

THE
PRODIGAL RECLAIMED.

OR THE
SINNER'S RUIN AND RECOVERY.

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The Prodigal's Return.

THE PRODIGAL.

CHAPTER I.

The Story of Charles L——. The Prodigal's career.

PASSING up the East River from the city of New York, just before the traveller enters Long Island Sound, he may be tempted to inquire the name of the owner of a fine house and spacious grounds, that attract the eye, and by their elegance and neatness appear to be in the hands of a man of wealth and taste. His name is not known to me, but the spot, now the abode of strangers, is full of deep and painful interest as the early home of one whose story I am about to tell.

Charles L—— was the son of a wealthy man of business in the city of New York.

His parents were neither of them Christians, but their associations were chiefly among religious friends, and their social and domestic relations were governed by a rigid regard to sound morals.

Charles was an only son. Nursed on the lap of luxury, and in infancy and childhood freely indulged by the fondness of a tender mother and a father who doated on his boy, it is not to be wondered at that he soon displayed a will of his own, and a disposition to have it gratified without much regard to the feelings or wishes of those around him. But Charles was not what is called a bad boy. In very early life he discovered some traits of character that endeared him to those who loved his parents and who mourned at that parental and mistaken tenderness, which was leaving his will unsubdued and preparing the son and the parents for future pain.

It was the kind suggestion of these more judicious friends that led Mr. L—— to resolve and Mrs. L—— to consent to place their son, now a fine boy of ten years of age, under the roof of an uncle in a quiet New Eng-

land village. A few months after this plan was agreed upon, Charles found himself in the family of a country pastor, whom he was to look upon in the light of a father, and whose word was to be his law.

Here the sweet influences of the religion of Jesus Christ were felt in the hearts and shown in the lives of a well regulated Christian family. The morning sun saw them always with the word of God before them, and after a portion of its sacred truths was read, they were led to the throne of grace in fervent prayer by the head of the pious household. The evening was closed with the same hallowed exercises, and then too there was singing that went up from hearts full of gratitude and love. The Sabbath was remembered to be kept holy. Modern conformity to the world may think it too severe, but the Sabbath was regarded there as the Lord's day, not man's. There was no light or vain conversation, no reading of worldly books, no walking the streets or fields except to go to the house of God, or to do an act of kindness to an afflicted neighbor. Religion, the reli-

gion of the Bible,—not a weak and cold system of morality that philosophy may teach without a revelation from heaven, and which makes no more of Christ than a martyr or a hero,—but *that* religion which owns and teaches the sinfulness of the heart and the sinner's need of forgiveness through the merits of another, that brings out the necessity of Christ's death as the only ground on which God can be just when he pardons ; *that* religion was the power that reigned by love in the family of the New England pastor.

I am thus particular, that it may be seen how changed must be the circumstances with which Charles was now surrounded. Placed in such a family and required to conform to the same rules that all obeyed, he was not slow in showing out the natural aversion of his heart to every thing that was good. If he gave a decent attention to the religious exercises of the house, if he treated the Sabbath and the institutions of religion with respect, it was too plain that he yielded a reluctant tribute to what he could not avoid. But the good pastor loved the boy, and tenderly

and faithfully sought to impress the principles of divine truth upon his soul. Charles spent some four or five years under this instruction, visiting his parents two or three times in the course of the year, at which seasons he enjoyed again the sweets of indulgence, and learned to hate the restraints of a religious family and the dullness of a peaceful village. He had, however, at the village school pursued his studies preparatory to college, and at the age of fifteen he was glad to take leave of his best friends in the country, and enter the university.

In reciting these facts (for this and what is to come are not matters of fancy, but the records of what are familiar to some still living), my design is not to follow the subject of this sketch through all the walks of childhood and youth, to mark the several steps by which he reached the end of a short and gay career of folly and sin; but that those who read may learn to shun the rocks on which he was early wrecked, or rather the whirlpool in which he was swallowed, I will mark some of them on the map before us.

I have said there were some traits of his character that endeared him to his parents and friends. Grown up to youth, full of spirits and fond of pleasure, Charles was the life of the circle of young companions that gathered around him. Generous to a fault, and supplied too freely by his father with spending money, he had both the disposition and the means to indulge himself and others in those amusements that lay the foundation for future vice, and spread flowers in the pathway to eternal ruin.

Long before he left college he had distinguished himself in the ball-room far more than in his class ; and he was far more ambitious to obtain conquests in the halls of fashionable folly than in the fields of learning, or the world of fame. Passionately fond of dancing, he pursued it with enthusiasm, at the risk of health and reputation, and regardless of the kind advice which reflecting friends wasted upon him.

While Charles was in college, his father purchased the beautiful place on the East River to which I have already referred, for a

summer residence. His winters were passed in the city, and when Charles came home, with no taste for the drudgery of professional life, and no fitness for business, he was installed in his father's counting-room as a clerk, spending his days in the forms of business, and his evenings in the pursuit of pleasure.

The THEATRE was his favorite resort. Its glare and glitter, its thrilling excitements and wild amusements caught his heart, and night after night he revelled in ideal scenes of passionate interest, till he learned to look with cold indifference upon the every-day realities about him.

He found his way to the gaming-table, and with reckless impetuosity plunged into the vortex which there opens for the souls of the young. Not far from the theatre and the billiard-room, was the house of her whose steps take hold on hell. With madness that defied all restraint, and shut out hope of his recovery, he abandoned himself to sensual indulgences without shame, and resisted, as the counsels of an enemy, the efforts of friends

who, at each step of his downward course, had interfered to save him from ruin.

How often in these days of dissipation had a mother wept over him, with tears that none but heart-broken mothers shed over ruined sons ! How often had a fond father sought him out in the dark and hidden haunts of vice to which he nightly resorted, and mingling a parent's love with the strong authority of an injured father, led him home, and watched by his bedside till the morning light, that with the first return of consciousness he might extort a promise of reform. Such influences, stronger than any restraining power but the grace of God, might have saved him but for the grasp of an enemy that was dragging him downward to death and hell. It was scarcely possible that he should have run his course thus far without having drunk often and deeply of the intoxicating cup. Intemperance had marked him for its prey. This was some years ago, in the morning of the great temperance reformation which has since so signally and gloriously blessed our country and the world. And when he was

persuaded by the united entreaties of his parents and friends to pledge himself to abstain from "ardent spirits," the smile of hope was seen on a mother's faded cheek, and a mountain weight was removed from his father's heart.

There *was* a change in Charles that all regarded with intense delight. It lasted for months. Again he was the pride of his parents and the centre of a thousand hopes.

The cup of happiness seemed to his parents to be full when Charles led to the altar, and brought home to their house, a lovely bride, whom of all others they had chosen as one who would make him happy, and throw around him the restraints of love, should he ever be allured again into the paths of vice.

On the very evening of his marriage, it was painfully evident that he was not beyond the reach of the destroyer. I have said that this period was at the opening of the present temperance reformation, and few had then thought of danger from the use of wine. But in the festivities of the marriage day, in the midst of company of which young L——

was the life and soul, and called on again and again to drink to his "health and happiness;" (Oh! the mockery of such words over the wine-cup!) he lost command of his appetite, and before he suspected his danger he was overcome. Deeply mortified at this occurrence, he determined to regain his self-respect by a rigid adherence to entire abstinence from all means of intoxication. But the appetite was excited, and it would be gratified. The rest of the story is soon told.

Months passed away and the once elegant, accomplished, fascinating Charles L—— was sinking deeper and deeper into the abyss of shameful, disgusting intemperance. The appetite became a passion, the passion became a *mania*. The last hope of his recovery was now blasted. The prospects of wealth and honor and domestic bliss had lost all charms in his eye. The gross sensuality of his darling sins, the vile companions of his nightly debauch, the delirious excitements of the theatre and gaming-table, again absorbed the desires of his depraved heart. In vain did

parental affection plead, in vain did a young wife, with their first-born on her breast, weep tears of bitter grief over his fall ; in vain did he hear the strong appeals of religious truth ; in vain was he admonished of the danger to his immortal soul, and the certainty of his swift destruction, if he persisted in his downward course ;—he was in the grasp of the destroyer. Deaf to the cries of affection, blind to his own guilt and shame, and dead to all the sweet sensibilities of the soul, he was lost, and lost for ever.

Such incessant and reckless devotion to the intoxicating bowl was making serious inroads upon his once vigorous constitution. When he came home from his nightly revels, his wild, demoniac ravings gave sad warnings that he might speedily fall a victim to the drunkard's scourge, the *delirium tremens*. Even in this last struggle, when reason had deserted the throne, and conscience had long been drowned in the wine-cup, and, to the hearts that loved him most, death seemed the only relief that would ever be theirs, even in

this last struggle there was once more lighted up a faint gleam of hope.

One morning, after a night of more than his accustomed revelry, he awoke apparently to the strong and vivid consciousness that he was in the road to hell. From the time that he left the fireside of the good pastor in New England, he had seldom given a thought, never an *hour*, to the memory of the lessons which were then, with so much faithfulness and love, imprinted on his young heart. But *impressions thus made are never entirely obliterated*. They may be forgotten in the midst of the follies and sins of a gay career; they may be buried under other and deeper impressions that exert a controlling and destroying power; but they are still there, and in some hour, perhaps of delirium, perhaps of calm reflection, perhaps on a dying bed, or it may be in the world of despair, they will be remembered and reviewed, with all the distinctness of the time when they were graven in the mind. So was it now with Charles.

His wife was struck with mingled astonishment and joy as she heard him engaged in

earnest prayer for the pardon of his many sins for the sake of Jesus Christ. She wept with him, and though quite unused to the language of prayer, she poured out the desires of her bursting heart that God would have mercy on the poor prodigal, and lead him back to the paths of virtue and of peace.

At this juncture, I was sent for, and in a few moments, was at his side.

“Oh,” said he, as I entered the room, “I am glad you have come. I have been praying for the pardon of my many sins, and God has heard my poor prayers for the sake of his Son. I feel better now. I am happy now. I am going to heaven now! There, there comes an angel, there another; don’t you see them coming? There, I am going now; come, and go with me to glory.”

I saw in an instant that he was wandering, though he was so peaceful and apparently so happy, that his friends were weeping for joy at the prospect of his sudden conversion from the error of his ways.

I assured him that there was no immediate prospect of his departure, and sitting quietly

on the bed which he thought was a car on which he was about to be conveyed to heaven, I spoke to him freely of his past life, the necessity of sincere repentance for his many transgressions of God's holy laws, and of the infinite provisions made by Jesus Christ for the forgiveness even of the chief of sinners. Then it was that I saw the strength of those impressions which had been made on his heart while under the instruction of the excellent clergyman of whom I have spoken. The whole plan of salvation was distinctly before his mind, and the views of divine truth which he expressed were far more clear and complete than are usually shown by intelligent men who have not enjoyed religious instruction in their childhood. I dealt faithfully with him, as one who has an account to give before God. But what could be done for a man whose reason was gone, and whose fancy spread before him visions of celestial glory on which he was soon to enter? I prayed with him, and left him.

A few days more and I was sent for again. In the mean time he had plunged deeper

than ever into his destroying indulgences, and the terrible *delirium* that haunts the drunkard's brain had obtained the mastery. One wild scene of unbridled excess had followed another in swift succession, till he was laid upon his dying bed. No, he did not have a dying bed! No visions of angels waiting to convey him to heaven now floated before his eyes. No dreams of pardon and peace by the blood of the dear Redeemer, shed their soothing influence on his soul.

"*Take them off! Oh, take them off,*" he screamed as I came into his chamber. "They have come for me; I see them, I feel them; this is hell."

The scene was awful to me, heart-rending to those who loved him as none others could. Every object in the room was a demon ready to dart upon him. They leaped on the bed, they planted themselves on his breast, they laughed at his horrors, and revelled in his cries and groans. It was with great difficulty that strong men could keep him on his couch of anguish. He was determined to fly from the monsters that gathered in troops

about him. Seizing his opportunity when their attention was for a moment diverted, he leaped from the bed, by the side of which sat his parents, wrinkled and gray but not with age, and his own young wife with their only child in her arms; he broke away from the attendants who vainly strove to hold him back; he rushed from his chamber into the streets of the city, and there in his nakedness and madness raved like a devil escaped from hell. They caught him and forced him into the house, but could not compel him to lie down. He stood in the middle of his chamber, struggling fearfully with friends who gathered around him to pacify his maniac frenzy. His wife fell on his neck, and implored him by his love for her and his darling boy, to lie down and be still, till the storm that raged in his brain should pass by. But no tears, no prayers, no force would quiet him in that wild hour. He stood and struggled fiercely with phantoms, and raved of devils and the damned. An unearthly brightness lighted up his face as he exclaimed, "I am ready now; I'll go, I'll go;" and

he stood—a corpse! They laid him on the bed, and closed his eyes for ever.

Such was the career and fate of one whom I knew and loved. He was a Prodigal Son. How many fall like him; perish like him, in the very morning of their days.

As I have read the story of the Prodigal Son in the gospel of Jesus Christ, I have often admired its force and fidelity in portraying the course of every sinner in his apostasy from God. But more than this, it follows the prodigal, not only in his departure, but in his return to the father, whose house he deserted, and whose love he abused. And as I have dwelt upon the beauty of this story as a complete picture of the sinner's ruin and recovery, I have thought of asking the young to follow the parable with me, step by step, and patiently contemplate its wonderful fitness to lead them to a knowledge of their danger, a sense of their sinfulness, and to guide them in the way of salvation.

The chapters that follow are written with this design. If any of my readers, having

learned the melancholy end of poor Charles L——, should here lay down the book, it may never be known to him who writes it; but it may be the act which God will look upon as a cold rejection of a kind offer to lead them in the way of life everlasting. Let us read and study the parable of the Prodigal Son.

CHAPTER II.

The object of this little book—The parable of the Prodigal Son—The analogy between the Prodigal and every sinner—An outline of the discussion.

MAN is a prodigal from God. In the morning of his being he was owned as the child, and treated as the favorite of Heaven. But he has wandered away from his Maker, disowned the relationship in which he stood, squandered the goods that a father's kindness had bestowed; and in the distance to which he has strayed he must perish miserably, unless brought back to God.

In the gospel we have a faithful history of the sinner's career. The story of the Prodigal Son was left on record to mark the voluntary departure of man from God; the miserable condition to which sin reduces the sinner; the bitterness of sorrow he feels when awakened to a sense of his sinfulness; and the steps by which he must travel back to his

deserted Father; his actual return, and the joy there is on earth and in heaven over one who was dead, and is alive again; who was lost, and is found. Read the parable with this object before the mind, and observe the parallel. It meets the case of every prodigal sinner who has returned to God. You will find it in the fifteenth chapter of Luke.

“A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.’ And he divided unto them his living.

“And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him.

“And when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many hired servants of my father have

bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger ! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son ; make me as one of thy hired servants.'

"And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet ; and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it ; and let us eat and be merry ; for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found.'"

To follow the sinner through all his wanderings, and to lead him step by step in his return, is a task for which, here on the threshold, I feel insufficient. But the object in view is an honest one, and to accomplish it God may give strength to the weak. It may

be that even this feeble attempt will meet his approbation, and secure his blessing; and should it thus prove to be the means of leading one poor wanderer back to God, so that there should be joy in heaven over a repenting sinner, and Christ Jesus should have one more child at his feet in glory, or one more star in his crown, it will be more than sufficient reward. If you, dear reader, whose eye now rests on these words, should be persuaded by what you read, to think of the evil and the danger of sin, and under the gentle but subduing influences of the Holy Spirit, should then be raised, from the hell into which you are just ready to sink, to the joys of holiness and heaven, then will it not be in vain that these pages are written. And when you and I meet before the throne of that Saviour together, we will rejoice that this humble effort for his glory was made. And if you throw away the book and read no further, if you press on in sin till death overtakes you, it will still be some consolation to me, that, in the morning of your apostasy, I asked you to turn from your evil ways and live.

In tracing the analogy between the prodigal in the gospel and every sinner, we will pursue such thoughts as these :

The relationship existing between God and man,—that of father and son. The happiness of that relation, and the duties that flow from it.

The character and conduct of the sinner. He is unwilling to perform his duties, and prefers to depart from God.

God gives the sinner the privilege of having his own way if he chooses to take the consequences. He gives him his portion of goods in this life, and permits him to use or abuse them.

Sin is an apostasy from God. This constitutes the guilt and misery of sin. Present and eternal misery, is present and eternal separation from God.

In the far country the prodigal wasted his substance with riotous living. The sinner wastes his time, talents and opportunities. The prodigal, by his extravagance, was reduced to want. The sinner loses peace of conscience, God's favor, and his immortal soul.

The prodigal became a menial ; the sinner becomes a slave.

The prodigal would fill himself with husks ; sin never satisfies the soul's desires.

In the depth of the prodigal's distress, no man gave unto him. Sinners would not help each other, if they could ; they could not, if they would.

When ready to perish he began to reflect. He came to himself. Many think that when a man is under conviction of sin, he is beside himself ; but he is mad who can rest securely under the guilt and danger of apostasy from God.

Reflection led to repentance. He determined to return and confess his sin. He arose and came. He resolved to cast himself on the sovereign mercy of an alienated father. This was faith.

When he was yet a great way off, the father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. This was the reception ; the best robe was brought ; a ring was put on his hand ; and shoes on his feet.

There was joy in the father's house. There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. Will there be joy in heaven over you, this night, dear reader?

You are addressed in this parable, and in the book you now hold in your hand. Whatever your name, or place, or age, if there is an "evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God," you are the sinner whom I would reach. Do not read and admire the fitness of this story to illustrate the case of your neighbor, but bear in mind that "if thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." Prov. 9: 12.

CHAPTER III.

The relationship existing between God and man—The happiness of that relation, and the duties that flow from it—Sinners are altogether without excuse if they renounce their relationship to God and depart from him—Man in paradise, and man an apostate, a prodigal.

As a creature of God, man is under infinite obligations to obey his Maker. As a dependent creature, receiving life, and breath, and being, from his Creator, he is bound to render the perfect love of his heart, and the sincere and ceaseless service of his life. The thing formed is subject to him who formed it. The power of the Maker is absolute, and the thing made has no right to call it in question. Were this the extent of man's obligation to God, it would justly demand his perfect obedience of every precept that has been issued from Jehovah's throne.

No conceivable excuse can be urged for the slightest departure from the requirements

of the divine law. Every thing around us obeys its Maker, and why not we?

Why is it that the whole material world, animate and inanimate, answers the end for which it was made? Why is it that for six thousand years the countless worlds of this vast universe have moved on in their noiseless, mighty career, without derangement or decay? Why is it that through all her operations, from the mote that floats in the sunbeam, up to the sun in whose beams it floats, nature now rejoices in the same harmony as when "the morning stars sung together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" It is because the material world obeys its Creator's laws. Not a jot or tittle of the *natural* law has failed to be fulfilled. Summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, have followed each other in sweet obedience to the law that regulates the seasons of the year. Worlds on worlds, unnumbered and perhaps innumerable, roll on in "confusion, unconfused," wheeling their wide circuits through the fields of space; the slightest deviation from their appointed orbits might

disturb the balance of the universe; worlds fixed in their distinct and distant spheres would be brought within each other's influence, and suns and systems thus deranged would rush in wild disorder into utter ruin. This catastrophe would be the consequence of one star wandering from its place. But no such Lucifer has appeared among the host of heaven. The laws of nature are the laws of God, and the material world knows no revolt. It was left for rational, intelligent creatures to set the example of disobedience in the government of God.

But my object in this illustration was to show that man is under obligation to obey his Creator, and ought to yield obedience as readily and perfectly as the senseless creation. If it be said, that matter must obey and cannot do otherwise, I answer that reason does not make it necessary for man to sin. He, on whom the gift of reason has been conferred, stands higher on the scale of being than the senseless clod, and ought to yield more glory to him who thus distinguished him.

And in his word, God often refers to this relationship of Creator and creature, as forming one source of deep and lasting obligation. You have noticed it in that beautiful chapter that closes the book of Ecclesiastes: "Remember now thy *Creator* in the days of thy youth." So in the 43d chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah, we read, "Thus saith the Lord that *created* thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel." And again, in the same chapter, he says, "I have created him for my glory, I have formed him, yea, I have made him." And this relationship is made the basis of a claim to the service and love of the creature; a claim that commends itself to every man's conscience as natural and just, and involving fearful and surprising guilt if it is disregarded and contemned. Simple as the claim thus presented may appear, it has a firm hold upon the whole man. It is his reasonable service to consecrate himself to God (Rom. 12: 1), and every instant that he refuses, the very stones cry out against him and reproach his disobedience.

