Psalms - Commentaries by Julius Anton Wilhelm Eugen von Poseck

Green Pastures and Still Waters, Sixth Degree. His and Our Home. (23:6)

Verse 6, " Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

It might appear, at first sight, as if in the preceding verse we had come to the climax of blessings. Can there be a fuller measure than an overflowing cup; such as we receive at our gracious Shepherd's Table, where He not only fills the vessels up to the brim as at Cana, but makes them run over?

Yes, there is a still greater blessing in store; according to the marvelous abundance of Him Who is the portion of our inheritance and of our cup. The crowning blessing, the blessing of blessings, will be this—"to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever "—to be " for ever with the Lord "—with Him Who gave us that Table and that cup, when going to give Himself for us—to dwell with Him in His and our Father's House, Who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Him.

But before entering more fully upon this blessed hope of the Christian, we find something else in our verse, for it consists of two portions: first, the goodness and mercy of our God, following us all the days of our pilgrimage here below ; and, secondly, the dwelling in the House of the Lord for ever.

Beloved fellow-pilgrim! We are passing through a wilderness where the taint of sin has not yet been removed, nor the evil been done away. On the contrary, evil of every kind is on the increase; violence and corruption filling the earth, as it was in the days of Noah, wherever one looks in the political, social, or religious field. These are the latter days, the last times described in the Divine Record with such solemn traits.

And what is needed, dear fellow-believer, to keep us, in these evil days, from being " overcome with evil? " The answer from God's own Word, is, " Cleave to that which is good;" and all that is Divine, and nothing else, is good. There is but one that is good, God; and it is an increasing sense of His goodness and mercy that we want more than anything else, amidst a world of increasing evil. And this being granted, my reader, what more adequate close could there be for our precious Psalm than this sixth verse? Having fed at the Lord's Table upon everything that is good and blessed, having got the heart filled with Christ and His Love, and with the sense of the grace and goodness of His and our God and Father; having in spirit, and in the power of the Spirit, as worshippers, breathed the pure atmosphere of heaven, of God's own holy and gracious Presence—we carry the savour and vigour of that atmosphere with us into our divers earthly relationships, when entering upon the duties of another week ; and thus we shall be enabled, through grace, to walk here below, as those whose citizenship (conversation) is in Heaven, from whence we look for our Saviour.

And it is this quiet assurance and increasing sense of God's goodness and mercy, so much needed now-a-days by Christians everywhere, that we get at the beginning of our verse. It is but the simple and natural result of the preceding verse.

When speaking in our meditation on the second verse, of the blessing resulting from feeding at the beginning of the day on the pasture of the Word of God, I quoted a line from Dr. Doddridge:—

And, certainly, we may add: The smiles of Divine favour and blessing received on the Lord's Day morning, at His Table, bless all the week.

If you and I, Christian reader, have been (not in a prophetic, but in a Christian sense) in the Spirit on the Lord's Day—the first day of a new week—we enter upon the duties, or, may be, trials of another six days, with an overrunning cup of blessing. 'What then is my first thought on Monday morning? The same as that which follows in our verse, close upon " my cup runneth over."

" Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

Mark, reader, the very first word that follows upon such a cup, is, " Surely!" The expression of perfect and calm assurance.1 Assurance of what? Of the forgiveness of my sins? of salvation ? of my acceptance before God ? That must have been all settled before; it precedes the cup, but cannot be produced by it. This is the calm assurance of the goodness and mercy of my God and Saviour. The same quiet confidence that spoke at the opening of our Psalm, " I shall not want," after having said, " The Lord Jehovah-Jesus is my Shepherd," says at the close, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me;" after having fed, not upon His Word only, but Himselt.at His Table; and having drunk of that cup of blessing given by His own dying hands.

Arising on Monday morning, perhaps with a family " unprovided for" (as people say) around me, a week of trouble, and trials, and cares before me, a world surrounding me where evil of all kinds is increasing at a fearful rate, hastening towards the end like the floods of the Niagara—amidst a professing Church in disorder and ruins—ruins of which I form a part—when I look up from it all to Heaven, what do I say ?

Is it, " Hitherto the Lord has helped me; here I'll raise my Ebenezer? and, I trust and hope He will not let me sink at last ?" Poor return for such a cup of blessing, that would be. It would be pretty much like Jacob's answer to God's promises, addressed to Jacob from the top of that ladder of blessings. God said to him, " And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places, and will bring thee again into this land: for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

And what was Jacob's answer at the bottom of the ladder? " If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God," etc.

Alas! alas! I am afraid not a few are at the bottom of the ladder on Monday morning. And why? Because they have not been at the top on the Lord's Day. Sad to wake on Monday morning, like Jacob, as it were, from a dream, and to say, like him, only in a different sense, " what a dreadful place is this! "-

Our Monday morning hymn should be such as this:—

"O Lord, how does Thy mercy throw Its guardian shadow o'er me ; Preserving, while I'm here below, And guiding safe to glory."

" Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever ! "

And then I say, " As sure as that Heaven is above me, from whence God has sent down His only begotten Son into this world, to seek and to save sinners, me among the rest; as surely as He has borne my griefs and carried my sorrows, and was wounded for my transgressions and bruised for my iniquities ; as surely as God has raised Him from the dead, and received Him up to glory; as surely as He intercedes there above before God, as the High Priest for all His people, and as the Advocate with the Father for each beloved child ; as surely as He, the Good, Great, and Chief Shepherd, and the Head of the Church, watches and directs and protects from on high, the flock and Church of God ; as surely as I am sealed with the Holy Spirit, Who cries within me, " Abba, Father ;" and as surely as God, Who cannot lie, tells me in His own Word that I am accepted in the Beloved One, and that, as He is, so am I in this world ; and as surely as this Word assures me that from the Father's, and Christ's love, none and nothing shall be able to separate me ; and as surely as there is no. variableness nor shadow of turning with the Father of lights ; as surely as Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday Jesus Christ, to-day Jesus Christ, and for ever Jesus Christ ; and as surely as He has promised that His Spirit—the Eternal Spirit, shall abide with me for ever ; and as surely as His Word shall abide for ever, when this world, with its vain glories and lying vanities, will have relapsed into nonentity ; and, as surely as I have been feasting upon Him at His Table yesterday, and blessed His Cup of blessing, and have received there an overrunning .cup of joy and peace, in the power of the Holy Ghost,—so

" Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

In what light does the world appear to me now? As the " Valley of the Shadow of Death?" Rather, as a place where Christ upon the Cross has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil; to deliver all who believe in Him, from the bondage of the fear of death. A place where He has sent me with a message of life, and peace, and glory—life and incorruptibility brought to light by the gospel. A place where I have daily opportunities to glorify God and His and my Christ, which will never occur in Heaven.

Or does it appear to me as the " valley of mulberries "—dearth and broken cisterns all around—dry as a sieve ? just the place for God to teach me, and for me to learn that all my springs are in the living God, and that His loving-kindness is better than life, Who satisfieth my soul as with marrow and fatness ;— just the place to dig wells with our " staves " under the direction of " the Law-giver " (the Holy Ghost), and, whilst passing through it, make it a well .

Or does it appear to me a " valley of tears?" Yes, when I look at it ; but then I look up to Him, Who, though He was a Man of sorrows in this world, acquainted with grief, and, in the days of His flesh, poured out strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death,—now bids me, whilst weeping when looking around, to look up unto Him. Why was His heart glad when He passed through this vale of tears? It was because He set His God always before His face, and God was at His right hand. In the safe place of constant dependence upon His God, and in the perfect sense of His goodness, His heart was glad, and His tongue (or " glory ") did rejoice. " My goodness extendeth not to thee," and " Why callest thou me good? There is none that is good but One, that is God."

" Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

Or do I look at this world as a " valley of Achor," a " valley of trouble? " Alas! alas! it is! The Church, allured by the " wedge of gold " and the " Babylonish garment," has loved this world, that mocked her glorious Head with a crown of thorns and spit upon His face. And therefore shame and confusion have come upon her. But, while those who sigh and weep and lament over such ruins with some thing of the spirit of a Daniel and Jeremiah, (would there were more of that sighing and crying amongst Christians !) and bow down before God and say, " Unto us belongeth shame and confusion of face because we have sinned ;" let us not forget to add, like Daniel, " But unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy, although we have sinned."3 Surely the multitude of His tender mercies is still greater than the multitude of our sins, which His love has known how to cover in grace.

The prince of this world will be sure to make it a " valley of Achor," in his sense, to all who desire, amidst the general defection, to live godly in Christ Jesus. He will say to them, as it were: Do you think I shall permit you to pass through my kingdom daily contradicting my principles in what you say and do ? You shall have nothing but trouble.

I say, so much the better. For those that bear the reproach of Christ without the camp, Achor, i.e., trouble, is just the proper place. It is better than all the treasures of Egypt; it is the very place to be happy in, and to realize His nearness and sympathy, Who once called out from glory, " Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?

And as to the " valley of trouble," to me it is but the " valley of Eshcol," where I daily taste the comfort of the Holy Spirit, Who, to me, turns it into a " door of hope ;" not in the sense of an earthly Jewish hope, but as the One Who makes me say, " Come, Lord Jesus," and tells me that soon I shall dwell in the House of the Lord for ever.

Thus we pass through this world of increasing evil, not getting occupied with the scene of evil around us, but with the " goodness and mercy " of our good God above us.4

There is something very affecting in the thought of goodness and mercy following me all the days of my life, I must remind my reader here of a remark, when speaking on the " Valley of the Shadow of Death." I said that a child going by night with its father through a dangerous place, would, in the sense of the danger, cling closer to his father. In our sixth verse, it is not so much the sense of the evil and danger around that

makes me cling closer to my God and my Saviour, but rather the sense of His goodness. And just as the eye of a loving mother, passing with her weak little child along a rough road, would watch and follow every movement of the child, so the loving eye of our God, in His unchanging goodness and mercy, follows and watches over our every step. The same gracious eye that was looking out for the return of the prodigal, and recognized him when he looked but as a speck in the distance, follows every movement of the found, accepted, and beloved child, on the way to the Father's House above. And how many children are there on that way? poor and feeble as to themselves, though infinitely rich in Christ ; and though marking their daily path with failures ; yet, a loving eye, that has counted each hair of those numberless children, follows their every movement, and His " good hand " marks our every-day path with the waymarks of His "goodness and mercy." May grace be given to each beloved child. to be guided by the Father's eye, as we know the voice of His blessed Son, our Good. Shepherd; that we may not be like horses and mules whose mouths must be kept in with bit and bridle; but may we be kept very close to His good and holy eye, to discern at once whither it bids us to go ; and may we have a deeper sense of His good hand upon us. I mean that sense of His good hand which we find. in His two servants of old, Ezra and Nehemiah, in a " day of small things," when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin opposed, taunted, or tried to ensnare them in every possible way. Then, with perils and evil without and within, what was it that upheld and encouraged those faithful servants of God in their arduous path? It was the sense of God's goodness and mercy above all the evil around, so fully re-echoed when the foundation of the Temple was laid and the song arose, " Praise ye the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever!" It forms the grand theme of so many Psalms, especially towards the close, anticipating the praises of Israel when, restored to their land and temple, they, on their part, will own and praise the goodness of Him W hose mercy endureth for ever.

Let me just quote a few passages from Ezra and Nehemiah. First, as to their sense of the eye of God being upon them , from Ezra:—

" But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they (their enemies) could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius." (Ezra, v., 5).

Further, as to their sense of the " good hand " of their God:—

" And the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him." (Ch. 7:6).

" And on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him." (v. 9).

" Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem ; and hath extended mercy unto me before the king and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened, as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me; and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me." (27, 28).

" And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me." (Nehem. 2:8).

" Then I told them of the hand of my God, which was good upon me." (v. 18).

The cloud and the pillar of fire went before Israel in the wilderness to guide; and the rock, which is Christ, followed them to provide ; and did not Jacob own that goodness and mercy that had followed him all the days of his life, though they had been few and evil, when he worshipped God, leaning on the top of his staff ?

But, Christian reader, whilst it is true that " the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect towards him " (King Asa's was not) ; let us remember, on the other hand, what is written:

" The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is lie that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (1 Pet. 3)

Therefore, beloved, let us follow the same apostle's injunction: " For he that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips, that they speak no guile; let him eschew evil and do good ; let him seek peace and ensue it."

Christian reader, let us remember that the good hand of our God is also the mighty hand of our God, to humble those whom His goodness does not lead to repentance. But, blessed be His name, whenever He sees fit to humble us because we were not humble—as soon as He has reached His gracious purpose, and as soon as we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, we shall find it as gentle as it is mighty. The same hand which knows how to cast the wicked into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 21) we find, in the same chapter, wiping all tears from the eyes of His children.5 Blessed to be in that good, mighty, and gentle Hand, as the only place of safety, and blessed also to be under it, as the only true place for discipline and exercise.

There is a great tendency (always natural to man,) in these days of increasing evil, to become occupied with evil. We may have to deal with evil—in the Church and elsewhere—but we cannot do so in the right way and spirit, unless we are occupied with that which is good. This is the way to acquire that noble Christian art, if I may say so, of overcoming evil with good. That which is evil is not the proper food for the heart of a child of God, but that which is good. Christians are not vultures nor eagles, which are gathered together where there is a carcass. Neither ought they to be like the raven let out of Noah's ark, which " went forth to and fro," because it preferred the carcasses that floated on the water to the food that was to be found in the ark. We ought to be like the dove that returned to the ark with the olive-leaf of peace in her mouth; for the mind. of the Spirit is life and peace, and His fruit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. We are enjoined to " follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." And " the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

What I have said, just before, as to the natural propensity to get occupied with evil, reminds me of a true word of some servant of Christ.6

When speaking on that ungodly habit of evil-speaking, so baneful and destructive (and most so for the speaker himself)—he compares those evil-speakers to birds of prey, which, whilst flying over most lovely tracts of country, do not perceive anything of its charms and beauty. They have in view some out-of-the-way offal. on which they settle and peck (like the raven referred to above).

May the God of Peace, in His infinite goodness and mercy, keep all His dear children—the " sons of peace "—from the spirit of strife and contention, and give us, as we are " children of Abraham," more of his spirit, " Let there be no strife amongst us, for we are brethren." If once the mind of a Christian has assumed the natural bent of being occupied with evil, there is no knowing where it may lead him.

It is this increasing sense of God's goodness and mercy, which is, I think, implied in the apostolic greeting of Peter, " Grace, mercy, and peace, be multiplied unto you;" and of Jude, " Mercy unto you, and peace, and love be multiplied ;" before speaking, in his epistle, of these evil last days.

0 that those words of that prayer of prayers, ascending to heaven from the heart and lips of the most loving Shepherd before He died for us, may in its divine savour and power rest in our hearts:

" And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given one, that they may be one, as we are. . . . And now come I to thee ; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. . . . I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

And, beloved, does it not seem as if God, through His Spirit, in that most solemn epistle of Jude, answers (as He did at Pentecost) to this intercessional prayer of His blessed Son?

" Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

One word more, and we shall have done with this first, all-important portion. of our verse. My reader will remember that, in the preface of these pages, I referred to three essential requisites for the spiritual health as being fully met by our precious Psalm, viz.; first, good and suitable food (in the first two verses of this Psalm); secondly, regular exercise (vv. 3 and 4) ; and last, but not least, a pure and congenial atmosphere. It is, I there remarked, this last requisite we find supplied in the two last verses. Now, at the close of the third chapter of Paul's epistle to the Philippians—that epistle where every line breathes the spirit of joy, peace, and liberty—we find our pure and heavenly native atmosphere, as those whose conversation (or citizenship) is in Heaven, from whence we look for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout the third chapter, all the capacities of the new nature, acted upon and drawn forth by the Holy Ghost as their motive power—are in motion—reaching onward, making, like a swimmer, for the shore of the first resurrection, with the ascended Christ as the glorious goal. He is, as it were, standing again at the shore, as in the closing chapter of St. John's Gospel, only not merely as the Great Shepherd, the First-begotten from among the dead, and Firstborn of many brethren, providing for the need of His own left behind in this world, but as our ascended and glorified Lord and Christ ; ready to leave, once more, the place of His rest and glory, to receive up to Himself His own, in glorious bodies, to see Him as He is, and to be like Him and with Him, in the Father's House. Here we breathe heavenly atmosphere—resurrection air. But then, in the fourth chapter, we again are, for a little while, on earth—for what? Not to inhale the thick and poisonous air of this world, but to feed—upon heavenly things, and to breathe, even here below, the atmosphere of Heaven! Another has said, " To live heavenly on earth, you must live in heaven." How true! And what about the troubles and cares of daily life here below? The answer is, " Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Be at home in the third chapter of the Philippians, and you will be fully at ease in the fourth.

And what is the result of thus making our requests known unto God? The peace of God shall keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. What is its character? The peace of God is independent of circumstances. The mightiest throne of this world may be overthrown in a day by the tidal-wave of a revolution ; but the peace of God is as high above the troubles and changeful circumstances of this world, as His throne is above it ; and this immoveable, unshakable peace will keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. And having thus cast all our cares upon God, and, mark reader, leaving' them there,—after having done so, we live in and breathe the pure heavenly atmosphere, and have room in our hearts for " whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise ; " and we " think on these things."

And what is the result, dear reader, of thus breathing the same atmosphere with God, and of being thus occupied with all that is good and heavenly? " And the God of peace shall be with you."7 The God, Who makes even your enemies to be at peace with you if your ways please Him—that " God of peace," Who knows how to bruise Satan under the feet of His saints, will be with you—and thus our hearts being at home in our heavenly blessings in Christ, feeding upon all that is good, breathing the pure atmosphere of Heaven, we shall walk heavenly on earth with an abiding, yea, increasing sense of God's goodness and mercy ; not only at the beginning of the week, but all through it ; and our song in the wilderness (not only on Lord's Day morning) will be:-

In the first chapter of Revelation (that book of general changes and commotions) we find the Eternal, Unchangeable One, and at the end—the eternal, unchangeable state and scene.

Yes, " goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." I do not want a prophet to tell me what is before me,—I know that " goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." This is enough. All the days of my life, yea, every moment, until the end of the pilgrimage. A lasting blessing here below, and everlasting blessing there above. " All the days of my life " here on earth, and " dwelling in the house of the Lord for ever "— above!

And what is this best of blessings, my reader? It is this: To dwell in the House of the Lord, and with Him forever! It is the crowning blessing. Would our cup at His Table be overrunning, if we only showed His death, without being able to add, " till He come?" Why, it is the very thing that makes the cup run over, and contributes to impart such a savour to the repast spread for us by our dying Saviour's love. For it reminds us of the love wherewith He, Who gave not only His life but Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour, will come again Himself, to receive us up to Himself, to be for ever with Himself. It is this blessed hope which, next to His death, forms, so to speak with all reverence, an integral ingredient of the Lord's Table. Therefore our blessed Lord, when instituting the Supper of the New Testament, connected with it the blessed hope of His coming again as an integral, final portion of refreshment, as it were, when we feed upon

the " Lamb slain," with the bread of affliction. At the time when He gave it, it was His coming again for Israel in the blessings of His millennial kingdom; for the Jews had not yet been finally rejected, and the Church was not yet in existence. But in the especial instruction Paul received of the Lord with regard to His Table, it is His coming for the Church—not His public appearing, as already mentioned in our meditations on the preceding verse. And if the blessed hope of His coming forms the cheering and comforting element, and gives the motive power for a Christian's life, how could it be wanting at His Table, where we remember Him Who once was offered to bear the sins of many, and shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation, unto them that look for Him. Perhaps it would have been the proper place there to enter upon that blessed subject. But I refrained from doing so, partly because it would have extended our meditations on that verse beyond the proper limits, and partly because I feared putting the chief subject of meditation at that Table, the death of Christ, in the back-ground.

It is true our verse does not mention the Lord's coming in so many words. But I have no doubt but that this blessed truth, like most of the other Christian truths, is, in principle, imbedded and expressed in this Psalm, as far as this could be done in this precious portion of Holy Writ. For how can we read these words, " And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever," without at once thinking of those precious parting words of our blessed Lord. to His disciples in John 14? There He mentions His Father's House where He was going to prepare a place for them, only in close connection with the blessed truth of His coming again for the Church (never mentioned before in that wondrous Gospel, and in the other Gospels not mentioned at all, nay, not even hinted at). It is as if our blessed Lord, in speaking those comforting parting words to His own, had said to them, " I know that it is not the House above merely, and the place I am going to prepare for you there, that makes Heaven Heaven for you, but your being there with Me. I give you credit, that, if the language of the Psalmist in the Old Testament is, " Whom have I in Heaven but thee? And there is none on earth whom I desire beside thee"—this will be your language in a far higher sense—and therefore I tell you that I am not only going there to prepare a Place for you in the Father's House, but when that place is prepared, I'll come Myself to receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

Or could a faithful Jew think of the House of the Lord at Jerusalem, His Temple, without connecting it with the coming of Him Who was greater than Solomon? Were not Simeon and Anna, who hardly departed from the Temple, looking for His coming? Thus, whether we take these words: " I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever," in the sense of the Temple at Jerusalem, or in the Christian sense of the Father's House—the heart of the faithful, (be it the faithful Jew of old, or in the future, or the Christian believer who knows and realizes this blessed hope,) cannot help at once connecting it with the hope of His coming ; for the Jew at His public appearing ; for the Christian as a present hope, which he knows may at any day, yea, at any hour, be turned into a blessed reality. You might just as well think it possible that a betrothed one, to whom her future husband writes that she would soon dwell in his Father's house for ever, would, in reading this, not think at all of his coming to fetch her. I think his coming would be her very first thought.

Precious as is the assurance that goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, what would it be without the last few words, the culminating blessing of our Psalm! This life will soon be at an end. What then? The second assurance of our verse, " I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever! "

Yea, through all eternity, There I shall, together with all His flock, and yet in the full individual and undivided enjoyment of His presence, remember all that my blessed Shepherd has done and has been for me on earth. Then I shall remember and fully appreciate that goodness and mercy which has followed me all the days of my life, whilst on my way to Him through a mighty, subtle, and cruel enemy's country.

The same gracious Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, of Whom it is said in the 13th chapter of. John, that, " having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end of His life here below), assures them and us, in the next chapter, that we shall dwell with Him in the Father's House for ever: " In my Father's house are many mansions ; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

Let us meditate a few moments on these precious lines before we come to the next verse.

How great is the Father's House? Can you count the " ten thousands of ten thousands " and the " thousands of thousands," that are thronging there above, around the throne of God and the Lamb? Or can you number the hosts of the saved who are there, and will be there above, for ever with the Lord, and for whose benefit those crowds of angelic spirits were and are sent to minister to them during the time of their pilgrimage on earth, (Oh, wondrous love and grace that did and does send them!) And " yet there is room."

"I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Ah ! dear fellow pilgrim, once arrived there,—

There will be no longer any question as to whether I shall want or not ; nor as to the abundance of the green pastures, and the still waters, and the feeding and peaceful lying down there ; nor of straying and restoring, and being led in the paths of righteousness ; nor of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, with its darkness, perils, and terrors, and the safely and fearlessly passing through it ; nor even of our gracious Shepherd and Lord's Table, and the Cup of blessing—though all this will ever be remembered in glory. Once arrived there, it will be the dwelling in the House of the Lord for ever and — blessed hope of the Christian believer—the being " for ever with the Lord." The Jewish worshipper, when going up three times a year from the distant borders of the Holy Land to worship at Jerusalem, might say, whilst travelling on the dusty road in the heat of the day, " Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee. Selah." But when the feast was over, then came the sorrow of parting. No such parting for us, fellow-heir of glory,—"I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

And, beloved, there is something infinitely more precious than all the glorious surroundings of that bright place above. It is the face of Jesus that we shall see in that place. And that Face is more than all the Place.

Suppose you return home from a long journey. What would your home be to you if you find your beloved one gone, who makes it a home to you? What would be the Place to you, even if it were the most splendid and comfortable, without the beloved Face?"Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none on earth whom I desire beside thee." What would be a Christless heaven to you? And may I add, " What would be a Christless home (I mean household) here on earth to you? I must leave it to the conscience of my Christian reader to answer the last question. There was a poor (but rich) brother in Christ (now in glory and rest with Christ), who had not much of a " home " here, but who could write these lines:-

What a contrast to these words: " I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever! " do we find in the book of Revelation, as to those " who dwell on earth." The dwelling on earth, there, brings down upon those unhappy " settlers " all the awful judgments of God, mentioned in that most solemn, yet most precious closing portion of the Word of God. May God, in His mercy, keep all His Saints from practically forgetting and denying that they are Saints of God, by settling down at ease in a world where the Lamb of God has been slain; forgetting that we are to dwell in those " mansions " in the Father's House, where the " Lamb slain " will be in the midst of the Throne. He will be the only center in heavenly glory; may He be our only center on earth! The Psalmist, when saying: " I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever," does not give us any description of the scenery. At the close of the Word of God, we find indeed the glorious battlements of the Heavenly City pointed out to the eye of the wearied pilgrim, in the never-fading glorious colors of Divine inspiration. There we find the Jerusalem above depicted to the eye of faith (not of imagination, for we have not to do here with poetic fictions, but with eternal blessed heavenly realities) in the light of glory — " even like a jasper-stone, clear as crystal "with its walls of jasper—gates of pearl—its foundations all garnished with precious stones—its streets of pure gold, transparent as glass—and the glory of God lighting it. But who is the light of it? The Lamb—" And the Lamb is the light thereof." lie was the light of this dark world, and He is the light of that Heavenly glory. What a glorious scene we find depicted here to the adoring gaze of faith! But in our Psalm it is neither the House nor the City that fills the writer's heart and mind, but it is the One Who dwells in that House. It is the " house of the Lord." When the Lord comforts (in John 14) the hearts of His sorrowing disciples, it is not so much the " many mansions," that He lays stress upon. He gives them credit for better desires. They are in His Father's House. But more ; after having said, " I go and prepare a place for you," He continues, " And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." Likewise the apostle Paul, when comforting the persecuted Thessalonians with the bright hope of the Lord's coming (1 Thess. 4), does not give them a glowing description of heavenly scenery, but simply says, " And so shall we be for ever with the Lord; comfort one another with these words." Instead of depicting the scene, he simply mentions Him Whose presence gladdens heaven, on Whose face the eye of God rests with perfect Divine delight. It is neither the pressure of daily cares and circumstances, nor even the attractive power of heavenly rest and glory, that makes a heart that is true to Jesus, long for His coming, but His own blessed Self. It is true this wretched scene of sin, death, misery, and cares, and opposition to God and His Word and work—this world—will for ever close behind me if the Lord should come to-day, or this moment. And more than this, my wretched self, my flesh, wherein there dwells nothing good — that which hinders me more than the world around me, from the full enjoyment of communion with Him, and in His service—all this will be left behind in the twinkling of an eye. All that scene of sorrow will close behind me for ever ! and a wondrous scene of heavenly light, glory, and bliss will open before our view, when at the word of Divine command that once spoke, " Lazarus, come forth," and at the voice of the archangel, and at the sound of the trump of God (and, O blessed hope ! this may come to pass in the course of this very day !) all the sleeping saints of all ages will come forth from their tombs, and we that are alive shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air, to be led and introduced by Himself, our Good. Shepherd, (Who has led us here below so often beside the still waters,) into rest and glory with Him in His and our Father's House. . . . But it is Himself, and not circumstances, neither earthly nor heavenly, that makes the heart long for His coming. " Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth whom I desire beside thee." How much more than in the case of the Psalmist, should this be the only hope and comfort of the Christian's heart?

-What should we think of a poor maiden, betrothed to a nobleman who had gone into a far country, if she were looking for his return and for the nuptial day, because it would release her at once from the cares and troubles of her present poverty, and transplace her into the luxuries and comforts of a splendid mansion ? Could such motives be called bridal affection? As little as selfishness can be love. The one excludes the other.

Or, take the case of a queen, retained as a captive in a land from which her royal husband had been expelled. What would be the subject of her thoughts, hopes, and affections, at the news that he was on his way to reconquer his kingdom ? Would it be the relief from her present state of humiliation, captivity, and dangers? Or would it be the anticipation of sharing again the throne with him, surrounded with homage and splendor? Certainly not, if her heart were true to him. It would be himself—his person—his look—the tone of his voice—his face and his embrace—that would engross her mind and heart. And, suppose the once rejected king had regained his kingdom and throne, and is approaching, after his victory, to hold his triumphal entrance into his capital. His hitherto deserted and captive queen, followed by the acclamations of the people, hastens to meet him before the gate of the city. What do you think, does she strain her eyes for—what to catch sight of, at the approach of the victorious procession? Is it the splendid ranks of the warriors and officers, and their trophies, and their glittering arms? Or is it the splendid festive robes of the magistrates and courtiers, or the standards and flags of all colours, that her eye is resting on? Or is it the sound of the victorious trumpets that her ears are so eager to catch and to drink in? No, there is one voice only—a voice sweeter to her ears than the sweetest strains of the triumphal march—a voice not heard by her for many a year, except in her dreams, but, once heard, never forgotten—it is the sound of that voice her ear is longing to hear. All the splendid scenery—the gorgeous pageant—which the great crowd is eager to see and to admire, is to her only so far of interest as it announces the approach of him whom her heart loves, and has so long pined for, during dreary nights and comfortless days.

At last he himself appears on the white horse of victory, and the murmur, " There is the king—the conqueror "—soon swells to the outburst of general homage, " Long live the king! Hail to the conqueror! " Mothers hold up their little children in their arms, and say, " There is the king, the mighty conqueror!" What is the queen's all-absorbing feeling and thought at the sight of the king" There is my husband!" To her, at this moment, it is neither the king nor the conqueror that would swell her heart with pride No! it is the all-absorbing thought of love. That is my husband, who has so loved me, and does love me, and from whose love neither sea nor land could ever separate me. And now I shall be with him for ever!

There is something very sweet and precious in the words of the Apostle John in the first chapter of Revelation: " He that loveth us.” The disciple, whom Jesus loved, and who was calmly leaning on His bosom, when all around, except Judas Iscariot, were startled and alarmed at the words of the Lord: " One of you shall betray me "—the same disciple, when speaking of Him as he saw Him in His attributes of judicial glory, (which; when seen by John, laid him at once prostrate like a dead man at the Master's feet,) greets the Church from Jesus, " who loveth us, and has washed us from our sins in His own blood ;" re-echoed, as I suppose, in that precious portion, by the whole Church. The terror of the Lord had not frightened away his confidence in His love, any more than it did in his fellow-apostle Paul.

The Voice that had sounded in John's ears like " the noise of many waters," like the cataracts of a Niagara, or like the roaring sea, was still the voice of the Good Shepherd that died for him,—that same voice said to him: " 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 (hades) and of death."

The Church, in the same closing book of Holy Writ, is called " the Lamb's wife." It is not " The King's wife." Let us remember this also.

The bright Star of that hope, be it the hope of the Lord's coming for the Church, or the looking of God's witnesses of old for His public appearing, shines throughout the ages of Holy Writ, from Enoch to the last page of the Word of God, the very last word of which is the longing expression of that blessed hope: " Even so, come, Lord Jesus. It shines in its wondrous brightness from the beginning of the New Testament to Revelation. It was the Star of Jacob that had arisen, the Star from the East that set the wise men of the East a-going, and kept them a-going, perhaps faint, yet pursuing, and led them safely unto Bethlehem's manger, to bow in worship and homage before the Divine babe, Who was " God manifest in the flesh." The very darkness of those terrible waves of judgments in that solemn closing portion of God's Word, only serves to enhance, as it were, and to set in relief, the brightness of Him Who says: I am the bright and morning star. Ah! reader, may those two words found in that closing chapter, as it were the winding up of the whole Bible,—the words: " I Jesus," in their full blessed meaning, be more realized in our hearts, and lead us more into the patient waiting for His coming ; as He, at the right hand of God, Himself is patiently waiting for the moment whet. the Father shall bid Him arise, and receive up unto Himself, into the Father's House, all for whom the Good Shepherd died.

Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord."

