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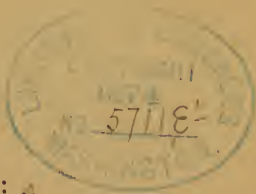
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THE
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OF
ST. PETER.

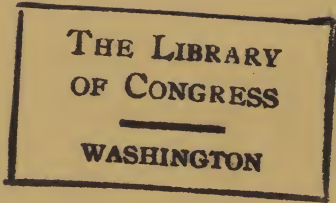
BY
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PASTOR OF THE SOUTH REFORMED CHURCH, NEW YORK.

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TO

The People of the South Reformed Church,

WHOM FOR TEN YEARS

I HAVE SERVED IN THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL,

AND FROM WHOM

I HAVE RECEIVED MANY TOKENS OF RESPECT
AND AFFECTION,

I Dedicate this Little Volume,

WITH THE ASSURANCE OF THAT WARM CHRISTIAN LOVE
WITH WHICH I AM,

THEIR FRIEND AND PASTOR,

E. P. ROGERS.

SOUTH CHURCH PARSONAGE,

April 1, 1874.

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PRECIOUS FAITH.

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ :—2 Peter i : 1.

THE PRECIOUS THINGS OF ST. PETER.

CHAPTER I.

PRECIOUS FAITH.

IN the Epistles of St. Peter, we find much use made of the word, "precious." He speaks of "precious faith," "precious trial of faith," "precious blood of Christ," "Christ precious to believers," a "precious cornerstone," and "exceeding great and precious promises." Here is a circle of gems, of rare beauty and inestimable value. They are the treasures of the Christian. The humblest of

God's saints may say, "All these precious things are mine!"

This rich treasury is worthy of a special examination. We propose to pass through this store-house of God's grace, and look at the precious things which it contains. We believe that such an examination will be very profitable and pleasant. Much as we may have dwelt upon each of them, and however correct and appreciative may have been our views of them, as we have considered them singly, yet, when we examine them in their relations to each other, we shall see new beauty and find richer value. As a handful of jewels, each brilliant and costly by itself, when brought together in one cluster, combine and so increase their lustre and their value, so these precious things of St. Peter, gathered into one group, form a collection of gems of heavenly beauty and of priceless worth.

The first of these, to which we direct the

attention of our readers, is that which is presented under the title of

PRECIOUS FAITH.

The word faith here, may be taken in its objective and its subjective sense. It may thus signify the truths which are revealed for the Christian's faith, and also the act of faith itself. When the Apostle Jude speaks of "the *faith* once delivered to the saints,"* he uses the word in the former of these two senses as the system of Christian doctrine, which the saints of God have received, and which they believe. When the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews declares, "Without *faith* it is impossible to please Him,"† he uses the term in the latter sense, as the act of receiving the truth of God, and resting on it for salvation. So when St. Peter speaks of "precious faith," it is proper to understand him to allude both

* Jude 3.

† Epis. to Heb. 11 : 6.

to faith as a system, and to faith as an exercise and grace. And in both these senses he declares that it is "precious."

The word "precious" is derived from the Latin *pretium* (a price), and means that which costs something and has a value. In the ordinary use of it, the idea of *peculiar* value is associated. When we speak of anything as precious, we are generally understood to convey the idea of more than ordinary value. As applied to the great truths of the gospel, to the faith delivered to the saints, the word is not too strong. We may well say of these, with St. Peter, "*precious faith*."

The great truths of the gospel are precious in themselves:

The truths which pertain to God, to the human soul, to redemption by Jesus Christ as a divine and Almighty Saviour, to the office and work of the Holy Spirit, and to the future life, are, in themselves, the greatest, the

most wonderful, the most beautiful, the most precious which the mind of man can receive. No truth in nature is so grand, as the truth of the divine existence. That memorable answer to the question—"What is God?" "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth," as it doubtless was a true inspiration of the Divine Spirit Himself, presents to the mind a cluster of the most splendid and impressive attributes of being and character. The more we dwell upon it, the higher and broader it grows, until we are ready to exclaim: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea!"* Yet though the nature and

* Job 11: 7-9.

methods of an infinite God must always, in many respects, be beyond the reach of a finite understanding, yet the simple fact of God is one of unspeakable value to the thoughtful, believing soul. As revealing the God of creation, this truth is precious. The instinctive desire to know the origin of things, to find the great first cause of all that we see, can derive no satisfaction from any theory but that with which God's written word begins. It seems as if the Creator anticipated that His thoughtful creatures would desire, first of all, to know whence all things came ; to know how all the wonderful elements of the earth, and the splendid mechanism of the heavens first sprang into being. And so, in making a revelation to men (His very first declaration), He meets, at once, this instinctive and universal demand of a thinking mind, with the true, comprehensive, satisfactory, and precious declaration—"In the beginning, God

created the heavens and the earth.”* How satisfactory to a rational mind! How infinitely superior to the absurd theories of human philosophy, the puerile negations of infidelity, or the dicta of self-sufficient sciolists! It is a “precious faith”—a faith of real value to the intellectual nature and necessities of man. I look out upon this wonderful world, greeting me everywhere with evidences of design and wisdom; combining elements of beauty, grandeur, usefulness, and pleasure; crowded with every provision for the support and comfort of its vast population. I observe the graceful slope of the hills; the rich fertility of the valleys; the fragrance of the flowers; the grandeur of the forests; the vastness of the ocean, and the splendors of the heavens; and I find it a very precious thing to have it told me that this order, and harmony, and beauty, are the work of an in-

* Gen. I : 1.

finitely wise, and powerful, and benevolent God. It is a great satisfaction and rest to the instinctive craving of my nature, after an adequate cause of what I see, and of my own mysterious being, to believe that all things are of God. While unbelieving minds are ever tossed on a sea of restless inquiry, and unsatisfying speculation, and credulous fancies, I rejoice that I can say: "O Lord! how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth also is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships; there is that leviathan whom Thou hast made to play therein. These wait all upon Thee, that Thou mayest give them their meat in due season."* I pity the man who cannot receive the truth that God made all things by the word of His power. I do not see how such a

* Ps. 104 : 24-27.

man can ever have any true intellectual, to say nothing of spiritual rest. An orphan in a fatherless world ! The creature of accident, or fate ! All things around him, the fruit of irrational forces. How cold and unsatisfactory and comfortless such a faith. It is not "precious." It has no real value. Let me cling all the more firmly to the simple, sublime revelation : " In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth ! "

And this faith is not only satisfying to my instinctive desire to know the origin of things. It is precious because of its enlarging and ennobling influence upon my own mind. There is no idea with which the human intellect can have such strong natural affinities as the idea of God. " The fool hath said in his heart there is no God. " * Presented to the mind, even of a child, it seems natural and intelligible, and as if it was made to fit the very peculiarities of

* Ps. 14 : 1. •

the mental constitution. A child cannot be a sceptic. Atheism, that compound of pride and credulity, cannot find congenial quarters in the unsophisticated mind of the young; and the man who receives the idea of God cannot but feel the expanding and educating influence of it through all his intellectual nature. Robert Hall, in his splendid discourse on modern infidelity, thus graphically and eloquently presents this thought: "The idea of the Supreme Being has this peculiar property, that, as it admits of no substitute, so, from the first moment it is formed, it is capable of continual growth and enlargement. God Himself is immutable; but our conception of His character is continually receiving fresh accessions, is continually growing more extended and refulgent, by having transferred to it new elements of beauty and goodness; by attracting to itself, as a centre, whatever bears the impress of dignity, order, or happi-

ness. It borrows splendor from all that is fair, subordinates to itself all that is great, and sits enthroned on the riches of the universe."

And what this fundamental idea of revealed religion does for the individual, it does for the community and the nation. The very idea of public virtue, order, and propriety is lost when there is no recognition of this great and precious truth among the people. A godless people never can be a virtuous people. All history testifies to this. A world without a maker, is, of course, a world without a ruler; and a world without a ruler can never be a world of stability, order, or happiness.

The truth of God in Providence is one of the precious things of faith:

The doctrine of providence naturally follows that of creation. The same reason which induced the Almighty to make the world, would induce Him to superintend and govern it. It is His creature—and He cannot throw

it off to shift for itself. The government of all its parts and interests, in wisdom and goodness, tends as much to His glory as its original creation in beauty and symmetry. No man who had constructed, with great pains and cost, a beautiful edifice or an ingenious piece of mechanism, would naturally abandon all care and oversight of either when completed.

The fundamental ideas in the doctrine of Providence are, that the whole created universe is as dependent on God for its preservation in being and harmony of operation as it was for its original creation; that everything animate or inanimate, in form and substance, in essence and in power, or quality, is preserved and guided, not by any intrinsic principle of life or motion, but by the wise and sovereign will of God.

This is a part of "the faith once delivered to the saints." It has been held by the Church

in all ages. And it is "*precious faith.*" It has a great value. It is full of comfort. It is the basis of all practical religion. The presence of God, as a providential governor, everywhere, and at all times, ordering all things according to His own most wise and righteous will, for His own glory, and for the best good of His creatures, meets the wants of our moral nature. It is the foundation of trust, and hope, and submission. It is an anchor of the soul, amid those storms of trial and perplexity which vex the voyager on the sea of life. How intolerable would our lot be if we could not believe that "thè Lord reigneth." We must have a God to look up to and confide in—our very nature demands it; our circumstances demand it; we cannot live a day in real peace without it. It is a precious truth, that over this great world, in which is so much that baffles our reason, confounds our philosophy, and tries our patience

and submission, no frantic chance or inexorable fate presides, but the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! I wonder that any thoughtful mind can be willing to live without the truth of God's providential government over the world. Atheism makes nothing of the world but a work-shop for the living, and a pit for the dead. Pantheism is sublimer in its theory, but no less cold and comfortless: "One mighty tide of force, filling immensity, its waves, galaxies and systems; its foam sparkling with worlds; one immeasurable ocean of life, swelling in endless billows through immensity, at its own vast, vague will. Such is, at once, the universe and the god of Pantheism. The pantheist is himself one little conscious drop in the boundless tide, in the all-embracing infinite. In the branching of the stars, this infinite rushes out; in the little flower at your feet, it lives. In all the embodying of human thought, in the rearing of

nations and polities, in the building of towered cities, in the warring and trading of men, it finds a dim garment; in the beauties, and grandeurs, and terrors of all mythologies, the grave look of the Olympian king, the still and stainless beauty of the woodland Naiad, the bright glance of the Son of Latona, the thunder brows of Thor, the dawn smile of Balder, it is more clearly seen. The beauty, which is the soul of art; the majesty that lives, from age to age, in the statue of Phidias; the smile that lingers on the perfect lip, and in the pure eye of a Madonna by Raphael, is its very self. You may look at it; you may by effort of thought, evolve it within you; but the drop holds no converse with the ocean; the great rolling sea hears not the little ripple on its shore; you can hold no communion with your God; your highest bliss is to cease individually to be, to sink into unconscious, everlasting trance." This, in the words of

Peter Bayne,* is pantheism. And in contrast with this vast, vague, comfortless picture, he gives us the Christian idea of the universe under the providential government of God: "An immensity, to the bounds of which, urge them never so wildly, the steeds of thought shall never pierce, thronged with ordered myriads of worlds, all willed into existence and ever upheld by a Being of whom tongue cannot adequately speak, or mind conceive, but who lit the torch of reason, who hears the voice of man, and whose attributes are dimly mirrored in the human soul. Conceive such a God, infinitely above this stupendous universe, filling it with all His light, as the sun fills the dew-drop (as distinct from it as the sun is from the dew-drop); to whom the countless worlds of immensity are as the primary particles of matter comprising the dew-drop, are to the sun. Then add this thought,

* "The Christian Life—Social and Individual."

that He, around whose throne, the morning stars forever sing, to whom anthems of praise, from all the star-choirs of immensity, go toning on eternally from galaxy to galaxy, hears the evening hymn of praise in the Christian home, the lowly melody in the Christian heart, the sigh of the kneeling child; and when his sojourn on earth is over, will draw up the Christian, as the sun draws up the dew-drop to rest on the bosom of infinite love."

Such is the Christian idea of the world, under the providential government of a wise and loving God. Well may this article of faith be classed among those "precious" things which St. Peter groups together in his epistles.

But more precious than either the God of creation or of providence, is the God of redemption to the believer.

It is a precious, a valuable thing to know

that this great world, and all the systems of worlds that make up the universe, are the work of the Almighty's fingers. It is also a very valuable truth that the world, thus made, is sustained and governed by its wise and benevolent Creator. But if this Creator and Sovereign of the world, whose wonderful power, wisdom, and goodness are declared by the earth, and reflected from the heavens, is not our friend, if we are not in harmony with Him, and cannot expect His personal favor and approbation, but must anticipate His holy displeasure, His moral aversion, then we can gain scanty comfort from the contemplation of His attributes as the Creator and Ruler of the universe. The more we see of these, the more fearful and appalling is the thought that all these wonderful attributes must be arrayed against us. If I am a sinner against God, and an unforgiven sinner, I cannot see the evidences of God's being, power,

and goodness in nature and providence with any satisfaction or comfort. What is all this wisdom, this goodness, this power, but the attributes of a God who cannot look upon sin but with infinite abhorrence ! If He were not so wise, so powerful, so good, the thought of my personal relations to Him, as an unforgiven sinner, would not be so hopelessly sad and frightful. But He is infinitely wise to know all my sin ; He is infinitely pure to abhor my sin ; He is infinitely powerful to punish my sin. He can create worlds, and launch them forth into boundless space ; He can guide and govern their mighty movements by the word of His power. A holy being may look on Him in these relations with nothing but admiration, reverence, and joy. "But when I consider, I am afraid of Him ;"* I must know something more of God than creation or providence can teach me,

* Job 23 : 15.

before the deepest wants of my soul can be reached, and my most urgent necessities can be satisfied. And I do know something more. The "faith," which is so precious to the humble believer, tells me something more. It not only tells me that, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and that "He doeth according to His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth;" it tells me that most wonderful truth, that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* Ah! this is what I want to know. This answers that great question which must break in agonizing earnestness from every heart that knows anything of its sinfulness and peril: "What must I do to be saved?" This shows me that there is a way by which this great and glorious God, whose

* John 3:16.

hands have built the earth and spread the sky, and before whom all the mightiest forces of nature bow in mute submission, may become my loving Father and Friend, even though I am, and always have been, a poor, unworthy sinner.

This shows me that there is a way by which He may be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus; that there is One who, human to suffer, divine to give dignity and value to suffering, human to feel the pang which the law denounces upon human guilt, divine to secure forever to every believing soul the benefits of that atoning pang, human to sympathize and divine to save, becomes just such a Saviour as I need, and is freely offered to me in the gospel. The great mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh," is the most *precious* of all the truths revealed to man. It is most precious in itself. It is so unprecedented in its benevolence, so unpar-

alleled in its sacrifice, so superhuman in its conception, so infinite in its merit, and so unbounded in its saving power, that it commands the wonder of angels, and will forever inspire the profound and adoring gratitude of millions of redeemed souls, who have proved how precious it is. There is no story in all the annals of love, that has such elements of power and pathos, as the story of the Cross. Told in every language; told by the mother to the child, by the teacher to the pupil, by the friend to his companion, by the preacher to his flock; told in the abode of poverty or the home of wealth, in the home of sorrow or the abode of prosperity; whispered in the ear of sickness, breathed to the mourning heart, spoken in the cell of the prisoner, at the couch of the dying; preached on the scaffold or at the stake, it has always manifested itself as a precious truth—precious to the living, precious to the dying; precious to the trem-

bling sinner, precious to the believing Christian ; precious to the pilgrim on his journey, precious to the saint in his rest. There are no rays of light that stream so sweetly over this dark world, as the rays that come from the Sun of Righteousness ; there is no bread so nourishing to the pilgrim on his toilsome way, as "the bread of life, which came down from heaven ;" there are no waters so refreshing to the thirsty soul, as those that gush from the "Rock of Ages ;" there is no friendship so disinterested, pure, and unchangeable as His who is "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother ;" there is no comforter in sorrow so equal to Him of whom it was said, "Jesus wept !" there is no victory over death like that which He gives, who said : "I am the resurrection and the life."

This, then, is the "precious faith," of which St. Peter speaks, considered in its objective character as a system. God in Creation, Pro-

vidence and Redemption, in its Alpha and Omega, its beginning and its end. All other important truths are embraced in these. The truth of God as a Creator and Governor, of Christ as a Saviour, of the Holy Spirit as a Sanctifier and Comforter, believed and illustrated in the life, is all that we need to make us wise unto salvation. If you, dear reader, have opened your heart to this precious faith, if you have truly believed in God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, you have already been enabled to say, precious faith, precious system of truth, precious in itself, precious to me, precious in life, precious in death, and precious in an eternal heaven.

