the attraction of a Christian, that he is going to join his own beloved connections, and the martyrs, and the apostles, and the prophets, and the patriarchs, and the innumerable company of angels—and, above all, “the Lord of all,” the most wonderful of all characters, the most endeared of all benefactors, the most precious of all friends!

We have not only the nature and effect of this death, but the pre-eminency of the blessedness to which it leads. It is strongly expressed. It is “better”—“far better.” Far better than what? It would be saying little to say that it was far better than his trials, far better than to be stoned at Philippi, than to fight with beasts at Ephesus, than to be a night and a day in the deep, than to be in perils among false brethren. It would also be little to say that it was far better than all his temporal comforts. These a Christian does not undervalue; yea he is grateful for them, and enjoys them with a relish peculiar to himself. But he has something even now superior to all outward good—The means of grace and the comforts of the Holy Ghost. But to be with Christ is far better than these: as the day is far better than the dawn, and the inheritance and the vintage are far better than the earnest and the first-fruits only. Our communion with him here is distant and often intercepted—there it will be perpetual and immediate. We love the streams—but what is the fountain! We love the house of prayer—but what

is the temple in which they serve him day and night!

“Thine earthly Sabbaths, Lord, we love;
 But there’s a nobler rest above:
 To that our labouring souls aspire,
 With ardent pangs of strong desire.
 “No more fatigue, no more distress,
 Nor sin, nor hell, shall reach the place;
 No groans to mingle with the songs
 Which warble from immortal tongues.”

MARCH 26.—MORNING.

“Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.”—PHIL. i. 24, 25.

VOLTAIRE, in his letters to one of his confidential friends and admirers, more than once says, I hate life, and I dread death. How different were the views and feelings of Paul! He did not dread death, but could say, “I long to depart to be with Christ, which is far better.” And so far was he from hating life, that he valued it as affording him opportunity to glorify his Saviour, and to serve his people according to his will. We have seen one part of his strait—Let us look at the other,

Whether he derived his persuasion from a knowledge that his bonds were manifest in all the palace, and that efforts were making in his favour by the saints in Cæsar’s household, or from an inspired intimation, we cannot determine: but he was confident that he should not only escape death, but be released from imprisonment. Thus he would be debarred

from a state which, as to personal enjoyment, he deemed far better than every thing else, and intensely longed after, and yet he speaks of it with more than acquiescence. What an instance of self-denial was here! How backward are some to make any sacrifice in order to do good. They cannot forego a luxurious meal to furnish a poor family with a plain one. They cannot give up a little variety in dress to clothe a naked child. But Paul is willing to resign heaven itself, though he was sure it was his own, and every kind of suffering rendered it desirable—in order to be useful. Self-denial is the first lesson Christianity requires; and every part of it tends to inspire us with a disposition to look, not on our own things, but also on the things of others. This was the mind of Christ. When he was rich, for our sakes he became poor. And the glorified who are now with him, and have drunk fully into his spirit, would be all ready, were it the will of God, to leave their ecstasies, and come down again and live in this vale of tears year after year, to serve the cause of the Redeemer, and to promote the salvation of mankind.

We see also that Paul was conscious of his usefulness. Ignorance is not necessary to humility; much less affectation. A man need not deny his abilities, or acceptance, or success; though he ought to acknowledge from whom they come, and on whom they depend. A mother may have a lowly mind, and yet feel that her life is of importance to her rising charge; and the feeling is even a duty. A minister may be willing to enter into his rest, yet be more than reconciled to life, when he sees that many hang upon his lips who may be saved or comforted by him; and it would be folly in him not to be aware that he is a

blessing. Paul said, "I am nothing"—and so he was absolutely—but not comparatively and relatively. Am not I, says he, an Apostle? "Have I not seen Christ?" "By the grace of God I am what I am. Not I, but the grace of God which was with me: but," adds he, "I laboured more abundantly than they all." And he here makes no scruple to say, that the welfare of the Philippians and others depended upon his abiding in the flesh.

But wherein did he reckon upon being serviceable? Not only in the conversion of sinners, but in helping them much who had believed through grace—"For your furtherance and joy of faith." This is worthy of notice. It shews the importance of faith. Paul considered this every thing—not to the exclusion of holiness, morality, and good works; but as to the production of them, and their support, and their increase. He knew that as faith prevailed, every thing in the Divine life would prosper.

Some say, there is no growth in grace. But the Apostles prayed, "Lord, increase our faith." The faith of the Thessalonians "grew exceedingly." And Paul was concerned for "the *furtherance*" of the faith of his beloved Philippians—that is, that it might be more clear in its views, more firm in its principles, more powerful in its influence, more appropriating in its confidence. He also wished not only for their furtherance, but "*joy of faith.*" This joy they would constantly need; and it would be their strength. Jesus is the source of it, but faith is the medium. He is the well of salvation, but faith draws the water—"In whom, *believing*, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory"—We are "filled with all joy and peace *in believing.*"

Such was Paul! He was once a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious, and abhorred the worthy Name by which we are called: but he obtained mercy: and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was exceeding abundant to him-ward in faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus So that he could now say, “for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”—“Christ is all and in all.” Is any thing too hard for the Lord?

What an example is here! “What zeal, and yet what knowledge! What preparation for both worlds! What readiness to go! What willingness to stay if there was any thing more for him to do or suffer!

“Behold the awful portrait and admire!

