

SERMONS FOR CHILDREN



MARK GUY PEARSE

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Harvey J. Blaney,
May 1935

TO

The Boys and Maidens

OF THE

MILDMAY PARK CHAPEL :

TO WHOM THESE SERMONS WERE PREACHED,

I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME,

WITH EVERY GOOD WISH FOR BOTH WORLDS.

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P R E F A C E .



THESE Sermons were preached to the children of the congregation in the ordinary course of the ministry. Once a month the week evening service was given up to them. Not the sermon only but the whole service. Their hymns were used ; the prayer was very brief and simple, and the lessons were expounded so as to interest and instruct them.

There was no difficulty in making the first service a success. An announcement from the pulpit on the previous Lord's Day secured the services of the best advertisers in the world—for in this matter none can compete with the children. They told their schoolfellows and friends, and henceforth it became an easy thing to get some hundreds of children at the monthly service.

Nor did the interest end here. It broke up the monotony of the week evening services. The grown folks liked it, some of whom were not "great scholars"—for in these very learned times it has almost the charm of novelty to hear a sermon that

is easy to be understood. Parents too came with their children, and thus in many instances began a regular attendance at the House of God.

By no means least is the benefit that the preacher himself derived from such services. To try and come down to the level of the little ones, to be gladdened by the sight of so many bright and interested faces, to become a child again in sympathy and thought, and to have the children's love so generously given in return—not many things will check so effectually as this all tendencies to *dry-rot* in the pulpit. And other services will come to share in the simplicity and tenderness of these.

In not a few instances these sermons have been blest to the salvation of the children. All the sermons are aimed at this, and without this they will be the worst of failures. Children can no more be saved by moral essays, than adults. They have sinned, and good works will no more avail for them than for others. It is bad enough to let our neighbour starve for lack of good food; but what if when our children ask for bread we give them a stone? They can come to the Father only by the precious blood of Jesus. It surely is an insult to the blessed Redeemer to talk as if He Who bade them come to Him were unable to save them until they are grown up. That religion cannot be so greatly beyond them, of which its Author said—“*Verily I*

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*say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."*

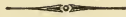
It is hoped that the publication of these sermons may tend to a further good. Sunday evenings at home with the little ones could scarcely be more profitably employed than in having such a children's service. Observing the order of a service, let there be plenty of singing, a simple prayer, a chapter read verse by verse all round, and then the children's sermon. So may be created the deepest and most hallowed impressions of the whole life; influences that may lead, by God's blessing, to an early decision for Christ; or else a "portion of goods" that cannot be lost in any far country; memories that shall wake up from their long sleep, and lead the wanderer back home to the Father's House.

Dear Reader, if the children need to be saved—and they surely do; and if they can be saved, and, thank God, they can,—shall we be satisfied with anything less? Is it not our bounden duty to seek their salvation? The minister, the teacher in the Sunday-school, and the parent in the home, are to work with this definite purpose. Let us tell the little ones not only of Jesus, but of Jesus as their Saviour, to be loved and trusted *now*. And let us fall at His feet beseeching Him with an entreaty that cannot be refused,—"*Come and lay Thine hand upon them and they shall-live.*"



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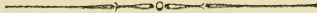
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SERMONS FOR CHILDREN.





I.

THE VALLEY OF DECISION.

*"The day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."*  
JOEL III. 14.



HERE is some difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of these words. But whilst learned Doctors differ, we can take the words as they stand, and find in them some lessons that will do us all good.

I want to talk about "THE VALLEY OF DECISION."

I remember how this text struck me when I was a little lad. Children have a strange way of mixing up things, and I came to think of these words as in some way connected with a place to which I should like to take you all, near to my native town, in the far west of this country. Away out on those wild cliffs, with the fierce Atlantic rolling in upon them, there is a valley which came to be in my mind a sort of "Valley of Decision." You left the little town and turned through some fields; then came out again upon the road and under some pleasant trees; again through fields and lanes, over marshy places, and past a muddy red river flowing from the mines and rolling down to the sea; then by a mill with its dripping wheel covered with bright green moss, and the wet wall green with ferns. You had to climb a steep hill, and at the top of it stepped upon the moorland, golden with the scented furze, purple with heather, and green and brown with the hardy bracken. Away over that still moor, far from the haunts of men—where you might go for days together and scarcely see anyone but the shepherd and his dog—you would, if you knew just the right place, go down a little path by a shining stream, and it would lead you into one of the most lovely valleys you ever saw. The steep sides of furze and heather rise high up and shut it in completely. It opens towards the sea, and far off you catch sight of the blue ocean which stretches away, away for thousands of miles, and you hear the surge and roar of its breakers rolling in on the calmest summer-day.

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Right in the middle of the valley runs the little brook, hurrying on until it shall leap off the cliff a clear hundred feet, and be lost in the waters of the great sea below. Here let us sit for awhile, and let this be our valley of decision. The deep blue sky is above us, now and then the kite is poising himself on a trembling wing far over our heads; or the gull goes sailing along without a beat of his white wings; or the raven's hoarse croak comes from the cliff.

This valley of decision is A PLACE FOR SOBER THOUGHT.

Look at the little stream hurrying on between the banks. Here, almost hidden under the thick growth of forget-me-nots and long grass; here, spreading out into a broad pool, catching the light of the sun and reflecting the flowers on its banks; there, narrowed into a swift river under dark bushes; but always and everywhere hastening away to the great sea. *Is not that just like our life?* It is hurrying away, always and everywhere. Laughing with pleasures, idle and happy, troubled and murmuring, life is always hurrying on. Friendships and joys cannot keep it, any more than the flowers can keep the brook. And, like it, we are going away to that great sea, Eternity. Day and night, awake and asleep, working and resting, life is hurrying on to that great sea. How are we going? Sometimes when winter torrents have swollen the stream, I have seen it go leaping over the cliffs, a black flood, dashed upon the rocks below, and lost in the angry waves. But in the

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summer time I have seen the little silver thread of water caught by the summer breeze, and turned into a shower of spray, about which rainbows played as the sun shot through the glistening drops, and it seemed to die in light all crowned with radiant beauty. Where is our life going? Dark, troubled, sullen, in the chill winter of the soul, going away to be lost in those dark depths? Or, is it lit up with Heaven's sunshine and joy, going only to be borne upward, gently home, covered with light and rainbow hues? Let us press these things upon our minds. The valley of decision is *a place of sober thought.*

Then again, sitting here in this pleasant valley, I am reminded that the valley of decision is A PLACE OF SOLEMN WARNING.

Just under this little valley a merry party had come one day for a picnic. One of the company, a strong young man and a capital swimmer, had slipped away to bathe. Suddenly, as the others sat singing on the rocks or were strolling on the sands, one sprang up and pointed to their friend as he was being borne away by the current. He was drowning. There was no boat near, and none could help him, and there his friends, in an agony of grief, watched him sink down under the waves, and he was seen no more. It is a place of solemn warning.

Another day I had been under the cliffs, and was returning with my friend, when we met a little bright-faced lad running down the steep side. When we had reached the top, we saw him, a speck



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far away down under us, sporting along the foaming edge of the waves. Scarcely had we turned our faces from him before a huge wave swept in, and he was borne away, struggling in vain, with none to hear his cries—just swept away and drowned. That valley came to be a *place of solemn warning*.

What is death, but the sweeping in of the waves of eternity, bearing away one and another? Day after day, hour after hour, those about us are being swept away. Where are we? What hope have we? We too must die. Many younger than we are have died; many as young are dying every day. Death may just as likely sweep around us and bear us out to be seen no more—beyond all help. Think of these things deeply and seriously. The “valley of decision” is a *place of solemn warning*.

The place further suggested OUR DANGER AND OUR DELIVERANCE.

This little valley stood at the head of a deep gulf shut in on three sides by the cliff, and we could look over the sloping shoulder of a headland and see beyond it a steep precipitous cliff, in which was a huge cave, running up three-fourths as high as the cliff itself—a huge, black, rounded cavern, that went by the name of Ralph’s Cupboard. Never accessible from the land, it was scarcely ever to be entered from the sea. At low water the sharp rocks rose up and blocked its entrance, and when the tide came in, the wild waves swept about it so as to threaten destruction to any that should attempt to enter it.

Its name came from the romantic escape of a

bold smuggler. He was known to the coastguard men, and they had tried again and again to take him; but he was loved and admired amongst the people, and they were always ready to afford him shelter and to mislead the officers. One wild night, however, the coastguard came upon him, and surrounded him. He sprang into his boat, and pulled hard over the wild waves. But the men gained on him. Hard pressed, there seemed but one escape. There, in front of him, the great foaming waves were thundering into this cave, dashed against its sides into a shower of spray. Turning his boat towards it, he waited a moment until he could catch the swelling wave, and then, as the coastguards watched him in horror, they saw him swept into what seemed to be the great black jaws of destruction. But his confidence and courage were his safety. With a cool head and a strong hand, keeping his boat in the very middle of the cave, the wave swept him right away to its very end, and left him on the little bit of shingle beach that the tides had thrown up there.

Now, like him, we have broken the laws: we are condemned. We have sinned, and the law saith, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The "terror of the Lord" is upon us, at our heels, following us like our very shadow. The moments are hastening upon us, bearing the evils that must come. We must perish, unless we can find some way of escape. No skill, or cleverness, or courage of ours can save us. It is folly to go on hoping and desiring, unless we can find a place of refuge. See, here it is: "A

MAN *shall be as an hiding-place.*" Our only safety is in Him ; our only hope of escape is there. Boldly, fearlessly, let us cast ourselves upon Jesus. In Him are safety and blessedness. The Avenger cannot touch us there, for Jesus hath satisfied the law ; He hath redeemed us from its curse. O, look to Him, and now resolutely, boldly cast yourself upon Him !

“Jesu, Lover of my soul,
 Let me to Thy bosom fly,
 While the nearer waters roll,
 While the tempest still is high :
 Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
 Till the storm of life be past ;
 Safe into the haven guide,
 O receive my soul at last !”

Such is the valley—a place of *sober thought* ; a place of *solemn warning* ; a place that reminds us of *our danger and our deliverance*.

Yet all this will not make it *the valley of decision*.

There may be the sober and solemn thought, and the view of Jesus Christ as our Saviour ; yet it needs one thing more. In such a valley it may have been that the poor prodigal had led the swine, near to such a steep place beside the sea. He had much sober thought. Hunger and want and friendlessness make a man think. He thought about his folly and about his happy home and his father's love to him, and that away there the hired servants had enough and to spare. Yet here in his rags he sits, with his white face hidden in those wasted hands, thinking within himself. But now see ! he

suddenly springs to his feet; he grasps the staff desperately; barefooted, ragged, perishing with want, yet saith he, "*I will arise and go to my father.*" Then it is "the valley of decision." As he goes away along the path and over the hill, he has made it "the valley of decision."

So people live for years in this valley of sober thought and of solemn warning, but they don't make it the *valley of decision*. You, perhaps, have thought of God reverently; you have said your prayers day and night; you have listened reverently, to the Word preached, and yet you have never made up your mind to love Jesus and to serve Him. Though you may have said, "I will arise and go to Him," yet you have never got up and come. You have never flung yourself down before Him, crying, "Lord, have mercy upon me! I want to be Thine. Take me; make me as one of Thy hired servants." You have never made it the valley of decision. Come, let us say it now—"I will; by God's help, I will." We must make up our minds to do it. Men make up their minds about everything else, and do it; but about this, men go hoping and desiring and thinking, but never deciding—about this, the most important of all. Be undecided about everything else, if you like, but get this settled. It is a strange thing that people never have so many excuses in anything as in religion. We are very much like the blind man in Cornwall that Mr. Thomas Collins met with one day.

"Well, friend," said he, "do you go to any place of worship?"

"No, Sir," said the blind man, "I haven't got a

coat fit to go in. Can't go to chapel, Sir, in this, and it's the only one I've got."

"Ah! replied Mr. Collins, "that's it, is it? Do you go to market?"

"O, yes, Sir, I pick up a'most the week's living there."

"Just so; you go to market. And do you go to fair?"

"Yes, Sir, I always go to fair."

"Come, let us kneel down and have a word of prayer." And the blind man knelt. "O Lord!" said Mr. Collins, "look upon this poor blind man. He has got clothes good enough to go to market; and he's got clothes good enough to go to fair. He can go everywhere, O Lord! but to Thy house, and do anything but what Thou dost tell him."

"Stop, stop, Sir," cried the blind man, "please don't go on, Sir; I'll go, I'll go, if ever I live to see another Sunday."

Now might we not pray about very many like that?—"O Lord, look upon that lad! He has been making up his mind about what he'll do, and he has decided and goes to the shop, or the office, or the workshop; he has decided about a hundred other things. He can make up his mind about everything except for Thee, O Lord, and for what Thou dost tell him." This, of all things the most important, of all things the most awful and weighty,—surely, like the blind man, we need only hear this indecision spoken of to feel its folly, and to resolve to amend. Let us say, "By the Lord's help, I will decide. I will make up my mind to be His."

Once this valley taught me *the folly of delay*. Two of us, merry, light-hearted school-boys, were down under the cliffs one day, clambering over the rocks and shouting in the caves. We came to the little bay of white, clean sand, shut in on either side by steep rocks, that stood out in the sea at mid-tide, and quite closed the bay. We knew the tide had turned, but there was plenty of time—plenty of time. We could have walked on over the sand whilst we were lying there; but the water came in further and further. Now it had touched the rocks; still we could have waded through it. But we were thinking of other things; there was plenty of time. Now the waves were breaking fierce and high. And we sprang up to find ourselves locked in by the tide. We knew that where we were standing would soon be under water. There was nothing for it but to climb the cliff above us. Steep with black overhanging rocks, there was just one place where a mass of rock had fallen, and had swept a smooth road to the very beach. And up that we had to climb. It was hard work, perhaps to us more hard than dangerous; but I shuddered more than once as the loosened stones slipped from under my feet and went rolling down to the sea below, knowing what I must expect if I happened to slip. How foolish it seemed now for me not to have got out when I could have done so, easily and comfortably. Every day's delay makes it more difficult for us to decide. We get into a way of putting off. "Not yet, not yet," until we can scarce say anything else. Come, dear young folks, let us say, "I will *now*, by

God's help." These delays are foolish and dangerous.

Then, lastly, the text tells us that *when we have made up our mind, the day of the Lord is near.*

When the prodigal said, "I will arise," and when he did arise and go, it was not long before his father saw him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. When we set about it in downright earnest, the day of the Lord is near. In the life of Billy Bray—which many of you, I think, have read—he tells us that he had gone sorrowing and sighing for some time, until he could bear it no longer; and one night he sprang out of bed, and fell on his knees, and cried out, "Lord, Lord, Thou hast said, 'Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened.' Lord, I ask now—give; I seek now—let me find; I knock now—open unto me. And that moment I found." When we have made up our mind, the day of the Lord is near. But perhaps some burdened soul says, "Well, I have sought earnestly; I have pleaded and cried to God, and no help or light has come." Well, perhaps you have been trusting in your earnestness. Your confidence has been in your tears. Your faith has been in the agony of your wrestling. Look to Christ. Come to Him, saying, "Lord, here I am, a poor needy, helpless sinner. I can't seek Thee as I want to do; let me sink into Thee! Here I lie, unable to do anything of myself. I will be Thine, and I must have Thee;" so sink down in helplessness upon Him.

The day of the Lord is near—the day of salvation.

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A day,—because it is *light*. The shadows shall flee away. The gloomy clouds of night shall be dispersed. The healing sun shall rise, and the night with all its perils and fear shall end. A day,—because it is *joyful*. The rosy dawn touches the eastern sky, and at once earth wakes up to music; the air is full of joyous sounds; the flowers open; the dew-drops sparkle in its light, and all is joy. Ah! the day of the Lord is near, when sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Then we shall obtain joy and gladness. The time of the singing of birds shall come for us. Joy cometh in the morning.

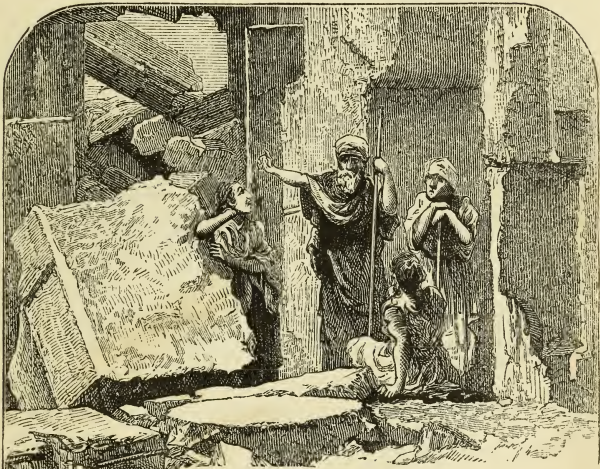
“The *day* of the Lord,” not the days. It shall never end; its joys need never fade; its light need never grow dim. Our Lord shall never fail us. His blood shall ever avail. His presence shall defend us, and on and on toward the perfect day, from grace to grace, from glory to glory. This day shall only die away into a more radiant light where “they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.”



## II.

### BOYS AND GIRLS PLAYING IN THE STREETS OF THE CITY.

*“And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.”—ZECHARIAH VIII. 5.*



ONCE upon a time there was a great city, one of the most beautiful that the world has ever seen. A high wall went around it, very broad and very strong; large gates protected it at night; and all day long the rocky ways that led to it were crowded with men of strange

dress and strange language, who had come to see its glory, and to bring costly presents to the king.

The great wonder in it was the Temple. It was built of monstrous blocks of marble, and was fragrant with cedar wood; it was paved with costly stones; it was made rich with gold and sparkling jewels, and was full of all kinds of exquisite work. Here, day and night, was the Presence of God, and here the priests ministered before His glorious Presence, and the people came to seek His blessing. Besides the temple, there was the palace where the king lived,—a place with its gardens of wonderful trees, its flowers and fountains, its apes and peacocks. The city was so rich that gold seemed to be everywhere. The king was so wise that kings and queens came a long way to hear his wisdom. And the people were so great and strong, that the nations about them were proud of their favour and very much afraid of their anger.

But the people of this city began to forget God. They did not honour Him or serve Him, but worshipped other gods and served them. Then God punished them. They fought amongst themselves. Other nations came up against them, took away their treasures, burnt their homes, and spoiled their beautiful city, and carried them away as slaves into another country. Then they began to think how foolish they had been, and of the happy days long ago. When they were really sorry, and meant to serve God again, He sent His prophets to them with good news. A few of them had come back to their city already, but they were very weak and had

no heart to do anything. So Zechariah came into their midst with the word of the Lord.

You can picture a fine old man, with a silver beard, wearing a simple dress woven of camel's hair. He stands amidst the broken pillars and the ruined arches. As the people gather about him, a little company of poor Jews, he speaks the word of the Lord. We will read together what he says (verses 3—5):—*“ Thus saith the Lord ; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem : and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth ; and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, the holy mountain. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts ; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.”*

So the prophet spoke of Jerusalem. But not only of Jerusalem. *God has a city still.* In it live all who love Him and serve Him. His people live in His city. All round them, too, there is a wall, very high, as high as heaven, and very strong,—they are walled about with God's love and care. In this city, too, they have the temple of His Presence ; they can always pray to Him and praise Him, and come to Him for help, and comfort, and joy. And in this city, also, there is the palace of the King,—One who is stronger than David and wiser than Solomon. He is their Ruler and Defender, and the people of His city always do His will and wait upon Him. And, like Jerusalem, it is a city of peace ; it is pleasant for situation, the joy of the whole earth.



There is a river flowing through it, bright and clear which makes it glad. The people of the city drink of the water, and it can cure all their sorrow, all their care, all their weakness, and all their fear. Now, it is of this city, too, that the prophet speaks here. "The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof."

So the *Heavenly Father* would have *His city full of boys and girls*.—Old men and old women shall be there, and strong, busy fathers and mothers. But not only these. The Lord would have boys and girls there, playing in the streets.

And first let us think *why God would have us in His City*.