If the sinner is endowed with moral and mental faculties that raise him above the brutes that perish, and above the inanimate world, his obligations are wonderfully increased. God gave him those powers for a more holy purpose. He who conferred them ought to be glorified in their exercise. The author of human *reason* is entitled to the profoundest homage of *that* reason. The author of human *affections* ought to be *loved* with all the heart, and mind, and strength. And when the Creator, the source of intelligence and affection, enjoys the service and the love of those whom he has thus endowed, he receives only what is his just due. And if his claim is disputed, and these tributes denied, if the creature uses his reason in devising rebellion against his Creator, and sets his heart on sin instead of holiness and God, it is right that he should break him with a rod of iron, and dash him in pieces like a potter's vessel. - Psalm 2: 9. When we have made a machine that does not answer the purpose for which it was made, we destroy it and make another. And if the great Cre-

ator of heaven and earth should gird himself with vengeance and exclaim, Let us destroy man whom we made in our image, and should then crush beneath his feet this whole revolted empire, as we would crush a reptile that had aimed at us his sting, God would be just. And with dying groan, each perishing sinner would be compelled to say, amen. It is a wonder of mercy that sinners are left one moment out of hell! It is more wonderful that they are suffered to live any where under the government of a holy God!

These thoughts are urged upon you, that you may see wherein you have violated the first principles of your being, if you have ever broken a single precept of God's word. The relation of creature and Creator has imposed on you obligations from which no circumstances can relieve you; and if you have refused to answer all the ends for which you were made, you deserve to be destroyed.

But vast and conclusive as is the obligation derived from this relation, it is the least interesting of all the relations in which the sinner stands to God. He enjoys this in

common with beasts and stones. There is a higher and nobler bond that draws the intelligent creation towards God.

“We are also his offspring.” This sentiment of a heathen poet an apostle repeats to express another relation between man and God. He is “our Father.” Strange condescension it is on his part, to permit us to be called the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. But it is no more strange than true. God is called by the tender name of “Father” more than *two hundred* times in the Holy Scriptures. It is *the* title by which his creatures are most frequently desired to address him. It expresses more fully than all others, the relationship that should exist between man and God. *God is the Father ; you are the child.*

Let it not be thought a thing incredible with you that God should be under obligations to his creatures. He has assumed them and will perform them. Having created you, he is bound to exercise for you a Creator’s care so long as you answer the end for which you are made. *And no longer.* Having

formed you with faculties capable of happiness or misery, God is further required by the benevolence of his nature, to place happiness within your reach. It would not be right for God to make the holy angels miserable. They have a title to bliss so long as they obey. *And no longer.* The moment they sin, all obligation on God's part, to make them happy, ceases for ever, and he may punish or destroy them whenever it pleases him. So with you. God is bound by his own justice to do good to the deserving, and that obligation he will discharge to the satisfaction of every obedient subject of his wide empire.

Has not God most freely and faithfully performed his whole duty towards you? His preserving hand has always been above, and beneath, and around you. But for that shield death would come to you on every gale, meet you at every step, and hurry you into the grave. You live only because God permits. You sleep on the upholding hand of the God whose law you have broken; and that hand is between you —

far beyond this mark of mercy, even in the midst of your sins, he sets before you happiness, and places it within your reach. This is favor undeserved. When the law is broken, the sentence comes, and justice calls for its execution. But God, still willing to be the *Father* of his creatures, has followed them with kindness, and has offered pardon, and promised to the penitent the return of his alienated love. He has provided a way for their recovery, and urged it upon their acceptance with so much earnestness, that if they persist in sin, and perish, they will have none to blame but themselves.

These facts, too evident to be denied or doubted, show you that God has done his duty to you, even when your treatment of him had released him from all obligation. But if the relationship of parent and child imposes the duty of protection and kindness on the father, what are the duties that rest on the son? *You are bound to obey.* This is the first duty of a rational creature. The claim is laid in nature. All men acknowledge this. Where the gospel has never been preached,

where barbarism reigns, and no light but that of nature shines on the heart, even there the right of the father to the obedience of the child is admitted as the basis of all authority. The Roman law allowed a father to put his son to death for a breach of his commands. The gospel has regulated the claim, but has not weakened its power. The claim is *strengthened* by every unmerited act of kindness that you have experienced at the hands of your Father in heaven. Had God punished you in the first moment of sin, with everlasting banishment from his face, your obligation to obey would not have been cancelled or weakened. The angels who sinned were damned on the instant, but they are at this hour as much bound to obey the law of God as the angels that worship before the throne. But when God was pleased to refrain from punishment and to spare you in mercy, your obligation has been increasing according to the number and magnitude of favors received. To record and recount those favors I should not know where to begin, nor where to end. Should we commence with the first moment

of your existence, and dividing your life into as many periods as there are minutes in your years, each individual moment would be a monument of God's mercy.

Perhaps the severest expression that ever fell from the lips of the Son of God, is that memorable curse, "It were better for that man, that he had never been born." *You live*; a creature of God; a moral being; a dying and yet living creature; liable to ten thousand accidents, yet spared in mercy, protected amid dangers seen and unseen, and surrounded with favors more in number than the stars in heaven, or the sands on the seashore. Yet these are nothing more than common mercies. We could not number them, though we should say nothing of what God has done for his creatures as those who have sinned. All this will be considered hereafter. But leaving the gifts of divine grace out of the account, the gifts of providence alone will furnish motives to enforce the most perfect compliance with every precept of the law.

And beyond obedience, God requires your love. "My son, give me thy heart." He asks no other obedience than that which is the fruit of love. He deserves your love and ought to have it. *He is infinitely lovely.* Every thing in him is fitted to secure the undivided affections of every intelligent creature in the universe. If the moral world would follow the dictates of sound judgment, and act as reason and conscience approve and enjoin, that world would unanimously exalt the Lord Almighty in their hearts. Combine the wisdom of the whole creation, from every part of this world, and from every other world where intelligence reigns, and let that collected wisdom designate the character of him who is worthy to sit on the throne, and be honored and worshipped, and loved by all both now and for ever, and JEHOVAH of hosts would be declared worthy alone to receive glory, and honor, dominion, and power, both now and for ever. If sin were not enthroned in the heart, and the choice of a monarch were submitted to those who dwell here and on high, the Lord Al-

mighty would be chosen King of kings by the united voice of the universe. And why not? What traits of character, what qualifications for office, what claims to love, do good men seek after, that are not blended most harmoniously and illustriously in the person of your Father in heaven?

Do men love *benevolence*? God opens his hands, and streams of kindness flow in rivers of mercy to this parched and desert world. And if men love goodness, they ought to love God.

Do men love *justice*? They profess to admire it in each other; and God is eternally, inflexibly just. His character was never impeached, though clouds of false witnesses have sought to cast reproach on his name. His laws are equitable, designed to promote your happiness as well as his glory, and the ingenuity of man was never able to impair or improve them. The penalties are complained of as being too severe, but they were not sufficiently severe to deter you from incurring them. You knew the law and knew the penalty; you broke the law, and when the

penalty comes upon you, you complain of its severity. And God has administered the complicated affairs of this vast empire for sixty centuries, in the midst of ceaseless and desperate rebellion, and not a charge has been made good against him; the universe, with the exception of wicked men and devils, has approved of his administration.

Do men love *truth*? God is true, though every man should prove a liar. His purposes are eternal, his word unchangeable, his veracity unimpeachable. He cannot lie. For thousands of years he has had a controversy with a race of beings who have labored to fasten upon him some charge of falsehood, some failure to fulfil his engagements, that might serve as a pretext for their unfaithfulness, but they have labored in vain. If truth is lovely, God ought to be loved.

Do men love honor, and glory, and majesty, and power, blended with mercy, and goodness, and meekness, and the softer graces that shine in holiness? They find them all combined in that unapproachable light which surrounds the throne of Jehovah! Around him those

attributes cluster. From him those rays of grandeur and beauty shine forth to fill heaven and earth with his glory. Angels gaze with delight upon the brightness of the Father's face, and seraph hearts burn with love as his perfections beam eternally upon them. And I ask, why is it that the sons of God who have never swerved from the purity of their first estate, will study the character of God and love it the more, the more they learn; while man, who has revolted from God, will hate him the more his attributes are revealed. If angels love their Maker supremely, why should not you? Are you more capable of judging what is lovely than they? Are your obligations less than theirs? For you God has done what he never has done and never will do for them; and the obligation that draws you to him is stronger than any other chain which extends from his throne to a created heart.

Thus it appears, that if we study the character of God, we find in him all those perfections, which ought to engage the undivided love of every creature in the moral universe.

Therefore, God has a claim upon you, both from what he is, and what he has done. Can the claim be strengthened? Let us go one step further.

Your own interest requires you to love and obey your heavenly Father. You desire to be happy here and hereafter. But to be happy you must be holy, and to be holy you must forsake sin, and love the Lord with all your heart. Would you know what fruits of joy and peace will spring from love to God in the heart of man, look back to the morning of this world's being, when man rejoiced in the smiles of his Maker, and delighted to hold communion with him as friend with friend. It is hard for us, in our present sinful state, to form an adequate conception of the happiness that reigned in the human heart, and spread itself over the pathway of man, before he broke his Father's law, and became a wanderer from his home. In the garden of Eden there was every thing provided to make him blest for whom all was made. The flowers bloomed in beauty at his feet ; delicious fruit hung in rich abundance around him ; the

air of heaven was balmy, and its light was sweet. The birds of the air and the beasts of the field were his friends.

He awoke in the morning and rejoiced in the goodness and loving-kindness of his Father in heaven. He, whose servants were angels, delighted to come down in the cool of the day, and walk in that garden, and hold social converse with his creature man. The heart of that creature must have been full of praise. And God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, and he gave unto him one to share his joy. Now it was Paradise. There was no holier, happier heaven than Eden. Man, in the image of God, grew in knowledge, and holiness, and happiness, as day by day his powers enlarged and took in new supplies from the great Fountain of light and love. How could it be otherwise? The friend of God, surrounded by all that heart could wish or hope, why did he not continue to be thus for ever blest. Immortal youth bloomed on him; no pain, disease, or danger threatened him; heaven was his on earth, and eternal life opened on his unclouded view.

But in that bright morning of his existence man enjoyed no more than would have been the portion of his posterity had he continued to love and serve his Maker. This was his tremendous responsibility. God laid on him the mighty trust of standing there in the garden, at the head of the human race, to act for himself and those who should come after him. He abused the trust, and involved himself and his children in the ruins of that sad fall. Our first parent knew that on him was laid the weight of a world's immortal hopes, and as he looked upon the forbidden fruit, he felt that by obeying the command of God, he would secure for himself and his posterity a title to everlasting life, while disobedience would bring on him and them the curse of offended justice, the righteous indignation of a holy God. All this he saw and felt, when he put forth his hand to commit the first sin that stained this virgin world. But with madness, just like that which marks the transgression of every sinner who breaks the law of God, he ventured on the awful experiment.

“ He plucked, he ate
Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat
Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe
That all was lost.”

From that dark hour to this, the consequences of that one sin have flowed like a river of death over the natural and moral world. The beauty of Eden withered as if the desert blast had smitten it. Thorns and briers sprang up and grew in the pathway of man. The fruits of the earth no longer came at his bidding, but were to be earned by the sweat of his brow. Disease, and pain, and want, and death, a long sad train of wretchedness and woe, followed him as he went forth into the wilderness of a desert world, a prodigal from his Father, an outcast from paradise, an heir of hell. Sin was his curse. His sin proved his misery. It alienated his Father's heart, it poisoned the cup of his domestic peace, it enfeebled his body, beclouded his mind, strewed his way with pains, and fears, and woes, and exposed him to misery more exquisite and overwhelming hereafter.

And “by one man, sin entered into the world.” “By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.” “By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation.” Rom. 5 : 12—19. This is the record which the Holy Ghost, by the apostle to the Romans, has given of the connection between the sin of our first parents and the misery of his posterity. It is a statement that must be true, because God has said it ; this connection must be wise, because God appointed it. It must be good, because he who ordained it had in view the highest glory of his own unsullied name, and the highest good of the children whom he has made.

Such was the change that took place in the world in consequence of sin. What sin did for our first parents, it does for you. It was for their *interest* to be holy. It is for your interest to be holy. True it is that you do not stand in the same relations with those of Adam in the garden, but you live under the same moral government, with the same promises and threatenings to induce you to yield perfect obedience to the same law of

the same righteous God. The same heaven of unfading bliss invites you to its everlasting enjoyment. The same curse hangs over your head, to fall for ever on the soul that sinneth against God. Now, in the morning of your career, make up your mind to depart from God, to break his law, to cast off his authority and plunge into sin, and that curse shall fall upon you here, and rest on you with an increasing weight through all eternity. You shall live in sin, and die in sin, and while you feel in your soul the fire that is never quenched, and the gnawings of the worm that will never die, it shall be the bitterest pang in the anguish of eternal woe, that when you resolved *to-day* to continue in sin, you knew the consequences and might have shunned them but for the wretched choice you made.

And instead of wasting the precious hours of time in vain inquiries as to the wisdom of the system by which you are involved in all the bitter consequences of our first parents' sin, will it not be far more for your present and future good to ask the way by which you

may be delivered from "the wrath and curse of God," that now threaten your soul? Were you in a burning house, you would seek to escape, before you sought the origin of the flames. If your best friend were sinking in the waves, you would be more anxious to know how he could be saved, than how he was thus exposed. You are in danger, near and dreadful. How shall you escape?

CHAPTER IV.

An ungrateful son—The Prodigal's demand—The father remonstrates, pleads, warns, but in vain—God thus reasons with sinners, sets life and death before them, and warns them of the future.

Not many years ago, in the State of Maryland, there was a man whose experience so much resembled that of the father in this parable, that I must stop a moment here to mention the circumstances. This man was the father of two sons to whom a small property was left by a relative, on the possession of which they were to enter when they came of age. The "younger" of these "two sons" had in very early life, and through his youth, been wild and reckless; and so regardless of the little that from time to time had been committed to his hands, in fact had discovered so many indications of being a spendthrift, that his father was justly fearful that the property bequeathed to him

would soon be squandered, if he should have it in his power. As this property was in the hands of the father, to be kept until the children came of age, he declined paying it over, when the "younger son," on the day that he was twenty-one years of age, demanded it as his own.

The father had always been a kind and indulgent parent, and having never denied his children a reasonable request, he could not believe that any serious resistance would be offered to his determination still to retain the property in his own hands, and supply his son with its annual avails. Who, then, can imagine the surprise of that affectionate parent, when this beloved son, whom he had "nourished and brought up," prosecuted him in the civil courts, and by a regular process of law, compelled him to pay over the property which he held in trust.

The son received the money, and not many days after left his father's house, to enjoy, without restraint, the pleasures of the world. The rest of his history is that of all other prodigals. He spent all in riotous living.

He rushed from one scene of sensual indulgence to another, till his property was gone, his health ruined, and worn out with disease and want, before he was thirty years old, he came back to his father's house and died.

As we pursue the parable of the prodigal in the gospel, we shall be more and more struck with the analogy between his case, and that of every sinner under the parental government of God.

This father, we may believe, was doing all for his children that the most generous affection could do, to promote their highest interest and happiness. But to the impatient spirit of the younger son, the mild government even of a father's love, was too severe. He would not "bear the yoke in his youth." He saw others, who had broken away from the restraints of parental authority, revelling in the luxury of independence, and his passions urged him to follow their brilliant and tempting path. Home, with all the fond endearments of the domestic circle, its love, its peace, its joy, its hope,—home was to him a prison. He looked out on the world as

through a grated door. Abroad it was bright and charming, at home it was dull and drear. Others *seemed* to be happy in the pleasures of the world ; he *was not* happy at home ; he would try his fortune for himself, with those whose hearts were always light, and whose faces were always lighted up with smiles.

We may imagine the “father” sitting in his own room, thinking of the multiplied sources of comfort with which God had surrounded him, and sending to heaven his silent but fervent prayers, that his “two sons,” his only children, the pride of his heart and the delight of his eyes, might be kept from the evil that is in the world. The restless spirit of the “younger” has often filled his mind with painful anxieties, and at times the waywardness of this thoughtless child had forced upon the father the fear, that one day he might bring his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. This younger son enters the room, and suddenly makes the demand, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.” In the original language of the gospel it reads more like this, “Give me my share

share of the property.” It comes as a claim, as if he had a right to a portion of the property whenever he chose to take possession. There was no acknowledgement on the part of this assuming boy, that he was entitled to nothing while his father lived, and to little or nothing, as the *younger son*, when his father should be called to die ; but with strange boldness, he demands *his* portion, and will have it *now*. He will not wait to have it when his father can no longer enjoy it ; he is not willing to be sustained by his father’s bounty, to have every want supplied, and every care relieved, but makes such a demand as assures that tender father that his son is determined to desert the parental roof, and become a wanderer in the world.

Scarcely could the father believe his own ears. Mingled emotions of surprise and grief must have filled his heart, at the bold determination which marked the demand of this wayward son. He never dreamed that his own son, his youngest, his Benjamin, would thus insult him in his own house, with so

unreasonable and ungrateful a proposal. This child of many prayers and tears, perhaps the idol of his heart, was resolved to break the ties that bound him to the home of his childhood and youth, and to plunge madly, perhaps irrecoverably into ruin. So well the father knew the temper of his son, that now the worst fears filled his heart as he saw that son before him, bent on his own destruction.

And must this darling boy, perhaps he said within himself, and must this boy whose very faults I have forgiven and almost loved, this child whom I have watched in infancy, whom I have pressed to my heart ten thousand times, and prayed with earnestness that God would bless, and sanctify, and save him, must this child be LOST? Must he become a prodigal? Will he desert me now that my head is whitening for the tomb? Is this the fruit of my excessive indulgence, my parental forbearance with the faults of a dear child? True, I have yielded to his caprices, indulged him in his failings, borne with his frequent errors, trusting fondly that love would win

him to repentance, and bind him closer and for ever to my heart. But my kindness, that long since should have led him to repent, has made him bolder in his sins ; it has hardened him, when I hoped to melt him by its power, and here he has come at last to make a formal demand, and take a final leave of his father and his best friend. What would I not give rather than suffer him thus to go? Though I am rich, yet for his sake I would become poor. Would he but stay near me, and love me, all that he could ask or wish should be his even now, and by-and-by, I would raise him to honor and power ; he should be rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, and be the heir of happiness that he has never yet heard of or conceived. It is not my goods that I value. O no. If he would remain with me, I would load him with wealth. “How shall I give thee up!” “Would God, I could die for thee, O my son, my son!”

How much does such language as this express of the feelings with which God regards the ungrateful wanderings of the sinner. To

bring out more clearly still the unreasonable ness of the son's request, we may suppose the father to address him in the words of mild but firm remonstrance, hoping to dissuade him from the fatal step.

"My son, this is a strange, a most unusual request. You ask me to divide my living with you, as if you had not at all times received whatever was necessary for your happiness. Have you ever lacked for any thing that I had it in my power to give?"

"I cannot say that I have."

"Have you ever been denied any reasonable indulgence since you have been under my roof?"

"I do not know that I have."

"Have I ever laid any commands on you that have been hard to obey, oppressive or capricious; any that were not calculated to promote your happiness as well as my interests, and the general good of the family?"

"No, I have no complaints to make."

"Have I not sought to make you, and all under my authority, happy, furnishing them with every thing that the most indulgent father

could grant ; and have I not promised to do for you hereafter, all that is reasonable, and far more than *you* have any right to demand ?”

“Why, yes, I suppose you have ; but then——”

“And tell me now, my son, for it is your father speaking from the fulness of his soul, tell me if I have not loved you tenderly. In the season of your infancy, when you could take no care of yourself, I watched over you. In your childhood, I labored for your support, and to this hour your every want has been supplied. In sickness I have hung over your couch with tenderest solicitude. Night after night I have sat by your side, or knelt to pray for you. Have I not followed you always with kindness that no words can express ? And even in your errings, for you know you have often grieved me, my son, even then have I not yearned over you with a tenderness such as no heart but that of a father can feel ? Speak to me now, and tell me if I have not done all this, and more ? Say, if there is any thing that will bind you for ever

to my heart, and I will do it, any thing, every thing ; but do not, O, do not desert me, now that age is coming on me, and I feel that not many years hence I must lie down and die. I would have you near me to close my eyes. Stay with me, my dear son, stay.”