Nor stop at wonder—imitate and live.”

MARCH 26.—EVENING.

“And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.”—JOHN xiv. 29.

HE refers to what he had said concerning his death and resurrection; his sufferings and glory. As nothing befell him by chance, so nothing took him by surprise. All was laid out in his view: and he saw the end from the beginning—and foretold it all before any of it had come to pass. For what purpose? “That, when it is come to pass,” says he, “ye might believe.”

Hence we see the importance of faith. This is what he always required in those he healed. “Only believe,” said he to the ruler of the synagogue. He said to his disciples, with regard to the death of Lazarus, “I am glad, for your sakes, that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe.” If a man

wishes a tree to grow, he waters not the branches, but the root. Holy tempers and good works are the fruits of religion—Faith is the root; and as this is enlivened, every thing in the divine life prospers. Unbelief makes God a liar! renders the Scripture a nonentity; and leaves the soul open to every sin. But he that believeth shall be saved. Yea, he hath everlasting life. By faith we stand; walk; live. We are justified, we are sanctified, by faith. Faith purifies the heart, and overcometh the world. Unless we believe, we shall not be established. We are filled with all joy and peace in believing—We read of the joy of faith; the prayer of faith; the work of faith; the obedience of faith; the fight of faith—every thing is ascribed to faith in the word of God.

—Here we learn, also, that there may be an improvement in faith, where the principle is already found. Did not these disciples believe at this very time? They had been with him from the beginning. They had heard his sayings, and witnessed his miracles, and seen his glory. And they believed on him too. And had left all to follow him. But they did not sufficiently believe. Their faith was too obscure in its views; too feeble in its hold; too powerless in its operation. Are there not, then, degrees in godliness? May there not be a growth in grace? Does not Paul tell the Thessalonians, that their faith grew exceedingly? And how desirable is this progress! The strong in faith have a thousand advantages above the weak. The latter have a heaven hereafter; the former have a heaven here too. And if the Apostles were defective, and said, Lord, increase our faith, what need have we to cry out, with tears, like the

father of the child, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!"

We remark, also, that one of the best means of increasing and establishing our faith is, to compare the word and the works of the Lord together. This was the help and advantage he would here insure to his disciples: "Now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe." So did the Church in the time of David:

"As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of our God." We have heard the promises, and we have seen the fulfilment. We have heard the threatenings, and we have seen the execution. We have heard the doctrine, and we have seen the practice. As soon as Jesus had said, "Go thy way, thy son liveth," the nobleman "believed," and went his way. "But as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth! Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth; and himself believed, and his whole house." That is, he now believed more firmly and impressively; and this was the consequence of comparison. Thus, facts are yielding us constant and growing evidence of the truth of God's word. Upon this principle, apostates and scoffers do not scandalize us—the Scripture tells us they will come. We read in the Scripture, the way of transgressors is hard: that he who walketh uprightly, walketh surely: that the merciful shall obtain mercy: that the way of the slothful is a hedge of thorns—and how little must he have observed the experience

of others, or consulted his own, who is not every day more convinced of the truth of these declarations!

—Finally. Does not this clearly intimate, that the benefit to be derived from prophecy is subsequent to its accomplishment? “Now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.” He mentions the same thing in several other places: and we are informed, in more than one instance, of the result. Thus we read—“When, therefore, he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.” So, also, when they had witnessed his “zeal” in purifying the temple, “his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” Thus we see our remark justified. And, indeed, how can it be otherwise? Where is the evidence of the truth of prophecy before it come to pass? You say, A God who cannot lie hath spoken it. But God himself does not demand our faith on the announcement, but on the event. And how little can it be understood beforehand; unless as to its general bearings! A definite and particular acquaintance with the contents of Divine predictions would derange the order of Providence, and in many cases hinder the effect. Had this fact been duly considered, much time and attention would have been more profitably employed, than in attempts to open the seals, and blow the trumpets, and pour out the vials of the Apocalypse. There is no prophet among us, nor any that telleth how long; yet there are, as Fuller calls them, “fortune-tellers of the Church.” Pastors have been drawn away from their proper work—And “the

hungry sheep look up, and are not fed”—And sinners are not converted from the error of their ways. For, even allowing the views, advanced with so much presumption, to be just and true, they are not repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostles preached a crucified Saviour—and determined to know nothing else.

It is not for us to know the times, or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. He has entrusted us with his commands; but not with his decrees. “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

MARCH 27.—MORNING.

“*He hath done all things well,*”—MARK vii. 37.

A GREAT commendation; but deserved, Human excellences are rare and individual. One man does one thing well; another does another thing well—but He does *all* things well. The little *men.* do well, is only *comparatively* well; all *He* does is *absolutely* well. And this will appear, whether we consider him as the Creator—and survey the works of nature; or as the Saviour—and contemplate the wonders of grace; or as the Governor—and examine the dispensations of his providence.

We have some fine specimens of his agency recorded in the Scripture. Take, for instance, the history of Joseph. Read it over again and again and then ask, Could any link in this chain, any stone in this structure, have been omitted? In this achieve-

ment, could any thing have been added to the plan, or the execution? From a part we may estimate the whole. And what applies to his dealings with others, will apply to his dealings with us; for all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth.

—But whence, then, is it, that we cannot really and readily, with regard to his agency in our affairs, and especially in those of a trying nature, adopt the acknowledgment, and say, He hath done all things well?