There was in Germany a dear aged handmaid of the Lord, known to the writer, who was a practical illustration of this patient waiting for Christ. Sister Margaret,"—under that name she was known to her Christian friends—had to struggle hard for her existence; but she had faith and patience; faith, to rise above difficulties, and patience, to bear up under them. Her daily task was to fill up the little tiny holes in newly manufactured cloth. So she was, day by day, sitting in her poor little chamber, which was half darkened by the cloth spread against the window to discern those tiny holes. At every one of her hard and trying tasks, she used to say: " Now, I'll just finish this, and then the Lord will come." Was she disappointed to find the Lord did not come when she had finished it? The next stitching invariably began again with: " Now I'll just do this, and then the Lord will come." She did not say, " Now when I have done this I shall only get those few pence, and how am I to pay this week's rent to-morrow, seeing it hardly suffices to pay for a loaf ? " (Even that was often wanting, only never beyond the right moment.) But that dear Christian had not only patience to wait, but faith to knock at the right door, as the following little incident will show:-

One afternoon, on a very hot summer day, two or three Christian friends came to see " Sister Margaret." They were poor, like herself. Wearied and fatigued from the journey, they looked as if they would not be averse to a cup of the well-known German beverage. But in Sister Margaret's cupboard there was neither bread nor coffee. It was like the widow's barrel—empty. Sister Margaret lifted up her heart to Him from Whom every good gift and every perfect gift cometh, and Who " giveth liberally and upbraideth not." She felt sure that her fervent desire for entertaining—not angels, but some of God's own children, had been granted. She filled her kettle with water and put it on the fire. The kettle began to sing. Sister Margaret silently thanked the Lord for having granted her request, though no sign of it was to be seen, not even, as it were, a little cloud as big as a man's hand. The water began to boil. Still dearth all around. The water is boiling over. Says Sister Margaret quietly: " Lord, the kettle is boiling." A knock at the door. Another Christian friend enters, who knows nothing of the urgency of the case, and within a few moments Sister Margaret's table is spread with plenty, I know I need make no apology to my Christian reader for having introduced into these pages these scenes from humble life. Perhaps they may serve, under God's blessing, to make us more gratefully appreciate and turn to account that most blessed and sweet Christian privilege of hospitality, which our dear " Sister Margaret " craved and obtained from her and our Liberal Giver. May we, through grace, learn to say like her, in childlike simplicity, " Now, I'll just do this or that," however insignificant it may be, and not for my own profit or credit, but ' in the name of the Lord Jesus ', " and then the Lord Himself will come." Then, as to the minutest circumstances, we shall be able to say with the same simplicity, " Lord, the kettle is boiling."

I am afraid that not a few of the " Lord's moor" have not sufficiently learnt the full meaning of that noble title " the Lord's poor." Bowed down with the cares of daily life, they do not remember that the cares of this world may become a snare just as much, though in another way, as the riches of this world, if they are allowed to get between Christ and the heart. They are like the pendulum in the fable, that stopped moving, and, when asked by the dial " Why do you stop," replied. " I was thinking how many ticks I have to perform in the course of every day ; sixty ticks every minute, sixty-times-sixty every hour, and four-and-twenty times-sixty-times sixty, or eighty-six thousand and four hundred ticks every day ! The thought quite overcame me, and I stopped." " Why," replied the dial, " don't you simply confine yourself to making every single tick, without troubling yourself about the next? For if you do so, the next tick would follow as a matter of course, and all would be easy enough."

This was exactly what Sister Margaret did. She made every single tick in the monotonous clockwork of every day's task, without troubling herself about the next following tick; thinking that before her aged eyes would have to search for another tiny hole in her cloth, the Lord might come, in the twinkling of an eye, and she be " for ever with the Lord,"

What was the character of the evil servant in the Gospel? He was not like those mockers of the last days, of which the Apostle speaks, that say aloud and boldly, " Where is the promise of his coming?" He only listened to the secret whisper of his heart saying within himself " My Lord delayeth his coming." The effect is immense. He is in company with the drunkards, (mark, it is not said that he took to drinking himself) i.e., in friendship and company with the world, whose friendship is enmity against God. May the Lord in His infinite mercy, grant us all a more daily and hourly realization of those blessed words:—"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess., 4:15-18.)

Let me just direct the attention of my readers to one expression in this blessed portion. The English translation has " in the clouds," which is not exact. The Greek text says " in clouds," (not " into the," nor in the.") It means that the very clouds which at our Lord's public appearance will be the symbols of judgment 8, will, at His coming for His saints, be only like chariots—the means of conveying them up to Him. " A cloud " (like a chariot) received him out of their sight " (Acts 1:9; Comp. Rev., 11:12.) It will be the same with His saints. Sweet and blessed thought!

The children of this generation are not only wiser, but also more persevering, where their interests are at stake, than the children of God. Many, if not most, of my readers are familiar with the history of the famous retreat of Xenophon with his little army. During nearly two years,

those ten-thousand men. under their brave and skillful general, had to fight their way back to their own country, through twenty-three provinces of the vast Persian Empire. They had to contend with every kind of hardship and danger ; with hunger, thirst, cold, heat, diseases ; daily pursued, attacked, and harassed in every way by their subtle and cruel .enemy, whose army was immensely superior in numbers to theirs. But nothing daunted, though often faint, they pursued their dangerous retreat.

What was their great motive power, my Christian reader ? It was the hope of soon reaching home. That little word: " Home, sweet home! " was, as it were, their daily watchword. It was their daily hope, animating, cheering, and sustaining them in their arduous and perilous journey, day by day, and step by step. And when at last they were not very far from their native country, they came to a place called Colchis, where their vanguard ascended a high range of hills that lay on their way. No sooner had they reached the top of those hills, than they burst into the cry:

“eaxarra, eaxarra!" that is: " the sea! the sea! " Xenophon, their leader, who was in the rear, not discerning, at such a distance, the meaning of their cry, and believing that his vanguard was attacked, sent some battalions to their succor. But as soon as these had climbed the hills, they all joined in the cry: " Thalatta Thalatta!" Soon Xenophon, together with the rest, joined them, and then they perceived the cause and the meaning of their cries and gesticulations. There, at their feet, lay the vast ocean, so long looked for. There was the harbour, with numerous ships, to convey them to their now not very distant home. And they had been so near it, and had not known it! It was a scene beyond description. Some of the soldiers throwing themselves upon the ground, and weeping with joy;—others throwing away their arms, and embracing each other, whilst some others, again, danced with joy. At last the end of all their troubles had arrived. Here they were at the top of the hills, inhaling the fresh breezes of the sea, numerous vessels lying ready for conveying them home "—home to their own country—home to their native towns or villages—home to their old street—home to the well-known house—home to their beloved ones, rushing forth to embrace them All those two years of unprecedented hardship were forgotten at that moment! Alas! they did not think, in those first moments of joy, of the sorrows and disappointments they might have to meet, when reaching home at last ! Many a seat in their homesteads they would find empty—many a sweet voice hushed in the silence of the tomb; and hearts of old friends grown cold and indifferent!

Oh, beloved in the Lord, you and I need not anticipate such disappointments, when we shall shout a better word than Thalatta! Thalatta!

Christian reader! Is He, Who is " the bright and the morning star," our daily and hourly expectation? And does the blessed hope of His coming shed its light upon our daily and hourly path, keeping us with a large heart, walking in the narrow path of obedience, in holiness, righteousness, and peace, through a subtle and cruel enemy's land, towards our glorious home? Does it, like the star that guided the wise men from the East to Bethlehem's manger, set us a-going and keep us a-going, as those in whose hearts the day-star has arisen? " The Spirit and the Bride say, Come! " And He that answers, " Surely, I come quickly! " will not tarry ! Those morning clouds, dipped in glory, which we behold there in the sky, ready, as it were, like those vessels in the harbour of Colchis, to convey us home, may be ordered the next moment to receive us up in changed, glorified bodies, out of the sight of this world, and to convey us through that endless blue ocean above our heads, to that glorious coast of the first resurrection, where He Himself, the great Captain of our salvation, Who has guided us by His Spirit safely through His and our enemy's dreary and perilous territory, will land us safely, and introduce us into His Father's House and presence. " Behold I and the children which God hath given me! "

" For ever with the Lord !"

When on earth, I knew that nothing should be able to separate me from His and the Father's love—what can separate me here in heavenly glory ?

If in the house of Simon on earth, there was one at His feet who had been lost away from Him, and was then lost in Him, overwhelmed by' His presence ; and if there was another in the house of a raised Lazarus at Bethany, lost at His feet in wonder and adoration, unmindful of every thing and everybody around-

The whole of our precious Psalm will then be a thing of the past, though ever held in grateful remembrance.

And now, my dear Christian reader, I must bid you farewell. We have been feeding together, under the direction of our gracious Shepherd, I humbly trust, upon the " green pastures " and been led by Him beside the still waters " of His loving provision. Through this lovely " garden of the Lord," under the guidance of His Spirit, I hope we have walked together " in the cool of the day," listening to the searching and gracious voice of our blessed God and Saviour. We have tasted, through the grace of our blessed divine Guide, of its exuberance of blessings; we have gone from degree to degree, from terrace to terrace, as it were, and the higher we rose, the more we sung (for we could not help it), until we have reached the top in our heavenly Paradise—His and our blessed Father's House. And before we are bidden to enter there, let us once more turn and cast a grateful glance around us, and let us sing with adoring hearts:

Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord," (aye, and with the Lord) " for ever."

Blessed for ever be His glorious and gracious Name!

Green Pastures and Still Waters, Fifth Degree. His Table and His Cup. (23:5)

V. 5. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies ; thou annointest my head with oil ; my cup runneth over."

WE now come to a scene and atmosphere which is altogether different from all that precedes, and the very opposite of the last verse. It is as high above it, as the heavens are above the earth. The " Valley of the Shadow of Death," with its exercises of faith in the trials and conflicts of the Christian pilgrim, is left behind, and we enter upon higher regions, the heavenly atmosphere of the Christian worshipper. The peaceably

lying down and feeding upon the pasture of the Word of God, amidst a restless and hostile world, and the being led by Him beside the still waters of refreshment, with broken cisterns all around — or the necessary exercises of conscience, heart, and faith, for deepening communion with God—blessed as they are—yet what would they be as to power and lasting practical effect, unless linked with the blessings of the fifth verse, —The Lord's Table and His Cup,—and the heavenly, pure atmosphere of worship that characterizes that Table ? The pilgrim now takes his place as a worshipper in the Heaven-lies. The wilderness is left behind, and Canaan above opens before us, flowing with blessings better than milk and honey.

Yes, they fill the Holy Place! The odor of Mary's ointment filled the little house in Bethany, and ascended higher still, no doubt; for it was spent upon Christ, and came from a heart filled with Christ. But the Christ above, sitting at the right hand of God, in His dignity as the Son of God, and according to His merits as the Son of Man, fills all the Father's House above with the sweet incense of His presence and acceptance as the perfect Man, Who has glorified God on earth in His life, and, above all, in His death upon the Cross. And never during the whole life of Christ on earth, which ascended as a constant incense up to God,1—never, except during those hours in Gethsemane, and- during that prayer that ascended up to Heaven from the banks of the brook Cedron, the threshold of Gethsemane (John 17),—arose there a sweeter incense from Earth to Heaven, than in that solemn night, when the Good Shepherd, before He died for His sheep, prepared a Table for them in. the presence of His and their enemies.

That Table is as old as is redemption. It was prepared in the darkest night that ever was, or will be. I do not mean, as to natural darkness. In that sense there had once been a night in Egypt far darker than this—a night, which lasted " three days." It was when its sin-benighted and hardened inhabitants were made to feel and realize, in an anticipatory way, the terrible power of darkness to which Pharaoh and his kingdom belonged; when they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days, whilst all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings. And not many days after, that night had been followed by another, neither so long nor so dark, but unrivalled in its awfulness—a night never to be forgotten in Israel, though long since forgotten in Egypt—when the Lord passed through the land and smote all the first-born, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle. But, for His people, who by nature were under the same condemnation as the Egyptians, God had " found a ransom;" for " without shedding of blood there is no remission." And, as during the terrible darkness of the former " night ' there had been light in all the dwellings of Israel, so there was, amidst the awful judgment and terrors of the second " night," a perfect shelter to be found in every dwelling—even the poorest hovel of Israel being marked by the blood of the Lamb. But God had not only provided a ransom and a shelter for His people; He had prepared for them a Table in the presence of their enemies, where they could feed upon the lamb, to get strength for the journey before them ; as they had been sheltered by its blood upon the doorposts and lintel. In that night, whilst all Egypt rang with the wail of despair, there stood six-hundred-thousand men of Israel, every one in his house, with his family, around that Table of Jehovah's gracious provision, when He was about to deliver His people, and lead them like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. There they stood, every one with his loins girded, with his staff in his hand, and with his shoes on his feet, ready to depart, feeding in silence upon the roast lamb. I say, in silence, for there was not one single note of praise heard at that Table, during the solemn supper of Passover, It was not only on account of the cries of lamentation all around, but because the blood, which sheltered them from that terrible, resistless hand of the Destroyer, was, at the same time, a voice to their own consciences, that they had deserved the same fate, and had escaped it only through the gracious provision of God. And, besides, they had not yet " seen the salvation of the Lord; " and until that had been, there could be no song of praise. After their deliverance at the Red Sea, the Passover was to be kept by Israel in the wilderness ; and, after having crossed Jordan, the Passover, again, was the first thing that met them in Canaan. There, at Gilgal (the taking away of the reproach of Egypt), before the very walls of Jericho, the Lord again prepared a Table for His people in the presence of their enemies. The blood of the Lamb—the death of Christ—must be the foundation for every blessing—whether it be for the shelter in Egypt, or deliverance from it (Rom. 3: 23 —25) ; or for guidance and sustenance during the conflicts and temptations of the wilderness (1 Peter 1:18-21 ; Heb. 10: 19-23) ; or for the abundance of Canaan, and our safe and perfect realization and enjoyment of it (Eph. 1:7-9 and Ch. 2)

But there was another night—a night in Canaan—compared to which those two nights of Egyptian darkness appear to be as daylight. It was that night when Judas went out from the presence of His Master to betray Him with a kiss—a night, singled out by the Holy Spirit from every other dark and terrible night that ever has been or will be, by those awful additional words, " and it was night." He Himself, the One so shamefully betrayed, when ascended, and surrounded by the light of heavenly glory, of which He is the brightness Himself—remembered it, when, by way of an especial revelation, He reminded His apostle and all His flock of that never-to-be-forgotten night, in those words, " in the night in which he was betrayed;" thus confirming these solemn words of His Holy Spirit, " And it was night." As to any outward appearance, as remarked above, there was no difference. That night had broken in like every other night upon the Holy Land of Promise, with its natural beauties and abundance. The Holy City of Peace, with its glorious temple, lay buried in sleep. Those who were gorgeously appareled and lived delicately, rested from the enjoyments—and the poor of the flock, from the trials and exercises of the day. Only the measured footfall of the Roman sentinels was to be heard from the high terraces of the castle. Perhaps, from the distant wilderness, now and then might be heard, like the faint sound of an approaching tempest, the deep voice of a roaring lion, seeking whom he might devour. But no cry of despair, as in that awful night in Egypt, interrupted the silence and peace that lay over Canaan and Jerusalem, the City of Peace. But, alas! what peace ! In the day of her visitation, when the King of Righteousness and Prince of Peace entered her gates, riding meek and lowly on the colt of an ass, she had not known the things that belonged to her peace; and now they were hid from her eyes. And this night has come upon her!

But there was something in the atmosphere of that night, only perceived by hearts with spiritual instincts, like Mary's. The air was thickening with the leaven of malice and wickedness ; for the high priest and the rulers, with the people, were going to keep the Passover. The prince of the power of the air was summoning and gathering his evil hosts of wicked spirits in the air, to exercise from thence his infernal influence upon the children of this world, whose prince he is. He was concentrating his army for the final battle, to be fought on Calvary, the place of a skull.2 . . . There are some faint sounds, coming from the palace of the High Priest, and stealthy lights can be seen, moving from window to window. But they do not appear like preparations for the great feast of the Jews " that was at hand, but like the hushed voices of thieves and robbers, preparing for a nightly raid; and those lights resemble wandering stars, soon to relapse into darkness.

Quiet and stillness all around—But no! a voice interrupts the treacherous peace of that night. . . a voice of deepest anguish.

It ascends from the banks of the brook Cedron, over which David went, when fleeing from his son Absalom. It comes from One, greater than David—from David's Son and Lord! He is kneeling upon the cold turf of the garden of Gethsemane. . . . His sweat, as it were great drops of

blood falling down to the ground. Let us approach here with unshod feet, reader, for the ground is holy. It is wondrous grace that permits us to listen to the utterances of that voice, which then was not heard by the chiefs of His apostles, though they were so near—for they were asleep.

" Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless " (oh, let us ponder this `nevertheless,' reader !) " not my will, but thine, be done."

Thrice that appeal of deepest agony is heard going up to heaven. But no responding voice from above is heard this time—for the cup which the Father has given Him, shall He not drink it? But an angel comes down to strengthen Him, Who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death.

Again His voice is heard, speaking to His awakening disciples, " Behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand."

The prince of this world, and of the power of the air, the chief ruler of the darkness of this world, is approaching with his satellites. They are led by an apostle of the Lord, " the son of perdition."

It was their hour, and the power of darkness. . . . " and as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, "Master, Master, and kissed him." . .

" And they laid their hands on him and took him."

The darkest treason that ever was, or will be, had been accomplished. The Chiefs of Israel had weighed out thirty pieces of silver, as the price for Jehovah, their Messiah.

But, just as increasing darkness only serves to set off the brightness of a light shining through the night, so the love of Him, Who was betrayed, sold, denied, and forsaken by His own in that night of sins of the darkest dye—shone out all the brighter, set in relief by the very darkness around Him. I have dwelt longer than I intended on that night, my fellow believer, for I feel we are apt to forget it practically, and to slight that Love that then shone brighter than ever before, though always perfect in itself from first to last. Oh, would that that night were more fixedly in the remembrance of our consciences, and that love more in the memory of our hearts. Then, indeed, when sitting down at the Table, prepared for us in that very night, by our Good Shepherd, we should better understand and carry out the full meaning of His tender and loving dying injunction:

“This do in remembrance of me."

What a moment, when Jehovah-Jesus, in the night when He was betrayed, sat down with His apostles to eat the last Passover with them before he died! A better blood had to be shed—the blood of the Lamb of God—to procure for them and for us, the blessings founded upon it—for them on earth, and for us in heavenly glory. Before Him and His apostles, was set the roast lamb on the table, of which He Himself was the blessed antitype. What was the train of His thoughts when the Holy Lamb of God looked at the type before Him? Was it His own sufferings? Yes, but in what way? " With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you, before I suffer."

The One Who sat at that Table with the twelve was the very same by Whom God made the world. When He appointed the foundations of the earth, He was His Father's daily delight, and His delights were with the sons of men. " In him was life, and the life was the light of men." " Behold I and the children which God hath given me." That which now engrossed His heart and mind, was not the anticipation of His sufferings (the hour of Gethsemane had not yet come), but those for whom He was going to suffer and to die. It was not the travail of His soul, but those that were to be the fruit of it, all whom the Father had given Him out of this world, and whom He was going to redeem by His blood. They and we, fellow-believer, filled the foreground of His mind and heart before He suffered; and they—we—are the first of whom He thinks and speaks, after He has been heard from the horns of the unicorns,

" I will declare thy name unto my brethren ; in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee."

Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God," And did not Jesus know what manner of men they were, for whom He was going to suffer? As to " that nation," for whom He was to die—" He came unto his own, and his own. received him not." The Son of God, the King of Israel, Who saw Nathaniel when he was under the fig-tree, knew that in that very night the false shepherds of Israel were going to weigh out to His betrayer the price for a common slave, as the price of Jehovah, their Messiah. And as to His disciples, nays, His apostles, did He not know that one of them, who was eating His bread at that very table, had lifted up his heel against Him, to betray Him for thirty pieces of silver? Was He not aware that the chief of His apostles, to whom He had given the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, would in that night deny Him thrice? And knew He not that all His disciples, the one whom He loved (and who was then leaning on His bosom,) along with the rest, were going to forsake Him in the hour of deadly peril? He knew it, and He told them. He knew and fore-knew every thought and movement of their treacherous, proud, deceitful, and inconstant hearts—and of ours. He knew it all, and He felt it too; as only He, perfect God and perfect Man, could know and feel it. The words, " Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat," were followed by, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not, and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." And, in the perfect knowledge of all this, did His hand hesitate, even for a moment, to take the bread, and give thanks and break it, and likewise also the cup, after supper? Those blessed words, " This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you," are followed by, " But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly, the Son of man goeth, as it was determined, but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed! "

There was a conscience there, upon which even such words had no effect. Judas Iscariot took the sop. Satan entered into him, and finally hardened his conscience, and afterwards drove him to despair, The others were alarmed; but what comes next? " And there was a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest."

Wretched hearts of ours, that betray themselves (even at such a table, and even at such a moment) in, the very presence of Him Who was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross—of Him, Who loved His own unto the end, and Who gave His life for His sheep. But the purposes of the Obedient Son could not be shaken by the treason and pride of men's rebellious hearts! When He came into the world, He said, Lo, I come3 to do thy will, O God." When in service on earth, it is, " My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." And at the end, in Gethsemane, it is again, " Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done."4 Such obedience could not be turned from its path by all the defection of His own around. Could His purposes of divine love be shaken or modified by the wretched selfishness in the hearts of His disciples—or by ours, my reader? No; His obedience was as unwavering towards His Father, as His love was unchanging towards those whom the Father had given Him, " Behold I and the children which God. hath given me." His love had its motive in Himself, Who is Love, and not in anything in us, or in our hearts, which are the very opposite of love—selfish. " Not that we loved " Him, but He has loved us, He gave Himself for us. Oh! what accents of sweetest, perfect love, grace, loveliness, patience, goodness, and wisdom, were heard in that night, the atmosphere of which was pregnant with all the wickedness of Satan and men.

He prepared a Table for them in the presence of His and their enemies. Did His thoughts, whilst He was eating the Passover with them, travel back, if I may say so, to another night, separated by fifteen-hundred years from that present one? In that night He had also prepared a Table—this very Table—for His people in the presence of their enemies, when He went and slew the first-born throughout Egypt, to deliver His people from its bondage. Then cries of death and despair rang through the night, whilst Israel stood and fed in safety. But now the time had come when the " First-born of all creation " was to be slain—slain by wicked hands; yes, and not only so; He was to be " wounded in the house of his friends."

But there was more: " Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered' The Judge of Egypt, the Judge of the whole earth, was to undergo the judgment due to His people, due to you and me, reader! The Deliverer of His people of old, was now to be delivered by their children into the hands of sinful men, in order to deliver them from their sins. The Lamb of God was to take away the sin of the world, and to die for that nation, " His own "—who received Him not—Messiah was to be cut off and have nothing.

But, no! He now looks onward, not backward. His words, " With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer," are followed by, " I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And His words, " Take this [cup] and divide it among yourselves," are followed by, " For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come." Did they understand what He meant by, "before I suffer," and, " until the kingdom of God shall come? " Alas! they were dull of understanding, " slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken." They did not know that " Christ ought to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory." They " trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." Redeemed from what? From the consequences of their sins, i.e., the yoke of the Romans. Had they never heard of the words of the angel of the Lord, when he spoke to Joseph? " And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." Had they not heard the voice of the forerunner, exclaiming, " Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world? " If they had, they had forgotten, or not understood it. But had not the Lord Himself foretold thorn, " The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again? "

"They were exceeding sorry," and Peter even said, " That be far from thee, Lord!" But the Cross of Christ, and the truth that He must suffer, and thus enter into his glory, was entirely beyond the narrow compass of their thoughts, however clearly foretold in the prophets. They " understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not; and they feared to ask him of that saying." The glorious truth of resurrection was just as far, if not still farther beyond their conception.

The first tidings of it "seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not." But there was One in the midst of them, the spotless, gracious One, Who not only forbore with their (though culpable) ignorance, but even, stooped down and washed their feet, before He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, to die for them. May we learn of Him to practice what we sing so often:-

The Passover, the Supper of the Old Testament, being over, Jesus then proceeded to prepare for them, and for us, the Table—the Lord's Supper, of the New Testament.

“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, this is my body, which is given for you-; this do in remembrance of me."

Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

What a disclosure of the true meaning of the Passover-lamb, upon which they had been feeding! All-overwhelming in its effect, if the truth of the Cross, if the real meaning of the 53rd chapter of the prophet Isaiah had now burst upon the vision of their minds. But, alas! that cross was still far from their thoughts ! Self had the uppermost place there. They contended which of them should be accounted the greatest. But the meek and lowly One among them, Who had come from glory to die for them, and to suffer Calvary's woes, and to enter into His glory, was looking onward to the glory of His kingdom, for which the dying thief upon the Cross, craved a passport of Him. After having addressed to them one of His faithful, yet always gracious rebukes, He continues, " 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; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."5

What can surpass the perfect grace of such words, spoken at such a moment, and addressed to such hearts as theirs and ours ? May the spirit, and the very tone of them, so to speak, be more present to our hearts and minds, in the abiding power of His own Spirit!

The Supper of the New Testament, the Lord's Supper, had been established by the true Paschal- Lamb Himself. Jehovah-Jesus, the Lamb and the Good Shepherd, had prepared a Table for them in the presence of their enemies. All around, the atmosphere of evil is thickening, and the prince of this world and of the power of the air, is summoning and gathering his hosts of wicked spirits, to inspire, incite, and lead on poor deluded sinners, Jews and Gentiles, to their final conspiracy and open rebellion around the Cross (as he will do at a later period, for the battle of Armageddon.—Rev. 16:13, 14). At the house of the high priest, his satellites assemble, and the watchword of treason is whispered, "

Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; hold him fast." But amidst and above that murky atmosphere of Satan and men's wickedness, there arises from that upper chamber, where the Good Shepherd has prepared a Table for His sheep in the very presence of their enemies—an incense sweeter than that of Mary's precious ointment, ascending to heaven. Hark! the notes of a hymn of praise going up to Him, Who " is good, and whose mercy endureth for ever! " It is intoned by the voice of the Good Shepherd, before He goes to die, and His sheep —minus the traitor—who know His voice, join in the wondrous song. Oh! what a song in that night! Was there ever a singing like that? At the Red Sea, from the shore of safety, the joyful song of redemption had ascended to God, when Moses and the Children of Israel praised the mighty salvation of Jehovah, and Miriam answered with the Daughters of Israel! A wondrous choir of praise, indeed, sung by millions of grateful voices! Such a vast hymn of praise, there had never been in this world, nor ever will be, until it come to pass that they shall say, " Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord! " But what was it, compared to the notes of praise that ascended to God from that upper-chamber, sung by those twelve voices? Not Moses, the servant of God, who was faithful in all His house, intoned that hymn, but the Son over His own House, Jehovah-Jesus, the Deliverer of His people of old, to Whom that song of redemption at the Red Sea was addressed. He Himself is leading the song of praise of His little band. The voice that was soon to appeal to His Father in the agonies of Gethsemane, and then from the Cross, in that cry, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? "—we hear at that Table, leading the praises of His little flock; just as if, even before He was heard from the horns of the unicorns, He must in anticipation praise His Father and God, (soon to be known as their's too,) in the midst of His " brethren." He wept when He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead He sings a hymn when He is going to die—to die the death upon the cross, Did not he know what Calvary meant? Gethsemane tells us. Oh! for ears and hearts to listen to that voice, and to ponder over that song. What an insight it gives into the perfect obedience and into that perfect love that dwelled in the heart of Jesus! May His Word dwell richly in us, in order that " with grace we may sing and make melody in our hearts to Him, our Lord," as He aid to His Father and God, in that never-to-be-forgotten night.

That Supper was ended; the things concerning Him had an end. Then the Lord, with the Eleven, leaves the upper-chamber for Gethsemane! Here, whilst on their way, we listen to His parting words—His farewell to His disciples, words for ever engraven on the hearts, not only of those who heard them, but of all who have an ear to hear the voice of that Good. Shepherd, which was so soon to be silenced in death. Then from the banks of Cedron, the boundary of Gethsemane, a prayer ascended to Heaven, upon which I do not wish here to offer any comment; only praying that some portion of that fragrance, which went up to God in that night and from that spot, might remain in its precious savour in our souls. The incense of the burnt-offering of Him, Who gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour, went up to God from the only pure heart that ever moved or will beat on earth, till He Himself, Who alone has a pure heart and clean hands, will come again and ascend to the holy hill of Zion. But God has, in His wondrous grace, permitted such as you and I, fellow-believer, to be in spirit witnesses of that prayer, and to inhale some of its sweet fragrance for the everlasting benefit of our souls.6

Then follow the agonies of Gethsemane—the betrayal and capture of Jesus—the defection of all His disciples—Jesus before the High Priest, Herod, and Pilate—and then the Cross ! " It is finished ! " The Veil in the temple is rent " from the top to the bottom."7 The earth quakes—the rocks are rent—and the graves opened. Two days more, and the First-begotten from among the dead, the Firstborn of many brethren, Jesus, the Lord, is risen indeed; is seen of His disciples forty days, as the Great Shepherd, brought again from the dead. A few days more, and He is received up into glory. The lowly Son of Man has taken his seat at the right hand of God. He sends down from glory the promise of the Father. The Spirit of God, the Spirit of glory, takes His abode in man on earth, (in men redeemed by the Blood of the Son of God,) and testifies that Jesus, the Son of Man, has been made Lord and Christ, and that they who believe in Him are sons of God. The last testimony is addressed to the Jews through Stephen—in vain. The Cross had been their reply to the witness of the Son of God; stones are their answer to the last testimony of the Holy Spirit to their consciences. Stephen sees the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God in perfect sympathy, (the same sympathy with which He stooped down at the grave of Lazarus and wept,) and ready to receive the spirit of His faithful witness up into glory. The Second Man from Heaven, the Son of Man, is seen in heavenly glory, as the Head of His members on earth, who are baptized by the Spirit of God into one body—His Church, the Body of Christ. What a bright light there was shining in Stephen's time in the violent and bloody city of peace! Five thousand members, the first members of the Body of Christ, all of them " one heart and one soul," as they formed one body. And the power of the Holy Ghost within that " house of the living God," maintaining, in discipline, that holiness which " becometh his house for ever," as exercised in the solemn case of Ananias and Sapphira, was so great that, of those without, " durst no man join himself to them." There was no danger then of Gibeonites creeping in, however strongly the unity and love among the disciples might naturally have attracted them, for " fear came upon every soul." And, as to the Lord's Supper,

" They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

What hymns of praise arose there around the Lord's Table at Jerusalem, offered up by those first-fruits of the travail of His soul!

They, indeed, kept the Passover with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth; and they sung, not only the " new song " of the redeemed, but the " new song " of the righteous too. But still they did eat the Passover, the Lord's Supper of the New Testament, " with the bread of affliction." That is to say, I doubt not, that their praises and thanksgiving bore the character of a chastened joy, and that there was a subduedness in their voices when they sung.8

Those three crosses set up on the place of a skull," where their Lord had been suspended along with two transgressors, when the spotless Lamb of God had been bound to the accursed tree, had scarcely had time to be removed. Their song of praise, I doubt not, bore much of the quiet and serene, but sober and subdued character of that hymn that was sung in that upper-chamber; sung by their and our now glorified Lord, before He suffered for them and us. Their position, indeed, was vastly different from that of those who did eat the Passover with the Lord. The latter were at that time in an analogous position to that of Israel, in that memorable night in Egypt. They had to be redeemed first by the blood of the Lamb, and to be delivered from it by the power of God in resurrection, on the ground of the virtue of that blood. (Only they, unlike Israel in Egypt, could sing, for " the First-born of all creation," to be slain for them, bade them sing. He Himself intoned and led their praise.) Not so those who broke the bread at Jerusalem after Pentecost. Though the same apostles who had eaten the Passover with the Lord in that ever-to-be-remembered night, were with them, yet they were altogether in a different position. They could raise, like Israel of old, the song of deliverance from the shore of safety—the wilderness before them, where persecution. famine, sword, and nakedness, awaited them. In that sense, they kept, like Israel of old, the Passover in the wilderness, as redeemed and delivered from Egypt; but, as to their

bodies, still in the wilderness—the wilderness (Jerusalem and Canaan) was around them.

But as risen with Christ, their Head in glory, as those who had been delivered by the power of God from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son, they were in an analogous (though, of course, infinitely higher) position to Israel in Canaan. Like Israel of old, when they had just entered Canaan, and kept the Passover at Gilgal, those five thousand at Jerusalem kept the Passover, seated, as it were, on the banks of Jordan, and looking towards the waters of death, which had only just returned again into the bed of the river, after they had been divided, to let the people of God pass over into the Land of Promise and blessing. Seated in the Heavenlies, we look back to the death of Christ, which not only has shut the mouth of the pit, and redeemed us from Egypt and its judgments, but has opened the gate of Heaven to us, as being our title for heavenly glory.

But there was a difference between those at Jerusalem and those at Gilgal. We read in the Book of Joshua, that the manna ceased the day after they had eaten the Passover, and that they henceforth fed upon the " old corn of the land " (i.e., Christ, no longer known after the flesh). Now I think that this was not exactly the case with the apostles of the circumcision and the flock of God at Jerusalem, who had come from the Jewish fold. True, the Lord when eating the last Passover with His apostles in that most solemn yet blessed night, had told them that the things concerning Him (as Israel's Messiah) had an end. Messiah was to be cut off and have nothing. But Israel's despised, rejected, and crucified King had interceded for them upon the Cross. God, through His Spirit at Pentecost, had responded to the intercession of His gracious Son, by the mouth of Peter. If they, as a nation, had now repented and believed in. Him, their true Messiah and King, Whom they had slain, but Whom God had raised and made Lord and Christ—Christ, their Messiah, Whom the Heavens had received, would have come again. The shout, " Hosannah! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord," would have resounded through Jerusalem, and the times ot refreshing, the millennium, the Kingdom of righteousness and peace would have begun. But " Hosannah," we may add, on our part; blessed be God, that, through their fall, salvation is come unto us.