God would have boys and girls in His city *because He loves them so much*.—Have you noticed that the Heavenly Father will never have the children shut out from anything that He has provided for the people? The Garden of Eden was, I think, the only place in the world where the Heavenly Father was, and grown-up people were, and there were no children. Perhaps if a little child had been there, Eve would have found something better to do than to listen to the devil that came tempting her to disobey the commandments of God. In all the feasts of the Jews, God commanded that the children should have their share. You remember that in the temple Jesus could come when He was a boy of twelve years of age, and sit down with as much right as anybody else. The priest's work was very solemn, and yet the little child Samuel could go up with aged Eli, and minister before the Lord. The



king's was a very high and important work, to reign over the people; yet little Josiah, only eight years old, might be anointed as king. When Jesus came down from Heaven as the WORD of God, to tell us of the Father's love, He said: "*Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven.*" For them there was a special tenderness; "He laid His hands upon them and blessed them." Now, dear boys and girls, this is how the heart of the Heavenly Father feels towards you to-day. He loves you all, and would have you all in His holy city. He does not forget any little one. He does not think that you are too young, or too ignorant, or too weak. He would have the old man and the old woman, so old that they stand tottering on their sticks with very age. He would have the busy men and women from the east and from the west. But He would have you too; the streets are to be "*full of boys and girls.*" It will not be right unless you are there. The Heavenly Father wants to hear your happy voices and glad singing; He wants to have your fresh young hearts. *And He wants you now.* To wait until you are men and women, would be for the streets of the city never to have any boys and girls in them. He would have you come in, and come in now.

Then I think the Heavenly Father would have the boys and girls in the city *because it is dangerous outside.*—There were wild beasts prowling about,—jackals and hyænas; and perhaps a fierce old lion came down from the hills to see what he could find.

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A Missionary was telling me the other day about a town near to where he lived in Africa; that one night the gates were shut and the watchman was keeping guard in the still darkness, when he heard something move about the gate and then try to climb the wall. He called to it, but after a minute's silence he heard it again. He threatened to shoot at it, but it did not answer. Then he thought it might be some man of the town trying to get in, and thinking to frighten him, he rushed to where the sound was and grasped the intruder in his arms. But he let go in a moment and fled, shrieking with a noise that woke up half the people in the place. Instead of a negro, his arms had clasped the cold, scaly back of a monstrous alligator. It is a dangerous thing to be outside the walls when such creatures are prowling about. Then there were robber bands, almost worse than the wild beasts, who came on the poor traveller and stripped him of all he had, and left him bleeding and half-dead, if they did not kill him at once; or else they carried him away as a slave. And so it is outside the city to-day. There is the old lion that goes about "seeking whom he may devour." And there are many robber bands that strip people of everything, and make slaves of them to hard masters, and even kill them. Sins like *Drunkenness* and *Vice* and *Dishonesty*, I mean. No wonder the Heavenly Father wants to have the boys and girls safe within His holy city.

The next thing for us to think of is this: *How may we get into it?*—I see the city, with its strong

grey walls and its great gateways. Its gates are shut to keep out all enemies, and the watchmen with spears keep guard above the battlements. The archers hold their bows ready for any foe. A long way off from the city there stands a man looking and longing to enter it. Why does he not come in? Ah, he has been an enemy of the King, a rebel against His laws, and if he were to come the watchman would signal his approach, and the ten archers would bend their bows and aim their arrows at him, and he would die. He could never get in there, at the gate of the Law. Ah, dear boys and girls, we have broken the law, we have rebelled against God,—the whole ten commandments condemn us. How can we ever enter the city? I don't wonder that the poor rebel weeps as he thinks of all the joy and blessedness within, and wishes that he could find a way to come back.

Then I see that they are making a new gate. Is it a private entrance for the King, and for the great and rich, and will they call it the *King's gate*? No, it is finished, and they have written over it the words: "*Him that cometh unto ME I will in no wise cast out.*" And at this gate I see no watchman with spear, and no archers with bow and arrow; but there is One with such tender love and compassion that none could ever shrink from Him. It is THE KING'S SON. And forth from this gate messengers are hurrying with tidings for all rebels and outlaws. A free pardon for all. The King's Son has borne their punishment. He has suffered in their stead that He might bring them all into the city of God.

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And now, whoever will, may come. O, let us enter, dear children! Let us come up to Jesus, and confess to Him our sins, and trust Him as our Saviour, and we shall enter through this gate into the city. No other gate will open for us, but He is able "to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him." Do not stay trying to make yourselves good enough to come in. We can never do that. Do not wait until your hearts feel very soft. Come to Jesus just as you are. Kneel down to Him and ask Him to help you. Ask Him to save you and to lead you into His city. Remember what is written over the gate, "*Him that cometh unto ME I will in no wise cast out.*"

And lastly, *think what the boys and girls are doing in God's city.*—They are playing in the streets of the city. That is, they are very happy. Boys and girls are happy sometimes when they work, and are happy sometimes when they learn, but they are always happy when they play. The moment they get unhappy they leave off playing. It means, then, that they are very happy.

They are happy because *their sins are forgiven, and they know that God loves them.*—There was a little boy once who lived away in Switzerland, amongst the mountains that are covered with snow all the year round. One day he quarrelled with his brothers and sisters and got very angry. He was in such a bad temper that even at bed-time he was sullen and when they told him how wrong it was, he did not seem to mind at all. But when he got into bed he was too unhappy to sleep. He turned from side

to side, feeling very miserable. At last he got out of bed, and kneeled down and said, "O God, I am very unhappy, I have done wrong in being so cross; I am very sorry. O God, forgive me and help me, for Jesus Christ's sake." Then he got into bed again, feeling so happy because, as he said, his heart was filled with sweet peace. Who do you think it was? The great and good John Fletcher, of Madeley, whose life you must all read when you are old enough. In the city of God the boys and girls are happy because they are forgiven.

Then they are happy *because of the wall that is about them.*—The wall of God's love and care. Have you ever heard of the old woman who always used to pray, "O God, be a wall about us"? It was in the dreadful days of Napoleon Buonaparte. He was driven back from Russia, and fierce Russian soldiers were following him. Everybody was greatly frightened, thinking that the soldiers would come upon them and take all that they had, and perhaps kill them. But when this old woman heard of it, she said, "O God, be a wall about us!" Her neighbours laughed, and even her little grandson said, "What does grandmother mean by talking about God being a wall about us." "Ah," said the old woman, "you will see, you will see; He can take care of us and be a wall about us." The soldiers had to march close by her house, but in the evening she prayed to God, and went to bed as usual. In the night the soldiers passed; but they did not see her dwelling. There came a very heavy fall of snow, and it drifted against the hedge of the cottage garden

so high that the soldiers could not see it, and all passed along without knowing that there was a house there. Thus God really built a wall about her. He sent down the light snow from heaven, and piled it up for her defence. So that the next morning she might have sung the ninety-first Psalm, "*Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most high, thy habitation [or city]; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.*"

And lastly, they are happy *because they can play in the city.*—If God had not told Zechariah to say this, I am afraid some people would have thought of something very different. They would have said, the boys and girls shall come up out of the lands where they have been slaves, and they shall come back to the Holy City; but when they get there they must be very quiet; they must be seen more than heard; they must always be going up to the Temple, and always be praying and singing hymns. But when God brought the boys and girls back to His city, the streets were to be full of them *playing in the streets thereof.* Because they were in the Holy City, they were not to try to be men and women; they were to be boys and girls still, full of life, and fond of playing, and loving to run and shout. Do not think that because you are children of the Heavenly Father, that tops, marbles, and kites are sinful for you. Do not think that it is a sin to run about and skip and jump. The Heavenly Father would have you in His city, and He would have you "playing in the streets" of it. Kind and



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loving and pure, because you are His. Always honest and always true, because you are His. Asking Him to help you because He is your Father; often asking yourself, what would Jesus have me to do? and trying with all your might to do it. Yet boys and girls still, with as much gladness in your hearts as they can hold, playing as well and as much as anybody else may play. But ever playing in the streets of His city with love, and truth, and purity, and courage.

*But remember,—if you put off coming to Jesus till you are men and women, you can never be boys and girls in His Holy City.*

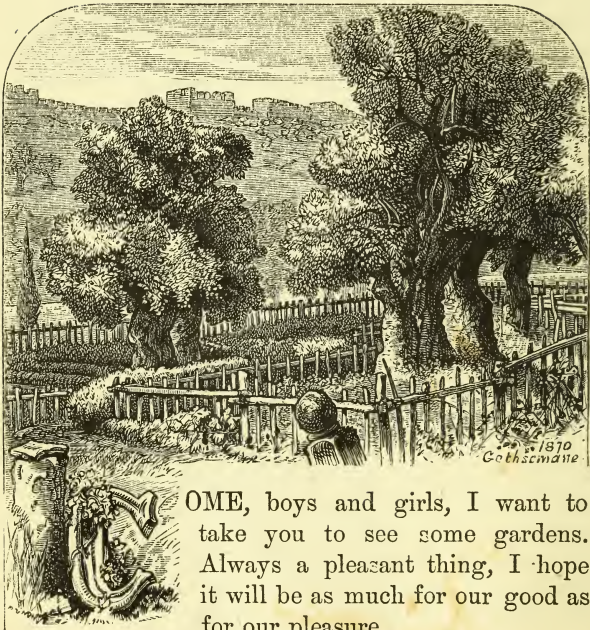




III.

KING'S GARDENS.

"*The King's Garden.*"—NEHEMIAH III. 15.



COME, boys and girls, I want to take you to see some gardens. Always a pleasant thing, I hope it will be as much for our good as for our pleasure.

Let us turn into the first garden that was ever made; the most wonderful and the most beautiful that the world has ever seen. God caused

to grow out of it every tree the fruit of which was most delicious, and every flower that was pleasant to look at: there were fine rivers flowing through it,—now rippling along as pleasant little brooks, by the rocks and the nodding ferns, or leaping down in foaming water-falls; then spreading out into glassy pools with flowers fringing the banks, and trees bending down their leafy branches till they almost touched their own reflections. All kinds of fowl were swimming in it and flying on it, that had never learned to be afraid; and on the banks were all kinds of wonderful creatures. This was the home of the first man, Adam. Here he lived with Eve his wife; here, amidst the sweet breath of flowers and with the golden fruits, where it was “an everlasting spring,” and all was young and light and glad, and always beautiful. I think you could guess why it was so beautiful: because God made it, and because there was no sin in it, but God’s blessing came on it like a constant sunshine and a gentle dew. You remember that when sin was brought in, it was all spoiled; and the man was driven out to eat the herb of the field, and thorns and thistles grew instead of flowers.

There is another garden that I would take you to see. We must come to it on a moonlight night, when dark shadows are all about the trees, and the silver light comes falling in here and there about the huge old trunks and twisted arms. Let us come softly and solemnly, for Jesus is here. He is praying: and as He prays, the sorrows that He bears for us, dear children, bow Him down in bitter an-

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guish, and in His grief and agony He sweats as it were great drops of blood. He sinks down under the curse of the world's sin. And so, as the first sin was in the garden of Eden, the burden and curse of our sin were borne by Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

There is yet another garden that we read of in the Bible, even more beautiful than Eden, more holy than Gethsemane. It is the garden of which St. John writes. A garden like Eden, for there is a pure river of the water of life, and in the midst of it and on either side of the river is the tree of life. And there the fruits last all the year round, twelve manner of fruits, and fruits every month. And like Gethsemane, Jesus shall be there, but not in agony or grief. "The Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." And unlike Eden and Gethsemane, you and I may enter that garden, for Jesus says, "to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

But there is another garden of which the Bible tells us a great deal more than of these. A garden that I want us to think about as *the King's garden*,—a garden with which we all of us have to do. Very often when I am going through a garden, I come to some little bit marked off from the rest by a stick or a row of stones, and some lad or some little maiden comes running up; "This is my garden," they say, "my very own, to do whatever I like with." Now each of us has a garden, our very

own, and yet it ought to be and must be the King's garden. You know what I mean,—it is the garden of the soul, the garden of the heart.

And first, I should like you to remember *that gardens are made out of waste places.*

You have been in a forest, and you know how the brambles cover it, and the great trees grow in it, and there are the thick ferns; and here in the pits are beds of nettles, and in the damp places and round the edges of the pools the rushes grow. It is all wild and waste. I don't say that there is nothing good in it, or beautiful,—there are primroses and violets, and wild fruits. But there is no garden; not much else but brambles, and weeds, and great trees. Now, every garden was like that at first; it was wild, and tangled, and bramble-grown. And so it is with the King's garden. We want our heart to be nice and kind, and like a king's garden ought to be; and we look at the brambles and the waste places, and fear sometimes that it never can be made into a garden. "I never shall be good," you say. "I never shall be like so and so." You think of your mother, or of some good man or woman, and then you look at yourself and think that it is no use for you to try. When I was a little boy I learnt drawing, and one day when I had tried again and again, and couldn't do it right, I flung down the pencil and said angrily, "I never shall be able to draw." The master was a very kind and a very wise man. He laughed pleasantly, and said, "Come, never is a long time. I couldn't draw any better than you can when I was your

age." That put new life into me. He who could draw anything with his pencil, and could make it exactly right with just a touch—to think that once he could not draw any better than I could! I went at it again then, and never felt inclined to give up afterwards. And so, dear children, with the best people that ever lived. St. John, and St. Paul, and all the good people you have ever heard of,—their hearts were wild and waste before they became the King's gardens. So we won't be giving up because we are not what we want to be. The King's garden was a waste at first.

Now perhaps the next thing you think of is that it must *be cleared*. But there is something before that. If you were to go away into the forest, and say, "Here is plenty of ground, I will make a garden;" and you begin to cut down and dig up. But very soon you would have somebody coming and asking what right you had to do that, and you would find that before you could make a garden you must claim the land. Before the king can make a garden he must own the land. Once there was a cruel king who wanted to make his garden larger, and he thought that he would buy a piece of land that belonged to a man in the city. But the man valued his land very much; it had belonged to the family for many years, and so he would neither sell it nor take another piece in exchange. The king was very angry, and the queen too when she heard of it; and she made up her mind that the king should have it. So she wrote a letter to the chief men in the city, telling

them to bring a charge against Naboth, and then to stone him to death. Soon the answer came back, "Naboth is dead," and the king went out to claim his garden. But as he went the prophet met him, and thundered in his ears a message from God:—"Thus saith the Lord, in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, king Ahab." Before the king can make it a garden it must be his.

And so with this waste that we want to make into a king's garden. Jesus says to us, "*My son, give Me thine heart.*" He will never force it away from us. But if we give it to Him, He will take it just as it is, all waste and worthless, without any fruit and without any flowers, with nothing but brambles and weeds. He wants the heart, not because it is a garden, but that He may make a King's garden of it; filled with fruitful trees, and pleasant flowers and sweetness and beauty, and that He may come in the garden and talk with us, as He came to Eden and talked with Adam there. So, dear children, kneel and say to the Lord, "Here is my heart, Lord Jesus; Thou dost ask for it; wild and waste as it is, I give it Thee. Make it into a King's garden where Thou shalt come."

The next thing is that *it be cleared and planted.*

Of course the King's garden must have no weeds, or nettles, or brambles, or waste places in it. Weeds must be cleared up and burnt, and the waste places must be turned into flower-beds. There will be roses, and pinks, and lilies; there will be the mignonette with its sweet breath, and the pleasant

borders of coloured leaves all laid out in beautiful order. There will be shrubs and there will be fruit-trees trimmed and trained, now white with blossom, now heavy with delicious fruit.

“Ah!” you say, “this is hard work to get it all cleared and planted.” The weeds will grow so fast when you have pulled them up. And then other things are so hard to get rid of. There’s unkindness, like a prickly thorn, how hard to cut it up so that it shall never grow again, and plant the lily of kindness instead of it: how hard it is to get rid of idleness, that ugly bed of weeds which spoils it all. To get rid of disobedience, that is like the wild creepers, climbing wherever they ought not to climb, and growing as they ought not to grow. It is hard work. But suppose you could get somebody to come and change the ground, so that instead of bringing forth weeds it should bring forth flowers and fruits. That is just what we can do. Jesus has come on purpose to create clean hearts. He tells us that our hearts of themselves will grow nothing but dreadful things—lying, and hatred, and theft, and unkindness, and cruelty, and murder. But He will put His Holy Spirit in our hearts, and give us a new heart; then there shall grow out of it all the fruits and flowers that make it the King’s garden. This is the list:—Love, like a sweet breath, shall fill it. Joy shall be in it, like the singing of birds. Peace shall grow there, and fill it with gentleness and quiet. Patience shall be there, with its sweet, meek-eyed flowers; and Gentleness, like a lily of the valley; and sturdy Goodness shall grow

there, like a tree planted by a river ; and Faith shall be round it like a strong wall ; and Temperance,—well, let that be a bright fountain in the middle of the garden. And wherever these are, *there* is the King's garden. So you see we have to give Jesus the garden of the heart, and we have to ask Him to create it clean and new.

Then *we have to keep this garden for the King.*—Though it be a new heart and a clean heart, it will want taking care of. If you will look at the story of Eden, you will find that though the Lord caused the earth to bring forth the trees and flowers that were all “very good,” yet He put the man into the garden to dress it and keep it. And we have to keep our hearts for the King. First we must plant it well, and keep getting better flowers and more fruit. There is a storehouse of seed where all the King's gardeners have got theirs, and we can go and help ourselves,—*the seed is the Word of God.* Then we must water it at least twice a day, and prayer is the watering ; it refreshes and revives the King's garden, it keeps it alive. If we don't pray, the garden will soon be dead and withered. Then we must watch against enemies. When I was a boy, we used to set little heaps of “grains” to attract the slugs and snails, and then creep out at night with a lantern, and take these mischevius creatures, that otherwise would have spoiled all the fruit and many of the flowers. Take care of these—of habits that spoil all the fruit ; of little neglects and forgetfulnesses that ruin the King's garden. And then we must keep off other things too. The

peach-trees and plum-trees have a matting or net hung in front of them; in winter to keep off the frosts, and in summer to keep off the busy birds. So we must be watchful against things that hurt the King's garden. The frost will often come and wither it very quickly; some companion, or some book, or some bad influence like an icy breath blights and perhaps kills it all. And the birds that steal the fruit, little chattering, twittering sparrows and finches, are they not hasty words, and thoughtless ways, and little harmful thoughts and feelings that build their nests in the King's garden, and steal the fruit?

Then, in the last place, *if it be the King's garden the King Himself will come to it.*—Jesus Himself comes into the heart that is given to Him and kept for Him. He delights to come into it, and walk and talk with His child there. And I will tell you why He delights so much to come. There was once a great king called Cyrus, who had a beautiful garden, of which he was very fond. He used to watch it very much, and take such pleasure in it that people could hardly understand it. He said, “I take so much interest in my garden because I have planted every plant, and have sown every seed in it.” So it is that Jesus loves His garden. He turned it from a waste into a garden; He has sown the good seed and planted the trees; it is His garden.

Dear children, *it is a happy heart that is turned into the King's garden.* The sun always shines there, and the birds sing all the year round, and the fruits

are always ripe summer and winter. I have heard of an old man who lived in a very poor cottage far away from everybody else. One day somebody called to see him, and noticing the broken windows and the bare walls and the cold floor, and thinking how far he lived from any neighbour, said, "My friend, you must be very lonely here." The old man looked up as if he had not thought of that before. "Lonely!" he said, as his eyes lit up with joy, "Ah, so I might be, but Jesus is such blessed company." He had been walking in the King's garden with the King, and was so happy that he had forgotten about everything else.

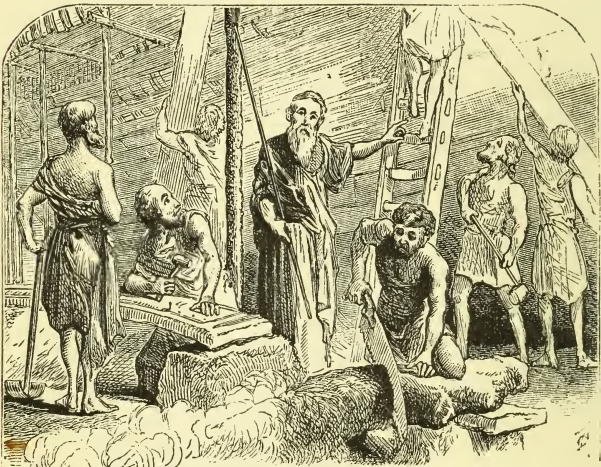
So let us give our hearts to Jesus, and He shall give Himself to us. So let our hearts be His garden now, then one day He shall bid us come into His Paradise, to walk with Him in white raiment, and to go out no more for ever.



IV.

THE MAN WHO OBEYED.

“Thus did Noah: according to all that God commanded him, so did he.”—GENESIS vi. 22.



SOMETIMES when I get a group of merry boys and girls about me, they cry out, —“Now please to tell us a story.”

“What kind of a story?” I ask them. “What must it be about?”