—The reason is, we judge *atheistically*. Every unregenerate sinner lives without God in the world. But a Christian is made to differ from others; and from himself. Yet his sanctification is not complete. Something is left in him of all the old kinds of leaven; and therefore something of this atheism. He is in a good frame when, with Eli, he can say, of whatever befalls him, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." But he does not always see him. He sometimes stops at the instrumentality employed—Oh! it was that unlucky accident! it was that heedless servant! it was that perfidious neighbour! it was that cruel enemy!—No wonder *He* does not do *all* things well, when he is not acknowledged as doing *any* thing.

—We judge *selfishly*. We are not to view ourselves as detached individuals. We are parts of a whole; and variously connected with others. What is not good for us personally, may be good for us relatively. Suppose a trying dispensation makes us more tender and compassionate towards our fellow-creatures and our fellow-Christians; suppose a distressing experience gives us the tongue of the learned, and enables us to speak a word in season to

him that is weary; suppose, as witnesses and examples of the power and excellency of the Gospel, we arouse the careless, and confirm the wavering: is there not enough here to call for our resignation and praise? Ezekiel was deprived of the desire of his eyes, with a stroke: to himself this was painful; but it was profitable to his ministry, and useful to his charge—and this was the design of it. No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

—We judge *carnally*. What is not pleasing may yet be beneficial: and natural evil may be moral good. When things are agreeable to our wishes, we never think of any difficulty in the Divine proceedings. While we have ease, and health, and friends, and success in business, we never complain of the darkness of Providence. But as soon as there is any reverse—then we groan out, “His way is in the sea, his path in the deep waters, and his footsteps are not known”—as if every thing was to be estimated by our accommodation and convenience—as if God acted wisely or unwisely, righteously or unrighteously, just as his doings affect us—and affect, too, not our best interests, but our present and temporal! Is it wonderful that we, who deserve stripes, should feel the rod? that we, who need correction, should meet with chastisement? Is it mysterious that the vine should be pruned? the ground ploughed? the gold tried in the fire? If the child now thinks certain restraints, and privations, and rebukes, to which the father subjects him, needless and harsh, he will more than approve of them when he comes to years of maturity.

—We judge *prematurely*. He that believeth maketh not haste. It is good for a man not only to hope, but quietly wait for the salvation of God: and

one reason is, because it will prevent a wrong conclusion. Therefore, says the Apostle, judge nothing before the time until the Lord come. You would not judge of the abilities of the limner from the unfinished sketch, but you would wait till the canvass had received the last touches of his masterly pencil. You would not judge of the perfection of a building from the digging of the foundation, and the coarse materials lying in a kind of disorder all around; especially if you had never seen the plan or the model: but you would stay till the parts were all put together in their places, and the top-stone brought forward with shouting—Let us stay till God has done. What I do, says he, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter. Then every thing will speak for itself. Then we shall walk, not by faith, but by sight. Then we shall see what we now believe; and for ever acknowledge, “He is the rock; his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right, is he.”

MARCH 27.—EVENING.

“Am I in God’s stead?”—GEN. XXX. 2.

“WHAT Jacob here says to Rachael, every creature to which we address ourselves will sooner or later say to us: “Am I in God’s stead?” The doctrine we may derive from the words is this, NO CREATURE VAN BE IN THE STEAD OF GOD. But let us explain the doctrine by some distinctions and concessions.

Though no creature can be in the stead of God, God can be in the stead of any creature. David therefore at Ziklg. when deprived of all his sub-

stance and his relations, “encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” And the Church exclaims, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine: the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

The sun may enable a man to dispense with a lamp, but the lamp cannot supersede the sun. The fountain is necessary to the stream, but not the stream to the fountain.

Though no creature can be in the stead of God to us, one creature may be in the stead of another creature. A minister may more than fill the void made by the removal of his predecessor, and may possess a double portion of his spirit. A child may be deprived of a father, and some kind patron may take him up and educate him, and place him abroad in life, and fully repair his loss. A husband may seem inconsolable when deprived of the desire of his eyes; but soon after, another soft hand may wipe away his tears. One relation seems much more irreparable; it is that of a mother. Yet we ought not to indulge in general and indiscriminate reflections. There are mothers-in-law who are mothers in kindness; and step-mothers—that is—those who step into the place of real mothers, who fulfil the duties of the office, and are mothers indeed—and such can never be too much commended and praised.

Though no creature can be in God’s stead, a creature may be in God’s hand. He may be God’s instrument, but cannot be his substitute. The instrumentality that God employs differs much from the

instrumentality which men employ. Men employ instruments from necessity, God employs them from choice. Men employ them from weakness, God employs them from wisdom. Men depend upon their instruments, Goers instruments depend upon him. They are no more than he is pleased to make them. How then can they fill his place? They are nothing without his agency. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; hut God that giveth the increase."

The truth of this doctrine it would be easy to exemplify. Can any be in God's stead as a creator? This is Jacob's immediate aim in his reply—am I in God's stead, who hath withholden from thee the fruit of the womb? He is the sole author of existence; the former of our bodies; the father of our spirits; and by this he has an infinite distinction from all creatures—they are made, and he is the maker. Who can be in God's stead as a preserver? It is in him alone we live and move, as well as have our being. If preservation be not a continued creation, it is a continued agency. Were he to suspend his upholding influence for a moment, we should relapse into nothing. Can any be in God's stead as a redeemer? Who but he could say, Deliver from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom? He alone who required the sacrifice, could provide the lamb for a burnt-offering. He made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. "Beside me there is no Saviour." Who can be in God's stead as a teacher? "Who teaches like him?"