PRECIOUS FAITH.

CHAPTER II.

PRECIOUS FAITH.

WE have considered Faith in one of the senses in which the word is used — the sense of that system of truth which is contained in the written revelation which God has given to men, and which He calls us to believe. The fundamental truths of the being and government of God, and the system of redemption by Jesus Christ, are the vital points in that system. Whoever receives these great truths with the solid convictions of the understanding, the free consent of the will, and the warm embrace of the affections, is a true believer, and has been made wise unto salvation. He sees in them a heavenly

beauty and a divine grandeur, and can cordially assent to the truthfulness and propriety of the language of St. Peter, when he describes the gospel-system as "precious faith."

But the word faith is also very frequently, indeed, in most cases, used to signify that act of the mind, that grace of the heart, by which, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the believer receives these vital truths, and rests upon them for salvation. It is the grasp of the soul upon truth, its personal reception and appropriation of God's revelation, which is commonly meant by the term. Paul so understood it when, in answer to the earnest question of the jailer at Philippi, "Sir, what must I do to be saved?" he answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." So the word "faith" is used in that wonderful eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is such a splendid description of its nature, its heroes,

and its triumphs. It is the act of the individual soul, by which, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, it freely and cordially embraces the cardinal doctrines of the gospel, and, receiving and resting upon them for its hope of salvation, exemplifies and illustrates them in the daily life and conversation.

Yet there is scarcely any subject so simple, and at the same time so vital, about which so much difficulty gathers in the mind of inquirers, as about this article of saving faith. The ordinary definition of the term is belief, trust, confidence—the reception of testimony. Natural faith may be thus defined. There are some propositions which command our faith as soon as they are presented to the mind. We believe that two and two make four, or that the whole of a thing is greater than one of its parts, because we cannot help it. The mind is so constituted that it must receive

these statements as true, because the contrary involves an absurdity. So we believe in the life, achievements, and death of Julius Cæsar, because the historic evidence is clear and satisfactory as to these facts. But this sort of faith does not exhaust the idea of religious faith. Faith in the mere facts of history, or the axioms of mathematics, has not, necessarily, any operative principle connected with it. Our faith in Julius Cæsar is not a faith that exerts any special influence on our life. We neither do, nor refrain from doing, anything because we believe in Cæsar, which we might not equally do, or refrain from doing, if we did not believe that he ever existed. The current of our daily lives would flow on in its ordinary channels, quite undisturbed by our faith, or our want of faith, in the distinguished Roman. So we may profess a faith in the historic facts of Christianity, in God and Christ, and a future state, which is no

more religious faith than our belief in the facts of Roman history.

That is the highest form of faith, which not only implies the assent of the understanding, but includes, also, the consent of the will, the choice of the heart, and the devotion of the life. One of the finest instances of this kind of faith, inspired only by natural objects, and exercised only on material things, is presented in the history of Christopher Columbus. He believed that there was an undiscovered passage to the East, and this faith became the controlling power and principle of his life. In the face of ridicule, opposition, and persecution, he boldly proclaimed and maintained his theory. No sneers of the learned ; no ribaldry of the mob ; no opposition of friends ; no invective of foes, could affect his invincible confidence in what was unseen, unknown, and purely a matter of faith. The world knows by heart the story of his faith, his toils, and

his triumphs. All over Christendom, painting and sculpture and monumental piles, record the grand history. They tell of the power of faith in things unseen, even in natural lines, upon an earnest soul.

This sort of faith, inspired by religious truth, and directed to religious objects and ends, is what we call evangelical faith. This is the faith that saves the soul. When a man is convinced of the truth of the doctrines of religion, gives to them the assent of his mind, the affiance of his affections, and then allows them to be the controlling principle and force of his daily life, then he *believes* with that faith which saves. He who thus believes "shall be saved."

This faith, however, must be exercised on the authority of a "Thus saith the Lord." It is concerned with the direct revelation of God. It deals with facts, and not with philosophies; with revealed, and not with secret, things. There are some who stumble here. They com-

plain of the mysteries of religion as inconsistent with intelligent faith. They say that they cannot believe what they do not understand. God does not require this. He requires faith in *facts*, and not in modes or philosophies. It is quite possible and rational to believe a fact, when we do not understand the theory that is behind it. A man may believe that a steamer can cross the ocean against wind and tide, though he may be entirely ignorant of the mechanism and the philosophy of the steam-engine. A child can tell the time of day by a watch, though the method of its working may be utterly incomprehensible to him. I can believe the fact that the golden grain that waves so richly on the field in the summer, is the product of the seed that was sown in the spring. But no mental effort can enable me to master the mystery of its wonderful multiplication.

Why, then, is it irrational to believe the

fact of the divine existence, and exercise proper emotions in reference to that fact, even though the nature of Deity must be an insoluble mystery to a finite mind? Why is it irrational to believe in the fact of salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ, and to be filled with love and gratitude to Him, even though we cannot fathom the metaphysical difficulties of His two-fold nature in a unity of person? Why can we not believe fully in the fact of the enlightening and renewing influences of the Holy Ghost, even though the exact mode of His working in the soul is as mysterious to us, as it was to Nicodemus of old? We are not called upon to believe the philosophy, but to receive the facts of the divine revelation. We acknowledge the justice of this principle every day. There are but a very few of the things which we firmly believe in natural relations, the philosophy or *modus operandi* of which, is not a mystery to

us. Who can understand the law of *life* by which these hearts beat, and these limbs move, and this wonderful machinery of our bodily frames keeps running on in regular and harmonious operation? The world is crowded with facts which we implicitly believe, yet the mode or philosophy which is behind them, we never think of comprehending. Why is it irrational to ask that we exercise faith in the great facts of Christianity, even if we cannot fathom the infinite mysteries which are behind and beneath them.

The first element, therefore, in a true faith, is a firm conviction of the truth of what God has revealed in His Holy Word. There must be a complete submission of the understanding to the teachings of revelation. The facts of the Gospel, supported as they are by abundant and conclusive testimony, must be believed. But here, there is sometimes an error on the part of the inquirer. When we say that what

the Gospel reveals must be fully believed, we do not say that all that men may embody in creeds and systems of theology needs thus to be received. Saving faith is concerned only with those broad, fundamental, vital truths, which are accepted by the general consent of the Christian mind of all ages, as essential to salvation. There has always been a disposition among sects and theologians to demand faith in all the articles of their favorite creeds, as an essential to Christian fellowship. And it is the custom with some churches now, to require of their members to profess their faith, not only in the few essential doctrines of the Gospel, but in those higher mysteries about which Christians have differed, and still differ honestly, and which are not so much the integral parts of the evangelical system, as planks in a denominational platform. And this is a stumbling-block, and an offence to many sincere and honest souls. Their views

are clear on the vital truths of repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; but in regard to other points of theology or metaphysics, they have no intelligent or fixed opinions. So they fear that they are not believers, because they cannot accept the dogmatic statements of theologians, or the creeds which denominations would fain enforce upon those whom they invite to their fellowship.

But if the great vital truths of our holy religion—those which pertain to the being and government of God, the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit; those which cluster round the Cross of Christ; the great truths of sin and redemption—are truly received into the mind, this is all that is needed for the first element of saving faith. Let me truly believe that I am the child of an infinitely wise, just and good Heavenly Father, whom I ought to love,

honor and serve, and that is all that I need to believe about God. Let me believe that I am a sinner against Him, and need His forgiveness, or I cannot be happy ; that is essentially all that I need believe about myself. Let me believe that the Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven to earth, to obey, suffer and die for me as a sinner, and that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, I may become a saved man by the merit of His obedience, death, and intercession ; this is all I need to believe about Christ and redemption. And if I believe that I ought humbly and gratefully to endeavor to be like Christ, and try to please Him in all that I do, this is all that I need to believe about the Christian life. How simple is this creed ! And yet it comprehends all that is needful to be received by the understanding, in order that a man may be made wise unto salvation. A little child can receive these vital truths with a real faith, and become

thus a son or a daughter of the Lord Almighty.

Next to this cordial assent of the understanding to the vital truths of the Gospel, must come the warm grasp of the heart, and the sincere devotion of the life. We are not only to be convinced of the truth of the Gospel, but we are to rejoice in that conviction. The assent of the mind must also ensure the consent of the will. This is not always the case. A man may feel obliged to admit the truth of certain propositions, but the more he sees that they must be true, the more distasteful do they become to him. He wishes they could be disproved. He does not want them to be true. And when he is forced to believe them, he resolves that he will never love them. This is not true faith. It does not work by love. But when the conviction of the mind implies also the choice of the heart, then there is saving faith.

Now, it may be claimed for the cardinal truths of the Gospel, that they themselves appeal, not only to the understanding, but also to the heart. They are not, like the principles of natural science, a mere philosophy, cold and emotionless. They are fitted to stir up the sensibilities; to rouse the passions; to elicit the emotions; to inspire the affections of the believing soul. Take the fundamental truth of God, our Father, our Redeemer, our Comforter—God in Creation, in Providence, and in Redemption—surely these are not truths to be merely the themes of cold intellectual speculation! The whole affectionate nature of man is so formed as to cling to the idea of God, as a Father whose tenderness and love are ever freely offered to his children. How beautiful are the images under which God represents Himself to our faith! “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” “As one whom

his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.”
“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee?” It is scarcely possible for language to express more of tenderness and affection, more that appeals to the best sensibilities of an ingenuous soul. And when we turn to God in Christ, and receive the one great, blessed fact of redemption, surely there is nothing in all the annals of love that approaches it in its appeal to the affections. How perfectly heart-breaking, in their pathos, are those words of the Scripture which speak of the love of God in redemption! No familiarity with them can ever destroy that element of inimitable tenderness which is so conspicuous in them: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “For scarcely for a

righteous man would one die ; yet, peradventure, for a good man, some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." If a man really believes such truths as these, his heart must be thrilled to its centre by their power. To be indifferent to them, he must be less than man. But he is not indifferent to them. Multitudes of believing souls have broken the alabaster box, and poured its sweet and fragrant offering of grateful and adoring love upon the Saviour's head. Multitudes of redeemed and rejoicing spirits have been able to say, as they shrined the loved image of their Lord in their grateful hearts, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides Thee." They have echoed the earnest words of St. Paul: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ Jesus, my Lord." It is not a thing of mysticism or

fancy, this "faith which worketh by love;" it is a sweet and blessed reality. Faith is more than conviction, higher than mere belief. It is a clasping of the mighty arm of the Great Father—a resting on the bosom of the loving Lord. It is looking to God with a love that soars up into reverence, with a reverence that melts back into love :

"No earthly father loves like Thee,
No mother half so mild,
Bears and forbears, as Thou hast done,
With me, Thy sinful child."

And again this sacred poet* says :

"O Jesus ! Jesus ! dearest Lord !
Forgive me, if I say,
For very love, Thy sacred name
A thousand times a day !
O light in darkness ! joy in grief !
O Heaven begun on earth !
Jesus ! my love, my treasure, who
Can tell what Thou art worth ?"

* Faber.

This is the language of a heart that truly believes the great sweet truths of redemption ; that takes in the story of the Cross ; that hath known and believed the love that God hath to us. To such a believing soul, the devotion of the life to God and His service is not a hard or unnatural thing. With the truth fixed in the convictions of the understanding, embraced with the warm grasp of the heart, it would be strange, indeed, if the life did not show its operative influence. All the figures under which the Bible represents the normal relation of man to God, imply the idea of devotion and service. The believer is a son of God. In the idea of sonship is involved, not only faith in the being and affection for the person of the parent, but a cheerful, generous obedience to His will. The believer is, in a high sense, a servant of God ; not in a degrading or servile relation, but as one whose dignity and pleasure lie in his faithful devotion to his

Lord. The believer is a soldier in God's army. But the prime element in a soldier's duty is to be loyal and obedient to his commander. The believer is a steward of God. And a steward is, of course, to be careful of his Lord's interest and faithful in his devotion to Him. Thus, every aspect in which a believer is presented in the Scriptures, represents him as one who believes in God—loves God, and is consecrated to God's service.

Faith, therefore, implies the conviction of the understanding, the choice of the heart, the devotion of the life. Belief, love, and service, are its essential elements. There is no mystery about this Christian grace. It is a natural, simple, beautiful thing. It is illustrated by many analogies, but best by the filial relation. What a dutiful child, by the common consent of mankind, should be to a good parent, faith would have us all be that to God. If you, dear reader, wish to know

whether you have true faith, ask yourself, if you are a parent, "What do I wish my child to be to me?" Your own heart will give you the answer: "I want my child to trust me with a firm, intelligent confidence; to love me with a free and cordial affection, and to obey me, in all rightful things, with a cheerful and generous obedience." And your child will do this in the main, if he has true faith in his father. He may not always rise above the little weaknesses and errors of youth, nor will you expect that. But in the main, he will show his faith by his works, and you will be satisfied. And you will be wise to bear with all his youthful follies, and tender to forgive his little delinquencies, secure as you are of his faith and affection. And so it is with our Heavenly Father. Faith brings us into such a relation to Him, that, "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he re-

membereth that we are dust." This is a sweet and comforting assurance. God never forgets that we are children, and is always tender and considerate of us, knowing our ignorance and imperfections, and bearing and forbearing with us as we need.

And faith is a principle capable of growth and progress. Many fear that they do not have any because their exercises are feeble, and like those of a child. But this is not a just conclusion. The Christian is not born full grown, but a babe in Christ. And, as in the case of a new-born child, all the developments of the new life are feeble, though they are real. If your faith, dear reader, is not as strong and assured as that of a mature Christian, it may still be the faith of a little child. And if you cherish and cultivate it, it will grow. Like life, it thrives by culture, and not by neglect. Express it, rather than repress it, if you would have it increased. It

may be like "the blade," but, with proper cultivation, according to the Saviour's own teaching, it will soon be "the ear," and then "the full corn in the ear."

PRECIOUS FAITH.

CHAPTER III.

PRECIOUS FAITH.

IN the last chapter, we defined faith in its subjective sense, as involving the assent of the understanding, the choice of the heart, and the devotion of the life to the vital truths of the gospel. It is in this sense that the word is most used in the New Testament. This is the "faith that worketh by love." This is the faith that saves the soul, and overcomes the world. And this faith is styled by St. Peter "precious."

There are two senses in which the word "precious" may be used. One signifies costliness, and suggests the idea of a great price. The other signifies intrinsic practical value.

A thing may be precious in one of these senses, and not in the other. It may be costly, without being valuable. It may be valuable, without being costly.

Faith, however, is precious in both senses. It is costly, and it is valuable. It is costly, because, in order that we might be saved by it, the mighty sacrifice was needful of the manger and the cross. The object of saving faith is the Lord Jesus Christ. The subject of faith is His atoning work. That work consisted of His humiliation, obedience, suffering, and death. "For ye were redeemed not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." Had it not been for this infinite sacrifice, there would have been

nothing for us to believe ; and, consequently, there could have been no such thing as saving faith. But “ God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.” So that, in a true sense, faith is exercised at the expense of the sufferings and death of the Son of God. It is true that these sufferings were voluntary. The atonement was no arbitrary proceeding. “ No man,” said Jesus, and He never made a more august declaration, or gave more convincing evidence of His divine character ; “ No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” But the voluntary character of the atonement does not depreciate its value, does not lessen its costliness. It magnifies it. When David, in his thirst, longed for a drink from the well at Bethlehem, and three of his bravest warriors cut their

way through Saul's army, and brought the sparkling water at the hazard of their lives, to their thirsty leader, David valued the gift all the more highly, because it was the fruit of a free and affectionate devotion to him. It was too costly for him to drink, and so he poured it out as an offering to the Lord. So the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ is all the more precious, because it was the fruit of His infinite love. But it was very costly. Measure the distance from the bosom of the infinite Father to the virgin's arms; from the radiance of a glorious heaven to the darkness of Gethsemane; from the throne of eternal power to the bloody cross, and you may be able to comprehend what that transaction cost, on which your faith is founded. Faith in the voluntary sacrifice of the Son of God must be "precious faith."

But faith is also precious in itself. It is not only costly, but it is valuable. *It is precious,*

because it brings us into right relations to God.

It has been well said that "Religion is to be regarded not as an acquisition, but a restoration; not as the gaining of a new friend, or home, but as the recovery of a lost father; the going back to a former home, hallowed by ancient memories, and reviving in the heart a thousand dormant associations." Thus there was great force and propriety in the language of the prodigal, "I will arise and go to my father." Sin is not the normal condition of the soul, any more than blindness is of the eye, or lameness of the foot. There is an article of faith which is sometimes spoken of as "the natural depravity of man." We object to this language. We think it teaches what is not true. Not that we question the great sad fact of human corruption. No man who has candidly studied his own heart can be in any doubt on that point. We cannot doubt "the

depravity of human nature," but this is a different thing from "natural depravity." This depravity is dreadfully unnatural. It is something diseased, corrupted, apostate, degenerate, fallen in man. He was made upright, in harmony with God, and truth, and moral rectitude. This was his normal state. Adam, in the innocence of his first creation, on intimate and endearing terms with his Maker, was in his natural condition. But when he was afraid to meet God, and hid from Him among the trees of the garden, he was in an unnatural, abnormal state; and in this same state all his children are, until faith brings them back to their original and natural condition of harmony with God, and with truth and duty.