“O, about lions and wild beasts,” say the little ones. “No,” say the boys, “about the sea

and narrow escapes, and something dreadful, you know."

Well, dear children, think what a wonderful Book God has given for all of us. Stories of lions and bears; stories of giants like the great Goliath; stories of wild storms at sea, like that Jonah was in, and like that in which Paul was wrecked. As wonderful as any of them is this story about Noah and his ark.

It was one thousand six hundred years after the creation of the world. All the people everywhere began to forget God. They gave up praying to Him, and worshipped the sun, and the moon, and the stars. Now God looked down from heaven, and saw all the wickedness that was done, and we are told that it *grieved Him at His heart*. For God sees everybody, and is always grieved by our wrong-doing. I should like you to think of that for a moment or two. Look at it in the sixth verse,—*it grieved Him at His heart*.

"Father," said a little girl one day, "you won't love me if I am not good, will you?" The father thought quietly for a moment as the little face looked up to him, and then he said, "Yes, I shall love you; only *it will be with a grieved kind of love that hurts me*." Dear children, it is a very dreadful thing that God should be angry with us, but I think it is very much worse that He should be grieved at His heart by anything that we may do or say. Let us hate sin because God will punish it, as He punished this; and yet let us hate it more because it grieves our Heavenly Father.

Whilst all the people were thus forgetting the Lord, it happened that a little lad was born in the house of his father Lamech. His grandfather was the very oldest man that ever lived, and you can think how the boy would stand beside the old, old man Methuselah, and listen to the wonderful things that he could remember. He knew Adam quite well, and had heard all about the garden of Eden, and could tell how good man was at first, and how happy, until he began to rebel against God. So the lad grew up, thinking about these things, no doubt, and perhaps wishing that he could be as good as Adam had been once, and that God would come and talk with him too.

Now Lamech called his son's name NOAH, which means *rest*. He said, when he gave this boy his name, "This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed." He thought of his son as a blessing from God. Lamech's daily labour had troubled him, but his little son's winning ways helped him to forget his trouble, and to be more content to work hard, and be weary. In loving Noah, and in thinking what he might be when grown up, how good and useful a man, Lamech's heart found "comfort." Perhaps he knew beforehand how much better Noah would be than all the other men and women in the world, and so could think of God Himself as taking pleasure in him. Now, boys and girls, each of you try to be to your father and mother what Noah was to Lamech—"rest" and "comfort," not vexation and trouble;

so that God may be pleased with you and bless you.

So Noah grew up to be a man, praying to God and seeking Him. Thus he "found grace" in the eyes of God, and he served the Lord, with his wife and three sons. At the same time the other people grew worse and worse, until they had filled the earth with violence; and to punish them for their sins, God was about to send a great flood and sweep them all away. One day as Noah was praying beside the altar on which he had offered his sacrifice,—perhaps away in the shade of the trees, perhaps away on the still top of some high mountain,—God spake to him about what He was going to do.

God never speaks to us in that way now, because we have what Noah had not,—we have the Word of God. That is His commandment and His will for us.

Let us read what God said, in the 13th and 14th verses:—"*And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.*" Gopher wood is the wood of a large kind of cypress, very light and hard, and therefore well suited for this purpose. It was to be a very great ship, five hundred and twenty-five feet in length and eighty-seven feet broad—a great deal larger than any man-of-war. And in it all the animals were to be

saved. You can think how strange and bewildering such a command must have sounded to Noah. How could he build it? And how could the wild beasts be got into it? He comes home and tells his wife and sons about it. They would think it very strange and very unlikely. Would God send a great flood to sweep all the people away—the strong men, the fair women, the little children? How many questions they would ask about it, and how many difficulties they would raise. But no matter how strange it seemed, or how difficult it might be, God had said so, and Noah at once made up his mind to do it. This is what you must notice most of all—how many times it says, *Thus did Noah: according to all that God commanded him, so did he.*

But making up his mind to do it was not enough—he must *set about it*. And how should he begin? He was a man like us, and the things must have occurred to him as they do to us.—“How can I build an ark, I and my sons? There is the wood to be cut down, and then it will take years to build; or how shall I manage to keep the wild beasts alive? They may eat us up, or we may perish in the flood after all.” And then I see him set out bravely with the axe. “Never mind—God has told me to do it, and I will. He will help me,” he says. “Thus did Noah, according to all that God commanded him.”

And so, boys and girls let us learn fearlessly to obey God. We can't see how this is going to be, or that. We don't know how we shall manage

about this difficulty or the other. But what does all that matter? God has told us to do it, and when He commands, He always gives strength to obey. I have heard that Mr. Charles Wesley said one day, "Ah, if I had a pair of wings I would fly." Mr. John Wesley said, "And if God told thee to fly, brother, He would give thee a pair of wings." God always gives strength to do what He commands. Nobody need ever say "*I can't*," about anything that God tells us to do. "Thus did Noah: according to all that God commanded him, so did he."

Then Noah must have thought within himself again,—“What will the people say? The clever men who know all about the stars and the sun, will laugh at me, and will say that no such flood will come. Some of them, I dare say, will get angry with me. But never mind what *they* say. God has told me to do it, and so I will.” So boys and maidens, let us be very bold when God commands us. What does it matter that somebody may laugh at us? The King of kings has commanded us. For Jesus, Who has loved us and given Himself for us, we can be bold. Here, too, let us be like Noah, “according to all that God commanded him, so did he.”

And now Noah begins to build his ship. Down from the forest they bring the timber; the planks are measured and cut according to the message of God, and they are arranged in order. Day after day finds him at his work. Week after week he sticks to it. Months have gone, and he works on.

Now it is years since he began, and yet you find him busied from morning to night with the ringing hammer and the saw. Old men that used to creep out and laugh at his folly have passed away. The little children who watched him cut the first trees and heard the hammer ring about the first planks, have grown up to be men and women. I dare say it was everybody's joke, then. Perhaps they called it "Noah's folly." But unwearied, Noah worked on. Summer went and winter came, and day after day he wrought on for forty years, and fifty years, for eighty years,—there he was still, though a hundred years had gone. God had commanded him, and so he would obey.

And all this time we may be sure that people would reason with him about being so foolish. The wise men would tell him that it was all nonsense,—that no such flood had ever been heard of, and that it was impossible. If it did come, they could get away to the tops of the mountains. Besides, in such a toss and storm Noah's huge ship would be sure to go down. She would upset, said one. She would spring a leak, said another. She would be dashed on the rocks, said a third. The wild beasts would devour all the people, said a fourth. But their laughter did not move Noah. God had spoken, and he would obey. "According to all that God commanded, so did he."

And sometimes, boys and girls, we shall perhaps begin to get tired, and think that God has forgotten His word. Then let us think of Noah. Sometimes, the laughter is hard to bear. But let

us keep on obeying. God has commanded, and we *will* do it.

At last the ark was finished. The creatures had come into it. Two and two they had gone up as God had commanded them. But now came a more severe trial of Noah's obedience than ever. Look at the seventh verse of the seventh chapter, and then at the tenth. After seven days the waters were upon the earth. Think of those seven days. The sun rises just as usual, throwing the shadow of the great ship far up the valley; it creeps across the sky, and sets in the west without a token of a storm. Then the still stars creep out, and the quiet night passes without any terror. How they laugh now at this man in his ship, on dry land and without a sign of flood!

But on the seventh day the sun sets wild and threatening. The storm-clouds fill up the sky, lurid and terrible. The mockers look pale and troubled. And now the deluge bursts upon them. Floods leap from heaven to meet the swelling floods of river and sea. Wild waves sweep over the banks and join the surging torrents, and whole towns go down in the foaming waters; and as the hosts sink shrieking, they see the ark of refuge borne safely over the waters. Alas! all vainly do they shout now for help from him whom for a hundred and twenty years men had laughed at and made their scorn.

For forty days God watched over the little company. Then the floods went back, and the shrinking waters let the ark rest safely on the mountain

top ; and as the rainbow spanned the earth with promise, Noah and his family stepped out into the silent world.

And so let us be sure, dear children, that *God will always punish sin*. It is a dreadful thing that He will never pass by or make light of. And our only safety is in hearing His voice and obeying it. St. John tells us that this is His commandment,—“that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ.” *Jesus Christ is our Ark of refuge*. As the floods beat upon the ark which sheltered those within it, so our punishment falls upon Jesus, and by Him we are saved. It would have been a poor thing for Noah to have had an ark, and yet never to have gone into it. He went in, and the Lord “shut him in.” And it is a poor thing for us to know all about the Saviour Jesus Christ, and yet not to be saved. Come, dear children, let us trust in Jesus as able and willing to save us, and let us cling to Him with all our heart. You remember the hymn in your hymn-books :—

“Jesu, Lover of my soul,
 Let me to Thy bosom fly,
 While the nearer waters roll,
 While the tempest still is high :
 Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
 Till the storm of life be past ;
 Safe into the haven guide,
 O receive my soul at last !”

Let this be the prayer of your heart.

Also learn that we never need fear when we are in this Ark. The great threatening waves came wash-

ing over the ship, and the wild rains and fierce winds beat upon it, but those within it were quite safe, for the Lord had seen long ago how wild the storm would be, and He had told Noah to build the ship for just such a storm. And so when we are in Jesus Christ we are quite safe. He can never fail us. In the wildest storm there is no danger for us. He is the Refuge that God has provided.

Like Noah, too, *those who are in this Ark shall one day stand on the mountain top.* Not on Ararat, but on Mount Zion. And there the heaven shall be spanned with a rainbow of better promise than that which Noah saw,—the promise that there shall be no more sin, and no more sorrow, and no more pain, and no more death. There shall be “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth shall be passed away. And “there shall be no more sea.”



THE WOMAN WHO LOOKED BACK.

"Remember Lot's wife."—ST. LUKE XVII. 32.



It is very early in the morning. As we pass along the road the white mists linger about the meadows, half hiding the cattle and sheep, and hanging in drops from the leaves, and covering all the grass. Overhead the stars shine in the dark blue sky, but their work is nearly done, for away in the East there

is the rosy blush of sunrise. It is getting lighter now as we stand in front of a grey city wall, high and strong. The old watchman has just flung open the great gates and gone to rest, glad that the night's watch is over. As we stand looking through the gateway there is not a sound about us; nobody is moving; the houses are still; everybody is asleep, except the birds that twitter to each other that the morning is come again.

Now we hear voices, and down through the street there hurries a little group,—two angels, and with them a man and his wife and two daughters. The angels hasten them forward through the gate, and then one of them points away to the distant hills. "*Escape for thy life,*" he cries, "*look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.*"

They hasten forward, wringing their hands as they think of what they have left behind, and yet hurrying on in fear of what may overtake them. They have got some little distance, perhaps a mile or two from the place, when suddenly a loud roar makes the very ground tremble, and all the air is filled with the lurid glare of a great fire. They see their shadows flung in front of them, and press forward, frightened, with quicker steps.

Now one of them stops. She turns her head, and looks back. And whilst she is looking, horrified at the flames that seem to be raining down from heaven upon the city and its people, a shower of the burning sleet sweeps over her. It blinds her, and burns her, and buries her beneath its ashes.

And there she is left; and as the mass cools, it stands in the plain "a pillar of salt,"—that is of some earthy substance.

I can tell you one or two stories that may help you to understand how Sodom was destroyed. Many of you have heard of Pompeii, a city in Italy that was buried under showers of lava from a burning mountain, and how they have lately been digging out this city, and what they have found. Here is a story for the girls. In one pillar of stone they found the body of a woman, and in the woman's arms there was a little child. On the stony crust that covered her there were the traces of her waving hair, and of the folds of her dress. She had been caught by the shower of molten stone, and buried underneath it. All the rest had got away safely. Perhaps she could have got away too, but she thought of her little child as it lay asleep in the cradle, and she turned back to get it. Then at the door the burning shower met her, and as she screened the little one with her arms she was buried under that dreadful fire. Ah, maidens, love your mothers! You may live to be old, wrinkled, grey-headed women, but you will never find any love in God's world so tender and true and blessed as your mother's love—except the love of Jesus.

And now a story for the boys! The explorers of Pompeii came to another pillar of stone, in a sort of sentinel's box in the wall. Underneath this crust of stone they found a soldier holding a lance. All the rest of the soldiers got away, and perhaps

this one could have got away too, but he was on duty. We think of him watching the burning flakes falling around him, and of all the people running from their houses, but this brave fellow drew himself up, and said, "I can't run away—I'm on duty." And he died rather than desert his post. Boys, be brave and strong for Jesus. Never mind what anybody says, or what anybody does; stick to the post of duty. Think of this Roman soldier, and say, "I can't run away—I'm on duty."

So much, then, for the story of how Lot's wife was turned into "a pillar of salt." Now let us look at this memorial stone, and learn the lessons it teaches.

FIRST: "Remember Lot's wife," and remember *what a dreadful thing sin is.*

Adam disobeyed God, and the earth was cursed, life was filled with sorrow, and death came with all its terrors. The people sinned in Noah's time, and God sent a great flood that swept them all away, men, and women, and children. The people of Sodom sinned, and God rained down fire from heaven, and burned up the cities of the plain. Pharaoh disobeyed God, and the firstborn was slain in every house in all the land; and the king and his host perished in the Red Sea. What a dreadful thing sin is, when Jesus Himself, Who is full of love and tenderness, tells us that it ends in the fire that is never quenched! And, most of all, dear children, what a dreadful thing sin is, because it has crucified the Son of God! My sins and your sins have nailed Him to the tree. It is an awful thing

to sin. Do not think that the flood and the fire came in the old time, but that things are different now. God does not change. He sees every wrong thing we do, and He hears every wrong thing we say, and He hates it now as much as He did of old, and will punish it as much—yes, and more: for we have the advantage of their example and the express warning of God's word; so that Sodom and Gomorrah shall rise up in judgment against us. Be more afraid of that which is wrong, than of plague, or fever, or the most dreadful disease; for sin ends in everlasting death. Be more afraid of sin than of fire, for it shall cast the soul into hell. Fly from it faster than from the face of a serpent, for its poisonous bite is an eternal torment, a worm that dieth not. Look at the pillar, with the fierce fires beyond it, and the black smoke stretching over all the city, and learn to fear sin and to hate it. And, escaping from the plain to the Mountain of safety, hate it yet more because it has slain "the King of Glory."

SECOND: "Remember Lot's wife," and remember *that God tells us for our good.*

Lot's wife, no doubt, thought that it was very hard indeed, very unkind, that she could not look back,—that it was a commandment without any reason at all. What harm could there be in looking back? Why shouldn't she please herself in a little matter like this? Ah, foolish woman! she did not see what the Lord saw—that the swift shower would overtake her, and that she would perish. Be sure of this—that whatever the Lord tells us is for our

good. Children, even very little children, learn this much about what their parents tell them. "Baby," said the mother one day, "you must not touch the knife: if you do, it will cut you." The dinner-time came, and baby sat in her chair with knives lying about, and out went the little hand to take the forbidden toy. Directly there was heard a scream, and baby's bleeding finger taught her that her mother was kind and wise in saying, "you must not touch!" Very likely baby wished she had thought so sooner. People generally do wish they had done what was right when they get into trouble for doing wrong; but those wishes are too late. Take this Book that our Heavenly Father has given us, find out what He tells us to be and to do, and then stick to it, quite sure that His words are right and loving. Look at poor Lot's wife, burned and buried under the pillar of salt, and remember that God always tells us for our good.

THIRD: "Remember Lot's wife," and remember what *little things may turn people into*.

You can imagine how she thought of it:—"Why, whatever harm can it do just to look back? It won't take a minute. I'll be after them directly. Perhaps my sons-in-law are coming behind us. I will only look back once." So she turned her head, and then she turned herself round, and she was looking on the dreadful sight when there came the shower of fire over her, and she was left a "pillar of salt."

Ah, dear children, I would that little things never turned people into anything worse than pillars

of salt. There are thousands of people to-day who are being turned into something very much worse by little things. I knew a lad once, a pleasant, open hearted, merry boy as you ever saw. He was grown old enough to leave school and go to work. "Come," said a companion one day, "come into the public-house and have a glass." He held back for a minute—he had never done it before, and he felt it was wrong. "O come on!" cried his friend, laughing, and taking his arm, "you must not be too particular, you know." "Well," thought the lad to himself, "it's only once, and only just a little!" And he went. "Only once, and only just a little." It was the same thing over again the next day. Then two or three times a-day, and still it was only just once, and only just a little. Come and see what it turned him into. Down this wretched alley with its miserable houses, and its miserable people, and its miserable children—there, lounging against the door of the gin-palace, see what looks like a heap of rags. And now he lifts the foul face of a drunkard,—a face so bleared and bloated that you shrink back from it frightened. *That* is what it has turned him into. "Only just once, and only just a little." It is the devil's whisper. Beware of it whenever you hear it. "Remember Lot's wife," and remember what little things may turn people into.

I must show you another picture. I knew another lad, whose parents hoped that he was going to grow up a very good and useful man. But two or three idle fellows got about him, and

tempted him to bet. It was only a shilling—so very little, and only just once, and he might make so much by it too, they said. So it began. Then it was the theatre, only just once, and to other vile places, until his money was gone, and he stole from his master. I saw him, poor lad, and I will tell you what it turned him into. Come with me to this large place, shut in with high walls, spiked all along the top. We must ring at this huge gate. A man opens a little wicket. When he knows what we want, he unlocks the great door. We see now that there are pistols in his belt, and a sword at his side. He bids us follow him. We go away through long passages, and stop in front of a cell. “Look in here; he can’t see you,” the gaoler says as he points to a round hole in the door. Poor fellow! there he sits, in a prisoner’s dress, with his face buried in his hands, and the tears dropping on the floor of his lonely cell. There, disgraced, and always alone, he must work on day after day for months, until he comes out to find everybody ashamed of him. “Only just once, and only just a little,” turned him into that.

And, dear children, even that was not all. It turned a happy home into misery. It made the father, who was proud of his son, to hang his head in shame, and go weeping down to his grave. It turned his happy mother into a grief-worn, broken-hearted woman.

Still worse ruins and sorrows than these can little things bring about. “Remember Lot’s wife,” and when you hear the whisper, “It’s only just

once—there's no harm in it—it's only just a little," take care! Remember what little things may turn people into.

FOURTH: "Remember Lot's wife," and learn *how foolish it is to look back*.

Looking back could not put the fire out. It could not do her any good, or anybody else. And yet we very often do it, old folks and young folks too. Here I am going along the road one day, and I find a little maiden crying as if her heart would break. There is no need for any one to say, "What is the matter?" There it is, plain enough. She has let fall the jug of milk, and there the pieces are lying on the ground like a map of the White Sea with sundry strange islands in it.

"Come, don't cry so about it," I say to her kindly; "you know crying won't mend the matter."

"No, Sir!" she sobs, "no, Sir!" and then begins to cry more than ever.

"Now, do you know anybody in all the world who would give you money to buy a new jug?" I ask her.

Ah! you maidens are sharp little creatures. She does not say anything, but looks up at me, and takes hold of the corner of her apron, shyly. You can see that she is saying, "Well, now, Sir, perhaps you would be kind enough to do that."

Smiles come instead of tears as the hand finds the money for a new jug, and with many thanks and promises to take more care next time, the little maiden runs away, instead of staying to cry over the spilt milk.

I know some people who are never doing anything else but looking back—crying over their spilt milk; wishing this had not been, and trying to mend the past by looking at it. And boys and girls often do the same thing. We cannot undo what is done by looking at it. Lot's wife won't put the fire out by turning her head. Let her be as sorry as she can, and let us grieve over the folly and evil that we have done. But "remember Lot's wife"—that no good will be done by merely looking back.

FIFTH: "Remember Lot's wife," *that we must escape to the mountain.*

Very likely she thought they had gone far enough now to be quite safe. They had come outside the gates, and were upon "the plain." Who ever heard of a fire hurting any one at such a distance? And, as a ruddier glare shone all about them, or the crash of some falling tower burst on them, she turned and looked. Ah, foolish woman! She has perished. Did not the angel say, "*Stay not in all the plain; but escape to the mountain, lest ye be consumed?*"

And so, dear children, our only refuge is in the Mountain. The swift fire that always follows sin will surely find us out, if we hide anywhere else than in the mount of the Lord. Calvary is our refuge, the cross of Jesus Christ is our only hiding-place. We must escape to the mountain. *Escape for thy life!* How earnestly the angels spoke to them all! Just as earnestly, you see, to the daughters as to Lot and to his wife. What folly it would have been for the daughters to have said, "We are not

so old as our father and mother, so there is no need for us to hurry!" Why, the fire was as likely to catch them up as Lot or his wife. Young and old children and parents, there is need to be in earnest in this matter. We are none of us safe until we come to Jesus, and hide ourselves in Him.