So would an affectionate father address an ungrateful son, about to desert his roof. And such language keeps up the analogy. So God might now speak to you from the throne of his holiness ; and what could you answer him ? What could that prodigal son, now bent on his own destruction, say to these tender appeals ? If he could recur to one single act of his father that was cruel, one unkind word, one unreasonable command, or even an unpleasant look, he would seize upon it as a palliation of his base ingratitude. But that father’s life was love. From his infancy upward, that son had *felt* how good a *father* could be, even to an undeserving child ; and as the sum of his kindness pressed on the heart, as all the acts of parental love came thronging on his mind, he could not find or frame an excuse for his ungrateful purpose.

“He was speechless.” The sense of obligation to stay and serve his father, and cheer his declining years with filial love, to make some faint return for all that he had received, doubtless pressed upon him, just as you feel at this moment a sense of duty to your father on earth, and to the God of heaven and earth who made you.

The young man was struggling between this conviction of duty to his father, and a desire to taste the pleasures of the world. He wanted to be free to court the vain follies of a life of sin, and he must first be delivered from the bondage of parental care. His father saw the struggle, and thus continued:

“My son, you are young, and, like most young men, you think that happiness may be found in the ways of folly and sin. I see what you want, and I know what will be the consequence of the course you propose to pursue. And before you quit the home of your childhood, and the father who has wept and prayed over you as many times as the sun has risen and set upon you, let me warn you plainly of the result. Pleasure will lead

you into sin. Sin will lead you into misery. The great enemy of souls will draw you aside from the path of virtue ; you will, by degrees, overcome and silence the reproaches of your conscience ; you will find it becoming more and more easy to break the laws of God and man ; your soul will, by-and-by, delight itself in sin ; the loose, and abandoned, and corrupt, will be your companions,—they will throw their chains closely around you, and draw you downward to everlasting ruin. If a treacherous friend has pushed you from a precipice, can you stop midway in your fall ? Can you leap from the whirlpool, when drawn into its remorseless gulf ? Then may you rescue yourself from the influence of sinful companions, when they have enticed you to the brink of the precipice, at whose base is the burning lake. And now, I warn you, as a father, that if you persist in your determination to depart from your father's house and pursue a course of sin, you will make yourself miserable now, and run the risk of losing your soul. But I shall not restrain you against your own free will. You must

make your own choice. I offer you riches, and honors, and happiness, if you will stay and live with me, and love me. And I warn you, that if you go, you incur my displeasure,—a FATHER'S CURSE,—you will pierce yourself through with many sorrows, and at last may lie down in devouring fire, and dwell with everlasting burnings. But you are to decide yourself; therefore, choose you this day whom you will serve."

The son listens to this solemn warning. He trembles under its truth and power. He is half resolved to stay. But the love of the alluring world steals over him, and at last, with down-cast eyes and quivering lips, he says, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." Poor boy!

Now, I do not mean to say that this account of what might have occurred between the father and the prodigal son, is, in all its points, like that which marks the departure of every sinner from the living God. There may not be any hour in the sinner's history when he thus enters into a formal argument with his Maker, and then

decides to desert him and become a prodigal. But I do say, that in his holy word, God has reasoned this whole matter with the sinner, setting before him all the motives to love and obedience, and the sinner knows just as well, the consequences of sin, and the fruits of holiness, as if God should come down, and, calling each sinner to his feet, should reason with him, as this father with his apostate son.

Suppose that God should say to you as he said to Israel of old, by his prophet, "Come, now, and let us reason together." Is. 1 : 18. Knowing full well the settled purpose of your heart to depart from him, he might address you thus :

"You are a creature of my hand, dependent on me for life, and breath, and being. This world is my house, and while you have lived in it, you have been supported by my power, fed from my stores, and clothed by my love. Mercies innumerable I have poured in your path, and loaded you with kindness as free as it was undeserved. Never have I denied you a reasonable request, while you

have been a subject of my government. Enjoying the freedom of your own will, you have been permitted to seek your own pleasure in your own way. I have set before you the highest and purest joys that men or angels can desire, and offered them freely without money and without price. I never laid on you a command that was hard, or unjust, or unequal, that would not promote your good as well as my glory. My 'commandments are not grievous.' 1 John 5: 3. 'The law is holy, and just, and good.' Rom. 7: 12. And if you and all my offspring had obeyed that law, the earth would have been a paradise to the present hour.

"And have I not laid you under obligations of gratitude unspeakably great? Think of the tenderness with which I nurtured you in your infancy, when life was but a breath; and of the care I took of you in childhood, when others fell in death around you; how I led you on to youth, preserving your health, or healing disease, when you were sinking under its power. And more than all this, when I saw you on the brink of everlasting

ruin, did I not send my servants to warn you of your danger? Did I not commission my prophets, 'rising early and sending them,' to warn you to 'flee from the wrath to come?' And last of all, did I not send my well-beloved Son into the world, saying, they will reverence my son. And he came into the world, and laid down his precious life to ransom guilty men, to ransom you, from the sentence of a broken law? Have I not sent my Spirit to convince you 'of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come,' and have you not felt his influences on your own soul? 'What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it?'

"But I see you are bent upon sin, and as I desire you to act advisedly in this great matter, on which hangs the fate of your undying soul, I call heaven to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death. Deut. 30: 15. In keeping my commandments there is great reward. You shall enjoy my favor which is life, and my loving-kindness which is better than life.

"If you will delight yourself in the Lord,

I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and will feed you with the heritage of Jacob. Isa. 58: 13. It shall be well with you on the earth; it shall be well with you in the hour of death; and when you are called from time to eternity, you shall inherit a kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. I will take you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also. You shall sit on a throne of glory, and to a harp of gold, you shall sing the songs of praise, and rejoice in the blessedness of heaven for ever and ever. But if you will still persist in your present resolution to depart from the living God; if, when I call, you will not hear, and when I stretch out my hand, you will not regard [Proverbs 1: 24—28], I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh. It is an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the Lord thy God [Jer. 2: 19]; and you will find it so in your own sad experience. Sin may, for a season, be sweet to the taste, but at last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Prov. 23: 32. The time cometh when you will

repent in anguish of soul, that you ever broke my law, and set at naught my counsel. I will rain snares, fire, and brimstone, upon you, and a horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of your cup. Psalm 11: 6. You shall not live out half your days. Psalm 55: 23. You will live 'without God,' and die 'without hope,' and then go away 'into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' Mat. 25: 41. Where I am there you shall never come. When the door of mercy is shut for ever, you will stand without, and knock long and loud, crying, Lord, Lord, open unto me. But from within I will answer, 'Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.' There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourself thrust out. Luke 13: 28. O that thou wert wise, that thou understood this, that thou wouldst consider thy latter end. Deut. 32: 29."

Thus might the infinite God and Father remonstrate with you. All these counsels,

and promises, and threatenings, are addressed to you, as directly and personally as if you were the only PRODIGAL in the family of man, and you have never opened that book of God, without finding a Father's warnings, and a Father's entreaties, to children determined to go astray. And when you read of the prodigal son who listened unmoved to the ardent prayers and faithful warnings of his aged parent, and was still resolved that he would break through all restraints, and follow the leadings of his own corrupt desires, you thought he must be a hard-hearted, ungrateful wretch, who deserved to be driven from his father's door, a beggar. But you did not reflect that *that* father is your heavenly Father, and *that* son yourself! You did not reflect that *you* had thus basely demanded your portion of the goods, that you might enjoy them here; that *you* had thus determined to slight the love that had followed you unceasingly, from infancy until the present hour; and in spite of all the motives drawn from love, and fear, and hope, that *you* were rushing on toward your own ruin. And, if

now you seek some palliation of your base ingratitude, you cannot recall one unjust command, one unkind word, one ungracious look, from your Father in heaven. God is love. He has loaded you with benefits. And when you think of departing from God, and seeking happiness in other pursuits than his service and love, all these mercies crowd before you as accusing witnesses. He never commanded you to do any thing unreasonable, or that is not calculated to make you happy here and hereafter, and you are altogether inexcusable for not obeying every precept that was ever issued from his throne.

But why should I follow this analogy further? It is imperfect only because the sinner's conduct, *your* conduct, is infinitely more unreasonable and wicked, than that of any profligate son, who has broken away from an earthly parent, and become a prodigal. You sin against love that no earthly parent ever felt; against motives that no earthly parent ever could urge; against restraints that no earthly power could interpose. And if your heart was touched with sympathy for that

father, when he implored his son to remain near to him in his declining years, and be with him to close his eyes in death, how will you feel when you behold the Father of angels, the "everlasting Father," bending from the throne of his glory to beseech such a poor worm of the dust as you are, not to desert him and ruin yourself. Even now, in his holy word, he reasons, remonstrates, and pleads with you. Listen to his voice. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." Isa. 1: 2. "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" Ezek. 33: 11. "I will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." Rom. 2: 6—9.

“Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” Isa. 55: 2, 3. And when all these appeals have failed, and you persist in departing from him, he exclaims with parental tenderness, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? my heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.” Hosea 11: 8.

This very hour, the eye of the omniscient God is fixed upon *you*, and the heart of Jehovah yearns on *your* behalf. You may be the poorest and most obscure individual on the face of the earth, but you are not unknown to him who sits on the throne of the universe with archangels at his feet. In his presence you are now standing, and in your heart are saying, “Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.”

• Will you have your portion here?

CHAPTER V.

Parental tenderness—The sailor and his mother—The father yields to the Prodigal Son's request—God will permit sinners to take their portion here, if they choose to have it.

THE father yields to the unreasonable demand of this prodigal son. It was just like a *parent* to yield, though it would seem to us that a stern refusal, with a merited rebuke, would have been better for the reckless boy.

Parents often yield to the unreasonable requests of their children. So our heavenly Father sometimes suffers his creatures to have their own way, warning them of the consequences that will follow their transgression of his laws. Such language as this once fell from the lips of infinite wisdom and parental love: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart,

and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Ecc. 11: 9.

In one of the seaports of New England, there was a mother who doated on a well beloved son. "He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow." Her fond indulgence had been sadly and ungratefully abused; her counsels, and prayers, and tears, had been slighted and scorned; and as he grew in years he grew in vice, and became more and more impatient of the slight restraint of a widowed mother's voice and love. He resolved to go to sea, and in the roving life of the free sailor, on the broad ocean or the distant shore, to find that pleasure which his heart lusted after. Many of his young companions had gone to sea, and whenever they were in port, he listened with delight to the tales they told of "fun and frolic," and his mind was fixed to go along with them. He came to his mother and told her of his intended project. I will not, for I cannot, describe the anguish of that mother's heart, when that dear but wayward son announced his cruel purpose,

and prepared to leave her cottage and become a wanderer “o’er the world’s wide waste.” His sailor’s chest was hastily filled with the little store her scanty means would afford ; *she divided unto him her living* ; she would have given her life to have turned him from his purpose ; but as he *would not* stay, she exhausted a mother’s love and care to provide the means to make him comfortable when he should be far from her and home. Detaining him for a moment as he was just leaving the door, and impressing upon his cheek a parting kiss, she put into his hand a little volume, and with a voice almost choked with tears, she said :

“My son, I shall never, never see your face on earth again. You will never hear me begging you to come to Jesus Christ for the pardon of your sins, but this book will tell you all that I would say. It is the Bible ; take it, my son, your mother’s parting, dying gift. I cannot live, when you, my earthly all, are gone, but as my last request, I ask you to read this book. You will sometimes think of me, and of home, and of the times when you,

a happy boy, were in your mother's arms ; yes, you will think of *me*, and then go to your chest and get this book and read it. Will you, John ?”

“ Yes, mother, yes, I will ; good-by.”

“ Farewell, my son ; God bless you, John ; may we meet in heaven.”

The Bible was locked in his chest, and he was soon on the deep, and far from home.

It was evening, and the calmness of the hour invited thoughts of her whom he had left. The thousand deeds of tenderness and love with which she had followed him from his childhood, now came over him, reproaching him for his base desertion. Scarcely knowing why, but obeying the last promise he had made, he went to his chest, and taking out his Bible, sat down by a light to read. He opened to that precious chapter of Isaiah, which you would do well to read before you lie down to sleep to-night, the *fifty-fifth*, and as he read the *seventh* verse, he wept like a child. “ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have

mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” It was an arrow to his soul. But with the impression still deep that he ought to repent and turn to God, he closed the book, and conscious of his *half* willingness to come back, he joined his thoughtless mess-mates, and with the jest and song soon drove away all thoughts of his mother and his Saviour ! That was a decisive moment. He plunged deeply into sin, and became renowned on board the vessel for the profaneness of his tongue, and his contempt of all that was good. Now and then an hour of reflection would come, and bring thoughts of her whom he had forsaken, and of Him whose name he had blasphemed. But such hours came seldom, and such struggling thoughts were soon drowned. He hardened himself in sin and became a prodigal.

He wandered on foreign shores, and there rioted in all the indulgences which his depraved heart desired. Disease seized him among strangers,—that disease which the lovers of sinful pleasures often suffer in the righteous judgment of God,—and he was

stretched on a dying bed, beyond the reach of human aid. He called for his Bible, and its holy leaves were constantly before him, and its solemn truths came home to his heart. But they came only to make his dying hours more miserable, and to give him a dread foretaste of future wrath and woe. He saw that he had trampled on all its love, refused all its calls, despised all its promises, and laughed at all its threatenings; and now, when death stood at his bedside, and hell opened on his dying eye, he groaned in agony over his wicked career of sin, while he confessed the justice of God in turning a deaf ear to his expiring cries. He died with the Bible in his hand; a poor, lost prodigal.

When the prodigal in the gospel made his request, the anxious father gave him his portion, and let him go. The sinner departing from the living God, does not go without his portion. God will give his creatures their portion in this world, if they prefer to have it here, rather than in the world to come. This is one of the settled principles of his government. He deals with men as rational creatures.

He gives them their choice, and if they prefer misery to happiness, hell to heaven, *it is theirs*. Fearful as the thought may be, it is the fact on which may be suspended the precious interests of *your* soul.

How was it with the angels that kept not their first estate? They were happy in his presence, rejoicing in the light of his smiles, and filling heaven with their holy songs of praise. They chose to break away from his service, and seek their own pleasure in the ways of sin. And he did not hold them back. With all their mighty powers of mind, “angels, though in ruin,” he suffered them to go. The doors of glory were thrown wide open, and the army of apostate spirits took their “journey into a far country,” to spend their substance “in riotous living,” in hell. They are prodigals to this hour.

So was it with our first parents. In the blessedness of their first creation, holy and happy, they were not compelled to serve God. They were left free to stand or fall. They chose to sin, to forsake the God who made them and loved them. They preferred to be

prodigals, and God let them have their own way ; and they made themselves as miserable as they became sinful.

Your own consciousness bears witness that God has dealt just so with you. In all your past transgressions of God's holy law, you must be conscious that you have had your own way. You are having it now. And if you wish still to forsake God, and go farther and farther from him into the forbidden path of sin, he will suffer you to go, rather than to restrain you by any violence to your own choice. Nay more ; if you want the means of enjoyment in your apostasy, perhaps he will give them, holding you accountable for the use you make of them.

LIFE is a blessing. God permits sinners to live. Even after you have deliberately resolved to persist in sin, God may spare your life. He must hold you up or you could not live a moment, and he does uphold you while you brandish the weapons of your warfare against him. He must prolong your breath, though every breath is spent in defying his will. He moves your life-blood

through all its winding course, though every time your heart beats, it is in rebellion against him. Thus he gives you "good things," though your life thus given, is spent in wicked efforts to dishonor him, and mar the happiness of his kingdom. And the very fact, that you are this moment living in God's world, breathing his air, rejoicing in his sunlight, and reposing under his care, is constant evidence that he is willing to give you the means of being happy, though you squander those means on your own lusts, and abuse your prolonged existence to your own misery and shame.

REASON is a blessing, and a gift of God to sinners. When the first man would be a prodigal, God did not deprive him of his reason and send him out of Eden a raving maniac, nor a stupid idiot, nor a senseless brute. This would have been just, but God was too kind to do this, even when man had forfeited all claim to his love. His lofty powers of mind, which fitted him to be the companion of angels, were continued to him still, and he was allowed to use them even in

the pursuits of sin. And when you have wandered far from God, you have been blessed with *reason* in its high, unclouded exercise. Your mind is the inlet of ten thousand pleasures that make this life worth enjoying, and a prelude to more exalted pleasures in another world. You are proud of your intellect, but seldom think that it is a gift of God; that it is a part of that portion which was given you, and with which you departed from God.

Then there are the gifts of Providence that lie thick in your path. You have had your birth and instruction in a land where the gospel, with its messages of love, is constantly sounding in your ears, and in your wanderings this gospel follows you to win you back to your Father's house. The gospel is the gift of God to sinners, and to none but sinners. Prodigal as you are of all the gifts of God, there is none which you so basely waste as this. And why should I speak of other "goods" that God has so freely bestowed on his sinful creatures? Why should I mention the means of grace with which you are sur-

rounded; the quiet Sabbath that returns so often, inviting you to think of heaven; the silent witness of your conscience that so often reproves you of your sins; of the Holy Spirit that strives with you to bring you back to God. You have the BIBLE in your hand; you carry it with you in your career of sin, and may always consult its pages for direction whenever the thought of return finds its way to your heart. Tossed on the sea of life, allured among the dangers that have ruined thousands before you, this blessed book has always been at hand as a beacon to warn and guide you. Had you followed its direction, long ere this you would have been led back. Had it not been for the impressions *this* book once made on your heart, and which have held you as with chains when temptation has assailed you, long ere this you might have been in hell.

God has given *reason* and *revelation* to prodigal sinners, and what more can a father give, than a knowledge of his will, which is perfectly wise and good, and the means of understanding and doing it. But to prodigals

there are goods that seem more to be desired than these. The younger son, who demanded his portion, would have thought it hard indeed, had his father given him a Bible and some good advice, and then sent him away. He wanted *money*. The good things of this life sinners value more than the means of securing life eternal. And even these are not denied by him who is kind even to the unthankful. The wicked often abound in riches. It troubled a good man of old to see them having more than heart could wish, while the righteous were poor. The rich man, who lifted up his eyes in the torment of hell, was, on earth, clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously, while a pious man was lying a beggar at his gate. The same may be your portion and your doom. If the riches that perish with the using, the gold and the silver that supply the means to gratify the unholy appetites of your mind, are the "goods" that you would have, I have no doubt they will be granted by him who freely gives. But they will only serve to make your future and final ruin more sure and irre-

trievable. Your bags of gold may sink you deeper into hell. Your riches may make your life a life of care, your death embittered with the keenest pain, your portion in the world to come a portion of unmingled and exquisite woe.

But you may take the portion of the goods that falleth to you, if you choose to have them. The father of the Prodigal gave the money to his wandering son. God will give you *this world*, if you would rather have it than the world to come. Will you take it and go on in sin ; or will you turn and live ?

CHAPTER VI.

The young man's haste—He gathers all together—He goes into a distant country—The sinner is in haste to break away from God—He risks all in the pursuit of sin—He departs far, very far from God.

HE was in haste to be gone. “Not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country.” His conduct would have been more decent, had he stayed with his father to support his declining years, even if he had afterwards become a prodigal. But in the wildness of his young heart, he was in haste to be his own master, and in pursuit of the pleasures that looked so tempting to his eyes. He gathered *all* together. The kindness of his father had given more than was needful to supply his present wants, but he would leave none behind. He did not stop to think that he might lose his property in the pursuit of sin, and therefore it would be prudent to

take but a little and venture *that* at first, and afterwards decide on risking more. No, he would venture ALL. He took his journey into a *far* country. Not content with breaking away from the restraints of his father's house and parental authority, he was determined to fly beyond his reach ; to get as far as possible from home and all the influences which early associations might interpose to hold him back in his gay career.

Perhaps it was not the intention of the Saviour, in this parable, that every part of it should receive a spiritual interpretation, and I would not seek to draw from any part of it, instruction which it does not plainly teach. But the haste of the younger son to be gone, reminds me to say, that the sinner departs from God as soon as he has an opportunity. How early in life you were capable of moral action, and therefore responsible for your conduct, I do not now inquire, for it is not necessary in this connection to determine this question. But it will not be denied, that you began to sin against God as soon as you could sin, and have continued it to the pre-

sent hour. This is true of every impenitent sinner, and you must be a rare exception, if it be not true of you. And you will remember, that in the earliest season of childhood, it was irksome to you to be compelled to receive religious instruction and perform religious duties. Reading the Bible was not as pleasant as the perusal of a trifling tale. Prayer was not a privilege, and the house of God not a favorite resort. The character of God was repulsive. You abhorred his holiness, you feared his justice, as these attributes shone out in his word, and threatened you with the punishment due to sin. This was your early experience. It shows how soon *you* were disposed to depart from God. It shows that "the natural heart is enmity against God," and that nothing but opportunity is wanted to make that enmity apparent.