We are not only in darkness, but blind—Who but he can give us eyes as well as light? We are not only ignorant, but weak—Who but he can give us capacity as well as lessons? Who but he can bear with our infirmities? Who but he can make us wise unto salvation? Who can be in his stead as a sanctifier? Who but he can create in us a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us? “This people,” says he, “have *I* formed for myself; they shall shew forth *my* praise.” Who can be in his stead as a comforter? Who can be a substitute for him in healing the broken in heart, and binding up all their wounds? Who can revive those who walk in the midst of trouble? Who can fill the valley of the shadow of death with joy unspeakable and full of glory?

Let us think of this fact, and be thankful that this only, this all-sufficient Being is accessible; and allows and commands us to “take hold of his strength.” Let us think of it in reference to creatures—Let us think of it in *asking* for them. They may appear desirable; they may be useful; but let us never suppose that we *must* obtain them in order to our happiness. One thing only is needful; it is an interest in God. Let us think of it in *possessing* them, and say, with Watts,

“To thee we owe our health and friends,
Our wealth and safe abode;
Thanks to thy Name for meaner things,—
But they are not my God.”

Let us think of it in *losing* them. We are allowed to feel, but not to despair. Yet what idolaters are we! and it appears when our gods are taken away, Oh! if I should lose such a preacher! Oh! if that beloved connection was removed—mine eye would no

more see good, But the storm that carries away the stubble, does not destroy the estate. It was not a bad question the child addressed to her bereaved and weeping mother when she said, "Is God dead?" How strange would some of our feelings appear if they were expressed in words! The meaning of many a murmur, and many a groan, is, I have nothing—but God himself left!

—Yet what did David think of this? "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

MARCH 28.—MORNING.

"Hereafter I will not talk much with you; for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."—JOHN xiv. 30.

THERE are many talkers—profane talkers—indecent talkers—foolish talkers—vain talkers. And there are some who are wise and good talkers; their lips are as a well-spring of life. But *He* was perfectly wise and good—Oh! to, have heard him "talk!" The term is applied to his more public teaching—"While he yet talked to the people." And had some of his ministers spoken more in a familiar and conversational mode, they would have resembled him more and the poor would have had the Gospel preached unto them; and the common people would have heard them gladly: and the children in the temple would have cried Hosanna.

It is here intimated, that he *had* talked "much"

with them. He was never reserved. If he kept back any thing from them, it was because at the time they could not bear it. He treated them not as servants, but friends; for all things that he had heard of the Father he made known unto them. He always instructed, and reprov'd, and encouraged them, as the occasion required. He seized every opportunity for religious discourse, and levied a tax of spiritual profit upon every natural object, and every providential occurrence, that presented itself. He could not see a sower going forth to sow, or a fisherman drawing his net ashore, or a woman drawing water, but he derived from it a parable, or an illustration—Teaching his followers to be social and communicative in Divine things; and, for this purpose, to cultivate their understanding; and to be filled with the Spirit. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. How can much religious discourse be expected from those who have so little of the life of God in them? If, for the sake of consistency, they sometimes make the attempt, it must be a task; and they will soon drop into what is more natural to them—a conversation empty as the wind, and barren as the sand,

—But “hereafter” he *would* not talk much with them—not from disinclination, but for want of intercourse. Their opportunities would soon be over—for he was going to leave them. With regard also to us—it is probable as to some, and certain as to others—that we have heard and read much more than we ever shall read or hear in future. Yet a little while is the light with us.

The way in which he refers to his removal from them, by his suffering and death, is remarkable—

“For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.”

He marks, First, the character of his adversary—the prince of this world. He is not so by right, but usurpation; and by God’s allowing him power over those who provoke him. When the traitor had received the sop, Satan entered into him. He was in him before: but his agency was under restraints. These restraints were then all taken away; and the devil had his victim entirely to himself. Israel would have none of him: so he gave them up to their own hearts’ lust. All who walk according to the course of this world, walk according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. They may imagine themselves to be free, and many of them make a figure, in the eye of sense; but faith sees them taken captive by the devil at his will; and held in the vilest subjection—he is their prince—yea, according to the Apostle, he is the god of this world: and, in reality, they not only obey, but worship him.

—Secondly, he sees his approach: “He cometh.” Not personally—so he had come to him in the wilderness, and been foiled; but in his instruments: in Judas that betrayed him; in Peter that denied him; in his disciples that forsook him and fled; in Herod that threatened him; in Pilate that condemned him; in the Jews that clamoured for his blood, and in the Romans that shed it. “One of you,” says our Lord, “is a devil”—he gives him the name, because he bore his image, and did his work. “The Devil,” We? read, “shall cast some of you into prison.” Is the Devil a justice of the peace? No; but if he acts unrighteously and cruelly, the justice of the peace is

the Devil. The Devil is not Voltaire; but, by poisoning and destroying the souls of men, Voltaire is the Devil, who was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.