Now, it is a law of all being, that an unnatural condition is an unhappy condition. When the eye is inflamed, irritation and pain is the unavoidable result. When a tiger is confined

in a cage, he is restless and miserable. The wild freedom of the jungle is his natural state, and he cannot be at ease when a captive. "The deepest unrest is ever that of things or beings in an unnatural or distorted condition; the unrest of aberration from a proper place or course, and so of interrupted harmony and equipoise. The restless streams and brooks fret their mountain channels, till they reach their proper depths in river or sea; and the waves of the sea itself, disturbed by the storm, heave and sway themselves to rest in their natural and common level again. The thunder-storm is but the voice of Nature's unrest when the balance of her elements is disturbed, and she seeks to regain the wonted repose of harmony and law."

This is emphatically true of an intellectual, moral, and accountable being, who is out of harmony with God. The language of the Bible is not overstrained, when it says, "The

wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest." Man, though fallen and corrupt, is yet at times true enough to the promptings of his original and real nature, to be very restless and miserable in his apostate condition. Disquietude, dissatisfaction, and disgust are frequent visitors to an unbelieving and unreconciled spirit. There are many men who scarcely know what is the matter with them. They are so restless—so unsatisfied; often so positively unhappy. They imagine that their physical system is deranged—they say that they are "nervous;" they go to their medical adviser for counsel, and he prescribes diet, or exercise, or travel, or change of occupation. Alas! the malady is deeper than the nervous system. It is a disease of the moral nature, and its remedy is faith. My dear reader, when you are conscious of feverish desires, when you sigh under the wearing toils and cares of life; when you feel like say-

ing, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest;" be assured that this is the evidence that you are out of your normal relations, that your soul has lost its true level; and seeks it in vain. And when the passions of your heart break out, as they sometimes do in wilder storms, and you seem to toss on a troubled sea, the proof accumulates that you have fallen from your rightful place; that sin is treason to yourself as well as to God, and that you can know no real and abiding peace until you listen with faith to Him who says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Faith, then, is precious, because it brings us into right relations to God. He is no longer an object of dread and aversion. We no longer are afraid when we consider Him. He becomes our Father reconciled in Christ, and we are assured that He loves us as the sons

and daughters of the Lord Almighty. In a sense of forgiveness and reconciliation, the soul "regains its lost equilibrium, and finds again the centre of repose, for which it has been sighing in vain." God in creation is its Father. It associates Him with all that is beautiful on the earth, and all that is grand in the heavens. New brightness to the sunshine; new fragrance to the flower; new beauty to the field; new grandeur to the ocean, is in the gift of faith—our "Father made them all."

God in Providence is the God of the believer. All things work together for his good. The changing seasons, and the rolling years; the crosses and the delights; the cradles and the coffins; the disappointments and the triumphs of this changing scene, are not to him the play of chance, or the movements of fate, but the ordering of a wise, benevolent, faithful God, who "doeth all things well." Amid all vicissitudes and conflicts, here is a place

of rest, comfort, and security, "the Lord reigneth." When unbelief is gone, and doubt no more disturbs the mind ; when God is chosen as the resting-place and joy of the heart ; when a man who has groped about in the darkness of scepticism, or the pride of unbelief for something to cling to as an anchor amid the storms of life, trusts himself and all that he has and is, in the hands of God his Father and Saviour, then he is kept in perfect peace, and, like a weary child, rests in the everlasting arms. Such a faith is precious. It has a great value in a world like this, where so much of "the trail of the serpent" is left. And God in redemption also, becomes unspeakably precious to the believer. For the deepest unrest of the soul is not caused by sorrow, but by sin. "The spirit of a man can sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Faith in a crucified Saviour ; faith in a finished atonement ; faith in

an all-powerful intercession ; faith in a perfect righteousness ; faith in a purchased and free salvation, can bring a sense of pardon and peace to “the very chief of sinners ;” can take away the pangs of a reproving conscience, extract the sting from death, and rob the grave of its victory. All this is the natural result of a restoration of fallen man to his right relations to God ; the return of the prodigal to his Father’s house, the recreation of the lost image of the Maker, in man, the noblest of his works.

Faith is also precious in its relation to the two great conditions of life, action, and endurance.

Our great business in life is to do and endure the will of God. And when we remember that this is the will of an infinitely wise, just, and benevolent Being, no higher end can be proposed for his creatures. “The chief end of man,” according to the Assem.

bly's Catechism, "is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever." We glorify God when we do or endure His holy will. And for this faith prepares and furnishes us in the highest and best manner.

Faith is itself the highest principle of action. This is equally true in natural and spiritual things. Ever since the world was made, the history of all real progress has been a history of the activity and triumph of faith. Making all due allowance for the difference in the natural energy which men or nations possess, it will still be found that the individual, the nation, the age has accomplished the most, according as it has possessed and exercised most faith. This must be so in the nature of the case. A belief that a thing can be done, is a great and important element of power to do it. On the other hand, doubt and distrust as to the feasibility of what we propose to do, is always an element of weakness. "A strong

faith makes a strong will, and a weak faith makes a weak will." The history of civilization, literature, art, science, discovery, and invention, all great forces, is a testimony to the power of faith. Human history is crowded with facts that cannot be explained, except on the supposition of this power as a principle of action. Literature illustrates this in its own history, as well as in its records of all other forces. The ages which have given to the world a solid, and enduring, and edifying literature have been the ages of faith. And the times which have produced a weak, corrupting, and transient literature have been times of scepticism and unbelief.

The man, therefore, who enters on the work of life under the influence of true faith, is furnished with an element of power that is very precious. It imparts energy and vigor to the mind. The great truths of religion, received

into the consciousness and grasped by the affections, must enlarge, and invigorate, and stimulate all the forces of the soul. Other things being equal, we should expect a Christian mechanic, merchant, or farmer to do his work better and more successfully than an unbeliever. He can work with a free spirit, and give all his energies to his task. His work is accepted as a part of God's great plan of life for him, and he feels that he may reasonably expect His assistance in doing it. His own personal relations to God being rectified by faith, he is not a prey to anxiety and apprehension about these relations; he is not harassed and impeded by the thought that comes to many a busy, and what the world calls successful man, that after all, his life may be a failure. The work of life does not seem like drudgery to a man of faith. It is ennobled by being associated with God's providential and gracious purposes for him, so that, while

he is "not slothful in business," he is "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

Constituted as we are, congenial activity is the law of our highest dignity and joy. To an active and energetic spirit, labor is pleasure, exertion is rest. Toil that is unfelt, is no longer toil ; and, though fatigue and waste are inseparable from these material organizations, still to an earnest spirit inaction is grievous, and work is welcome. Let a man then enter on the work of life conscious of right relations to God, free from those gloomy doubts and harassing fears which do at times obtrude even upon the most thoughtless and worldly, with simple faith in God, and resting his highest interests in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he is fitted for all labor, inspired to every high activity, braced for every conflict, and furnished for every good word or work.

Tell me, dear reader, would it not be an unspeakable blessing to you, as a working

man, to have your mind filled with that serene peace which comes from true faith. If you were sweetly conscious that your heart was right with God, and that His smile was resting on your way, and that in all your toil you were only serving Him, and carrying out His wise and good plan of life for you, would you not feel far better furnished for life's toil and endeavor than you ever have been? Have there not been many times when you felt your need of such a support and stimulus? Has there ever been a doubt in your mind that had much power to perplex and distress you, a doubt whether you were really attaining to the true end of life, and might not be obliged in the end to count it a lost life? How dispiriting and debilitating is such a thought! No man can make the most of himself and his opportunities under such a paralyzing influence. Oh, believe, believe, dear reader! Have faith in God, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,

and then go forth to the work and warfare of life, braced and inspired by the thought, "All things are possible to him that believeth."

And in its relation to the other great condition of life—*endurance*, faith is precious.

He has only half learned the secret of life, who has learned only to do. The side of action is the most demonstrative and popular, and men naturally consider this first of all in making their plans and estimates of life. The *doers* are always before the public eye, and arrest the public attention, just as a thunderstorm excites more notice, and seems to be a thing of more power than the falling of the dew, which comes in the quiet, unseen night. With very many men power is estimated only by exertion, and nothing is considered effective save that which is showy and noisy.

But it is scarcely too much to say that life, a right, true, effective life, is more concerned

with endurance than with action or demonstration. It is far easier to do than to bear. There is much to stimulate to action—men see our works, and applaud them. Action is a thing of the broad sunshine and the crowded thoroughfare, where the people are, and we are seen of men. Endurance is a thing of retirement and loneliness; there is little of human observation or applause to stimulate or encourage it. It belongs to quiet hours and unseen places, and it needs a stronger principle beneath it than action. Many a man can *do* much, who can *endure* little. Many a man can give, who cannot forgive. Many a man can fight bravely with a foe, who cannot rule his own spirit.

When we consider the number, the variety, and the constancy of the occasions which call us to the exercise of the passive virtues in life, the importance of some great principle which lies at their foundation must be appar-

ent. Ambition will not answer the purpose. Passion may drive even a coward to a fight, but it cannot sustain a man in trouble, or under wrong, or sorrow. Napoleon was a man of action; and he could make all Europe tremble at his name. But many a humble Christian woman could surpass the conqueror of kingdoms in the dignity and grandeur of a patient endurance. Faith, as it is the mightiest principle of action, is also the only successful source of endurance.

We have had occasion before to speak of the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that wonderful record of the triumphs of faith. What is said there of the Old Testament saints illustrates the doctrine of this chapter. What did they not do, what did they not endure by the aid of faith? Their history is reproduced in the history of the martyrs; in the records of Christian missions; in the experience of all true believers. All

over the world to-day there are multitudes of Christians in chambers of sickness, homes of poverty, abodes of sorrow, bearing heavy burdens with a beautiful patience ; drinking bitter cups with a cheerful resignation ; doing hard drudgery with a persistent fidelity ; serving God and their generation on the rough frontier of the Christian life, unknown, unheralded, unsung, sustained by simple faith in the great realities of eternal things. Like Moses, they "endure, as seeing him who is invisible."

A principle that can enable a man to meet and bear the varied trials of this world with patience and fortitude, may well be called precious. What can be more valuable to men whose home and field of labor is in this world of sin and sorrow ? There is a great deal in this life that will try us very sorely if we have not the refuge of faith. If you have not yet learned this, dear reader, you will learn it soon.

The rough places are before you, where you will need an Almighty arm to support you. The dark hours will come when you must have light from an unseen world. The valley of the shadow of death is before you, and faith alone can light you through. The unchanging retributions of eternity are at hand, and faith alone can enable you to meet them. He who has received the vital truths of the gospel with a firm, cordial, practical conviction and affiance, is fit for the action and the endurance of life. Whatever befall him, he trusts in God, and is kept in perfect peace. The storms of sorrow and disappointment may rage like the angry Galilee; faith in Christ is able to hush them into peace. The skeleton king may shake his fatal dart at the believer, but he can say, "Oh, death, where is thy sting? Oh, grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Precious

faith ! that can enable a man to do and to suffer all the will of God.

“ Lord, we believe. Help Thou our unbelief.”

PRECIOUS TRIAL OF FAITH.

“That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”—1 Peter, i. 7.

CHAPTER IV.

PRECIOUS TRIAL OF FAITH.

WE have considered faith in its nature and its value. We are now to consider one of the methods by which its preciousness may be demonstrated and increased.

In the passage which stands at the head of this chapter, faith is compared to gold. And the peculiar value of trial and testing, as related to this Christian grace, is set forth in comparison with the purification to which this precious metal is subjected, and by which its highest purity and value are secured.

The comparison of faith to gold, is striking and truthful. This is the most precious of all metals. It is the most esteemed by men. It

commands all those objects of taste and luxury and enjoyment, which all men naturally desire. It delivers us from the fear of want. It procures for us the means of intellectual culture. It builds up all the great institutions of commerce, and art, and benevolence. It enables us to relieve the physical sorrows of our fellow-men. It enables us to extend the influences of our holy religion. It is the great motive power of the world's progress. Wrongly estimated and pursued, it is a stupendous curse.

Rightly valued, sought, and used, it is a magnificent blessing. But its power as a simile is always felt. As pure as gold ; as bright as gold ; as precious as gold, are current phrases in society, and all acknowledge their force. The sacred writers in very many instances use the simile of gold to express what is precious in truth, or valuable in character. So when the apostle uses gold to illustrate the grace of

faith, he uses a metaphor truthful in itself, and adapted to universal appreciation.

There are many respects in which we might show the beauty of this figure, but we will speak only of one. Faith enriches the soul, even as gold enriches its owner. As a poor man who has become affluent, can surround himself with all those material blessings which are in the gift of wealth, so faith enables the believer to appropriate all those blessings which make the soul rich. All that is grand and noble in truth; all that is rich and satisfying in the promises; all that adds dignity and lustre to the character; all that brings peace and rest to the soul; all that enlightens darkness, rests weariness, comforts despondency, and consoles the sorrowing heart, is in the gift of faith. "All things are yours," says the exulting apostle; "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or

things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." This is the magnificent inventory of the Christian's wealth, and "it cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof." The glorious riches of the gospel of the grace of God, become the inalienable inheritance of the humblest believer. He is an heir of God, a joint heir with Christ, to "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

Read the unequalled close of the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, ending with those grand words; "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life; nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers; nor things present, nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is the gift of faith, this is the assured portion of every believer, and how

much more precious it is than gold, the eternity of its full realization and enjoyment can alone reveal.

Faith, therefore, is the Christian's gold, his chief portion, his means of all spiritual wealth ; his source of comfort, peace and joy.

Now everybody knows that gold requires to be purified, both in order to test and to increase its value. The flames of the furnace, the cleansing and refining power of chemical agents, must be applied in order to reduce the rough ore, purge away all impurities, and bring out the precious metal in its real value. The process may be rude ; it may involve much rough handling and crushing, and if the metal were sensitive and alive, we may suppose that it would involve great suffering for a time, and yet the purity and lustre and value of the precious metal would justify all the severity, and make the trial itself a precious and valuable process.

What is true of gold, is also true of faith. It needs to be tested; both in order to prove its reality and to increase its tone and power. There is this two-fold object to be secured. Just as in mining, a piece of ore may be selected, which may or may not be the true metal. It may be impossible to decide as to the real character of the specimen, until the test is applied, which will conclusively reveal the fact. And if it be the real ore, it will not be fit for use, until it is refined and purified. So that for both these great ends, the searching flame, and the dividing processes of fire and chemicals, are needful and precious.

So, when we are in ordinary circumstances, we may not be able to determine whether our faith is genuine. Faith is confidence in God. Faith is reliance on Christ. If we have many other things to lean on, we may be in danger of mistaking our confidence in them for trust in God—for confidence in Christ. If you

plant a tree, and surround it with stakes, by which it may be supported when the rude winds blow, you cannot tell whether the sapling can stand alone, so long as these props and stays remain. That will be revealed only when the stakes are taken away, and the tree is left to meet the blast by the strength of its own inner life.

If a limb has been broken, and the fractured parts are bound up with splints and bandages, the patient cannot be certain that he is healed until they are taken off, and tries the limb, and tests its intrinsic strength. So, when we are not, as it were, forced to any real test of our faith, we cannot be certain that we have it. We may be unconsciously relying on other things, and until these are removed, we cannot be certified that there is any other and higher principle which will remain, and will still give us support and strength.

The grand peculiarity of faith is, that it

takes hold on the invisible world. It is not a reliance on sensible objects. It is said of Moses that, "he endured as seeing him, who is invisible." And the apostle illustrates this office of faith, when he says: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Faith is concerned, we say, with invisible things. It has to do with the great truths of revelation. It takes hold of the promises of God. It has no trust in any arm of flesh. Therefore, it must be, as it were, crowded up to these, in order to its lively exercise. Outside props and reliances must be taken away, and then it will appear whether there is anything else which is better and more reliable, left to the soul. A child can

never know whether it can go alone, until it lets go of its mother's hand, and essays to walk by faith in its own motive power. And the falls which are always involved in this process, though they be more or less severe, are precious; they are valuable, as that discipline which develops, and tests, and strengthens its own muscular power, and its own faith in that power.