But, until the death of Stephen, Israel had not yet been finally rejected. Those five thousand converts were the first-fruits of Israel, and bore, thus far, the character of a Jewish remnant. They might look for the return ot their Messiah, as Christ after the flesh, in His earthly relationship to His people; they could not say with Paul, " though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more !" In that sense, the " manna " had not yet ceased for them, until, with the rejection of Stephen's testimony and his death, all was over with Israel, and Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, was called.

The songs of praise that arose from those first believers at Jerusalem, when they commemorated the Lord's death at His Table, or privately broke the bread in their houses with singleness and gladness of heart, were accompanied with the first murmurs of the storm of persecution that was soon to break in upon them, and for which the death of Stephen was the signal. Saul, the zealous model-Jew, and the unsurpassed pattern-man of religion after the flesh, and of its attainments and effects—Saul, the persecutor of the Son of David, begins, like a wolf, to make havoc in the flock, " entering into every house, haling men and women, and committing them to prison." The rest are scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. But the efforts of the enemy, as usual, only serve to bring about the accomplishment of God's counsels. The breaking up and scattering of the Church at Jerusalem, prevented the formation and accumulation of a Jewish -Christian centre in that city, which would have been the very opposite to God's intentions. The mystery of Christ, which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God, was now to be made known. Saul, the persecutor of the Church,—the wolf, making havoc, and the lion, breathing out threatenings and slaughter,—is called from glory and made the apostle of the Gentiles, and the mystery of Christ is revealed to him and through him. But I must forbear entering upon this wondrous and glorious subject, as it would lead us away from our verse.

Amongst the commandments which this Apostle—the pattern of God's long-suffering now, as he had been a pattern of men's attainments—received from his now Liege-Lord, the exalted Head of the Church, was that which he had delivered to the Corinthians, but which they had sadly forgotten and neglected. It referred to the character of the Lord's Table, which was well-nigh being effaced among them; for many had ceased to discern the Lord's body, profaning the Lord's Table, and thus eating and drinking unworthily, and thereby eating and drinking judgment unto themselves. Therefore many of them were visited with sickness, whilst others had even been cut off by death.

But our Great and Chief Shepherd, Who has not ceased to be the Good. Shepherd though now in glory, foreknew, and had provided for all the needs of His flock: He knew all about our poor hearts, and the unceasing efforts of the adversary to divert them from His blessed Person, and lead our consciences and hearts away from His holy and gracious presence. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. And where to get a whole heart for Christ, where acquire that evenness of walk, that balance between heart, knowledge, and conscience, except by abiding in His presence, close to His blessed Person? There is nothing that we stand so sadly in need of as this balance. And there is no place where His sheep and lambs, if gathered in the Spirit, are more really and consciously in His presence, than at His Table, when feeding upon and showing His death, the highest proof of His love our Good Shepherd could give us.

Before He went to die for us, it was:—

" With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you ! " After He has been heard from the horns of the unicorns,—a risen Saviour,—it is, " In the midst of the congregation I will praise thee ; " and after He had been received up to glory, and has called Paul for the gathering of those sheep who were not of Israel's fold—the Great and Chief Shepherd gives from glory, to him who once made havoc in His flock, a proof of how the interests of that flock, especially with regard to His Table, are on His heart in glory. Paul receives from His glorious Master the following instruction, expressed in those few simple words—Oh, would that the grace and love that gave them, may engrave them with indelible letters on the hearts of His flock!

" The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, "take, eat ; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.' After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, ' This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.' "

These words, addressed by our gracious Shepherd from glory to the flock of God, through His apostle, appear to be of a threefold import.

First, the few but weighty words in v. 23, addressed to the consciences of His flock (" the bread of affliction," to be eaten with the Passover).

Second, vv. 24, 25 for the heart ; and—

Third, v. 26, the blessed hope of His coming (not in connection with His kingdom, i.e., His public appearing, as in the Gospels, but His coming for His Church) as an encouragement on the way.

First the conscience, then the heart, then the realization of Him as our Hope; such is His own order, at His Table, as everywhere,—as we have said repeatedly in these pages: no true feeding of heart, without an honest and tender conscience before Him (which is a different thing from an unpurged conscience).

As to the first part, the night in which the Lord Jesus was betrayed, I have already endeavoured, in my poor feeble way, to offer a few comments on that solemn time. I therefore refrain from saying more, except to repeat, that our blessed Lord, Who would that that night of Egypt should be ever remembered by His people of old, wills that night in Canaan to be ever present to our remembrance; not to darken our joy in His presence, but to give it that hallowed, and chastened, and therefore deeper character, suited to such a Table. Joy, that springs from meditating upon love that shone so brightly in that night!

One word more, and I have done. Have you listened to those sounds and utterances that fell on the air of that night, reader? Such as, " For what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor." " Which of us shall be accounted the greatest? " " What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? " "Master," and then the sound of the betrayer's kiss. " Although all shall be offended because of thee. yet will not I." " If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise." " Woman, I know him not." " Man, I am not " [one of them]. "Man, I know not what thou sayest," accompanied by cursing and swearing. " He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? " Then the awful reply to that awful question, " He is guilty of death! " Then the sound of spitting, buffeting, and smiting, and, " Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is it that smote thee? "

Reader, some of those words—the worst—fell from him that had preached the gospel and cast out devils. They came from hearts, by nature not worse than yours and mine—hearts with feelings of natural affections and friendships—with devotional feelings, when in their gorgeous temple—some among them truly attached to the Lord, especially one of them. And yet; they furnished each their part in the awful concert of the voices and sounds of that night!

But in that same night, a voice—calm, even, and gentle, yet full of holy solemnity—in accents of purest grace and eternal love, spoke these words:

“This is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me."

And:-

"This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."

Oh! may those words in Divine power abide in our consciences and hearts! May they produce in our hearts a true response to Him Who spoke them, and draw forth in its constraining power the Love of Christ to those that are His. And may that grace and love shine out more brightly in a world where men are hateful and hating one another, and where darkness is thickening; in order that, during the night of Christ's absence from this world, we may reflect more of His light, Who, when here below, was ever the light of this world, shining with equal, undimmed brightness—the light of life!

And, beloved, if anywhere, it is in His presence, at His Table, that we derive grace and strength for this from Him Who is the strength, as He is the light of our salvation. It is at that season, on the Lord's day, when gathered by His Spirit around His Table, when feeding on His death,—

It is there that we, through grace, in our poor measure, ponder on the depths of sufferings which it required to accomplish those counsels, of which His Apostle exclaims: O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! " When the obedient Son of the Father entered into those deep waters, where there was no standing for His feet, whilst all the billows and waves of Jehovah were going over His head! The waters of death and the waves and billows of God's wrath around, beneath, and upon that spotless One! When I eat and drink at that Table, I do not so much think of comprehending with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, in the sense of the third chapter of Ephesians, but I think of the love of Christ, which was strong as death. At that Table, I am not to be fed with high Church-truth, blessed as that is, in its proper time, and place; but I feed upon a dead Christ. Ponder on that love which led Him there, love which could not be quenched by the waters of death, nor be consumed by the waves and billows of Divine wrath ! Before that Cross, I bow my poor head to the dust, not to reason about it, but to muse and worship before it.

Ah ! fellow-believer ! which was deeper, the depth of the sufferings of that Good Shepherd, Who prepared that Table for us in the night when He was to be smitten for us, or the depth of those Divine counsels, to be made good only by those sufferings ! And as to the height of those counsels of glory, is not the height of His Cross the measure of them? Do you know the height of it? I do not mean, of that tree of curse, but the height of those mountains of sins and transgressions heaped upon it? Mountains, too high for all the waters of the Deluge to cover them, but not for those waters into which that Good Shepherd went down, when He died for us! Or the length? Do you know how long were those hours, spent upon the Cross by the Forsaken One? Of how many minutes or seconds did these hours consist? Or the breadth? Can you measure the distance, expressed by His hands and arms, when extended and nailed to that cross-beam by wicked hands, in order to remove our transgressions, as far as the West is from the East? Do you know, how far is the West from the East? I know that the blessings flowing from His Cross will extend to the remotest corners of the world, when not only we, but " all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord ; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him"—When the kingdom (in fact) will be the Lord's, and He (the true Joseph) be the governor among the nations—when " all they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship ; all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him, and none can keep alive his own soul "—when a seed shall serve him, and be counted to the Lord for a generation—when they shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.

In the fifth chapter of the Book of Revelation, where we behold the Lamb, once slain, as the center of Heaven,—we find something more as to the height and depth and length and breadth, as to the blessed results of the Cross. It is as high as is the Throne of glory, in the midst of which I find the Lamb, as it had been slain. That universal choir of praise ascends from the very bottom of the sea, the inhabitants of which then cannot be silent any longer—it embraces the redeemed from every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and it lasts for ever and ever. Not a single discordant note will be heard in the harps, or in the new song of the redeemed, though none can number them; for Christ, the Lamb once slain, will be the sole object for every eye, and the only motive of every heart. The Lamb, once slain—here on Earth, when upon His Cross, the center of Satan and men's opposition—will be, above, the heavenly center of attraction. Is it thus with us, beloved, when gathered around Him at His Table ? Oh, may He,

gladden and fill our hearts with His blessed presence; no object before us but Him, no motive within but Him, the Lamb Who was slain. Then our harps, indeed, will be well tuned, and our praises ascend to God through Him, Who adds virtue and efficacy to them.

But I am anticipating here a subject, of which I shall speak presently, I mean the subject of worship.9 It is the very result of the feeding upon the death of Christ. The breaking of bread, and the drinking of the wine, His broken body, His shed blood—is " the great day of the feast," as it were, the grand moment at that meeting—that wondrous, long, deep pause, when His saints worship in silence, whilst musing upon that wondrous truth:

" The Lamb was slain."

In the blessed portion of the 'Word of God just referred to, there are three phases of heavenly worship. 1. The falling down of the twenty-four elders, and the casting of their crowns before the throne. (Rev. iv., 10). 2. The singing of the New Song (Ch. 5:9, 10) and 3. The final silent worship at the end. Which of those three great phases of heavenly worship will be fraught with the greatest degree of happiness for the worshippers, if one may use this expression about a place where every thing conveys the thought of perfect happiness, I do not venture to decide. We shall know it, when there, fellow-believer. But one thing I may venture to say, I think, without fear of being found fault with, except on the part of those who do not like " pauses ;" namely, that that long, deep, and worshipful pause, following upon the act of the breaking of bread, which, when happy, generally occurs about the middle of the meetings for breaking of bread, is one fraught with deepest blessings for every heart taught by the Spirit to turn to account those precious minutes. In that heavenly scene just referred to, that pause concludes the whole, after the sound of the harps and the voices of the singers have ceased. Such a pause is like the “Selah " in the Psalms of David, which generally occurs after some important truth has been expressed. The " Selah," the pause in the music, and the " Yea, truly," comes in, when the Psalmist, the man after God's own heart, bade his harp rest for a moment, whilst his heart began to make melody in musing on some great truth, which, indited by the Holy Ghost, had just been uttered. For instance, " And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah." . . " Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah." Would there were more such " Selahs," i.e., making melody in our hearts to the Lord, in the assemblies of God's saints! How often does it occur, that, when there has been a spirit of heaviness and dullness during the first part of the meeting, the tide turns and the time of blessing sets in with the breaking of bread. It is not the singing of hymns that stirs up the heart when there is a spirit of heaviness, but, it in spirit and truth, singing is the result of a heart moved by the grace of God, and by His Spirit.

On the other hand, there may be in an assembly, a happy spirit of worship from the beginning ; but if the act of breaking of bread—the great central-act of the meeting—and the blessed pause of musing on the death of Christ have been in the Spirit, the rest of the meeting will be sure to be of a still deeper and higher tone of worship, with increasing power in the liberty and unction of the Holy Ghost, until at last, having partaken of that " Cup of blessing, which we bless " (mark, reader, the stress that is laid by the Spirit on that Cup !), the heart itself becomes a cup filled with blessings, running over with peace, joy, and thanksgiving to God, the fountain of all blessings. But this leads us to the all-important question of worship, upon which I desire to offer a few remarks, beginning with the opening word of our verse, the little, but important word, " thou."

" Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies ; thou anointest my head. with oil ; my cup runneth over."

My reader will remember the change of expression we noticed when meditating on the fourth verse, His staff and rod in the " Valley of the Shadow of Death." We then observed the change of the word " He," as speaking of the Lord, to " Thou," as addressing the Lord Himself, instead of speaking about Him to others. The change of expression, there, was the natural result of the surrounding scene, with its dangers and conflicts, as the " Valley of the Shadow of Death," and of the confidence of the timid sheep in the Shepherd's love. The happy change from " He " to " Thou," then continues throughout the second half of our Psalm, but from very different reasons. The " Thou " of the heavenly worshipper. when addressing his God and Saviour, is, in motive and character, very different from the " Thou " of the preceding verse. Its motive is not in the solemn aspect of the scene around, and the feelings inspired by it, but in Him Who fills the whole scene, a heavenly scene of worship, with His own blessed person.

" And I beheld, and lo! in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts [or, living creatures], and in the midst of the elders, stood a lamb, as it had been slain."

Here (Rev. 5) we again meet with those different expressions, " Thou " and " He." It is the blessed privilege, by grace divine, of the twenty-four Elders, to address God and the Lamb in the second person, with the holy familiarity of nearest and dearest relationship, as implied in that little word " Thou." Neither the Cherubim, connected with the glory of God in government, nor the Seraphim,10 the heralds of His holiness, are entitled to address God and His Son with " Thou." Neither Michael, the Archangel, who, whilst contending with Satan for the body of Moses, could say, " The Lord rebuke thee," and whose voice will be heard again, when he will come with the Lord to give the signal for the first resurrection ; nor Gabriel, the familiar angelic servant who " stands in the presence of God," and who was honored by Him with the heavenly message of good news to the man who was " greatly beloved " of God, and to her who was highly favored and blessed among women ; neither of these can address God in this way. Most honored and blessed servants of God as they are; excelling in strength and doing his commandments, and harkening unto the voice of His word—yet they are not entitled to use that little word " Thou." They are " ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation," them who address God as " Abba, Father." Neither is any other " 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 " entitled to do so; though they all at last take part in that wondrous and glorious scene of heavenly worship: for they are all in the place of mere " creatures."

And, just as on a state-occasion at a royal court, every servant, from the highest dignitary down to the lowest, and every one of the whole company has his place assigned to him; and all are required to keep their places and speak in the terms prescribed by the law of royal etiquette, because perfect order becomes the presence of royalty; so, and much more, in the heavenly courts above. God is a God of order; and if He wills order in His Church, the assembly,11 (where even His angels, accustomed as they are to divine and heavenly order, would be grieved to see a woman with uncovered head), and in our divers earthly relationships, surely this royal principle of order must rule supreme among His own heavenly surroundings above. There are those nearest (" round about ") the Throne, seated on twenty-four thrones, with crowns on their heads; and there are the angelic hosts, standing farther off. There are those who have harps and sing the now song—even the twenty-four—and there are those who only " speak." It is the twenty-four Elders who are seated close around the throne, and have harps and sing, who say, " Thou art worthy;" it is they, who are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and have been made sons, brought to glory by the Cross of the Captain of their salvation, when He was made perfect through sufferings ; it is they, not the angels, who have been made kings and priests unto His Father and God: and they alone, therefore, are entitled through the blood of the Lamb of God, to address God and the Lamb with that blessed " Thou," as the expression of the nearness of their relationship as children of the Father, and as the Bride of the Lamb.

In our Psalm the " Thou " is addressed by the grateful flock to our Good Shepherd, Who died for us, and, before He gave His life, prepared for His sheep this divine repast, not to be found even in the green pastures at the opening of our Psalm.

" Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

Where are these our enemies to be found? No doubt in this world around us, for all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. But we must remember that, as those who are called to love their enemies, and to bless them that curse us (our position and character being totally different from that of saints of the Old Testament—being heavenly, and on the ground of grace, not of righteousness), we are not to look at these, nor even to think of them, as our enemies, " For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in high places." (Ephes. 6:12 ; Comp, Ch. 2). It was those hosts of invisible fiends, under their terrible leader, the prince of the power of the air, who brought all their fearful influence to bear upon the children of disobedience, and upon the son of perdition—the enemies on earth—in that night when the Lord Jesus was betrayed, and when the Good Shepherd prepared a Table for His flock in the presence of their enemies. But, as observed already, the enemies then were around and above them in the air. As to us they are above, wicked spirits in heavenly places.

Wondrous place of perfect safety and triumph, which only the love of our blessed gracious Shepherd could give us, Whose victory is our own. To sit down at His Table, to think, not of our spiritual enemies, but of Him Who has triumphed over them openly on the Cross. Then they seemed to triumph when, in the presence of His enemies around and in their hearing, the cry went up, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? " And when they derided and taunted Him with, " Aha! so would we have it! " "He saved others, himself he cannot save! " " If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross! It is in their presence we are now seated at this wondrous Table and sing the song of triumph, feeding upon His death, Who, through death, destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. He Who once was crucified in weakness, and liveth in the power of God, has, in His marvelous love and grace, given us a seat at that Table! Truly, there is no place on earth like that! What king could spread a table like that? Well it behoves us to say:—

" Lord, why am I a guest?"

in the sense of our utter unworthiness; without being occupied with our unworthiness, but filled with the sense of the all-worthiness of the Lamb once slain for us.

" Do it in remembrance of me," was the parting, loving injunction of our Good Shepherd. Now the word " Remember " has a twofold meaning. First, it implies something past, and something, or somebody, who has been present where we are now, but is now absent. Thus, as present in the body and absent from the Lord, we feed at His Table upon a dead Christ. Now a dead Christ is not One Who is living on Earth, nor One Who is risen and ascended in heavenly glory. We feed upon His death, as a thing of the past, but ever present and dear to our hearts and minds at His Table. We do so in remembrance of Him as our absent Lord, (else it would not be remembrance), though as those who are in His presence, and among whom He is present, and, I believe, nowhere more so than at His Table. It is at the same time, as risen with Him, as seated together in Heavenly Places in Him, that we worship at His Table. Thus we are there in a double character. As Israel, whilst passing through the wilderness, kept the Passover, remembering that ever memorable night in Egypt, when the Lord " passed over," having provided a hiding-place for them in the blood of the lamb, and the Red Sea, where He encompassed them with songs of deliverance ; so we, whilst passing through the wilderness as pilgrims and strangers, keep the Passover, remembering that night when the sword was to awake and smite the Shepherd, the Man Who was God's fellow, when He was to be delivered for our offences that we might be delivered from the wrath to come. We remember those waters of death, which were (like those of the Red Sea)—death to Egypt life for us; judgment to Pharaoh and his host, but deliverance for us.

But when Israel kept the Passover in Canaan after they had crossed Jordan, they not only looked back from the banks of that river to the shore of the Red Sea, the waters of life and deliverance for them — but to the waters of Jordan that had only just returned into their natural bed, the way of entrance for them into Canaan. Dry-shod they had crossed the Red Sea; dry-shod they had crossed Jordan. The waters of the former were no death nor judgment for them, as to Egypt; and the waters of Jordan were no barrier to them, as to the promised land; on the contrary, they were only its threshold, its entrance. This we have in Col. 3.

We, therefore, at the Lord's Table, like Israel in the wilderness, remember Christ Who died for us (the Red Sea); but we do this, as those who are dead with Him, and risen with Him, seated together in the Heavenlies in Him. But let us always remember that the spring and motive of worship at His Table, is not the thought of what we are in our heavenly position and union with Him and in Him, and as dead and risen with Him ; but the thought of Him Who died for us, whilst, as to our position as worshippers, we look from the Canaan—banks of Jordan as it were—back towards the waters of death into which Jesus, in His wondrous love, entered for us.

" The Lamb was slain—let us adore."

It is the musing, the feeding on His death, that produces and forms the chief motive for worship here; not our blessings in the Heavenlies, although, of course, this forms an ingredient, and a most blessed one, too, of worship. It is the sense of the love of Him Who died for us, and of the grace of our blessed God and Father Who gave that Son for us; Who not only so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, but Who " spared. not His own Son" (when this world and His own people hated Him without a cause)," but delivered Him up for us " when we were His enemies. But it is Christ Who died for us, the Lamb slain, which is the integral and central theme of worship at His Table.

" We'll sing of the Shepherd that died."

It is He as the Good Shepherd Who gave His life for His sheep, Whom we remember here, not as the Great Shepherd Who has been brought again from the dead. But then worship, having sprung from the musing upon the Cross of Christ, as the highest proof of the Son's and of the Father's love, goes up in the power of the Spirit—that well12 of water springing up into everlasting life—and rises up to that glory from whence that blessed. Spirit of glory came down to dwell in us. As the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, " Abba, Father," He acts in us as the Spirit of liberty; as the Spirit of glory, He points upwards to glory, where we—see Jesus, crowned with glory and honour," seated. at the right hand of the Majesty on high. We know God. looks at the face of His Anointed One with the supreme delight of a God and of a Father. And by His Spirit, throughout the whole of Hebrews, that precious epistle of worship, He directs the eye of faith towards the same blessed Object. The Father loves His Son because He " laid down His life for us " in perfect obedience to His gracious will; and we love Him because He " loveth us, and has washed us from our sins in His own blood." Thus God in His marvelous grace has enabled us to meet with Him in the same common object of delight. He thus feeds our souls, not with angels' food as He did Israel, but with His own bread, " the bread of God." Wondrous privilege of His grace! But solemn responsibility for those who neglect that food; far more solemn than for those who esteemed the food of angels " light bread."

A few words upon the position of the worshipper (though the subject may be familiar to most of my readers), for any who labour under the deplorable confusion that prevails on this all-important subject.

It is in the sweet incense of Christ's own acceptance before God that the worshipper draws nigh unto God, as " accepted in the beloved." The worshipper (I mean the believer who has settled peace and knows his union with Christ) is enabled, through grace, not only to say in a mere negative way, " No spot within, no cloud above;'' but he can add in a positive way: There is now One at the right hand of God, One to whom I can point and say: There is my Righteousness! God has made Him unto me wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. All His excellences, as the accepted Man before God, are mine, for I am before God in Him, accepted in the Beloved. His finished glorious work upon the Cross is the basis of my relationship with God; and in His glorious Person is my standing before God. My peace with God is as settled and perfect as the blood of Jesus upon the Cross could make it; and my standing and acceptance before God is as perfect as the Person of Christ in Heaven can make it. Upon the Cross before God He was identified with what I was as a sinner; for He, who had done nothing amiss, bore my sins on the Cross ; and He, who knew no sin, was made sin for me, that I " might become the righteousness of God in Him " (2 Cor. 5). And in Heaven, before God, I am identified with what He is as " the Righteousness of God ;" yea, more, as the Beloved One of God, for we are " accepted in the Beloved,"

It is not my intention here to enlarge in a doctrinal way upon the truth of our union with, and our standing in, Christ. But as there is so much uncertainty and confusion on this point in the minds of many dear and sincere believers, I could not well enter upon the all-important subject of worship without referring to that which forms the only foundation, and qualification, title, and passport for a worshipper (one who draws nigh to God)—that is, the value of the work and Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ not only has purged the sins of the believer; He also purges his conscience by sprinkling upon his heart (i.e., by applying to it through His Spirit) the virtue of His own Blood which cleanseth from all sin. Thus the heart has got rid of an evil conscience; and the saved one draws nigh as a worshipper with a true heart and a perfect conscience.

"Having, therefore, brethren, 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 veil, that is to say, His flesh; and [having] an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

A few words on worship before entering more closely upon the meditation of the remainder of our verse.

What is Christian worship?

Worship, in a Christian sense, is the tribute of our hearts and lips offered up to God, for what He is in Himself, and towards us, as revealed in the unspeakable gift of His dear Son Jesus Christ.

The object of worship, therefore, is, our Saviour-God.

The basis of worship is, the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Power of worship is, the Holy Spirit.

The place of worship is, the heavenly Sanctuary, where our High Priest has entered; and-

The position of the worshipper is, in resurrection. (Col. 3. and Ephes. 2.)

" All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord, and thy saints shall bless thee." And why ? Because He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the Heavenlies in Christ.

When Israel had crossed Jordan and entered into the Land of Promise, the manna ceased, and they fed upon the old corn of the land. Here in the Ephesians and Col. 3.) we have the old corn of the land to feed upon.

Blessed as it is to feed upon Christ as the Manna, the Bread come down from Heaven, God manifest in the flesh — to contemplate His humanity, perfect in humility, meekness, lowliness, and grace—this is not feeding upon the " old corn of the land," i.e., Christ in Heaven. The manna belongs to the wilderness, but the " old corn " to Canaan. Our fellowship and union is with a risen, ascended, and glorified Christ, sitting at the right hand of God; not with an earthly Christ, of Whom the apostle of glory said, " Henceforth know we no man after the flesh ; yea though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." Precious as it is, I repeat, to have our hearts feeding upon all the excellencies and perfections of the gracious, lowly Jesus on Earth, for the stay and comfort of our hearts; yet such a feeding would be impossible, unless in fellowship and union with a risen, ascended, and glorified Christ, Who had to die first, to bring us unto God, and into union and fellowship with Himself. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, else He would have abode alone. A Christ after the manner of Thomas a Kempis will not do for us.

Jesus, when on Earth, was not the One Who " was dead and is alive for evermore; " but it is Jesus risen and ascended, Whom God has made Lord and Christ, Who died for me. Israel ate of the old corn of the land the day after they had eaten the Passover; and the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten of the old corn of the land.

The Passover13 (a Christ Who died for us) must be the first thing. (2 Cor. 5:14.) Then comes the feeding upon the old corn of the land (2 Cor. 5: 15, and Col. 3: 1, 2) ; and then the manna (i.e., the " knowing Christ after the flesh ") ceases.14 (Israel will know him thus at a future time).

One word more, and I have done. There is an important truth laid down in those words of the Lord to His worshippers in Israel, " None shall appear before me empty." Now I am afraid there are but too many of us who come to the Lord's Table, as Joseph's brethren came to Egypt to fill their empty sacks, i.e., to get blessing. Such will not get an overflowing cup; and it will soon be empty again. The Lord wills that our joy should be full. If one of His flock during the week has allowed himself to be reduced to such a culpable emptiness by neglecting " the green pastures " and " still waters " of our loving Shepherd; and has sunk into a state of despondency; such an one will approach the Lord's Table in something like the spirit, if not in the words of Esau, " Bless me, even me also, O my father ! Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? " It is a poor thing to be like a crane with a lame wing, hopping along the shore, and looking after his happier companions flying away to brighter regions; and to exclaim, " From the uttermost part of the earth have I heard songs, even glory to the righteous. But I said, my leanness ! my leanness ! woe unto me !" If we have neglected the " green pastures " and the " still waters " of our loving Shepherd, we cannot expect the full blessings of His " table " and His " cup," though it would be worse still to stay away from His Table, and thus slight it. on that account.

But mark, reader, it is in this portion of our Psalm, in the Heavenly place of worship, that we get the overrunning cup and the anointing oil of gladness. The " still waters " connected with the " pasture " do not give us the overrunning cup." And why not? Because, feeding upon His Word, blessed and indispensable as it is for the comfort and strengthening of our souls, yet is not the feeding upon His death. His broken Body and His Blood shed for us, is food different from the " green pastures " and the still waters.''

" This is my body which is broken for you," and, "This is the new testament in my blood," is not the same as, " Thy word is sweeter than honeycomb." It is thus, as seated in the Heavenlies on the Canaan-side of Jordan, that we feed upon His death,—looking at the glory-ward side of His Cross as Heavenly worshippers, that we get the overrunning cup. The heart is thus filled and overflowing with Christ, Who fills God's own heart, and fills all heaven before Him, as He has fulfilled all His counsels of glory, wisdom, love, and grace. The heart is filled with the sense of the " unspeakable gift of God."

And, beloved fellow-believer, is not the love of such a Father and God Who gave His Son; is not the love of such a Son, Who gave Himself unto God for an offering and sacrifice; Who did not spare Himself, nor please Himself, but died for us and rose again ; is that love not enough to make every heart that has the sense of it, and muses on it, an overflowing cup of joyful worship and adoration in His presence ?

"None shall appear before me empty."

Again, Christian reader, let us ask: What about our hearts when we appear as worshippers before Him, and sit down at His Table, the very sight of which reminds us of that love which was strong as death? Alas! how often it occurs that saints appear on the morning of His glorious resurrection, at the Table where we show the death of Him Who loves us and has washed us from our sins in His own Blood, with hearts that, during the week, have known very little of the power and atmosphere of that resurrection; and, perhaps, still less of that Cross where perfect love and holiness were blended, and where mercy and truth kissed each other. The Lord will not have us to appear before Him, like Joseph's brethren as mentioned above, to fill our empty sacks ; but to empty our full hearts before Him and before His and our Father and God in worship, whilst feeding upon His death ; and thus to get them in return filled to the very brim, yea, overflowing with peace, joy, and praise. It is quite true that God delights to fill empty vessels, but not if their emptiness is caused by their having been bottom-upwards during the week, as another has said. If the heart, during six days, has been turned after earthly pursuits and provisions for the flesh, it is a poor thing to go on the Lord's day to His Table to get blessing. We know that our blessed Shepherd in His restoring grace, even for such, has blessings at "His table," provided there has been real confession and self-judgment previously. He does not despise sacrifices that come from " a broken spirit and a contrite heart." But all-essential as such a condition of heart and spirit is for every one that appears at the Lord's Table, it is not worship. A saint who, like a true sheep of the Shepherd's flock, has been feeding upon His pasture; led in and out by Him; knowing His will, and hearing His voice, and following Him ; appears at His Table like a vessel filled with Christ, ready to empty itself before God in worship, and then to be filled to overflowing, whilst musing, feeding upon His death. But if his heart has been engrossed with earthly things, he appears like a vessel that has first to be emptied, that he may receive the blessing that such rich, pardoning, and restoring grace and love has in store even for such.

May we ever remember that the first place in Canaan where Israel kept the Passover, was Gilgal, which means the taking away of the reproach of Egypt, and there they were circumcised.

"We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

O blessed Saviour, Shepherd and Bishop of Thy flock, whom Thou hast bought with Thine own Blood, keep, through Thy grace, every sheep and lamb of Thine close to Thy feet and near Thy loving heart; so that, on that bright resurrection-morning, when we meet at Thy Table " to sing of the Shepherd that died," our hearts may be more fully responding to such wondrous love, whilst partaking of its provision.

But blessed be Thy providing love, that whilst thus feasting on the Divine repast, Thine own hands did spread before they were pierced, we can exclaim with grateful and joyful hearts and lips .-

" Thou hast prepared a table before me in the presence of mine enemies ; thou anointest my head with oil ; my cup runneth over."

The second is that of a converted Roman Catholic young woman who was dying in consumption. After she had found peace, she broke bread at her father's house. The. Lord's Supper being ended, she said, " I believe I am going to be with Christ," and departed —at the Lord's Table—His memorial—to be for ever " with Christ, which is far better."

Which was the happier—the thief that went up from the cross to be with Him in Paradise—or this dear sister who fell asleep at His Table, just to step into His presence-

Green Pastures and Still Waters, Fourth Degree. His Staff and Rod in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. (23:4)

v. 4. " Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

IF my reader has read the little preface of this book, he will remember what was said there, as to the three essential conditions of health—natural or spiritual—viz.: 1. Good and suitable food; 2. Regular exercise; and 3. A pure, congenial atmosphere. We have found the first of these requisites in the two opening verses of our Psalm; in the third, the exercise of conscience and heart, and the deepening blessing resulting from the restoring grace of Him, Who is the Bishop as well as the Shepherd of our souls.

But now we come to another kind of exercise, no less needed than those in the preceding verse. I mean the exercise of Faith, for we now approach the dark " Valley of the Shadow of Death."

The lying down in the green pastures, and the restoring of the soul, blessed as they are, belong to a province very different to that upon which we now enter, that of the " Valley of the Shadow of Death." Solemn words, these! What is the meaning of them? Is it death itself, " the king of terrors?" As for a Christian, we know that death, solemn as it is in itself, is this no longer; just as little as it is to him the " wages of sin;" for the same Apostle who, with regard to the unbeliever, so calls it, says: " For me to die is gain." Christ has " abolished death," and by destroying, through death, him that had the power of death, that is the devil, has delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

But, at the same time we must remember, that death, to a Saint of God before Christ, bore a very different aspect and character, to what it does to us, since Christ died and rose again.