There is a natural loveliness in early piety, but it is a flower that rarely blooms on earth. How few are willing to give the morning of their days to the God that made them, and to the Saviour who died to redeem them.

The gay world invites the young heart's love, pleasure promises joy and peace in the paths of sin, and hope whispers that by-and-by it will be time enough to think of God, and heaven, and hell; and so the youth who should have sought first to make sure work for eternity, rushes, with wild impetuosity, on the course of evil which his wicked heart delights in, and long before he has reached the season of manhood, he has become a prodigal.

“*He gathered all together.*” The sinner ventures ALL when he departs from God. All that he *has*, all that he *hopes*, all that he *is*, the sinner puts in peril by persisting in sin.

“What shall it profit a man, if he gain the *whole world* and lose his own soul?” But the sinner puts in jeopardy his happiness here, as well as hereafter, when he enters on a life of rebellion against God. This world would be heaven but for sin. A God of mercy has mingled sweetness with the waters that flow through this vale of tears, and if men would not poison the cup before they drink, they

would find them sweet to the taste. There is the bliss of the domestic circle. How the heart beats at the memory of home, and all the fond endearments that cluster about the fireside and the altar. The prodigal of the parable had a home, and might have been happy there, if sin had not enticed him away, and made him a houseless vagabond. Many a home, an earthly paradise, has sin converted into a hell. In every neighborhood there are melancholy evidences of its fatal power. Sin, in various forms, but still sin, and only sin, has invaded the domestic sanctuary, violated the marriage vow, crushed young hearts in the spring-time of their bliss, dried up fountains of love, blasted every hope of happiness, drugged the cup of life with wormwood and gall, and planted with thorns the pathway to the grave. And if sin may invade the purity and peace of the domestic circle, if this sanctuary affords no protection from its wasting breath, what scene of happiness may it not becloud, what source of joy may it not dry up? Sin has been, and ever will be, the source of misery ; and he who cher-

ishes it in his heart, is warming a serpent that may yet inflict a deadly sting.

The SOUL is put in peril by the sinner's choice. You have a soul infinitely more precious than the whole world; it will live when the "stars shall fade away."

"The sun is but a spark of fire,
A transient meteor in the sky,
The soul, immortal as its sire,
Shall never die."

And that deathless soul shall live in the full possession of all the blessedness that God has prepared for them that love him, and spend its eternal state in rising from one point of happiness to another, until it has reached,—no, it never will reach,—a resting-place in the boundless career of glory on which it enters. Or, it will live in the suffering of torments that no tongue can describe, no thought conceive; and live in that intensity of despair, until it has reached,—no, it never will reach,—a resting-point in the endless misery on which it enters. And when you think of a departure from God, and obstinate

continuance in sin, let this thought be first in your mind, "I am running the risk of losing this happiness, and of sinking into this woe!"

Look abroad on this wide world in which you live, think of all the sources of enjoyment which are open to the virtuous mind; look onward, and upward, to the bliss that awaits the blest in the presence of God; think of being an angel with vast and growing powers, receiving constantly new supplies of happiness, as the streams of knowledge and holiness flow into your soul, filling for ever, yet never full, like "light into a fountain running o'er;" think of that inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, and bear in mind that every moment you remain in sin, you risk it *all*. It is a fearful hazard.

The prodigal gathered "all" together, ventured it, and lost it. But what was it? A bag of gold!

You risk more. Heaven, holiness, a throne, a crown, a priceless crown of glory, a seat at the right hand of the majesty on high, the smiles of God, the everlasting hap-

piness of the immortal soul, *all* this you peril when you persist in sin. Will you run the risk? If you were on the threshold of your father's house, and knew that by leaving the door you would incur a father's displeasure, forfeit all expectation of receiving any thing from his estate, become an outcast on the world, a beggar, a vagabond, a slave, would you go? If you were standing at the door of heaven, and knew that by turning your back on him who asked you to enter, you would lose all hope of ever gaining admission to that blest abode, would you turn away and become a prodigal?

Coming back to the parable, we find a youth whose course was much like yours. He is just ripening into manhood, and the brightest prospects of earthly good are spread before him. But he gathers all together, and takes his journey into a far country. Why does he quit his father's house? Has he a happier home in the distance toward which he bends his steps? Has he houses and lands afar off which he must visit? No. He is leaving his only home, and his only hope. Is he

flying away from a tyrant father, whose harsh commands and terrible blows have made his house a place of fear, and alienated the children's hearts? O, no. That wandering child has been nursed on the lap of kindness, fed at a bountiful table, clothed in purple and fine linen, surrounded with all that could make home sweet to the young heart, and now he turns his back on all, an exile from home, a prodigal son. That wanderer from his father's house is a picture of every sinner still in his sins. Perhaps the prodigal is the reader of this page.

The young man pursued his journey into a *far country*. The sinner is *far* from God. Sin is a state of separation from God. This constitutes at once the guilt and misery of sin. There is a sense in which the sinner cannot depart from God. "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. The darkness hideth not from thee." Psalm 139. Guilt flies from God. The first sinner hid himself

in the garden, lest he should meet the eye of Him whose law he had broken, and whose curse he had incurred. But the eye that never sleeps can pierce the darkest recess, gaze on the coward culprit, and fill his soul with awe and shame. In this sense the sinner never can be far from God. Even hell shall feel for ever that "God is there," by the terror of his wrath, taking vengeance on them that will not repent. But there is another and a higher sense, in which it is most fearfully true, that sin separates the soul from God. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Heb. 12: 14. Sin is the veil, the wall, that stands between the sinner and a holy God. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you." Isa. 59: 2. Remove that cloud of sin from the sinner's soul, and he would stand in a blessed relation to God; he would converse with him as a man converseth with his friend, and feel at home amidst the manifestations of his glory. Heaven is the presence of God; holiness makes heaven. And the longer the soul pur-

sues the path of sin, the greater becomes the distance between it and the source of good, the more difficult and hopeless its return, and the more miserable its ruin. While all the motives that three worlds combined can furnish, urge the sinner to come back, while the love of the Father throws innumerable barriers in the way of departure, and holds out all conceivable facilities of return; while heaven invites and hell threatens, the wretched prodigal, blind to his interests and reckless of immortal happiness, pursues his journey into a far country! Did he understand the real nature and tendency of sin, as a state of total separation from God, and heaven, and peace, and joy, he would cry out, as he felt the loneliness of his lost condition,

“ Whither, ah. whither shall I go,—
A wretched wanderer from the Lord,—
Can this dark world of sin and woe
One glimpse of happiness afford?”

He would see that sin was preparing him for that awful hour, when the gathered wrath of an insulted and slighted, a *deserted* Father,

shall utter itself in one word that shall seal the eternal doom of all the prodigals in the universe. Would you hear that word? Would you stand among the wretched throng of prodigals, summoned from the far countries to which they had wandered, and now dragged back to judgment? Would you make one of that miserable assembly on whose affrighted ears that awful word shall break?

“Thou lovely Chief of all my joys,
Thou Sovereign of my heart,
How could I bear to hear thy voice
Pronounce the sound, DEPART?”

But why not be glad to hear it *then*, if *now* you prefer to depart from God. He but gives you the privilege of having your own way, and when he rises from his throne in judgment, and utters the final sentence on your ruined soul, he does no more than seal the choice you make to-day. With the perfect understanding, that sin is a state of separation from God, that the farther you wander the more miserable you will be, and the more probable that you will never return, you are

still resolved to go. And when he fixes his eye on you, among the millions called up to hear their doom in the great day of final account, remember that on the day when you read these lines, you made a choice that justly exposed you to that sentence which separates you for ever from the presence of God.

“DEPART!” O, how that sentence will fall on the ear of the finally impenitent in the last day! They who were always far from God, will then be filled with dismay, as they find that *that* separation is to be eternal. Prodigals whom no love could win back, will then bewail their departure, and feel, that the guilt and misery of sin are now justly the portion of those who have deserted their father’s house.

CHAPTER VII.

Riotous living—The follies and vices of youth—Dancing, gaming, play-going, licentiousness, and other sins—The sinner wastes his substance, his time, talents, opportunities, parental counsel, the Holy Spirit, the blood of the Son of God.

THROWING the rein on the neck of his passions, the young man dashed madly on in the highway to ruin. The parable does not mention the steps of his downward course, the several sins by which he was reduced to beggary and shame, but it tells us, in one comprehensive remark, that in the far country he wasted his substance in riotous living. But we need no inspired pen to write the record of a prodigal's ruin. It will be easy, without a guide, to follow him from one haunt of vice to another, his extravagance gradually increasing, his moral sense declining, his passions growing more and more inflamed, the restraints of early instruction becoming less powerful, until his property, health,

character, self-respect, are all gone, and he is left a wreck tossed on the sea of pleasure at the mercy of winds and waves.

In the opening of this little book, I have told the story of a young man whose early fall it was that led to the preparation of these pages ; and the reader will remember that the prodigal ran through a regular career of vice, beginning with amusements that in themselves are innocent, and terminating in sins that speedily make wreck of property, reputation, life and hope. Let us look at some of these pursuits, so fascinating to the young heart, and learn their nature and their final tendency. We saw that elegant young man, the ornament of a BALL-ROOM, and happy in the gay circle of which he was the life and pride ; and here, in the giddy whirl of the *dance*, he began his career of dissipation that ended in a death of horror, the very remembrance of which, though years have since fled, now fills me with fear !

You will, perhaps, tell me that “there is a time to dance,” and that there can be no sin or danger in visiting the ball-room now and then. There are seasons when, beyond

all doubt, it is *not* a time to dance. Thus, it is not a time to dance,

1. When it is a time to mourn. You would not dance at a funeral, or when your friend was dying, or your house was burning, or your life in danger. But if your sins are still unrepented of and unforgiven, *with you* it is a time to mourn. You ought to be in bitterness as one who is in bitterness for his first-born. Your soul in danger! Your interests for eternity about to be ruined! Your all about to be burned up in the fire that is never quenched! Your friends about to perish, and with these dangers thick around you, will you *dance*?

2. When more important business presses for attention. If an opportunity offers of making a handsome sum of money, you would not lose the offer for the sake of spending an evening in the ball-room. You would answer the invitation by saying, that "business calls me away and I must be excused." But have you nothing to do to secure the pearl of great price, riches for eternity, the salvation of your precious soul, and will you spend perhaps the last hour of time in dancing?

3. When you are on the verge of hell! You would not dance on a precipice. You would not dance on slippery places while fiery billows roll below. Dancing there would resemble more the antics of a madman, than the rational amusements of a sound mind. But many a ball has there been on the threshold of hell.

A few years ago, at a ball in New Hampshire, four young men left the room to spend a little time in a game of cards, and while they were at play, one of them fell back in a fit and died. His companions covered up his body with cloaks, returned to the dance, and said nothing of the awful event, lest it should spoil the sport of the evening.

One of the first balls which the young man, whose history opens this book, ever attended, was marked by the following impressive incident. On the very day of the ball, a young lady who had been invited, and who was intending to be present, was summoned suddenly into the eternal world. Her residence was directly opposite the public house in which the assembly was to be held. The

doleful news of her sudden death spread rapidly, and as there was no time to make new arrangements, the party gathered at the appointed hour, and then the question was seriously debated among the managers, whether they should go on with the dance, or adjourn to another evening. It was decided to go on, and the ball did go on, though in the front chamber of the house across the street, sat melancholy watchers by the corpse of one whose sleep was not disturbed by the mirth and music in which she expected to join. I knew some of the youth that were there that night, and I know that some of them were sad as they now and then looked out of the window, and saw the lone, dim light in the house of death.

Is it safe to dance when death is so near at hand? So long, then, as you are living without a good hope of heaven, you have no time to spend in thoughtless amusements, however innocent in themselves they may be.

Nor is that amusement innocent which exposes one to danger. It may be *innocent* to sport on the ice, but if the most of those who

have ventured on it have perished, would you try it because it is an *innocent* amusement? And are there no positive evils that threaten the votaries of the dance?

Is not the health exposed? It is common to dance in warm rooms, in cold weather, in thin clothing, and the sudden changes of temperature, to which young and delicate persons are thus subjected, sow the seeds of disease that in many cases terminate in death. Many heart-broken families, whose fairest flowers have thus been early blighted, will confess that this is true; and yet it is the least consideration to be named in such a connection as this.

Are not assemblies for dancing almost invariably held in places where intoxicating liquors may be obtained? And do they not form a part of the evening's entertainment? Many a young man has here formed the habit of social drinking, and before he or his friends were aware of the danger, he has been fastened in the arms of the destroyer.

Is not the gaming-table usually near the ball-room? In the country or in the city,

wherever young people are accustomed to meet for dancing, facilities are provided for those who wish to *play*, and the bird may escape out of the hand of the fowler sooner than the youth out of the snare of the gambler.

Dancing is inconsistent with serious anxiety for the salvation of the soul. Who ever heard a sober word, who ever loved to indulge solemn thoughts, in the mazes of the dance? Suppose that a company of youth about to enter upon a winter's round of pleasure in dancing schools, balls, and the like, should be impressed by the Holy Spirit with a sense of their sinfulness and danger, and the duty of attending immediately to the concerns of their souls. One of two things is plain; they must give up their dancing, or drive away their convictions of sin. The two are incompatible. Which shall they abandon? Of course you admit that on no account must they quench the Spirit, and it follows that they must not dance. And if the amusement does tend to make religion an unwelcome visiter, and to drive away all thought of God

and the soul's salvation, the amusement is not innocent. It leads to death. It puts in peril the immortal soul.

But David danced. So he did, and dancing has sometimes formed a part of religious ceremonies; not the modern dancing, the lascivious waltz or the gallopade, but motions of the body which men may make under the influence of high-wrought joy. And when you are released from the bondage of sin, and brought out into the liberty of the gospel, you may go forth, as the healed cripple, "walking, and leaping, and praising God." When the younger son, a prodigal, ruined by riotous living, came back at last to his father's house, there was music and dancing in those glad halls; and when you come back to God, there shall be joy unspeakable among the angels around the throne.

Young Charles L—— was a gambler. Not by profession, but adopting it as an amusement, he soon found that gambling was a passion, and he had no inclination or power to resist its charms. Of all the vices to which profligate men are addicted, there is

not one that more rapidly undermines moral principle than this. How soon it destroys the sense of obligation to God and man! How speedily does natural affection for parents, wife and children give way, that the vile passion may be gratified! And what sin is there, which the gambler is not ready to commit? He becomes a thief and a robber almost without knowing it. He will be a murderer, rather than lose the means of play.

Mark the haggard countenance, the desperate resolution, the demoniac smile, of that midnight group. Hear the exulting shout, the maddened blasphemy, the half-uttered groan that come up from those haunts well called "hells." Would you make one of their number, partake of their pleasures, and drink of their cup? Perhaps you are just entering the road that leads to this chamber of death. Perhaps you now and then play a game of cards for the sake of the game, and have never thought of being a gambler. But gaming is a most bewitching sin. Its hold on the heart is like the grasp of death, and

escape is like a rescue from the grave. The more you play, the more you will love to play. Many will be ready to lead you step by step, till you venture a little money, and a little more; losing fires you with a strong desire to win, winning tempts you to play again; until you are insatuated with the vice, and are willing to hazard any thing and every thing on the cast of a die. Every thing? Yes; you put your immortal soul, the kingdom of God, your eternal salvation, at stake, with the prospect, almost to a certainty, that you will lose and be ruined for ever. A desperate game, that strips you, not of your money only, but of your hopes for this world and the next. And if now you are taking the first steps in the course that thousands before you have traveled, you are on the outer circles of the vortex from which few were ever delivered till they were cast out dead. If you can hear the voice of remonstrance, fly from the tempter as you would from the plague.

The prodigal's "riotous living" was marked by shameful indulgence in the lusts of the

flesh. Luke 15 : 30. The word of God, particularly the book of Proverbs, often warns the young against the seductive influence of the sin of licentiousness. So prone is the depraved heart of youth to be ensnared by the allurements of sensual pleasure, that not without reason has this been regarded by the inspired writer as one of the most FATAL vices into which the sinner falls. If I am not mistaken, the language of the Holy Spirit is stronger in its expression of the destructive influence of this, than of any other sin. As if the very touch were pollution, and indulgence, death, the wise man has said, "None that go unto her, return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life." Prov. 2 : 19. And again, when referring to the same sin, he writes, "He that doeth it, destroyeth his own soul." 6 : 32. "Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." 7 : 27. "The dead are there and her guests are in the depths of hell." 9 : 18. The peculiar power of this vice is to poison and kill the sensibilities of the soul, so that he who falls into its embrace learns to look on

himself with contempt even before the world have discovered his shame. The secrecy of his sin may give him the assurance that others respect him, while his own conscience, daily losing its power, reproaches him with being a hypocrite and a villain. A fact to illustrate this tendency of this vice fell under my own observation a few days ago.

A young man from the State of Connecticut, who had been brought up by pious parents, came to the city of New York and was employed as a clerk in a retail dry goods store. Not many weeks passed away before he had formed acquaintances with young men of loose habits, who led him step by step into the snares of this destroyer. It was necessary that he should have more money than his wages would furnish, and he soon began to pilfer from the till of the store. His employer, a pious man, perceived the alteration in his clerk's deportment, his averted eye, whenever any one looked him in the face, his anxious countenance, as if his rest had been often broken; and watching his conduct narrowly, the merchant became convinced

that the young man was on the highway to ruin. He laid a plan to detect him, if he should make free with the money of his employer, and his worst suspicions were confirmed. One morning, as the young man came to the store, the merchant took him into his counting-room, charged him with taking money for the sake of indulging in vice, and as the guilty wretch was compelled to admit the truth of the charges, he was sent home in disgrace and shame to his parents, whose gray hairs he will, in all probability, bring down with sorrow to the grave.

It is with clear conviction of the truth, that I believe the reformation of a gambler, a robber, a drunkard, a murderer, more hopeful than that of a confirmed libertine. All these sinners may have some tie unsevered that moral influence may touch to save. But the heart of a man who has given himself up to the indulgence of sensual appetites, is a mass of moral corruption in which no good thing can live. In the most solemn places, under the most solemn appeals, his mind wanders and fastens on the most loathsome thoughts,

crowding out all the suggestions that divine truth may urge. When parental affection, or a sister's love would win him back to the path of virtue, he feels, and that is his only feeling, that he is a degraded being, unfit for the communion of refined and delicate minds; he deserts the paternal roof and the social pleasures of the cheerful fireside, choosing rather the company of those whose hearts, like his own, are steeped in vice.

Remember, then, O sinner, that the same lightnings which played around Sinai when the sixth command was written, attended and confirmed the SEVENTH. Remember, that the purity of heaven is never stained by the presence of an adulterer. And I warn you now, perhaps at the outset of your apostasy from God, that one single step in *this* sin is more dangerous and deplorable than the first step in your brother's blood.

I might follow the prodigal onward through other sins which attend his course of "riotous living," and speak of his profaneness, his Sabbath-breaking, his intemperance, but these sins are so often made the the theme of re-

mark, and the word of God is so full and severe in its declarations against those who "do these things," that I forbear.

It is more than likely that you have read these details of particular sins with the proud consciousness of your own innocence, saying all the while to your own soul, I am no gambler, or drunkard, or debauchee. But if innocent, you are not beyond the power of temptation. And though you have never plunged headlong into vice, and in your own eye and that of the world you may be a model of virtue, in the sight of him who looks on the heart, and who estimates character by the discovery he makes when he looks within, you may be guilty.

Lay thy hand, then, on thy heart, reader, and in the presence of the great Searcher of hearts answer the inquiries now made of your inmost soul. In the secrecy of that breast, art not thou conscious of indulging some of those sins which have been spread before thee? Have not desires after forbidden pleasures often reigned in thy heart? Had not God restrained thy corrupt passions, to what

lengths in sin wouldst thou not long since have gone? And though to-day the world doth not know thee to be a gambler, or profane swearer, or adulterer, is it not true, that foul thoughts have been cherished in thy heart, until before this hour, had it not been for restraining grace, thou wouldst have been ruined. The fear of man may have been a barrier. Regard for reputation, for the feelings of friends, and the fear of disease, and death, and hell, may have stood between thee and the sin that so easily besets thee; but has not thy heart often lusted after some forbidden object, and pleaded passionately for guilty indulgence? If thy near friends knew thee as well as thou knowest thy own heart, where wouldst thou hide from the face of man?