SIXTH: "Remember Lot's wife." *Tarry not in the plain.*

Between Sodom and the mount of safety there was a long stretch of level ground. They were not to tarry in this. Very many do tarry there, and many, like Lot's wife, are consumed there. Some of you, boys and girls, to-day are *in the plain*. You are not in the city of the very wicked people, and you are not in the mount of refuge, but you are stopping in the plain between them. Some of you are on the plains of *Good Desires*. You want to be saved, and to find Jesus; but you stay there, and never get any further. Some of you are further on, in the plains of *Good Endeavours*—you are trying to do right, and to find Jesus. Lot's wife had got as far as that; she had come upon the plains of Good Desires and Good Endeavours; but there she stayed, and was consumed. "Tarry not in the plain; but escape to the mountain, lest ye be consumed."

You see the angel had not to go with them to show them the way. It was very plain and very easy. Just like the way to Jesus. So easy that you can escape to Him to-day; so plain that "a wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err therein." A little girl said to me one day, "Please, Sir, may I speak to you a minute?" I saw that she was in

some kind of trouble, so I took her hand and said, "Certainly, my little maiden; what do you want?"

"Please, Sir," said she, as her lip quivered and the tears filled her eyes, "it's a dreadful thing, but I don't love Jesus."

"And how are you going to love Him?" I asked.

"I don't know; please, Sir, I want you to tell me." She spoke so sorrowfully, as if it were something she could never do.

"Well, St. John, who loved Jesus almost more, perhaps, than any one else ever did, says that 'we love Him, because He first loved us.' Now if you go home to-night saying in your heart, *Jesus loves me*, I am sure that to morrow you will say, *I love Jesus*." She looked up through her tears, and said very softly, "Jesus loves me." She began to think about it, as well as say it, about His life and His death on the cross, and began to feel it too. So she went home. The next evening she came to me, and putting both her hands in mine, she said, with such a very happy face, "O, please, Sir, I do love Jesus to-night, for He does love me so!"

She had escaped to the Mountain, and found safe refuge in Jesus.

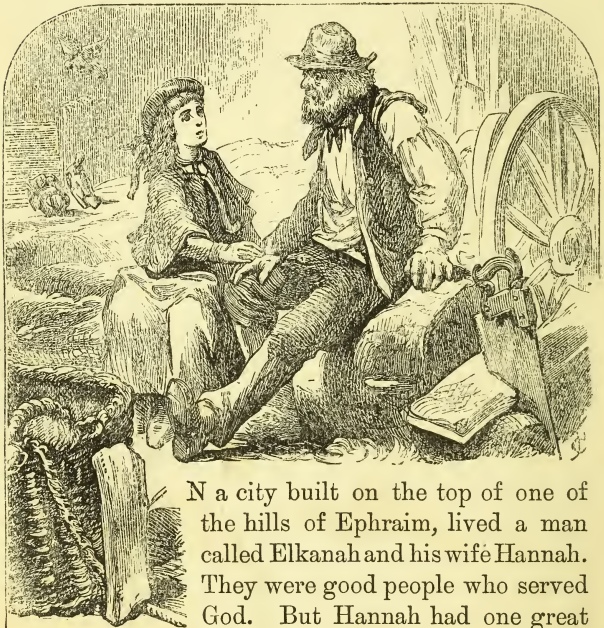
There is our refuge too, dear children. There the fire cannot pursue us. "He has borne our sins in His own body on the tree." There is no safety for us anywhere else.

"Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

VI.

THE CHILD MINISTER.

"Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod."—1 SAMUEL II. 18.



IN a city built on the top of one of the hills of Ephraim, lived a man called Elkanah and his wife Hannah. They were good people who served God. But Hannah had one great trouble,—she had no son; and she promised that if the Heavenly Father would send her a son she would give him up to the Lord all the days of his life. God

heard her prayer, and Samuel was born. Whilst he was yet a little child, his mother took him to the High Priest, and there left him to be trained for the service of the Lord.

The first thing I want you to notice about Samuel is this,—that, like most good men, he had the best thing that any little child can find when first it comes into the world,—*a praying mother*. When I was a boy there was a very favourite story of mine about a negro who sat one day on the deck of a steamer, waiting to be sold. He was very wretched, sitting there with his face buried in his hands, when a stranger came up and asked him what was the matter. “Me gwine to be sold, massa,” said the poor negro. “What for?” asked the stranger. “Well, you see, me disobey orders. Me pray too loud, and my massa gwine to sell me. He let me pray easy, but when me gets happy me begin to holler, and then me know nothing about orders or anything else.” The stranger was struck with the negro’s appearance, and as the master came up just then he said, “What will you take for your negro?” The price was a hundred and fifty pounds. He was healthy, the master said, and the best hand on the estate. But he got religious, and used to pray so loud that the master had resolved to get rid of him. Now the stranger thought that it would be a very good thing if he could get a good negro to pray for him and for his family, so he bought him. “Has he a wife and family?” the stranger asked. “Yes,” said the old master, “a wife and three children, and I will sell them for a

hundred and fifty more." The stranger paid the three hundred pounds, and then going up to the negro, he said to him, "Well, Moses, I've bought you." "O, hab you massa?" and the poor negro looked very, very sad. He was thinking of his wife and children. "Yes, and your wife and children too," said the stranger. "Bless God for that!" cried Moses. "And look here," said the gentleman, "you may pray as much and as long and as loud as you like, only whenever you pray you must pray for me and for my wife and my children." "Why, bless the Lord," cried Moses, "me hab all kind o' commodation, like Joseph in Egypt." Twelve months had gone by, when one day his old master came in to see him. He found Moses measuring corn and looking very happy. "I want to buy Moses back again," he said, "I can't get on without him; everything is going wrong, and I've been a miserable man." "No," said his master, "I'm not going to sell Moses to anybody, but I shall give him his liberty, and let him work for me if he will as a free man, for since he has been here, I and my wife and my children have found the Saviour, and everything has prospered wonderfully. I owe more than I can ever tell to praying Moses." "O, massa," cried Moses, with tears in his eyes; "me always prays for you too, sare. Me put the old massa and the new one both together." Now if a man would give three hundred pounds for a praying slave, who can tell the worth of a praying mother? Next to the love of Jesus in our own hearts, the best thing in the world is this—a mother who prays for us. I

have heard people say sometimes of a boy who was born heir to a large estate, or to very much money, "Ah, he's a lucky fellow—he is born with a silver spoon in his mouth." But very often it was the most unlucky thing that could happen. This is the best fortune that any child can have—the heritage of a mother's prayers.

I am going to talk to you, boys and girls, about this little minister, his robes and his little coat. And I pray that the Lord may help me to speak so wisely that some of you, like Samuel, may begin to serve Him.

FIRST, let us think *about the child minister*.—Samuel ministered before the Lord, *being a child*. No doubt Eli saw that the child was called of God. But even then he must have been a very kind and a very wise old man to let this little fellow come to help him in the house of the Lord when he was so young. Most people would have said, "What is the good of a little lad like that? What help can he be? He is not strong enough or big enough or wise enough to do anything. Let him stay at home, and let his mother take care of him till he is grown up. Then he will be of some good. But this child, he is too little to know anything about it." I think this story is put in the Bible to teach us that it is very foolish and very wrong to talk in this way. The child Samuel ministered unto the Lord, and so can you. Your little hands can serve Him, and your young hearts can love Him. Let nobody say you are too young. Jesus said something very different from that. He said, "Suffer the *little*

children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And at another time Jesus said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them *unto babes*. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight." So you see, Jesus would have you to love Him now and serve Him now. He would not have you wait till you are grown up. He wants *children* to minister to Him. Samuel, though a child, was not too young to love Jesus.

"But what could this little child minister do?" you ask. "It was all very well for him to be with the old man Eli, learning good lessons, and hearing God's word, but of course He could not *do anything*." Oh, but he could. He did many things that were helpful, as we shall see by and bye.

Little folks can do very many things. To begin with, nobody doubts that *children can do much harm*.

The other day there was a robbery near London. The people who lived in the house thought that they had guarded it securely; there were bolts on the doors and bars on the windows. But one morning the servants came down and found that all the silver things were gone. How had the thieves got in? Why, there was just one little tiny window, so small that they thought there was no danger in that; but in through that window the thieves had sent a little boy, and when he got inside he could open the door for the rest, and so all the mischief was done. They found then what harm little folks could do.

And then, too, people know that *little things can do much good*.—Those of you who keep your eyes open—and I hope you all do—must have seen at the railway stations and at other places, a picture of a lion in a net, and a little mouse gnawing at the rope. And this is the story that it represents. A lion who was the great king of the forest had somehow got into a net,—I don't know how, but so it was. All the animals when they heard of it, came to his majesty's help. The elephant came and walked round and round as majestically as it could, and looked very sad. The bear came and danced all about. The tiger came and roared very loudly indeed. But all that did not bring the king out of his trouble. Then came the hyænas and jackals and wolves, and they shook their heads very wisely, and said if only this were done, and that. But as no one could possibly do what they talked about, that didn't help very much. So it seemed that the great king of the forest must die thus miserably in a net. Then as the lion was sadly bemoaning his fate there came a little mouse, and said that if he might make so bold he thought he could set his majesty at liberty. It was very absurd in such a little thing to try and do what the elephant and the great animals could not do. But the lion thought there could be no harm in his trying. So he crept up to the rope and began to gnaw at it. Strand after strand of the rope was bitten through by the sharp little teeth. It was a long and wearisome task, but the little teeth worked on. At last the rope was loosed, and when once it gave way it was an easy thing for

the lion to get out, and the king of the forest was set at liberty by a little mouse. Such good little things can do.

But best of all is this, *that little hands can do something for Jesus*.—Do not be wishing that you had this or that. Do not be waiting until you are grown up to be men and women. The *child* Samuel ministered unto the Lord. There were many little things that he could do. He could pour the oil into the lamp, he could keep the wick trimmed, he could keep the golden candlestick clean, and his little hands could put out the lights in it every night. And all day long he could wait upon the old man Eli, and he could think what he would want, and could help and comfort him in many ways. Are you thinking now, “What can I do for Jesus?” Well, you can always be kind for Jesus—gentle and loving. Kneel down to-day and ask Jesus to help you. Each one of us can always be brave and truthful and generous for Him; and we can keep clean thoughts and truthful words and right ways for Him. At sunrise Samuel perhaps had to draw aside the covering of skins, and the sunlight came in flooding all the place with radiant light. So you can let joy and sunshine come in to your house by trying to make those about you happy. And in doing that, you, like the child Samuel, will minister unto the Lord.

Here is a story of a child minister that will show you how very much children can do for Jesus. Little Annie Gale had given her heart to Jesus, and now all day long she wanted to be doing His will

and pleasing Him. But one morning her heart was very much grieved. A gentleman had called at her father's house, and he laughed at the notion of little Annie being converted. "She was always so good that she did not need it to make her any better," he said. "If old Dan Hunter began to love Jesus, now, I should think that there was something in it." Poor little Annie was very grieved, and going away to her room, she knelt down and said, "O Jesus, they won't believe that Thou dost love me, because I am so little. O, Jesus! help me to get poor old Dan Hunter to love Thee, and then they will believe that Thou dost love me too." Then little Annie set out for old Dan Hunter's house.

Now, there was no mistake about it, that old Dan was the very crossdest and most disagreeable man in the village. He worked away in his wheelwright's yard, grumbling and growling all day long. No poor woman ever came into his yard to get some shavings for the fire, and no boy ever crept in there for a basket of chips. Nobody who could help it ever came to see old Dan. This morning he was at work bending at his saw, when a very pleasant little voice said, "Good morning, Dan."

The voice was so pleasant that Dan looked round and forgot to scowl. "Please, Dan," said little Annie, "I want to speak to you, and I'm sure you won't mind, will you?"

Now it was so long since anybody had cared to speak to Dan at all, that he couldn't understand what this little maiden could have to say, so he set down his saw and rolled his apron round his waist,

and sat down on the trunk of a tree. Really, for old Dan, he was looking quite pleased.

“Well, whatever do you want to say to me, little one?” He spoke gruffly—he always did, but it was a good deal for old Dan to speak at all, for he generally only grunted.

Little Annie sat down by his side, and looking up into his rugged, wrinkled face, she said, “Well, Dan, you know Jesus *does* love me, and I do love Him. But the gentleman at home says that I am so little, and that I am so good, that he does not believe that I know anything about it. But he says that if *you* would begin to love Jesus, then he would believe in it. Now, Dan, you will, won’t you? because Jesus does love you, you know;”—and little Annie took hold of Dan’s great rough hand. “He loves you *very, very* much, Dan. You know He died upon the cross for all of us.”

Poor old Dan! Nobody had ever talked to him like that for years and years,—never since his mother had gone to heaven. And down those wrinkled cheeks the tears began to come, very big and very fast. “Don’t cry, Dan; because God loves us though we have sinned, and He sent Jesus into the world to save us.” Dan’s heart was broken. He could only say, “God be merciful to me—the worst of sinners.” As little Annie talked with him, he came to see it all,—how that Jesus had died for him, and was able to give him a clean heart and a right spirit. Little Annie left him praising God his Heavenly Father, for such wonderful love, and went away to tell the gentleman at her home.

“Now, Sir,” said she, “you must believe that Jesus loves me, because old Dan Hunter has really begun to love Him, and he has got converted.”

“Nonsense,” laughed the gentleman. “Why Annie, whoever told you that?”

“Well, you’ll see.” And he did, and so did everybody else in the place. They saw that old nipped, frowning face turned into joy and gladness. They saw the ill-tempered old Dan become so kind that everybody had a friend in him, and when you passed the yard you might be sure to hear a happy old man, as he worked with hammer and saw, cheerily singing about the wondrous love of Jesus.

So little Annie ministered unto the Lord.

I must say a word about another thing. “Samuel ministered unto the Lord, being a child, *girded with a linen ephod.*” The linen ephod was the dress that the priest wore. You may read of it in the twenty-eighth chapter of Exodus and the sixth verse. Though he was only a child, yet it would not do for Samuel to appear before the Lord without the proper robe. Not in his own robes, but in the robes that were appointed and commanded of God. And so, I think, God teaches us that we cannot minister to Him in our own strength or our own goodness. We must get the right robe, and that is the robe washed and made white in the blood of Jesus. We must get His Spirit into our hearts. When He has forgiven us our sins and washed them all away, and when He has clothed us with His love and gentleness and truth and wisdom and courage and goodness, then we are beautiful in His sight. The ephod was to be

made of gold, of purple, of blue, of scarlet, and of fine twined linen. We must come to Jesus for the robe first, the golden love and all the virtues, and the cleansing blood. Dear children, before any of us can minister unto the Lord we must have the right robe.

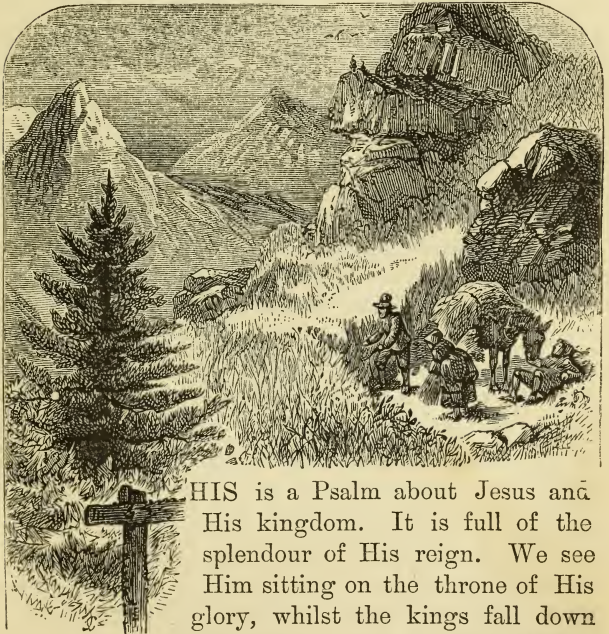
And then, lastly, we are told that his mother made him a *little coat*.—She was a wise mother, and made his coat to fit him. Boys and girls, don't any of you think that because you are going to minister to the Lord, you must give up being children, and must be men and women. Many people think that ministering children must never have *little coats*. They make great stiff solemn coats, much too long and too heavy and too clumsy for little wearers. The blessed Lord would have you minister to Him, and wear the linen ephod. But you are to wear the little coat too. Be simple and happy and merry, like children; and wear your little coats even though you minister unto the Lord.



VII.

THE HANDFUL OF CORN ON THE TOP
OF THE MOUNTAINS.

“There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains.”—PSALM LXXII. 16.



HIS is a Psalm about Jesus and His kingdom. It is full of the splendour of His reign. We see Him sitting on the throne of His glory, whilst the kings fall down before Him, and lay their crowns at His feet. The long train of camels and asses comes bringing the gold of Sheba, and gifts from

the isles. His enemies are led in triumph, and are made to lick the dust. But suddenly, amidst all this glittering pomp and splendour, the Psalmist takes us away to the bleak mountain top. Here, where the wild winds sweep, we stand on the barren rocks that crop up from the heather, amidst loneliness that is only disturbed by the hoarse croaking of the raven, or as the eagle sails on his great wings far over head. And standing there, he does not show us the great extent of the Lord's kingdom reaching from the river to the ends of the earth; he does not tell us of the gold in the rock, or of gems that will adorn the Saviour's crown. He shows only "*a handful of corn*"! It seems a very little thing to talk about, after all this majesty. And yet we shall find in it some wonderful things that it will do us good to remember.

1. *Let us think of where the corn comes from.* It does not come like anything else in the world. In the woods you may sometimes find a tree growing with a little round black fruit, hard and sour. It does not seem to be worth much by the side of the luscious plum from the garden. But that sloe, as it is called, is the plum in its wild state. The gardener takes it, and trains it, and cultivates it until it comes to be a larger and finer tree. So it is with the crab-tree and its little bitter fruit,—that is the wild apple. And so with the strawberry, and all the fruits and plants in our gardens. They were found in a wild state, and they had to be cared for and cultivated before they were worth anything. But nobody ever found corn growing wild. Unlike everything else,

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corn is the special and peculiar gift of God, which He put into man's hand just as it is. You remember that when Adam was in the garden of Eden, he had to dress it and to keep it. All grew of itself and he had only to prune it and to keep it in order. But when he was driven forth from the garden, he had to "eat bread." And that was to grow, not of itself, but only by hard work. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread"—this was the new commandment. So God gave to him "the handful of corn," unlike everything else.

Now, dear children, if you will think for a moment, you will see how much this is like Jesus. He came a Man amongst men, and yet He is separate from us, and unlike us all. He is the special gift of God to a perishing world. All the good and wise men amongst us have been evil. They were born in sin, and their hearts, like ours, were prone to be wild and evil. The Husbandman has had to watch over them and care for them, and He has brought them into gentleness and goodness and wisdom. But Jesus was born without sin. We could never have found such an one as Jesus amongst us. He is the gift of God,—the Bread of Life sent down from heaven. And it is pleasant to remember that Jesus was given to us in Bethlehem,—that means, you know, "the House of Bread." Away on the Judæan hills then, in the House of Bread, God gave to us "the handful of corn."

2. Then think of another wonderful thing about the corn,—*it will grow all over the world.* You learn of different things that grow in different countries,

—sugar in the West Indies, and tea in China, and spices and many kinds of trees in other places. I have heard that once, when a certain ship came into an Australian harbour, all the people flocked down to it, and everybody was eager to buy, even at a fabulous price, the treasure that it carried on board. What do you think the treasure was? Why, nothing but a little daisy—a common daisy. And to these people far away, it seemed like a little bit of home come to them when they saw a daisy again. Though it was common enough here, there it did not grow. But corn grows all over the world. No emigrant ever goes to a place where he cannot sow corn and reap a harvest. In the tropics, where the sun beats down upon them with a sweltering heat, corn will grow. Up in the arctic regions, where the people wrap themselves in skins of wild beasts, and have little else but whales and seals, they can grow corn. Wherever man can live, corn can grow. And is not that like our blessed Jesus? He says to us, “*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*” No home but may have Him in it; no heart but Jesus will dwell there; no land under heaven but there men may find the Bread of Life. In wild woods, amongst eternal snows, in the heat of the desert, out on the seas, in the islands, on the lonely top of the mountains,—everywhere men may find Jesus. He is “the Bread of Life” of which all the world may eat.