So faith in God cannot be proved to be real, without a discipline that will throw us upon that alone. This discipline will involve trial, and the trial may be severe; but it is precious, yea, more precious than of gold, which perishes. The captain of a new steamer can never be secure of her sea-going qualities, so long as she lies at her pier, or sails over a smooth sea. The storm, which tests her strength and seaworthiness, is a blessing to the commander and the crew.

Our Lord tells us of two builders who

built each a house. There is every reason to suppose that these houses were similar in everything but the foundation. But for the storm which assailed them, this difference would not have been known. But when it came, that which was built on the sand fell, with a ruinous fall; but the other, founded on the solid rock, stood unyielding and secure. Precious was the storm that assured the builder that his dwelling was safe.

So David sang, "Deep calleth unto deep; at the noise of thy water-spouts, all thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." Does this sound like a wail of sadness, a dirge of despair? Listen to the following strain: "Yet the Lord will command his loving kindness, in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." This is the voice of faith, taught when trial sweeps away all other reliances, to cling all the more closely to the everlasting arm.

You may think you have settled faith in God, in His infinite wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth. So long as all God's dealings are in accordance with your own will, and no counter-current assails you, you may rest in that belief. But how is it when things are not as you would have them? how is it when clouds obscure your sky, and the tempest lays your cherished things low in the dust? Can you then turn to God, and say, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice"? Or, are you bewildered, and bereaved, and broken-hearted, and rebellious? This is the time to trust and lean upon God. This is the time to test the genuine character of your faith. The sea is rough, and the tempest is high. Do you cling fast by the anchor of faith to the Rock of Ages? Can you say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him"? When the things that have been very pleasant to you are taken away, can you say, "The Lord gave, and the

Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord" ? This is the way in which faith is tried, that it may be made manifest, and the trial of faith is far more precious than that of gold, even as faith is itself more precious than the metal—for that perisheth—but faith endureth unto everlasting life.

We can appeal here with confidence to the experience of true Christians. Is there any one whom you know in whose piety you have great confidence ? Go talk with that friend on this point. Ask him where he gained the best evidence of the reality of his faith. He will tell you about some great trial, some dark day, some rough place in his journey, when he was forced to fall back upon God and grope in the gloom, feeling for the everlasting Arm. He will say, as David said, "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Ah ! let us thank God that He minis-

ters to our necessities rather than to our desires in our Christian training. We shrink from trial. As we steer out on the sea of life, we say, "Lord, give us fair winds and smooth waters." We should say, "Lord, give us such weather as Thou seest to be best for us to make us good and hardy sailors." But whether we ask it or not, the faithful and loving God will do it, and we shall praise Him for it forever in heaven. No matter how heavy may be the blow, if it only tests the genuineness of our faith, it is worth far more than it costs. No matter how fiery may be the trial, we shall live to say, "It is more precious than gold!"

But it is not only good for us to have our faith tested by trial to prove that it is genuine. The trial is equally precious as a means of increasing it and making it stronger.

It is quite remarkable how weak a genuine faith may be. Blessed be God, that He regards quality more than quantity in his peo-

ple. A diamond is no less a gem of genuine value, because it is far less in size and brilliancy than the Koh-i-noor. When the test has been applied that reveals it to be a real diamond, it is esteemed precious. And so when by the test of trial the genuine character of a believer's faith is proved, what though it is but "a grain of mustard seed," it is precious as a gem in the estimation of God; and humble though it be, it can be made to overcome the world and save the soul.

But faith is almost always weak in its beginnings. It is the first breath of a new life in a soul that has been "dead in trespasses and sins." Young life is generally feeble life. There is a grand principle of growth and progress in it, but at first it is feeble. The man who was blind, when his eyes were first opened, saw "men as trees walking." Young faith must grow; weak faith must be made stronger. A Christian's comfort and a Christian's useful-

ness alike depend upon the vigor of his faith. Mr. Spurgeon, in one of his discourses, describes in a very graphic and characteristic manner a weak believer, under the name of "Little Faith." He says that such a believer has many inconveniences and discomforts. *While he is really sure of heaven, he very seldom thinks that he is.* Great Faith is sure of heaven and knows it. Paul could say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." That is "Great Faith." Again, *"Little Faith, while always having grace enough, never thinks that he has."* The promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee," is his if he have only a little faith, but he does not realize the comfort of it. And *"if he be sorely tempted to sin he is apt to fall."* These disabilities of a weak faith, so graphically described, are familiar to the experience of most Christians, and they are sources of great discomfort and

hindrance to usefulness. So that anything that invigorates faith, even though it be trial, is very precious—that is, very valuable. There are other methods which are to be used. A feeble faith, like a weak limb, grows stronger by exercise. The blacksmith's knotted muscles and massive strength came to him by degrees, as day after day he wielded the ponderous sledge. Express your faith; do not repress it, if you want it to grow. Give it air and exercise; don't house it up like a hot-house plant. Bring it out into the sunshine and the air, and use it, and it will grow. Give it food too, or it will still be puny and stunted. God's word is full of truths and promises, that are the kindly nourishment of faith. Feed upon the word as David did, and you will find it sweeter than honey and the honey-comb.

But, after all, the best method of strengthening faith is by trial. The man who would get a strong arm must lift heavy burdens, or wres-

tle with one that is stronger than he. Jacob's character was never so broad and manly as after that long night of conflict by the brook Jabbok. Says Spurgeon: "We don't grow strong in faith on sunshiny days. It is in strong weather that a man gets faith. Faith is not an attainment that droppeth like the gentle dew from heaven; it generally comes in the whirlwind and the storm. Look at the old oaks; how is it that they have become so deeply rooted in the earth? Ask the March winds and they will tell you. It was not the April shower that did it, or the sweet May sunshine; but it was the rough wind of March, the blustering month of old Boreas, shaking the tree to and fro, and causing its roots to bind themselves around the rocks. So it must be with us. We don't make good soldiers in the barracks at home; they must be made amidst flying shots and thundering cannon. We cannot expect to make good sailors on a

quiet stream ; they must be made far away on the deep sea, where the wild winds howl and the thunders roll like drums in the march of the God of armies. We must grapple with great troubles if we would have great faith."

This is the teaching of the word of God. Everywhere it inculcates the doctrine. "Fight the good fight of faith" is an apostolic injunction. It is a good fight, but it is a fight nevertheless. No man ever grew up to a mighty faith who did not fight with mighty foes. "The time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, of Samson, and of Jephthae, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms ; wrought righteousness ; obtained promises ; stopped the mouths of lions ; quenched the violence of fire ; escaped the edge of the sword ; out of weakness were made strong ; waxed valiant in fight ; turned to flight the armies of the aliens." What a triumphant

record ! It stirs the soul like the blast of a trumpet. These were the heroes of faith, no holiday soldiers, but men whose plumes were dancing, and whose swords were glancing in the very thickest of the fray.

This truth makes the pages of life's history, that have been wet with tears, gleam like the leaves of an illuminated missal. It sheds sweet light on the sore discipline of life. Some disciples have never found what it was to have a strong faith till they came to very rough places on the way of life. Some men have found it only when loss and disaster came upon their fortunes. Some women have found it only when they put on the widow's weeds. But, however found, it is precious ; yea, more precious than gold, which perisheth, for "it is found unto praise, and honor and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

So, dear reader, do not be afraid of trials. Shrink not from the stern discipline of life.

In whatever way it pleases your Heavenly Father to test your faith, be assured it is wisely and kindly adapted, and intended to make it stronger, and braver, and more efficient. And as faith is the Alpha and Omega of the Christian life, the source of all power and progress, as well as of all peace and comfort, whatever makes it stronger and more assured must be very precious to the soul. The faith which our Lord commended, and which seemed to awaken His admiration, was that of a humble, trusting woman, who met trial after trial with steady, persistent appeal, rising in the strength of her faith as each obstacle in her way seemed to be more formidable, until she conquered at last, and won the boon for which she asked. "Let us even rejoice in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed." "Be not afraid," no matter how

great the trial may seem, "only believe." "All things are possible to him that believeth." "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." And "the trial of faith being more precious than gold, which perisheth, though it be tried with fire, shall be found unto praise, and honor and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

PRECIOUS CHRIST.

“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”—
1 Peter, ii : 7.

CHAPTER V.

PRECIOUS CHRIST.

IN the preceding chapters, we have considered the nature and preciousness of faith, and of that discipline by which its genuine character is tested, and its vigor and value increased.

We now come to the great object of Christian faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, and our purpose is to show how precious or how valuable He is to the believer.

When we look at a diamond, and see its wonderful and beauteous lustre, we are at once, and instinctively, impressed with an idea of value. This is an abstract idea. We need not connect with it any personal associations,

any memories or sentiments of a special character pertaining to ourselves, or to any person or persons who are dear to us; yet we cannot fail to be at once impressed with the idea of wondrous value.

In looking at the regalia of England in the Tower of London, or the jewels in the famous Green vaults in Dresden, the impression is made upon the mind of the most superficial beholder that he is looking on gems of extraordinary worth. He has never seen them before; he may never see them again; they cannot be connected, in any way, with his personal history. He has not a solitary association or memory by which he is linked to them; yet the mere sight of them impresses him profoundly with a sense of their incalculable value. But if a precious gem is the gift of a living friend; if it is ours as the pledge of a devoted affection, and especially, if it is the fruit of toils, and sacrifices, and sufferings

endured in our behalf by some one who has loved us and given himself for us, oh ! then, what new elements of unspeakable value are added to the gem, and in what a profound and blessed sense is it precious to us !

All this is true of the relations which exist between the believer and his Lord. Christ is precious in Himself. He has His own intrinsic and heavenly beauty ; He shines on the pages of history with a halo such as has never surrounded any other character. Simply as a picture, there is nothing in all the galleries of art which approximates to its divine beauty. No painter ever had such a conception ; no novelist or poet ever imagined such a hero. That the picture is before the world's admiring gaze, is the highest proof that it is more than a picture. We feel, we know, as we look at it, that it must be a reality. A mind that could have conceived such a character as the Lord Jesus Christ must have been

more than human. The picture is without a blemish, the gem is without a flaw. As we look upon the Lord simply as a representation, a drawing, an image, a personage in history, we involuntarily exclaim—It is reality, it is life, it is beauty, it is grandeur, it is perfection!

The delineations of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, are the most attractive and fascinating which history presents to our view. All the images which the sacred writers employ are most expressive of His loveliness, His value, His glory. We cannot form an accurate or exhaustive idea of Him by looking at one of these inspired representations. We must group them into a magnificent whole. The King, crowned into many crowns, is Jesus; but not the full development of the glory of Jesus. The Shekinah of the holy city is Jesus; but this, however splendid, does not constitute our Lord, as He

appears in His glory. In forming a conception of Jesus, let us bring together into one person, or individual, all the detached representations given of Him in the Scriptures—the Son of God, the King of kings, the Sovereign crowned with many crowns, the Judge on the great white throne, the Godhead coming with clouds—and in all these we have images of grandeur, and sublimity, and glory that are awful and overwhelming. Combine with these the images of the Shepherd leading His flock in green pastures and by still waters; the sympathizing Friend, weeping with the afflicted at a brother's tomb, or offering His bosom as a pillow for a loved disciple's head; the gentle and considerate One, who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; the Fountain in the desert; the shadow of a great rock in a weary land; the Vine, of which His people are the branches; the weeping, pitying Man on

Olivet; the Healer of disease and the Comforter of sorrow; the home-friend and heart-friend of the lowly and the poor, and we have traits of inexpressible beauty, and inimitable tenderness, and marvelous fascination, which, blended with those of grandeur and sublimity, make up the most complete, the most attractive, the most precious portraiture which human eyes have ever seen or human affection ever worshiped. Precious! Ah, yes! Apart from every personal association, independent of every memory of what this Saviour is and does, and is yet to be, and to do for us, in His own intrinsic, absolute, independent, eternal worth, the Lord Jesus Christ is "chiefest among ten thousand, the one altogether lovely!"

But when we add to His intrinsic and absolute preciousness, the great fact that this wonderful, this glorious being is the Saviour of the humblest soul that believes in Him:

that there is a close and tender personal tie between them, so that the Christian can say, as he beholds this perfect, this beautiful, this lovely, this heavenly being: "My beloved is mine and I am His," what an element of value is added to His preciousness. Christ would seem to be precious, did we consider Him only in His relations to the heavenly world—to the Father and to the holy angels. There is an intrinsic value that attaches to Him, growing out of what He is in Himself. But when the believer thinks of his Lord, it is not so much in this abstract and absolute relation. No! As he sees all the beauty and glory of this Divine Saviour, as he beholds every separate and individual attribute blended in one harmonious and magnificent whole, and remembers that this is his own dear Lord, who loved him and gave Himself for him, his views of the preciousness of Christ reach to the highest point of grateful and adoring ap-

preciation, as he exclaims: "*This is my beloved, and this is my friend!*"

For this personal relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, into which faith introduces the believer, implies a title to everything that can be a real good to the soul. This is the meaning of the apostle's words, when He exclaims: "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

What a golden chain it is that thus links the believer to all the riches of God's universe. Faith makes the Christian a child of God; but that is not all. If he is a child, then he is an heir; but that is not all, he is an "heir of God," and "a joint heir with Christ." Everything that we need, from a crumb of bread to a crown of glory, is secured to us, if Christ be ours. Everything that the

Omnipotent Father would bestow on the only-begotten and well-beloved Son, in which His redeemed people can share, is equally theirs, for they are Christ's.

We see, therefore, dear readers, that "precious faith" unites every believer to a precious Christ, and gives him a personal interest in this Saviour. "*Unto you*, therefore, which believe," not only in Himself, not only to God and to angels, but "*unto you* he is precious." There are two senses in which this is true: Christ is precious to the believer in the sense of being valuable to him, and in the sense of being dear to him; a thing may be valuable to us, because it is useful, but it may not be a thing that we love. A very little medicine may be immeasurably valuable to a sick man, because it may save his life, but it is bitter still, and though he takes it readily, and values its curative properties, he does not love it, and will not take it except under

the pressure of stern necessity. So a thing may be dear to us when it has no real intrinsic value. There are little trifles in every dwelling, mementoes of dear ones who are gone from us, that are inexpressibly dear and precious to us—things that a stranger would fling away, but which no gold could purchase from us. But Christ is precious to the believer in every sense. He is valuable; yea, invaluable; He is “the way, the truth and the life” for His people. He is their Redeemer from sin, from death, and from hell. He is their Mediator with God the Father. He is their Advocate before the throne. He is their Prince and Defender. He is their Shepherd and their guide. He is their Sympathizer in every sorrow, and their Comforter in all distress. He delivers them from a guilty conscience. He justifies them before the law of God. He succors them in every temptation. He makes them conquerors, and

more than conquerors, over death and the grave. So He is precious to them; yea, precious to them all. The high and the low, the rich and the poor, the bond and the free, be they only believers, find their all for this world and the next in this precious Christ.

And He is *dear* to all believers. True faith "worketh by love." David is the representative of all God's saints, and how he speaks of the precious Lord! How he uses the language of deep affection: "Whom have I in heaven but thee; and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides thee!" "My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee, and my soul which thou hast redeemed." "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplication." "O Lord of hosts! blessed is the man that trusteth in thee." "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever and ever." "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me; bless

his holy name." This is the language of ardent affection, of grateful, adoring love. It is repeated in the Apostolic writings. The Christian heart that beheld Jesus through the mists of prophecy and vision, and loved Him as its Saviour and Friend, beat all the more fervently in the bosoms of the godly men to whom the coming and work of Christ was an accomplished fact. And so the penitent yet earnest Peter could say, as he looked on his risen Lord with eyes that sparkled with joy at his resurrection, while they wept tears of repentance, that he could ever have denied Him, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." And so Paul, that disciple "born out of due time," could say, "Whom not having seen we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory." And so John could say, he who leaned on the Lord's breast at

the supper, "We love him, because he first loved us."

And what is true of Apostolic and Old Testament times, has been true of all the Christian centuries. To the believers of all ages, climes, and nations, Christ has been precious, precious in the sense of dear. Their love for Him sustained the martyrs as they joyfully counted not their lives dear for His sake. The hymns and holy songs which live longest, and have the deepest place in the hearts of God's people, are those which embody the intense affection of the believer for his Lord. How many of God's people have sung :

or, "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds,"
or, "Dearest of all the names above,"
or, "Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear,"
or, "Jesus ! I love thy charming name,"
or, "Rock of Ages ! cleft for me,"

making loving melody in their hearts unto their Lord. There is "a great multitude, which no man can number," even now upon the earth, to whom Christ is unspeakably precious, who love Him with all their hearts. It is not uncommon to hear it said, that the piety of the Church in our day is far below that of the elder day; that if it were tested by fire and sword, it could not stand the test. I am not so sure of that. I believe there are some even now, who love Jesus Christ with a love that would not shrink, if it were needful, before the rack or the stake. I believe that my sainted mother was such a Christian. I believe that Christ was dearer to her than husband, or children, or home, or anything below the sun. And through long years of widowhood, and through a forty years' conflict with great physical infirmities and heart bereavements, this affection for her Lord sustained her, and made her a bright, and cheer-

ful, and happy, and exalted Christian. And I believe that there are many, like her, who do love Jesus, and find His name sweet in their ears, and to whom He is precious beyond all beside.