And why pursue these inquiries? They are simply intended to produce conviction of personal apostasy from our Father in heaven. And is not every mouth stopped? Who has not gone astray? Where is the man, the woman, the child, that is not a prodigal from God; wasting, in riotous living, the rich pro-

visions which a father has made for their present and eternal good?

The sinner's fancied innocence of the vile sins which defiled and ruined the prodigal, serves as a shelter against personal conviction, and the reader may feel that the illustration has advanced so far beyond his case that it has lost its particular application. You may have even wondered that rational men could so basely and wickedly prostitute their immortal natures, in the follies and crimes of abandoned profligacy; and thus wondering, you have forgotten that this parable is a portrait of every individual who has apostatized from the God of heaven. You are the prodigal who has thus shamefully wandered, and madly wasted your substance in riotous living. Because you have never staked your property at the gambling-table, you forget that you have ventured your soul! Because you have never, like the prodigal, wasted your living among harlots, you forget that you have polluted your soul with criminal indulgence in unhallowed desires, until you must be an object of abhorrence in the sight of Infinite

Purity. Because you have never been intemperate, you forget that you have drank of the waters of worldly pleasure until you have intoxicated your soul. Since "riotous living" has not led you into the gross vices of abandoned men, you forget the wicked prodigality with which you have consumed the portion which your Father gave you.

The young man in the parable left his father's door, loaded with the gold and silver which an indulgent parent had bestowed. And when you saw him spending the wealth that might have made him comfortable in his old age, in the vanities of youthful amusements, and in the more criminal pursuits of sin, you were astonished at his profligacy, and disgusted with his crimes. But you forget that other prodigal loaded with greater riches, wasting them with wilder extravagance, and rapidly reducing himself to more distressing want. He spent gold. You are a spendthrift of glory! He wasted treasures that perished with the using. You waste treasures that might be yours for ever. He sacrificed on the shrine of his idolatry, wealth,

honor, health and hope ; you offer to the god of your idolatry, time, talents, opportunities, heaven, your radiant crown, your throne at the right hand of God. Which of these two, the prodigal of the parable, or the prodigal who reads, do you judge to be the most extravagant and the most wicked ? Recall the gifts of God which you have thus abused and wasted, perhaps to your own ruin.

TIME. For what was it given ? For you to prepare for eternity. How have you improved it ? As if there was no hereafter. In the very morning of your days, you gathered all together, and took your journey into a far country. At that time, in the dawn of your being, when your heart began to exhibit its corruption and its proud resistance to your Father's will, God did not come out in righteous judgment and cut you off. And all along in your past wanderings, every moment of time that has been extended, has been the fruit of kind forbearance. Nothing is more uncertain than the hold you have on time. Though heaven or hell may hang on the thread of life, it has held you up to the present

hour. Many have fallen, while yet you live. Pause a moment as you read——and while you pause, an immortal soul has passed into the world of spirits. It was not yours, but the next may be. When death will come to your house, you know not. He may come to-morrow or to-day.

“ Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the north wind’s breath,
And stars to set, but all,
Thou hast all seasons for thine own, O Death !”

And this time, so precious, so uncertain, how have you valued and improved it? As if eternity depended on it? As if when lost, it were lost for ever? Much of it is already gone ; what progress have you made in preparation for heaven ?

Thus far, you have spent your time in the pursuit of this vain world, as if this were to be your only inheritance ; as if you had an eternal lease of life, and a security against the arrest of death. Instead of making ready for the world to come, you have lived as if there were no heaven, no hell, no future. O, how *prodigal* you have been of time !

Your powers of MIND. Who clothed you with these powers, that liken you to angels, and if improved aright will fit you for their companionship hereafter? Who, but the Giver of all good. And have you dedicated them to his service? Have you used them all, in the work of exalting his glory, sustaining the honor of his laws, and the justice of his throne? This is your duty, from which there is no release. For this those powers of mind were given, and the very possession of them makes your accountability perfect, so that you may feel the force of God's law and your obligation to obey.

And now I ask you to look at the use you have made of those noble powers. Not a thought of your mind was ever set supremely on God. And those affections implanted in your heart that you might love your Maker and be loved for ever in return, not one of those affections was ever placed on him whom angels love. But you have wasted those powers in sin, you have loved the world and the things that are in the world; and have hated God and his service. A viler prodig-

gality does not mark the apostasy of one of God's creatures.

What OPPORTUNITIES you have wasted! How many precious Sabbaths have you squandered; or as you have wasted more than you can now recall and count, let me ask, if you ever spent ONE Sabbath in the undivided service and worship of God? Did you ever begin one of these sacred days with prayer, and improve each moment as it passed, in reading God's word, in meditating on divine things, in attending on the services of God's house, or in the public or private acts of religious duty and privilege? Never, never one! And if this sad answer is true, and there is not a doubt of it, then you may calculate the number of Sabbaths wasted, by multiplying the years of your life by the number of Sabbaths in a year. One Sabbath, improved as it should be, might have secured the salvation of your soul. What, then, is the value of the whole number you have thus wasted?

Then think of the blessings which the Sabbath always brings, and which you have

squandered. How many opportunities of hearing the messages of mercy that God sends to sinners, have you neglected? Away into the far country, whither you have wandered, the Lord has followed you with these invitations to return. You live under the droppings of the sanctuary, and its open doors invite you to enter on the return of each Sabbath morn. But a slight excuse, a transient cloud, a momentary pain, will often tempt you to stay away, and lose the opportunity of listening to the sound of a Saviour's love. How many privileges like these you have shamefully despised.

Nor is this all. Often you have sat in the house of God and professed to worship him and listen to the gospel. Here life and salvation have been set before you, and urged on your acceptance with more than parental tenderness. The law of God has been revealed in all its majesty and power. The love of God in Christ reconciling a world unto himself, has here been offered, with eloquence and tears. Calculate if you can, the number of gospel sermons that you have heard;

estimate, if you can, their value, each one of them a message sent to you from heaven, and sealed with the blood of the Son of God.

How much is *one* worth? What sum would equal the value of all? In childhood you sat under the preaching of the gospel; in youth it followed you; there never was a time when you could not have the same blessed opportunity. And have you not wasted all the truth that has thus come down to you from the God of heaven? You have *heard*, but have been a forgetful hearer. Perhaps you have made sport of it, or tried to doubt and disbelieve it. In the house of God, under the most pungent and powerful declarations of divine truth, your mind has been, like the fool's eyes, at the ends of the earth, and, instead of being made the better by these means of grace, you have been hardened in sin, until now you are indifferent to all you hear. Far above the heathen, far above your own deserts, you have been distinguished by the enjoyment of these gifts, but, like a prodigal, you have trifled them away, slighted them, as if they were of no

value. What a spendthrift of eternal riches you have been !

So too of that Bible, which in a former chapter has been spoken of, as one of the richest gifts of God to man. The prodigal took from his father's house no gift so precious as this. Silver and gold he might have had in abundance, but nothing could compare with this pearl of great price. Money could not buy it. God gave it from the fulness of his own boundless love. And in the midst of all your wanderings you have had this treasure, and have abused it basely. Its precious truths you have despised. Its infinite wisdom you have esteemed folly. Its holy laws you have broken. Its tender appeals you have withstood. This is recklessness of conduct that has no parallel in the history of him who wasted his substance in riotous living.

And when the HOLY SPIRIT has visited your heart in mercy, to convince you of sin, of righteousness, of judgment to come, to lead you back to him from whom you have wandered, how have you treated his kindness, and grieved him away.

There have been times when you have seen the Spirit's power on many hearts around you. Others have been alarmed, and feeling their sinfulness, have been induced to turn unto the Lord. But those revival seasons, when sinners pressed into the kingdom, and it seemed to be easy to be saved, those harvest seasons are passed, those summers are ended, and their golden hours you now number among those which you have squandered in sin, perhaps to the ruin of your soul.

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST ! And have you wasted that ? It was shed for you. No offer of mercy would ever have been made to you in the gospel, no Holy Spirit would have come to you in your sins, had not God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. John 3 : 16. Since Christ hath died for sinners, God can be just, and still forgive. This is your only hope. It is a plan to save that is broad enough for you, and for all who will be saved thereby.

“For all that believe,
Christ hath opened a fountain ;
For sin and pollution,
And every transgression,
His blood flows most freely,
In streams of salvation.”

And, as if to crown all your ingratitude, this gift, no less than the blood of the Son of God, you have abused ; this blood of the everlasting covenant by which God would save those who believe, you have trampled under foot and counted an unholy thing.

Were you BAPTIZED in infancy, and have all the blessings and privileges, which were then secured to you, been lost by your apostasy ? Perhaps you have not broken away from the instructions of pious parents, and resisted the impressions thus made on your infant heart. Perhaps no pious father instilled into your mind the principles of truth, warned you of the temptations to which your youth would be exposed, bore you in the arms of parental anxiety to the footstool of sovereign mercy, and sought the richest of heaven's blessings for your ripe years. Per-

haps no fond mother wet your cheek with the tears of maternal love as she laid her hand on your head in prayer, and consecrated her infant offspring to the Lord. But if to all your prodigality, you have added *this*, if you are a prodigal from a pious family, if a pious parent now on earth is weeping over your impenitence, if a parent, now a saint in heaven, is watching the progress of a wayward child, then you are pre-eminently a prodigal. There is, however, hope in your case, if this last portion is not yet all spent, if this tie is not yet sundered, those influences not wasted and forgotten.

The impressions formed by early instruction and holy example are the most powerful that human influence can make on the soul. The ties that fasten the heart to the scenes and associations of early life, are the strongest that man can throw around his fellow-man. And when the sinner thus restrained, deserts the path of virtue and wanders in the ways of sin, these impressions grow fainter and fainter, these ties weaker and weaker; but so long as they are not altogether effaced or

broken, there still is hope. Even for the vilest of prodigals there is hope, if he has not forgotten his father's counsels, and his mother's prayers. If the memory of a mother who prayed over him in his infancy, calls a tear, unbidden, to his eye unused to weep, there is hope even for him. That thought may be a beacon light in the darkness of his heart. He may be a wanderer on the broad ocean, tossed by the tempests of heaven, and driven by fiercer tempests in his own soul; but that thought of a mother's prayer and a mother's love, *that thought*, that last expiring ray, may be the polar star to lead him back to virtue and to God. The return would be as voluntary as the departure. He would follow the guidance of an impression which, it may be, the Holy Spirit made on his heart when he sat on his father's knee, or bowed by his mother's side to repeat his evening prayer.

In the silence and solitude of your soul, do you sometimes feel the power of early religious instruction or of pious example? O, cherish those feelings as the earnest of eternal

life. They may be the means, under God, of guiding your footsteps out of the snares of sin, into the strait and narrow path that leads to heaven. I could tell you of one who was thus rescued from the very borders of destruction.* He was the son of pious parents, and in infancy dedicated to God in the holy ordinance of baptism. In childhood he was faithfully taught the great truths of the Bible, and his early years gave bright promise that he would grow up in the fear of the Lord. And when he left his father's house to complete his education abroad, there was scarcely a fear in the hearts of those who knew him, that he would ever be a prodigal. But new scenes opened on him. New and gay companions welcomed the ardent boy to their circle, and spread before him the bright enticements of pleasure and sin. He struggled for a while against the tempter, but one barrier of virtue after another yielded, till at length he fell. The conquest was not easy,

* See "Elizabeth Thornton, with other Sketches." New York. M. W. Dodd. 1841.

but it was at last achieved ; and he plunged headlong into the vortex that has swallowed thousands, and from which few have ever been recovered.

There were those who saw his danger, and who desired to deliver him as from death. They spoke to him of the evil nature of sin, but he felt it not ; of heaven, but it had no attractions for his corrupt heart ; of Jesus and his dying love, but their power was gone. He was standing one day in the room of a pious young man who said to him, " How would your parents feel should they hear that you had become a Christian ? " The arrow found its way to his heart. He fell on his knees and asked the young man to pray for him. He thought of home, and the memory of all his early lessons of Christ and of heaven came over him, humbling him in the dust. He resolved to turn to God. He became a Christian, and often have those parents' hearts been filled with joy to hear the gospel by the lips of that son whom once they feared was a lost prodigal.

The story is familiar of the sailor who was invited to attend church, by a man who passed him as he was standing in the door of his boarding-house. The sailor at first refused with considerable bluntness, but the man entered into conversation with him, and presently asked him if he had a mother. He said he had. "And what advice would she give you about going to church, if she were here to-night?" inquired the stranger. The sailor went, and was converted.

It may be that he who would trample on a Saviour's blood, and resist the grace of God, and break his laws, and despise his proffered love, may pause before he crushes beneath his feet his mother's heart.

Thus have we noticed a few of the gifts of God which you have squandered in your course of sin. With the early instruction of pious parents, with baptismal vows upon you, with Sabbaths, and Bibles, and a preached gospel, with the influences of the Holy Spirit, and the blood of the Lamb of God shed freely for your salvation, with all these rich gifts, who is so rich as you? The prodigal was

not so rich. What amazing extravagance it must be, that so soon has wasted so much. Heaven is in sight, and it is promised to you on easy terms, but turning your back on that glorious inheritance, you madly break away from the courts of God, you spurn the rich gifts of your heavenly Father, and wander away into a region of death.

“ Stop, poor sinner, stop and think,
Before you farther go ;
Will you sport upon the brink
Of everlasting wo ?
On the verge of ruin stop—
Now the friendly warning take :
Stay your footsteps—ere you drop
Into the burning lake.”

CHAPTER VIII.

Famine—A starving man—A starving soul—Sin brings men to want—The Prodigal becomes a slave—He feeds swine, —The sinner is a slave to the world, the flesh and the devil—The Prodigal is reduced to despair.

“WHEN he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.” Riotous living usually brings men to want. Extravagance, intemperance, debauchery, gambling and kindred vices, will make wreck of the most splendid fortune, and reduce their victims to sore distress. It was so with the Prodigal. He went away from home rich. He ate, he drank, he indulged his licentious appetites without restraint, and never thought of the consequences, till compelled to feel, by the pressure of actual starvation. There arose a famine in that land. When he came to poverty, others around him were poor. They could not help him in his

misery, and he was like to perish with the rest.

In the last chapter we saw the shameful use which the sinner makes of the rich gifts of providence, and the richer gifts of grace, and we are ready now to believe that he who thus abuses God's great goodness must expect to suffer. Kindness rejected will alienate the heart of the dearest friend. The abuse of mercies may justly provoke their giver to withdraw them. Or if those mercies are not withdrawn, they may have lost their power to bless, and remain only as curses to those who have slighted them. So the preaching of the cross is a savor of death to those who will not yield to its power. So the poor sinner who has grieved the Spirit of God, sinks under deeper condemnation than if it had never come to his heart.

But the starving Prodigal was not so much to be pitied as you are, if you have wasted all the good things of God's grace, and are now perishing with hunger. It is a terrible thing to lose the favor of God, to feel that he is your enemy and has no thought of mercy

toward you ; that grieved by your base departure, and wounded by your shameful course of sin, he has given you over to hardness of heart and blindness of mind. The time was when you felt the influence of the Holy Spirit on your soul, exciting in your heart some anxious thoughts about your eternal interests. Where have those anxious thoughts now fled ? Why are you indifferent to the things that concern your everlasting peace ? Perhaps you are ready to perish for *want* of the Spirit whom you have grieved away !

The Prodigal took with him money that, while it lasted, gave him the means of getting back to his father. When *that* was gone, he began to be in want, having nothing with which to support himself *from* home, and nothing to help him on his return. When you deserted your Father, and became an apostate from God, you carried with you, in the remonstrances of conscience, the invitations of the gospel, the strivings of the Spirit, the strong evidences that you might return. These would have led you back and restored

you to your Father's house, had you not criminally LOST them all. You *are* in want. You must starve, if help cannot be found.

So the poor Prodigal felt as he awoke to the knowledge of his lost condition. He was in want of food, and there was a *famine* in the land. But what if he had *starved*? What is a starving beggar to a starving soul! A soul that ever lives, and ever starves! The want you suffer now, the loss of God's favor which is life, is but "the beginning of sorrows." The want that now threatens your destruction is the first gnawing of that worm that never dies, feeding on a soul that lives for ever to be its eternal food.

Look at a starving man, and think what would be his suffering if he were condemned to live for ever, and to be for ever dying with hunger. For days he lingers, and fails, and prays for food, for one morsel of meat to satisfy the ceaseless gnawings that he feels within; for weeks he drags on a miserable existence, sinking yet lower, and feeling still keener and more torturing agonies. Months wear away, but no relief, no crumb to break his fasting,

no drop of water to moisten his parched tongue ; he strives, but vainly strives, to die. It would be kindness to kill him. A long year has passed at last, and the starved wretch still clasps his bony fingers and prays for food or death. Year follows year, and there he lives and starves. Century follows century. Age succeeds age. A thousand years, a hundred thousand years, a million of years roll on, and O, what misery in all that time has that poor wretch endured.

But he never suffered one pain like a pang of hell,—his was a starving body, not a dying soul ! He never felt one agony like the torment of the damned ! His million of years was but as yesterday when it is past, compared to ETERNITY.

And this is the illustration chosen by our Lord to show the state of the soul that has apostatized from God. So it is with every soul that has sinned away the enjoyment of God's favor and incurred his righteous curse. A famine begins in his heart. No dew of divine grace, no rain of mercy descends on the dry,

withered, hardened soul of that abandoned sinner.

Perhaps this, also, is the sad state of the reader of this page. Is there no *dearth* of spiritual joy in your soul? Is God your God, and the Saviour your friend? Does the Holy Spirit dwell in your heart, promoting the work of holiness, and fitting you for heaven? Or does he leave you to the dismal consciousness that your vile ingratitude and profligacy have driven all divine compassion from you, shut up heaven against your prayer, and doomed you to perish miserably and eternally?

We must follow the Prodigal a step farther in his downward career. He must starve or work, and he preferred the latter. He went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; that is, he bound himself out, ceased to be his own master, and surrendered himself to the dominion of another. To all intents and purposes the prodigal became a SLAVE. It was a terrible alternative. It was a dreadful change from the ease and luxury of his father's house; but there the mild restraint of

a father's eye and voice, though every look and word were love, was more than his proud spirit would bear. For the sake of freedom, he had entered on the ways of sin, and now finds himself a slave.

The *SINNER* is a slave. He is a slave to his own lusts, a slave to the world, a slave to the *devil*. You resist such humiliating truths. You think you are slandered when I call you a slave. And what is there, that marks the difference between you and one who has been given up body and soul to the bidding of another? If you would hear the Bible on this point, it would reveal with terrible distinctness, the mournful state to which sin has reduced you. Read a sinner's confession in the sixth and seventh chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. And the bondage of sin, the dominion and power of sin, deliverance from sin, the liberty of the gospel, are all of them expressions so common in the recital of the sinner's experience, that they must be faithful records of the sufferings he endures while yet "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity."

“The carnal heart is enmity against God ; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Rom. 8: 7. But while the sinner’s conscience and his judgment assure him that the service of God is his reasonable service, and that he ought, without a moment’s delay, to yield himself a willing servant into the hands of him who has a right to his body, soul and spirit, the corrupt inclinations of his wicked heart drive him away from God, to the ignominious servitude of sin. So long as man is unrenewed by divine grace, he is led away by his own lusts, unless the fear of punishment throws a barrier between him and his unhallowed desires. But the passion thus restrained, struggles for indulgence, and too often gains the mastery. And when heaven is set before the mind, and its rich enjoyment offered, to induce the sinner to forsake his evil ways and live ; when the horrors of an endless hell are revealed, to alarm the sinner and deter him from his wickedness ; when the Saviour’s love is set forth in the gospel, to induce him to seek for pardon ; when the Holy Spirit strives “ . per-

suade and enable him " to embrace the overtures of mercy made in the word of God, then comes the struggle, and the sinful heart carries the day. It has been so with thousands of sinners, and will be so with more.