To the Old Testament Saint, this earth was the place and scene of his blessings, spiritual and temporal. His calling, his promises, his hopes, his blessings, and place of worship to give thanks for them, were on earth. The glorious reign of Solomon (the figure of the Greater Who is to come) was the expression of it; when every Israelite dwelt, in undisturbed peace, under his vine and under his figtree, and went up thrice every year to the Lord's magnificent temple at Jerusalem, to worship in the solemn assemblies before the Lord. Consequently, long life and health to enjoy those blessings, formed an integral part of them. What then must death be for an Old Testament Saint? To him, it was the end of all his joys and blessings—not only his temporal, but even his spiritual privileges of worship as connected with the Lord's holy temple, in His holy city, the capital and centre of the Holy Land, that " flowed with milk and honey." He had a vague idea of a last day, when the dead were to rise again, and the just, i.e., the believers, were to receive their reward. Jacob, in his parting words, and Job, and Martha, gave expression to this indistinct hope of resurrection. Still, death, to the Israelite, even to the godly, was an enemy, that " cut him off," and carried him away from his people, and all their blessings and privileges, into the shadowy, sombre regions of Hades, i.e., the place where all the departed souls—believers and unbelievers1—were kept; the Saints on the one side, resting in Abraham's bosom, and on the other side, the unbelieving, in torments. Even Abraham was there, and the inspired writer of this Psalm, David, till Christ came and burst the bonds of death and Hades. (Comp. 1. Sam. 28:13 with Matt. 27:52, 53.)

Christ had come, been " cut off, and had nothing." (Dan. 9) He had ascended on high, and sent down the Holy Spirit, baptizing and sealing by that Spirit the first-fruits from among His earthly people, and offering pardon, and the " times of refreshing from His presence," i.e., His immediate return to the earth, and the beginning of the millennial blessing. That offer of pardon and blessing, and, finally, the testimony of the Holy Ghost through Stephen, had been rejected by Israel. Since that time everything has been changed. The Church of God was formed (from all tongues and nations); and this, linked with a risen, ascended, and glorified Christ (as her Head) is His body.

The. Church is, in direct contrast to Israel, heavenly in her birth, and calling, and hope, and blessings, and worship.

" Blessed be God," writes the once so zealous an Israelite, Saul, after he had become Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles.

" Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

" Blessed be God," writes Peter, the chief Apostle for the circumcision.

" Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and Undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you."

All is changed, transferred from Earth to Heaven, and the Christian is a stranger and pilgrim here on earth, and his citizenship (conversation) is in heaven, from whence he looks for his Saviour; not to take his soul to heaven after the body is dead (though this is true), nor to raise his dead body (blessedly true as this is also) but to " change his vile body " (Comp. 1 Cor. 15:51 ; 1 Thess. 4:17, with John 14:3), " that it may be

fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." (Phil. 3:21.)

What then is death to a Christian?2 Let us take two men of God—heroes of faith, too, one from the Old, and the other from the New Testament. I mean King Hezekiah and Paul the Apostle. I do not know of two saints of God, who, when put in juxtaposition, would so strikingly illustrate the difference between what death was to the Old Testament saint, and what it is to the Christian.

Both those men of God were brought face to face with death ; King Hezekiah, when he " was sick unto death," after the sentence of death (though not in a judicial way) had been announced to him by the Lord through His prophet ; the Apostle Paul, when he had " the sentence of death in himself." (2 Cor. 1:8, 9) What was the effect upon each ?3 Let them speak for themselves.

KING HEZEKIAH (Isaiah 38)
PAUL THE APOSTLE.
" I said, in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave."
" We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead."
“[I said,] " I am deprived of the residue of my years."
" Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ ; which is far better."
I said, " I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living."
" Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."
" I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world."
" For now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then face to face."
" Mine age is departed and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent ; I have cut off like a weaver my life ; he will cut me off with pining sickness ; from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me."
" For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."
" I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones ; from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me."
" Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing " (i.e., that mortality might be swallowed up of life) " is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."
" Like a crane, or a swallow, so did I chatter ; I did mourn as a dove."
" Death, where is thy sting ? Hades, where is thy victory ? "
" Mine eyes fail with looking upward."

" For our citizenship (conversation) is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

" O Lord, I am oppressed ; undertake for me ! "

" Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working, whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

" What shall I say ? He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it."

" The Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God ; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.Then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air."

" I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul."

" And so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

" O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit:"

For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

" So wilt Thou recover me, and make me to live."

"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness ;"

" Behold, I show you a mystery ; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump."

" But thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption:"

"For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

" For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

" The sting of death is sin ; and the strength of sin is the law,"

"But where sin abounded, grace did. much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

" For the grave cannot praise thee; death cannot celebrate thee; they that go down to the pit, cannot hope for thy truth."

" So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written,"

" The living, the living, he Shall praise thee, as I do this day."

" Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

" The Father to the children stall make known thy truth."

" 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."

" The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord."

" Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I repeat what I have expressed already (though I need hardly assure the reader), that in thus contrasting the words of King Hezekiah with those of the Apostle Paul, there was not, nor could there be the remotest thought of putting the sincere expressions of gratitude towards God on the part of the godly King Hezekiah, much less his character as a champion of faith, in a disparaging juxtaposition to Paul. Each of those two honoured men of God, in perilous times of general unfaithfulness, stood their ground as faithful witnesses on the side of the Lord and His truth. Nay, I even make bold to assert that that gallant soldier of Christ, who could say, " I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith," and who sealed his testimony with his life-blood, if He had lived at the time and in. the position of King Hezekiah, would have expressed himself in the same spirit, if not in the same words. My intention was, as I said, simply to point out by means of contrast, the immense difference there is between the aspect of death to a Christian and its aspect to an Old Testament Saint.

At the same time I would call to remembrance what I have said in the preface—that it is not my intention to enter upon the dispensational aspect of our Psalm (i.e., the truths connected with Israel's position and hopes in the past or future), except in passing. I confine myself chiefly to the moral side of the blessed truths contained in our Psalm, in order that these meditations, under God's blessing, may-result in true feeding, and not in mere gleaning of dispensational knowledge.

I do not think that those words, " Valley of the Shadow of Death," mean simply, " death," although I am aware that it is generally taken in this sense. A Christian is not told to be " prepared to die," or " prepared to meet his Maker," as the expression is, or, as others say. " prepared to meet the worst." " To depart to be with Christ, which is far better," is not to be prepared to meet the worst. How does the inspired apostle characterize the conversion and Christianity of his beloved Thessalonians, whom he calls " his crown and joy? " Were their eyes directed towards a coffin? And was it said that they were not afraid of it, or " prepared for it? " The imperial monk of St. Just thus prepared himself " to meet the worst,"4 but this was not the goal of attraction placed before the eyes of those at Thessalonica. They were not directed to look at a skull. They were turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and—to " be prepared to die? " No, but " wait for His Son from heaven."

What then is the meaning of those solemn words, " Valley of the Shadow of Death "? "

Without gainsaying the interpretation. of v. 4 in the sense of death generally, and its application to the future Jewish remnant especially, when they will have to pass through unprecedented troubles (Dan. 12), which will usher in the millennial era of unprecedented earthly blessings; and without desiring. in the least to impair the comfort many a departing Christian may derive, and has derived, from this precious verse; yet I fully believe that this expression conveys more than merely death. It is " The Valley of the Shadow of Death," that is, this earth, the narrow and dark place (" the valley,") where the shadow, i.e., the power of death. has its sombre sway. Every reader familiar with Scripture, will be aware that the word " shadow " is used in the Bible in a fourfold sense.

In its literal meaning of a cool place, protected from the heat, or, in the spiritual sense of refreshment.

In the sense of frailty, and passing away.

Or it means figure, or type ; in which sense it only occurs in the New Testament. And-

In the sense of power.5

It would be absurd to take any of the three first renderings as the real meaning of " Shadow of Death" in our Psalm. Therefore there remains only that of power. The words, " Valley of the Shadow of Death," mean simply, this earth, the place where death reigns, death the "King of

Terrors," and he who has the power of death, that is, the devil, " the prince of this world " and " the god of this world." The whole scene around us bears the stamp of death, and is under the shadow, i.e., the power of death. That this interpretation is correct, we find confirmed by Matt. 4:16, where we meet with almost the same expression. It is said there about Galilee of the Gentiles, " The people which sat in darkness, saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death,' light is sprung up."

Now it is evident at the first glance, that the prophet does not speak there of the dying or dead, but of living people, i.e., the inhabitants of that portion of Canaan which was called " Galilee of the Gentiles." partly on account of the ignorance of its inhabitants, and partly because that portion of Canaan was, more than any other, frequented by Gentiles. They are, therefore, represented as " sitting in darkness," and in the " region and shadow of death," i.e., this world. Now, what is here called the " Region and Shadow of Death," appears to me the same as the " Valley of the Shadow of Death" in our Psalm. Only there is one little word in the above quoted passage from Matthew, which marks exactly the difference between the natural or unregenerate man, and the believer. I mean the word " sat."

As to the believer, in the Old as well as in the New Testament, he is supposed only to be walking or passing through this world6—" the Valley of the Shadow of Death "—whilst the children of this world are sitting in this region and shadow of death, in all the false security that has characterized them from the days of Noah and Lot until now, and will continue to do so, until " sudden destruction shall fall upon them."

And has this world with its daily increasing allurements, grand shows, gay colours, and fair appearances, lost ought of its solemn character as the " Valley of the Shadow of Death," since the Lord of glory has been murdered here? It was when our Lord was on His way to Gethsemane, that, for the first time in the Word of God, we find Satan called " the prince of this world," by the blessed lips of " the Prince of Life," the holy and just One, on the eve of His rejection and crucifixion. And why? Because the great enemy of God and man, the arch-deceiver of souls, who " is a liar and murderer from the beginning," had never before been so clearly manifested as " the prince of this world," (because he had kept himself more behind the scene), as now, when he combined the Gentiles and Israel around the cross, to slay God's well-beloved Son, Who had come into this world, to declare and tell out to poor fallen men His Father and. God's heart full of love, and truth, and grace, as seen in His own blessed Person. He came into this world, which was made by Him; and the world, blinded by the prince of the world, " knew Win not." They stared at Him and said, " Who are you?" But worse still, He came unto His own people, and they, instigated and hardened by Satan, received Him not. They said, " This is the Heir, come let us kill him!

But there is a still more solemn aspect under which we find Satan mentioned in the Second Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians. A still more solemn title is given him there, than that of " the prince of this world." He is called there (2 Cor. 4) " the god of this world."

It is, because Satan who will, at a not very distant time, set himself up, in the person of Antichrist, in the Temple at Jerusalem, " showing himself that he is God "—is now blinding men's hearts against the glorious light of the gospel, for the preaching of which, God, in His marvelous grace, has sent down His Holy Spirit from that same Heaven, whither this world had sent back His well-beloved Son with pierced hands, and feet, and side. Satan, the god of this world, is now preparing everything for the time when the world will worship the beast, his first agent, for the final rebellion against God, and say, " Who is like the beast? " It is for this reason, I think, that we, in the passage referred to above, find Satan called by that most solemn expression, " the god of this world." The very fact of the success of this process of blinding against the glorious gospel of God, which we see going on all around us in these days of Christless professing religion on the one hand, and open infidelity7 on the other, shows but too plainly that Satan is not only the prince and the ruler, but " the god of this world," as to men's hearts and minds. This will be fully manifested when the world will worship the beast, Satan's first agent at that fast-approaching period, and when the Jews will permit him to sit, in the person of his second agent, the false prophet or Antichrist,8 in the very temple of God, showing himself that he is God "

Fellow Christians, do we sufficiently bear in mind, that it is a terrible enemy's land that you and I are passing through? A land, where the stream of events is driving fast towards the closing awful catastrophe! Would you like to stay in a land that is on the eve of war with your own country? Where massacre is preparing all around you, and feet swift to shed the blood of all whom you love? Would you sleep, even for one night, in such a place if you could help it? Certainly not. On the contrary, your only and constant care would be to find a narrow and safe footpath to pass through it as quickly as possible. You would not forget for a moment, that you were in an enemy's land. Or would you like to live in a house, the walls of which were stained with the blood of your nearest and dearest relations? Shall I remind you of an Old Testament Saint, to whom the land which God. had promised to him and to his seed, was like a foreign country, after he had entered it? And why? Because " the Amorite then dwelt in that land," and God's time, when Abraham and his seed were to possess the land, had not yet arrived, " for the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full."

Christian reader, is this earth, where the blood of the Son of God has been shed, something else to you besides " The Valley of the Shadow of Death? "—" that great city where the Lord was crucified." Or is it to you something more than an empty tomb where your Lord was buried, Who " is risen indeed," and speaks from His Heavenly glory to you; In Me the world is crucified to you, and you to the world. If you then be risen with Me, seek things which are above, where I am, Christ, sitting on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on earth; for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Me in God.

"And has this world a charm for me Where Christ has suffered thus? No, I have died to all its charms Through Jesus' wondrous cross.

Or is there any amongst my Christian readers walking through the " Valley of the Shadow of Death," (upon which judgment is imminent,) with lingering steps and looking back?

" Remember Lot's wife!"

Alas! how many such pillars of salt do we meet with in the nooks and recesses, and at the corners of the " Valley of the Shadow of Death? " And why? Because to their eyes and hearts this world did not appear, as in our Psalm, a deep, damp, sterile, and misty vale, formed by bare shaggy rocks, with the eagles of death, " which are gathered where the carcass is," hovering above it in mid-air. Alas! to them it appeared a verdant, sunny, pleasant place, not a valley of tears; a place filled with the refreshing shadows of the comforts of daily life, and provisions for the flesh, instead of having the shadow of death upon everything around. This gloomy shadow is carefully kept out of sight in the broad pleasant walks of that great cemetery, called world; just as in your city cemeteries, the gardener and florist combine their skill to hide its

terrible contents beneath a smiling surface.

Fellow-pilgrim towards heavenly rest and glory with the rejected Nazarene, Who has made us kings and priests unto His Father and God, to reign with Him; do you feel a hankering after settling and colonizing on the soil of this world, that is stained with the precious blood of the Lamb of God? Let another voice from the Old Testament warn you: -

"Arise ye and depart; for this is not (your) rest; because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction." (Micah. 2:10.)

Christian reader, the soil of this world is not only polluted by man's crimson sin and blood-guiltiness, but it is also a volcanic ground, which will soon be shaken to the very centre by those thunders and lightnings. which, in the closing book9 of the Word of God, we see proceeding from the throne of Him Whose judgments " are true and righteous," and will soon be awakened by those voices proceeding from the same place, and calling out to the children of this world—

“Woe to them that dwell on the earth! "

that is, to them that " sit " in the region and Valley of the Shadow of Death, instead of " walking through" it.

Beware of seeking rest in the wilderness! The desire for it, if indulged in a Christian, is the sure forerunner of backsliding, or rather the beginning of it. There is no such thing as standing still, in spiritual nor in natural life. Either onward. or backward. Do you long for an " oasis? " Just a little " green spot (" for is it not a little one? ") an " Elim " of your own, in this world? Let me affectionately, but solemnly warn you! I know that God, Who refreshed His people of old, after their entrance into a barren wilderness, with the shadow of seventy palm-trees and the waters of twelve wells, as an earnest and foretaste of the time when the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose, may, and does, now, in His tender mercy and loving kindness, lead His weary pilgrims from time to time to a place of momentary rest—a refreshment (perhaps through the hospitality of one of His saints), to restore strength to the weak vessel worn out in His service, or to gather new vigour and buoyancy of spirit in solitude with the Lord. The Son of man Himself, homeless stranger though He was here on earth, had His " Bethany," though his true " Elim " was on the top of the mountains, alone with His God, after a day's unremitting service and unwearied labour of love. There, in the stillness of the night, on the summit of the mountains, from whence the prince of this world in vain had pointed out to Him the united beauty and glory of its kingdoms; there, far above the " Valley of the Shadow of Death," where men were sleeping in darkness and sin for the day of judgment—the Son was alone with the Father.

" The ear of the learned " was close to the doorposts of His God and Father, to receive, as it were, the orders for the corning day, and in the morning to descend to the plains to heal the lepers, to give sight to the blind, to preach the gospel to the poor, and to speak with the " tongue of the learned '' words in season to the weary and heavy laden. The, " I thank thee, Father," and the " Even so, Father," following the woes pronounced upon Chorazin and Bethsaida, was followed by, " Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Christian reader, do you know something of these " Elims? " They are not to be found under the shadow of the palm-trees of this world, nor in the dry atmosphere of a prayer-less study, but in the secret place of the most High and of our most nigh God, Whom we call Abba, Father! " If we do not acquire something of the " ear of the learned " on the top of the mountains, we shall never acquire the " tongue of the learned " in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, though we may speak with the tongues of men and of angels. We only shall weary people with unseasonable words, instead of speaking words in season to the weary.

Again I say, Christian reader, beware of making rest and ease your object. The looking for the " hearts ease," in the land of the wilderness, only betrays the heart's longing for the onions and garlic of Egypt. Let us not forget that it is only in the sand of the wilderness, and not upon the green lawns and meadows of the world, that we can trace the precious footmarks of Jesus, the heavenly Stranger in a world of sorrow and sin, though no stranger to sorrow, but a Man of sorrow, acquainted with grief.

He is not here! " And why? Because He has been rejected, spit upon, buffeted, crucified here! Does His cross, to you, cast its dark, broad shadow over all the allurements, and across the prospects of this world? The god and prince of this world tries all in his power to turn it into a "door of hope " for you,10 to make you forget that it is the "Valley of the Shadow of Death." He is not here! But we are; and for what purpose? Merely to walk through it as pilgrims and strangers? Not only so, but Christ has sent us into it as ambassadors, with a message of peace and life.

" And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee.

Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou host given me, that they may be one as we are."

" While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name; those that thou gavest me

I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."

" And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves."

" I have given them thy word; and the world path hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

" I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

" They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

" Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth."

" As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."

I know of nothing more humbling, and at the same time encouraging, than that marvelous grace, that permits us to listen to the utterance of sack a prayer. The prayer of Jesus, the " beginner and perfecter of faith," when He, close to the issue of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, before crossing the brook Cedron—the border of Gethsemane—lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, " Father, the hour is come; glorify thy son, that thy son also may glorify thee." It is the same grace that permits us to hear His parting words, when He left the heavenly glory, and said: " Lo, I come to do thy will, O God."

But let me direct your attention to those words of our blessed Lord:-

" As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."

The same words, here addressed to His Father, Jesus addresses afterwards to His disciples, when He appeared in their midst, as their risen Saviour, and, showing unto them His pierced hands and side, said, “Peace unto you;" as much as to say, Behold my wounds! They are the fountain of peace and life. I have received them in the house of my friends. But to you, they are to be the starting-point for that message of peace and life, with which I send you as ambassadors in My stead—first of all, to the same house—beginning at Jerusalem, and then to the whole world. You are to tell unto men, who would not be reconciled through My life, but hated. Me without a cause, that God is now going to reconcile the hostile hearts of sinners by My death. For you are to tell them, that the same blood, which, when shed by wicked hands, proved the consummate wickedness of man's heart and his irreparable ruin, is at the same time the means for washing away all their guilt, to wash him that believeth whiter than snow, and to fit him for a heavenly Paradise, and for the glory of God."

Then said Jesus to them again, " Peace be unto you! " But He adds, " As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." And then He breathes upon them the breath of resurrection-life, and says, " Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

Yes, fellow-Christian, Christ, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Who maketh us to lie down in His green pastures, and leadeth us beside the still waters and restoreth our souls, and leadeth us in the paths of righteousness;— Christ, our risen and ascended Head in glory, has sent us into this " valley of the shadow of death," to carry with us through these dark and hostile regions of death, the heavenly tidings of life and peace. Here, where men's feet, led on by Satan, are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery in their ways, and the path of peace unknown to them, and no fear of God before their eyes. Yes, it is from this " valley of the shadow of death," through which the little flock to whom it has pleased the Father to give the kingdom, is finding and winding its way, fearing no evil ;—that the sweet savour of the gospel is constantly ascending up to heaven as a sweet perfume to God, and a savour of life to them that are saved, but a savour of death to them that perish, It is here on this earth, which is again filling fast, as in Noah's day, with violence and corruption, that the Lord wills His little band to be " one," that the world might know that the Father has sent Him. Amidst war, and hatred, and revolutions, they are to " live in peace with all men, as much as lieth in them, and have salt within themselves, and peace one with another." And were not we ourselves sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another? But oh! what a sun arose over us, who were once " sitting in darkness and in the region of the shadow of death!"

" But after that the kindness and love11 of God our Saviour toward man appeared . . . to make us heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Are we, whilst passing through this world, carrying with us the savour and practical power of that divine philanthropy? Can we say with the apostle, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth? " Does the love of Christ constrain us, to let the light of His gospel of glory " spring up " to those that sit in darkness and in the region of the shadow of death? And when he, who fain would keep them there, hurls the stones of persecution. against the light-bearers, does the light shine through the broken pitcher? Are we, though faint, yet pursuing? And do we faint not, knowing that, though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day, and that our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen?

A Christian's position in this " Valley of the shadow of death " much resembles that of a man in a diving-bell who is working at the bottom of the sea. His home and natural element are above the water, but he has been sent down into the region and shadow of death, in quest of costly pearls, like that blessed One Whose love many waters could not quench. His life-breath, he draws from above through the tube that is fixed to his mouth. The waters of death are all around him, but quietly he carries on his work at the bottom of the sea, gathering costly pearls, till his work is done; and then lie is caught up to the open air, his proper element, where he meets his master and his friends, and receives the reward of his labour. But there is one danger—a terrible danger—connected with the work of a diver. There are not only the waters around him, but one of the huge and terrible inhabitants of that element of death might snap the tube, that links the man with his native element. His life would be cut off, together with the link that supplies him with air. Not so with us, Christian reader; " our life is hid with Christ in God." Satan may be permitted, " in majorem Dei gloriam," to destroy the bodies of the Lord's martyrs, but when it has been so, from among the flames of the stake their songs of triumph, arose, proving that their life was far above man and Satan's reach, that it was hid with Christ in God. Satan can just as little touch my life, as he can touch Christ, for " Christ is my life." There is life in my hand, or I could not move it. But that is not " my life." I may lose my hand without losing my life, but if I lose my head, my life is lost too. My life is not in my hand, but my head. If my life were in my keeping, it would be an unsafe thing indeed. Christ Himself is my life—Christ, my Head in glory at the right band of God—and thus my life is beyond the reach of harm, " hid with Christ in God."

Not many years ago a man of God bore a good witness to this blessed truth in an especial way. Whilst travelling, a robber stopped him on his way, pointing a pistol at the traveler’s heart and saying, " your money or your life!" The calm reply was, " Money I cannot give you, for I have none myself, and my life you cannot take, for it is " hid with Christ in God." The few words went like a bullet into the robber's heart. His pistol sunk; he disappeared in the dark forest, to emerge from it, a converted man.

" Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

Why? Is it because faith imparts courage, and casts out fear, as love does in another sense? No, but because He is with me.

But stop, I must correct myself, lest I should be guilty of a misquotation, and a grave one too, though it may not appear so at first. It is not written, " For he is with me," but

" For thou art with me."

The reader will have noticed the change from " He " into " Thou " in the remaining half of our Psalm. Why this change of expression? Because " He " will not do, when we come to the " valley of the shadow of death ;" whether we take these words in the sense of " departing to be with Christ," or for this earth, as the place of death when realized in its true character.

" He " will not do; it must be " Thou," i.e., the addressing of Himself,12 the "cleaving to Him with purpose of heart." It is, " Lord, to whom shall we go, for thou hast the words of eternal life? "

Suppose a child going home with its father on a very rough road, where a thickly wooded valley had to be crossed, where murders and robberies had been committed of late. Do you not think the child would, as they approach the dreaded place, cling closer and closer to its father13 ? Most surely. And the more we, through grace, are walking in the power of the Spirit and resurrection-life, in communion with the Father and with the Son, the more shall we realize what this world is in its character as the " valley of the shadow of death;" and knowing, too, that in ourselves, that is to say in our flesh, there dwelleth no good thing, we shall pass through it with fear and trembling, working out our salvation, and yet " rejoicing always in Christ Jesus," fearing no evil, "for Thou art with me." 14 The sense of the perils and opposition of the world around us—the very first instinctive feeling of every soul as soon as God begins His work there, will only contribute to bring us into closer communion with Him, Who is our strength, and Whose strength is made perfect in weakness.

And, vice versa, the more we are in communion with God, the deeper will be in us the sense of the true character of this " valley of the shadow of death," and the shrinking from the defiling contact with its " dead hones." But this sense of the dangers of the " valley of the shadow of death " will not be connected in us with alarm. On the contrary, it will he combined with the feeling of perfect security. For, covered with His feathers, and trusting under the " shadow of his wings," we fear no evil on our passage through this dangerous place, with its snares and temptations.

" In vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird."15 There is now One there above for me in heavenly glory, before His God and my God, before His Father and my Father. That blessed One, ere He entered there through sufferings, said to His disciples, " Ye shall leave me alone ; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." But in those awful hours upon the cross, when all had left Him alone, His God also, His only refuge, forsook Him, and the cry went up from the cross, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? "

And that obedient One, Who, passing through the " valley of the shadow of death " and who but He could fully realize what the " shadow of death " meant,) poured out strong cries and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, has been " heard in that He feared." God could not, nor would He suffer His Holy One to see corruption. God has shown Him the path of life out of the " valley of the shadow of death." It was a risen Saviour, conqueror over Satan, death, and Hades, that said to His disciples, who had forsaken Him in the hour of peril, " Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

And when Israel, who then rejected Him, will have to pass, at the time of Antichrist, through the fiery furnace of trouble, such " as never was since there was a nation." how precious to His faithful remnant will be the promise of the Great Shepherd, as written in Isai. 43:5, " Fear not ; for I am with thee," addressed to them (as in a general way to us all) in answer to the words of faith in our Psalm, " I will fear no evil, for thou art with me! " What a comfort to those faithful ones, when they will have to pass, in the most terrible sense of the word, " through the valley of the shadow of death!"

And so it has proved to be at all times to the martyrs of our blessed good and great Shepherd, who " for his name's sake " were " counted as sheep for the slaughter," from Stephen to the times of the Waldenses and Albigenses, and from them down to the martyrs of Madagascar, and the Madiais and Matamoras.

" I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

How blessed is this precious " Thou," whether it be addressed to Him Whom we call " Abba, Father," or to Him Who " is not ashamed to call us brethren." It implies the closest relationship and intimacy of faith and love. It is just the word suited for the " valley of the shadow of death," for such as His grace has taught to pass through it with pilgrim hearts and pilgrim manners. having the loins of their minds girded, and walking circumspectly," looking homeward, heavenward, looking unto Jesus, their eyes, in the power of the Spirit, fixed on His glory, and their hearts on His blessed person.

There is no place—except sin—where a Christian can be in his divers conflicts and temptations during his journey through the " valley of the shadow of death," where he may not have Christ with him—yea, be it death itself, as far as it can be applied to a Christian in a physical or mental way. There have been dear children of God, and heavenly-minded too, who have had to pass through hard struggles during their last hours on earth, but they never failed to realize " Thou art with me!" There is no place, I say, of suffering for a Christian in this world, where Christ Jesus has not been, and where we could not therefore realize His presence in power and sympathy, and say, " Thou art with me! " If a Christian be called to pass through the deepest trials and severest conflicts, he need not ask, " How shall I pass through them? " but before he has to undergo them, he has the blessed assurance that they shall not separate him from the love of the Son, nor from the love of God the Father, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Is it hunger? Jesus has felt it, after forty days fasting, and has been tempted whilst feeling it, and has overcome, and He will be with us in it and lead us victoriously through it. Or is it nakedness? The Lord of glory, Who had divested Himself of His glorious garment and made Himself of no reputation, assuming the humble garb of a servant, has been stripped of His vesture by the pitiless hands of Roman soldiers, when they cast lots over His garment. You will find Him there also with you. Or is it the sword? He has felt it as none else could. " Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." (Zech. 13:7.) Or is it death itself? Who can count the numbers of departing saints, around whose death beds (if we can call them so), the savour and atmosphere of a risen, ascended, and glorified Christ was spread, and His life shining through the earthen vessel when it was broken.

One departing Christian said, " Men call this death—I call it life." Another, " It is dying unto death." Another. " This is a mere nothing." Another, " No cloud above, no spot within."

But there is one instance of such a bright sunset of a departing Christian, that I cannot refrain from giving it at greater length to the reader. The lady, who is the subject of the following account, was the wife of a dear brother in Christ, who soon after her death issued a little paper for his friends, containing the account of her triumphant departure, He himself has since followed his beloved partner to glory, and I think that I am not guilty of an indiscretion in thus publishing the following extract, for the glory of that Lord and Saviour, Whom he and his partner here below served so faithfully, and with Whom they now rest from their labours.

When the doctor's decision was known, after her chest had been tried, her husband read the following hymn to her:-

Shortly after, she said to her husband, " Oh, I have had such a sweet visit from Jesus! I cannot tell you what a sweet visit I have had ! " She laid her hand upon his arm, and said with great earnestness and solemnity, "Mind, there is one thing I specially charge upon you, which is, that you go on your way rejoicing. You know I am not dying under the wrath of God. I am redeemed by the blood of Jesus. Tell all whom I know, that I am able to praise the Lord. I can praise Him. If He never give me another wink of sleep, still I will praise Him." (The words in italics, she pronounced emphatically.)

(I now proceed at once to the writer's account of Her last moments.

At half-past twelve, at her earnest desire, I retired to rest, leaving her nurse, our sister—, to sit up with her. At three, she sent to call me, and I immediately went to her. I found her labouring for breath, and covered with cold perspiration. She seemed much distressed in body, but apparently not more so than she was on the previous day. She said, " I cannot continue long if I have not breath." I had not the least idea that she was dying,16 and I lifted up my heart to the Lord, that, if it were possible, this cup of suffering might pass from her, and some relief be given to her poor body. I heard her repeating a part of Isaiah 43:2, " When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." I rose and reached a Bible, intending to turn to the passage. When she saw I had the Bible she said, " Read the twenty-third Psalm," which I did. Almost immediately afterwards, her countenance, which had previously been marked with an expression of the deepest anguish. and pain, from her great difficulty of breathing, became exceedingly animated, and beamed with an expression of joy and triumph. I was then kneeling at her side, and the change was so striking, that I rose from my knees, in order that I might have a more perfect view of her countenance. She looked steadfastly up to heaven, the radiance of which seemed really reflected on her face, and said with great energy and emphasis, and with a strength of voice far beyond what I should have supposed her then capable of, Satan, thou hast nothing to do here. Death is no king of terrors to me. I am washed in the blood of the Lamb. I am upon a rock. I am on a firm foundation. Lord, it is a solemn moment, but this is reality" (the latter words were pronounced with increased deliberateness and emphasis.) "O Lord look upon my dear children! Oh, grant that I may meet them before the Throne! " And then, making a further effort to speak, and having apparently strength given her for the occasion, she said with great animation, and with an expression of increased joy and triumph, " I would not change places with the greatest man on the earth." I was standing at her side, holding her hand in mine. She said, “Kiss me—kiss my sweet little boy in the morning—give my love to all the saints." Her breathing then became more difficult, and her voice feeble, but she said repeatedly, " Jesus, Master, come, come to me. Jesus, come, come!" Her voice then became inaudible, but observing that she moved her lips, I put my ear down to her mouth, and she said with an emphasis, which marked how she felt the words, " Precious—very precious! " These were her last words, and in less than twenty minutes afterwards—at fifty minutes after four a.m., she most gently and peacefully fell asleep.

A sister in the Lord who was at Mrs.—'s bedside a short time previous to her depart are, gave the following account of the last two days of her life on earth:-

On Monday I went and found her much worse, and, having been now many nights without sleep, she looked much exhausted, and suffered exceedingly from oppressed breathing; -but a holy calmness marked her countenance, and at times it was so lighted up with joy, that, but for seeing the laboured breathing, one could hardly fancy it was the taking down of the clay tabernacle. On my entering the room, she said, " All, all is now settled, Jesus! Jesus!" till it died away upon her lips. Her sufferings at this time from difficulty of breathing were very severe, and her mind, though happy, wandered a little, but in all, that strain of praise which it was beautiful to witness.