—Thirdly, he is confident of the result of the conflict: “And hath nothing in me.” He has enough in us.—First, enough of guilt. Hence he can alarm and dismay us. In the conscience of some he produces such terror and anguish, that the man chooses strangling and death rather than life. He is also the accuser of the brethren; and in their sins, and the sins even of their holy things, he finds enough against them to perplex and distress them in their afflictions, and in their approaches to God. But he could find no guilt in Jesus; and therefore he could stir up no feeling of self-remorse or despair.—Secondly, enough of corruption. Hence he can easily draw us aside by laying hold of our envy, pride, avarice, impatience. Owing to the remains of unmortified passions, or, as the Apostle calls it, the sin that dwelleth in us, we are always in danger from outward things. We may be ensnared by our dress, our table, our business, and our friends: what is innocent and good in itself may become to us injurious and evil. Here the sparks fall upon tinder. But there was nothing inflammable in him; and therefore no unhallowed fire could be kindled. He was the Holy One of God. “He *did* no sin,” and “in him *was* no sin!”

—A proof that if he was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted, he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.

—We also see that there must be a great dif-

ference between him and ourselves, as to mural danger. He was safe everywhere, and in all circumstances. We must watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation—The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

MARCH 28.—EVENING.

“*Gentleness.*”—GAL. v. 22.

PAUL here speaks of gentleness, not as a natural temper, but as “the fruit of the Spirit.” James also considers it as an attribute and character of inspired religion: “The wisdom that is from above is gentle.” This is surely recommendation enough to induce us to make it the object of devout attention. Gentleness is very distinguishable from weakness of mind, and the fawning of flattery. It requires us to give up no truth, to abandon no duty. Principle and consistency are not only compatible with it, but necessary to it. Lead is too soft as well as too worthless to be stamped into coin and currency. You cannot polish a sponge, or a fungus; solid bodies only can admit the process; and the firmer *they* are, the better will they shine. But gentleness must exclude arrogance, insolence, violence, harshness, rudeness, and every thing offensive and painful that can be avoided with integrity and rectitude. There is an artificial mildness, and a studied softness of manner, learned in the school of the world, that often covers baseness and ill-nature, and envy and hatred. But a Christian is to be an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile. He is to be in reality what others are in appearance and pretence: he is from inward disposition naturally to exemplify what others from education or custom put on. And

how lovely and engaging is that unaffected civility, that courtesy, which springs freely from the state of the mind and heart under the renewing influence of Divine grace! He that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men. It recommends his religion by adorning it, and gives him a thousand beneficial influences in dealing with his fellow-creatures. A man may wait even years before he has an opportunity for acts of high beneficence and extensive usefulness; but he can exercise gentleness every day and every hour, and thus contribute to the advantage and happiness of all that are about him. And does he not thereby equally befriend himself? Does it not preserve calmness and sunshine within? And are not all the mild and kind affections conducive even to the health of the body?

Let us therefore cultivate this gentleness. Let it enter our habits, and spread through our whole behaviour. Let it constantly actuate our temper, and regulate our speech. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from us, with all malice: and let us be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us. Let us in all our religious concerns remember that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be patient towards all men; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves. The way to convince another is not to affront, and insult, and provoke him, and drive him to resistance; but to shew him that you love him, and are only concerned to do him good. Some have no sooner expressed their belief that a man can receive nothing unless it be given

him from above, than they condemn and reproach him for a destitution, which, according to *them*, is not his guilt, but his misfortune! Is a brother overtaken in a fault? Let us restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves lest we also be tempted. Have we occasion to reprove? Let us remember what was said of Leighton—He rebuked faults with such kindness and mildness that they were never repeated, not because the reprovèd were afraid, but ashamed to repeat them. As much as lieth in us, let us live peaceably with all men; and resolve to act upon the lesson we teach our infants—

“I’ll not easily offend,
Nor be easily offended;
What’s amiss I’ll strive to mend,
And endure what can’t be mended.”

And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And ye masters, forbear threatening, knowing that your Master also is in heaven, and that there is not respect of persons with him. Gentleness indeed must peculiarly appear in our treatment of those who are placed under us. It is one of Lavater’s aphorisms on man, and will, we are persuaded, be found without exception true—“If, without living with him, or studying him, you would know a man at once, observe how he acts and speaks towards his inferiors.” Towards his superiors and his equals he is guarded, but with his inferiors he is open and free—and if with *them* he assumes airs, and commands harshly, and answers roughly; if he swaggers, scolds, and threatens; if he tries to inspire fear rather than to gain love—he has a tyrannical and a villanous heart. A common observer would say—he is no gen-

tleman; every thing in the Gospel says—he is no Christian.

MARCH 29.—MORNING.

“God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”—I THESS. v. 9.

—No: “He has not appointed us to wrath.” He might have done it. We deserved it. We were by nature children of wrath, even as others. But He has delivered us *from* the wrath to come. We have trials, but there is no curse in them. They come from a father who corrects, not from a judge who punishes. We may sometimes fear his wrath, but this is our infirmity. Flesh cries, Do not condemn me; but faith cries, There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

—But “to obtain salvation.” We are often said to be saved already. We are so, as to our state; but not as to possession and enjoyment. This is a future blessedness. It is, indeed, begun here: but that which is held up to the hope of the believer is the accomplishment of all that God has promised—the reception of the soul at death; the resurrection of the body at the last day; the glorification of the whole man for ever. What an object of expectation! How poor and pitiful is every thing seen and temporal, compared with this! Some are destined to shine in courts; some, to stride over the heads of others; some, to amass heaps of shining are; but, if a Christian, thou art destined to an inheritance beyond the skies, and a crown of glory that fadeth not away. “What is life? However indulged and endowed, it

is, in its best estate, altogether vanity! What are the pleasures of sin—for a season! What are riches and—death! a title and—damnation at the end of it! And what are losses and afflictions to a man who is going to obtain SALVATION!