“Yes, unto you, therefore, which believe, He is precious.” And there are times when you feel that He is so, with peculiar force. He is precious when you feel the burden of sin. When, now and then, you get a glimpse of your own heart, and are startled and distressed at the sight; when you feel that you are a poor, unworthy sinner, and are afraid of the wrath of God; when conscience is roused, and your heart is like a troubled sea, —then the thought of Him, whose precious blood cleanseth from all sin, and whose perfect righteousness spread over you, covers, like a spotless robe, all your stains, is full of comfort and of hope. I cannot see how any man, who feels any proper sense of his own

sinfulness, can dispense with the doctrine of the atonement. How can a sinner be forgiven, in harmony with eternal justice, if there be no adequate satisfaction rendered to the law which he has broken. God is a Sovereign as well as a Father, and the father's love cannot dishonor the sovereign's claims. In the atonement we see provision made at once for God's rights and man's needs; for the vindication of heaven, and the salvation of earth. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This is a precious view of Christ; freely "bearing our sins in his own body on the tree;" "redeeming us from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for us;" "suffering for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." This hushes the clamor of a guilty conscience, and says to the troubled spirit, "Peace, be still!" No matter how long, how willfully, how heinously we

may have sinned, if we believe in the atoning, interceding Christ, it is all forgiven, all blotted out, all forever washed away. No man need fear to stand before a holy God, whose faith takes even a trembling hold of the Cross of Christ. Unto the believer, suffering under a sense of sin, Christ is precious.

And so, in all the vicissitudes and conflicts of the spiritual life, Christ is precious as the strength and Deliverer of His people. So the Apostle felt, as in such graphic terms he described the conflict between his old and his new nature, in the close of the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. When almost in despair under the pressure of the strife between the good that he would, and the evil that he would not, he exclaimed, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" his faith, reposing on the Saviour, breaks out in

joyful assurance, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

And in times of affliction Christ is precious to the believer. There is no aspect in which He is presented to our faith, which is more attractive than that in which he appears as the sympathizing Friend and Comforter of His afflicted people. Many a believer has learned his best lessons of his Lord under the teachings of sorrow. And they are precious lessons. In all our affliction, He is afflicted. "We have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." How comforting this truth is, let His tried people testify. They who have lain on beds of sickness through days of pain and nights of wakefulness, have found a pitying Jesus near them to soothe their anguish, and make the pain of the body the healing of the soul. They who have met stunning and

unexpected blows of reverse or calamity, and have met them with fortitude and patience, have done so by the help of Jesus, who put underneath them the everlasting Arm and held them up, so that they could say, with David, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." They who have been called to drink of the bitter cup of bereavement, from whom lover and friend have been put far away, have found a sympathizing Saviour so precious to them, that they have been able to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord." Aged saints, treading with feeble step the short remnant of life's journey, cheered by the presence of their Lord, have been enabled to say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." And time would fail me

to tell of the testimonies to the preciousness of Christ that have come from the lips of dying believers. His image has been the last to fade from the glazing eye ; His name has been the last to linger on the trembling tongue.

An old Christian once lay on his dying bed, and the dear daughter, who hung over him with trembling solicitude, could see no trace of consciousness, hear no word of recognition from her dying father. Suddenly there came from the pale lips the faint articulation, "*Bring!*" "What shall I bring, father?" said the daughter, thinking that it was the expression of some need which she could supply. Again, and with more force, came the word, "*Bring!*" from the dying man. "Dear father! tell me, what shall I bring?" was the girl's passionate exclamation, in agony to know what she might yet do for her beloved father. Then a light beamed from the dull eye, and a smile played over the pale face, and the words

came audible and clear from the lips of the departing saint :

*“ Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all !”*

“Unto you, therefore, which believe He is precious.” Dear reader, is this Saviour precious to you ?

PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST.

“With the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”—1 Peter, 1 : 19.

CHAPTER VI.

PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST.

THERE is scarcely any substance which is at the same time so sacred and so mysterious as blood. If we are asked for a definition of it, it is easy to say that it is a red liquid, which circulates in the cavities of the heart, the arteries, veins, and capillary vessels of the human body. But when we have said this, we have by no means explained what it is, nor have we given any clue to that peculiar and universal sensibility which even the sight of it is apt to excite. There is certainly no fluid in the body which has such a complex composition, and there is no substance which seems to have such an intimate

and essential relation to human existence. In fact, the Bible tells us in most impressive terms, that *the blood is the life*. And we know that, while limb after limb may be severed from the body without necessarily destroying the principle of life, yet the most vigorous frame must succumb to the loss of this fluid. And unless its waste be checked, death is unavoidable. Blood seems to be the subtle, mysterious link between matter and spirit. It is guarded by the most solemn sanctions, both of divine and human law. The highest penalty under the divine code, is attached to its unlawful shedding; and that human legislation is neither wise nor good which departs, in this respect, from the wholesome severity of the divine enactments. There is deeply seated in the human mind a sense of the sacredness of blood. The sight of it, especially when shed by violence, always produces a sensation of pain, and sends a shudder to the

heart. Under the Jewish law, which, in many respects, was a model of wise legislation, even the blood of animals was held sacred. It could never be used for food. And when shed in needful provision for the wants of men, it was regarded as an offering to God. It was everywhere recognized throughout the Mosaic law, as the symbol of atonement. And in the religious rites of all nations, it is considered as the highest and most sacred of all the forms of sacrifice.

To a true Christian, there is, perhaps, no allusion which can have so much meaning, so much pathos, so much power, as that contained in the words, "*the precious blood of Christ.*" His natural sensibilities, His religious emotions, and His dearest hopes, combine to give most impressive significance to them. We have considered, in the preceding chapters, some of those things which St. Peter denominates precious. And we sympathize

devoutly in his application of this significant term to faith, and its trials, and to our blessed Lord. But none of these allusions come so closely and tenderly to the Christian heart as this, "the precious blood of Christ." In the most hallowed seasons of devout meditation; when we think of the foundation of our personal hopes and comforts; at the Lord's table, that scene where, if ever on earth we get glimpses and foretastes of heaven, there are no words which recur so instinctively and with such intense and touching significance to our memories. I have heard of dying saints who seemed to murmur something almost inaudibly as they were going home; and when some anxious and loving ear was held to their lips, it was found that this was the word with which they were going into glory, "*the precious blood of Christ.*"

We can call blood "precious," which is the blood of any whose character is lovely, and

whose fate is unusually tragic. A great deal of such precious blood has been shed in our world by the hand of tyranny, or bigotry, or persecution. The history of England, for instance, is full of such instances. That gloomy pile, which has figured so grimly in her history for a thousand years, known as the "Tower of London," has witnessed the shedding of the blood of noble men and fair women, whose names are now revered as those of heroes and martyrs. The martyrology of the Christian Church is rich in such annals. Patriotism also has had her sacrifices of precious blood. The fields of our own land have been enriched with myriad drops of such blood. But where, among the heroes and martyrs of the world, can be found one like our Lord Jesus Christ? Where can be found one so pure, so lovely, yet so grand and heroic; so stainless in holiness; of such a celestial temper; so divinely beautiful and good,

yet so fully in sympathy with all that was human? When we think of our Lord merely as a man; when we consider Him only as a pure and benevolent being, who was cruelly put to death in His early manhood by a vindictive priesthood, without a stain on His character or a blot on His name, the catastrophe of His death excites our profoundest sympathy. When we reflect that, during His short life, He proved Himself to be the best friend of His race, the kindest, gentlest, most self-denying and true of all men; going about doing good; speaking so that "the common people heard Him gladly;" illustrating, in His life and death, the heavenly principle, "It is more blessed to give than to receive;" surely, we must consider His blood, so cruelly shed, as "precious" indeed. The character alone of Him who died, must shed its consecrating influence on His death, and give to every drop of His blood a sacred aroma.

Even apart from any personal relations to the event, we could not be indifferent to it as a history, an instance of innocent and heroic suffering, of sublime and beautiful self-sacrifice. We should be false to every ingenuous emotion, recreant to every true and generous sensibility, did we not esteem the blood which was shed on Calvary, "precious." We should not think it too much, to single this out from all the pure, heroic blood that was ever shed on earth, and say, "This is 'the precious blood of Christ!'"

But the real truth far exceeds this meagre statement. No blood was ever shed, in which we are so deeply, personally interested. Very precious blood has been shed for us by others. Martyrs have died to send down to us a pure faith and an open Bible. Heroes have died to give us a free country and an independent nation. Our fair land has been drenched in blood that we may well call precious, and

which will long be hallowed in the grateful memory of a great people. But what are the sufferings of martyrs, or the deeds of heroes in the cause of truth or patriotism, compared with what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us? It is "the old, old story," this story of the Cross, but we do not know it fully yet. It is the story of salvation, but salvation is a word which eternity alone can fully define. It is the story of redemption, but who can fathom the meaning of that mighty word? Who can comprehend what is implied in the deliverance of even one immortal soul from sin and death; from remorse and anguish, unmitigated and eternal? Ah, dear readers, we are only in the alphabet of our Christian experience! We "see, as through a glass, darkly." "We know in part, and we understand but in part;" but we know this, that whatever this great salvation is; whatever be the sublime and eternal significance of

such words as peace, pardon, rest, joy, glory, honor, immortality, heaven, we owe all our hopes of these to "*the precious blood of Christ!*"

In other words, the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation of all our hope of salvation: "For ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." No other blood but this could atone for sin. The spotless lamb bleeding on the Jewish altar, was but a type of that "Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." It is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. "But the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth from all sin." It is precious, because it has atoning virtue and purifying power. Its shedding vindicates eternal justice, satisfies infinite law, and enables God to be "just, and the justifier of Him that believeth in Jesus." The blessed sacrament

of the Lord's Supper owes all its significance to this precious blood. If it means anything at all, it means that Jesus Christ died on the Cross to save us from the guilt, power, and penalty of sin. There are some dogmatic statements of Christian doctrine, embodied in creeds and confessions, about which believers hesitate and even honestly differ. But there is no hesitation among all evangelical Christians here. There is no other teaching that can satisfactorily explain the meaning of the Lord's table. All over it is written in characters of light, the precious blood of Christ; Christian believers there go back instinctively to the scenes of Calvary, and sit in grateful, adoring, loving wonder, where the ground is stained with the dying Redeemer's blood, and say, "This is precious blood."

And why precious? Why more precious than the blood of Abel, or Stephen, or Paul, or John Rogers, or Margaret Wilson, or any

other heroic martyr, who died for God and His truth? Why do redeemed sinners say so much about "the precious blood of Christ?" Why are these words so continually uttered at the communion-table, on the dying bed, at the gate of glory? We have seen that it was the blood of a pure and innocent and heroic sufferer, and that it was shed for us. But this is not all. This was the blood of a divine Saviour. This suffering, bleeding Christ, was more than man. He was the equal of the Almighty God! "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow!" This was more than man, who died for man. He who hung on the Cross as man, sat on the throne as God. The hand that was pierced with the nails, grasped the sceptre of universal empire. The brow which bled under the crown of thorns, was radiant with a crown of glory! The blood which was shed for us, came from the veins of the God-man

Christ Jesus. This is the reason why St. Peter calls it "precious;" this is the reason why it speaks better things than the blood of Abel. If our Christ, like Abel, were only a man, why should His blood speak better things? Abel's blood spake, but its cry was Vengeance! Christ's blood speaks, but its cry is, Mercy!

It is, therefore, only when we see that Jesus is a divine Saviour, that he came from heaven and glory, to earth and shame, to atone for our sin by his perfect obedience, and reconcile us to God through his death, that we can at all understand the real significance of the familiar phrase, "*the precious blood of Christ.*" No blood like this was ever shed. The shedding of no blood ever accomplished what this has accomplished. It has satisfied an infinite law. It has propitiated an outraged justice. It has purchased for guilty men pardon, peace, and joy. It has purchased for the

weeping penitent the smile of God and the bliss of heaven. There is not a blessing which we need or can enjoy, from a crumb of bread to a crown of glory, which we do not owe to it. Do we want peace of conscience, assurance of pardon, hope of eternal life? These are the fruits of the shedding of "the precious blood of Christ." Do we need strength to live a right life, to resist temptation, to fight the good fight, and endure unto the end? He who shed His precious blood for us will not refuse to give us, these. Do we need a talisman, with which we can take away the sting of death and rob the grave of its gloom? When you, dear reader, lie down on your dying bed and feel the chill of the last enemy's approach, put your whole trust in the precious blood of Christ, and you will be a conqueror, and more than conqueror, in that trying hour. And when your spirit goes up from its tabernacle of clay, and knocks at

the gates of Paradise, and you are asked for the entrance-word, just whisper to the shining angel who keeps the gate, "The precious blood of Christ," and the portal of pearl will be flung wide open for you, and you will be free to tread the golden street up to the throne, whereon sits forever "the Lamb that was slain." Then your salvation will be complete; then your redemption will be consummated. And as ages on ages roll away, and ages on ages still succeed, and you still rise from one degree of saintly blessedness to another; if one of the angels who desire to look into these things, ever asks you what is the secret of your bliss, and what is the chorus of your song, and what is the crown of your rejoicing, he will ask, and you can give no better answer than these blessed words: "THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST!"

PRECIOUS CORNER-STONE.

“ Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.—1 Peter, ii : 6.

CHAPTER VII.

PRECIOUS CORNER-STONE.

WE are to consider in this chapter another of the precious things which St. Peter groups together in his Epistles. I need not say that the allusion here is to the Lord Jesus Christ. The verse at the head of the chapter is a quotation from the prophet Isaiah. In the 28th chapter of this prophecy, the 16th verse, we read: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste." Thus the prophet and the apostle, both speaking by inspiration, represent the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour

of mankind, under this truthful and expressive image. The figure is an architectural one. It is drawn from a building, and from the familiar practice of builders. Everybody knows that when an edifice of any size and importance is to be reared, the laying of the corner-stone is attended with special and impressive ceremonies and services. It is considered as representing the entire foundation of the building, and it is, of course, a most important part of the edifice. The strength, symmetry, and durability of the building depend upon it, and every wise and experienced architect looks with the most scrupulous care after the material of which his corner-stone is made, and sees that it is well laid, and is "true and trusty." For many a well planned and stately building has failed to stand and accomplish its object, for want of a proper corner-stone, for lack of a good foundation.

If this is true of earthly buildings, how

much more true is it of that which we build for eternity. The foundation on which we rest our everlasting hopes ought to be sure. All men are builders—builders not only for time, but, consciously or unconsciously, builders for eternity. I do not propose to take any time to show on what unreliable foundations many men, and some schools and churches, are resting their immortal hopes. Suffice it to say, that there are those who are like that unwise builder of whom our Lord spake, who built his house upon the sand. And the end will be the same. When the day of storm and trial comes, the house will fall, and great will be the fall of it.

But whatever may be the name or nature of those foundations on which mistaken men and false religious sects may be resting their hopes or their systems, the teachings of the Bible are clear and explicit. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is

Jesus Christ." "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste;" or, as St. Peter has it, "he that believeth shall not be confounded." Here we are distinctly taught that Jesus Christ, and He alone, is the only reliance of sinful man for salvation; that on His great redeeming work all our hopes must rest; that He has been set apart by God the Father for this special work; that He possesses all the essential requisites for it, and that the man who builds on Christ, the stone, the tried stone, the precious corner-stone, shall never be disappointed in his trust. His building shall stand.

Jesus Christ, then, is the divinely laid corner-stone on which the believer's hopes must ever rest. The foundation of pardon, justification, and full salvation for every believing soul is laid in Him. And the precise aspect

of His work for man, which is represented in the figure used by St. Peter, and called a "precious corner-stone," is that which is called the atonement. This atonement consisted in Christ's perfect obedience to the law of God in His life, and His sufferings, and death on the cross, by which the law was satisfied, God's holiness and justice fully vindicated, and the way opened for the gracious forgiveness of sinful man, his deliverance from the guilt and condemnation of sin, and his complete and eternal restoration to the favor of God. And this entire doctrine, taught as it is in numberless and harmonious passages in the Old Testament and the New, declared by patriarch, psalmist, prophet, and apostle; and declared clearly and distinctively by our Lord Himself, is all comprehended in this one declaration, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

2 Cor. 5 : 21. It is, therefore, the doctrine of the atonement which is the corner-stone, the sure foundation of the believer's hope.