I had not been very long with her when she expressed a great desire for prayer, and said, "O pray to Jesus for a little sleep to rest my weary body. Begin and end with praise, for it is a pleasant sound." After this I read the first five verses of the 103rd Psalm, and then from the 11Th to the 17th verse, during which time the Lord heard our cry, and gave her sweet and refreshing sleep for twenty-five minutes. When she awoke, she lifted her head and said, " My heart is filled with praise and gratitude for all His goodness. I feel more like myself than I have done for some time. . . It is the first sound sleep I have had for some days and nights." She then asked to see her little boy (who had gone to spend the day out), and said, " I may yet see my little girl. I remember the night before I left home, kneeling down by my sweet child's crib, and asking the Lord to bring me back again to see her; but (as if taking herself up) the Lord's will be done: He does all things well for me." After a little, I asked her if she felt happy in the bright prospect before her. " Yes," she sweetly answered, " Peace, peace flows like a river through my soul." Then I asked her if she found it hard to give up those she loved. Her eyes, at this time, beamed with that expression which words have no power to convey, and she added, " Hard—not hard—willingly, or a thousand times more! I could lay all at the feet of Jesus, for worthy is the Lamb!' " After an interval, she turned and said, " Is my affection weakened or abated? or why is it that I can give up all for Jesus? "

At two o'clock, she had another sleep for thirty-five minutes, and, when roused, she said, " My heart is bursting—bursting with the praise of Jesus. I have a great desire to speak to the doctor, to tell him of Jesus—of such a Jesus—oh! to be able to do so! " Presently he arrived; but the quick breathing prevented much conversation ; but enough was said to show him the perfect calmness with which she viewed the immediate prospect of death.

After awhile I said, " What glorious realities will soon burst upon your view; all His glory before you." To this she replied, " Do you know, I am not so much thinking of the glory as of Jesus! " I said, " He is the sun and centre of all glory—the Lamb is the light of the city." " Yes," she replied, " I am swallowed up in thoughts of Jesus. He is the bright star of hope of my heart. I have no conflict to-day, all is praise." On my bringing her some food she said, " My poor body needs much nourishment—the hand of death is heavy upon me—all will not do."

I once asked her if she had any regret as to her present circumstances, in being away from home; or if she had any wish to live. With animation she replied, " I have no desire to live—Jesus has taken all my foolish fears away; my husband, children, and all I have, are in His

safe keeping. I have no regret about a single thing; all well. It is better for me to die here than at home, for it is the will of Jesus, and I am happy. I have no regret about anything."

The next day, Tuesday, when I came, I found her much worse. Her poor body was much worn out, and her breathing distressed. When I asked her how she felt, she whispered, " Oh! fist sinking—to sleep in Jesus is my desire. I long for His coming; my heart is still bursting with His praise." She then spoke of the Lord's goodness in sending her a Christian nurse to attend her.

While I was sitting at her bedside, she spoke as if talking with Jesus. She turned and said she saw Jesus and that He came for her, but not to give her any more sleep, but to take her to Himself. At another time she said, " Do you know, you will be in the glory as soon as I "—and then entered with animation into some thoughts on the resurrection. Joy and peace filled her countenance.

About two o'clock, her breathing became dreadfully oppressed, so much so, as to prevent her speaking, except in broken words, " I pray —my Lord—Jesus—ten—ten—minutes relief—for Thy poor—weak—servant." Here was a pause; she looked as if her mind was altogether absorbed in heavenly things. But now and then would be heard, " for Jesus' sake," and " I ask for Jesus' sake " —" I want "—. Not more than a few minutes elapsed when there was quite a visible change; her breathing became calm, and, with a beautiful smile upon her countenance, she said, " The Lord has heard my prayer; I have never felt Him so near. Do you not see how much better I am? Will you bring me something to take?" On her getting some nourishment, she said, " Wonderful has this answer been to my prayer; let us exalt His name together, for He is dwelling here; His power is very present; it is better to put confidence in the Lord than to trust, or lean in any way, upon man." On being asked to take some medicine, "Prayer has done more for me than medicine; have I not much reason for praise and thankfulness? It should fill my heart."

When the following words were said, " The everlasting arms are underneath you, and His banner over you is love," she replied, " yes, I am living in the very power of this. I know the reality of it. They are no light words I wish I could speak loudly of His goodness. The love of Jesus surrounds me on every side, and there is power keeping me up, or I should sink." She remarked how good the Lord was to her, in giving her so much rest from the laboured breathing, and that she had only asked for ten minutes; " but," she added, " He measures not His mercies to His people." Some one remarked, "How patiently she bears all! " when a look of anguish came over her countenance, and she whispered, " Not my patience—there is no patience but in Jesus. He sweat great drops of blood for me; how great must have been His agony in the garden ! "

On the first verse of " Rock of Ages " being repeated to her, she said, " I am on a firm foundation—Satan, death, or life, cannot shake me; when resting there, I feel very safe and happy."

On her little boy being brought to wish her good night, she kissed him affectionately and said to him, " Remember Jesus," which were her last words to him.

Here I conclude my extract from the above account, which to some of my readers may appear to be rather incongruous with the purport of these pages. I at first hesitated to give the extract at the length I have done. But as I wish to guard most decidedly against any appearance of intending, by my remarks on the meaning of " The Valley of the Shadow of Death," to detract from the blessed truth of our gracious Lord's especial presence with His departing saints, or to deprive them of the comfort of it; and as I have derived great blessing myself from the reading of the above account, which is little known; I thought it wrong to withhold, or even to shorten it more than I have done already. These pages are not written to meet the views or tastes of a certain portion of the flock, but for the benefit and comfort of the flock of God at large, as far as this can be done without sacrificing Divine truth. And if only one single, feeble, and suffering sheep or lamb of Christ's precious flock has derived strength and comfort for the hour of conflict from these pages, I shall feel amply rewarded.

We now proceed in our meditation.

" Thy staff and thy rod, they comfort me."

It is evident that the words " Staff" and " Rod"17 do not imply "correction " or " chastisement ;" whether my Christian reader take the " Valley of the Shadow of Death " for this world, as a scene of death, or for death, the hour of departure, itself. For, if applied to a believer's life in this world, it is evident, from the Word, that " Staff " and " Rod " cannot mean correction," as many take it;—for " no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous," whatever the result may be, and therefore it could not be said in this sense, " they comfort me." But if applied to the hour of death or departure, how could we for a moment entertain the thought of Christ " chastening " or " correcting " His suffering ones at that moment? The very thought would be monstrous. " Thy Staff and thy Rod they comfort me." Thus it is clear that the meaning of those two words must be a widely different one, viz., " Staff " in the sense of " support," and " Rod " in the sense of " power axed authority," as it was in the hand of Moses, when he lifted up his rod and stretched out his hand over the Red Sea, and the waters were divided, and the people walked on dry land in the midst of the sea. So the " Staff and Rod of Him, of Whom Moses and his rod is a type, support and comfort His feeble flock, whilst passing through the " Valley of the Shadow of Death," so that we can always say, if truly leaning upon Him, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

When Bethany, that little " green spot " of true refreshment to the heart of that heavenly Stranger, Whose meat and drink it was to do the will of His Father Who sent Him, had, for a time, assumed the general character of the " Valley of the Shadow of Death," and bore the deserted aspect of death ; when every head and heart there was bowed under the shadow or power of death, which had asserted its claim even upon him whom the Lord loved ; there was One, moving in that place of death and a consternation with the calmness of Divine Majesty. He could say, I am the resurrection and the life." His head was shining in the sunlight of resurrection, whilst His feet were walking through the dark " Valley of the Shadow of Death," until that blessed glorious head itself was bowed upon the cross, but only to utter the words, " It is finished! " Was it not the Staff of that good and great Shepherd that supported and comforted those two drooping lambs of His flock with the words, " He that believeth in me, though He were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth believeth in me, shall never die,"—before He lifted up the Rod of authority and power at the mouth of the grave, and spoke the word of Divine command, "Lazarus, come forth!"

Christian reader, is one of your beloved ones sick? Or has it pleased God, Who "moves in a mysterious way," to take away your Lazarus, or your Isaac, or Rachel? Remember, the "Staff and Rod " of His Son are ready to support and comfort every drooping, anxious, bleating sheep and lamb of His flock, as He Himself is ever the same, " Jesus Christ yesterday, and to-day, and for ever! " If our all-wise and all-gracious Gal and Father, the God Who blessed His servants Jacob and Job more in taking away than in giving, (heartbreaking work though it was to them, for the time), has seen fit to bless you in the same way; beloved, do not be discouraged under the " rod of correction," applied by the band of a Father Who did not spare His only begotten Son, but delivered Him up for us, and laid the " chastisement of our peace " upon Him, that by His stripes we might be healed. Such a hand cannot inflict one needless pang, nor cause one single needless tear. He knows how to make us taste the sweetness of His love, whilst feeling the (natural) bitterness of the rod. And cannot we, beloved, acknowledge the Father's " rod of correction " in a way very different to that of Job?18 We can begin where Job ended. Job said, " The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord !" We are enabled, through his wondrous grace, to say, " Blessed be the name of the Lord. He has only taken away, to give me all the more—not earthly blessings, as He gave afterwards to Jacob and Job—but to give Himself to me more fully."—Sad idolatrous hearts of ours, that require so often the withdrawal of a gift of that loving God, that we may be weaned from the creature, and return to and appreciate the loving grace, that is not wearied with repeating those painful lessons so often needed.

But beloved, if we through grace have learnt to submit to the " rod of correction," as applied by the hand of a loving Father, we shall surely experience the comfort and power of the " Staff and Rod," held and wielded by His Son, the blessed Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. His eye, once, before it closed in death, weeping with those that wept at the grave of Lazarus, now surveys from the height and light of glory, where He is seated at the right hand of God, all the sheep and lambs of His flock, as we are winding our way through this narrow and dark " Valley of the Shadow of Death," often scattered at the side of its dark mountains, and " fainting, yet pursuing," knowing that His " Staff and Rod ' comfort us.

I have alluded, in passing, to the Lord's gracious dealings with His servant Job, who in himself is a figure of God's discipline with Israel (who were "going about to establish their own righteousness,") and of the unprecedented blessing that will result from it through God's marvelous grace. Let me now add a few words as to God's no less gracious ways with His servant Jacob,19 whose checkered life prefigures, like that of Job, the discipline and blessing of Israel.

In the long list of that bright and glorious cloud of witnesses of faith in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find " Jacob, when a dying." There was not much testimony of faith in Jacob's life, (only that he was not profane like Esau.) His faith was manifested on his quitting the " Valley of the Shadow of Death." What a halo there was around that death-bed, where the old Patriarch " blessed the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." When he, a homeless youth, had fled from his father's house and the fury of Esau, he had nothing but this staff,—the bare ground for his bed, and a stone for his pillow.20 It was then and there that the Lord had said to him, " Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land ; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

And how that blessed God, Who is faithful and " able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless with exceeding joy before the presence of his glory "—kept His poor faltering sheep, Jacob, during his adventurous life though indeed, sheep-like, he had often lost his way. God kept and blessed Jacob, in spite of Jacob, from the moment when He, from the top of that heaven-and-earth -uniting ladder, which was covered with the bright messengers a heaven, had announced to the sleeping solitary youth His intentions of blessing him, until Jacob's last hour, when the hoary Patriarch, on his death bed, blessed the sons of Joseph, counting on the promises of Him Who had roved so faithful to Jacob.

But what a retrospect from that death-bed to the starting upon his checkered life's journey, marked by the heavenward ladder of blessing! Could Jacob ever forget that ladder? Just as little as Peter ever forgot the transfiguration on the holy Mount, when a voice spoke to him, and to those with him, from the excellent glory, " This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased! " Just as little as Paul could forget what he had seen and heard, when caught up, beyond the top of the ladder, into the third heaven. And yet, had not Peter, when he was young, and girded himself, and went whither he would, practically forgotten that he had seen that glorious One on the holy mount, and heard such a voice?—he thrice denied his Lord and Master. And had not Jacob, when he was young, and even when he was older, often acted as if he had never seen that glorious vision, nor heard that gracious voice, which spoke to him from the top of that ladder ? Alas ! the very staff in his hands was the memorial of Jacob's own ways and strayings. Had he not, during his changeful life, been wont to lean upon his staff, only not in the dependent posture of worship, but in self-confidence ? Had he not, instead of waiting upon the Lord and biding His time, constantly turned to his own resources, trusting in his own deceitful heart, or in his own strength, or the clever contrivances of his ingenious spirit, to forestall the accomplishment of the promises of God given to his fathers and to himself ? But " the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,"—the God Who had " hated Esau and loved Jacob "—had broken that rotten staff and shown Jacob the folly of leaning upon it. God had, by a life-long discipline, produced in Jacob those three blessed things, which the most excellent of his royal descendants had acquired, through the same grace, by way of deepest exercise and discipline after a grievous fall; I mean those three blessings mentioned in the 51St Psalm.

Broken bones (the seat of man's natural strength).

A broken spirit (man's natural wisdom, plans, and contrivances).

A broken and contrite heart (the seat of man's idolatrous affections).

Yes, Christian reader, He makes the bones which He has broken, rejoice. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart God will not despise. Jacob's death-bed was a proof of it.

The staff upon which the dying Patriarch was leaning, was not only a memorial of his own many strayings by following his own ways, but, at the same time, of God's long suffering and patience, and faithfulness to the promise He gave Jacob on the outset of his adventurous life, the days of which were " few and evil," as the aged pilgrim said before King Pharaoh. And, just as the staff upon which the dying body of the Patriarch was leaning, did not break under the weight, and thus proved to be a true and firm support, so Jacob, when at last he had learnt to rely fully and unreservedly on the Lord, and to lean upon Him—not half, but wholly—had found that he could not sink with such a prop, and that that staff could never break, but was his support and comfort. Although in Egypt, whither he had come by God's direction, he was not

now leaning upon the “staff of Egypt, which pierces the hand that leans upon it," but he had learnt that " in quietness and confidence shall be our strength." And, just as his body was leaning upon that memorable and, for Jacob, so characteristic “staff," so his whole soul was leaning at the moment of his exit from the " Valley of the Shadow of Death," upon Him, whose " Staff and Rod " comfort those who trust in Him, and Who had said to Jacob, " Fear not, I am with thee." What a scene of worship! though only in an Old Testament sense. " Lord, I have waited for thy salvation!" What moments full of brightness were those last hours of dying Jacob ! At the outset of his life, when awaking from his vision at the foot of that ladder, he had said, " What a dreadful place is this! " When on his deathbed—a dreadful place indeed to every stranger to the grace of God!—Jacob is lost—in worship ! "All is bright." He exclaims, " I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord ! "

There was not only the humbling retrospect of the past, but the looking onward, though dimly, through a long, long vista, as it were, to the final accomplishment, in millennial glory, of the promises of God, given to his fathers Abraham—and Isaac—and to himself, when the vision of that heavenly ladder will become a blissful reality ; when " the Lord will hear the heavens, and the heavens shall hear the earth ; and the earth shall hear the corn and the wine and the oil ; and they shall hear Jezreel ;" and when heaven will be " open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." No doubt the dim eye of dying Jacob, who then was wiser than Joseph, caught sight, like dying Moses from the top of Pisgah, of that millennial day of the Lord, which Abraham longed to see and,—he saw it.21

" Thy staff and thy rod, they comfort me."

It was the staff of the blessed Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, that supported and comforted His sheep, scattered at His death, and gathered again at the news of His resurrection, when He hailed them with that message of unspeakable blessing and comfort, " Peace be unto you! " and " Why are ye troubled? Handle me! " And it was His rod of authority that directed the inhabitants of the element of death to the nets of His disciples, and invested restored Peter with the oversight of His flock.

And do not we, Christian reader, whilst walking through the " Valley of the Shadow of Death," and daily proving it to be such, sweetly experience the support and comfort of His staff and rod, Who is a very present help in trouble, and has said, " I will never leave thee nor forsake thee! " So that we may boldly say, not only, " The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want," but " The Lord is my helper ; I will not fear. What can man do unto me? "

He breaketh the staff of the wicked ; but the poor of His oppressed flock, whose hearts are attached to His person, He feedeth with the " Staves of beauty and bands." So He did at the time of His presence on earth, when His own received Him not, but " weighed for his price thirty pieces of silver." And so He did at the time of the apostolic mission in Israel, when the poor of the flock for His name's sake were " counted as sheep for the slaughter." And that staff of " Beauty " and that of Band," and that of support and comfort, and His rod of authority, has been at all times of the Christian era, and is still in these perilous latter days, wielded by the tender and yet almighty hand of the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

" He visits those that are cut off [or hidden]. He seeketh the young one, and healeth that that is broken, and feedeth and beareth that that standeth still."

" Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy staff and thy rod they comfort me!" Blessed for ever be Thy gracious and glorious name.

Green Pastures and Still Waters, Third Degree. Jesus, the Bishop of Our Souls. (23:3)

v, 3. " He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake."

How infinitely blessed! And yet how sad and humbling, that, after having tasted the loving-kindness of that Shepherd, Who never suffers us to lack any good thing, and after having enjoyed the green pastures and the still waters of His provision, straying should ever occur, and restoration be needed! Wretched hearts of ours, that require it, and blessed grace, that is ever ready to restore, even such wanderers from His person and pasture. Wonderful is the restoring grace of the " Shepherd and Bishop of our souls," no less wonderful than His saving grace as our Saviour. But how humbling! For the saving grace of God was extended to, and exercised on behalf of a wretched, rebellious creature, a sinner blinded by Satan and sin (though none the less guilty on that account) ; but Divine restoring grace is exercised, by the blessed Bishop of our souls; towards those who have been washed and bought by His own blood, have been brought to God and made children of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, sealed by the Holy Ghost, and made to know the Shepherd's voice—in whose hearts the love of God has been shed abroad—who have tasted that the Lord is gracious—who have been made to lie down by that tender Shepherd in the " tender herbs " of His pastures, and led by Him " beside the still waters." Is not the strayer from such love and grace far more culpable than the stranger (by nature) to that grace? Is not the sheep that has turned away from such a Shepherd and such a pasture, far more guilty than those who, like natural sheep, had lost their way? Strange as may sound the murmurings of Israel, " Our soul loatheth this light food," when they had been daily fed with " angels' food," and to hear them express their preference for the onions, garlic, and fleshpots of Egypt ; yet what about the wanderings and secret hankerings after Egypt, on the part of those who have been fed with the " bread of God," and yet betray, not in so many words, but by their actions and demeanour, the same sentiments!

Christian reader! The prince and god of this world is now-a-days more than ever busy, to provide pastures for straying and half-hearted Lots! Alas! that there should be so many in these days of widely-spread scriptural knowledge!

A few words on the characters of Abraham and Lot, may not be out of place here, familiar as the subject may be to most of my Christian readers.

What formed the striking difference between Lot and Abraham? Lot chose for himself, whilst Abraham left it to God to choose for him.

" And Abraham said unto Lot: Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee" (not before us)? " Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me, &c." (Gen. 13)

Mark, reader, the following verse:-

" And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar."

Lot's eyes and heart were set on those meadows around Sodom, which were not the green pastures of our Psalm, though they looked like " the garden of the Lord "—that Paradise, from whence man had been expelled. Lot wanted to lay 'himself down in those green pastures, and he did not know that the ground was volcanic, i. e., ready for judgment. He wanted to pitch his tent beside those waters, that rendered that plain so fertile. But, alas! they were not like the " still waters "—those " waters of rest," beside which our gracious Shepherd leads His flock.

We read in the following verses:—

" Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan ; and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent towards Sodom."

Mark the solemn " But" in the next verse:" But the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly."

The battlements of wicked Sodom, arising in the midst of those well-watered plains, were no harrier to Lot. He pitched his tent towards Sodom. The company of the wicked, to be anticipated, did not make him recoil from his choice. The country around Sodom bore a beautiful aspect to the natural taste, and Lot's eyes, being so eagerly fixed on the alluring scene, overlooked the tower of Sodom, which ought to have been to him like a warning finger, or beacon, reared amidst those alluring fields and gardens. The placid waters, that rendered those plains so attractive and fertile, were soon to reflect the fire and brimstone that was to rain from heaven, and turn them into a scene of black and monotonous destruction. The substratum or foundation of those fertile plains was volcanic (I mean, spiritually) and the atmosphere bore the oppressive character of the approaching judgments of God. Abraham saw and felt this; Lot perceived it not. Whilst his worldly eyes were on the green pastures of Sodom, Abraham's heart was " desiring a better country.' Whilst Lot pitched his tent towards wicked Sodom,1 Abraham's eyes were looking, and he was pitching his tent towards a heavenly city, " whose builder and maker is God." Canaan, the Land of Promise at the time, was for him only a " burial-place." In Egypt, whither famine had driven him, Abraham had learnt a lesson: not to make nor follow his own choice, but to leave it to the Lord-

It was the same as that which, many centuries after him, was expressed by the inspired pens of two of his most excellent royal descendants, namely

" Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." (Psalm 37:3).

"Wait on the Lord and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it." (v. 34).

" Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." (v. 4, 5.)

" Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him." (v. 7).

" In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." 'Prov. 3:6).

" Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established." (Prov. 16:3).

Let us just look for a moment at the different results of Lot's and Abraham's ways. Already in the next (14) chapter, Lot is made to taste the bitter fruits of his own sad choice. But at the same time, the Lord delivers him, in His mercy, by the hand of his slighted relation. But Lot would not be delivered. He again runs blindfold into the same net, where he day after day " vexed his righteous soul " (for he was a righteous man, after all, in his dealings with his neighbors, and keeping his garments unspotted from the flesh of Sodom, though, alas, not unspotted from the world), in being obliged to witness their " filthy conversation," without the power of witnessing or protesting against them, which he had lost by his very dwelling amongst them. His tent had disappeared, soon after it had been pitched " towards Sodom." From the approaches of Sodom to its " gates," there is but one step. We find him seated under the gate of Sodom, the place of the ancient world's honor and traffic. Finally, he has to be plucked out from the fire like a brand, and is " saved through fire," whilst his wife is turned into a pillar of salt. Again he makes one of those " towns " his refuge (for " is it not a little one?"), till at last, afraid to stay there any longer, lie flees to a cave in the mountain, there to disappear in sinful gloom from the scene, after having become the father of the Ammonites and Moabites, those inveterate and constant enemies of the seed of Abraham, i.e.— of the people of God.

Let us now turn from this sad picture of a worldly believer's choice, course, and end, to the blessed result of Abraham's walk of faith.

After Lot had lifted up his eyes and chosen for himself, we read in the same chapter:-

" And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him:

" Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. . . . Arise, walk through the land, in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee."

And whilst his unhappy kinsman pitched his tent, towards Sodom, " Abraham removed his tent and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre . . , and built there an altar unto the Lord." There he dwelt under the safe shadow of the wings of the Almighty, in the calmness, peace, and joy of worshipful communion with his God. From thence he went forth, in the strength of that communion and dependence, with his three hundred

and eighteen servants, born in his house2, to rescue his kinsman from the united power of those four kings. And after his wondrous meeting with that most blessed, mysterious. king and priest, and receiving from him bread and wine, the symbols of strength, joy, and blessing,3 and the blessing of " the most High God, possessor of heaven and earth," and after giving unto Melchisedek, as to the greater one, the tithes of all, whilst refusing to accept even so much as a thread or a shoe-latchet from the king of Sodom, " lest he should say that he had made Abraham rich," Abraham hears those words of blessing from the Lord: " I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

Again in. the peaceful retreat of Mature, where the Lord made Abraham and his house to lie down in green pastures, and led him beside the still waters, whilst Lot daily vexed his soul in Sodom, we are permitted to witness that unique scene of never fading freshness, recorded by the Holy Ghost, in the epistle to the Hebrews, as a pattern of hospitality. It is a scene, nowhere else to be met with throughout the pages of Holy Writ, except at Bethany, where we find the same wondrous Divine Guest—but under what different circumstances!—not going to judge, but ready to undergo the judgment due to us!

At Mamre it is, that we behold the Lord Himself, (Who was Abraham's shield and his great reward), with two of His mighty angels, seated under the shadow of those trees that covered Abraham's humble abode, partaking of His servant's hospitality, and leaving, before His departure, the royal boon of the promise of a son and heir. Is there any scene of the most luxurious earthly hospitality offered to royalty, gracing by its presence the splendid abode of some great favored vassal, to be compared to this picture of primitive hospitality, truly divine in its simplicity? But this scene of divine and patriarchal simplicity is followed by one of divine grandeur.

" And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way."

" And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

And then follows that wondrous scene where the Lord announces judgment to be imminent upon Sodom and Gomorrah. His two companions have withdrawn and gone before with heavenly discretion, for their Master's departing words of familiar favor to Abraham. The latter pleads for the doomed city before One, Who was always willing to listen to the voice of intercession, wherever this could be done without sacrificing what was due to divine holiness, righteousness, and truth, the claims of which He Himself was one day fully to meet upon the Cross. Where is there an intercessor and advocate like Himself, Who so willingly listened and responded to Abraham's intercession? I need not dwell on this sublime scene; for what heart, taught by divine grace, has not feasted upon portions like Abraham's pleading for Sodom, or Moses' intercession for the people on the Mount of Horeb? Comments upon such scenes, where divine majesty and condescending grace combine, so that even angels, though desiring to look into these things, withdraw in heavenly modesty, would appear so much like an intrusion, that one can but follow their example; only praying that reader and writer, like those two exalted servants of God, might learn to be more truly alone with God, in order to inhale more of the pure heavenly atmosphere of such scenes, and to carry with them from the mountain, the intended blessing in power and grace.

A few words as to the closing scene in the next chapter. On the following morning Abraham stood again on the same spot, where he had pleaded so touchingly and earnestly for those cities.

" And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord."

What a change did his eyes behold!

" And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace."

Where were those well watered green pastures that looked like the garden of the Lord, and had attracted the worldly eyes of Lot? An immense black, desolate, charred plain, was all that met Abraham's eyes; and arising from it, the smoke of Sodom and Gomorrah, like the " smoke of Babylon the great," that will rise at a future, not very distant period. The proud cities had been turned into ashes ; the alluring green, and blossoms, and fruits of those treacherous pastures and gardens, had become smoke; and the placid waters that made them so fresh, lovely, and fertile, had merged into the still waters of the Dead Sea, which now covers the spot, where once the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life had their sway, and feasted on the gay-looking but hollow " apples of Sodom," the contents of which are " dust and ashes! "

Christian Reader!! Beware of the " apples of Sodom,"4 those fruits so enticing in appearance, that have been said to grow on the shores of the Dead Sea, on the spot where once Sodom and Gomorrah stood.

There was once a disciple, the youngest and the oldest of the apostles, who knew what it was to lie down in green pastures, and to be led beside the still waters by Jehovah—Jesus; for he was wont to lean on the bosom of that Good Shepherd, to listen, as it were, to the movements of that heart of love, and to drink from His lips the words of grace, and truth, and life. It is through the pen of that disciple that the Spirit addresses to us, dear reader, those words of warning

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever."

Dear fellow-Christian! Remember; this world indeed will pass away. The great fire of Sodom and Gomorrah will be followed one day by a still greater and more solemn conflagration, In the Second Epistle of the Apostle Peter, we read:-

" The heavens and earth which are now, by the same word " (by which the old world perished, being overflowed with water) " are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,5 in

the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat ; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up."

" Seeing then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat ?"

" Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

" Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

Beloved Christian reader! Fellow-pilgrim and fellow-heir of glory with Christ! Bear with me, if I have enlarged upon the solemn subject of backsliding more than you may deem compatible with the verse in contemplation. But if one looks at the fearfully rapid strides which worldliness makes amongst the flock of God—and not only amongst the younger portion of that flock—one can but hide one's face before God in the dust, and weep over our common shame and reproach, which we have brought upon God's testimony! Surely, it behooves us to say, not only like Daniel, " We have sinned," but to add, like Nehemiah, (when he was himself in the place), " I have sinned." Why is the gold become dim and the most fine gold changed? Is it not because we have become rich and increased with goods, instead of buying of Christ Jesus that " gold, tried in the fire,' to be bought of Him alone? And how is it that we have become rich and increased with goods? Is it not because we would be rich? And why would we be rich in this world? Because we had " left our first love " —and therefore the " love of money, which is the root of all evil," has come in; and the love for the things of Egypt, its honours, and pleasures, and treasures—the very things which Moses refused, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. How is it that we are not "valiant for the truth upon the earth?" Is it not, because we have lost the secret strength of our Nazariteship in the treacherous friendships of this world? Alas! how many a " man of valour," how many a champion of Christ, has been, or is being, delilalized6 in the enervating embrace of the world!

But remember, Christian reader, that the same Lord Who reproved His backsliding people of old, and only judged " backsliding Israel," because she had justified herself more than treacherous Judah," invited them again and again, before He judged them, with that touching appeal," Turn, oh backsliding children, saith the Lord, . . . and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."

And had not God given unto you, once a sinner of the Gentiles, that true Pastor, in Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd? He had fed your soul indeed with knowledge and understanding, by His Spirit, in the blissful pastures of His Word, and refreshed your heart beside the still waters of His provision He had made you to taste His grace and loving-kindness. And yet you had turned aside, worse than the prodigal, who turned his back upon his father, and upon his father's home, before he really knew the love and grace of that father. You have turned your back, not only upon the Father, but upon His blessed Son too, Who had left His Father's house, to tell out His Father's heart to prodigals like you and me, in order to bring us through His cross unto that Father, of Whose person He Himself was, and is, the express image, as He was, and is, the brightness of glory. You have turned away from that Shepherd Who came to seek and save the lost, you among the rest, and to carry you on. His shoulders home rejoicing. You have turned His rejoicing into grief. Have you considered, Whom you are thus grieving and slighting, in turning your back upon such a Shepherd, and slighting His pasture? Alas, alas, you have forgotten the price with which that Shepherd has bought you, even His own blood.

There was a time when your eye, in the power of an ungrieved Spirit, and with the ardour of first love, was fixed on His blessed person, Who is " altogether lovely," so that you saw no beauty nor comeliness in the things of this world, that you should desire them, and they were unto you like " roots out of a dry ground."

You had been made to hear the voice of that Good Shepherd, Who spoke to you, on the day of salvation: " Thy sins are forgiven! go in peace! " You knew that voice, you loved it and followed it. With the eagerness of the new-born babe, you turned to the sincere milk of His Word. You had learnt to say, " Abba, Father," unto His Father and God, because that blessed God had sent the Spirit of His Son into your heart, and, in the power of that Holy Spirit you held sweet communion with your fellow-Christians. You worshipped God in the beauty of holiness. together with His redeemed people, and at the Table of His dear Son. You remembered Him, Whose love was stronger than death, and Whose body was given for you, and His blood shed for the remission of your sins; and your joy was full, and your cup running over. But, alas! those are bygone days, and the sorrowful words of Lamentations are yours: "The joy of my heart is ceased; my dance is turned into mourning. The crown is fallen from my head." I will not inquire how long you have turned away from that Good Shepherd, and have slighted His and your gracious Father's love, and grieved His Holy Spirit; nor how it was you turned from such a pasture to the meadows of Sodom, and, perhaps, more than Lot, to its unrighteousness and fleshly lusts, too, that defile body and mind? " Where art thou? " That first question, addressed so solemnly by a pitiful, but holy God to His creature, fallen amidst the abundance of an earthly Paradise—does it not, with double and threefold force and solemnity, apply to a fallen child of God, heavenly in calling, heavenly by birth, heavenly in blessing, heavenly in position and character, and with a heavenly and glorious hope? "Remember, from whence thou art fallen!

Here I stop—bowing thyself first of all under the sense of my own repeated wanderings from my loving Shepherd's heart and pastures, but owning thankfully the grace of Him Who has restored, and does restore, my soul. But if these lines should happen to meet the eye of a backslider, and draw forth a tear of genuine godly sorrow and repentance, I will bless God for it! Do not despair, weeping and repentant one! Christ does not despair of you, hard and thick as the icy crust may have grown, with which the world around, or the flesh within, has encased your poor wretched heart, that was once basking in the sunshine of His love and grace. Do not despair! Sad and grievous indeed, and dishonouring to that blessed Saviour Shepherd's name, has been your defect, your fall, and wandering from such love and grace! No wonder that your happiness is gone, remembering from whence you have fallen. Those seasons of quiet, unclouded, practical peace, the result of a conscience kept sweet and undefiled under the holy eye of a gracious God, are bygone times, "gone for ever," Satan would whisper. That blessed Divine Comforter within you, Who filled you with joy and peace, has become a stern Reprover, because you have preferred and sought the comforts of the world without, "where our Lord was crucified," and you have made provisions for the flesh. (Hebrews 10) Or, worse still, perhaps you have, by slighting the rebuking voice of the Exhorter (as you previously had slighted His comforting voice), succeeded in silencing at last that grieved Divine heavenly Guest altogether for the time ; and you are floating along with the current of the world,

apparently quiet, yea, even happy, as far as this can be said of one, who has, like the sow, returned to the wallowing in the mire—the natural element—and, like the dog, to his own vomit—happy, if you can only succeed in forgetting that you were once happy. Poor, poor wanderer! From the feast of the fatted calf, and from the joy of the Father's house, you have turned back again to the " husks of the swine." It seems as if you had pawned to the world the very " shoes from your feet," if not the " ring from your finger," and taken again to the old filthy rags.