Then there is the slavery to the world. Its maxims and precepts, its fashions and fortunes, hold the soul of man in oppressive bondage. If religion is unfashionable, the sinner will perish rather than be looked on as out of the fashion. If his young friends will point the finger of derision at him when he begins to seek religion, the slave to fashion will put in peril his soul, and probably *destroy* his soul, sooner than be laughed at. And what is the scorn of men, to " the everlasting shame and contempt " [Dan. 12: 2] of those who will be among the "scorners" at the last great day? And there are slaves to this world who worship gold as their God. Not the *miser* only, who is "starved in this world, damned in that to come;" but the man of business who lives for gain *and nothing else*, whose Bible is his leger, whose closet is his counting-room, whose God is mammon. He

is a slave. There is no man on earth who works harder and sleeps less than that poor rich man. He rises in the morning, and business haunts him with the first breath of air he takes ; it follows and goads him through the day ; he has scarcely time to eat, none to pray. The charm of the domestic circle wins him not. He is a slave. Sometimes he sighs for liberty, and fixing his eye on some distant point, he says to himself, when I am worth so much, I will be my own master. But that time comes, and the bond of covetousness is stronger than ever. He toils on till he dies.

And the man of pleasure, gay as he is, and boasting of his independence, is bound to his sins, and bound to his companions in sin, with cords that are not to be easily sundered. When he would abandon the pleasures of sin, and seek after things of more enduring good, they rally around him, and hold him fast, and drag him down to death and hell.

The devil leads sinners captive at his will ; binds them to his service here ; exacts a servile compliance with his wicked precepts ;

and when they have finished the work he has for them to do, he takes them to himself, and they are his slaves for ever. The wages of sin is death. Rom. 6 : 23.

Do you see that young man in the field, feeding swine ! A short time since you saw him clad in gay apparel, setting out on a tour of pleasure ; what now is he doing there ? Behold in this the *ignominy* of sin. The Prodigal joined himself to a citizen of the country who sent him into the field to feed swine. These were unclean animals which it was not lawful among the Jews to feed, and those, therefore, to whom our Lord addressed this parable, would look upon one employed in such a service, as among the most degraded of men.

And worse ; he eats with the swine ! As if a lower depth of shame had opened, he sinks to a level with the lowest brutes. To feed swine was mean enough. To herd with them was worse. But to eat with them, was a degradation from which the vilest of men will shrink.

Sin is the source of shame. Holiness exalts men to the likeness of God, fits them for the company of angels and the honors of heaven. Sin filled our first parents with shame, and made them hide from the sight of God. You could not hold up your head in the presence of holiness. You would cower with shame, if called to stand before the face of him in whose sight the heavens are unclean. And as you look with profound contempt on the poor wretch whose crimes have made him the companion of swine, who eats with them, and is thus an acknowledged outcast from the society of all human beings, so must all sinless beings look on the sinner with infinite abhorrence, wondering, too, that immortal man, with such a destiny before him, will so debase his soul. If you despised yourself as holy beings must despise you, what loathing would fill your heart as your character is revealed, by the Spirit and the word of God, to your own mind. When Job obtained but a faint conception of his own vileness, in contrast with the character of the Holy One, he cried, "I have heard of thee

by the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth thee : Wherefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42 : 5, 6. Is. 6 : 1—5.

And what were HUSKS to a starving man ? Just what the vain pursuits of time and sense are to the desires of the immortal soul ! The prodigal snatched the dry food from the swine, and sought to assuage the gnawings of starvation. But in vain. So you may feed on the honors, pleasures, riches, which this world gives, but the soul within will never be satisfied with any thing below the throne of God.

Lay up *treasures* on earth, heap up gold, till the world calls you rich and happy ; and you will still *call* yourself poor, and *know* yourself to be miserable.

Seek for *honor*, and *power*, and *fame* ; and what are they but HUSKS that will not satisfy ? Who ever had enough of these ? The mightiest of earth's conquerors wept when there were no more nations for him to subdue. And what, now, is the value of Alexander's fame ? What the glory of heroes and princes,

whose very names have now passed from the memory of man !

Or would you seek for worldly pleasure, the merest phantom that ever cheated the soul? Bubbles that burst when caught; flowers guarded by a thousand thorns; waters sweet when tasted, but bitter and deadly when drank. As well might you feed a dying man on ashes or the wind, as to satisfy the soul of man with pleasure's empty song. And if I could address the crowds of deluded men who will rush on in quest of riches, honors and pleasures, losing heaven and hope in the vain pursuit, I would say :

Go, ye prodigals from your Father's home ; go, feed on husks till ye pine away and die. Ye worshippers of mammon, go, bow to the idols of silver and gold which you have set up, which can neither see nor save. Worship them and perish ; but if you wish for riches that will survive the "wreck of worlds," O lay them up in heaven.

Ye aspirants for fame, for honors and power, go, mount the car of ambition and ride madly on to glory. But ye, too, shall

find that none of these things that the nations seek after can fill the capacities of the feeblest soul. Go, win your crowns and wear them ; but you shall leave him that humbleth himself, the crown that fadeth not away.

Ye votaries of pleasure, ye butterflies of a brief summer's hour, ye insects that sport your gay wings in the sunshine of folly and of sin ; go, sip the honey from every flower that blooms in the fields you roam ; but you shall leave the nectar of heaven to those who seek for "joys substantial and sincere." Go, dance on the verge of hell, and riot in licentious indulgence. If you will feed on husks, make the most of them ; but depend upon it, you must find something better, or perish with hunger.

But, starved as this miserable prodigal was, with nothing but the husks for his daily food, the misery and helplessness of his condition are still more apparent, when we are told that "no man gave unto him." Doubtless all his old companions in sin had deserted him, and now they treated him with cold neglect, or scorn. It is the way of the world. The

gambler casts off his *friend* as soon as he has cheated him of his money. The man who sells his neighbor intoxicating liquors, drives him from his house, as soon as he has no more means of paying for the poison. Sin is selfish. It has no tender mercies even for sinners, and sad is that man's state who trusts to the wicked for relief, when want presses heavily on him and his house.

Sinners can give each other no relief when the consciousness of guilt is awakened in the heart. Like this prodigal who went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, sinners, when pressed with sin, are inclined to fly to others for relief. And what relief do they obtain? They are led to the pleasures of the world as a cure for the distress they feel; and many a pretended friend has directed an awakened sinner to a course of idle amusements, to read some light but captivating book, to visit in gay company, or to turn the thoughts to any thing but the concerns of the soul, and thus has sought to relieve the melancholy which settles on the heart that is convinced of the nature of sin. Give

husks to a starving man, as well as worldly pleasures to a perishing sinner. Sinners would not help each other if they could, they could not if they would. "No man gave unto him."

And now to what a state of misery is this young man reduced. An outcast from his father's house, abandoned by all the friends that surrounded him in his prosperity, destitute of all means of relief, an enemy of God, and loathed of men, he lies down to die. DESPAIR took possession of his guilty soul.

Despair is the sure result of sin. It is no rash assertion, it is the truth, that reason and the word of God unite in teaching, that sin will, sooner or later, shut out hope from the soul of man. This "dreadful state of deep despair," may come when the sinner, crushed under strong convictions of his guilt and just deserts of punishment, feels that he is left of God to perish eternally. It may come, when, stretched on a dying bed, he looks away to the judgment-seat of Christ, before which he must shortly stand, and knows that he is not prepared for that awful scene, and has no

time left in which to make ready. It may not come until the lost sinner closes his eyes on the light of heaven, and the glare of hell bursts on his affrighted spirit, and he awakes to the discovery that from him hope has for ever fled. But it will come. If the sinner persists in sin, and resists the voice of conscience and the strivings of the Holy Spirit until death stands at his bedside, despair may be there to rack him with anguish before the flames are on him. If death come suddenly, the unready sinner starts and turns pale. "This night shall thy soul be required of thee," is a message of terror to the careless, and when the summons comes, it is no strange thing that, with the prospect of judgment near, and with no hope of salvation, the lost prodigal should cry out in anguish that fills the heart of every hearer with pity and grief.

Scenes like this are often witnessed in this sinful and dying world. A few doors from me, and but a few days ago, a young lady was cut down with sudden sickness. Rapid were the ravages of the destroyer, and vain

the remedies that love and skill would offer, to stay the spirit in the hour of its departure. When told that her sickness would probably prove fatal, and that it was feared she was very near the end of life, she cried out, "I cannot die! I will not die! I must live! I am not ready to die!" No, she was not; and when the voice of kindness would soothe her sorrow, and speak of hope in Jesus, even in the hour of dissolving nature, still she cried, "I might have found the Saviour when I was in health, but now it is too late, *too late*. I must die, and where shall I go!"

Many such death scenes has it been my sad lot to visit, and always, when retiring, have I felt how true it is, that sin will breed
DESPAIR.

Or, if the hardened sinner, given over of God to blindness of mind, lives and dies regardless of the nature or the consequences of transgression, despair will overtake him, and overwhelm him. When the rich man lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and prayed for *one* drop of water to cool his

parched tongue, and heard a stern denial even of this small request, there was nothing left for him to hope. Hell is the empire of despair. Not a ray of hope ever stole in upon its darkness. Could the eye fix upon some point far down the course of never-ending eternity, where the agony of hell would find some respite, it would be a sweet relief to the infinite bitterness of that place of torment. Though that point were millions of ages hence, beyond the stretch of mind to calculate, still were there in that vast distance of futurity, a spot where the soul shall find a resting-place from its sorrows, where the fires burn less fiercely, if they do not expire, where the stings of conscience grow dull, and the gnawings of the undying worm are, for a season, to be satisfied, that point would rise like a star of hope over the dismal gloom that broods for ever on the ocean of despair.

But no such point as this the wildest thought of a lost spirit ever fancied. They who are in hell know, of a truth, that they are there for life, and their misery is, that *life*

is to have no end. They know that a prisoner never escaped from that dungeon. The pardoning mercy of God never reached a soul there. A ray of light never travelled into that bottomless pit.

“ But darkness, death, and long despair,
Reign in eternal silence there.”

CHAPTER IX.

Madness—Returning to reason—Thoughts of home—Reasons for returning to his father's house.

“HE came to himself.” Was he a madman before? We speak of one whose reason has returned after a long season of derangement, as of one who has become *himself* again. Is a *careless* sinner mad?

Scoffers at religion, who would mock all serious thoughts of God and the soul's salvation, always speak of *anxious* sinners as if they were losing their senses. You may hear the enemies of Christ making sport of those who begin to be concerned about the future, and, if you were to believe them, you would think it altogether unbecoming a sensible person to be anxious on the subject of religion. But learn from the prodigal *who is mad*; the sinner who begins to be in earnest about the interests of his immortal soul, or the sinner who is thoughtless when a moment hence he may be in the flames of hell?

That man must be mad who stands on the edge of a pit, and is unconcerned when the ground is crumbling beneath his feet. But that man is not mad who flies for his life when the ground trembles. Were you in a burning house with a friend, and both of you were aware of the danger of being speedily enveloped in flames, which of you would act the part of a madman, the one who rushes to the door to escape, or the one who lies down to sleep?

A young man, in the open field, among a herd of swine, is starving. He has no friends near him to whom he can go for aid. In the depth of his misery, when death stands before him, and hope has failed him, and despair has seized him, he thinks of a house where there is enough to eat, and a friend who would gladly give him relief. Would you have him go, or starve? Was it madness to think of life, when he knew that life could be had if he would but return?

No; *he* is the man bereft of reason, or the man who *abuses* the reason God has given him, who lives in the world as if he were to

live here for ever ; who knows that he is on the verge of the bottomless pit, and walks unconcerned ; whose soul is starving, while the rich bounties of heaven are despised as altogether unworthy of his regard.

Well did the wisest of men once say of sinners, "Madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead." Ecc. 9: 3. Is it not the height of madness to make yourself miserable when you might be happy, to be a beggar when you might be a prince, to die when you might live, to go to hell when you might go to heaven ? Is it not madness, that has no equal in the mad-houses of earth, for an immortal being to trifle with eternal realities, reject a proffered crown of glory, despise the love of God in the gift of his Son, trample under foot atoning blood, and when the offers of salvation are urged upon him with all the eloquence of heaven, to plunge headlong, and of his own free-will, into the midst of "everlasting burnings." And that is the madness, O sinner, that now possesses thee, that arms thee with weapons for thy own ruin, that drives thee on toward

destruction when the door of heaven stands wide open and invites thee to enter and be saved. Thus madly the prodigal fled from his father's house. Thus madly he wandered farther and farther from home, wasting the goods paternal kindness gave him, plunging deeper and deeper into sin, and of consequence into misery, until at last, in the hour of despair, a thought broke upon his bewildered mind like a voice from heaven. It was a thought of HOME.

A home, once *his*, but his no longer. He remembers the parents whose arms once sheltered him, and whose tenderness soothed him in his infant days. He thought of his brother, the companion of his boyhood. He thought of the parental roof, and the couch on which he had slept in peace and security. He remembered his father's table, and as hunger pressed him sorely and the husks mocked his misery, he began to think of the folly of perishing when there was bread enough in his father's house.

Dear reader, do you ever think of home? I mean the home of your childhood and the

scene of your youthful sports and joys. Do you not often think of the parents whose love still winds itself around your heart, and fastens you to the spot where yet they live, or to the more sacred spot where their remains are laid. You may not have been called away from those scenes of endearment, and the cares of a *busy* world, or the snares of a *wicked* world, may not have made you an exile from your father's house. But suppose you were in a far country, in a land of strangers, and poverty and sickness had overtaken you. No kind mother is near to minister to your wants ; no sister smooths your pillow or drops a tear of pity for your wo. In those long nights of cheerless suffering, would not the memory of home revive with subduing power ?

Never shall I forget the thoughts of home that made me water my pillow with tears, when thus among strangers, I once laid down, as I thought, to die. And when I lingered long, and those most dear to me flew, as on wings of love, to my side, O, how easy it seemed to die, with parents to catch the last looks of love, and sisters and brothers to share the sorrows of my last hours.

There are times when the thoughts of *home* will thus steal on the heart, and bring tears to the eyes of those not used to weep. The student in his room at college cherishes the memory of those whom he has left at *home*. The youth who has gone from the sweet influences of the domestic circle, and the thousand associations of *home* in a calm country town, to enter upon business in the midst of a noisy and tumultuous city, often thinks of the quiet scenes of his father's house, and sighs to be there again. The sailor, tossed on the ocean wave, thinks of *home* and the mother whose love would have kept him there. Every where in the wide world, the heart turns back with longings to the home of childhood, and ties, tender but strong, bind it fast to the spot that is hallowed in memory as the centre and source of the fondest joys.

I love to think that our blessed Saviour, when he drew the picture of the sinner's wandering, made the first thought of his return to spring from the memory of his father's house. It proves to me, at least, the value he placed upon those associations that gather

around the human heart, and which he who formed that heart employs in his wise but often wondrous plans to reclaim poor sinners from the error of their ways.

Perhaps you, who are now reading this book, may have been led by these facts to think of pious parents whose hearts would beat with joy, and whose cheeks would be wet with grateful tears, should they hear that an absent child, or one whose feet still linger near the domestic altar, had been led to repentance; and as this thought, so melting to a young heart, has stolen upon you, has not a half-formed desire been awakened to return to your heavenly Father from whom you have wandered, and who would rejoice to receive you to his arms? As we have seen the evil nature and the fatal fruits of sin, have you not felt the need of finding pardon and the favor of an offended God, before sin shall have proved your ruin in this and the world to come? And as the happiness of heaven has been revealed to your view in the invitations of the gospel, has no desire to obtain a title to its eternal enjoyment been kindled in

your soul? I think you feel with me that a father's love is worth seeking if it has once been lost, and a father's house is the best refuge for a starving son. And if the tie that binds you to the parents that gave you birth, and cradled you in infancy, and followed you with kindness all along the paths of early years, if the debt of gratitude you owe to that Father who gave his Son to die for you, will not awaken any desire in your breast to turn from sin, and seek for holiness and heaven, then your case is desperate indeed. But if you will for a moment think of a few reasons to induce an immediate return to that God whom you have forsaken, and whose displeasure you have incurred, it seems to me that you will be disposed to regard the resolution of the prodigal as just the resolution on the formation and execution of which your salvation may depend.

1st Reason. *Remaining where you now are, you must perish.* The Prodigal felt the truth of this. Hunger is inexpressibly painful; and when starvation stared him in the face, he knew that he must die or find relief.

And you are starving, perishing ! Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. You are a sinner, and the disease is making steady and fatal progress. To make your destruction sure, it is not important that you should become more profligate,—more like the prodigal,—in your habits. You may never be a gambler, a thief, or a murderer; you may be moral as the world goes, and like the young man in the gospel (Matt. 19 : 20), you may keep the letter of all the commandments. But you are a sinner; you have never loved God with all your heart, and thus living and thus dying, *where Christ is* you can never come. It is therefore certain, that you are now in a perishing state. The very indifference you feel on the subject renders the case more clear. If you were in earnest about your salvation, there would be more hope. But sitting quietly *there*, in danger of death and hell, perhaps not a day between you and eternity, and still careless about the awful interests that are at stake, you are making your own ruin certain.

It may be that you have promised yourself to attend to your soul's concern at a future day, and "time enough yet" may be the song which now lulls you to slumber on the verge of wo. Millions now in hell once thought as you now think, that by-and-by, in manhood or old age, in sickness or at a more convenient season, they would prepare to die. But death suddenly snapped life's brittle thread, and they sunk into the pit. Or, God in mercy spared them longer, and youth was spent in folly, manhood in the cares of life; gray hairs,—the blossoms of eternity,—gave warning that death was near; but "time enough yet," was the song that lulled them still, and trusting that they would find pardon before they were summoned to judgment, they lived in sin, they died in sin, and now they wail in wretchedness eternal, their miserable deferring till to-morrow what should be done to-day. Just there you are sitting, and just there you may perish. That spot takes hold on hell.

2d Reason. *Should you perish in seeking the salvation of your soul, it would be no worse*

for you. In fact, it would be a thousand fold better. The bitterest ingredient in the cup of human suffering must be the thought that you might have escaped it all. Seek for salvation *now*, and that thought will never pierce your heart with pain. And should you now earnestly endeavor to secure the favor of God and reconciliation with him on the terms of the gospel, and thus sincerely seeking you should perish, it would be a soothing reflection in the midst of future torments, that you had perished, not because you had slighted offers of salvation, but because your Father had rejected you when you lay repenting at his feet.

3d Reason. *But no one ever did perish, who came to God for pardon.*

“ In the world of endless ruin,
It shall never, Lord, be said,
Here 's a soul that perished, suing
For the boasted Saviour's aid.”

Search the earth over, summon all the lost in hell to bear witness, and the gathered testimony of the universe will indicate the

truth of this broad assertion. “Whoso cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out,” is a promise which has never yet been broken. It stands on the page of his Testament still, and he is faithful to his word, sealed as it has been with his dying blood. And if no one ever perished in the way to heaven, if the pledge of Christ prevents such a disaster hereafter, why should you hesitate to set out?

4th Reason. *In your Father’s house there is bread enough, while you are perishing for want.* When this thought arose in the mind of the prodigal among the swine, he desired to return. He said to himself,—perhaps he groaned the words aloud,—“How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger.”

And as *he* reasoned in his misery, so *you* may reason. Read the sweet assurances in the fourteenth chapter of the gospel of John ; they are the words of Christ himself, “In my Father’s house there are many mansions.” Recall the parable of the marriage supper, and behold the rich provisions made for sinners, and the free invitations to partake.

Think of heaven itself! That is your Father's house. There is a table to which you are invited. The invitation cost nothing less than the sufferings and death of the Son of God. If the invitation to the feast has cost so much, how rich must be the feast itself.

But if these reasons are duly weighed, can it be that a rational man will hesitate as to the steps to be taken? Staying where you now are, you must perish; coming to Christ, you can but perish; coming to Christ, no one ever did perish; while you sit still and starve, there is bread enough and to spare in your Father's house. Will you return?

CHAPTER X.

The resolution—I will arise and go.