The doctrine of the atonement grows directly out of these two things: the infinite holiness of God the Sovereign, and the willful sin of man the subject. These two factors are both acknowledged by all candid thinkers. Everybody admits the perfect holiness of God, and the willful guilt of man. God is a ruler. Man is a subject. God is such a ruler that His law is the harmony, order, peace, and joy of the universe. God is such a ruler, that to dishonor His law, is not only an infinite insult to Him, but an infinite injury and wrong to all His creatures. We know that even in this lower and imperfect state, the most gigantic evils which afflict our times, grow out of the very inadequate manner in which law—human law—is vindicated and maintained. If in all our land the just penalty

of broken law was inflicted promptly and unsparingly on every offender; if public justice always triumphed, and no offender—be he high or low—could by any means escape the just penalty of his misdeeds, what an infinite benediction this would be to society! How would life, liberty, property, reputation be enhanced in security and value! How would crime be diminished, virtue increased, and the sum of public happiness and general prosperity largely augmented!

But in a government like that of God, embracing all creation, extending over all time, and comprehending every interest of truth, justice, and happiness for myriads of creatures, it is of infinite importance that law should be upheld in its integrity, and the authority of the Sovereign should be fully and forever maintained.

Then we have this great problem, “How shall man be just with God?” Or, in other

words, How can man be saved from the guilt and condemnation of law in consistency with the justice of God, the integrity of the divine government, and the safety of the moral universe? So stupendous a problem as this was never presented save in this single instance. So prodigious a crisis as this never occurred but in the case of human apostasy. So dire an exigency never asked for provision, except once in the history of creation and of law. It is very easy for a superficial thinker to ask, Why could not God forgive sin in man, as a human father forgives his erring child, without demanding the bloody tribute which the doctrine of the atonement implies. The answer is, The analogy is not perfect. It is not the Fatherhood of God that is concerned in this case, so much as it is the Sovereignty of God. A father may forgive a disobedient child in the private relations of the domestic circle, though even there he cannot do it,

either justly or wisely, at the expense of the parental authority over the household. But a judge, a ruler, cannot forgive an offence against the law which he is sworn to uphold, and on which the well-being of the whole community is dependent, without some adequate provision for the vindication of that law. And if an earthly sovereign is hedged in by these essential limitations, where the interests of a petty community only are involved on a comparatively limited and insignificant scale, must not the Supreme Ruler feel their force whose kingdom embraces all worlds, and is related to the well being of the universe itself? God Himself is bound by the nature of things. There are obligations which belong not only to earthly rulers, but even to the King of kings! The Judge of all the earth *must* do right. And with these two inexorable factors still before us, the infinite holiness and justice of the Sovereign, and the

willful guilt of the subject ; the awful problem still remains, and angels cannot solve it : How shall man be just with God ?

But the problem, awful as it is, has been solved. "Behold," saith the Lord God, "I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation ; he that believeth shall not make haste." That which men or angels could not have devised, has been devised by God Himself. "Behold, *I* lay in Zion a stone." The grand expedient of the atonement came from the mind of God Himself. And this fact effectually shuts the mouths of those objectors who say, that this doctrine represents God as a stern and implacable despot, who must be appeased with blood before He is willing to pardon and save His own creatures. Such critics forget that the atonement itself at once glorifies the love and magnifies the justice of God. They represent the wrath of God as

like the emotion of rage or anger in man, often an utterly wrong emotion, and do not see that it is the sublime aversion of His lofty and pure nature to all sin, which excites this wrath. The anger of God against sin, is as grand and glorious a feeling, as much worthy of the admiration of every pure and noble soul, as any of the emotions which belong to God's infinite heart. It exists side by side with an infinite compassion; a divine tenderness for the sinner; a love that is ready to make any sacrifice, save that of truth and justice, for his salvation. "At the very instant when the immaculate holiness of God is burning with intensity, and reacting by an organic recoil against sin, the infinite pity of God is yearning with a fathomless desire to save the transgressor from the effects of this very displeasure. The emotion of anger against sin is constitutional to the Deity, and is irrepressible at the sight of sin. But this

is entirely compatible with the existence and exercise of another and opposite feeling at the very same moment, in reference, not, indeed, to the sin, but to the soul of the sinner. Mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other in the Divine Essence, and it is a mutilated and meagre conception of the Godhead that can grasp but one of these opposites at once." No! "God is love," and "God is angry with the wicked every day." "God is love," and "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." "God is love," yet "the soul that sinneth, it shall die!" These are not paradoxes. These are not contradictions. These are but representations of the complex nature of God. One class of truths represents his feelings towards sin; the other describes His sentiment towards the soul of the sinner.

It is, therefore, an entire misconception of the nature of the atonement, to suppose that

it is some device whose object is to render an implacable Sovereign, to make a rigid Law-giver, merciful. The atonement does not infuse into the Deity any new attribute or quality, which was not always an essential part of God's nature. God was always merciful. God was always ready and willing to forgive sin. His own language, confirmed by the most solemn asseveration, is: "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he should turn from his evil way, and live." The Bible is full of the most touching assurances of God's merciful character and disposition towards His creatures. He yearns over His sinful children with inexpressible tenderness. No fond earthly parent ever had such tenderness for a child as our Father in heaven has for us, and always had. If this had not been true, there never would have been any atonement. Law—sublime, inexorable, majestic, unpitying, would

have issued its mandate of condemnation, and executed its penalty to the very letter.

But that very expedient which objectors and cavilers denounce as a proof of the implacability of God, is the great imperishable monument of His love. It is His own matchless expedient, not to create a fount of mercy within his heart, but to remove the barrier which infinite justice must oppose to the opening of that deep fount, and the leaping forth of its glad streams of forgiveness and love. Men who revile the doctrine of the atonement as inconsistent with the mercifulness of God, cannot surely understand the rudimental truth of the gospel. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Who devised this great scheme by which law could be vindicated and man be saved? Who laid this corner-stone, this precious corner-

stone, that lost men might build securely on its sure foundations? Let God Himself reply : “ Behold, *I* lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious.” This precious stone was quarried in the eternal councils of the Godhead ; it was shaped and squared by the Almighty hand ; and by that same Omnipotent and loving hand it was laid in the fullness of time, as the sure foundation for the hopes of a sinful world. No suggestion of such an expedient as the atonement of Christ came from any outside source. From whence could it have come? What created mind could have conceived such an expedient? What creature could have dared to venture such a suggestion to the King of kings? Out of the divine mind itself, out of the infinite heart of God, a mind and a heart alone capable of such a conception, came the wonderful idea of such an atonement for sin as would vindicate eternal law, and save a guilty world. “ Be-

hold, I lay in Zion a corner-stone, elect, precious."

But men say again, in criticising the doctrine of the atonement, that there can be no justice in requiring an innocent being to suffer for the guilty. If this corner-stone is laid in the blood of Christ—confessedly a pure and holy being—it was as gross a piece of injustice; yea, more so than to have pardoned a guilty world without any atonement at all. But the premise is false on which this conclusion is based. If, indeed, it could be shown that the sacrifice of Christ was an arbitrary or unwilling sacrifice, that Christ was forced to the cross by the edict of the Father, then, indeed, this great transaction would have been an awful breach of justice, and utterly unworthy of a holy God. But it was not so. This great atonement was agreed upon in the eternal council of the blessed Three. The Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost were equal-

ly concerned in its conception and adoption. It was as voluntary on the part of the Son as on the part of the Father. It could never have been otherwise. The co-equal, co-eternal Son could not have been forced to sacrifice Himself for guilty man. And had it been so, the sacrifice would have had no atoning power, no propitiating efficacy. But the glory of the atonement is, that the high contracting parties in it were equally free, equally bent on their sublime expedient of divine love, equally desirous to save sinful man, while equally jealous for the honor of the divine law. It was the fruit of that infinite justice and of that infinite love which we meet in the Godhead. It was the Child of that eternal aversion to sin and that everlasting pity for the sinner, which embrace each other in God, and which are equally grand and lovely attributes of the divine character. The Father gave the Son. The Son delighted to be given.

The Holy Spirit freely and joyfully undertook to apply the benefit of the atonement to the believer. And the glorious Trinity of the Godhead derive an infinite and eternal joy from its conception and consummation, as generation after generation of believing men build on the precious corner-stone of the atonement of Christ, the fair fabric of their eternal hopes.

This, then, is the corner-stone on which we rest, the work of redemption by our divine Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Blending Deity and humanity in perfect though mysterious union, taking our nature, He obeyed the law which we had broken; bore the wrath which we had incurred; endured the penalty which we deserved, and thus satisfied divine justice and vindicated the spotless law of God. This offering was voluntary, adequate, and successful. Law rears no barrier now against the exercise of mercy. God the

Father can open His loving heart to the very chief of sinners without a stain upon His spotless throne. The perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer, and received by faith wrought by the Holy Spirit in the soul, justifies the believer before the law, while the death of the Saviour on the cross pays the penalty of our sin, and takes away its curse. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is not on our own repentance ; not on our own goodness ; not on anything that we are, or can be, that we rest our hope of pardon, peace, and eternal life. Vain, indeed, is every such reliance. Rather do we build on the stone, the tried stone, the precious corner-stone, the sure foundation, which God has laid in Zion. Our trust is in what Christ has done for us. We rest in His atonement ; in His intercession. We hang all our hope of salvation on His cross, and living and

dying, on earth, and in heaven, our song shall
be—

“Rock of Ages ! cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee !”

PRECIOUS CORNER-STONE.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRECIOUS CORNER-STONE.

IN our last chapter we endeavored to show that the “corner-stone” and “sure foundation” of the Christian’s hope is laid in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. This is the grand expedient, the fruit of infinite wisdom and eternal love in the Godhead, by which the law of God is vindicated, while its condemnation is taken away from every believer. This is the “Rock of Ages,” on which a perishing world may rest; and whoever puts his trust here “shall never be confounded.”

This corner-stone is one of the things which St. Peter calls “precious.” And this chapter

proposes to show how appropriately this significant epithet is applied to it.

I need hardly say, that, in the sense of costliness, this corner-stone is "precious." There is a great difference in the foundation-stones which are used for buildings. Sometimes the common rock of the neighborhood is rudely quarried, and with but little labor or cost is laid into the foundation. Sometimes a finer quality of stone, such as granite or marble, is employed, and then the process is more elaborate and costly. The stone is carefully cut and shaped, and, it may be, is polished with much skill and labor, so that it is not only massive, but beautiful. This process involves labor, and time, and cost, and is only done when the edifice to be built is of a very costly and valuable character. A palace for a monarch, or a building intended for the seat of government and legislation for a great nation, may well have such a precious corner-stone,

such a costly foundation. But this precious corner-stone, of which St. Peter speaks, is intended for the foundation of a world's hopes—the corner-stone on which not only the individual believer builds, but on which the whole Church of God, in all ages, and forever, is founded. The Church itself is built upon “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone.” When we consider the vastness, the extent, the beauty, the grandeur of this divinely-constructed building; when we remember that its materials are gathered from all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues; that it is to be the most wonderful and glorious monument of the wisdom, power, and love of the Infinite God, and that it is to stand forever and ever, surely we cannot doubt that its elect corner-stone, its sure foundation, must be unspeakably precious. We must believe that the process by which

the corner-stone was prepared for its place was a costly process. Such is the truth. The stone on which rests the hope of the Christian, and the glorious structure of the Church of God, is no mere rough boulder plucked from the way-side, and rudely laid as the foundation of a cheap and temporary building. The work of quarrying and shaping it was planned, with infinite skill, far back in the recesses of eternal ages. To its beautiful and grand design, the boundless wisdom of the Adorable Trinity was devoted. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost gave to the work their skill, their labor, their care. It was no hasty design, no rough, cheap expedient; it was the fruit of the august council of the skies, the product of the best wisdom, and the deepest love of the Everlasting God. Ages ago, the mighty plan was communicated to men. It was represented in type, and pictured in symbols and images, for generation

after generation. Spotless lambs bled and burned on countless altars to typify this precious corner-stone. Old patriarchs spoke of it to their children, and died in the blessed faith of its being surely laid even above their graves. A princely minstrel wrote his most beauteous lyrics in its praise; prophets and seers spoke of it with the burning eloquence of lips touched with live coals from heavenly altars; and all this before the grand process of shaping and polishing it for its place began. Then came this costly process at last, "in the fullness of times." In the humiliation of Bethlehem, in the soul anguish of Gethsemane, in the cruelties of the judgment-hall, in the unutterable agonies of the cross, in the dishonors of the tomb, behold the costly process by which this precious corner-stone was quarried, and cut, and shaped, and polished for its mighty place, as the sure foundation of our eternal hopes. No rude, worthless stone,

hastily selected, coarsely dressed, carelessly laid, is the elect, precious, sure corner-stone of the world's redemption, of the Church of God. What uncounted ages of wise design, what immense periods of profound preparation, what awful expenditures of labor and suffering were needful ere this corner-stone was laid in Zion ! As no building of earthly architecture can compare in dignity, beauty, and duration with that which a Divine Builder has reared upon it, as His eternal and glorious monument and palace ; so no earthly foundation has the same right to be called precious as this divinely-quarried corner-stone !

But the corner-stone of the believer's hope, the foundation of the Church of God, is not only precious in the sense of costliness ; it has other grand elements of value.

It is a tried stone. Many a building has been founded on a corner-stone, that, when

tried, has proven insecure. But this is a tried stone that has stood every test. Time has tried it. Time, that has destroyed many corner-stones, has eaten out many foundations, has brought so many stately buildings to the dust, has not yet triumphed over this. Age after age has passed away; the old palaces and monuments of ancient civilization and grandeur have crumbled into dust; the proudest architectural piles of the world's history have been vanquished by this ruthless enemy; but there is one corner-stone which has survived the tooth of time. In every age, among all nations, no one ever built on this foundation and was disappointed. What uncounted systems and expedients have been devised by men, have been inculcated by sages, have been tried by multitudes of eager souls, and have been proved to be worthless. One by one, in long procession, they have passed away, and the place that

knew them, knows them no more. But this grand expedient for a world's great crisis still survives. The Cross still stands erect and sublime in the world's history. Later ages vie with earlier in their admiration and attachment. Jesus, the Crucified One, lifted up, still draws all men unto Him; and the advancing ages, even to the last, shall only herald new triumphs for the great atonement, and twine fresh laurels for the brow that once was crowned with thorns.

It has been tried by numbers.

Numbers are often a test of strength. That on which a few may safely rest, may fail to sustain many. That must be an awful scene when a ship is wrecked at sea, and the boats, loaded to their utmost capacity, are obliged to repel the drowning wretches who implore, with the agonizing entreaties of dying men, to be taken on board. The test of numbers here is as frightful as it is conclusive. But,

blessed be God, this precious salvation by Christ, the corner-stone, fears no such test. The gospel ark, unlike that of the old patriarch, is capacious enough to hold all that desire to enter and ride out the storm of God's wrath securely. This corner-stone is strong enough for all God's creatures to build upon. "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Just think, dear reader, how many have built on this corner-stone, which is Jesus Christ. The venerable patriarchs, the inspired prophets, the goodly fellowship of the apostles, the noble army of martyrs, the believers of all ages and nations since the world was made, that "great multitude whom no man can number," have all built on the Rock of Ages! The countless myriads which have gone up from earth to cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, and ascribe all the glory of their salva-

tion to the Lamb who bought them with His blood ; the ransomed of the Lord, who, now on earth, are returning and coming to Mount Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads ; all these have rested their eternal hopes upon this “ tried stone ; ” all have built upon this “ precious corner-stone.” And how nobly it has stood the test. Firm and well placed, broad and enduring, it stands to-day and invites the faith of a perishing world. Though such uncounted hosts have built on it, it is just as strong and sure as it was six thousand years ago. The atonement of Christ is, to-day, the only hope of lost men. The repenting sinner now must cling to the Cross of Jesus. “ There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved,” but His. There need be no other, for this is all-sufficient. Christ is like the sun. That great luminary has melted the snows of how many winters ; brightened the

hues of how many springs ; ripened the fruits of how many summers, and mellowed the tints of how many autumns ; and yet there is not a ray the less to gladden the world to-day. Christ is like a great river. For how many ages has it rolled down its waters to the sea, fertilizing all its banks, as it glided by ; and yet its offering to the sea is not a drop the less to-day. Tried by the test of numbers, Christ is precious ; He is just the same sure foundation now as if he had not held up the hopes of ages and generations of believing souls.

It is tried by the variety of those who have built upon it.