The company of your brethren and the assemblies, you seem to dread, and yet to yearn for them. The enemy, taking advantage of a harsh word or ungracious demeanour towards you, on the part of some stern, though faithful, or of some ungracious brother, whispers to you (for remember, he is always " the accuser of the brethren "), that you have lost their confidence for ever, and that therefore they do not want you in their company, as being only felt to be a dead weight among them and a dishonour to the Lord's name and His testimony.

Most of this, if not all, is, of course, quite true; and the best way to frustrate the intention of the accuser is, to own that it is true. This at once must silence the accuser, who wants you to believe that your brethren judge you, to prevent you from judging yourself, that is, to prevent your restoration. Or he seeks to lead you into despair (for his wiles are manifold), under pretense of self-judgment. Where Satan works in the conscience of a backslider, he never will lead him to the Word of God for true self-judgment, but he will try to use it as a weapon, to frighten and harden a stray one of God's flock into despair. It is a terrible chastisement on the part of God, when Satan is permitted thus to gain ground and power in the conscience, and to turn even the medicine of the Word into poison, by misquoting and misapplying it. The writer of this heard of a case, where a Christian, a preacher of the Gospel, who had been used in blessing, had been living for a long time in a secret course of sin. Satan at last acquired such a power over him (his conscience being constantly practically defiled), that he lost all assurance of salvation. He used to say, that he had been like a pipe, conveying blessings to others, whilst he himself was dry, and never had known them. (A new proof, by the way, how dangerous a thing it -is, for one who has no settled peace, to be engaged in service.) He took to reading novels, turning away from the Bible; " for that Book," he said, " only condemns me! " In this state of despair he remained for thirteen years! Then he fell into decline; when, shortly before he died, the Lord restored his soul to light and peace. Thirteen years of misery and despair! Solemn and warning example for every Christian, not to presume upon such a grace; nor, on the other hand, to despair of that grace, through listening to the old serpent, who would say, "your iniquity is greater than that it may be forgiven," or " your punishment is greater than you can bear."

" He restoreth my soul."

There is the saving grace of our Saviour, and there is the restoring grace of the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. And, as no sinner has gone too far for that grace to reach and to save him, so no sheep or lamb of His flock has ever gone too far astray for the restoring grace and love of Him who gave His life for us. When Jesus was on earth, His gracious ear was swift to hear, and to discern the feeblest cry of appeal to His mercy, from a needy one, whilst His tongue was not slow to speak the word of healing. He stopped at the cry of Bartimeus, which His disciples would fain have hushed, to keep the blind beggar away from Him, Who alone could heal him. And do you think, the apparent distance of glory, where He is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty, can prevent His hearing the feeblest bleating of one of the farthest stray-sheep of His flock? No, no, no! Jesus Christ is ever the same: yesterday, Jesus Christ—to-day, Jesus Christ—and for ever, Jesus Christ ! The same in all His fulness—the same in His power—the same in His love—the same in His wisdom—the same in His faithfulness—the same in His holiness—the same in His truth —the same in His sympathy—the same in His grace to save and to restore! Blessed be His name!

" He restoreth my soul."

Ah! do not listen to the suggestion of the enemy, who fain would make you believe that you are beyond the reach of the restoring grace of Jesus, the "Shepherd and Bishop of our souls," as he would make an awakened sinner believe that he is gone too far for God's saving grace in Jesus the Saviour.

" He restoreth my soul."

This is true and available for every stray one of His flock, just as it is true and available for every sinner, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save " sinners." The blessed whosoever " holds good as to the restoration of stray sheep, just as much as it does for unsaved sinners.7 It holds good, I repeat, for every stray one of His flock, without saying how far he had gone astray. David, the writer of this blessed Psalm, was himself a pattern of such restoration in the Old Testament, as the Apostle Peter was the great pattern of that wondrous restoring grace in the New Testament, and on Christian ground. Has any sheep strayed farther than David or Peter did? Alas! I repeat, alas! that straying from such a Shepherd and from such a pasture ever should occur! — A gloom has been cast over the bright aspect of those sunny green pastures in the preceding verse, with the flock of Christ reposing on its tender herbs in peaceful enjoyment. Sad wanderings have come in, and done dishonour to the name of that good and great Shepherd, Who has provided that pasture. But the Shepherd is also the High-Priest—blessed be His name! He intercedes for the stray ones, and the result and effect of that intercession is repentance and confession. The very tear that dims your eye, poor wandering one, and falls upon these leaves, is it not a proof, yea, the fruit of His intercession for you, just as Peter wept, because his thrice denied Lord had prayed for him. I only pray to God that this tear, the first fruit of Christ's intercession, may bring forth fruit meet for repentance, as it did in the case of Peter.

How blessed and re-assuring to our souls, to behold. Jesus, in the closing chapter of John's Gospel, accomplishing His work of restoring grace in the soul of Peter! Except the case of Judas Iscariot (who was none of His sheep, but the son of perdition),—there could hardly be a case of a fall, more dishonouring to the Lord. He had denied his Master thrice, and affirmed his lies with oaths, swearing and cursing! And yet, what perfect restoration do we find in this wonderful chapter, in that apparently desperate case of the most shameful defection, on the part of the chief of the Apostles, whom his Master had entrusted with the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven! If we behold in the first chapter of John's Gospel, the Son of God in His divers glories (closing with the glory of the Son of Man), in the last chapter we see Him as the gracious Shepherd, restoring His sheep.8 It is that adorable, divine, restoring grace, all human thoughts surpassing, extended on the part of that so sadly and shamefully requited, yet loving Shepherd, towards His stray sheep. Let us consider, in a few words, this true pattern-case of restoration, for the instruction, or, it may be, exercise of our souls.

Peter had thrice denied the Lord, whilst warming himself before the fire, side by side with his Master's enemies. What was it that made him go out, and the bitter tears of genuine repentance start from his eyes? It was Jesus' intercession for Peter, before he had denied the Lord. The

Lord had said to him, " I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail riot." (Compare 1 John 2)

"And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him: Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice ! "

" And Peter went out and wept bitterly."

Could Peter ever forget that look? No word accompanied it, but Peter felt pricked to the heart by it, just as much as those three thousand at Pentecost by restored Peter's words in the power of the Holy Spirit. That " look " was the last he saw of his liege Lord, disowned in so cowardly a way ; for we do not find any intimation in Scripture that Peter saw Jesus alive afterwards. But no doubt that look went with Peter wherever he went, not to drive him to the last act of despair,9 but to deepen in his soul, (by a thorough self-judgment as to that which had led to his fall,) the work of restoration, manifested in the first tears that responded to that look.

Scripture throws a veil over the whereabouts of Peter at the time of the crucifixion, death, and burial of the Lord, and it is not our part to try and lift it, any more than that which conceals those three days of deepest exercise in Paul's soul, when he was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink. The Lord told Ananias that Saul " prayed." But that eye, full of Divine love unspeakable, full of grace and truth, that gave unto Peter, before it was closed in death, the look of a thrice-denied and yet loving Saviour-Shepherd's reproach, to "restore his soul," opened in resurrection-life, full of grace and peace upon the repentant disciple on that bright and glorious morning, when the Lord " was seen of Cephas," first of all the apostles. Why was He seen of Peter first of all? Was it not to assure the stray one of his perfect forgiveness by his Lord and Saviour, Who had just been delivered up for his offences, and raised again for his justification? The apostle to whom Jesus had given the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, was no longer to lag behind with lingering steps under the sense of unpardoned guilt (as Peter had done on the same morning, when, on his way to the grave, he had suffered himself to be outrun by his gentle fellow apostle) but in the assurance of the grace that is in Him, Who is " the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls,"10 he was henceforth to take his place again as the chief of the apostles. All was settled between that good and great Shepherd, Whom the God of Peace had brought again from the dead, and His stray sheep, who was yet to be a shepherd of God's flock. All was settled in that quiet interview at an early hour of the resurrection morning. No eye, not even that of the disciple whom the Lord loved, was suffered to witness, no ear to listen to what passed between the Lord and His restored disciple, We only see the effect of it in the closing chapter of John's Gospel, where we no longer find Peter lagging behind but swimming ahead of all to the shore, the first to greet his Master.

The work of restoring grace had begun and deepened in the soul of Peter, but the outward test of its genuineness, the finishing touch, as it were, had not yet been applied. This we find here.

Thrice Peter had denied his Master; thrice the question is addressed to him: Lovest thou me ? " But this was not merely for bringing more closely home to his conscience the sin of his threefold denial, though, no doubt, reminding him of it; for that matter had been settled previously. It was done to put the knife to the quick, in order to make Peter judge the root of the evil, i.e. his self-confidence, which had brought him to fall.

For had not Peter said: " Although all shall be offended, yet will not I? " There was still more than self-confidence, that had made him say: " I will lay down my life for Thy sake; I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and unto death." It was his pride that made him, at the same time, speak disparagingly of the love of his fellow-disciples, implying, that their defection and desertion of their Master might be quite a possible thing; but his, Peter's, love to his Master, was so much deeper and truer than theirs, that so base a conduct was impossible for him.

Accordingly, the first question Jesus addresses to him is this: " Lovest thou me more than these ? " The word used for " Lovest thou " in the original in the two first questions of the Lord to Peter, implies love of the highest character, as we find it used of the love of God, (John iii. 16) where the Greek word is the same, and so in 1 John 3:4 and throughout the New Testament. That is, the Lord asks Peter, whether he loved Him with the highest, i.e. with perfect love; and, secondly, whether he loved Him more than his fellow-disciples did." To this Peter replies, " Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee, with the love of a friend." The Greek word is here cbag, as much as to say: " O Lord, how dare I, after my disgraceful conduct, presume to say, that I love Thee with the highest love! I love Thee with the love of a friend. That is all I may venture to say, after what I have learnt of my treacherous, wretched heart. And as to saying; I love Thee more than these, or, if all should be offended with Thee, I not, how dare I entertain even the thought of it? For if I am to be judged by my conduct, I love Thee less than all my fellow-disciples! " So Peter only replies: " Yea, Lord, I love Thee with the love of a friend."

To Peter's first answer, the Lord replies with: " Feed my lambs." To Peter's second reply, the answer is, `` Shepherd my sheep!" The second question of the Lord is put thus: "Lovest thou me with the highest love,"—leaving out " more than these? " The third time the Lord's question is " Lovest thou me with the love of a friend?" (adopting Peter's word). To this Peter grieved, replies: " Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee with the love of a friend." As if he had said: " Lord, I hope I have learnt at last, no longer to trust in my own heart, which is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. I had forgotten what is written in Thine own Word, O Lord: that, ' he that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool.' Therefore, instead of looking at the barren fig-tree for fruit, I cast myself on Thine omniscience, Who searchest the reins and the hearts. Thine eye, O Lord, saw my brother Nathanael, in whom there is no guile (would that I were now like him) when he was under the fig-tree. Thou Son of God, before Whose eyes all things are naked and open, I cast myself upon Thy grace, that foreknew and called me as it did Nathanael, that made me love Thee, as it opened my dear brother's heart; and upon Thine omniscience, that knows that I love Thee. I, therefore, can say nothing more than: ' Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee.' "

The probe of that skillful Physician, Who never misses the right spot, had been applied. The test had been made, and Peter had stood it. The work of restoration was complete, and so complete was it, that the Lord could honour His restored disciple, not only by committing to him the charge of His flock, but by foretelling him, that through divine grace, he was one day to glorify God by sacrificing his life in the service of his Master, Whom sacrificing had thrice denied.

What an honour, conferred upon one so deeply fallen, and only just restored! How unlike are our ways to God's ways.

And what, Christian reader, was the effect of this wondrous restoration as to Peter's service? Simply this, that forty days later, at Pentecost, the same apostle, who had denied his Master thrice, could charge his brethren of Israel with those memorable words, " Ye have denied the Holy One."

" What self-blinded hardihood!" natural and religious respectability would here exclaim. Man has a standard of his own, of what he calls " proper " or " becoming," according to which he regulates his actions and dealings with his fellow men. This standard is a " moral standard," and it is, of course, as far as it goes, necessary for this world, and better than none at all. But we must not forget, that what is moral is not always divine, though what is divine is always moral. And just as in the Old Testament we find that everything connected with the Tabernacle and service of God, was to be weighed with the " Shekel of the Sanctuary," i.e., by the divine measure, and not by a gauge of human conventionality; so a Christian, in dealing with his brethren, is to measure and judge everything according to the divine standard or measure, i.e., God's principles, as laid down in His word. Now these principles are those of holiness (implying, of course, truth and righteousness), and grace. Holiness becometh the House of God. This is paramount. But grace becometh the hearts of His saints.

Let us return for an illustration to Peter's case. Following the common notions of human propriety, he must certainly appear " out of place," when he, " standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice," thus taking the place of their spokesman, as it were, and then delivering that wondrous first gospel sermon, by which 3,000 were converted.

Peter was the proper spokesman of his fellow apostles, because he was the mouth-piece of the Spirit of God, just sent down from that glorified Jesus, Whom God had made Lord and Christ.11 And why could Peter be the mouth-piece of the Holy Spirit? Because Jesus Whom God had made both Lord and Christ, had restored him. Why could he, in the power of the Holy Ghost, Who is the " Spirit of truth," no less than the " Spirit of love," charge his hearers twice with having " denied the Holy One? " Simply because Christ had restored him. Human propriety would have said: "Why, common sense ought to have taught him better. Peter ought to have been the very last to take such a place amongst his fellow-apostles. And then, the very idea of his charging the people with having denied the Lord in the presence of Pilate! Must he not expect that they would turn round upon him and say, "How can you have the face to charge us with a thing you have done yourself?12 You accuse us of having denied Him in the presence of Pilate, whilst you denied Him before a maid-servant. We denied Him through ignorance, as you say yourself, but you denied the One Whom you had owned to be your Lord and Master and Rabbi, and Whom you had followed, and Whose bread you had eaten for more than three years. Are you the one to charge us with such a sin? "

Yes, Christian reader! Peter was the one, not his fellow apostles, who had not denied their Lord and Master. He had learnt through grace, in consequence of his fall, to loathe and judge his wretched self and flesh, perhaps more completely than others. He had thoroughly learnt the horribleness of that grievous sin, and judged the root (pride and self-confidence) that had produced it. And therefore he was the man to speak about it, whilst, at the same time, the grace which says, " Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more," had justified him from all that he had done, and thus enabled him to charge others with the same sin he had committed himself, because he was (O wondrous grace of God!) as perfectly cleared of it, as if he had never done it! That perfect divine grace had restored repentant Peter, and therefore the place he took under the guidance, and the power, and authority of the Holy Spirit, was owned, not only by his fellow-disciples, in whose presence the Lord had restored and invested him with authority, but by the people themselves, none of whom found any fault with what Peter said or did. On the contrary, " many of them that heard the word, believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand."

It might be said, Peter's service at Pentecost was gospel-service. But what about acting in the Church, on the part of one who had fallen and has been restored? Ought he not to "walk very softly " all the rest of his life? The reply is, that if he has been restored by Christ, as Peter was, the Spirit of God will own, and make his action owned, in the Church too. Did not Peter take the same prominent place in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, and had not his sin been that of lying, as was theirs (though not that of lying against the Holy Ghost, as in their case, for then the Holy Ghost had not yet been sent). And yet he charges them with the same sin he had committed in the aggravated way of denying his Lord.

" My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your -ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts:"

His word, through the mouth of Peter, did not return void unto Him, but it did accomplish that which He pleased, and it did prosper in the thing whereto He sent it.

" But," it may be said "grievous as Peter's sin was, it took place before the Holy Ghost had been sent, and therefore his case was very different from what it would have been after Pentecost." Granted; but this does not alter the principle of which I have spoken. For the same disciple, after Pentecost, relapsed into a sin of a similar kind, though not of equal gravity. From the same fear of men, that had made him deny his Master, he became guilty of dissimulation, and led others, and even Barnabas amongst them, astray with him into the same sin. He thus compromised the truth of the gospel, and " builded again the things he had destroyed." He had publicly to be rebuked by his fellow-apostle Paul, whose very act and words shewed the gravity of the sin. And was not Peter's sin all the graver on account of the place he held? And yet, where do we find, that Peter was for that reason kept aside from ministry? He evidently submitted to Paul's public rebuke, which was no small thing for a servant of Christ in his position, and the best proof, that he at once judged himself for it; and this was deemed sufficient.

Did the Holy Ghost suspend Peter for a certain time from the place and ministry for which Christ had called and appointed him?

I fear not a few of us are sadly in want of the same lesson, which legal Peter had to learn:

" What God has cleansed, that count not thou common." It is a solemn thing to count and to call " improper," what Christ and His Spirit have seen fit to declare proper " by the clearest and most striking cases in Holy Writ. But such will be the lamentable effect, whenever Christians lower the standard and measure of divine and eternal principles of truth ; seeking to adjust them to the scale of human notions of what is called " fit," or " becoming," or " proper:" This is not raising, but lowering the standard of truth as to discipline.

Christian reader! Beware of every human measure (often called " propriety," or good sense," or " common sense,") in divine matters. Such human principles, if acted upon as a guide for church action, are truly mischievous to the flock of God, and throw souls back under the power of the enemy.

Let us remember that the same gracious Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Who restored Peter, enjoins upon us in His Word by His Spirit:

" Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself; lest thou also be tempted."

What is meant by these words? Is it in our power to restore the soul of a stray sheep ? Certainly not. This is the work of Him only, Who is the " Bishop of our souls."

" He restoreth my soul."

None but Jesus could save us ; none but He can make us to lie down in green pastures ; none but He is able to lead us " beside the still waters ; " and none but He can restore a soul, when it has strayed.

" He restoreth my soul."

The restoring work of grace in the soul must be, from first to last, the work of our God and Saviour. Let us beware of restoring what the Lord has not restored, and, on the other hand, of refusing to own and to receive what He has restored! The usual result of such, too often, alas! fatal mistakes, is the hardening of the stray-one of Christ's flock, and the driving him away farther than ever, only that, even in such cases, the supreme rich grace of our blessed Lord can rise above the sad follies and sins of His disciples, and even of some of His pastors, in restoring the stray-one in spite of them, just as that wondrous grace knows how to bless us in spite of ourselves. Only this in no way lessens the solemn responsibility of those who thus destroy souls for whom Christ died.

What then is meant by the divine injunction to restore an erring brother? Simply, the same that the washing of the feet implies. Does not Christ now, as He did when on earth, only in a far higher sense, wash our feet with the washing of water by the Word? And yet He enjoins upon us to wash one another's feet. For though the whole work of grace, whether in salvation or in restoration, from the first movement of repentance towards God, till the final redemption of the body, is all of our thrice blessed God and Saviour, yet it has pleased Him to make such as we are, instruments of His grace, not only for saving sinners, but also for restoring backsliding children.

But in order to be thus instruments, vessels meet for the Master's use, everything depends upon the way and measure in which we have practically learnt to realize in our own souls that grace and love divine, to which we owe everything. And alas! how little, how deplorably little, have we practically learnt at the feet of the gracious Saviour, Shepherd, and Bishop of our souls, what that grace really is, upon which we daily have to live and to depend.

This humbling and alarming lack of practical grace. is not so much manifested in the work of evangelization (though even there it betrays itself often), but especially in cases where the restoration of the soul of a stray saint is in question.13

We have learnt, through grace, to look at an unconverted one, as he is, not as he ought to be, remembering the loving-kindness of our God and Saviour, that has appeared_ unto us, who were once hateful, and hating one another, even as others. But, brethren, do we not look too often at an erring brother, only as he ought to be, forgetting, not what we were, but what we are in ourselves?

I need hardly add, that I am speaking now of personal grace in individual dealing with Christians, (though here as well as in the case of church action, that grace cannot be true grace, if disconnected with truth), and not of church discipline. I would not for a moment appear to advocate, even in the remotest way, laxity in church discipline. " Holiness becometh thine house for ever." It is only the lack of personal grace in our individual dealing with our fellow-Christians, that I mourn over.

An eye, quick to discern something wrong in a fellow-Christian, is no proof of spirituality, but only, too often, of the very opposite. Such a sharp lynx-eye may be an indispensable requisite for a detective, but it is certainly not a commendable quality in a Christian. If I look at my fellow-Christian with a gracious eye, I see first of all in him that which is Christ-like, that which God has wrought in him, and I say: " How much there is in that brother that is like Christ, whilst in myself I find the very opposite."

A gracious and spiritual eye, at the same time, is quick to perceive that which dishonours the Lord in doctrine or practice, and the heart that belongs to that eye, is grieved and humbled to see it, and ready to pray for the one in whom such evil is seen ; to gird himself with the towel (I do not mean to say, in the presence of him whose feet are to be washed14), and to stoop low, to get at his feet and wash them, which, of course, cannot be done behind his back ; and, if necessary, to deal with the evil itself, and withdraw from it, if it is not judged ; to " put away that wicked person from amongst us," where this extreme case of discipline unhappily should be needed15. But with what deep sense of our common shame, with what confession and " eating of the sin offering," with what prayer, and tears, and humiliation, will such an one join in such an extreme act! And how will such a gracious heart yearn after the excluded and stray one of the flock of God. How will his gracious eye look after him, and his heart go out in ceaseless prayer before God, in the blessed name of Jesus, the great High Priest, Who ever liveth to make intercession for His people. Does not He behold and know the misery, and the wretchedness of that stray sheep, going away farther and farther from Him, and the green pastures and the still waters of His own loving provision? And does not the Father's eye, that once was looking out for the returning prodigal, follow the poor wandering child in his backsliding course, waiting for the moment when he shall return, not only broken, but melted down under that Father's chastening hand, which is as gentle as it is mighty.

And does not that blessed Holy Spirit of God, once sent into the heart of that unhappy " relapsed prodigal," when first he felt the father's kiss, and stammering, responded with " Abba, Father; "—does not this Holy Spirit, though grieved, at the same time make intercession for that stray one with " groanings which cannot be uttered? " whilst in Heaven, Christ Himself, the Saviour, Shepherd, and Bishop of that soul, utters His never-failing voice of intercession, as High Priest, and Advocate with the Father, the effect of which will surely be the tear of repentance,

and the words, " Father, I have sinned." The Father looks out for that stray one; the Son intercedes for him, and the Spirit does the same. Christian reader, are you doing the same? Have you ever wandered from such a Father? Have you ever strayed from that Shepherd and from His Pasture? Have you ever grieved that Holy Spirit of adoption? And if so, how far had you wandered? Did it require less divine grace to restore you, than it will for the restoration of this brother or sister, whose "sad course," you say, has so much "shocked " or "pained " you? Depend upon it, whenever you feel anger or bitterness arise within you at the failure of a fellow-Christian, it is a sure proof that you never have really judged the same thing in yourself, which, seen in your brother, excites your anger. And if we, in seeing anything wrong in a fellow-Christian, do not at the same time judge the same thing in ourselves, we are not in a fit condition to wash his feet, and to restore the stray one.

" Ye that are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of meekness."16

How, then, are we to restore one another?

In a twofold way. First, by avoiding every-. thing that would give a handle to "the Accuser," in our manners and words towards the stray-one, so as to shut up his heart, and to harden his conscience still more; and secondly, by owning and aiding the work of God's restoring grace in such a soul, as far as it is manifested, without going beyond it, lest we should hinder the work of restoration, instead of aiding and strengthening it. We must not seek to be more gracious than God Himself. Over-strictness and laxity are the two extremes, between which it is all-important to steer, especially in cases of discipline. I am afraid we err most on the former side, i.e., by over-strictness,17 It is, alas! not so rare an occurrence, to hear the confession of a stray-one, and his desire for restoration to the Lord's Table, spurned with such words as these: " No, he is not yet sufficiently broken down,' he has not yet felt deeply enough, and judged the sin." " Then," another adds, " he, or she must be reminded of the sin, till it be judged." Such language, except in cases where the whole demeanour, and the gravest facts, show unmistakably that the repentance is a mere profession, is truly sad! Another case of no rare occurrence, is that of a saint, who has been under discipline, but restored, being constantly kept with a stigma upon his character, or under " censure," as some express it, just as if he were a ticket-of-leave-man, who must be kept for some years under the surveillance of the police. He has to run the gauntlet of continual allusions to the past, and, if at last, in a weak moment, he grows impatient at the constant bickerings; he receives, as a balm for the wounds inflicted on him, words like these: " Your impatience only shews that you have not yet judged yourself; therefore, it is quite right you should be further reminded of it."

I do not know of anything more calculated to counteract the consolidation of the restoring work of our gracious Shepherd, in the soul of a just restored stray-one of His flock. This is worse than " healing the wounds of my daughter slightly!" It is tearing them open afresh, and thus destroying, as far as possible, the sheep for whom the Good Shepherd died.

" He restoreth my soul."

But He does more:

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake."

We have just seen how Jesus, in the case of His restored apostle, not only forgave his sin, but made Peter to judge the very root of the bad thing in him, that had caused his fall. There is not only repentance and forgiveness, but also the practical cleansing. God is faithful and just, not only " to forgive our sins," but, it is added, " to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Let us not forget it!

God, the Father's, chastening yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness. He will have us to be " partakers of his holiness." With Him, there is no such thing as running into sin and then jumping back again into His favour. He loves us too well for that, even if His holiness could permit it. And as the. Father, so the Son, and the Spirit. The way of Christ in restoring a wandering sheep, we have just seen in Peter's case. And as to the Holy Spirit, every Christian knows that, after a practical departure from the Lord, this blessed Spirit lays His finger on the conscience of the sinner, in His convincing and exercising power; bringing borne to him, and making him to realize the gravity of his sin, committed against such a God and Saviour, before he points upwards to the throne of grace.

But again it is He, Jehovah—Jesus, the watchful Bishop of our souls," that leadeth the restored sheep or lamb of the flock " in the paths of righteousness," as it was He Who led it " beside the still waters." In the preceding verse, it was not the sheep making use of its feet, for there it was not the question of walking, but of feeding. Consequently, it was the "lying down in the green pastures," and the being led " beside the still waters." But in this verse, after the stray one that had turned away from " that Shepherd," and " that pasture," and " those still waters of rest," has been restored through His wondrous grace, it becomes a question of walking henceforth " in the paths of righteousness," as the practical result of true restoration. It is the path, and the path belongs to the feet, to walk, not only into it (after having turned aside) but,

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness."

But, Christian reader, however deeply you may have learnt, through His grace, to feel and judge the dreadfulness of wandering from such a Shepherd; if really restored, you will have learnt another thing, namely: that it is henceforth not only a question of " walking " in the right path, but of His leading our feet in the paths of righteousness. Have you learnt that every moment of independence of Him, and His guidance, is a step out of that narrow path of righteousness, and into the broad and slippery road of sin? Only in the light of His holy presence, it is, that we see light. There alone it is, that we learn to discern true from false, right from wrong, good from evil. And at His feet only, it is, that we shall find His Word to be " a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path." But remember, it is not His Word that leadeth us in the paths of righteousness, but it must be Jesus Christ Himself, none but He. Blessed be His gracious name.

Nothing but being kept at His feet, under His eyes, and near His heart full of love and grace, will keep me in the path of righteousness.

But why does He lead us in that happy path, Christian reader? For our good! no doubt. But mark, there is a higher motive, a higher principle, infinitely superior to that of our own welfare. And that motive and object is " for his name's sake." Yes, it is for His own blessed name's sake, that He leadeth us in the paths of righteousness. When Jehovah-Jesus was upon Earth, He had not come in His own name, nor did He speak or

act in His own name, but in that of His Father.

" I am come in my father's name, and ye receive me not," " I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world."

" Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me,"

and

" While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name."

" Father, glorify thy name," was the prayer that went up from the heart and lips of that obedient One to His Father in Heaven, when at the immediate prospect of the Cross, and of all that the Cross meant, His soul was troubled. But the cry, " Father, save me from this hour," was immediately followed by " Father, glorify thy name." Blessed be His name!

And that God and Father, Whose voice then so promptly responded to that cry with, " I have glorified, and will glorify again," will be sure to take care to glorify the name of Jesus on Earth, as He has glorified His blessed Person in Heaven. Or do you think, He will permit His children to " tack," as it were, that great blessed name of His Son Jesus, to the bundle of their worldliness and unrighteousness in trade and elsewhere, instead of honouring- it by walking in the path of righteousness? May His Grace keep us from practically "denying," by walking in the crooked paths of unrighteousness, that great, holy, and blessed name, wherein we have found so great a Salvation.18 His scepter is a " scepter of righteousness," and He has " loved righteousness " and " hated iniquity," It is for this, that His God has anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows. There can be no gladness for the unrighteous; for, as there is no peace for the wicked, certainly there is no real joy nor gladness for them.

" Shout for joy and be glad, ye righteous." Mark well, where this is said, Christian reader. At the end of Psalm 32, written by the same royal shepherd, after he, a stray sheep, had been restored by Jehovah, the Good Shepherd. That Psalm begins with,—

"Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."—And v. 3.-

" 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. Selah. I acknowledged," &c. &c.

There is no joy till restoration, and walking in the paths of righteousness. It is after He has restored the soul, Christian reader, that we come to the " over-running cup " and the " anointing of the head with the oil " (of gladness), not before. There may be much joy and gladness in the soul of a converted sinner, after he has found peace with God ; but it is not of that deep and lasting character, as is the blessing in peace, and joy, of a restored sheep of God's flock ; because the latter comes not merely from the knowledge, by faith, of salvation, founded upon a finished work ; but it consists in a deeper practical (though in a far more humbling way acquired) knowledge of the Person of Him, then known to such an one, and experienced not only as the Saviour, but also as Shepherd and. Bishop of our souls. Neither is the joy of a new convert to be compared with the " oil of gladness," in verse 5, poured out on the head of the worshipper. who, after having been restored by his gracious Shepherd, has learnt, under His guidance, to walk in the paths of righteousness, and now with a conscience, not only purged and set at ease, after previous confession, but habitually kept clean in communion with, and dependence upon His God and Saviour, is able to drink in the full streams, of blessings into a heart, open for the reception of that higher order of blessing connected with true worship.

Christian reader, remember: First, " the paths of righteousness “; then, " the oil of gladness." This is divine order. At the same time, there is a blessed assurance in those words: " He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake! "

Yes, for His name's sake! Let us, for a moment, turn once more to that prophet, who, in an especial way, as the mouthpiece of God's Spirit, gives expression to our blessed Shepherd and Bishop's tender sympathy with, and gracious purposes as to His earthly flock of Israel. In the 34th chapter of Ezekiel, when speaking on the pasture of our gracious Shepherd, we have seen His loving interest in their welfare, his judgment upon the false shepherds, and upon all those who had spoilt the pasture, and neglected the flock; and at the same time, His announcement of the millennial abundance in blessing, under Jehovah-Jesus, the good Shepherd. In chapter 36 of the same prophet, we find their restoration, as to walking in the " paths of righteousness," whilst they enjoy the verdant pastures of the kingdom of " righteousness and peace."

They had "profaned" His "holy name" among the heathen.

But the Lord continues (v. 21):

" But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen whither they went."

" Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Th us saith the Lord God ; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen whither ye went," (whither God had scattered them, judging them " according to their way, and according to their doings."— v. 19).

" And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them ; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes."

" For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and I will bring you into your own land."

" Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you."

" A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."

" And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes ; and ye shall keep my judgments and do them."

" And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers ; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."

" I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and I will increase it, and lay no famine upon you."

" And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen."

" Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations."

And why is the blessed Lord going thus to restore and lead them, through His goodness, to repentance? For their sake?

" Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel."

Why is it, that Jehovah will thus restore His people of old, and reinstate them in the Promised Land, where He will make them to lie down. in green pastures, and lead them in the paths of righteousness ; and will " increase them with men like a flock, as the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem, in her solemn feasts, when the waste cities shall be filled with flocks of men ? " It is, " that the heathen, among whom His name had been profaned by His own people, may know that He is the Lord." (v. 37, 38).

It is " for his name's sake."

He cannot, nor will He, fail to glorify that name, any more than He can deny Himself. Jehovah-Jesus, Who, when here below, did everything in His Father's name, and glorified that name, has a right, in His actions of blessings, to do everything " for His own name's sake." Alas! alas! that that blessed name of Jesus, which is above every other name, and before which every knee shall how, as every tongue shall own His Lordship, for the glory of the Father, should have so little influence upon our daily walk! How many things do we in our own name, forgetting the Divine injunction of the Apostle: " Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

If Christians would only apply that question:

Can I do this or that in the name of Jesus? " —as a constant rule for the regulation of their daily walk, how it would at once settle, or at least simplify, a thousand difficulties, that in these perilous last-days constantly arise, and perplex so many uncertain minds, or, shall we say, " double hearts? " And above all, how far more would that blessed name be glorified by those who bear and profess it!

We have no right to do anything in our own name, for we " are bought with a price," but Jesus Christ has a right to do and grant every-thing—

Green Pastures and Still Waters, Second Degree. His Pastures. (23:2)

v. 2., " He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.'