THE starving prodigal remembers the plenty that fills his father's house, and is almost resolved to arise and go. Still were there difficulties, and he may have said to himself, "The way is long and rough, and I am weak, and sick, and dying. I may perish by the way-side. There is none to help me. I must at last lie down and die. O that I had never wandered from my father's house. He was a kind and gracious father ; he never denied a reasonable request I made ; he gave me all I desired, and more ; he never laid on me a hard command ; he never gave me an unkind word or look ; and when, with base ingratitude, I asked for my portion of the goods, how freely did he give it to me. He would have made himself a beggar to please his son. Ah, well do I remember the

last look of agony he cast on me, when I broke away from him ; how he came to the door, and followed me out, and called to me to come back, and how I hurried away beyond the reach of his voice. That last call now sounds in my ears. There have been times since that hour, when I have seemed to hear that voice ; when I have returned from a night's debauch, or when conscience has been roused by hearing of his goodness, and his longings for my return. And now I hear that voice again as clearly as when he stood in the door and cried, ' My son, come back.' Yes, I hear it, and methinks I will obey. But will he forgive me, if I do return ? Will he forget my base apostasy, my vile ingratitude, my profligate career, my rags, and poverty, and shame ? I seem to hear him saying, ' Return unto me, and I will return unto you. My son, give me thy heart.' It is the voice of my father !! I know it, though it speaks but in whispers to my soul. And what if he does disown me, and drive me away from his door ? I deserve to die ; I must perish if I stay here ; and it will sweeten the bitterness

of death to die near the home of my childhood, and with this load of guilt removed from my heart. I will not die a prodigal. I will go and fall down before my father and confess my sins, and if I perish, I will die in the dust at his feet."

Such reflections as these, resulted in the resolution, "I will arise and go to my father." The decision was timely, and wise, and saving.

It was *timely*. Delaying a little longer, it would have been for ever too late. Death was near, death in a most horrid form. Whatever was done, must be done quickly.

It was *wise*. He could do nothing better. Help from those around him was out of the question. Husks were useless for a starving man. His father might relieve him; at least, he would make the effort and abide the result.

It was *saving*. He never would return to his father, unless he **RESOLVED** to return. This fixed determination was essential to his deliverance. Halting between two opinions, half inclined to go, and half to stay, he would

have perished there among the swine. In his weak, exhausted state, his case was growing more and more desperate. He must go or die.

Now observe, even after his determination, he might perish ; he might alter his purpose and return to his husks : but unless he did determine to return, he must inevitably perish.

You remember the story of Esther. When she wished to present herself before Ahasuerus with a petition, she knew that unless the king should extend his golden sceptre, and permit her to approach the throne, she must die ; but an enemy had laid a plot to destroy her and her people, and unless her request was granted, she must perish. In this extremity she said, "If I perish, I perish ;" and venturing thus, she approached and lived.

So the lepers of Samaria reasoned. At the gate of a starving city sat four leprous men. Within the city was famine, without was a besieging army. They said one to another, and very wisely, "Why sit we here

until we die. If we say, we will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we sit still here, we die, also. Now, therefore, come, and let us fall into the hands of the Syrians; if they save us alive, we shall live, and if they kill us, we shall but die." This was good reasoning, as was shown by the result; they went to the camp and were saved.

As the starving prodigal reasoned, as the lepers reasoned, so may the sinner reason.

“ I can but perish if I go,
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die.”

The sinner, perishing in his sins, must come to a *decision*, a firm determination, to forsake them, or he will never come back to God.

If you are poor and desire to become rich, you will not lie on a bed of idleness, and expect gold and silver to come down, like rain, from heaven into your hands. If you wish to gain some post of influence or honor,

you will not sit still and expect that, without effort on your part, the prize will be gained. And the greater the prize, the stronger would be your exertions. He who aims to be the conqueror of the world, must make mightier efforts than he who would subdue a province. And if the salvation of the soul,—in value, far surpassing worlds,—be the object in view, it is the plainest dictate of reason, to summon every energy, and, with fixedness of purpose, to come to a decision that, so far as you are able to determine it, the question shall be settled at once, and for ever.

Such counsel as this is not merely the counsel of man's wisdom. It is the advice, nay, it is the command of God your Father, and as such, I urge it on you this day. The children of Israel were wavering in their minds between obedience to God, and base desertion; and Joshua cried out, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Josh. 24: 15. The great captain would have them decide on the spot, that their decision might be registered for, or against them. At another time, when the same fickle people were deliberating

whether to worship the God of their fathers, or to bow the knee to Baal, the prophet Elijah demanded, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."

1 Kings 18: 21.

The solemn admonition is now addressed to every sinner to whom the sound of the gospel comes. It is this moment addressed to the sinner who holds this book in his hand.

The decision should be made *understandingly*. Religion is a subject, of all others, worthy of an intelligent consideration. It has claims on the minds of men that will bear the test of rigid examination; and if you can find a good reason why you should not yield to those claims, a reason that will be sufficient to excuse you in the hour of judgment, then you may neglect the subject altogether. The decision to forsake sin and turn to God, will require you to make sacrifices, and you must count the cost before you begin to build. Especially, if you are about to build a house for eternity, you must look well to the founda-

tion on which the structure is to be reared. Examine the subject in the fear of God, with the Bible before you, on your knees in prayer, with the certainty that you are soon to appear at the bar of the universe, to answer for all the deeds done in the body ; and if, in view of these truths, it appears to you a reasonable thing to forsake your sins, *then* and *there* decide to be on the Lord's side.

The decision should be made *in humble dependence on divine grace*. "If the Lord do not help thee," said the king of Samaria, to a starving woman, "whence shall I help thee?" You may make ten thousand solemn resolutions to repent, but without strength from God to keep them, you will break them all, and go back to your sins. Perhaps your own experience will confirm these remarks. Often you have thought that you would seek the Lord, and make preparation for death and heaven ; but these thoughts have gone, and you have become more careless than before. And so averse is your wicked heart to all that is holy, so fond are you of all that is evil, that without the almighty power of

God to overcome your aversion to holiness, and your love of sin, you must perish, miserably and eternally. This is the uniform testimony of Scripture. And it is a truth which cannot be overlooked or disbelieved, without fatal injury to the soul. If the sinner cherishes the error, that he can change his own heart without divine aid, and go to heaven in his own strength, he will probably make no effort until it is too late to repent, and if he does make the effort, the result will show at once his ignorance and weakness. You must, therefore, form the resolution to turn unto the Lord, with a deep sense of your need of divine grace to assist you in every step you take.

The determination should be *unalterable*. Having formed this purpose in your own mind, it would be well to go away into some secret place where no eye but that of God can see you, and there, in solitude, but in the presence of him who reads the inmost thought of your heart, write this decision, "I will arise and go to my Father." I do not ask you to record the resolution if you decide to

be against the Lord. I have heard a story that illustrates the danger of forming rash resolutions to sin, and I will mention it, though the place and date of the occurrence have been forgotten.

A preacher, in making an appeal to an assembly of college students, from these words, "Choose you this day whom you will serve," called upon the young men to come to a decision that night, to be *for* or *against* God. "Go to your rooms," said he, "and there deliberate whether or not you will serve the Lord. And when you have decided, write the decision in your own blood, that it may be regarded by yourselves, as final and unalterable." Six or eight of those who heard this appeal, assembled that night in one room, and there agreed, that let others do as they would, as for them, they would serve the devil! They drew up a covenant, and, *opening a vein*, they signed it in blood, making a formal surrender of themselves to the service of Satan. It is related, further, that the preacher whose exhortation had led them to this horrid resolution, lived to know,

that every one of them came to an untimely death, in the midst of a dissolute and blasphemous career.

I ask you to make a solemn determination, from which you will never go back, that you will be the Lord's.

Make it *immediately*. There is no time to lose. The prodigal might have lived some days longer, perhaps weeks, but soon he would have sunk into a state of insensibility, from which he could not have been aroused. Relief to a perishing man may come too late, though it comes before life is gone. The sinner may sink into stupidity, deathlike and fatal, and before the "lamp of life has ceased to burn," he may be unconscious of his dying condition. His eyes may be blinded, his ears stopped, his heart hardened, his conscience seared, and his soul, deserted by the Spirit of God, may be given over to destruction. How far you may be gone, we know not. If you feel one emotion of concern still lingering in your heart, it is an evidence that the Holy Ghost is waiting to be gracious, and that you may yet live. Nor is it needful that you

should be told how suddenly your hold on life may be sundered, and all opportunity of repentance for ever cut off. Were you certain of life for three-score years and ten, the work before you is great enough to require the whole. Ten thousand years are not too many to be employed in making ready for *eternity*. And when you are not sure of ten years, or ten days, or ten minutes, in which to accomplish the mighty work, ought you not to begin at once? at least, DECIDE to begin? Suppose that you were under sentence of death, and a promise of pardon were made to you, on the condition, that before another hour was spent, you would confess your guilt and pledge future obedience to the laws. Would you ask the messenger of such tidings to take out his watch and tell you, as the minutes passed, that you had one less and one less, so that as the last moment was expiring, you might confess and promise? No; the instant the offer was made, you would fall down on your knees, bewail your crime, and pledge perpetual obedience. The messenger of God comes to you, a criminal, under sen-

tence of eternal death, and he offers pardon. And will you ask for one minute more, and one more, hoping that the time is not yet spent, that you may yet yield and be saved from hell? Is it prudent to be putting in jeopardy your immortal interests, by deferring, from day to day, a decision that involves heaven with all its joys, or hell with its endless burnings? If ETERNITY may depend on TO-DAY, is it prudent to defer this day's duty until to-morrow? *To-morrow* may never come to you. If you would make a wise decision, you will make it now. "Now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation."

Why is it then, O sinner, that you hesitate to form the resolution of the prodigal, "I will arise and go to my Father?" No appeal has here been made to your passions, to stir you up to some rash resolution which you may regret hereafter. Religion is not a mere impulse. It is a sober, rational subject, to be viewed with candor and judgment, and when you have fairly understood your duty, do it; not because you are roused by appeals to

your feelings, but because you are convinced that it is your duty to repent and forsake your sins, and because you know that you will be lost if you do not. If there is any thing in this truth to alarm you, then be alarmed. If you are afraid to go into eternity with the unforgiven guilt of a whole life resting upon you, then fear and tremble. If you are afraid to stand on the verge of the bottomless pit, while fiery billows roll below, then fly from the spot where you now stand. If you are afraid to rest "on the palm of the hand of an angry God," then fly to his bosom, and seek a shelter there.

But what thou doest, do quickly. Time rolls on, and will soon bear you beyond the confines of this world, into a "far country," from which you will never return.

"Haste, O sinner, to be wise,
Stay not for to-morrow's sun."

CHAPTER XI.

Repentance—The prodigal will fall down before his father and confess his sins.

THE ruined young man, resolving to return to his father, begins to feel his unworthiness to be received into that father's favor and love. He saw that his ingratitude had justly exposed him to the indignation of one whose kindness he now desired, and as his own shameful conduct appeared in contrast with the character of his father and the treatment he had received at his hands, a deep sense of his vileness and wickedness took possession of his heart. He was decided not only to return, but to humble himself at the feet of his father, confess his sins, and plead for pardon. The language of his confession is here recorded, that other prodigals may know in what terms they must acknowledge their transgressions when they come back to God. He said to

himself, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." This confession shows us the emotions of his heart. It is the language of a PENITENT. And although in the order of the story, we have not reached the point where this confession was made, we may contemplate it *here* where it was first conceived, as *our* Father looks on the heart, and regards, with interest, intense and holy, the first risings of sorrow which are felt in view of sin. In this confession there are several important points to be noticed as implied in true repentance.

1. He was deeply sensible that he was a sinner. In language which is now understood by children as well as others, we would say that he was *under conviction* of sin. It is one thing to *acknowledge* yourself a sinner, and it may be quite another to *feel* yourself to be one in the sight of God. All men who believe the Bible will admit that they have not kept the commandments; that they have

broken them in thought, word and deed. And thus having broken the law, they are sinners deserving punishment. A sinner may be willing to own his guilt, but still have no deep sense of its nature. In this sense, the most of those who live under the gospel are *convinced* of sin, and are ready to confess their exposure to its penalty.

But when the Spirit of God opens the blind eyes of the sinner that he may see himself as he appears in the sight of a holy God, the discovery he makes is terrible and overwhelming. "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." Rom. 7: 9. This was the account which a great sinner gave of himself after he had been converted. He thought he was a very good man before, but when the law of God, requiring "truth in the inward parts" (Psalm 51: 6), was revealed, and he saw that he had never yielded to its holy precepts a single emotion of his heart, he sunk under the power of personal conviction of sin, and DIED. As death was the penalty of a broken law, he saw and felt

his desert of death, and therefore used this strong language to express his feelings in view of the discovery he had made. The exercises of all are not alike under the convicting influences of the Holy Spirit. Some whose lives have been marked with no flagrant vices have been highly excited, and their convictions have been attended with strong anguish of soul ; while others more openly profane and ungodly have exhibited less powerful emotions. But every sinner, who would come to God for pardon, must feel as this Prodigal when he said, I HAVE SINNED. And the steps by which men are led to this consciousness of personal guilt are as various as their exercises under it. Sometimes a sinner is suddenly alarmed by the preaching of divine truth, and awakened to a sense of his lost condition, and soon he discovers the secret of his danger to be his sinfulness before God. Another may be induced to read the Bible, or some other good book, and thus be guided to a knowledge of himself ; or the providence of God may arrest his attention and bring him to consider his ways ; or, in an hour of cool

reflection, tired of the vain pursuits of the world, disgusted with the husks it offers, like the Prodigal, he turns his thoughts towards his father's house and longs to be there. These are but so many means which the Holy Spirit employs to convince men of sin, and when their attention has fastened upon the exercises of their hearts, and they contrast themselves with Him whose eyes are too pure "to look on evil" (Hab. 1: 13), they are led to cry out, in the words of the penitent publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The first words the Prodigal would utter when he came to fall down before his father, would be, "I have sinned. I cannot deny it. I have basely deserted him whom I ought to have loved as my dearest friend; I have wounded him to the heart by my vile ingratitude; and since I have cast off his authority and pursued my own chosen way, I have squandered the goods he gave me, consumed them on my own lusts, and reduced myself to my present wretched state of deep despair. I feel that I am a sinner, and in no other character can I present myself before my injured father."

And when the sinner, under conviction of his personal guilt, presents himself at the footstool of mercy, he must come with this language on his lips: "I know, I *feel*, that I am a sinner. Long ago I broke God's holy laws, and never, never did I love the Saviour with my heart. I have sinned in times and ways without number. Sabbaths I have wasted, sermons I have slighted, whispers of conscience I have silenced, strivings of the Holy Spirit I have resisted, the love of God the Father, and of Christ the Son, *love* that ought to have won *my* love, and moved and melted my heart, I have abused! How like a prodigal I have wasted the rich bounties of God's providence, and the richer bounties of his grace! And now the memory of these sins fills me with remorse and shame. How have I hated instruction and my heart has despised reproof, and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation. Prov. 5: 12—14. *Guilty*, GUILTY, GUILTY, I must plead, and throw myself on the mercy

which up to this hour I have madly despised.” This language becomes a sinner who feels convicted of sin, and who seeks not to cover his guilt or to charge it on another, but takes all the blame on his own soul. And the Prodigal was ready to go still farther.

2. “I have sinned *against heaven*.” So David, when convicted of his foul sin, and cut down under a sense of his guilt, cried out to God, “Against thee, *thee only*, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight.” Ps. 51 : 4. Thee only ! And had not the adulterer and murderer blasted the peace of his neighbor’s house, and filled it with shame and blood ? How then could he say that he had sinned only against God ? Because the peculiar wickedness of his crimes appeared when he saw himself in the presence of a God of spotless holiness, whom he had grievously offended, and whose displeasure he had incurred. And when the sinner reviews his life, and calls to mind his individual acts, and surveys his heart in all the extent of its wickedness, it is not the injury which he has done to society that affects him so much, as the fact that

every sin he has committed, every thought of sin he has indulged, is a weapon formed against the God of heaven! Treason against the throne of the universe is the crime of which every sinner stands condemned. The very Being who formed you for his own glory is the one whom you have defied. The love that fills heaven with bliss and would make you as happy as the angels, is the love which you have contemned. God is love, and on the throne of his holiness he sits and beholds you in your apostasy, and as you turn your back upon him and rush on in sin, "his heart is turned within him," and he cries, "How shall I give thee up!" The serpent, when warmed, stung his benefactor, whose bosom had sheltered him from the cold. He against whom you have sinned has thrown his arms of kindness around you, saved you from death and hell, opened the door to heaven, and offered an everlasting home with him in joy that no heart has yet conceived; and that is the Being at whom the arrows of your sin are aimed. "I have sinned against heaven." Compared with my

offences against *heaven*, all my crimes appear scarce worthy of being mentioned. How could I be so ungrateful, so vile, so wicked, as to harden my heart against the kindest of benefactors, the best of friends, the tenderest of parents. I knew that he hated sin. I have heard him saying by his prophet (Jer. 44: 4), "O, do not this abominable thing that I hate." But with the full consciousness that his holy eye was looking on me, and his heart grieving over my ungodliness, I have sinned against him, repeatedly, desperately, and without excuse. I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and,

3. "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." His *unworthiness* overwhelmed him. Self-condemnation is essential to true repentance. And as the wretched prodigal remembered the scenes of guilt and shame through which he had passed in his course of riotous living, and his degrading service among the swine, and thought of returning to his father's house where purity alone could enter, he felt like saying with one of old, "Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in

dust and ashes.” Job 42 : 6. And another, looking on himself and his people in contrast with the holiness of God, cried out, “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face,” “because we have sinned against thee.” Dan. 9 : 7—8. And the weeping prophet said, “We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us ; for we have sinned against the Lord our God.” Jer. 3 : 25. In all the penitential Psalms, and in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, what heart-breaking and humiliating confessions of sin do these writers make, showing, as well as words can show, how they despised themselves. And the nearer they approached the throne of grace to find the pardoning mercy of a pure and holy God, the deeper was their sense of personal shame and guilt. This was true of the Prodigal. *How shall I appear before my father?* My conscience is my own accuser, and I feel that I am utterly unfit to lie in the dust at his feet. So the poor sinner, whose heart is pierced with a sense of his true character, loathes himself, and can scarcely believe that there is any other

sinner on earth so vile in the sight of heaven. Perhaps his exposure to the punishment due to his sins first filled him with alarm and led him to seek for some way of deliverance from the curse of a broken law. But as he discovers his own sinfulness more clearly, he abhors himself and hates sin, not because it exposes him to the wrath of an angry God, but because it is odious and abominable in itself, and renders him altogether unworthy of coming into the presence of holy beings.

And now he feels how just it is that God has threatened to punish sin. He is ready to admit that he himself deserves to die, to die eternally, so clearly has he incurred the penalty of the law. One sin deserves punishment, and the number of his transgressions is so great, and their guilt so manifest, that he cannot undertake to justify or excuse them.

“ Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
I must pronounce thee *just* in death ;
And if my soul is sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well.”

To feel this truth sincerely is essential to true repentance. As long as you are laboring to make yourself to appear not quite so bad as the Spirit of God has convinced you that you are, as your own conscience upbraids you with being, and as the Bible represents every unconverted sinner to be, so long you are refusing to humble yourself before your Father. And why seek to justify or palliate your offences? They are all spread out in the face of heaven. They will all come up against you in the day of judgment. Instead of making a vain attempt to conceal your wickedness, go and fall down before God, and cry with the penitent author of the fifty-first Psalm, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." Read the whole of this prayer on your bended knees, and with strong crying and tears, as you observe its marked description of your

own case. Behold the Prodigal in the dust before his father ! Hear him exclaiming in deep self-abasement, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son ; make me as one of thy hired servants. I do not deserve to be restored to the honors and privileges which I have lost by my base apostasy. I ask not a seat at thy right hand, and an assurance of future reward, but only that thou, whom I have offended, wouldst forgive me, and remove from my soul this grievous load of sin. Lay thy rod upon me, and it shall be well. Smite me, I deserve to suffer. Slay me, I deserve to die. But O, let me hear thy voice, in tones of pardon, assuring me that thou art reconciled to thine apostate, prodigal son, and I will die in peace. Such acknowledgments of guilt would clearly indicate,

4. A determination to forsake sin. The repenting sinner, convinced of its evil nature and its fatal effects, flies from it as from the plague. All the sins of his past life come up in array before him, and he shrinks from them, wondering that he could ever discover in them

any thing to love, and determined never to harbor them again. Those sins which were once most dear, that led him farthest from God, and nearest to the brink of hell, that held him firmest in their grasp, and threatened most fiercely to work his ruin, he now regards his worst enemies, and prays most earnestly to be delivered from their power.

Thus he is able to bring to a test his repentance. If he has mourned over his sins simply because they are likely to make him miserable when punishment follows them, his repentance is nothing more than selfish fear of consequences, and when that fear subsides he will return to his sins, and sink into deeper stupidity than that from which he has just been roused. But if he feels sorrow for sin because it is odious in itself, and offensive to the God of spotless purity who has forbidden it, if he loathes it because it is the only source of misery in the universe, and must make misery wherever it is found and as long as it endures, if he hates it as an enemy which he would for ever shun, and from which he hopes ever to be delivered, then is his sorrow sincere,

and such as a father loves to see in the bosom of a prodigal child.