Men of all ages have found in Christ Jesus and His redemption the sure foundation of their hopes. The Jew and the Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, have alike rested on this corner-stone. Men of all shades of character, from a Nathaniel to a thief on

the cross, from a Nicodemus to a Philippian jailer, have found in Christ just the Saviour whom they needed. In architecture, you would scarcely use the same corner-stone for the cottage of the serf and the palace of the king. But the monarch and the serf alike can build their immortal hopes on this tried foundation. Every variety of temperament, every phase of character, every degree of moral degradation and guilt that is represented in humanity, is met and ministered to in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. With a divine flexibility and power of adaptation, the gospel addresses itself to all the varieties of human character and human need. For amid all these varieties there is the same radical and universal necessity—that which grows out of sin. There are a variety of diseases that afflict the body; and they call for varied remedies. It is quackery only that professes to apply the same method

in every case. But it is not so in the therapeutics of the gospel. Whatever be the outward phase, and however varied the development in each individual, there is something in every case that calls for the great atonement, that demands "the precious blood of Christ." And to no case has the remedy ever been applied in vain. The sinner, in every place, of every age, in every station, has built on this corner-stone. In wealth or poverty, in honor or obscurity, in learning or ignorance, in freedom or in bondage, the believing man has found in Christ a sure foundation.

Surely, then, a stone thus tried, by time, by numbers, and by the variety of those who have built upon it, may well be called "a precious corner-stone." It is a great element of its value that it has been so thoroughly tested. When it is offered to sinful and condemned men now, as the foundation for their hopes of pardon and justification, it does not

come to them as some novel and untried expedient, which they may well fear will not be suited to their case. If I have a dear child who is dangerously sick, and a medicine is recommended to me which is a specific for that disease, it adds much to its value if I am told that, in a hundred similar cases, in my immediate neighborhood, it has been entirely successful. This makes it precious, indeed. I can adopt and use it with confidence, for it has been tried. And so this great remedy for the terrible malady which afflicts the moral world, whose end is eternal death, this great salvation which Christ has effected for men, may be adopted without fear, with the utmost confidence, by every man who feels that he needs something on which to rest his immortal hopes.

And this corner-stone is precious, also, because it is "a sure foundation." The work of Jesus Christ, as our Redeemer, is a complete

work. It satisfies every requirement of God and every necessity of man. We must remember that God builds on this corner-stone as well as man. The demands of His ethical nature must be met, the integrity of His government must be vindicated, and the claims of His justice must be satisfied. No scheme of salvation would be "precious" that did not effect this ; for it would not be complete, and could not furnish a sure foundation. But the obedience and suffering of Christ does all this. It is a perfect obedience, it is an infinite suffering ; so that the apostle asks, in triumphant tones : " Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect ? It is God that justifieth ! Who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died ! " What are the claims which such a death cannot satisfy ? What is the Law which such an obedience cannot vindicate ? To distrust the ability of this corner-stone to make a sure foundation for the hope of even

the very "chief of sinners," savors far more of unbelief than of true modesty and self-renunciation. If God is satisfied with the great expedient which the Godhead devised, and carried out to such a complete consummation, what right has any man to doubt that he can rest securely upon the work of Christ? He may be a great sinner; he may richly and consciously deserve the wrath of God; his salvation may be a miracle of grace; but the precious "blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin;" and whosoever believeth on Him shall be saved!

There is awful presumption in building on any other corner-stone than that which God has laid in Zion. But there is no presumption in the very chief of sinners, when he puts his unwavering trust in the "Rock of Ages." When we lose sight of the Cross, when we forget the wondrous power of the blood of Christ, we may well despond. There

is no sure foundation beneath us then. Salvation seems too great a thing to be achieved in the face of the broken law and outraged majesty of justice. So Michael Angelo, that saintly soul, expressed it in one of his sonnets :

“Despite thy promises, O Lord, ’t would seem
Too much to hope, that even love like Thine
Can overlook my countless wanderings ;
And yet Thy *blood* helps us to comprehend,
That if Thy pangs for us were measureless,
No less beyond all measure is Thy grace.”

Oh, yes ; this corner-stone, which is laid in Zion, is “precious,” because it is “a *sure* foundation.” The great Master-builder of the Universe has laid it ; He knew what was to be founded on it ; He understood what it would be required to bear—it was to support the pillars of His eternal throne, and to sustain the hopes of a guilty world. He laid it wisely and well. He is satisfied with His

own work. The splendid edifice of the redeemed church is already partially completed, resting upon this precious corner-stone. As each generation passes, course after course is added to the magnificent building. It begins to show itself among the nations. It rises higher, and waxes more lustrous and glorious every day. It will go on in its growth, reposing securely on its sure foundation, until the last believing man has been gathered into it, and the top-stone is laid in glory. The foundation will never sink; the corner-stone will never yield an inch. It is divinely laid, elect, precious—a sure foundation; and he that builds upon it shall never be confounded!

Dear reader, have you built yet upon this precious corner-stone? Are you relying for your eternal happiness upon Jesus Christ, the divine and Almighty Saviour, whose blood alone cleanseth from all sin? This corner-

stone has been fully tried and found to be sure. No man has ever truly builded upon it and found that his building would not stand. It is sufficient for you. The atonement of Jesus Christ is ample for your justification at the hands of that great law which you have broken. It is as true now as it was eighteen hundred years ago, that "there is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" for, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." If you build on any other foundation, you will not find it sure. No other corner-stone is so "precious" as this. Selected in the councils of eternal wisdom; cut and fitted at infinite cost; laid by the Omnipotent hand of the Great Architect of the universe, and for ages bearing up the hopes of myriad builders, it is the only sure foundation for a sinner's hope. Holy patriarchs built on it by faith, even when they saw

it only through the veil of type and figure. Inspired prophets built on it, even though they died before their predictions of its glory as a foundation-stone were fulfilled. Noble martyrs built on it, and found that the wildest storms of persecution, and the fiercest assaults of the last enemy, could not shake it. Your godly fathers built on it, and found it sure. It stands before you the same precious, tried corner-stone, the same sure foundation—Jesus Christ—the Rock of Ages. Build on it, dear reader, at once, and your building will stand while the eternal sunshine of heaven gilds it with undying lustre. Build on anything else, and when the storm of death and judgment comes, it will fall; and great, oh, how great, how hopeless, how irretrievably ruinous will be the fall of it!

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EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES.

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises ; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”—2 Peter, 1 : 4.

CHAPTER IX.

EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES.

WE are to consider, in this chapter, the last of the precious things mentioned by St. Peter in his epistles. But though last, they are by no means least. He speaks, as we have seen, of “precious faith ;” “precious trial of faith ;” “precious Christ ;” “precious blood of Christ ;” “precious corner-stone ;” and now, of “exceeding great and precious promises.” This last specification opens before us a field so vast, that we can do little more than glance over its broad surface, and take a general survey of its richness and beauty. No pen can do justice to the promises of God. The nature and the variety of

the blessings which they contain ; the fullness and beauty of the language in which they are expressed ; the perfect assurance of their fulfillment to every believer, and their wonderful power to sustain and cheer the soul amid all the vicissitudes of life, and in every possible phase of Christian experience, all testify to the greatness of this department of Divine revelation, and to the propriety and force of the language of St. Peter, when he says, “exceeding great and precious promises.”

The promises of God to man, have reference to His two-fold nature and its necessities. He is made for two worlds—the present and the future. He needs provision for both. Such provision is found in the promises. They comprehend all that he needs for the body—for his physical comfort ; all the essentials of life and activity and enjoyment for this present state of being. They assure him of all

needful helps to endure all possible trials incident to this life. The believer is assured that no evil shall permanently and hopelessly afflict him ; but that trouble shall either be taken away from him, or he shall be enabled to overcome it. The promises declare to him, on the authority of God, that there is no real good for this life which he shall not enjoy ; and that there is no real essential evil from which he shall not be finally and fully delivered. They cover all his path—they are related to every season ; they embrace every peculiarity of need ; they meet every demand of man's nature which lies between the cradle and the grave. For the needs and interests of the life that now is, the promises are "exceeding great, and precious."

But it is in reference to their bearing on the soul and the future life, that their greatness and value are more fully seen. These are the most radical and imperative necessities of

man. It is a great thing to be assured of provision for the wants of the physical, but how much greater to be assured of adequate provision for the needs of the spiritual nature. The hunger of the body is sharp and urgent, but what is it to the hunger of the soul? It is a great thing to know that we may expect provision for this brief and uncertain life. But of what infinite moment it is to be assured that we shall be provided for in that unending and changeless life which is before us, and into which we may be hurried at any moment. It is in these respects that the promises are "exceeding great, and precious." The wise and discriminating Providence of God, in its provision for this life, is far surpassed by the wonders of His grace in its ample and satisfying provision for the necessities of our immortality. To the humble believer are promised pardon of sin, peace of conscience, the complacent love of God, ade-

quate strength for all the work and warfare of life, power with God in prayer, victory over all the assaults of the world and Satan, triumph in the hour of death, and "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him, as for one who is kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation."

What great things these are! What precious promises must those be that assure us of them! And the language in which they are conveyed to us, is not ambiguous or uncertain. It is clear, intelligible, and explicit. There have been long and earnest controversies in all ages, about the doctrinal teachings of the Word of God. Volumes have been written to explain, illustrate, and defend utterly antagonistic interpretations of them. Centuries of thought, discussion and strife, have been needed to crystallize these doctrines into sharp and permanent forms. But

the promises are declared in such plain and absolute terms, that there has been little opportunity for misunderstanding or misinterpretation. And all varieties of sects, schools, and denominations have united in regarding them as the common treasury of God's people, from whose inexhaustible resources adequate supplies could be sought and obtained by believers of every name, and of every variety of necessity and experience. This glory, have all the promises of God.

But the promises are not only intelligible and explicit in their declaration. They are sure and certain in their foundation and fulfillment. They are made by that God who cannot lie. They are from "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." They are the fruit of His free and sovereign grace. They are an essential part of the eternal covenant of redemption. They are based upon the work of the Lord

Jesus Christ, and are sealed with His most precious blood. They are adapted to our needs, but they are not founded upon our merits. They have a better and surer basis. They are confirmed to every believer by the witness of the Holy Ghost, by whom He is "sealed to the day of redemption." No man ever trusted in them and was disappointed. In them every believer may have "strong consolation, who has fled for refuge to the hope set before him." Every generation of God's people has rested securely in them, for the body and the soul, for life or for death, for time or eternity.

"The promises, therefore," says Dr. Samuel Clarke, "being of such a nature, and confirmed unto us by such authority and evidence, cannot but have very great and happy influences upon the mind, when seriously attended to and applied with faith; especially as they are a means by which the Spirit

of God carries on His work upon the soul. They are the strongest arguments to persuade the sinner to turn to God ; the greatest encouragements to a humble, believing dependence on the grace of Christ in the gospel, and the most powerful motives to sincere and universal obedience, since by them we are assured that every penitent sinner shall find the most gracious acceptance ; that from the grace of Christ we shall derive sufficient strength and capacity for every duty, and that in keeping God's commands there is great reward. So that, would we but duly consider the several *promises* made to every exercise of grace, and every performance of duty, what a spur would this be to quicken our slow pace in the ways of holiness. What an encouragement to be steadfast and unmoveable and always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

1. The value of the promises may be seen in their influence in keeping the mind of the believer free from anxious care and solicitude about his temporal interests. These interests being the first to press themselves upon us, cannot be ignored. The questions, "What shall I eat, what shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be clothed?" are radical and fundamental inquiries. Food and raiment are essential to life and health and comfort. We must have them. It is irrational and affected to despise them. But what a degree of wearing anxiety and overstrained solicitude presses upon many hearts, because they forget the promises of God. How many professed Christians are the victims of constant apprehension and unhappiness, for fear that they shall not be provided for in respect to their bodily wants and those of their children. Were there no promises of food and raiment, no assurance that He who feeds the young ra-

vens when they cry, and clothes the lily of the field, will not clothe His people and feed them with food convenient for them, there might be reason for anxiety and fear. But there are such promises, and their truthfulness is illustrated and confirmed by the daily experience of God's people. "I have been young, and now I am old," said the Psalmist, "yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging bread."

2. The same is true of the wants of the soul. None of the declarations of God's word are more absolute and unequivocal than those which offer pardon, justification and free salvation to all that believe. It would be impossible to quote them in detail. The Bible is full of them. When we have heard one, such as "He that believeth shall be saved," or, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool;" or,

“Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;” or, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely,” we have heard the spirit of them all. These promises of pardon and salvation to the very chief of sinners, on the simple condition of faith, are absolute and unequivocal; and there is not a man in the world who may not appropriate them to his own case, if he will, and rejoice in the hope which they reasonably inspire in every believing soul.

So that a Christian, with these “exceeding great and precious promises” of God, need have no anxiety for body or soul, for the bread that perisheth, or for that which satisfies unto life eternal, if he will only believe the word of the Great Promiser. There are promises of temporal blessings of every variety to the Christian—food and raiment; protection against all forms of temporal affliction; deliverance from enemies; support under trou-

bles ; the healing of diseases ; length of life, and everything which is generally esteemed a temporal blessing. It may be asked if we are to understand these in an absolute and unqualified sense, and if so, whether this is not inconsistent with the experience of God's people who are often in trouble in this life. We answer that these promises of earthly good are to be taken in a general sense, as indicative of God's love and goodness towards His people, but that their fulfillment in particular cases, is limited by His wisdom and judgment as to what is for the highest good of His believing people. It is the highest proof of our Heavenly Father's love to us, that He ministers to our necessities rather than to our desires ; and He alone is competent to judge what our necessities really are. In some cases, health, riches, reputation, triumphs, may be true blessings, and then we may expect that we shall receive them. In other

cases, the loss of these may be most for our good and for God's glory, and then He will take them away. We may, therefore, desire and seek after them on the ground of the promises, but always in a spirit of faith in God's higher wisdom, and of submission to His most righteous will. He has promised these temporal blessings, and He always will bestow them in every instance where they, under the circumstances of each case, will really prove to be blessings. And, therefore, God cannot be chargeable with insincerity or unfaithfulness to His promises, in those cases where any of His people fail to receive these coveted gifts. While He promises freely and sincerely to bestow them, He reserves to Himself the right to judge in what particular cases it is best for him to bestow them, and in what cases it is best for Him to withhold or take them away. This consideration, with all candid Christian thinkers, will not derogate from the

preciousness of the promises, nor weaken their trust in God's faithfulness. Temporal good may, or may not, be a source of the best well-being. Sometimes it may be a blessing, sometimes a curse. God only knows when it will be one or the other. And our wisdom and happiness are always found in our willingness to leave the application of his many promises of temporal good in individual cases, to His infinite wisdom and His faithful and discriminating love. And thus there is one promise which we may believe will *always* be fulfilled: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, *because he trusteth in thee.*"

When we turn to the spiritual promises, we find here also a great variety adapted to the varied wants of the soul. There are promises of a general nature; such as promises of pardon, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance in holiness, growth in grace,

strength for labor, patience for suffering, victory over death, and final glory.

Then there are promises of particular and special graces—such as the grace of faith, repentance, love, and meekness ; promises of knowledge, wisdom, zeal, and courage ; promises of God's care, guidance, support, and constant presence. There are promises which refer especially to Christ—such as the promise of His individual love for His people ; of His calling them by name ; of His intercession for them ; His joy in them ; His gift of abiding peace to them ; His washing away of their sins in His blood ; His vanquishing all their enemies, and His abiding with them forever.

Then there are promises which relate to the Holy Spirit—promises of His teaching, guiding, healing, comforting, and preserving believers to the end. There are the promises of the ministry of angels in their behalf, of their

presence in critical moments and in great exigencies. And there are promises of future glory and blessedness, which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and have not entered into the heart of man, of things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

There are also promises addressed to the Christian in youth and in age ; in prosperity and adversity ; in health and in sickness ; in life and in death. There are blessings of the family and the fireside ; of the sanctuary and the sacramental table ; of the going out and the coming in ; of the day and the night ; of the sea and the land ; of the birth and the bridal ; of the cradle and the coffin.

There are promises to fathers and to mothers ; to children and children's children ; to the widow and the orphan ; to the bond and the free ; to the pastor and the flock ; to the teacher and the taught ; to the ruler and the ruled. There are splendid promises to the

Church — the Holy Catholic Church — which embrace all time, and the whole world, in the sphere of their fulfillment.

In respect to these exceeding great and precious promises of spiritual blessings, it may be said that they are all absolute and sincere and faithful, and will certainly be fulfilled in the experience of all the true people of God, in connection with, and in proportion to, the measure of *faith* with which they receive and rest upon them.

This answers the question, Who may claim these exceeding great and precious promises? All need them. No man's path in life runs in such a favored course, that he will not need these promises at every step. No man deserves them. The highest goodness of which the soul is capable, does not merit what is implied in the wonderful promises of God. Every man can have them who believes them, and honestly seeks the aid and comfort which

they give. And it is worthy of notice that these promises are adapted to foster and enlarge that very faith, which is essential to our personal share in the gifts which they bestow.