Now, we may safely turn, under the guidance of our gracious Shepherd, to His pastures, Oh! what boundless expanse of evergreen pastures, does He open and spread out before our wondering eyes! What a freshness of " tender herbs," [see margin] glistening in the sunshine of His presence, favour, and blessing. Come hither, ye poor starving sheep and lambs of His flock. Come, ye that hunger, come, ye that are thirsty, and behold the bright, boundless scene of exuberance, that bursts upon our view, as we approach it under His guidance. Not narrow meadows, with shriveled, half-withered grass, hedged in by human religious creeds, prejudices and ordinances, confined within the narrow pale of a sect; but enter here with that liberty, wherewith Christ, your Good Shepherd, has made you free ; and your sour shall be satisfied, as with marrow and fatness, and your mouth shall praise Him with joyful lips, Who is the door, and maketh His sheep to go in and out and find pasture. But there is more. " He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." Blessed Shepherd! He not only leads the sheep to the pasture, and says: " There is the food Now go and feed." But He makes us to lie down in the midst of that exuberant expanse of " tender herbs," to rest in the repose of perfect peace. But mark, Christian reader, " He maketh me to lie down." He alone, and none else, can do it. " He," Jehovah Jesus, must be at the head of this second verse, as He heads the first, and as we shall find Him at the opening of the third. It is He Who does the whole work of feeding, and restoring, and comforting the sheep, as it was He Who did the work of salvation. It is the Shepherd Who sought the sheep, when it was lost, and carries it home on His shoulders, after He has found it.1 When the sheep was lost, Jesus loved it, and because it was a lost one, He sought it. After He has found it, He loves it, because it is a found one, and He carries it home on His shoulders. But here, it is neither the going of the Shepherd after the lost one, nor His carrying home the found one, but His making the feeding one " to lie down." His disciples, at His command, could make 5,000 hungry people " to sit down " upon the tender grass, to satisfy their natural hunger from His abundance. But neither they, nor any other servant of Christ, even if he be the most gifted preacher, teacher, or pastor, can make the feeblest lamb of the flock of God " to lie down" in. the tender herbs of the green pasture of Jehovah Jesus. Such a gifted under-pastor of Christ's flock may make the people to " sit down " under his ministry (as is the current expression), just as the Lord's disciples made those 5,000 to sit down upon the grass, but none but Christ can make them to " lie down."

Let not the reader think I am playing with words. The evil propensity of holding men in admiration, instead of honouring God's labourers "for their works sake " (i.e. for God's sake), is vastly increasing everywhere; although God, in our time, perhaps more than ever before, takes care to remind, by most solemn lessons, His blood-bought people, of His warning word—"Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." An exciting sermon, or a " stirring lecture," often produces effects very different from the "lying down in green pastures." " One thing is needful,"

Christian reader, in our days more than ever. A more constant sitting at the feet of Jesus, feeding upon His Word, with open eyes, open ears, and open hearts. Eyes fixed on His beauty and glory, in the power of faith and of an ungrieved Spirit. Ears, swift to hear, and to listen to the voice of that Shepherd, and hearts responding in adoration and thanksgivings. No lying down in His green pastures without such sitting at the feet of Him, by Whom " grace and truth came " into the world. There alone we learn to take in truth, and there alone we learn to digest it, in the deepening sense of His grace. It is His grace that says to you: Ye sheep and lambs of My flock ! I want you not only to feed upon My pastures, but to lie down in the midst of them. The only use you have made of your feet, has been to run astray with them. Therefore I not only carry you home on My shoulders, but, as to the pasture, after you have been feeding, I fold your feet under your body, lest you should use them for running hither and thither in My pasture, and thus turn the very abundance of it into snares for your feet; growing weak instead of growing strong. And so I lay you down in the midst of them. Rest now, ruminate, digest, meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them, in the peacefully reclining posture of calm repose, in the midst of the verdant exuberance around thee, that thy profiting may appear to all. Blessed feeding Blessed lying down! And thrice blessed Saviour and Shepherd of our souls, Who alone, and none else, can make us thus to lie down in evergreen pastures.

A few words as to the character of our loving Shepherd's pasture, i.e., the Word of God. It has a twofold power and aspect; one for the conscience, and the other for the heart. It is like the little book which the angel gave to the apostle John; in the mouth sweet as honey, and making the belly bitter. It has a searching, detecting, judging power, as to the conscience; a healing and comforting power, for the broken heart; and a formative power for the conduct. And as there is no healing, where there is no wound, so there can be no comfort for the heart by the Word, unless connected with true exercise of conscience. Its comforting power cannot be realized in the heart, unless its searching power has been felt in the conscience. Further, the Word. of God has a detaching power, as to all that belongs to this world; but an attaching power to the person of Christ Jesus, Who "is altogether lovely " (a word for the heart), and also " the chiefest among ten thousand," (a word for the conscience).

But " whilst the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," (an effect, which in itself, implies rather the opposite of food and pasture,) it is at the same time " sweeter than honeycomb " to the taste [Hebrew " Palate "] of him, who has been exercised thereby. Let us remember here again, that there is no real feeding of the heart on the pasture of the Word of God, unless there be, at the same time, real exercise of an honest conscience (made true by grace) under the eyes of "him with whom we have to do," Christ Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but He is also " he that is holy, he that is true." It is of the utmost importance, constantly to remember this, though well known, yet, alas! so often unheeded truth, especially in these latter times, Do we not hear, across the distance of eighteen hundred years, the solemn note of warning from that faithful watchman, when, from Rome—then the capital of the Gentiles, not yet " The mother of harlots,"—but the closing scene of labour of the most faithful witness of Christ and His truth,—he thus prophesied:-

" For the time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." A time, when there is much enjoyment in the light of truth, but amazingly little exercise of conscience under its power and authority; much laying hold upon truth, without truth laying hold upon people's souls. Great talents, great powers of oratory, and beautiful language, in sermons and writings; but the Cross, and its power, lost sight of, or hidden by the very flowers of human oratory, that professes to set it forth by adorning it! A time of much stir and excitement, often called " Revival," with the saddest, hardening reaction and relapse in its wake; constant appeals to the feelings of the natural heart, " sowings to the flesh," even in the preachings and writings of real and zealous servants of Christ, but little appeal to the conscience, where God begins His work by His Spirit and Word. It is well worth noticing, I think, that the apostle referred to above, in that most solemn third chapter, when speaking of the activity of the divine Word (2 Tim. 3:15-17), mentions only those effects of Scripture which refer to the conscience. " All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." Does not Scripture minister sweet comfort, peace, and joy, " sweeter than honeycomb " to the heart of the believing reader? Where is the tried saint of God, who has not experienced it, and blessed God for it, when reading the Psalms, for instance; that portion of Holy Writ, which in an especial way bears this characteristic stamp of the whole Word of God, i.e., its appealing power for heart and conscience? Is it not to this comforting and edifying element of Holy Scripture, that the same apostle refers, when he (Acts 20) commends the flock of God, and especially its pastors, to the Word of His grace, which is able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance amongst them who are sanctified? Most assuredly! Why, then, does the apostle, in enumerating to his beloved son in the Truth the blessed qualities of Scripture, mention almost exclusively those which act upon the conscience? It is because, in those parting words, alike touching and solemn, he forewarned Timothy of a time, then already budding, but now in full bloom; a time of profession, when there would be those who had the form of godliness, but denied the power of it, " having their conscience seared with a hot iron." Christian reader, God has not given us the light of His sun, " from the heat of which nothing is hid," to look at it, and merely to enjoy its brightness, as being a " shining light;" but that we should walk in that light, and discover our path by it. It is the same with the light of His Word. The Psalmist does not say, " Thy word is a lamp for my eyes and a light for my head," (to enjoy it,) but, " it is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (to walk in it).

Honest Christian reader! You will bear with me, for having enlarged so much on the question of conscience and exercise; for you know, that there can be no real feeding of the heart on the Word of God, without true exercise of conscience, under its divine authority and power. I certainly do not want to frighten any sheep or lamb of the flock of God, or to prevent their joyful feeding and peaceful lying down in the " green pastures," but the contrary, But you, lamb of His flock, who, with little knowledge, perhaps, but with an honest conscience, a true heart, and a hungry and thirsty soul, turn to His pastures,—you will find them abundant, evergreen, full of " tender herbs." Who can count the hosts of His flock that have been feeding here, and yet the pastures are exhaustless—ever the same exuberance, the same verdure—and why? Because they are Divine, and because that gracious Shepherd does not suffer His sheep to trample on His pastures, but makes them to lie down in. the midst of them, to feed and to digest. The " tender herbs '' are both food and pillow. Of what use could the legs of the sheep be in such a place? Our Good Shepherd, in pasturing His sheep, does not make them to run over the pastures, but to " lie down " in them. Going after knowledge is not feeding. There are those who are " ever learning," and yet never come to the knowledge of the truth." They are always on their legs, bat seldom, if ever, " lie down." Unless you yield your restless feet to the bidding of our Good Shepherd, Who wants to fold them gently, and thus to make you lie down in His pastures, you will never learn to rest and feed at His feet, and thus grow before the Lord.

O may we learn more truly to sit, like Mary, at His feet, the only place to learn true service; and to lean on. His bosom, the only place to learn something of His love, like the disciple " whom Jesus loved."2 Alas! how constantly are so many Christians on their legs, when reading the Word, i. e., leaning on their own understanding, their own learning, vain knowledge, and fancied wisdom, religious prejudices, and preconceived notions, early imbibed through wrong teaching and training in the divers religious schools of these days, (which bear in many of their features so fatal a resemblance to the religion of the Pharisees who " possessed the key of knowledge," but only to shut Heaven to themselves, and to others too,) or through the dangerous habit of " spiritualizing " the Word of God. Are not all these our own feet, that refuse to submit to the gentle folding and the quiet " lying down?" How sadly they rob themselves of the food, our gracious Shepherd intended for them, growing lean and barren, with such a fullness close at hand.

" And what is required," some reader may ask, " to secure this happy disposition of quiet feeding on the pasture of the Word of God ? " The children of this world," who " are in their generation wiser than the children of light," furnish us in this respect with an instructive lesson. They tell you that the first requisite, for deriving benefit and strength from your food, is quietness of body and mind just before, during, and after a meal. Therefore they avoid carefully every interruption or disturbance during that time. The same rule, so strictly observed by hygienists, holds good as to the spiritual feeding of our souls. Or how is it, Christian reader, that the Word of God, in its power and freshness, is so much more felt, when read in the quiet morning season, and before entering upon our daily work? It is, because in the morning our mind is like a blank sheet of paper, open to receive and keep impressions; whilst in the evening it is full of the impressions of the past day; and cross-writing is poor work. It is not in the evening, before retiring to rest. that we want a bath, but in the morning. And above all, has not the Lord a claim upon the " first-fruits " of the day; that is, upon our first thoughts and feelings, when body and mind feel refreshed and invigorated by the mercies of the past night? And yet there is nothing, that the enemy so constantly tries to prevent, as our rendering these first-fruits unto God, and being alone with God at the beginning of the day. One hour thus spent with the Lord, early in the morning, in prayer and reading His Word—what freshness, vigor, and strength does it impart for the whole day, with its manifold and unforeseen temptations !

How true! If we were but more truly alone with God, in prayerful meditation over His Word, our " fellowship one with another would be more in the power and comfort of the Holy Ghost, as being the natural result of individual fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ; and it would be more distinctly seen by those without, that we have been with Jesus, feeding at His feet in His green pastures. Was ever any man more isolated in this world, than Christ? None understood Him, not even His disciples. But He knew how to be alone with God, and therefore He was never alone, even when all His disciples left Him, for the Father was with Him. At the outset of His career, He was alone with God in the wilderness, before He was tempted in the wilderness by the Devil, and bound the strong man." He was alone with God, when He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God, before He chose His twelve apostles, and went forth with them from the mountain down into the plain, on His work of unwearied love and unremitting service, in power and grace. He was alone with God in the garden—not of Eden, but of Gethsemane, to take the cup from His Father's hand, when He was to be forsaken of all His disciples, and at last to be forsaken of His God, and to die, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.

Reader, it is only by being much alone with the Father, and with Him, Who is our way to the Father, that we learn to feed upon these pastures, and to lie down in those ‘` tender herbs." " My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips," (Psalm 63) And when and where? " When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches," i.e., in the solitary seasons of the night or daybreak, when everything around is silent, and before the duties and cares of daily life have begun to claim our attention.

But the lying down in green pastures, implies not only the divestment of heart and mind from surrounding influences, whilst feeding upon the Word of God, but also the repose of mind and heart afterwards, to digest the divine food the soul has thus enjoyed in undisturbed peace. As I said already: the same " tender herbs," full of flavor, vigor, and fragrance, which are our food, are to be our pillow, to rest and to digest ; and mark, dear reader, such " lying down " and digesting of the food received, may take place in the midst of the performance of daily duties. They need not prevent our meditating on the things we have learned at the feet of Jesus. A sheep of Christ, thus made to lie down by Himself, need not be disturbed from its repose by the duties of daily life, however arduous they may be. On the contrary, such a one will perform them all the more faithfully. The serene light and sunshine, the freshness and peace of that pasture, will be carried into our daily earthly relationships and testify all the more of that peace, His peace, which the world cannot give.

There is one danger, in particular, against which we greatly need to be on our guard—I mean the reading of too many books, to the neglect of the Book. I need hardly add, that I am speaking here of religious books. They may be written by most pious and enlightened servants of Christ, and I would not, by saying so, even for a moment speak disparagingly of such books, lest I should sin against Him Who has given teachers, and against His Holy Spirit Who has imparted the gift of teaching, in writing, as well as orally. All I mean to imply, dear Christian reader, is this, that such books, (however helpful, if used in the right way and measure; and however honored, as servants of Christ, their authors may be), are human books after all, and not " the Word of God," which, in every tittle of it, is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Honor their authors, but do not make them your authority. And let me add, helpful and very blessed as religious books or tracts may be for the flock of God, they may not only be rendered useless, but positively injurious to the spiritual health of their readers, if their perusal leads to the neglect of the Bible. If a Christian has once contracted the habit of spending the greater part of his reading-hours upon religious books; and the smaller portion, or perhaps only a small fraction of it, to the reading of his Bible ; the invariable result will be, that the scriptural knowledge gathered from those books, will be stored up in the head, instead of being treasured up in the heart. The "lying down," produced by such a way of feeding, if we can call it so, will be the rest of spiritual idleness, if the authors of those books have done the searching and thinking for the reader. But even where the writer has made the reader really to think, but without making him to search the Scriptures, it will only lead to spiritual pride, the lying down of self-sufficiency and resting on the vain laurels of hollow attainments and knowledge. But if, with prayerful meditation,3 we have learnt to ponder the Lord's words in our hearts, like His blessed mother on earth,4 and make the reading of His Word our chief food, then such books may, under the Lord's blessing, help most effectually to strengthen and establish their readers in the true and living knowledge of that Word, " the entrance " of which " giveth light and understanding to the simple." It will keep the feeding sheep of the divine pasture from that 'undigested knowledge, which puffs up, and engenders pride, the worst of all spiritual diseases.

And what is the power that enables us to digest5 the knowledge we may have derived from reading that blessed Word, which is truth? It is grace, beloved fellow Christians, that grace of God, by which we have been saved, and of which we daily need a fresh supply to support us. A deep, real sense of that grace of God in our hearts, is the true digestive power for the truth which we have learnt. Without that grace, learnt

at the feet of Him, by Whom grace and truth6 came into this world to poor sinners,—without that grace, not only known in a purged conscience, but daily learnt and realized in a heart purified by faith, there may be a great amount of knowledge laid up in the head, but it will not be treasured up in the heart, (out of the good treasure of which, a good man bringeth forth that which is good). The knowledge, even of the sublimest truths, not being held in living, practical communion with God, will only serve to puff up, and engender that pride, which is the forerunner of a deep fall, and of a heavy crash; by which the name of the Lord will be only the more dishonoured, the higher the truth that has been professed. It is grace, of which the apostle says, that it " makes the heart steadfast," when he warns the brethren against being carried away with " divers and strange doctrines." And where else, I say again, is that grace to be learnt, but at the feet of Jesus, from Whose fullness we all have received " and grace for grace," (or, as the Greek seems to imply, grace heaped upon grace).

In the midst of the increasing violence and corruption of the world, the harassing cares and affairs of daily life, and the far more keenly felt troubles, connected with the confusion and ruin of the Church—the increasing apostasy everywhere, and the anti-Christian winds of strange and divers doctrines—everything hastening the ripening and development of the mystery of iniquity—there is

the love divine of our Good Shepherd ; and there is, better than the sunny green pastures of Goshen in. the midst of benighted and terror-stricken Egypt—that blessed, sunny, calm, and evergreen pasture of the divine Word, where Jesus makes us to lie down. So it proved to be for the hungry sheep of Israel, just before Samuel arose at the time of the general decline and corruption all around, when " Icabod " was soon to be stamped upon Israel. There was no open vision then, but the Word of God was precious to that " little flock," whom the same Shepherd tended, and fed from his Word. So it proved to be to the inspired writer of our Psalm, when, under the dark reign of Saul, the Lord's anointed was hunted from place to place, like the partridge of the mountains, and when he wrote that precious Psalm, from which I have quoted before, " a Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah":—

"O, God, thou art my God ; early will I seek thee ; my soul thirsteth for thee ; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is ; etc."

Thus it proved to be, when the Great Shepherd, after the God of Peace had brought Him again from the dead, walked with His two sorrowing disciples of Emmaus, and "expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself," and made their hearts to burn within them. So it was proved to be, when cruel persecution had broken in upon the little flock of God in England, in the times of the Lollards. In those days the Word of God was indeed precious to His sheep, when an English farmer gave a load of hay (about thirty pound according to our money) in exchange for the evergreen pasture of the Word of God. He " bought the truth " and proved that he was not going to " sell it." There was, at the time, a tender lamb of God's flock, who paid a still higher price for those divine pastures, on which his soul delighted to feed. A boy, whose parents were fanatical Roman Catholics, had obtained a few leaves of the New Testament. He had sewn them up in the straw of his mattress. At night, after retiring to his poor little chamber to rest, and after having locked the door, he opened the mattress, and took out his hidden treasure, and by the poor light of his candle-end, he reveled in the perusal of those few leaves. Was not this precious lamb of the flock of God made to lie down by his Good Shepherd. and to delight in the green pastures of His provision? Was not he led by Him " beside the still waters?" But he was also, " for His sake," accounted a sheep for the slaughter. Not many days after, his infatuated mother discovered through the keyhole, the cause of the change that had come over her boy, and he was dragged by his own parents before the bloody tribunal of a pitiless Inquisition. But when that tender lamb of the flock of Christ was led to the stake—to nature, the valley of the shadow of death—the same Good and Great Shepherd, Who had made him to lie down in the tender herbs of His pastures, was with him, and he " feared no evil."

Christian reader! God's truth was dearly bought in those days, and therefore it was not lightly sold. When, from the scarcity of its copies, the Bible was chained to a pillar in. St. Paul's Cathedral, there was a pasture spread around that pillar; and a feeding of hungry sheep and lambs, lying down in those green pastures, took place then and there, of which our surfeited age, alas! affords but few examples. Now, where the whole Bible may be had for a few pence (thanks be to God for this blessing!) what about the " selling of the truth," and what about the " feeding " on, and the " buying " of the truth? Has the responsibility for the wide-spread blessings of God's truth been lessened, because the appetite has decreased at the same rate with its price?

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven!"

" He leadeth me beside the still waters."

Just as the food for the body consists not only of meat, but of " meat and drink;" so it is not only the " tender herbs " that make the pasture. The " still waters," (or " waters of rest ") form an. integral part of it. Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life." This, of course, is first and paramount; but then His Spirit is the " Water of Life." The bread is the staff of life, to impart strength. The water is the preserving and refreshing element. Spiritually applied, of course, Christ is not only the bread, but also the giver of the living water, that is, of the Spirit. We all, only in an infinitely more blessed sense than Israel did, typically, in the wilderness—" eat the same spiritual meat, and drink the same spiritual drink." " We have all been made to drink into one spirit." Christ, through His Spirit, feeds us in the pasture of the Word of God, which is a " written Christ," as another has expressed it. " He will guide you into all truth. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." The Holy Ghost is not only a Teacher and an Exhorter, but He also is " The Comforter." And it is in this sense, chiefly, that our Blessed. Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit in John 14, as the One Who was to comfort His disciples during His absence.

Wherever there is true feeding upon the pasture of our gracious Shepherd, under the guidance of His Spirit, the same Blessed Shepherd leads us " be side the still waters," that is, He makes His sheep to realize the comfort of His Spirit of peace and joy, in refreshing power, as the result of true feeding upon His Word.

Sunny and evergreen pasture as that Word is, what would it be without those waters of rest and refreshment, afforded by the Holy Spirit, Whose mind is life and peace." What is a pasture without water? Every native of the East knows what thirst means, and what water is. In a dry and thirsty land, water to quench the thirst, is as indispensable as is food to still the hunger. Our loving Shepherd, in His unfailing care, has provided both. He Who led His people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron, feeding them with bread from heaven and water from the rock, when no green pastures of Goshen, but a barren and thirsty wilderness surrounded them, has provided for us the " waters of rest,"

amidst pastures richer than those of Goshen.

I have alluded above to the meaning of that expression " still waters," or, literally, " waters of rest." It is not the water in its cleansing virtue, that is spoken of here; for He leadeth us beside the still waters. Nor is it water in the sense of death, nor of life; for they are called waters of rest. " This expression surely does not imply that they are stagnant waters, like those of a pond, but waters clearer than crystal; like that river of water at the close of the pasture of the Word of God. They are " still waters," yet ever running, as emanating from the fountain of life." But although they are ever in motion, yet their very aspect imparts peace. Thus they are not like those restless, unstable, and troubled waters, to which the wicked are compared, but just the opposite.

The time has not arrived for the Lord's own, (who are now counted as sheep for the slaughter), to be with Him beyond the heat, trouble, and conflict of this world, in that blissful place, where they shall hunger no more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat ; where the same gracious Shepherd Who now feeds His flock in the wilderness, shall feed them, as the Lamb, which is in the midst of the Throne, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, God wiping away all tears from their eyes. Here it is His feeding and leading us " beside the waters of rest," in a world of trouble and sorrow, but where His pasture is as abundant and secure as that of Goshen, in the midst of plague-stricken and locust-eaten Egypt.

Now, meadows and prairies may be green and exuberant, and bright and sunny too but when the sultry atmosphere of a hot summer's day is brooding over them, where is it that the flocks seek shade and water? Is it not at the side of the same brook that waters those fertile meadows and the trees along its banks, and makes them to grow, that the flock finds shade, refreshment, and rest? And, beloved reader, does not the same Spirit, Who has provided the pasture of the Word, inspired and written by Him, minister to, and preserve in our souls the refreshing comfort of that Word? Always, of course, in dependence upon the Good, Great, and Chief Shepherd, Whom He is to glorify, and does glorify. Christ, through His Spirit, has provided the food for the hunger, the water for the thirst, shade and rest after the repast.

Thus our loving Shepherd, through His Spirit, makes us not only to lie down in His green pastures, but leads us beside the waters of rest. This blessed Spirit, as mentioned above, not only leads us into all truth, as the Divine Teacher and Exhorter, but His especial character is that of " The Comforter."

" For whatsoever things were written afore-time, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures" (the " still waters " of the pasture) "might have hope " (the element of refreshment amidst the sultry atmosphere of this world).

Let me add here at once the following verse:-

" Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus."

And further:-

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." (Rom. 15)

The Christians at Rome needed, in an especial way, the word of exhortation, to be like-minded. Questions and disputes had arisen amongst them, and thus the waters had become troubled. Now let me remind my Christian reader, of what I said, with regard to the lying down in green pastures, as to the feet of the sheep, and our gracious Shepherd's intention to prevent their making the wrong use of them. Sheep are silly things, and their folly betrays itself, especially in the use they make of their feet, in running astray with them. This is the reason, I think, why we meet here, for the second time in the same verse on the pasture), with an expression, which seems most distinctly to imply the care our gracious Shepherd takes to guard us against our own feet, in leading us beside the still waters. Why beside? Because the operation of the Holy Spirit, in ministering comfort, joy, peace, strength, and refreshment to our souls from the Holy Scripture, is as tender, and therefore easily interrupted, as it is powerful when not impeded.

Just as "dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour," so it is, (though here in another sense), when natural wisdom, will, and the energy of the flesh, put their clumsy hoofs into the still waters of peace and comfort, ministered by the Holy Ghost from the word of God. How many Bible readings have been, and are still, marred or prevented, by stepping into the waters, instead of being led beside them. I think that an awful responsibility rests upon those who, giving way to the perverseness of their Own will and disorderly mind, not only prevent the precious sheep and lambs of Christ's pasture from enjoying these waters of rest and refresh went, which their loving Shepherd had provided for them, but, by ministering questions rather than godly edifying, destroy precious souls for whom Christ died. The apostles, especially Paul, warn against those disturbers, repeatedly and most solemnly. They are the bane of every Christian assembly which is afflicted with them.

Let us now turn for a moment to chapter 34 of the Prophet Ezekiel, and we shall find there the same thing. Jehovah-Jesus, the blessed Shepherd at the head of our Psalm, expresses, even before He was on earth, prophetically by His Spirit, in the touching language of this chapter, His loving care for the sheep of His flock. After having pronounced judgment upon the false shepherds, who feed themselves instead of the flock, He continues:-

"Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep, that are scattered ; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places, where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountain s of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong ; I will feed them with judgment."

Then the Lord turns to His flock, and addresses them thus:-

“And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he-goats. Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet ? And as for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouler: with your feet,"

Solemn words these! Not only for false shepherds, but also for those of the flock who trample upon, and thus spoil the pasture, instead of gently and quietly lying down and enjoying it, together with their fellow-Christians;—who trouble and foul with their feet the still waters of comfort and peace, which are derived from feeding upon the tender herbs " of Scripture ; instead of being led beside those waters by that all-wise and gentle Shepherd, Who intends only the welfare of every individual sheep and lamb of His flock.

And just as the Father's House, where Jesus is now preparing a place for us, is large enough to accommodate every one of the innumerable multitude of His children—without any crowding (" yet there is room ")—and as the inheritance in store for us all, is so immeasurably rich (according to God's unsearchable riches in Christ Jesus), that there need be no envy nor jealousy between the co-heirs, as to the " dividing of the inheritance ;"—so is the pasture which Christ has spread for His flock. It is so immense and inexhaustible (as everything that is Divine), that there need be no pushing nor hasty rushing on the part of any members of His flock, numberless though they may be. So it was with His pasture in the earthly Land of Promise, flowing with milk and honey, where the Lord had led His people of old. There was abundance for all. Under the peaceful and happy sway of Solomon's scepter, Jehovah had made them to lie down in those green pastures of earthly blessings, where every Israelite dwelt under his vine and his fig-tree. But, alas! Jeshurun had waxed fat, and kicked against his Maker. And not only so, but the fat ones of the flock had " thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with their horns, till they had scattered them abroad." It was for this, that the prophet, on the part of Jehovah, pronounced judgment upon them. It was for the same reason that the apostle James pronounced the judgment of God upon the fat ones of the flock in ch. 2 (concerning the " thrusting and pushing "), and in the still more solemn language of ch. 3 (as to the " trampling, and spoiling, and fouling").

And if it was so grave a sin, to spoil that pasture, and to foul the waters God had provided for His flock of old, in earthly blessings how solemn, I repeat, must be the responsibility of those, who prevent the flock of God from enjoying the spiritual pasture and refreshment, provided for them by their gracious and loving Shepherd, by pushing, and thrusting, and trampling, and turning those waters of rest " into " waters of Meribah," waters of strife and trouble. It is against such that the apostle Paul warns his beloved son in the faith, Timothy, when speaking of those who " consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, proud, knowing nothing, doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness." " From such," the apostle continues, " withdraw thyself."

But it is not only against those troublers and spoilers, that we have to be on our guard. Let us not forget, dear fellow Christian, that the same flesh, the same tendency of self-will and trusting to our own wisdom and understanding, is in ourselves. If we, when reading God's Word, be it individually or collectively, receive with meekness the ingrafted Word, waiting for the guidance and teaching of His Spirit; the Spirit of God, not being grieved, will bring out God's thoughts from God's Word, which He has written Himself, and to which He alone possesses the key. But if, on the contrary, we approach the pasture of the Word of God with an unhallowed spirit, unbroken will, and leaning on our own understanding, we shall be sure to bring in our own thoughts, which is a very different thing from bringing out God's thoughts. This surely is not the way to the " waters of rest," nor the path beside them, in which the Lord leads, through His Spirit.

And here I must mention one of the most solemn features of our days: the want of reverence for and submission to God's Word, in making it a matter of opinion. If you and I, dear reader, were speaking about some human book, we might differ in our opinion about its contents. You might say: " I have a right to hold my own opinion, and you have a right to do the same. You are to respect my opinion, as I am bound to respect yours. But neither you nor I, nor any other man, nay, not the most pious, gifted, or learned, have any title or right to make the Word of God a matter of opinion. To submit the word of God to our judgment, would be nothing less than to judge God Himself. He has not given us His Word to form opinions about it, but to be under it—under its divine power, and under its divine authority, which is our proper, and only safe place.

What more awful presumption, than to submit that divine code, by which all mankind will be judged, to man's opinion! Ah! dear reader, this is not the gracious Shepherd's leading His sheep " beside the still waters ;" but the beguiling power of that old serpent (whose very first word to Eve was a perversion of God's Word), trying to lead astray, and corrupt the sheep and lambs of God's flock from the simplicity that is in Christ, by way of doubting, questioning, and reasoning ; and to lead them to the dark and troubled waters of infidelity, which terminate in outer darkness, with weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Surely there is nothing we need more than continual earnest prayer that we, through the grace of God, may be kept more abidingly in an humble, truly dependent posture at the feet of Him Who said. " Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls." Then we shall be surely led by Him, through His Spirit, beside the peaceful waters of rest, and that rest of heart and soul will be our constant happy portion, which is, alas, so little known by many who have peace of conscience. We shall, further, in this happy path, learn that which His honoured apostle Peter, " after he had been restored," learnt, " to stir up one another's pure minds; " and what His great apostle of the Gentiles, who once was a persecutor of the flock of Christ, " making havoc of the church," and " breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," learnt of Him, viz.. " to provoke one another unto love and good works."

Green Pastures and Still Waters, First Degree. Jesus, the Shepherd of Our Souls. (23:1)

v. 1 " The Lord [lit. " Jehovah "] is my shepherd: I shall not want."

I have already ventured a few remarks as to the contrast between the opening verse of this Psalm and the first verse of the preceding. I need not therefore, nor do I desire, to say more on this most sacred subject, only praying, that you and I, dear Christian reader, may learn to

ponder more at the foot of His cross, from whence that cry went up to God, on the bearing and meaning of it, in order that our hearts may learn more truly to enter, and to feed upon, the blissful assurance in the opening verse of our Psalm. No true feeding of heart, without true and honest exercise of conscience ! The Lord grant us all more balance between knowledge, and conscience, and heart !

Dear fellow pilgrim through a barren land, where there is no water ! Have we not often, amidst the conflicts and trials of our way through an enemy's country, felt constrained, through grace, to chime in with that broad, full-sounding key-note of joyful, yet calmest confidence, with which the Holy Ghost intones this Psalm through the harp of David1

" The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want."

Yes, beloved, He Himself, our ever-loving Saviour, in His own fullness and all-sufficiency, it is, Whom we find at the head of the pasture of our precious Psalm Jehovah—Jesus, Who " calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out," Who maketh them to go in and out, and find pasture, is necessarily at the entrance-of the pasture, as He is at the head of the flock.

Jehovah—Jesus, the Lord of glory, and the brightness of it, Who, from the light and height of that glory, came down into this sin-benighted world, to seek and save the lost, and to make them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, and to bring many sons unto glory.

Jehovah—Jesus, Who made Himself of no reputation, and divested Himself of His -glorious garment, to assume the humble garb and form of a servant—the lowest of all, Who owned nothing in this world, not even the manger, where He was laid, nor the grave, where He was buried, nothing—except " His Cross," because it was yours and mine, reader, by right and merit.

Jehovah—Jesus, the Heir of all things, by whom God made the worlds, but Who sold all His treasures—real treasures—and made Himself poor—the poorest of all—to make many rich by His poverty—oh! how many ! and oh ! how rich!

Jehovah—Jesus, the poorest in the midst of the abundance of Canaan, yet Whose first miracle manifested the fulness that was in Him, when He filled the empty water-pots of Cana with wine, keeping the good wine until the end, when He will say:—"Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved ! "

Jehovah—Jesus, Whose disciples filled twelve baskets with the fragments of five barley-loaves, after He had fed five thousand men with those five loaves and two fishes, but Who added: " Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life, which the son of man shall give unto you, for him bath God the Father sealed."