But by what medium will he acquire it?—"Through our Lord Jesus Christ." To seek it in any other way is a vain pursuit. There is salvation in none other. I am the way, said he, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me. Yea, it is not only useless, but sinful. It opposes God's revealed will and express command; it robs the Lord Jesus of his highest glory; it frustrates his grace; it makes him to be dead in vain. Much comes to some, *through* others. We have had friends and benefactors—but, above all, what have they done for us? What self-denial have they exercised? What sufferings have they endured? But *he* knew what would be required of him in opening for us a passage to glory. Yet he readily consented, and said, Lo! I come. Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow or love like his. He became poor, that we might be made rich. He died, that we might live.

The Apostle does not forget to tell us, that we are *appointed* to obtain the salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. As men, we are not the creatures of chance. There is an appointed time to man upon earth. God has appointed the bounds of our habitation. And, as Christians, are we the offspring of contingency? Is conversion a happy accident? It is the work of God: and he does nothing without foreknowledge and design. Four things may be observed with regard to this appointment. The *earliness* of it—in hope of eternal life, which God, that

cannot lie, promised before the world began.—The *freeness* of it—it was not founded on the foresight of any worthiness or works of ours—He hath saved us and called us, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.—Its *efficiency*—it will not, cannot fail—the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever. “I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.”—Its *appropriation*—blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness. Go back from effects to causes. Prove your calling, and thus make your election sure.

And remember one thing. Be simple, and receive the kingdom of God as a little child, not only as to its doctrines, but as to its invitations and promises. The writer, one day, attended the dying bed of a young female. I have little, said she, to relate, as to my experience. I have been much tried and tempted—but this is my sheet anchor—He has said, Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. I know I come to him—and I expect that he will be as good as his word. Poor and unworthy as I am, he will not trifle with me, or deceive me—It would be beneath his greatness as well as his goodness. I am at his feet; and can I perish there?

MARCH 29.—EVENING.

“Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint.”—2 SAM. xv. 15.

THIS was said on the trying emergency when he was about to leave Jerusalem, to escape from the vile rebellion of Absalom. And it was well said. And it shews us what little reason David had to complain, all men are liars. With a few exceptions, no one ever had more attached and devoted adherents than he.

There is no spiritual meaning in the words. They intend no more than they express. But who can help thinking with what propriety they may be adopted by Christians, and addressed to Christ? He is their Lord and King. They profess to be his servants. He has the appointment of their work. And they should be ready to do his will without partiality as well as without hypocrisy—“Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint.”

This is our reasonable service: and four things should excite, sustain, and increase this readiness.

First, the consciousness of our obligations to him. How much do we owe him! What has he not done for us? and in a way the most expensive to himself? He was rich, and for our sakes he became poor, and died that we might live.

We can never discharge our obligations to a love that passeth knowledge. But we should be deeply sensible of them; and hold ourselves entirely at his disposal; and delight to do his will; and constantly ask, “*What shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits towards me?*”

Secondly, a persuasion of his right to appoint every thing pertaining to us. Not a right derived and limited like that of a master or a father to dispose of his servant or his child: but an original, inalienable right—the right of an absolute proprietor—the right of a Creator over a creature whom he called out of nothing, and who lives and moves and has his being in Him.

Thirdly, a conviction not only that he has a right to appoint, but that his appointments are right—always wise, and just, and good. They may be sovereign, but they are not arbitrary. The reasons of them may be for a time concealed, but they are worthy of his character. They are now satisfactory to his own mind, and when explained they will draw forth our approbation and praise. We know not what is best, or even good for us. We have made mistakes and suffered embarrassments enough when we have attempted to judge for ourselves, to convince us that the way of man is not in himself. But he cannot err. His understanding is infinite: and our wisdom and welfare require us to say, “The Lord shall choose our inheritance for us.”

Lastly, a persuasion that our acceptance with him does not depend upon the place he assigns us, or the nature of the work he ordains us, but our submission to it. We are not answerable for our stations and offices; but for our conduct in them. We can serve the Lord in adversity as well as in prosperity; in a private as well as in a public capacity. A good actor on the stage may be seen in the character of a peasant as well as in that of a prince—it is not the part allotted him that calls forth the applause of the audience, but the manner in which he represents it. To be great

in the world depends upon things over which we have frequently no control: but all may be great in the sight of the Lord—the hearer as well as the preacher; the servant as well as the master. He looketh to the heart; and if we are ready to do whatsoever he appoints, we shall have the testimony that we please God: and shall soon hear him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

Such was the submission of Saul of Tarsus—“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Such was the temper of Samuel—“Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.” Such was the practice of David—“On thee do I wait all the day,” And such is the readiness of angels—Though they excel in strength, they do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. What pleases them is not the kind of work in which they are employed, but their having an opportunity of shewing their regard to the pleasure of the employer. May his will be done on earth as it is done in heaven!

MARCH 30—MORNING.

“When they saw him, they besought him that he would depart.”—MATT. viii. 34.