There are promises to men of weak faith; to child believers; to those who dare hardly to hope that they may claim them. The beginner in the divine life finds promises addressed to him in his weakness. Let him grasp them, though with a child's timid and trembling hand. They will be fulfilled in his increasing strength and courage, so that he can ask for more, and receive more, until he attains to such a stature and growth in Christ Jesus, that he can reach the loftiest and greatest of these exceeding great and precious promises of God.

Now, all these promises are intended to be the Christian's daily food. A general belief in them is not enough; they must enter into our daily thoughts; they must be stored up

in our memories; they must be always at hand, so that when we need them most, they may at once supply that need. They ought to be "bound upon our fingers, and written on the tablets of our hearts." They ought to be our staff by day, and we should pillow our heads upon them by night. We should habituate ourselves to notice their fulfillment in our own experience, and in the history of our fellow-Christians, and thus strengthen our faith in them more and more. We should make them the foundation of our earnestness in prayer, and our inspiration to diligence in Christian labor and activity. We should learn to expect their fulfillment, and not to distrust them. In this way our own experience of their faithfulness will be greatly enlarged, and our own efficiency in the Lord's work be greatly promoted.

Take these promises, dear Christian readers, and make more of them than you have

ever done. Here is a mine of inexhaustible wealth. Yours, perhaps, has been thus far, only surface-mining. Dig deep, and you will find precious ore. Who need ever despair of any real blessing for the body or the soul, who exercises a firm faith in the promises? Who is so great a sinner that they will not reach his case? Who is so unworthy that they do not apply to Him? Oh, these "exceeding great and precious promises!" They are uttered by God. They are secured by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are sealed to us by the Holy Spirit. They are yea and amen, to all that believe. Believe in them, dear readers. Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. No matter how great your need may be. Whatever is essential to your welfare and happiness is embraced in the promises, from a cup of cold water, to a full draught from the River of Life.

PRECIOUS STONES.

“And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones.”—Rev. 21 : 19.

CHAPTER X.

PRECIOUS STONES.

THE description of the glorified church, under the figure of a splendid and beautiful city, which is contained in this chapter, is familiar to all readers of the Bible. There is a gorgeous and glorious materialism about it which cannot fail to be impressive and significant. It is built of the costliest materials, and adorned with the most precious gems. Its gates are of single pearls, its walls are of jasper, its streets of shining gold; in fact, the entire city seems, in the vision, to be a conglomeration of the richest and most splendid gems, of every variety, united in a symmetrical and majestic whole. It is a wonder-

ful description—a picture gleaming with heavenly light, and arrayed in celestial beauty. We do not, indeed, understand it in a literal sense; but God has given us, in the most precious, natural objects, the means of comprehending, in some degree, the force of the metaphor and the significance of the image. We cannot fail to see that the Holy Ghost means to teach us, that what a great city built of gold and gems, would be in imperial splendor, such the redeemed Church of God will be in the day of her final glory.

The Church of God is built of living Christians. They are the lively stones of the great spiritual temple. Thus St. Paul, writing to the Christians at Ephesus (2:21-23), says: "Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye, also,

are builded together, for an habitation of God, through the Spirit." And, again, the Apostle Peter uses the same figure (1st Peter, 2 : 4, 5): "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed, indeed, of men, but chosen of God, and precious; ye, also, as lively stones, are built up, a spiritual house." And when St. John, in his wonderful vision, shows us this grand and beautiful city, and tells us that it is built of gems, and that the foundation of the wall of it is garnished with all manner of "precious stones," we cannot but think that we have here the completed, spiritual temple of the Lord, to which the apostles referred, and which is composed of materials, chosen and fashioned, and set by the hand of the Divine Architect Himself, of which nothing in nature can be an expressive image but her richest and loveliest gems, even redeemed souls, purchased by the blood of Christ, sanctified by His Word and Spirit, and formed

into a splendid edifice, which, from its corner to its cope-stone, is to be radiant with the light of God, and stand forever as the imperishable monument of His glory !

And this view is strengthened when we remember that God Himself speaks of His own people as precious gems. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up *my jewels*." These precious gems, therefore, of which "Jerusalem, the golden," is built, and twelve varieties of which are expressly mentioned as entering into its structure, are the saints of God, the chosen material of the holy city, the lively stones of which compose the spiritual and everlasting temple of the Most High ?

It is quite worthy of notice, that, while it is a common thing for men to speak sneeringly and depreciatingly even of true Christians, God always speaks of them in the most honorable and exalted terms. The whole domain

of Nature is ransacked to find the most beautiful, useful, and valuable things with which to represent them. The stateliest trees of the forest, the most valuable and fruitful of the productions of the soil, the rarest and costliest gems, the finest gold, are all used as illustrative of the Christian. And, as if this planet was not rich enough to furnish adequate imagery, the inspired writers soar into the firmament above, and describe a faithful Christian as one who shines "like the stars forever and ever."

The analogy thus presented, affords an interesting theme for meditation. It may give us higher ideas of the Christian calling and destiny, and stimulate us to greater diligence and fidelity in that calling and for that destiny.

Christians, then, as the stones, to be built up into the splendid structure of the New Jerusalem, are precious to God. They are

precious to Him, *as being the subjects of the everlasting purpose and the eternal covenant of redemption.*

Suppose a venerable, powerful, and illustrious king should summon to his presence one of his subjects, born in obscurity, and in no way likely to attract or deserve the special notice of the monarch, and should say to him : “ From your very birth, and before your birth, I determined to make you the object of my special favor ; I determined to raise you to the dignity of a prince of the empire ; I determined to surround you, at any and every cost, with every influence that might train and educate you for that distinguished position ; I determined to put every possible agency into operation that seemed likely to fit you to adorn my court and be a pillar in my kingdom ; and, at the cost of much pains and treasure, I have pursued this purpose steadily through all the

years of your life, until I am ready to carry it out, and place you permanently in the loftiest place which a subject can occupy in my kingdom." Would not the inference be irresistible that the monarch felt the deepest interest in this individual, that he was precious to him, that he was like a gem in his estimation? What a profound impression would such a communication make on a truly manly and generous mind? How it would stimulate him to justify his monarch's choice and purpose, and by the cultivation of himself in every particular element of a noble and useful character, show himself worthy of his high vocation?

This is a very feeble and inadequate illustration of my point. Far more than this is true of every believer. From the depths of eternity itself the Divine purpose took hold of him and destined him for the station of a prince in the eternal kingdom of God. This

grand truth is taught us in very many precious passages in the Word of God. St. Paul, writing to the Ephesians (1 : 3-6), says: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as He hath chosen us in Him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him; in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, whereby He hath made us acceptable in the Beloved." What a grand truth this is! and it is repeated, again and again, in the apostolic writings. What estimation must the Infinite God have put upon man, that he formed an eternal purpose to make him a jewel in His Crown, and a living stone in His everlasting temple! Connect with this

all that was involved in the carrying out of this purpose—even the whole history of redemption, the incarnation, the suffering life, the perfect obedience, the bitter, shameful death of God's own Son, the gift of the Holy Spirit to sanctify and seal the believer, to train and educate him, by all the combined and varied influences of Providence and Grace, for his high position and splendid destiny—and does it not show that the Christian is like a precious stone in God's sight—one that He loves to set in His Crown; one that He glories to place in His eternal temple?

How precious, too, to Jesus Christ, is the Christian. For his redemption the Eternal Son entered gladly into the councils of the Everlasting Father, and fulfilled His part in the scheme of a covenanted redemption. To seek out these chosen gems of God's treasury, He came to this world, and entered upon

that mission which was to bear Him through scenes of darkness and of blood. Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Calvary, ye can tell how precious were the souls of men in the sight of the God incarnate! In the humiliation, the agony, the blood, which shall be forever associated with your names, the universe shall learn how precious in the sight of God the Son were those who, through these mighty processes, were to be prepared to make up the eternal and glorious structure of God's Church.

Precious to the angels, too, who sung the birth-song of the infant Saviour over Judea's plains, who strengthened the tempted Man in the wilderness, who ministered to the agonized suppliant in the garden, who watched by the tomb of the Crucified, and published the grand fact of the resurrection to the desolate disciples, and who rejoice with angelic joy over one sinner that repenteth, as over a pre-

cious stone for the temple of Christ's everlasting glory; precious to angels is every Christian, who, chosen in the eternal purpose of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, guided and guarded, trained and polished by the providence and grace of God, is at last built into the holy and beautiful temple of God, a living stone, reflecting the glory of the Great Master-Builder in unfading and eternal brightness! Now, it is these precious stones, these Christians, in whom God, and Christ, and the Holy Ghost, and all good angels, take such a deep and tender interest, who are all to be built up into this beautiful city and this eternal temple of God. They are all gems—all precious stones—all of great value to the Builder of the temple.

But the vision of St. John teaches us that there is a great variety among these stones. He says: "The foundation of the wall of the

city was garnished with all manner of precious stones." Twelve different varieties are named, embracing gems of different color and quality (all costly and valuable), yet each with its individual and distinctive value. God, who has created the diamond and the ruby, the pearl and the emerald, and the other different gems, and blended all their varied loveliness in the one kingdom of nature, does the same thing in His kingdom of grace. The stones that are to be built up into His everlasting temple are of a varied character. Some sparkle with the brilliancy of the diamond, others shed the softer radiance of the pearl; one reflects the lustre of the emerald, another deepens to the glow of the ruby. There is a training for each, adapted to its character, and a place for each, according to its fitness. No man, therefore, need despair of finding a place for himself in the temple; no man can disparage his fellow-Christian, for

each is shaped and polished for his own place. In the Church, there are different members, and all have not the same office. "Some are there to teach; some to counsel and administer; some to care for the young; some to visit the sick and the sorrowful; some to attend to the temporalities of the Church; some to be liberal givers, and some without any formal mode of action, come under this description, which applies to all, 'sons of God, without rebuke, shining as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.' It is very beautiful to see how God, who has bound His world into a grand harmony, by its very diversity, has arranged for this same end in His Church by giving the members their different faculties of work—how the pure light, which comes from the sun, breaks into its separate hues when it touches the palace-house of Christ, with its varied cornices and turrets, till every color lies in tran-

quail beauty beside its fellow."* So every member may feel that there is a place for him in the Church, which he can fill better than another ; and that, by thus calling His people from all ranks, and with all varieties of endowment, He has secured that the wall of His spiritual temple shall be garnished with all manner of precious stones.

This throws light upon much, in God's providential dealings with His people here, that is mysterious and trying. As God knows exactly for what place in His temple each of His people are best adapted, so He knows what is the best training for each. With wise and kind discrimination He arranges the course of His providence, so that each of His gems shall have just the cutting and polishing that is needed to give to each his highest brilliance. There is a difference between the diamond and the pearl, between the emerald and

* Rev. John Ker.

the opal. Each must be treated according to its hardness, and must receive the peculiar friction which its nature and purpose requires. Therefore the skillful lapidary varies his process in each case, until all are brought to their finest finish, and are ready for their respective places and uses. So God wisely treats the precious stones which are to garnish the walls of His eternal and glorious city. The diamond must be so cut and polished that it shall sparkle with its own wonderful fire; the pearl must receive the treatment required to bring out its gentler and softer beauty. You may wonder why the providence of God is so peculiar in your case; you may complain that you are treated so differently from others; you may chafe under the pressure that is brought to bear upon you, and ask, Why am I thus made to suffer? It is all right. You are not in the hands of an ignorant or unskillful workman; you are

in the hands of One who knows perfectly well your capacities, and the exact place for which you are fitted, and what is the precise training and discipline which you need to give you your finest lustre and your highest value. If you are a father of several children, and are a wise father, you study the temperament and capacity of each one of your children; you endeavor to ascertain for what line in life each is best fitted, by natural genius or taste, and you vary your mode of education and discipline according to the peculiarities of each child. This one needs restraint, that one needs encouragement; one needs to be held with a firm hand, another may be guided by a finger. It is just so in God's redeemed family. All His people are His dear children; but there is a great variety of temperament and character among them. Each has a place to fill for himself; a place which he can fill well, and the wise and lov-

ing God means to fit him for that place, and His skillful hand will adapt the training of life to that end ; so that, when each precious gem shall finally be set in its own place in the wall of the golden city, each will be seen shining with its own peculiar lustre, and “the foundation of the wall of the city will be garnished with all manner of precious stones.”

I remark, again, that the fact that God has designed each one of His people for his own place in His beautiful city, invests each individual Christian with peculiar responsibility. In this world, honor and responsibility are generally connected. Distinguished position always involves special duties and obligations, and it is a very painful and humiliating thing for a man to be placed in a position to which he is not equal. The Christian, then, should endeavor to ascertain what sphere God intends that he should fill in His Church, and then spare no pains to qualify himself for it.

This is precisely what St. Paul determined to do. He says, "Not that I have already attained, neither am I already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus;" that is, "I mean to make it my great business to know and strive to attain to that precise end, which the Lord Jesus had in view when He apprehended me by His grace, and brought me into His kingdom." This is the duty of every Christian. He is to search carefully for the place and the work for which he may be best fitted. And he can find it, if he be honest and earnest in his search. There is scarcely an individual to whom God has not given some special faculty or opportunity for usefulness in His service—some place which he can fill and adorn. And we ought to try to discover what our best capacities and opportunities are. And we can be helped to do this by a study of ourselves and our posi-

tion, and by the judgment and counsel of our fellow-Christians. We may sometimes have a morbid sense of our unfitness for certain kinds of labor and responsibility to which we nevertheless seem to be imperatively called by the Providence of God and by the voice of the Church. In such cases, a humble, honest desire and determination to go forward and try to do our duty, will soon give us all the fitness which the position or work requires. But if we hold back from labor and responsibility, veiling indolence or cowardice under the mask of humility, we are defeating God's methods, not only of training us for usefulness here, but of preparing us for a bright and honorable place in His Kingdom in glory.

In the day and place in which we live, no Christian, who is honest with himself, can be long in doubt as to the sphere in which he can work for God and for the world. The

paths for Christian work run, from your very doors, in all directions. Never was there a time when Christian agencies and activities were so multiplied and diversified. A field is open for effort in this city alone, which would afford full scope to the powers and affections of legions of angels. A dense mass of ignorance needs to be enlightened; the crushing burdens of poverty call for relief; the sick, the aged, the widow and the orphan, demand your sympathy and aid; every variety of benevolent and philanthropic movement invites your co-operation; the Augean stable of public corruption requires a Christian Hercules to cleanse it and save the city from hopeless ruin. This vast country, growing every day more vast and powerful for good or evil, presents its claims for all those agencies which can exalt or embellish national character and life; and the world is everywhere open to Christian effort, and is sending

the Macedonian cry, in every dialect, from continents and islands, "Come over and help us!" Where is the Christian who cannot find something to do for the honor of Christ and the good of his fellow-men? He who is willing to work or to give, need not pause for a field or an object. If he will only study his own capacities and appointments as truly and carefully in reference to Christian usefulness as he does in reference to the business of life; if he will only go to his Lord and Saviour and ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" he will soon find out what he can do, where he can work, and how he can make the most of himself and his opportunities for the glory of God and the good of the world!

The practical teaching, then, which we draw from this beautiful description of "Jerusalem the golden," and the precious stones with which its walls are garnished, is, that every true Christian is one of God's gems,

intended for a place in this glorified Church—this everlasting spiritual temple of God—represented by this splendid city. That every Christian has some capacity to shine in that building; that the object of the varied discipline of life is to fit each for his place, and enable him to fill and adorn it; that life is full of opportunities for every one to do something for his own spiritual training, and for God's glory, which will tell upon the future; and that every one ought to feel the power of these considerations to stimulate and inspire him to increased diligence and fidelity in doing all that his hand finds to do, with his might. It is a very noble destiny which St John reveals here to the Christian, and it appeals very strongly to a sanctified ambition. My friends, have any of us, as yet, made the most of ourselves as Christians? If we be, indeed, among God's precious stones, have we received as much polish as we might? do we

shine as brightly as we should? and, if transferred now to the eternal temple, would we have a very distinguished place in the New Jerusalem? As we look back over our Christian lives, can we not, must we not see that we have not made as much progress as we might have done in character and in work. Perhaps we can remember the time when we had more true, warm, Christian feeling, and were more active and useful in God's service. But, however that may be, we have yet opportunity to reach a higher point of consecration, and prepare for a higher place in God's eternal temple. Let us improve what time is left us, as we shall wish we had when we come to its close. And when we meet our Lord at last, may we be taken and set as bright gems in the beautiful city, the "foundation of the wall of which shall be garnished with all manner of precious stones!"

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