3. And let us think again of *what the corn is worth*. A very little thing to talk about, this—“a handful of corn!”—to leave off singing about gold

and kings and costly presents, to speak about a little thing like this! It seems very strange at first. But, you know, corn is worth more than gold and all this splendour. Everybody wants bread. The queen cannot do without it, and the poor beggar must have his crust. Everybody wants it. The Book says, "milk" for "babes," and "strong meat" for men; but little folks and old men both need bread. It doesn't matter how rich, or wise, or strong men are, they must have bread just as much as the poor and weak. There is a scene in the Bible that you can find, showing that once there was a great scarcity of bread in a country. And the people got out all they had, their golden cups and plates, and all their precious treasure, and they flung it down before the king, and cried, "Take this; but give us bread, or we die." Again the cry was for bread. Then they drove up their cattle and sheep and horses and asses, and said, "Take these; but give us bread, that we may live and not die!" Yet again they needed corn, and they came, saying, "Take us and our lands; we will be slaves; only give us corn for us and our little ones!" Ah, dear children, "a handful of corn" was more than than all the mountains. It was more than all the gold and all the kingdoms. And this, too, is like Jesus. *We all need Him.* Children and old folk, the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor,—none can do without Jesus. And we need Him more than everything. The king in his palace needs Him more than all that he has. There are times when his crown can't help him, and all his wise men are of

no avail, and all his wealth and splendour can do nothing for him; but if he has found Jesus, he has more than all the world. So we need not wonder that the Psalmist sang of "a handful of corn."

4. And there is another reason why the Psalmist chooses it to sing about,—*because it has life in it.* Here is the handful of little hard, withered seeds—not much to look at. One comes by, and he wonders what that man can be looking at them for. "Don't waste your time over them," he says, "there is gold in this mountain; you had much better dig for that!" And another comes by, "you'll never make much out of that, 'a handful of corn,' up in this bleak place; there are diamonds to be had here—much better look for them." But the man quietly sows his handful of seed, and each seed sends up many stalks, and each stalk has the "full ear," so that his handful of corn has come to a nice little harvest. He brings it home and thrashes it, and next year he sows it again. This time he sows quite a little field of corn; and again there are the many stalks and again the full ears, and now he has a stack of corn. And when it is thrashed he needs a barn to keep it in. Now he begins to enclose new fields, and to plough up new places. Again he sows it, and again it grows. Now he stands on the top of the mountain to look at it waving in the wind, or still, like fields of ruddy gold in the summer sun. And this year there are many stacks, and the many barns are full. Next year the fields reach down over the mountain side and across the

valley. And the man who has dug for gold, comes to change his gold for bread, and the man who has found a diamond sells his diamond to buy bread. And gold and diamonds belong to him who sowed the "handful of corn."

And so Jesus is like the handful of corn upon the top of the mountains: the prophet tells us that we "esteemed Him not," and "hid as it were our faces from Him;" there was no appearance of greatness in Him, or of power. *But in Him is life.* He comes into our hearts, and we are made like Him, and from us others catch a grain of the good seed, and the life spreads from heart to heart and from soul to soul, until "the whole earth shall be filled with His glory."

5. If you look at the third verse of the Psalm you will find this,—"*The mountains shall bring peace to the people.*" The mountains were commonly the haunts of wild robber bands; and in the forests that grew on the mountains there were the wild beasts fierce and bloody. And now these very mountains were to "bring peace." And in doing this, nothing would be so helpful as that same "handful of corn on the top of the mountains." *Corn is a great peace-bringer.* Wherever men have no corn, they are savages, living from hand to mouth, like the wild beasts about them. But if they would have corn, they are compelled to work regularly. They must manage and arrange. Then, too, they begin "to have dominion over the earth." The woods that hid the robbers are cleared for the corn; and the wild beasts are driven



from their homes. The marshes are drained, and the désert begins to "bud and blossom as the rose." Well might the Psalmist sing of "a handful of corn;" for in this, too, it is like our blessed Jesus. Where He comes, the cruel robber bands are broken up, and the wild beasts are turned into gentleness, so that a little child can lead them. Mr. Wilson tells us that once in Fiji the men were rowing their canoe to one island which was very difficult to reach, when they might easily have got to another. He asked, "Why don't you row to that one?" The men shook their heads. Jesus was not known in that island, but He was in the other, and that made a great difference. "If we go to this island," said the men, "the people will cook *for* us. But if we go to the other they will cook *us*." Where Jesus comes there come gentleness and blessedness and peace. The savage are made loving, the fierce and cruel are filled with His own spirit, and the rough "mountains" themselves "bring peace."

6. And yet though there is all this that is wonderful about the corn, let us remember that it is of no good *except it be sown*. A handful of corn is indeed a poor thing without that. They have found some mummies in Egypt thousands of years old, and in their hands they have found some tiny grains of corn. If they had been sown, by this time they would have grown into enough to feed the world. But after thousands of years there they are, just the same as when they were first put there. And so, dear children, the glory of Jesus grows only when we have Jesus in our heart. It is not enough to

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know all about the corn and to have it in our hand, or to read about Jesus and only to think of Him. We must get His life in our heart. It must be *Christ in us*. Then we shall begin to be filled with His love, and shall be made like unto Him.

7. And remember another thing, too, that corn *only grows where the ground is made ready*. The grass of the meadow springs up and sows its own seed for the cattle, that sow not nor reap nor gather into barns. But corn will only grow where the hard ground is broken up for it; the plough must send its keen knife from end to end of the field. Then the sower can come with his precious seed. And so we need to be made ready for Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes to us, and makes us feel our sins, and makes our hearts ready. Do not wait trying to make yourselves ready, the Holy Spirit is come to do that for us. Ask Him to make your hearts ready for Jesus to come and live in them, and He will do it.

There is yet one other thing about corn that we cannot forget. Before *the corn does us any good it dies*. "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die," so says Paul; and Jesus himself tells us, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The seed in the ground dies that it may give us its fruit. And so with the corn that becomes our bread. It is taken and beaten and ground, and the life goes out of it that it may make us strong. Ah! dear children, think how much this is like Jesus. He lays down His life for

us. He dies that we may live. He is beaten and scourged and broken that we may have strength and everlasting life.

Dear children, let us receive Him into our hearts. Let us live to serve and please Him. And let us pray as David prayed,—“*Blessed be His glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with His glory.—Amen and Amen!*”

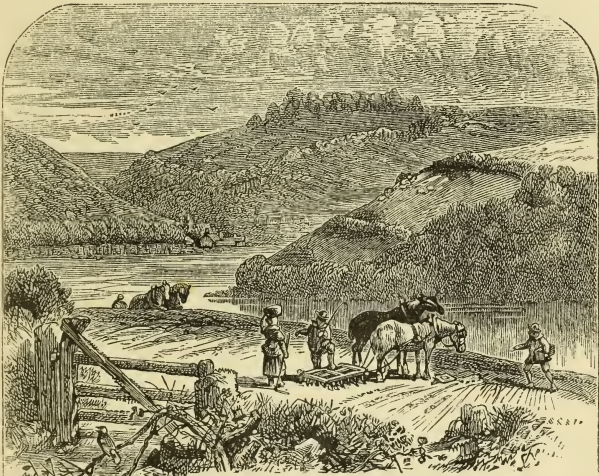


VIII.

A STROLL THROUGH THE FIELDS.

A SERMON FOR THE LITTLE ONES.

"A sower went out to sow his seed."—ST. LUKE VIII. 5.



I KNOW that you all love the country, with its forests and fields, its corn and flowers, its merry birds, and, often the finest and most beautiful of all, the great stretch of blue sky and fleecy clouds. Everybody enjoys a stroll through the fields.

But before we get to the fields, I should like

you to notice *Who spoke this text*. It was Jesus Christ. And notice, too, from what sort of a pulpit it was spoken. There have been some very good sermons preached from very strange pulpits. Years ago, when our grandfathers and great-grandfathers were fighting the French, there was a good Methodist preacher named John Nelson. He went on his way preaching till he got as far as Adwalton. There they took him, and would force him to go away as a soldier ; so they put him in prison until they could send him to the wars. But the good people wanted to hear him preach, and they came round the jail, and longed to get at the preacher who was inside the great stone wall. However, he spied a little iron grating in the corner of his prison, where the daylight came in ; and laying hold of the bars, he pulled himself up, and called through it to the people outside. He was soon heard, and a crowd quickly gathered. "John Nelson is preaching!" they cried on all sides. The magistrates who had put him in prison heard of it. "He can't be preaching," they said, "we have him safe enough in jail." Having sent to see, they found that it was so. John Nelson had made a pulpit of the prison wall, and a mouthpiece of the grating, and was preaching to the hundreds that had gathered outside.

But Jesus had a much more beautiful place than that. It was on a lake. If you will look on a map of the Bible land, you will see a place named the Lake of Galilee. On one side of this lake there was a gentle slope, dotted with little towns and covered with rich gardens, full of citrons and dates and

luscious fruits, and fringed down to the water's edge with bright flowers. This was the side on which Jesus stood; the other side was rough and rugged, with wild rocks, where the Gadarenes lived. The people in these villages lived chiefly by fishing; and you may picture the white or brown sails reflected in the blue waters, and the nets lying along the shore; and scores of boats following Jesus as He went from place to place. The people sat down on the grass, and He went into a boat, and there preached His sermon. The great blue sky was the roof, and the pleasant shore made the walls, and the blue water was the floor of that "temple not made with hands." The boat was the pulpit, and as the water lapped against the side of it, with all the people listening eagerly, Jesus told how "*A sower went forth to sow.*" Everybody there had often seen it, the man taking the basket on his arm and going on his way, flinging the seed over the ploughed field. As he went along, some fell on the way side, and the people trod on it, and the busy birds ate it; some fell on the stones, and was scorched; some fell among the thorns, and was choked; and some fell on good ground, and sprung up and brought forth fruit.

The seed is *the Word of God*—the lessons you learn from the Bible; and *those who teach* are the Sowers. But what are *the fields*? Well, *you are the fields.*

And now for our stroll. We go out across the farm-yard, and through the gate, and here is the first field,—

THE HARD FIELD.

“ Ah,” says the farmer, with a sigh, “ I can do nothing with this field, the ground is so hard ;” and as he strikes it with his stick, it rings as if it were a stone. “ And yet you don’t know what trouble I have taken with it. It is so hard that I can get nothing into it: more like a road than a field.”

Ah, boys and girls, I think you know that field. In the Sunday-school, and in the house of God, and in the home, I have often seen that field. Lesson after lesson is sown, and all sorts of good seed, but nothing seems to go in. The love of God, the story of Jesus, the wickedness of sin, all seems to be lost. The heart is so dreadfully hard, that no seed can get under the surface.

This is very sad. “ Will it always be so hard, farmer ?” you ask, wondering. And now listen to what the farmer says: “ No, no ; I hope not. You remember what David says in the sixty-fifth Psalm, — *Thou makest it soft with showers.* Only the rain from heaven can loosen the hard-baked earth, and open the ground so that the seed can get in and live. We must ask our Father in heaven to send that.” So there is a cure for the hard field of our hearts. He will send upon us His Holy Spirit, then the hardness is gone. The hard field becomes the good ground, and brings forth much fruit.

Leaving this field, we pass on until we come to a gate, and stop to look at the next field, — “ Now,” says the farmer, “ this is my

WEEDY FIELD."

There is no mistake about that ; weedy enough, indeed. As we come along by the hedge, our finger is stung by a tall nettle ; and as we get out of the way of that, we are pricked by a sharp-leaved fellow with his gay red cap on his head—this thistle. But they are not all such disagreeable weeds as these. There is a patch of yellow charlock, and the pretty wild convulvulus, and the scarlet poppy, and many other flowers. Yet they are all weeds. They have no business there, and they prevent the good seed from coming up.

“ You would scarcely believe how much seed I have put into this field,” the farmer tells us. “ And now look at it ! Why, if I had never sown a grain it could scarcely have been worse.”

Ah ! who does not know the weedy fields ? Boys and girls who have been carefully taught and anxiously looked after, and yet there came nothing but weeds. These boys with the good seed sown in them, began to quarrel afterwards ; so there came nettles and thorns instead of good fruit. This girl has the good seed in her heart, but she begins to think unkind thoughts, and perhaps to say spiteful things ; so comes a prickly thistle instead of good seed.

And these flowers—they were weeds because they were *in the wrong place*. Very good in a garden, but here, where they choked much good seed, they were very bad. Laughing is a good thing, but laughing in the wrong place is a weed. Talking is

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a good thing, and nothing is more foolish than to think that children should be seen and not heard. If God has given you ears and a tongue,—two ears and one tongue, remember,—He does not intend you to be deaf and dumb. But talking in the wrong place helps to fill up the weedy field.

But notice as we pass along that there is one part of the field that is quite clean. The corn is pushing up and all is promising a plentiful crop. We ask how this is. Listen to the farmer's answer. "I sent for as many boys and girls as I could get, and they came, and got on their knees, and pulled up the weeds, and cleared the ground. So there I shall have some good fruit."

So, boys and girls, let us set to work pulling up weeds. Remember that we can't do much unless we get on our knees for it. We must ask God to help us, and He will. Let us get rid of the weeds, these nettles and thistles of ill temper; the inattention, and the forgetting, and the things that come in the wrong place,—try to pull them up. I knew a little girl who was a very angry and passionate little maiden. Her mother said to her one day, "Mary Jane, I have been thinking how dreadful it will be for everybody when you are a woman. What a passionate, ill-tempered woman you will make." Mary Jane had not thought of that. True she was a passionate girl, but she thought that somehow she would be sure to grow up into a very kind and gentle woman, like her mother. She looked up rather frightened. Then her mother showed her how this dreadful prickly weed would grow and

grow every day, until it was too strong to be pulled up. So the little maiden began to pray for help. She pulled at the weed and kept pulling at it whenever it came again; and now she is the very gentlest woman that I know. We can clear the weedy field; but this must be your prayer "*Create in me a clean heart, O God!*"

Passing from that field, the farmer says in a low whisper, "Now if you go quietly, and cross this lane, and up the bank to the next gate, you will see a strange sight. This is

#### THE BIRD FIELD."

Directly our heads appear, up fly all sorts of birds. There are swift wood-pigeons, that go flying into the distance; there are lazy rooks, wheeling into the air, and flapping out of danger with a "caw," "caw," as much as to say, "We are not caught yet." The blackbirds fly screaming into the hedge, and little birds rise up from the field in a cloud.

And whilst we lean over the gate listening to the merry lark, we can't help thinking that we know many fields just as badly off as this. How many boys and girls there are in whom all the good seed is eaten up by the fowls of the air; and who does not know the names of many of these birds?

A busy bold little bird that steals much good seed on all sides, is called *Inattention*. Then there is the *chattering Magpie*, a great thief; busy whispering here and there, and humming and buzzing, a very destructive bird is this.

Then there is another bird that is almost worse than these. He steals very much more good seed and spoils as much as he steals. Can you guess his name? He never sings. He hears the others singing on the other side of the hedge sometimes, but he himself is as dumb as the bat,—it is *Always late*, who doesn't come in time for the hymn.

There is one bird more that I have found in Sunday-schools. In some places he is so much disliked that they keep people to go round and kill him wherever they can find him. He keeps the field from getting any good seed at all. His name is *Absent*. Take care, and never let him come near you.

One day as I was going through the fields I met a little sharp-eyed fellow standing by the stile as if he were very glad to see anybody in that lonely place. In his hands he held two pieces of stick that he kept knocking together with a loud noise. "Click—clack, click—clack," went the little fellow. "What are you doing, my boy?" I asked. He was making such a noise that he could not hear what I said. He stopped, and then I asked him again what he was doing that for. "Why, I'm scaring the birds, Sir," he cried out. And as a rook settled at the end of the field he ran away after it with a click—clack, click—clack, that soon sent it flying. That is what we must all do. We must all scare away birds that eat the good seed.

Now we have come to the last field. "Here," says the farmer, "is my bit of

## GOOD GROUND.”

We wonder that it is so different from the rest. But the farmer tells us how the rain from heaven softened it, and how they cleared the weeds and sowed the seed, and scared the birds ; and here now is this rich harvest. The seed fell into good ground, and brought forth much fruit.

And now, dear children, thank God that we can all be good ground. God can take away the stone out of our hearts, and by His Holy Spirit He can create within us the good ground. Let us kneel down and ask our Heavenly Father for Jesus Christ's sake to make us good ground. “The good ground are they which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”

“CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD!”

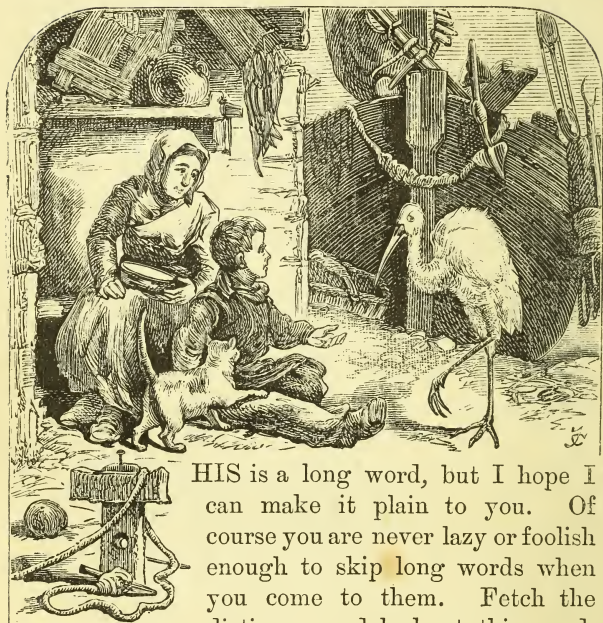




IX.

“I HAVE REDEEMED THEE.”

ISAIAH XLIV. 22.



HIS is a long word, but I hope I can make it plain to you. Of course you are never lazy or foolish enough to skip long words when you come to them. Fetch the dictionary and look at this word.

To redeem is to buy back, to re-purchase. That is simple enough ; and yet, dear children, this Redemption of which I would speak is so wonderful that we

shall think of it for ever and ever before we know all that it means. Let us ask the Heavenly Father to help us with His Holy Spirit. There is a promise in His Word that if any one ask wisdom of Him, He gives it freely; and that He never finds fault with us for being foolish and ignorant when we come to Him. "*He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not.*"

To redeem, then, is "to buy back;" and our redemption is a buying us out of bondage. We are "sold under sin," and God has bought us back with the precious blood of His well-beloved Son. If you will look at the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus, from the twenty-third verse you will find the law by which the land could be redeemed; or those persons who had waxen poor and sold themselves as bondmen—the law of redemption. I will try and put it into the form of a story.

In a little village amongst the hills of Judæa there lived a pious Jew who had two sons. He had trained them in the fear of the Lord, and taught them to love each other very tenderly, so that in his old age they were his comfort and joy. Whilst they were yet young men he died, and they buried him in the sepulchre of his fathers. Then Benjamin, who was the younger son, went forth as a merchant; and Jonathan, his brother, tilled the land of his fathers. It was a pleasant home, with the vines clustering about it, and dark-green olive-trees standing around, and rich corn-fields in the valley below. His flocks of sheep spread over the plain, and everything about him prospered. And indeed there would

not have been a happier man in all the land than Jonathan, save that he had one sorrow:—his brother Benjamin had gone away to what they thought in those times was almost the end of the earth. He had sailed for Spain, and nothing was heard of him for many years.

Thus things went on until one year there came a great drought in the land of Judæa. The fields were parched and barren; the olive-trees withered; the vines died; the flocks perished. All Jonathan's substance melted away like snow in the fierce heat of the sun. Month after month the drought lasted, and when it was over he had to borrow money of a rich neighbour to buy corn for seed. "He that goeth borrowing, goeth sorrowing," was what Jonathan soon found out. The next harvest was scarce worth the gathering, so that Jonathan had to sell his land to his rich neighbour, to pay back part of the money. The old home was his no longer. He could come and look at it with a very sad heart. He heard the laugh of strange children playing in the pleasant courts, and the haughty master passed him proudly. He, without home and without friends, could only stand and look in at what had been his father's house. He dared not set foot in it, for he had waxen poor and fallen into decay, and there was none to buy it back for him. So, with a heavy heart, he went trying his hand at one thing after another, and failing in all. All he had was gone, and at last, partly to pay his debt and partly that he himself might live, he had to sell himself as a bondman, a slave to his rich neighbour. His master

had to give him food enough to live on, and some rough clothes, and a shed to sleep in. But he belonged to his master. And though the law did not allow him to be treated like slaves have been in many places, yet he was really a slave. He could not please himself, but had to do just what his master told him.