HE had now entered the country of the Gadarenes, and cured two demoniacs. The people should have deemed themselves honoured by his presence; and have thanked him for relieving their wretched neighbours from the most dreadful malady. But he had, in correction of an unlawful traffic, destroyed their swine. They, therefore, preferring their sins to their

souls, feared and hated him, and—desired him to withdraw. He took them immediately at their word—and went—and returned no more. Oh! when he comes to us, and convinces us of sin, and reproveth us for our evil passions and vile courses; when he comes and makes us uneasy, by the admonitions of conscience, of friendship, of scripture, of providence; and, instead of yielding to his merciful design, we regard him as an irksome intruder, and entreat him, and he hears our meaning without speech, to leave us—he will comply with our desire—and say, They are joined to idols, let them alone—and woe unto them when I depart from them! This is an awful truth—

But it is an equally pleasing one, that if we desire his *presence*, he will indulge our wish. And, therefore, when the two disciples, going to Emmaus, reached the village whither they went, and he made as if he would have gone farther; they constrained him, saying, Abide with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent. And, it is said, he went in to tarry with them. So when the woman of Samaria had persuaded many of her neighbours to come to the well to see him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days.

Saviour Jesus! Thou art all in all. Come and dwell in our country—Come and dwell in our Churches—Come and dwell in our houses—Come and dwell in our hearts for ever! Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

“I cannot bear thine absence. Lord;

My life expires if thou depart;

Be thou, my heart, still near my God;

And thou, my God, be near my heart.”

MARCH 30.—EVENING.

“Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, and of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.”—COL. i. 4, 5.

THESE were the grounds of Paul and Timothy’s praise to God on the behalf of the Colossians. And they are all spiritual motives. Temporal blessings are not to be overlooked—But gratitude is to be wise, and to proportion its fervours to the value of the benefits conferred. And what are the good things pertaining to the life that now is, compared with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places?

Much depends upon the nature of our gratitude. There is no man who does not sometimes thank God. But for what? A safe voyage; a good harvest; a recovery from sickness. All that awakens *his* heart is confined within the circle of time and sense. Christians are peculiar in every thing; and their gratitude shews that they are heavenly minded. They therefore thank God not so much for the meat that perisheth, as for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life; not so much for civil freedom, as for the glorious liberty of the sons of God; not so much for health of body, as for soul prosperity. They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

The blessings here specified are three.

First, Their faith in Christ. Faith regards all the Scripture; but this is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Faith therefore has principally to do with the Saviour. It receives as true the testimony concerning him; and leads us to depend upon him, and to apply to him for

all that he is revealed to accomplish and bestow. Under the influence of it therefore we are represented as looking to him; coming to him; building on him as our foundation; entering him as our refuge; and glorying in him as the Lord our righteousness and strength—For the Scriptures always describe rather than define faith; and shew us what it *is* by what it *does*, and what it does with regard to *Christ*.

Secondly, Their love to all the Saints. I need not observe how often love is connected with faith: but the same order is always maintained between them—Faith precedes love. Love is the fruit and not the root; the effect and not the cause. Faith is the origin of every thing in the Christian life; and it is not real faith unless it be operative. It works by love. Love to whom? To “the Saints”—not exclusively, but peculiarly. The Thessalonians loved all their fellow-creatures, but not with the same degree, or even kind of love. They loved their enemies, but not as they loved their friends. They loved sinners; but it was with a love of pity and benevolence, not of esteem and complacency. But the Saints were regarded by them as the excellent of the earth, and in them was all their delight. Love to whom? To “all the Saints”—regardless of outward distinctions, or the minor matters of religion. Indeed our love to the brethren is not a proof that we have passed from death unto life, unless it regards them as saints. We love them under the influence of some other character or quality, unless we can pray, “Grace be with *all* them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;” and follow the example of him who said, “*Whosoever* shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Thirdly, Their “hope.” Hope is a grace, as well as faith and love: but as a grace, hope is in *us*; whereas here hope is said to be “laid up for them in *heaven*”—This shews that the *object* of hope is here intended; or all that which God has promised to his people beyond the grave. The laying it up in heaven reminds us of its security. Hence the admonition of the Saviour: “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.” In a world like this, where nothing is safe or certain, how anxious, fearful, miserable, must those be, who have their portion in this life! But Christians can dwell at ease. None of these changes and dangers affect their essential welfare. They know in themselves that they have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. They have chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from them.—It shews us that it is principally future. At present they are not at home, but strangers and pilgrims on earth. They have remittances and supplies, but it is from God’s riches in glory. The inheritance is reserved in heaven for them; and they cannot possess it till they are of age. Should they think of building their tabernacles here, something would soon tell them to arise and depart hence, for this is not their rest. Seed is sown for the righteous; but the reaping-time is to come. Now is the conflict; but the crown of glory that fadeth not away is reserved for the hour of triumph.—Also by being laid up in heaven it is much concealed. O how great is the goodness, says David, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear thee! and says the Apostle, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the

things which God hath prepared for them that love him. After all the developments of the Scripture, and the illuminations of the Holy Spirit in the experience of Christians, we read of a glory that *shall be* revealed. We could not in this weak state of flesh and blood bear the full disclosure. But the veil will soon be drawn aside; and the voice will cry, Come and see. And the sight will infinitely surpass the expectation.

MARCH 31.—MORNING.

“But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.” JOHN xiv. 31.