Jehovah—Jesus, Who, though He had come for the lost sheep of Israel, yet has made the very crumbs for the dog under the table, richer and more satisfying than the bread on the table for the children.

Jehovah—Jesus, Who, at the close of His earthly career, asked His disciples, " When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything? " and they had but one reply: " Nothing."

Jehovah—Jesus, Who, at the outset of a life of unremitting service, rejoiced at Cana, with those that did rejoice, and at the end of His course, in perfect human sympathy, stooped to weep with the weeping, at the grave of Lazarus, before He arose in His divine power and authority, to send. forth the word of Divine command, " Lazarus, come forth! "

Jehovah-Jesus, Who, when nailed to the Cross, spoke to His sorrowing mother, " Mother, behold thy Son," and to His sad disciple, " Son, behold thy mother."

Jehovah-Jesus, Who made the hearts of His solitary ones of Emmaus to burn within them, and broke the bread to them.

Jehovah-Jesus, Who appeared in the midst of His flock, scattered at His death, but gathered

at the news of His resurrection, eating and drinking with them, and saying, " Why are ye troubled? Handle me! "

Jehovah-Jesus, Who led the mute tribes of the deep (whose mouth He had made His purse) to the empty nets of His disciples, showing unto them at the same time, that their meal was ready on the shore, before they had caught the fish at His bidding.

Jehovah-Jesus, Who spoke to His own those parting words, " All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth," and, " Lo, Tarn with you alway, even unto the end of the world," and was carried up to heaven, whilst blessing Ills little flock with uplifted hands.

Jehovah-Jesus, Whose works of power and blessing were so many, that the disciple whom He loved, could but conclude his Gospel with that simple and vast statement, " And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written, every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

Christian reader, I have endeavoured, oh how faintly and imperfectly, to realize, in my little measure, something of the meaning of those opening words of our Psalm:

"The Lord, (Jehovah Jesus,) is my shepherd."

Could we admit, after these words, the shadow of a thought of want? Perish the doubt, that would dare to tread upon the heels of that glorious truth, " The Lord is my Shepherd." The following words, " I shall not want," are, for the logic of faith, only the natural and necessary conclusion of the first part of the sentence. They are twin-truths, so to speak, inseparable. Just as we would say on a fine spring morning, " The sun is risen, consequently there will be plenty of light and warmth." Once this statement repeated in the assurance of faith, " The Lord Jehovah Jesus is my Shepherd," you cannot help adding, " I shall not want." A natural man's way of thinking and feeling is just the opposite.

He first feels his wants, and then bethinks himself of one to supply it. Faith thinks first of the One Who supplies every want, and then says, I shall not want at all 2;" and if we, through grace, have learnt, in this time of many books and much knowledge, and yet of broken cisterns and confusion everywhere, to resort, with hungry hearts and thirsty souls, to him Who said, " If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink,"3 and, " I am the bread of life ; he that corneal to me, shall never hunger" ; we shall re-echo, with all our heart, that glorious strain of praise and confidence:

"The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want."

But, Christian reader, let us on the other hand beware of the whisper of the proud and independent heart, that would say, " I shall not want," without the preceding, The Lord is my shepherd." Such was the thought and language that characterized wretched and lukewarm Laodicea. She said, " I am in need of nothing," but disconnected with Christ. Laodicea's language was, and is still, " I am rich ; I am increased with goods ; I have need of nothing." And what was, and is still the Lord's reply ? " Thou knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee, to buy of me gold, tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." May God, in His infinite grace, keep your heart, beloved Christian reader, and mine, from that horrible spirit of pride and self-sufficiency, which formed the core of the lukewarm heart of Laodicea, " I am in need of nothing," apart from Christ. Blessed be His love, which does not cease daily and hourly to remind us practically of the truth of His word, " Without me ye can do nothing," and on the other hand, of the truth of the word of His Spirit through His apostle, " I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me."

Jesus Christ cannot be more than He is, nor will He ever be less. He cannot deny Himself: " Jesus Christ yesterday, Jesus Christ to-day, and Jesus Christ forever.4"

When on earth, at the close of His unremitting service of love, He asked His disciples: " When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything ?" And they replied: " Nothing." And since He has died for us upon the Cross, and is risen and has ascended to His Father and our Father, to His God and our God, has the apparent distance of heaven and glory, where He is seated now at the right hand of God, lessened His perfect human sympathy, of has it weakened His divine power? No, from heaven, that same voice of our heavenly Shepherd assures us through the inspired pen of the apostle:—

" I will never5 leave thee, nor forsake thee."

So that we may boldly say:-

" The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what will man do unto me ?"

Is not this promise, " I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," our blessed Lord's answer from heaven to that expression of calm confidence of His flock on earth, " The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." If His sheep, through grace, know His voice, surely He, in His love, knows theirs.

But, dear Christian reader, of what kind of want does our verse speak ? Of outward wants, such as food, raiment &c.? As to them, our gracious Shepherd refers us to our " Father which is in Heaven," and " seeth in secret," and knoweth that we need those things. " But," He continues, " Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and these things shall be added." Yes, beloved fellow-pilgrim and fellow-heir of glory, the Father, Who spared not His only-begotten Son, when we were His enemies, but delivered Him up for us all, (how lightly do we often read verses like this, and how little have we penetrated into the mines of divine love and wealth contained. in them,) " shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?" Blessed be His name, He has never failed to supply in due time, and in His own way, every real need of His children.6

But we must not confound need with want. Our wants, like those of little children, are very many, and, like theirs, often very foolish too. We cannot praise enough the loving wisdom of our Father, Who always supplies our need, but not our wants, unless it be to show us sometimes the bitter results of having our own ways and desires. Would that our needs were also our wants. But just here it is, that our selfish and superficial hearts constantly betray themselves. There is no danger of our outward or temporal needs not being our wants too. They are quickly perceived, and keenly felt, and even anticipated, often in a way very little to the honour of that " manner of love which the Father hath bestowed upon us," and which we are so graciously invited to "behold."(1 John 3:1.) But, Christian reader, how is it with our sense of our greatest, that is, of our inward spiritual need? However real on our part, the feeling and acknowledgment of that need may be, rest assured, the reality and greatness of it surmount immeasurably the feeble estimate we have of it. But, just as our Father and God, Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, supplies the temporal wants of His children, according to His own Divine wisdom and love ; so does His blessed Son, once the Lamb slain for our sins, as the " shepherd and bishop of our souls," provide for all our spiritual needs, 7not as we feel them (though even this only through the grace of God) in our feeble measure (through our sad. neglect of that grace)—but as He sees them, and. according to His own perfect estimate of them.

Blessed and calm assurance of confidence in His everlasting love, as expressed in those few words, " I shall not want." " The Lord is my Shepherd." To listen to the faintest whisper of unbelief, would be nothing less than to doubt either His love, or His power, or His faithfulness. His love ? What love can vie with His, Who is love, and has proved His love, as none other could. When about to depart from this world unto the Father, " having loved His own, He loved them unto the end," i.e., with perfect love. But more, " He loveth us, and hath washed us from our sins in his own blood." His power ? Jesus said, " All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth." Or His faithfulness ? He concludes with the assurance, " And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." If we are unfaithful, yet he abideth faithful ; he cannot deny himself." (2 Tim. 2. 13).

He was

" Faithful amidst unfaithfulness,"

when here on earth in the days of His humiliation ; and now He is faithful above our unfaithfulness, as our exalted Lord and Christ at the right hand of God: faithful as Saviour —faithful as Shepherd and Bishop of our souls —faithful as our High Priest before God, and Advocate with the Father—faithful as Head. of the Church. He cannot deny Himself, blessed be His name for ever !—Can I add a word to set forth His love, His power, and faithfulness ? What mortal's pen, unless inspired by the Spirit of God, can describe or define, what is, in itself, Divine and above all human conception or description,—" passing knowledge ?" Let us proceed to contemplate the threefold aspect, in which Scripture presents our blessed Shepherd to the hearts and consciences of His flock. Jesus Christ is-

" The good Shepherd," as to This love ;

" The great Shepherd," as to His power ;

" The chief Shepherd," as to His authority over, and faithfulness to His flock and His under-pastors.8

1.—JEHOVAH-JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD. What is the characteristic feature that distinguishes " The good Shepherd " from all other shepherds ? He Himself, Who heads this Psalm, has told us: " I am the good shepherd ;9 the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep " Since the days of Abel, there have been many faithful shepherds, who, like Moses and David, tended their flocks with the care of a kind shepherd. They were, humanly speaking, " good shepherds." But " a good shepherd," or "some good shepherd," is not " The Good Shepherd ;" or " The Shepherd—the good One."

The word "the " implies, that there is only one, who can be said to be worthy of that title, and who stands consequently at the head of His flock. Can this title be accorded to Moses, who was faithful as servant over God's House, and pleaded with God for the flock, saying, Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin;—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written ?" The same Moses said, not long after, " Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant ? And wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me ? Have I conceived all this people ? Have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swearest unto their fathers ? I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me." Or can that attribute be accorded-to that excellent shepherd, David ? He protected his father's sheep, entrusted to his care, at the risk of his own life. He thus proved himself, through the grace and help of God, to be indeed the very best of all good shepherds amongst men. But could David, for all that, ever be called, " The good Shepherd ?" No, David has not given, nor could he " give " his life.10 " Staking," and " giving " one's life, are two widely different things, though, on the first aspect, they may appear to the natural eye almost equally meritorious, or even identical. But “The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." There was only one,—Jesus Christ, perfect Man and perfect God—Who had power to lay down His life, and power to take it again, because He was the Son of God, Who had " life in Himself," whilst our lives—as being created —are not our own. And He only could give His life, as perfect Man—because His life had not, like ours, been forfeited by sin. Therefore Jesus alone, and none other, can be called " The good Shepherd."

There is another characteristic attribute of our " good Shepherd." He knows His sheep and is known of them. Jesus repeats (John 10: 14): " I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." They know His voice, and follow the Good Shepherd, Who, when here below, was always to be found at the head of His flock. Neither the combined craftiness of the Pharisees and Sadducees,—as another has observed—nor all the power of the Herods and Pilates, could prevent one single sheep of Israel's fold from hearing the voice of the true and good Shepherd. The porter (His heavenly Father) opened,11 and the sheep heard His voice, and He led them out. " And when he putteth forth His own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." How simple and precious all this is ! The sheep " hear his voice," and they " know his voice:" and " to know " the voice of a good and faithful leader, and to " follow him," is, for a true sheep, the same.

In the Gospels, especially those of Matthew and John, we find " the good Shepherd," from first to last, going before His little flock. So it was from the outset of His blessed career, when the first sheep were made to hear His voice, and followed Him (John 1), until the end, when the sword was to awake, and the Shepherd to be smitten, and the sheep to be scattered. Up to the last moment, we find Jehovah-Jesus at the head of His flock, protecting or preserving His sheep, which He had fed in His pasture. " Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he. If ye, therefore, seek me, let these go their way; that the saying might be fulfilled which he spake: of them which thou hast given me, I have lost none."

Let us just glance at the two Gospels mentioned above, where we find in an especial way the virtues of Christ, as the " Shepherd," shining out.

What was it that moved Jesus, when He (John 6:5) " lifted up his eyes and saw a great company come unto him? " Was it gratification with His success, that swelled the heart of that good Shepherd," Who had come to seek after the lost sheep of the House of Israel? No; it was their need, that made His heart to yearn over them; first, their outward need, and that, He satisfied with five loaves and two fishes. But, then, what was this outward want, compared with the spiritual need of those five thousand precious souls! Alas! they themselves had very little sense of it, if any at all. " Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perished', but for that meat which endured' unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed "

Those hosts thronging around the Shepherd of Israel, and following Him so eagerly, even across the water, were not of that class of whom He, in His first pastoral address, had said: " Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." They rejected that true bread from heaven, (which, not Moses, but the Father giveth,) held out to them in the latter part of the chapter referred to—that rich portion of Divine pasture, where hosts of famishing and perishing prodigals, who really hungered and thirsted after righteousness, have since found, and find still, the Bread of Life come down from Heaven, Who gave His flesh for the life of the world, Precious Bread of Life ! And blessed God, Who hast provided for Thy flock that meat which endureth unto everlasting life. Bread, which, whilst filling the hungry with the delight of spiritual and heavenly satisfaction, at the same time increases, whilst satiating, the divinely-created hunger of Thy feeding flock. Blessed hunger ! Still more blessed Bread that feeds it ! and thrice blessed Saviour, Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Whom the Father gave, and Who gayest Thyself for us in death, to eat Thy flesh, and to drink Thy blood, that Thy death might be life to us ! Eternal praise be to Thy precious name !

Again (in Matthew 9:36): " When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted (or were tired and lay down), and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." What was it that moved, at the sight, the innermost heart of our good and tender Shepherd ? Here it was not the momentary outward want, but the spiritual need of those starving sheep of Israel.

Then saith he to his disciples: The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that lie will send forth labourers into his harvest."

Is it possible, Christian reader, that you and I ever should want under the care of such a Shepherd, Who acted thus from the first to the last in unremitting love to his flock ? Impossible !

But, unbelief would, perhaps, whisper: What, in these last days, where perils of every kind surround us, infidelity spreading on the one hand, and Romish superstition and idolatry on the other—a time, when the sheep, and, still more, the tender unsuspecting and inexperienced lambs of Christ's flock are exposed to the winds of " divers and strange doctrines," whereby men are lying in wait to deceive !— blasphemous heresies against the blessed Person of the Son of God and His glorious work, increasing at a fearful rate, and taught or spread by men, who were considered to be watchmen in Israel, pastors and overseers of the flock of God ; and the very leaders leading astray the people of God ! Whom can you trust? Who shall advise you? Who supply you with sound pasture, when the food is so leavened and adulterated by the beguiling subtlety of that old serpent, corrupting the minds of many from the simplicity that is in Christ? Whither to turn for advice, instruction, comfort—in short, for true food for the soul, when the religious firmament presents the sad aspect of the falling of one bright star after the other? To whom can you go?

The answer is again, " Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of Eternal Life." The newborn babe in Christ, the youngest lamb of His flock, is perfectly safe under His care, and under the guidance of His Spirit, that unction from the Holy One, that blessed Spirit of Truth. Let us not forget, that it is to babes that the Apostle writes, " Ye have received an unction from the Holy One. " 12And this Holy One, He that is true, He that is holy, from Whom I have received that Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, Who leadeth me into His word, which is truth, reveals Him Who is the truth, and there is no lie of the truth. He Himself, Jehovah- Jesus, is my Shepherd, I shall not want. This is, and has been at all times, and under all circumstances, the reply of every simple-hearted sheep and lamb of Christ's pasture. For Jehovah-Jesus is not only the good Shepherd, He is also,

2.—JEHOVAH-JESUS, THE GREAT SHEPHERD.

Christ is " that great shepherd," Whom the God of Peace has brought again from the dead, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. " The God of peace," and " that great shepherd," blessed close, so full of comfort and assurance, of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the last chapter, where we find the sheep of God's flock exposed to all the corruptive evils and cruel violence of the arch-deceiver, by " divers and strange doctrines," whilst bearing Christ's reproach without the camp. It is in the same chapter that we meet with those three encouraging. assurances:— encouraging

" I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

The Lord is my helper ; I will not fear. What will man do unto me ?

" Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

And as if that were not enough, the Spirit of God winds it all up with reminding them, and us, of “the God of peace," and "that great shepherd."

Let us return for a moment to John 6. The same merciful Shepherd Whom we beheld there, feeding those five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, appears in that chapter, in the following night (the night of His absence from this world), to His disciples, as they were tossed by the storm. At that moment He appeared unto them as the " great shepherd," suited to their difficulties and dangers, walking over the waters of death, which threatened to swallow them up. It was His well known voice which, amidst the tumult and uproar of the elements, fell so soothingly on their ears and calmed their fears with these re-assuring words, " Be not afraid, it is I." Again it was Jesus, Whom the God. of Peace had brought again from the dead, Who, with His comforting words, made the hearts of His two desponding disciples on their way to Emmaus, " burn within them," when walking with them, He made His promise good, " Where two or three are gathered together in (or unto) my name, there am I in the midst of them." And was it not the same " great shepherd," Whose well-known voice greeted the ear of His mourning handmaid with, " Mary," and entrusted that true-hearted one, to whom His yoke was easy indeed, and His burden light, 13 with the first message of the glorious news, " Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and unto your Father; and to my God, and your God." Again, it was Jesus, the Great Shepherd, risen from the dead, Who appeared the same day (of His resurrection), when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, and stood in the midst, and said unto them, pointing at His wounds, as the fountain of all their blessings, Peace be with you," and " As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." And to Thomas, " Be not faithless but believing." And was it not again the voice of the Great Shepherd, that repeated to the disciple of His bosom, when he was an exile in the Isle of Patmos for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ, those calming and re assuring words, first heard in the midst of the foreboding winds and waves of Gennesaret, " Fear not! " adding, " I am the first and the last, I am he that liveth14 and was dead ; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell (i.e., Hades) and of death." Beloved fellow Christian, have not you and I experienced the tender care of that good and great Shepherd, unto Whom " All power is given in heaven and on earth? " These were His parting words, His farewell to the " little flock," remaining in this world, whither He had sent them as " sheep among wolves." And mark, dear reader, what follows close upon that encouraging assurance that " All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth ? " The Lord. adds, "Go ye therefore and teach (or disciple) all nations." Yea, " He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah."

Ah ! dear companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, this " earth removed," these " mountains carried into the midst of the sea," in the second verse of Ps. 4615 are very different things from the sunny, peaceful, and verdant pasture in the second verse

of our Psalm ; just as the troubled and roaring waters of the former, appear the very opposite of " the still waters," beside which Christ leads us. Yet the same blessed Shepherd Who fills, in our Psalm, the heart of His sheep so entirely with the sense of what He is in Himself, that (without adding the conclusive " therefore," as in the second verse of Ps.46), it simply adds, " 1 shall not want," even before there is any mention of the " green pasture " and the " still waters " that follow16'—the same Jehovah-Jesus it is, Who (as the Great Shepherd) in Ps. 46. fills the sheep of His pasture, counted, for His sake, as " sheep for the slaughter," so thoroughly with the sense of His " present help in trouble," that —even before we come (in v. 4) to " the river, the streams whereof (blessed contrast to the roaring, troubled sea in v. 4) " make glad the city of God "—the tried one says in calm confidence, " Therefore will not we fear."

And do not we, Christian reader, stand in great need of having our eyes, in the power of an ungrieved Spirit, more steadily fixed on Christ, and of more heart-feeding on Him, Whose loving-kindness is better than life, and satisfies our souls with marrow and fatness? The voice of that Good. and Great Shepherd, that once was heard, with its soothing and peaceful sound, above the roaring waters of Gennesaret, still makes itself heard above the waves, and amidst the storms of these present " perilous times." Surely, it does so to every sincere conscience and upright heart, even of the weakest of His disciples, tossed to and fro, as they may appear, amidst the shipwreck of all religious establishments and systems. " He preserveth the simple ;" only, do not embark without His bidding ! and, though your vessel be but a tiny craft or fishing smack, like those on the lake of Gennesaret, provided only you sail under His orders (be it labouring in His work, or in any private affair), you may surely count upon hearing, above, aye, and in the very midst of the rising waves 17, that same calm, sweet voice of our Good and Great Shepherd say to you, " Be not afraid, it is I." His first word to Joshua, before crossing the floods of Jordan was, " Have not I commanded thee?" Then comes, " Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest." Dear Christian reader! it is not on board of some religious " Great Eastern " or Leviathan," that those comforting words are likely to be heard. For those who have embarked in such great vessels, with large companies, do not seem much to want such an encouragement. They are inclined to think, if they do not say so, that they are prepared to brave the winds, and to ride on the proud waves, though the Lord, in His mercy, from time to time reminds men (as in the case of that far-famed big ship, when on her first voyage), tha " He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof [of the deep]. They mount up to heaven, they go down again to the depths, their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still."

How often has our gracious Lord, Who humbleth faithfully, taught, and teaches still, as to many a religious leviathan-undertaking of our days, the salutary lesson, `- Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

But thou, faithful, and therefore, perhaps, solitary, Christian mariner, in thy little craft, thrown about by the mountain-waves of Satan and mens' opposition, as if thou wert their play-ball—remember, that those very billows, by holding thee up, in thy little boat, on their foaming crests, only bear witness, that faith rides on the highest wave ; and, even when they seem to have engulphed thee and thy puny ship, in the " valley of the shadow of death," they must lift thee up again, and hold thee up to the drooping heart and dim eye of unbelief, as an evidence, that, even there, He was with thee ; and when thou seemedst to be at their cruel mercy, the tender mercies of thy Almighty God and Father, and of that Great Shepherd, surrounded thee, Who once spoke, " Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid."

JESUS, THE GREAT SHEPHERD.

" In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world." And above, and through all the tumult around thee, the voice of Jesus that once made the winds and waves of Gennesaret cease, and calmed the hearts of His troubled ones, will greet thine ear, also, with its soothing note: " Be not afraid, it is I." Embark with Him, and He will disembark thee on the shore of safety. " Then they willingly received him into the ship, and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went," (John 6:21.)

Another instance of the presence watchfulness, and never ceasing care of our Great Shepherd over His apparently deserted flock, occurs in the closing chapter of John's Gospel. His disciples had betaken themselves to their nets again, at the same place where the Lord had called them to be " fishers of men." There we behold Him, not walking on the waters, as in chapter vi., appeasing the winds, and waves, and hearts, and safely leading His own to land; but standing on the shore, and from thence directing the mute tribes of the deep to their net. And not only so, but He shows them—

-even before they cast their net at His command, after they had toiled in vain without Him.

But I refrain from enlarging here on that precious close of that grand, and truly divine Gospel. We shall return to it, in verse 3 of our Psalm, " He restoreth my soul, etc."

But, dear fellow Christian, in order to enjoy this assurance and comfort that flow from the consciousness of having Christ's approval for any work, or service, you may enter upon, it is indispensable, that you should have embarked, not only with Him, but under His pilotage, i.e., practically owning Him, in His place of supreme authority over His flock, as-

3.—TIIE CHIEF SHEPHERD.

If we look around us at the disconsolate state of the flock of God in our days ; the deplorable havoc, which Satan has made amongst that flock; if we look at the divisions, the legion of sects, the worldliness coming in among Christians like a flood, the general yielding to human authority in divine things, the sad backslidings, the errors in doctrine, the fearful speed with which the current of professing religion is hastening towards the final great apostasy ; we shall find, as the chief cause, that which lies at the root of it all: the losing sight of and practically disowning Christ's authority as the Chief Shepherd of the flock, and Head of the church of God. We must confine ourselves here to considering Him in His character as the Chief Shepherd of the flock of God.

Happy, to realize in our hearts His love and tender care as " the Good Shepherd," and to rely by faith on His power as " the Great Shepherd." But all this would be without abiding practical blessing for heart and conscience, unless our souls have learnt to own Him, and to bow before Him, in His supreme authority as " the Chief Shepherd " of His flock. He is not only "altogether lovely," but also "the chiefest among ten

thousand." Let us always remember it! In Roman Catholic countries, we find numerous " convents of the Good Shepherd." Rome does not grudge that concession (though even this only in an outward way). There is something so attractive, even to the unregenerate religious heart, in the thought of such a Shepherd's love. But I have scarcely heard of any religious society or " convent of the Great Shepherd," certainly never of a " convent of the Chief Shepherd." And yet, was it not Peter, the chief among the apostles of the circumcision (whom Rome has chosen for its ' foundation stone," instead of His glorious Master), who, not only equally with his fellow-apostle of the Gentiles, points to Christ as the foundation stone, but by whom the Holy Spirit speaks of Christ as the " Chief Shepherd," when exhorting the elders to feed the flock of God. It was the same chief of the apostles of the circumcision, to whom " the Chief Shepherd " committed the oversight of His flock, with those touching and solemn words, " Feed my lambs " [not Thy lambs], and " shepherd my [not thy] sheep," and " feed my [not thy] sheep."18 To me it appears to be exceedingly beautiful and truly divine, in the closing chapter of that grand Gospel, which opens in chapter i. with the setting forth of the divers glories of Christ, to behold Him departing from the scene, so to speak, as " the Chief Shepherd " restoring a stray sheep with all the tender care of the Good and Great Shepherd for the minutest details of the welfare of His flock.

In John 10, we have the Good Shepherd ; in ch. 20, the Good and the Great Shepherd ; and in the closing chapter, the Good Shepherd (in His providing love,) the Great Shepherd (in His power), and the Chief Shepherd (in His authority), And how those parting words of His gracious Master sank down into the ears and heart of His restored disciple, who there and then was appointed by the Chief Shepherd to be one of His under-shepherds, we find blessedly told out in the fifth chapter of his first Epistle.

" The elders which are among you, I exhort, who am (not " an apostle," but) also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking' the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly ; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind ; neither as being lords (lord-bishops) over your heritage; but being ensamples to the flock, and when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that does not away." These words shew how deeply engraven on the Apostle's heart and conscience, was that scene, and were those words, spoken to him by the gracious Great Shepherd on the shore of the Lake of Tiberias; and how truly and deeply, with all the authority his Master had given to him among the flock of God, his soul bowed down before, and owned the authority of Him, Who alone can be The Chief Shepherd of His own sheep and lambs, bought by His own most precious blood.

Alas! that this supreme authority of the Lord Jesus Christ should have been, and should be still, so continually ignored and set aside, practically (where it is not done willfully,) even by some of His servants, whom the Holy Ghost has fitted to be pastors! This practical denial of the authority of Christ lies, I repeat, at the root of the present sorrowful state of His flock. This condition is far more solemn, and the degradation far deeper than it was in Israel, at the time when the Good Shepherd was in their midst, seeking the lost sheep of Israel, and moved with compassion, when He saw them scattered as sheep having no shepherd. For the measure of our spiritual privileges and blessings, of which those sheep of Christ knew nothing, makes the present state of the flock of God all the more solemn.

There never was a time, when there have been on earth so many children of God as in our days, praised be His grace! Huge tidal-waves of Gospel-blessings, carrying numbers of rejoicing pardoned sinners to the shore of safety, have everywhere increased the flock of God. The harvest has been plenteous, indeed, and true-hearted and devoted labourers there have been, not a few, thank God! But when we turn to the present condition of the flock of God, alas! what a different sight do we behold ! It is the same as it was in the earthly days of our Heavenly Shepherd, when His loving eye saw the multitudes, and he was moved with compassion on them." They are " scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." They " wander through all mountains, and upon every high hill, scattered upon all the face of the earth," and very few true-hearted pastors there are, who, with disinterested devotedness " search and seek after them." Numbers, there are, of gifted and active evangelists, and highly endowed, and enlightened teachers and lecturers. But how thinly scattered amongst the flock of God, are true pastors! Floods of light—precious truths about Christ—poured upon the sheep and lambs of Christ's pasture, but, alas! how very little, of Christ Jesus Himself, and therefore how very little real food for their souls ! They are starving, and they cry for bread, and you give them—not a stone—but light instead. Light develops, but food produces growth. " Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby," writes the Holy Spirit by the pen of that faithful pastor, to whom the Chief Shepherd said " Feed my sheep "—" Feed my lambs." Mere " development," without 'true nourishment and growth, is a dangerous thing—canvas without ballast.—Hence those sad capsizings in private and public testimony of so many who seemed to be chosen vessels. Going and trading with truth,19 before it has been bought (not only learnt) at some cost, and before the heart has fed upon, and the conscience been exercised under the power of it, leads but too often to sad bankruptcy ! " Buy the truth, and sell it not! " But where truth has not been bought, but embezzled, so to speak, or borrowed, the end will be the selling it for some temporal advantage, or, it may be, the sacrificing it on the altar of the great modern grinning idol, " Light," falsely so called (rationalism and infidelity), or of that smiling idol, " Love," " Philanthropy," so called, or " Brotherly love," falsely so called.20 Hence, farther, the backslidings amongst the flock of God, especially in places, where there has been much blessing in the Gospel, but connected with much excitement. What is the cause of this lamentable state of the sheep and lambs of Christ? Is it because the ascended and glorified Head of the Church, Who gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," has seen fit in these last days, to send numbers of evangelists into this perishing world, whilst pastors and teachers appear less necessary to Him, and therefore are given only in comparatively small numbers? Is it because the salvation of sinners is just now His paramount object, and not so much the nourishing, comforting, strengthening, and establishing the saved ones? Who that knows the Lord Jesus Christ, and something of His love, which passeth knowledge, could for a moment entertain such a thought? The same gracious Master, Who called Simon Peter (and his fellow disciples), at the outset, to the work of the gospel, saying, " Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men," addresses to the same disciple, at the same place, before He left this world and went again to the Father, those parting words, " Feed my lambs," and " Shepherd my sheep," and, " Feed my sheep " (See the Greek). The same glorified Jesus of Nazareth, Who called Saul on his way to Damascus, to send him to the Gentiles, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God," gave to that chosen vessel of His grace towards the Gentiles, also the gift and heart of a pastor and faithful steward over that portion of His flock especially. We need not turn to Paul's epistles, every one of which bears testimony to the true shepherd-heart of that great apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher in the Church of God. It suffices, to refer to his parting words, addressed to the elders and pastors of the Church of Ephesus. They breathe such a spirit of a shepherd after the Lord's own heart, that I cannot refrain from repeating them here, familiar as they may be to the reader:-

" Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews ; and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

" 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. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

" And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

" Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, and to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears "

" And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

" I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

" And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied. him unto the ship."

I add not a word of comment upon that pastoral address, with its conscience-stirring, and heart-thrilling words, spoken on that shore. Across the distance of eighteen centuries, and notwithstanding all the ecclesiastical storms, and divers winds of doctrines, that have raged and blown since then, those words are conveyed, in never fading freshness and power, to the hearts and consciences of God's flock, and its pastors and teachers, by the same Spirit, Who gave them to the apostle, and has recorded them for us.

And is this a time, fellow Christian, when such words, and such pastors, are less needed than when they were first spoken. Has the cry: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," ceased or abated in the world, since the days of Ephesus ? Or are the warning words of the apostle with regard to the " grievous wolves not sparing the flock," and the " perverse teachers, drawing away disciples after them," less applicable in the nineteenth century, than they were during the first? One glance at the present state of the Church, suffices to shew, that at no epoch of her sad history, has there been a greater need than there is at present, of heeding those solemn prophetic warnings of the apostle. There is no doubt, for any enlightened Christian, that these are the last days, to which Paul refers in his Second Epistle to Timothy. With all our abundance of gospel-light and scripture-truth, never has there been a greater need of true-hearted, wise, and loving pastors, than now-a-days. On all sides, we hear the cry of famine, in the midst of an abundance of light and knowledge, and of mountains of books and periodicals. What a remarkable, and truly heart-sickening condition for that flock to be in, for whom Christ died!

How then are we to account for the lack of true pastors amongst the vastly increased flock of God? I think the above quoted passage from the First Epistle of the Apostle Peter (ch. 5.), furnishes us with a simple and full answer. But, all-important as the consideration of this question may be, we must confine ourselves here to one or two hints, as it has only an indirect bearing on our subject, and might lead us astray from the evergreen pastures of our Psalm, to the sterile regions of polemics. We therefore content ourselves with referring the Christian reader to that passage for prayerful consideration. Suffice it here to add, that we find there three essential qualities of a true shepherd (or pastor), mentioned by the apostle, whom " the Chief shepherd " had commissioned to " shepherd ' and " feed. " his flock, and who, on his part, enjoins the under-shepherds to " feed the flock of God," and to " shepherd " it (i.e., to take the oversight of it). These three essential qualities, each of which our apostle expresses in that impressive way so peculiar to him, first negatively, then positively, are the following:-

1. They are to take the oversight of the flock of God, " not by constraint, but willingly," i.e. they are to serve the chief Shepherd and His flock, not in the spirit of a mere official duty, but heartily, as serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. They are to serve, " not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind," and—.

3. Not in a ruling and domineering spirit, as if they were lords over their own heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

There are, accordingly, three conditions of the heart, that would render a Christian unfit for the place of a shepherd or pastor (or " elder”) of the flock of God.

Lukewarmness (by constraint, not willingly).

Covetousness (for filthy lucre, not of a ready mind).

Pride (an overbearing and ruling spirit).21

And now, dear Christian reader, before passing on to the meditation of the second verse of our Psalm, let us once more chime in, from the bottom of our hearts, with that glorious strain. " The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Though confusion and corruption are increasing all around us, Jesus Christ, in His own all sufficiency, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He is " Lord God, above all, blessed for ever." Above our failures, there is still His grace, which is, to those who feel and own before Him their own and their people's sins, (His sighing

and crying ones), as sufficient as ever. Above our weakness, there is still His power, His strength, " made perfect in weakness," if realized before Him. Above our manifold needs and wants, there is still His love, all-providing, that love of Christ, from which nothing shall be able to separate us.

The Lord., Jehovah [Jesus] is my shepherd: I shall not want."

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