The law said that if he were able *he could redeem himself*. But he toiled all day in the hot sun for his master, and had no strength left to do anything to make a little money to buy himself back. So he could only go on working and sorrowing, without any hope of redeeming himself.

If you look at the chapter again you will see that there was another way in which freedom might come to him. If he had a rich relation,—a brother, or a son, or an uncle, or a nephew, or a cousin,—that kinsman might come and pay down the price of his redemption and buy him back. But as poor Jonathan thought of that, he only sighed very sadly. He knew if Benjamin were living and could help him, that he would spend his last mite in doing it. But he had not heard of him for many years.

And, dear children, the Bible tells us that we are "sold under sin," that we are "led captive of the devil at his will." We are "without strength" to buy ourselves free. We bring out our golden resolutions and our good desires, but they can't redeem us. We try sometimes to break the bonds, and to run away from our hard master, sin, but we cannot. You have read of slaves running away, and going through all kinds of perils, to get their liberty.

There is a letter in the Bible that Paul wrote to Philemon about a runaway slave. But who can run away from the cruel master that we serve? Who can run away from his sin? It is like the boy who on a moonlight night thought he saw a ghost, and ran away from it as fast as he could run. The faster he went the faster it went. Wherever he turned it followed, until at last he tripped and fell, and then he found out that it was *his own shadow*. And like our shadows, our sins stick to us. We cannot run away from them. What can we do then? Like Jonathan, we have nobody about us to buy us back. The preacher cannot redeem himself, or any of the people. The people cannot redeem each other. Fathers and mothers cannot redeem their children. Where are we to look for a rich kinsman who is able and willing to redeem us?

Now comes a brighter bit of our story. Far off in the land where he dwelt, Benjamin lived all this time in great prosperity. He was a rich merchant, with very many ships. His house was a palace, and kings and princes were glad to make a friend of him and to borrow large sums of his money. But in it all Benjamin was not happy; the beautiful gardens, the palace, the honour of the great men and the friendship of the princes, could not satisfy him. In his dreams he often saw one thing that greatly troubled him. It was a poor slave working in the fierce heat, toiling in the fields that had belonged to his father, and as he looked at that sad face he saw that it was his own brother. At other times he dreamt of his father's house, with its vines and olive-



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 trees; and there would come one dressed as the master of the house, but it was a stranger to Benjamin. And after him there came a wearied, sorrowful slave, and the merchant saw his brother again. Now, what was all his wealth and splendour, if his poor brother was actually a slave? So leaving all the beauties and luxuries of his home, he got on board one of his ships, and set sail for the land of his fathers. He came across the Mediterranean sea, tossed by wild storms, and once or twice in great peril because of the cruel pirates that lay along the coast. But he did not mind all that in his eager love to his poor brother. At length he landed, and hastened at once for the old home amongst the hills. There it was before him—just the same. The vine covered it, the olive-trees were there, the merry laugh of little children rang from within. What if it were only a dream after all! And with a trembling voice he inquired for Jonathan. Then a stranger appeared in the door. He was the master. His was the house, and his the vineyards, and his the flocks of sheep.

"Is he living, then, who once lived here?" asked Benjamin, with tears. "Jonathan, is he living still?"

"Jonathan," cried the stranger, "he is living, but—"

"God be praised," said Benjamin.

"But he is waxen poor and fallen into decay, and he has sold himself to me. You will find him at work in my fields."

"Just as I dreamed, then!" said Benjamin. "I

will go and see him ; but first let me tell you that I am his brother, and I come to redeem him." And he beckoned to the servants to bring the chest of silver that he had brought with him.

The master could not please himself about it. He *must* take it. The writing was made out, and the money paid. Jonathan was really redeemed. Yet he worked on yonder in the fields as if he had no rich kinsman in all the world.

"Now," said Benjamin, as soon as that was done, "I must redeem the house, the inheritance of my fathers." Again they made out how much it came to, and again the servants counted the money. Then the house and land and vineyards belonged to him again.

"And now," cried Benjamin, rising from the table, "let me go forth and tell him." His tears shone with very gladness, as if his heart were too full of joy, and ran over at his eyes. He soon came to a poor slave, just such an one as he had seen in his dreams ; one pale, thin, grief-stricken, with a few old clothes tied round him, so that Benjamin could scarcely believe that it was really his brother. Brushing away the tears, and trying to hide his feelings as well as he could, he came up to him. "Jonathan ! do you know me ?" The poor bondman looked up for a moment, and sadly shook his head. Hope was dead and buried long ago.

"I am Benjamin, your brother, and I have redeemed you," and the rich merchant threw his arms round the slave's neck, and kissed him and wept.

"Redeemed me!" cried Jonathan, bewildered.
 "You Benjamin—and redeemed me!"

"Yes, my poor brother. God be praised! you are your own again. And your father's house, and the land of your inheritance, it is all yours."

Then Jonathan lifted himself up like a free man, and blessed his brother Benjamin with all his heart, and kissed him, and wept on his neck and blessed him again, and kept saying it over again and again,—“He has redeemed me. It's done. The price is paid, and I am redeemed.”

That very hour Jonathan was a redeemed man. He left the drudgery of the slave. He flung away the rags, and put on fair robes again. He went back to his father's house, and claimed it as his own. It was all his own, vineyards and olive-yards, fields and flocks, asses and oxen. All his own, for his brother had bought him and all of it back from bondage. His brother had redeemed him.

And so to us, dear children, in our slavery to sin there comes the “tidings of great joy.”

“With pitying eyes, the Prince of Peace
 Beheld our helpless grief;
 He saw, and—O amazing love!
 He flew to our relief.”

He is born in our midst that He may become a *Kinsman*, a Brother to us all. He comes bringing our ransom price. But He does not bid the angels bring the gold and pearls for our deliverance. He gives Himself a ransom for all. We are redeemed, “not with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.” And

now Jesus comes to us our loving Brother, and He saith, "*I have redeemed thee.*"

Now do not let us serve sin any more.—Jesus has bought us back from this hard master. It would be no use for the old master to come blustering to Jonathan and ordering him about. Jonathan would cry out, "Away with you, Sir. I have had too much to do with you already. My brother bought me out of your service. He paid the uttermost farthing, and do you think that I shall ever do anything more for you?" Dear children, we are redeemed that we should no longer serve sin. Jesus has paid it all. And now whenever the old master, sin, comes up to claim us, let us go at once and tell Jesus. It is done, all done. Let us put off the rags of our slavery, and let us put on the robes that belong to us. No more pride and ill-temper and selfishness, but the purple and fine linen of love and gentleness, and the white robe of goodness and purity. Jonathan would never keep the iron ring of the fetter on his wrist; that would be broken off directly; and instead of it, very likely a golden bracelet would be placed there by his brother. Fling away all tokens and belongings of the old service. Let us have our hearts filled with love to our blessed Redeemer, and let us wear the golden ornament that He will give us, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.

We may be quite sure that Jonathan would never be able to do enough to show all his love to Benjamin. He could never do enough to please him. So, dear children, let us love Jesus. We are not our own. We belong to Jesus. He hath re-

deemed us, and redeemed us with His precious blood. O, to love Him with all our heart, and to serve Him with all our strength! We can sing with Zacharias of old: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people . . . that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."

And Jesus by His precious blood has not only bought us back from the hard master, sin; *He has bought for us the Father's house too.* He has put us in possession of heaven and all its joys. No wonder that around the throne the thousands of angels sing unto Him their rapturous praise, their new song, saying, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood."

And now, dear children, if all this is true, shall we only listen to it and forget all about it? This very day let us hear the glad tidings, and claim our freedom in the name of Him Who saith, "*I have redeemed thee.*"

In a village in Norway there is the figure of a stork carved on the church, and over many of the houses. This is the beautiful story they tell of it:— That in that village once there lived a little lad, named Conrad, and his widowed mother. Every summer a stork came near the house, and built its nest close by. Little Conrad and his mother were very kind to the stork. They fed it and petted it so that it got to know them, and would come whenever Conrad whistled, to feed out of his hand.

Every spring they watched for it, and when it came it seemed as glad to see them as they were to welcome it. Spring and summer chased each other, until Conrad was grown up to be a young man. Then he said he would go to sea, and make money enough to come back and keep his mother in her old age. So he went as a sailor, and set out for a distant land. All went well for many weeks, but one day when they were near to the coast of Africa, a number of cruel pirates swarmed around in their boats, and climbed up the ship's sides. They took possession of the ship, and put the sailors in chains, and afterwards sold them as slaves.

Weeks went by. The widow began to be afraid about her boy, it was so long since they had heard of him. Ships had come and gone, and brought no tidings of him. At last they gave up all hope of seeing him again, and mourned for him as drowned, and all the village pitied the lonely mother in her grief. As for her, the only thing that seemed to interest her at all was the stork as it came each year. For Conrad's sake she welcomed it and fed it, until the autumn came, and it flew away into the sunny south.

Now it chanced that one day as poor Conrad toiled away at his dreary work in some lonely place, a stork came flying close to him, wheeling about him with great delight. In a moment the scene flashed on him of his home and of his mother and their yearly visitor. Scarcely knowing what he did, he whistled as he used to do to call the bird long ago. To his delight, the stork came at once

close to him, as if to be fed. Conrad lifted up his heart to God, and with tears gave thanks that so dear an old friend should have found him there. Day after day he saved what he could from his wretched meal, for the joy of calling the bird to feed at his hand. But Conrad's heart grew sad again as the time came for the bird to fly away to the north. Was it going to his mother's cottage? Was the nest there still that he remembered so well? Was there any to welcome it now and any to feed it? Then it occurred to him,—why this bird may help me to get away from this vile place. He managed to write on a scrap of paper a line or two, telling where he was, and that he was a slave, and then he tied it firmly around the bird's leg.

The spring came again, and with it the stork. The old widow's eye lit up as it came, reminding her of her lost boy, and tenderly she welcomed it and fed it. And as it took the food from her hand, she caught sight of this strange letter tied at its leg. Curiously removing it,—think of her joy when she found that it was from her son! Forth with the tidings she ran to the minister of the little parish to tell him of the news. It quickly spread through the village. They must send and redeem Conrad, was what everybody said. The next Sunday morning the people brought their money to the church, and each gave what he could for the widow's son. Then one was sent to the king to lay the case before him, and to get a ship of war from him that the pirates would not dare to touch. It took a long time in those days to send to Africa, and there to recover

Conrad from his slavery. But before the stork had flown, the bells of the village church had rung and all the people rejoiced with a great joy, for the widow's son was redeemed, and was safely at home again in his mother's cottage. Such is the story they tell of the stork in that Norwegian village.

And thus, dear children, from the bondage of sin and the evil of our hearts, we can cry to the King for His help. Prayer is the white-winged bird that can bear our message right up to the Father's house. And an answer shall come. Jesus, the King's Son, comes to redeem us. But lo! for us *He gives Himself, a ransom for us all!*

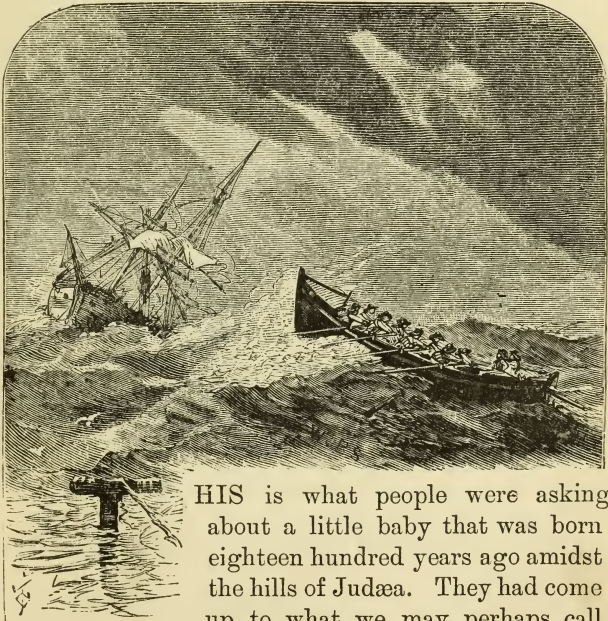
To Him let us look with all our hearts. And ever let us please and love Him Who in His wonderful love says to each of us, "*I have redeemed Thee.*"



X.

A QUESTION TO ASK AND ANSWER.

“What manner of child shall this be?”—ST. LUKE I. 66.



HIS is what people were asking about a little baby that was born eighteen hundred years ago amidst the hills of Judæa. They had come up to what we may perhaps call his “christening,” for when the baby was eight days old the Jews used to give it a name, as you had your name in baptism. It was a time of

much rejoicing. The relations came from miles around, and the rich people made a great feast of it.

This baby's "christening" was a very joyous one. His father and mother had no children, and were both well stricken in years when there came this little bright-eyed boy to gladden them. So all the relations felt that they must go up to rejoice at his birth. There were men and women who had come away from Galilee, and who spoke with a country brogue, like that which betrayed Peter. There were old grey-headed men with long silvery beards, talking solemnly of the times. There were rich relations for whom all the rest made way; and poor relations who tried to make themselves of some use in the preparations. There were priests who blessed the child in the name of the God of Abraham. And then of course there were children too, who wanted to kiss the little one, and who thought themselves quite big enough to nurse it.

Now the one thing that they all talked about was this—*What will they call him?* "Of course he'll be called Zacharias, after his father," said the old people. But his mother shook her head. "No," said she, "his name shall be John."

Let every John who reads this think of what this name means, and of what he ought to be,—*the gift of God.*

The mother's name was Elisabeth, and you would like to know what that means. Only the gentlest and best of maidens should have so sweet a name. It means, *the promise of God.*

The friends objected to the name John, because nobody of the family was called by that name. Perhaps the priest suggested that Zacharias was a good name; it meant, *the man of the Lord*.

All this time the poor father could take no part in the talking. He had been quite dumb for months past. They made signs to him, and he showed them that he wanted to write something. They brought the writing materials, and as they watched the old man's hand they saw him write, "*His name is John.*" That very moment the father's mouth was opened, and he praised God with a loud voice. Of course they were all very much amazed to hear him speak again, and as they went home, the different little companies that talked about it said to each other, "*What manner of child shall this be?*"

That child became the mighty preacher, John the Baptist; and Jesus says that of them that are born of women, there had not risen a greater than John the Baptist.

Now every boy and girl might well ask about himself or herself, *what manner of child shall this be?* Fairy tales very often tell how people have been changed into wonderful shapes, changed to different creatures altogether. As you grow older, you will find that there is no fairy tale so wonderful as that which is really happening every day. Isn't it quite as strange as any fairy tale to think of this little maiden here, with smooth, ruddy cheeks and sunny hair, turned into an old woman, going mumbling and muttering, with the weight of eighty years bending her down, wrinkled and grey and

toothless? Stranger than any fairy tale to think of this boy who finds it hard work to sit still for two minutes together, turned into an old man, stiff-kneed and bent, glad to creep along with a couple of sticks, and when he sits down hardly knowing how to get up again.

And much more wonderful than this even, is it to think of the little children merry all day long, being slowly turned into all sorts of men and women, good and bad, some doing very much good, and some doing so very much harm. Do you remember the story of the world's first baby? With what a strange wonder and joy his father and mother must have looked upon him, so innocent, so full of life and gladness. Surely those little hands could never do any harm, those bright, laughing eyes could never flash with stormy hatred. Some think that they called that first child Cain, in the hope that he would deliver them from the evil of their sins. But alas! the time goes by, and we see the child changed into a passionate man. Those eyes are filled with fierce anger, and full of envy, he rushes on his younger brother and beats him to death. Cain the murderer is he who was Eve's little happy child.

There is another story that you remember. How one night the house of a country parson took fire. The alarm was raised. The frightened family hurried forth half-dressed, and as they stood in the ruddy light, gathered in one of the outbuildings, the grateful father was kneeling to thank God for their deliverance, when he saw that one of the children was

missing,—a little lad of seven years. To reach him by the stairs was impossible, they were in a blaze. At that moment they saw him at an upper window. The flames roared and leaped in the wind. The burning masses fell on every side, flinging a shower of sparks high up against the black clouds of smoke. A few minutes more, and the fire would reach the place where the little fellow stood. Then a brave man bade another stand firm against the wall, and leaping on his shoulders, he stretched up a pair of strong arms and lifted the child out of the window, amidst the joy of the crowd. Think of the little lad of seven. His eyes full of wonder, his cheeks scorched with the heat, bewildered at the roaring flames and the half-dressed people and all the excitement, pressed to the mother's heart with tears of joy and thanks to the Almighty Father. But lo! the conjuror Time goes by, and the little lad is a great preacher stirring all the land, and blessed by God to the salvation of thousands of souls.

Now I want you to think what *you* are going to be. It is not *chance* that does all this. You are deciding now what you will be. The fruit comes out of the blossom; the flower out of the bud; the man out of the child. You are beginning now to be the men and women that you will be. You must be your own good fairies, and here are some things that you can do, or that you can get done for you. For we can go for help to One Who is able to do very much more than we ask or think.

FIRST: *Mend the little faults now.*

One day two men were building a ship. As they

sawed away at a piece of timber, they found that part of it was worm-eaten.

“We had better not use that piece,” said one man.

* “Why, we have had trouble enough with it,” said his companion. “’Tis a pity to throw it away. Nobody will see it, and it is only a little bit gone.” So they put it in.

After awhile the ship was finished. With her sails set and flags flying, and with merry strains of music, she was launched. She went across the seas, and was returning with a costly cargo. They were nearing home, and had almost reached the harbour when a storm came on. For awhile she stood it bravely enough. Then suddenly every face grew pale. The ship had sprung a leak. In came the water, in through the yielding plank. The sailors struggled against it in vain. Hope is gone. Up go the rockets of distress, and the brave men of the lifeboat take off the crew just in time to see the vessel with her costly cargo go down beneath the waters. And all through one worm-eaten plank! So look after little failings. It will be too late to mend them by and bye. And because there is only One Who does know all the little defects, and only One Who can make them right, let us go to Him with all our hearts, and pray as David prayed of old. “*Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults.*” Always remember that Jesus came into the world and died to save us from our sins and failings. This is what the angel said,—“His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.”

SECONDLY, *Be now what you would like to be when you are grown up.*

Be truthful.—The worst kind of man and woman that you can ever come to be is a *liar*. I would a hundred times rather meet you twenty years hence, all rags and tatters, as poor as church mice, and know that you told the truth, than find you what is called respectable people if you could even *play* at telling lies. The question is, what shall this child *be*? How it is dressed, and what it does for a living, is very little. What you *are*, not what you *have*, is everything. You may get rich perhaps,—I don't care whether you do or not. But if you want to be miserable for ever and ever, all you have to do is this, trifle with the truth. Whatever it costs us, boys and girls, let us be straightforward—speak the simple truth right out. Two boys were one day talking in school, an offence that the master severely punished. "Come up here," said the master, angrily, and the two offenders crept up to the desk. There, with cane in hand and looking very fierce, sat the master.

"Jones, were you talking?" "No, Sir, I wasn't," whined Jones. "Then, Smith, it was you, was it?" "Yes, Sir, please, Sir," said Smith, looking with anything but love at the cane. At once it came round Smith's jacket warmly, half a dozen times. Then biting his lips and with half a tear in his eye, Smith came back. Jones had slunk back, and was going on with his work. But he had much the worst of it. He knew himself to be a mean and false fellow, and he hated himself.

And he was growing up to be a liar. Whilst Smith would soon forget the cane, but would feel like an honest lad, growing up to be an honest man.

Be kind and pleasant.—I know an old man and his wife that you would fancy never could have been children. They never could have skipped about like other children, that old couple—old Mr. Grumbling, and Dorothy Grumbling his wife. I never knew anything please them yet. They go looking about with their dull heavy eyes through their big spectacles, always trying to find something to murmur at. Their mouths are pulled down at the corners, all sulky and cross. If their grand-children come they scold them for coming; if they stay away they scold them for not coming. Nothing ever is right. If the sun shines it is so dreadfully hot, and if it doesn't shine it is so dreadfully dull. If the wind is in the west it is bad for their rheumatics, and if it is east it is bad for their cough. If it is north it makes the chimney smoke: and if it is south they grumble that it didn't get there before, or else that it will be gone so soon. I would rather walk a mile any day than meet that old couple. No boy or girl would ever like to be like them. And yet they were children once. But as soon as little baby Grumbling could talk, he got into the way of saying, "I don't like this," and he pouted his pretty little face into such an ugly one. And Dorothy Grumbling was a cross girl, and grew up to be a cross woman. So you see they were their own bad fairies and turned themselves into such disagreeable crea-

tures. If you would be kind and pleasant men and women, be kind and pleasant now as boys and girls.