Such repentance is followed by reformation. The sins that he loved, he hates. The companions, whose society was once his delight, he now forsakes for the company of those whom God loves. The vices which before had unbounded influence over him, and which stood between him and heaven as an impassable gulf, he is now enabled to renounce, while he seeks the ways of wisdom which are pleasantness, and her paths which are peace.

Do you, whose eyes have run over these leaves, feel a sympathy with this penitent youth in the sorrows of his heart over past sins? Like him, you have wandered; like him, you have eaten the bitter fruits of apostasy from God; like him, you have reached the very verge of ruin, and unless you repent and turn, you must soon be in the world of despair. Are you sensible of your exceeding sinfulness in the sight of Infinite Holiness, and do you feel deep remorse and shame when your transgressions are contemplated as committed against a God of love, who is grieved

by the waywardness of those whom he made to be happy in his presence for ever? Would it be perfectly just and right for God to send you to hell under sentence of eternal separation from him and all holy beings? And should he thus punish you, is your heart so affected in view of sin, that you desire to avoid it and be freed from it, though you are never permitted to enter into heaven? This is a point to be guarded with the utmost care. If your *regret* for sin is the fear of punishment, *it is not repentance*. There is a sorrow for sin that "worketh death." 2 Cor. 7: 10. It is the grief of the sinner when he hates to give up his sins, but feels that he must or be punished. Godly sorrow, that is, repentance unto salvation, is a different exercise, and one which must be experienced by every sinner, before an offended God and father will be reconciled to him. If that sorrow, which has been explained in this chapter, and which was felt by the prodigal, by David and by the publican who would not lift up his eyes to heaven, if that sorrow now weighs on your heart, you will be ready to say, with sincerity

of soul, O thou who dwellest in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, my God and Father, let me bow down before thee and confess my sins. They are more in number than the sands on the sea-shore and the stars of heaven. They are aggravated by the light and love against which they have been committed, for I have known my duty but have not done it; and I have resisted the strongest motives thy word and thy Spirit have urged upon my heart. I cannot answer for one of a thousand of my transgressions. Thou hast set mine iniquities before thee, my secret sins in the light of thy countenance; and as they are revealed to me in some measure as thou seest them, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes. Unclean, unclean, God be merciful to me a sinner. I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

“ O thou, whose tender mercy hears
Contrition's humble sigh ;
Whose hand indulgent, wipes the tears
From sorrow's weeping eye :

See, low before thy throne of grace,
A wretched wanderer mourn ;
Hast thou not bid me seek thy face ?
Hast thou not said, Return ?

O, shine on this benighted heart,
With beams of mercy shine !
And let thy healing voice impart
A taste of joys divine.”

CHAPTER XII.

Faith—The Prodigal returns—The reception.

THERE comes a youth whose face bears some slight resemblance to one we have seen before. His tattered garments, scarcely covering his nakedness, his emaciated form, his countenance marked with disease and shame, tell a sad tale of suffering and wo. Grief, too, is depicted in his tearful eyes, and were it not for a look of strong determination to press on, and of confidence that he will reach the end of his journey, I should fear that he is just ready to fall down and die. But he does not look like one who was always thus wretched. Something about him shows that he has seen better days than these. His garments are in rags, but they are the rags of former robes.

It is the same young man whom but a few months ago we saw setting out from his father's house, clad in the vestments of luxury,

with abundance of wealth in his hands, a child of ease and pleasure, who had never known care or poverty but by name. “A wandering, weary, worn and wretched thing,” he travels on, cheered by a faint hope that he may live to find his father’s house again, or driven by the dreadful certainty that he will perish with hunger if he does not. If the thought of sinful pleasures, which he once enjoyed, returns to tempt him back, and something whispers that he will never find them in the quiet of the home he seeks, yet having proved the emptiness and felt the sinfulness of the follies once so dear to his heart, he resists the temptation to return, and forgetting the things that are behind, presses onward to those that are before. Sometimes he feels faint and weary, the dangers and difficulties of the way dishearten him, and he thinks of giving up in despair, but his awakened conscience urges him to go and confess his guilt, and he feels, that if he must perish, it is better far to die on the way to his father’s house. He may doubt his father’s willingness to receive him, and so vile does he now

appear in his own eyes, that he knows it would be right for his father to reject him with scorn and drive him starving from his door. But even this most painful apprehension does not hinder his progress. He knows that he ought to return, though he were sure of being rejected; that he ought to submit himself to his father whose service he has deserted, though that father should load him with chains and make him a slave for life. And more than this, there is in the character of his father something that assures him he will be welcomed and forgiven when he comes back, and whether received or rejected, he determines to go.

During the long months or years of this young man's absence from home, what were the feelings of the father whom he had shamefully deserted? Had *he* forgotten the boy whom he loved so tenderly? Had he ceased to be anxious for his welfare, or to look for his return? No, no. Day after day, week after week, month after month, he had prayed and wept over the case of his wandering child. Long and sleepless nights of anguish had he

passed, with thoughts of his lost one preying on his soul, and hope of his restoration having failed and expired. Often would he stand in the door of the house where he parted with his son, and find a melancholy relief in watching the spot where for the last time he saw the departing form of his wayward boy. O, who can tell, that has not felt, the bitterness of his cup, whose gray hairs are brought down to the grave in sorrow over a disobedient son! O, who can tell, that has not felt,

“How worse than serpent’s tooth it is,
To have a thankless child.”

It is hard to bury in the earth the son of your hope and love, in all the freshness and bloom of youth; to feel that his glad voice will be heard no more in your halls, nor his sweet smile meet you at the fireside again for ever. But there is joy in the heart of that parent who weeps over the grave of his darling child, compared to the strong agony of him whose son has sundered the ties of filial and fraternal love, and has become an

outcast on the world, a roving, reckless, ruined Prodigal. “Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away.” Jer. 22: 10. This, *this* was the grief that was rending the parental heart of David, when the tidings came that his rebellious son had perished in arms against his father, and he lifted up his voice and wept as he said, “O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” 2 Sam. 18: 33.

The father of this Prodigal was mourning still for his lost son. He has grown old before his time, and wrinkled with care, and bowed with grief, he feels that he himself has not long to live; but he cannot die in peace till he beholds once more the face of one who has wandered from his house he knows not whither. He is standing on an eminence that commands a wide view of the country before him; he scarcely dares to hope that he may catch sight of his long-lost boy. Again and again he has come and looked, and gone away to come again; but now his heart has

failed him ; he feels almost sure that his eyes will never more be blessed with that wished for sight ; when lo ! in the distance he spies the form of one approaching. He has often thus been deceived and he may be again. “ It is only some poor wayfaring man, ragged and worn ; O that he might be my son ! What if he does come in rags ; if he will only come to my arms, it is all I ask. And now that he draws nearer there is something in his step, his form, there is something *here in my heart*, that tells me *he* is coming. God grant it may be my son, my long lost son.”

Tears blur the good man’s eyes ; he wipes them away with the fold of his robe and looks again. Joy, joy to thy breaking heart, O father, it is thy son ! “ When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his

feet ; and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry ; for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found.”

The Prodigal coming to his father is a sinner coming to Christ. The wisdom and love of God have employed a great variety of terms to show the way by which poor lost sinners may be led back to him from whom they have wandered, and in infinite kindness to perishing prodigals he has left no means untried to win them to his house and arms.

FAITH in Jesus Christ is made the condition on which God is willing to pardon penitent sinners. But simple as these words appear, it is still true that unconverted persons think there is more darkness around this one point than almost any other truth in the Bible. When the sinner has been made sensible of his sinfulness and danger, he cries out with the awakened jailer at Philippi, “What must I do to be saved?” But when we answer, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, he asks again, “*What is it to believe?*” To the answer of this inquiry we ask your close attention.

You have read the New Testament enough to be familiar with such passages as these: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3: 14—15. "He that believeth on him is not condemned." 18. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." 36. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16: 16. In these passages we are again and again assured that salvation from hell is connected with the belief of truth concerning Jesus Christ. *What* that truth is, and *how* you are to receive it, are subjects of solemn inquiry.

1. There is no other way of salvation than by Jesus Christ. God requires you to obey his law, and if you have ever broken it in the least particular, you deserve to be punished. The penalty of disobedience is death, and you deserve to die. If for one sin that pen-

alty is due, how great is your desert of eternal death for the innumerable sins of which you stand condemned. And should you spend the rest of your life in the service of God, keeping all his commandments perfectly, the sins you have already committed stand charged against you, and you must answer for them in judgment. How shall you escape? There is no way of escape, and you must perish under the sentence of the law, unless some one will *suffer in your place*. This shows you the necessity of a *Redeemer*,—of one who will bear the iniquities of the sinner, and who, by making an atonement for sin, will satisfy the demands of a righteous law and render it right and proper for God to forgive the guilty. Such a Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ, and such an atonement has he made. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4: 12. You may labor hard to find some other way to heaven than that which leads you by the cross of Christ, but every other will lead you down to death and hell. The

poor woman who came to the Saviour to be healed of a malady under which she had long suffered, had "spent all her living upon physicians and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse." But despairing of all other help, she came to the great physician and was made whole. Let this, therefore, be a settled point with you, that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of lost sinners.

2. He is just the Saviour you need. All that God requires, as the conditions on which he will make you the offer of forgiveness, Jesus Christ has done. The Son of God, equal to the Father, voluntarily submitted to the law, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. The sufferings which he endured may therefore be regarded as an atonement for the sins of those for whom he died, and God may be just while he pardons the repenting sinner.

He is an all-sufficient Saviour. The sacrifice he made is enough for a world in sin. Millions on millions have believed in this Saviour, and dying in faith have gone home to glory to sing his praises before the throne.

Millions now living have found him suited in all respects to their wants, and trusting in him have rejoiced with joy unspeakable. The greatest sinners on earth have found this Saviour *sufficient* for their salvation, and the record of their pardon through the blood of Christ is now written to encourage you and all to come to him and believe. It is not strange that one whose eyes have been opened to see his vileness, and whose heart has been pierced with a sense of his just desert of punishment, should doubt that his salvation can be secured ; and when the gospel brings to view the gracious provisions made by Jesus Christ, he cannot be persuaded that the provision is great enough for his case. But to scatter such doubts, let the mind be fixed on the greatness of the sacrifice which the Lord of glory made when he undertook the work of man's redemption ; follow him through all the sufferings he endured, from the manger where he was laid in infancy, to the cross on which he hung in death ; listen to the voice of this Redeemer as he cries, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth,

FOR I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NONE ELSE.” Is. 45: 22. Hear the converted Saul exclaiming, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; OF WHOM I AM CHIEF.” And in another place, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he declares, “He is able to save them TO THE UTTERMOST that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Heb. 7: 25.

If Jesus Christ is able to save the chief of sinners, to save unto the uttermost all that come, if he is “GOD over all” and “mighty to save,” if the greatest sinners have already found his blood sufficient to wash away their sins, why should you doubt that he is ABLE to save you? You are a great sinner; you deserve to perish for ever; nothing short of an Almighty Redeemer can save you; *this Saviour*, therefore, is just the one you need.

3. He is WILLING to save you! And this is a truth which you are also slow to believe. You have heard him in the gospel uttering such sweet invitations as these: “Come unto

me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." And in other parts of the sacred volume you have read these words: "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Is. 1: 18.

To whom are these gracious assurances made, if not to you? Would you wish to find your own name in the Bible coupled with the assurance that Jesus Christ is willing to have compassion on your soul? Such a distinction is certainly not required in your case, and millions have believed on the same evidence that now meets your eye. Because Christ has made an atonement sufficient for the whole world, and because he has freely offered to save all who will accept salvation on his terms, he is willing to include you in that number, and forgive your sins.

What reason have you for doubting the willingness of Christ to have mercy on you? Has he made an *exception* of you in his offers of salvation? Has he said that he is willing to save all, and is he not sincere? Did he not leave his father's bosom, and come down to this world of sin and suffering, bear the reproaches of his enemies, submit to cruel mockings and scourgings and every indignity that wicked men could inflict, and finally suffer the shameful and painful death of crucifixion, *and all this* for the sake of sinners, his enemies; and is he not willing now to do that for which he gave his own life-blood? But no sinner ever had more reason to believe that Christ was willing to save him than you have. Every saint on earth, every saint in heaven, believed with the same or less evidence than is offered to you. It is impossible for language to be more clear and comprehensive than the promises of Christ, and they are as really and truly addressed to you, as to any other sinner in the universe. Take the promise in John 6: 37, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Whom

does that promise encourage, if not you? Listen to the invitation that lingers on the last page of the Bible: Rev. 22: 17. "Let him that is athirst, come; and WHOSOEVER will, let him take the water of life freely." Who then *may* come, if you may not? Read again the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, and dwell on each verse, containing a distinct and gracious call to you; and as you come to the seventh verse, behold the fitness of the invitation as addressed to you, a Prodigal from your father's house, sick of sin, but afraid to come back and trust to a father's forgiving love. Hear and admire the matchless mercy that extends a promise so full and free: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Are you not *wicked*, perhaps the chief of sinners? He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. He came to call you *because* you are so vile.

O wondrous love! The Son of God comes down and dies, to make atonement for the

sins of such a wretch as you! his enemy, in arms against him, and resolved to perish rather than have him to reign. And, more to be admired, when you have wickedly resisted the offers of his love, and hardened your heart against the Saviour, he has sent down the Holy Spirit to subdue your stubborn will, to convince you of sin, and lead you to him whom you have deserted and abused. Thus led to see and feel the depravity of your heart, the wickedness of your past life, and the perfect justice of that law under which you are condemned to an endless hell, you look anxiously around for some way of deliverance from the doom you deserve.

“Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!” John 1: 29. Fix your mind on Christ, and learn distinctly what you are to believe concerning him, to secure the salvation of your perishing soul. You must receive him as your **PROPHET**, to instruct you, as your **PRIEST**, to make atonement for your sins, as your **KING**, to rule over you, now and for ever. Are you wil-

ling to come and submit yourself entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ ; to consecrate your soul and your body, your time and substance, all that you have and are, unto him who gave himself to die for you ? Will you make this surrender, not for the sake of being pardoned and saved, but because it is your duty to submit to God, whether you are saved or not ?

If you are ready thus to cast yourself upon the mercy of God, in Christ Jesus, the way of salvation is perfectly plain. Like the wandering Prodigal in the parable, you have sinned against God, and are not worthy to be forgiven. But if you feel sincerely sorry on account of your sins, and believe that Christ is able and willing to forgive you, *the work is done*. You may trust with all the confidence of a child who confesses his fault and casts himself into his father's arms. This is *faith* ; a simple trust in the power and willingness of the Father to forgive, for the sake of what Christ the Son has done.

In this rapid view of the Prodigal's return, we have not observed with sufficient distinct-

ness, the fact, that while he was yet a great way off the father saw him and had compassion on him. If you have truly repented of your wanderings, and have found the way back to him from whom you strayed, you are ready to admit, nay, more, you desire to confess, that if God had not led you to see and feel your guilt and danger, you would never have been brought to his feet. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Rom. 5: 8. In you there was nothing to win the favor of heaven, or make it likely that you would ever be forgiven. You hated God more and more the longer you lived away from him, and would never have had a thought of return, had not the boundless mercy of that God whom you had so basely deserted, extended the means of salvation. It was the kind influence of his Spirit that awakened you to a sense of your lost condition, and inspired you with a strong desire to return. It was the same good Spirit that set your sins in order before you, and impressed your heart with the conviction of your per-

sonal guilt and just desert of eternal death; that overcame your native love for sin, led you to loathe and abhor it, to feel sorry on account of it, and to resolve to renounce and forsake it for ever. It was the Holy Spirit that opened the eyes of your understanding to behold the beauty and fitness of the plan to save, which the wisdom and goodness of God have provided, and enabled you, by faith, to trust in that *plan*, as the only ground of acceptance with the Father. Thus, led by the Spirit to the Lord Jesus Christ, you are prepared to say from the heart:

Here, Lord, am I, a poor sinner in the dust before thee! Having seen the evil nature and the awful consequences of sin, I come to thee to be delivered from its curse. Thou hast encouraged me, by the promises of thy blessed word, to look unto thee and be saved. And I know that thou art able and willing to save the vilest sinners who come sorrowing for sin and trusting in thy mercy. I have no other hope of obtaining forgiveness, than that which is built on the merits of Christ my Redeemer. I can now see that what he has

done and suffered may be accepted as a satisfaction for a broken law, so that thou canst be just while thou dost pardon the repenting sinner. I have no righteousness of my own to plead. My sorrow can make no amends for my past transgressions. My promises of future obedience are no reason why thou shouldst have mercy on me.

“Should my tears for ever flow,
Should my zeal no languor know,
This for sin could not atone;
THOU must save, and thou alone!
In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling.”

Relying on the atonement which Christ has made, and desiring to be saved in no other way, I commit myself into thy hands, O God, my Father! Take me, and do with me as thou seest to be for thy glory. I consecrate myself for ever to thy service, and trust for acceptance in the merits of thy Son.

If this surrender is made sincerely, your reception will be as joyful as was that of the returning Prodigal. I have often read

with delight, the description of this scene in the writings of Matthew Henry. In speaking of the tender emotions of the father when welcoming his long lost son, he says:

Here were *eyes* of mercy. "When he was yet a great way off his father *saw* him." This intimates God's desire for the conversion of sinners, and his readiness to meet them that are coming toward him.

Here was a *heart* of mercy. "He had compassion on him." Notwithstanding his guilt and, especially, his vile ingratitude, the father pitied him in his misery, and longed to forgive.

Here were *feet* of mercy. "He *ran*." The Prodigal came slowly under a burden of shame and fear; but the tender father *ran* to meet him with words of encouragement.

Here were *arms* of mercy, and those outstretched to embrace and save. "*He fell on his neck*." Though guilty and deserving to be punished; though defiled, for he had just come from feeding swine, so that any one who had not the strong and tender compassion of a father, would have loathed to touch

him, yet he thus takes him in his arms and lays him in his bosom. So dear, are true penitents, to God ; thus welcome to the Lord Jesus.

Here are *lips* of mercy. “He *kissed* him.” What tenderness of love ! This kiss not only assured him of his welcome, but *sealed* his pardon. It was the sweetest pledge of forgiveness a reconciled father could bestow.

The prodigal son began his confession ; “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” He was going on to say, “Make me as one of thy hired servants.” But the father listens no longer to his confessions : he commands the servants to bring forth the best *robe* and put it on him who came home in rags ; and a *ring* on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

The sinner returning to God, is stripped of his rags, and clothed with the robes of the Saviour’s righteousness. The ring on the hand is a constant memorial of the father’s kindness, and the shoes on the feet are to prepare him to go forward in his father’s ser-

vice. There are rich provisions made for the comfort of those who thus return. The *fatted calf* is killed, that he who came home hungry may not only be fed, but feasted. And if you have thus returned to God, you will find the provisions of the gospel are a perpetual feast to your soul. Christ himself, is the bread of life ; his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed. He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. John 6 : 48—58. Be encouraged, therefore, to come near to Christ, and derive from him those rich supplies of grace which you will need. Live on him. Look to him with the confidence of filial love, and you will find in him a Father and Redeemer, a God and guide.

There was joy over that young man's return. "Let us eat and be merry," said the glad father, "for this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost and is found."

Have you repented of your sins and turned unto the Lord, with full purpose of heart to devote yourself to him during the remainder of your days ? Have you cast yourself on the merits of Jesus Christ, renouncing all de-

pendence on your own works, and trusting entirely in the pardoning mercy of him who has offered freely to forgive? If so, there is joy in heaven, this moment, among the angels of God, over your return! There is sympathy in heaven felt for you. Angels wait to bear the joyful news that you have come back to God. The Holy Spirit hovers over you, and gently moves you to come. The Saviour, he who once hung on the cross of Calvary and shed his blood for you, looks down from his throne, in glory, and yearns for your salvation. The Father who gave his Son to die, and sent his Spirit to call you to himself, is waiting to be gracious, to receive, to pardon and save. Repent now, believe now, and joy will fill the breasts of friends on earth, will thrill the spirits of the just in heaven, will spread from saints to angels through all the hosts above, while God himself rejoices, saying,

“This my son was dead, and is alive again;
He was lost and is found.”