WHEN he says, “Arise, let us go hence”—he shews his readiness to suffer. “I will not wait for the enemy; I will go and meet him. I will go to the place where Judas will look for me. I will go to the garden of Gethsemane, where I am to agonize—and from thence to Calvary, where I am to die. I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” We always see in him this disposition—a proof that he was not compelled to engage; that he did not undertake the case from ignorance; that he did not repent of his work, even in the sight of enduring all its expensiveness of woe—He loved us, and gave himself for us.

Yet this alacrity was not rashness, but obedience—“As the Father gave me commandment.” Though in his higher character he had the disposal of himself. in his human nature, and in his mediatorial office, he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

He felt no inconsistency in this, and why should we? “No man taketh my life from me. I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again—This commandment have I received of my Father.” So mistaken should we be in supposing that the Father was less disposed to save us than the Son, or that his love was purchased by that death which was really the effect of it, and designed to be the medium through which it should operate. Herein God had commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And therefore did the Father love him, because he laid down his life that he might take it again: and for the suffering of death, he crowned him with glory and honour.

—Though there was something here peculiar in our Saviour’s obedience, there is something also exemplary in it. He did not expose himself *before* his hour was come; but cheerfully submitted. to the Divine will, when it *was* come. So we are not to turn aside in search of trials, but to take up our cross when it is fairly in our way. We are not to be impatient to suffer; but when we are called to it, the *call* should sustain us, and bear us through, for God is with us.

And this obedience resulted from love—“I love the Father. I delight,” said he, “to do thy will; yea, thy law is within my heart. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” His people, in their measure and degree, can say the same. As obedience is the best evidence of love, so love is the best spring of obedience. It is love that makes it pleasant to ourselves. It is love that makes it acceptable to God. With him nothing can be a

substitute for it. Indeed, we ourselves, in the conduct of our fellow-creatures towards us, judge, not by the bulk of the action, but the disposition from which it proceeds. The estimate is taken, not from the service, but the principle; not from what is given, but from what is implied. The smallest donation is welcomed as a token of cordial regard; while, like God, we abhor "the sacrifice where not the heart is found."

Jesus would have this known, not to his disciples only, but to others—and to all: "But that the *world* may *know* that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." And the world ought to know it: they are deeply concerned in it, and in due time they will know it. At present a very large majority of mankind have never heard of his Name, or of his salvation. But his cause is spreading. The Scriptures are entering all languages. Missionaries are visiting all climes. The Church is praying that his word may have free course and be glorified. And God has said, "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth." It must therefore by-and-by be said, without a figure, "Behold! the world is gone away after him."

But blessed are our eyes, for they see; and our ears, for they hear. We already know these things. But *how* do we know them? Do we feel as well as understand them? Are we as cold in our affections as we are clear in our convictions? Shall we be found in the number of those who behold, and wonder, and perish? Or, filled with admiration and

gratitude, and confidence and zeal, beholding as in a glass his glory, are we changing into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord?

MARCH 31.—EVENING.

“The engrafted word.”—JAMES i. 21.

HISTORY is silent as to the time when grafting was first introduced. But it has been long practised; and the process is now generally familiar.

The image essentially includes union, vital union between parts not connected before. The man receives the word into his heart, as the tree receives into its stock the scion, which by incorporation becomes thenceforward one with itself. The surprise seems here—We should imagine, when the insertion is made, that the sap of the tree entering the scion which is so much smaller, would immediately convert the scion into its own quality: but instead of this the scion converts the sap; and the changed juice maintains, enlarges, fructifies the scion; and causes it in due time to produce—not according to the kind of the old stock—but of the adopted graft.

A metaphor is not to be pressed: but we cannot avoid remarking, that as the body of the tree continues the same after the ingrafting, so in conversion we remain physically the same as before; retaining the same relations, conditions, callings; the same corporeal powers and mental faculties—only the efficiency of them is changed, hallowed, and applied to other uses and purposes—and all through the medium of the word.

Grafting is one of the most pleasing exercises to

those who feel delight in horticulture: and how eagerly and anxiously, after the operation has been performed, does the gardener go and examine whether it has succeeded! And this will be soon known. If the scion has *taken*, it proves the vitality by the appearance and growth of the graft. There are first the shoots; then the branches; at length the blossoms and the fruit appear; and the whole increases every year, till it becomes a great tree, and abundantly rewards the owner.

Thus earnestly and carefully does a minister look after the effect of his labour; and the success of his preaching is known and hailed in the same way; only with higher exultation and praise. Happy those servants of the Lord Jesus whose hearers have received “the grace of God in truth;” and to whom they say, “our Gospel came to you not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”

—It is from hence the Gospel has its character and is called the engrafted word. It is so called, however, not because this is always the effect—for there are many who receive it in vain; but it is designed to be so received; and it is actually thus received when “it is able to save the soul.” Thus it is called the word of faith—not because it is always believed; but because it is credible; and it is made known for the obedience of faith; and it cannot profit us unless faith be mixed with it. Thus it is called the word of life—not because it quickens all those among whom it comes—for there are many who remain dead in trespasses and sins: but it calls us to walk in newness of life; and the man who receives it, not only has “life, but life more abundantly”

How does this apply to us? “My word,” said Jesus to the Jews, “has no place in you”—Has it a place in us?—And what place? In the head only? or the heart? Is it in us a notion? or a principle? And does it work effectually in us as it does in them that believe? And does it fill us with all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God? Such is the promise: “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.”

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