Then, LASTLY, take with you two things more wonderful than any other gifts that you ever read or heard of. The first is a *golden key*. Whenever you use it help shall come. It will unlock dungeon doors, and loosen iron bars, and let the heavy chains fall off so noiselessly as not to awaken the soldiers to whom the prisoner is fastened. Read the story in the twelfth chapter of the Acts, and note well the golden key that is mentioned in the fifth verse. "*Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*" Wear this golden key at your girdle. It brings the Almighty to your help, and makes the most High God your Friend. Then besides the key, there is a charm that I would have you wear, not next to your heart, but in the heart itself. The charm is this, *try always to please Jesus*. Think of it, pray about it, and try to do it until you get it into your hearts. Try and be thinking of it constantly, What would Jesus have me to do? You never heard of any such wonderful charm as that. It will always tell us *what* to do. It will weave for us a robe of sunshine that the Book calls the *garment of praise*. And it will make us so strong that we shall be able to carry any cross that the Lord may ask us to bear for Him.

And yet the most wonderful part remains, that if we come to Jesus and seek Him as our Saviour and our Helper, *the child will become an angel of God*.

I heard the other day of a gentleman who was visiting some poor people in a wretched part of

London. After climbing up a great many stairs he came to a door, right under the slates of the house-roof. He knocked. "Come in," said a timid voice, and as the light fell in through the doorway, he saw a boy of ten or eleven, lying on a heap of chips.

"What are you doing here?" asked the gentleman, kindly.

"Hush, please, Sir," said the little fellow frightened. "He'll hear you, and find me. You won't tell him, will you, Sir?"

"What are you hiding for?" said the visitor.

"Father beat me," and he held up his arm, bruised and deeply marked with the lashes.

"My poor lad, whatever did he beat you like that for?"

Again the lad's eyes went timidly round the place, and he whispered again:—

"Father gets drunk, Sir, and then he beats me because I won't steal any more."

"And why won't you steal any more?"

"Because I went to school, and it says '*Thou shalt not steal.*' And father may kill me if he likes—he did nearly last time, only the neighbours stopped him—but I won't steal any more. We can't go heaven if we steal, you know, Sir; and I want to love Jesus." Again the frightened eyes looked round the dark place.

The visitor scarcely knew how best to help the boy. He gave him a shilling, and promised to come and see him the next day. The little fellow looked up with a heart full of thanks, and as if it were all that he could do in return, he said, "Please, Sir,

would you like to hear my hymn, that I keeps on singing over to myself?" And so he began the words that you all know:—

“ ‘Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child,
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee ;
Fain I would to Thee be brought,
Gentle Lord, forbid it not,
In the kingdom of Thy grace,
Give Thy little child a place.’

“That’s my little hymn, Sir ; good-bye.”

The next morning the gentleman went again,— up the long flight of stairs, and in that low narrow door-way. There lay the lad with the shilling in his hand. *But he was dead.* In the night the angels had come and fetched him home. And then there came the wonderful change. Instead of his rags, the white robe that Jesus gives, washed in His own precious blood ; the crown of gold on the head and the harp in his hand. Instead of the dark room, the glorious land of light, and the city with its golden streets and gates of pearl, and the river of life, and the trees with “twelve manner of fruits.” Instead of the lonely place, where in hunger and fright he lay saying over his hymn, about him are the white-winged angels, and Jesus leads him where is no more sorrow or pain, to the fountain of living waters, and with a pure, glad heart he sings in that blessed country the new song.

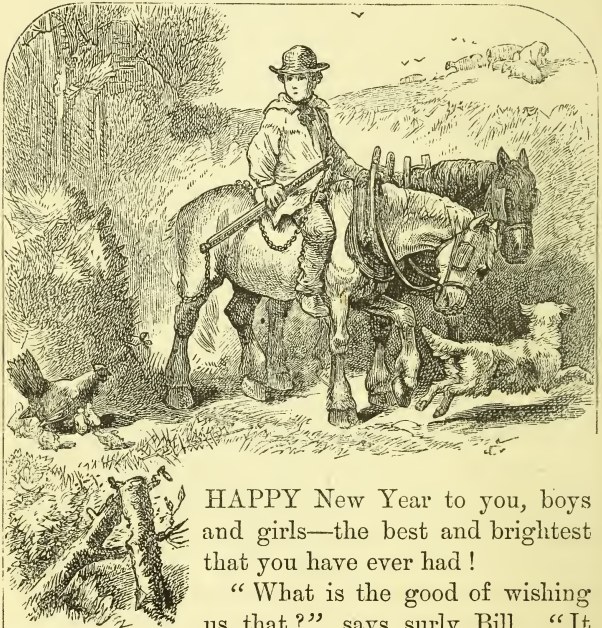
That, dear children, is the Lord’s will concerning you.

XI.

GREAT GAIN.

A NEW YEAR'S SERMON.

"Godliness with contentment is great gain."—1 TIMOTHY vi. 6.



HAPPY New Year to you, boys and girls—the best and brightest that you have ever had !

“What is the good of wishing us that?” says surly Bill. “It does not bring us anything. I’ve wished for things hundreds of times, and nothing ever came.”

Well, it is a very pleasant thing to feel that people love us enough to wish us any good ; and it

means that they *would* give us what they wish for if they could. So I will wish you a Happy New Year; and as I can't give it to you I will do what is perhaps better—I will try and show you how to get it for yourselves. Now there is one thing I wish for you all. I wonder if you could guess what it is. Sometimes I go into the great City of London, and see all the people hurrying along—crowds of men and women, and even boys and girls: they are all hurrying after what I wish for you. And away in the country the ploughman ploughs for it, and the miller grinds for it, and the woodman fells for it, and the miner goes down the deep dark pit for it, and the fisherman puts out to sea to look for it. All the busy world is eager to get it. It is *gain—great gain*. And that is what I wish for you—*great gain*. Once there was a king who had immense wealth. He had a throne of ivory overlaid with gold, and six ivory steps, with carved lions on each step, leading up to it, and a foot-stool of gold. Almost all the things in his house were of gold. As to horses and chariots, he had so many that there were four thousand stalls to keep them in. And every three years his ships came in, bringing gold and silver, and ivory, and apes, and peacocks. If ever a man knew what gold could do, this great king did. He was as wise as he was rich, and he said that *there was a gain which was more than pure gold*.

Years afterwards there lived a man who gave up all he had and went about preaching. He was very poor. Often he was in want. He went through all kinds of dangers, now in wrecks, and now amongst

robbers, and now amongst cruel men. And he who was so poor says just the same thing as the king who was so rich. He says, "*Godliness with contentment is great gain.*"

And this is what I wish you all—this godliness with contentment that is great gain. Godliness is a long word that you may not understand. But we can make it into two short words that you can easily see the meaning of. It is God-likeness, to be like God; that is, to be true, and good and loving. And that is more than all the wealth and splendour of the king.

This is great gain, because it is *something in us—in our hearts.*

A man perhaps has got as much money as he can count. But suppose he has a bad tooth-ache. Poor fellow! he puts his hand to his face, and goes about his beautiful room, sighing and groaning just as if he were the poorest man in the world. And whilst he looks out of his window over beautiful gardens, and over his own broad acres, he sees the little fellow riding the horses out to the plough. He is whistling merrily as he goes, and the dog bounds along at his side. The lark is singing joyously in the bright blue sky. The bee goes humming busily from flower to flower. All are happy but the rich man himself. All are happy because it is in *them*. Great gain is something that must be in us—it is sunshine and singing in the heart. And to be God-like is to have a clean heart, and to feel kind and loving, and to be true and brave. That is the only happiness—*gain in the heart.*

I have heard a fairy story that, though not true itself, tells pleasantly a great truth. It was in the times when there were said to be "Brownies," little fairies that lived in people's houses, and sometimes did a great deal of good, and sometimes a great deal of harm. If they liked they could be as good and kind as you boys and girls could be, and helped everybody very much. They swept up the hearth, they cleaned all the tins and brasses until the servant-maid could see her rosy face in them; they kept the milk sweet in the dairy, and tidied up everywhere. But if they didn't like to be good they could be as bad as some other little folks can be, and did all kinds of mischief. They turned all the things topsy-turvy, and made the milk sour, and spoilt the butter, and broke the eggs, and made the chimney smoke, and altogether were as spiteful as they could be.

Now once a farmer was so plagued by these little Brownies that he made up his mind to leave the house and go somewhere else to live. The servant-maid was so worried that she couldn't stay; the ploughboy ran off and never came back again; the man said they put stones in the horses' oats, and upset his milk-pail, and he couldn't stand it any longer, and he must go. So the poor farmer thought there was nothing else for it, and he must go too. He packed up his goods and filled his great waggon with them, and locked up the empty house. "Well," he said, as he turned the key, "I hope I've had the last of them. I think I have had quite enough."

Then he smacked his big whip and started for

his new home. As he went he had to go up a steep hill. He stopped his horses that they might rest a little bit, and as he stooped to pick up a stone to put behind the wheel, he heard a little squeaking voice like a mouse. He listened, and from the furniture in the middle of the cart he heard one little Brownie say to another, "Here we go, here we go; isn't it fun? He thinks he has left us all behind, but we shall go with him wherever he goes." And all the little Brownies joined in a chorus and squeaked—"We shall go with him wherever he goes."

"Dear me," said the farmer, sighing. "There, now—if that isn't vexing. They'll go with me to the new place, and I shall be just as badly off as ever. I may as well go back again." So he turned his horses' heads, and went back again with his Brownies.

You see boys and girls, what he wanted was this—if he could only have found something to turn the bad Brownies into good ones, so as to make them help him instead of hindering him. And that fairy story is true about hundreds of boys and girls; they think if they could only have this thing or that, and go here and there, how happy they would be. But the Brownies that do the mischief go with us. *They are in us—in our hearts;* and all we want is to have the heart made good. That is the way to be happy, and that is the great gain; when the ill-temper gets into a good temper, and the anger and impatience get turned into love and gentleness, then all the house inside is as happy

as it can be—that is the great gain, to be kind and loving, to be gentle, and true, and good—to be *God-like!*

And we can all be this. Because God our Heavenly Father loves us, and gave His dear Son Jesus Christ to die for us, we can ask Him to forgive our sins; and because the Holy Ghost is come to give us all clean hearts, we can bring our hearts to Him. Let this be our prayer, now and every day; and let us pray, meaning it—*Create in me a clean heart, O God!* That is the great gain. There was a dear little friend of mine, who is now in heaven, who was talking with his mother one Sunday afternoon. After a while he slipped out of the room, and was away some time. When he came back the tears were in his eyes.

“Where have you been, dear?” his mother asked.

“Mother,” he said, “I have not been happy in my heart lately, nor so kind and obedient as I ought to have been, so I went to my room to ask Jesus for a clean heart, and now I feel quite happy again.”

O! boys and girls, this is more than everything else—*it is great gain.*

Here is a piece of poetry that very prettily tells how happiness is not outside, in what we have, but inside, in what we are. A girl is going by the palace, and thinks of the Empress, and this is what she says:—

“I wish I were an Empress,
And had a crown to wear,
All glistening with diamonds,
And pearls to deck my hair,

And a train of velvet
For noblemen to bear.

“ I wish I were an Empress,
And rode a prancing bay,
Amid the people shouting,
And garlanding my way,
With trumpeters before me—
Toroo ! Toroo ! Tooray !

“ I wish I were an Empress,
My crown upon my head ;
I'd feed the poor man's orphans,
Who lacked their daily bread,
And give each maid a dowry
Who needed one to wed.”

Now the Empress was looking out of the window,
and this is what she says to herself as she sees the
girl :—

“ At my palace window oft,
Up aloft,
Looking down the crowded street,
I behold the maidens go,
Brisk of feet,
To the market or the show,
Laughing, tripping in a row,
To and fro,

“ And could hate them—woe is me—
For their light limbs moving free,
For their brisk elastic tread,
For their cheeks with cherries red ;
For their hair,
Flowing fair.
Oh, the May-time I have lost !
Oh, the nipping of the frost !”—*C. Mackay.*

The great gain is a good heart. God-likeness is great gain. But God-likeness is not all. Godliness *with contentment* is great gain. It is a dreadful thing for anybody to be discontented, but it is very much worse for a religious man, because it *ought not to be so*. It is wrong, and he could set it right if he would. If men have good and true and loving hearts, they ought to have contentment. It reminds me of a rich man who had nothing to do, and he got a fancy into his head that he was very ill. He lay in bed all day long, and took all kinds of medicines, and sighed and groaned about his symptoms, and really thought that he had enough to feel very ill about, and that he was going to die. One day a clever doctor that I knew came to see him, and found that he was quite well; but how could he make the man know it? At last he said, "I think, Sir, you should go to the south of France."

"O, I could never get there!" groaned the poor man.

"Well, I will go with you and take you."

The rich man was glad enough to pay the doctor for going, and the doctor wanted a holiday—so they started. But as soon as they got to France the doctor made him get up at six o'clock in the morning, bustled about with him in cabs and trains, and made him walk two or three miles at a stretch. And he had to do it, or the doctor would have left him behind in strange, out-of-the-way places. So gradually the rich man began to find that he could do it all—could get up and walk about, and eat and work like other people. And so these good people ought to

be contented; and they could be if they set themselves to be so. They ought to have godliness *with contentment*.

I heard a good story the other day about a man who said, "For a long time I lived down in the land of Discontent (in Cross Street, I suspect, between a gin-palace and a pawnshop), and when I lived down there I thought everything was wrong but myself: my wife was always wrong, and my children were always wrong, and the country was all wrong, and the minister was wrong, and the church was wrong, and all was wrong. But one day I came to a hill, and as I went up it I found it a wonderfully pleasant place. The sun was shining, and the birds were singing, and I began to find out that things were right, all right. The wife was right, and the children were right, and the country was right, and the church was right, and *everybody right but my ownself*. So I thought I would get right; and I got a clean heart, and now, I said, everything is right. I met a man up there, and I said, 'This is a nice place to live in. Can you tell me what the name of it is?'

"And the man said, 'This is the land of Good Content.'

"'I should like to come up here to live.' Is the rent much?' I asked.

"'No,' said the man; 'the houses are all rent-free. Nobody can make you pay anything for living in the land of Good Content.'

"'But the rates are very heavy, I am afraid?'

“The man shook his head. ‘No,’ he replied; ‘there are no rates, nor taxes either.’

“‘Then I’ll come up here to live,’ I said. ‘But how do I get in?’

“‘O, all you have to do is to walk straight up, and turn the key and go in, and stay as long as you like.’

“‘That will suit me just nicely.’ And so I went home for my wife and children, and ever since I have lived in the land of Good Content, and everything is always right now.”

This is what I wish for you all—*Godliness, with contentment*, which is great gain. Now, you can think of one or two ways in which it is greater gain than gold. *We can always have this gain with us.* You remember the story of the king who went to fight in the East, and, as he came home, he was taken prisoner, and shut up until somebody should send money for a ransom. There, a poor lonely prisoner, how he would think about his kingdom and his throne, about his crown and jewels and all his gold—how he wished that he had them with him. But they were a long way off, and could not help him now. All that gain of his was of no use to the poor prisoner. But when we have this gain of godliness with contentment we carry it with us wherever we go. St. Paul, who said this, took it with him into prison, and he sang there, quite happy, and in all kinds of strange places he was always rejoicing. Long ago, people used to talk about a philosopher’s stone which turned whatever it touched to gold. This “great gain” is the true philoso

pher's stone. Contentment in the heart makes everything golden.

And then, again, it is great gain because *we can take it with us when we must leave all other gain behind*. Have you ever read about William the Conqueror, the great king who had such wealth, and lived in such splendour? When he was dying, in France, all his friends left him to secure their own property, and as soon as he was dead even the servants took what they could, and hurried away. The dead body of the great conqueror was left almost naked on the floor. He who had his thousands of followers could hardly find a kindly friend to bury him. He who had so great a realm could hardly find a grave. He was dead, and he left all his great gain behind. But when St. Paul was an old man he had this godliness with contentment in his heart, and he felt that he could take his great gain with him. He said, "To die is gain." And this was the gain: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

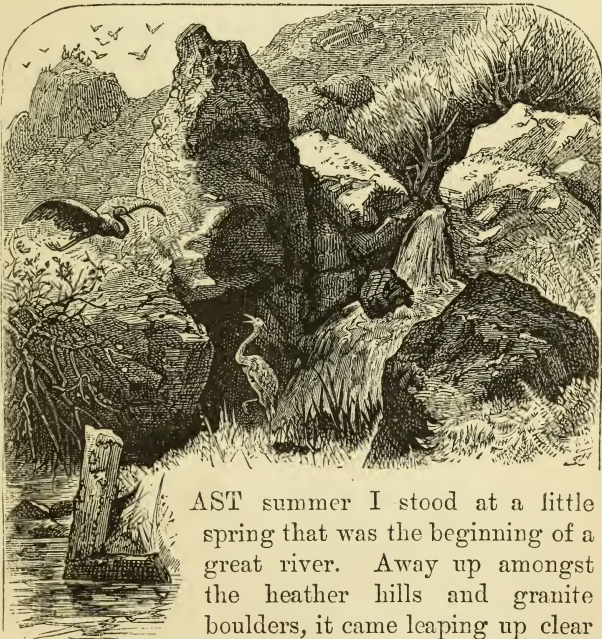
Boys and girls, I wish you all this great gain. We may all of us have it. Let us pray for it as a New Year's gift.

The Lord Jesus loves us, and delights so to bless us. He will lay His hand upon you and bless *you* with this Godliness and contentment, which is great gain.

XII.

HAPPY WORK FOR EVERYBODY.

"Both young men and maidens; old men and children: let them praise the name of the Lord."—PSALM CXLVIII. 12.



AST summer I stood at a little spring that was the beginning of a great river. Away up amongst the heather hills and granite boulders, it came leaping up clear and beautiful, where the ferns hung over it, and the wild birds came to drink. So the river began. Then almost immediately it seemed to be lost in a quag-

mire—a muddy place where your feet sank deep in, and it was hard work to pull them out again, where only rushes grew and rank grass. But oozing out in many places it came into a little stream again, and got other little streams to go with it, and then fairly started on its course. Sometimes it spread out, brawling over the shallows. At other times it narrowed itself into a little torrent, and went rushing between steep banks. Then it spread itself out in a deep pool by the moss-covered granite stone, and seemed as if it were not going any further. But it did; under the yellow furze-bush and by the forget-me-nots, there was the little stream stealing away slyly as if it were hiding itself. So away down the valley, growing as it went, until now it was big enough to do some work, and it had to go splashing and whirling round the dripping mill-wheel, grinding corn for hungry people. Then on again, always deeper and larger until miles away it became a great river and flowed out into the sea, away between deep-wooded cliffs—steadily, without shallow or torrent it passed out into the shining sea.

Now that, dear children, is something like this Book of Psalms. It is born away up amongst quiet thoughts, and in the deep still places of the heart. It comes along through dark places, often troubled and sometimes almost lost. Now flung over the falls, and now rushing furious like a torrent. But as it comes to an end, the psalm of the singer is deep and full and glorious. You will notice that each of these last Psalms begins with *Hallelujah*, or as the word is in the margin of the Bible, *Praise ye the*

Lord. Each of them is full of praise. In this Psalm the singer is getting his choir together. The angels lead; their sweet notes come down from Heaven,—and from the sun and moon and stars of light. Next comes the rugged bass—*Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons and all deeps; fire and hail, snow and vapours, stormy wind fulfilling His Word.* Then softening and blending both are the voices of kings and princes. And now the children are wanted. He cannot do without them. “*Both young men and maidens, old men and children, let them praise the name of the Lord.*”

You, boys and maidens, have to take your part. The Lord loves to hear the sweet music of the children’s voices. Do you remember that once when the children were singing to Jesus, the priests were angry and wanted Him to stop them. But Jesus asked them if they had never read what was written in the Book of Psalms,—“*Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise.*” Let who will be silent, be sure you praise the Lord.

And, FIRST, *Let us think what it is to praise the Lord.*

It does not mean that we should always be singing. I hope you do sing a great deal—skip about and sing with all your hearts. But some praise is not singing. Very often when people do not open their lips they are praising the Lord most loudly and most sweetly. Have you ever thought that God listens to our hearts more than to our lips? And this praise is always to have a *thankful feeling in*

our hearts. Praise is the heart singing. We want the heart that sees and feels how kind our Heavenly Father is, and loves Him for everything. One day as I was going along the road I saw a large coil of telegraph wire lying in a heap. There keeping itself all to itself, dull and heavy, it was the very last thing that you would ever expect to get any music out of. Soon afterwards, as we were going that way again, my little girl said to me, "Hark! what is that playing?" I pointed up to the wire—the same wire that lay coiled up in heavy silence. Now it was stretched along from post to post, and was making music the whole day through. And so it is with us, dear children. We keep our love in to ourselves and wrapped around ourselves, and then there is no music. But when our love stretches away to Jesus, then it makes the constant music of praise. It did not matter at all where the telegraph wire went, over the moor, through the wood, up the hill, down the valley, it was singing still. And so when the love of our hearts is set on Jesus, the gladness goes with us everywhere—at home or at school, at work or at play. It did not matter to the telegraph wire how the wind blew. Warm and sunny from the south, chill and nipping from the north, it was all the same; it sung still, and if we love Jesus it will keep our hearts singing always—that He can keep us in joy or sorrow, in health or sickness, in life or death. Thus the praise comes when our hearts are set on Jesus.

SECONDLY, I am going to give you some reasons why we should all thus praise the Lord—

“Young men and maidens, old men and children.”

Surely the first and best of reasons is *because He has loved us, and given Himself for us*. Some years ago I knew a man in Cornwall, of whom I dare say some of you have heard. At the time I knew him he sold tea, going from place to place with a pack on his back; but before that he had been a miner. One day when he was working far down in the mine, by the light of the candle that each carried stuck in his hat, they were going to blast a rock. He and his companion had bored the hole for the powder. Then they laid the fuze which was to light it, and cut that with a stone. It lighted at once, and each ran to the bucket that was waiting, and called to the man above to pull them up. He could not turn the handle with the two men in it, and called to them that it must be one at a time. They heard the fuze slowly hissing. They knew that in a moment more the explosion would come. They looked at each other—which should go up? Then, stepping back, the one said, “You have little ones, I have none. Go on; another second and I shall be in Heaven.” The man whom I knew stepped in and was drawn up the shaft. Directly there came the thunder, and the great mass of rock was hurled in a hundred pieces—one little piece flew up the shaft and struck my friend upon the forehead; and when he told the story he would lift his hat and point to the place where it had struck him. Then, as the smoke cleared, they came down the shaft to look for the mangled remains of

this man. "You can't tell, Sir, what I felt when I came down again," the miner would say with tears. "Why he had laid down his life for me and my little ones! How could I love him enough? Well, we began to search with axe and crowbar, heaving back the stones, when, as we lifted one great mass of rock, there we found him covered by a piece that had been shot out against the wall of the shaft, and roofed him over, so that he was not hurt a bit. Do you think I could thank him enough and be glad enough to see that he was not hurt?" Ah! dear children, how can we ever love Jesus enough. For us He laid down His life. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. The thunder and fierce lightnings of Sinai fell on Him, who gave Himself for us; and how can we love Him enough? Can we do enough for Him? Surely this now is everybody's joyful duty. Young men and maidens, old men and children, let them praise the name of the Lord.

Then, again, here is another good reason,—*We are the only creatures in the world that can praise Him.* If we don't praise the Lord, He gets no praise from His beautiful world. This is our greatness and glory that we can praise the Lord. After all, the dragons and great deeps can't really praise Him, nor the sun or stars. It is like the telegraph wire again. When the wind has come to the wire, then the music comes. The air that is in this chapel is blown into the organ, but it has no sound until it comes through the organ pipes. So all things in God's great world are dumb until they come to us. We are the harp and the organ by which their praise

is to go up to Heaven. Have you ever noticed how that step by step all things come up to us, and through us and in us, they are to serve God? There is the earth, the dull black soil of the fields. You know how it gives up its strength to the seeds that are sown in it, and to the plants: out of it come root and herb and flower and tree and fruit. And then all these, corn and all that grows in the fields, or trees and all that grows in the wood, they are to feed the animals about us, or to serve us directly in building houses and ships, and in a hundred other ways. And the animals what are they for? To serve us. They clothe us, or feed us, or serve us, from the singing lark that we stop to hear, delighted, up to the swift horse and useful dog. So with the metals—the iron that lies useless until man forges it, and the gold that is worthless until men find it. And is it all to stop in us and to end there? No, indeed. *Young men and maidens, old men and children, let them praise the name of the Lord.* We are to render loving thanks to our Heavenly Father for all that He has made. Every one of us, dear children, is to be a priest of nature—robed with the garments of praise we are to go in before Him and tell out the thanks of all the world about us. We are to see the beauty, and the love and the hundred uses of the earth, and are to render thanks to Him who made it all so good and fair. Because none else can do it, we may well say, “O that *men* would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!”

This is happy work indeed for boys and gentle

maidens. It is to do for our Heavenly Father just what the flower is doing for us. Go into your garden and look at the patch of dull, black earth. There is no beauty in that. On it rests the light, the colourless light that you can't see, though you see by it. It has no beauty. Over it there comes the breeze, the unscented breeze. Here is earth and light and air without any beauty at all. But see, here comes up the flower, and it changes all. Out of the dull earth come the graceful stem and exquisite flower. From the light, the clear colourless light it has gathered the tints and hues, these matchless colours. And from the scentless air it has distilled the delicious perfume. So out of all things we are to get the beauty and gladness, and turn it into joy for our Blessed Lord.

Then there is a THIRD reason why we should praise the Lord. *Praise is the only thing that we can give to the Lord.* Everything in the world belongs to the Lord. He made it. All that we have He gave to us. What have we got then that we can give to Him? Only this, our loving praise. In the East end of London, one day a gentleman was visiting, when he found a poor old woman very ill and starving. Without friends, without food, without fire, with nobody in the world to think of her but the landlord; and he only thought of her because he wanted the rent of her room. The gentleman in talking with her found that once she had been in a good position; he knew something of her family. He immediately set to work to help her. He got many persons to take an interest in her case, and

raised money enough to make her comfortable. He sent her things for her room, which before was stript by want; he sent her food and clothes, and got her some little work with which she could help with the rent. The poor woman was overwhelmed by his kindness, but she had nothing to give him. All she had, he had given her. But if you had gone to her room some morning you would have seen her going now and then to the patched window, carefully moving something to catch the little bit of sunshine that crept into her court for an hour or so every day. There, in a broken flower-pot she is growing a flower. She saved a few pence to buy it, and when it is at its best and sweetest, she thinks how she will go and take it to tell her thankfulness to him who has done so much for her. Ah, dear children, we too have nothing that we can give to our good Lord. But this we can do, and let us do it with all our hearts, let us grow this sweet flower of praise in our hearts. Let us have it at its sweetest and best, that all fragrant and beautiful we may give it to Him who has given us our all.

The FOURTH reason is this,—*That loving praise is the only thing that can satisfy our loving Lord.* Suppose that like Samson, I were to put forth a riddle, who could guess the answer? This shall be my riddle—What can kill love? Hard work cannot kill love. Jacob worked hard enough for grumbling Laban, but that did not kill his love to Rachel. The mother here works hard for her poor little sick child, toiling all day, and rising often in the night. Sorrow and suffering do not kill love. They often

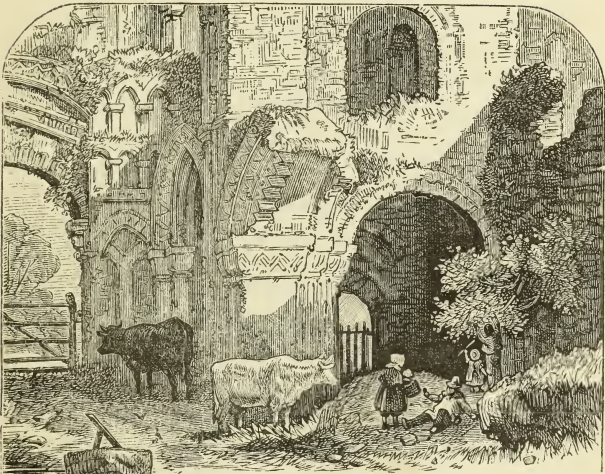
make love stronger and gentler and tenderer than it was before. What then can kill love? This,—if love never gets a word of loving thanks poor love starves and sickens, and is like to die. The father saw the prodigal a long way off, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. He brought his son home and gave him a ring for the finger and shoes for the feet, and the best robe and the fatted calf. And when the glad joy sparkled in the eye, and all his thanks for the father's goodness filled his heart, and flowed out in every look and word, then the father was satisfied. But suppose the son had taken little notice of it all—of his shoes, and the ring, and the fatted calf; if he had begun to complain and to grumble, I think then the father's heart would have been very sad, and his great love would have been sore wounded. Nothing else can satisfy love, but joy in it and loving praise for it all. Dear children, think of this, and because our God is love, let us live a life of continual praise.

And yet a *word more*, about the FIFTH reason. Everybody ought to praise the Lord now, *because it is the happy work that we shall do in heaven.* You know that nobody goes right into his work at once. The boy is bound an apprentice to learn the art and mystery of his craft. And so, dear children, it would be a poor thing to go amongst the angels who praise Him day and night, and not know how to begin. Let us practice it down here. Let us apprentice ourselves to this happy art, and so get ready to praise Him day and night in His holy temple.

XIII.

A STRONG TOWER.

"A strong Tower from the Enemy." PSALM lxi. 3.



SOME time ago, stood on the ruins of an old castle. The arches were broken down. The gateway, that once was guarded by stalwart men in armour, was in ruins. Ferns waved their plumes peacefully from the narrow openings, where once the archers shot their feathered arrows at the foe. The ivy clung round the crumbling windows, where fair maidens used to sit, working

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their tapestry with dainty fingers. In the moat below, the children shouted as they picked the primroses, or unwrapped the delicate "lords and ladies" from their green covering. And in the grassy centre court, that used to ring with tramp of armed men, the cows were grazing now. Beyond these stretched the pleasant country, dotted with farmhouses, and farther off the blue sea met the deeper blue of the sky and shut it all in pleasantly.

But as I looked the whole scene changed. I began to think of it as it was hundreds of years ago. The castle rose up strong with thick grey walls and mighty buttresses. Water filled the deep moat. Fierce old warriors moved to and fro in heavy armour. The country was covered with trees. Away on the coast there shot up the ruddy glare of a fire. The black smoke spread, and thick clouds flushed with the quivering flames. It is the signal that the enemy is landing. In a moment every one prepares for flight. Seizing what they can, father and mother and little ones hurry off to the castle. Up from all parts they rush in through the arched gateway—and now the drawbridge is lifted, the great doors are closed, and all are safe within. There no foe can get at them. The moat with its deep water went round them, and the archers stood ready to shoot with deadly aim. It was such a scene that David had in his mind when he sang this Psalm. He had often proved it in those wild fighting times, and he remembered how God had been all this to him. *Thou hast been a shelter for me and a strong Tower from the enemy.*



Let us think of the Lord as a strong Tower. And first we should remember *that the children wanted such a refuge just as much as the grown up people did.* It would never have done for the mother to have left her little child, or the father his boys and maidens. The enemy would have carried them away as slaves, or perhaps have killed them. The children needed a Tower quite as much as anybody else. And you need it to-day. There is still a strong Prince with a great army who is as cruel and fierce as ever he was. He is called the Prince of this world, and he goeth about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Nothing pleases him more than to tempt boys and girls into his service, that he may make them his slaves. Ah, what a cruel master he is! Nothing ever satisfies him. Even when his slaves have done all they can for him, and spent their lives in his service, he drags them down to his own dreadful abode. From this cruel enemy, Jesus is come to be our strong Tower, and we must run away to Him and there seek refuge from this enemy. There was once a good youth called Melancthon, and he made up his mind to love Jesus and to serve Him. He thought he could do it by himself, and tried. But he tells us that he soon found that the old devil was too strong for young Melancthon. That is why many of us fail. We try to fight the temptations of Satan in our own strength, and we are too weak. We should run away to Jesus. Even when our Lord Himself was tempted, you remember, He went for His defence to the Word of God, and began each



sentence with this—*It is written*. So He would teach us not to fight this enemy in our own strength. I should like you to find the story of Peter, who when Jesus began to be sorrowful, said, “I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death.” Jesus saw the old enemy coming up against Peter, and knew how strong a foe he was, and He said, “Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat: *but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.*” He wanted Peter to see where his strong Tower was. Dear children, whenever temptation comes to you remember that none of us can fight this enemy by ourselves. We must run away at once and hide ourselves in Jesus.

Nor is this the only enemy that makes us need the strong Tower. *We have often to run away from ourselves.* As I stood that day on the ruined castle I thought of another good work that it had done. Besides the foes that came from afar off, there were bad men who gathered together in the woods, and lived as wild robbers, often taking the goods and cattle of the people, and sometimes murdering them. Then the lord of the castle would go forth with his knights, and search out these cruel robbers, and destroy their refuges, and kill the chief of them; or he would bring them back, laden with chains, and shut them up in a deep dungeon, so that they could do no more harm. Ah, dear children, you know how such evil things dwell in our hearts—our tempers perhaps are passionate and set us all on fire, like these robbers used to do

to the cottages and homes of the people. The feelings sometimes are full of anger and hatred, like those cruel men. Now for them too the Lord is a strong Tower. He comes forth with His strong right hand to destroy this nest of robbers. He can lead them chained, and shut them up in His deep dungeon, so that they shall not hurt or destroy any more. In the nineteenth chapter of the Revelation, John gives us a wonderful picture of this glorious Lord and His army, going forth to make war against His enemies. Let us come up to Him against the evils that trouble us. He shall be our strong Tower from the enemy.

The next thing I want you to think of is this,—*That the gateway was always opened to children.* I sometimes see notices like this—“Children not admitted.” I am quite sure that was never put up outside the strong Tower. If they made way for anybody it was for the children. I think if the Captain ever put out his hand to help anybody it was to help a little child. When the drawbridge was pulled up and the gate barred, and the enemy hastening on, some poor fellow might have stood on the other side of the moat and cried for help, and I am not sure that they would run the risk of trying to save him. But if a little child had stood and held out its hands, I am quite sure that then the bolts were hurled back, and the drawbridge was lowered, and some brave soldier sprang forth to snatch up that child, and with a shower of arrows at his heels, bore it right into the strong Tower. Here none are more welcome than children; I had almost

said none are so welcome. Every boy and maiden can sing of the great Lord in heaven, *Thou art my strong Tower from the enemy*. You can come in—you are not too little, you are not too young. That gate is never shut against a child. I have heard that when a steamer was on fire on one of the American lakes an emigrant was coming home with his hard-won gold. He fastened it to his waist and prepared to jump overboard to swim to shore, when a piteous little voice cried—"Please, Sir, will you save me?" He looked for a moment at the tearful eyes. He must lose the gold, or he must leave the child, he could not save both. In a moment he loosened the belt, and let it drop; and then clasping the little one in his arms he sprang over, and bore her safely to the shore. Dear children, for us Jesus laid down His life; to save us He gave up Himself to the dreadful death of the cross. And now I am quite sure that when we come and ask Him to save us, He does take us into His arms and bear us safely into the strong Tower of His love and of His salvation.

Then in the second place think *what a safe refuge we have when the Lord is our strong Tower*. He is the Almighty. Some time ago I saw a great castle away on the south coast of England, and I looked with wonder at its great strength. It was built on the steep cliff that rose straight out of the sea, so that none could get to it that way. And above the cliff, batteries of cannon stretched away one above the other to the very top. I had to go through covered ways and past great gates and over

drawbridges with deep moats, and by huge cannon, and past sentinels at every corner, until at last I stood on the top of it all. And as I looked down over it, and noticed its strength and its security, I began to think how much stronger than all this is the Lord who was David's Tower. He holds the sea in His mighty hand. He made the mighty rocks, by the word of His power. That is the safest place in all the world, when the Lord is our Tower. You remember the story of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt, a great host of men and women and children. They could not fight, they had no spears or swords. After them came a great army with chariots and horses, and gleaming spears. And the fierce king rode furiously on saying, "I will overtake and kill them all!" But he could not come near them. The Lord was their refuge. And then we are told that the Lord *looked upon them*; that was all. And the chariots sank in the sand, and the wheels came off, and fear came upon them. And then God *blew with His breath*, and in a moment king and horsemen and chariots all are buried in the mighty waters. *His sea covered them*. Take another story. Here in this city is one of the prophets. He has no armour; only a loose mantle flung over his shoulder; bare-headed and bare-footed. And up against him came a great army to take him. An easy thing that, surely—these armed hundreds against the prophet and his young servant! No, indeed, they can't touch him. The prophet has the Lord for his Tower, and all about him are the chariots of fire and the horses of fire; and in a

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moment blindness smites all the army, and the prophet whom they came to kill becomes their guide, and leads them back to their own place. The strongest Tower in all the world is this, to have the everlasting arms about us.

Look at the next verse, and you will see that David thought the Lord so strong that His *tabernacle* was safer than any other stronghold. A tabernacle was a tent—an arrow could pierce it, a sword could rend it, the fierce winds might hurl it down, and a child's hand could cut the cords by which it was upheld, the fire could lick it up, or the floods could sweep it away. But if it were *the Lord's tabernacle* it would be safer than the castle of any other, and here would he dwell for ever. What harm could come to him there? Once, when men and women were slain for worshipping God as they thought they should do, a little company in Scotland had gone away to the hills to sing and to pray. The soldiers followed them. There stood the little company on the heather without any defence against bullet and sword. They saw the soldiers afar off, and prayed to God to hide them in His tabernacle. And as they prayed a thick cloud came rolling along the hollows, and it gathered about them and hid them. The soldiers rode on and passed them, anxious only about their own way. And as soon as they were out of sight, the mist rolled away, and the sunlight streamed down upon them as they lifted their voices in glad thanksgiving. How safe is he who has the Lord for his strong Tower from the enemy!

Notice too, that David not only speaks of the

safety but of the *blessedness* also. *I will trust in the covert of thy wings.* There is not only strength, there is comfort and blessedness—the covert of Thy wings. When I was going over that great castle of which I have told you, I thought that it was a very good place to hide in, but not a very comfortable place to live in. But when I got up to the very safest place of all, there I found a most pleasant little cottage; the ivy grew on the thatch, the jessamine and rose hung about the porch, a bird was singing merrily over the door, and from within came the happy laugh of children. There was strength, and there was comfort too. There was safety, and loving care. And so, dear children, is it in the Lord's strong Tower. The Almighty Power goes around us to defend us, and the arms that encircle us are the arms of Love. Do not let us go to Him for refuge only, but also for His tender love. Not only to escape from our enemies, but for our own blessedness. *I will trust in the covert of Thy wings.* Perhaps David got this thought from the eagle's nest. He had seen it far up amongst the mighty rocks, where no arrow could reach it, and where no foot could climb, there in the cleft of the rock, sheltered from wild winds. The eaglets had a strong tower that stretched away up to Heaven. But then there came the grand old eagle sailing on its great wings, and they had the snug warmth of the downy breast and the shelter of those mighty pinions. They rested beneath the covert of the wings. The Lord's Tower is a place of blessedness as well of safety.

Then there is another thing, that you will all see

at once. The tower might be very strong, and love might have made it very blessed. *But all that was nothing to him who was not in it.* We must come to the Lord and take Him as our Helper and Refuge. Hearing and knowing about Him is not enough. We must hide ourselves in Him. And remember that there were some persons who could never come into the Tower. The enemy could not come in for refuge, and the rebel and the outlaw could not come claiming its shelter. How then can we come in, for we have sinned? We have offended against the King's holy laws. Yes, but this same Lord hath given Himself for us. He hath borne our sins. He hath laid down His life for us. And now in His name and through His precious blood, whoever will may come. He is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him. That is all we need. For us the gate is open, for us the refuge waits if we come in the name of Jesus. Some people wait until they feel very good and very fit to come. I fear if we wait till then we shall never come at all. The people rushed away to the castle just as they were. They came without putting on a coat, or changing a robe. I think if they did anything they flung the robe away lest it should hinder their getting there. Wait for nothing. Come away to the Tower for everything. The gate is wide open, and the Lord stands bidding all welcome and saying that him that cometh shall in no wise be cast out.

And then there is one thing more, and only one. I noticed in that great castle that though they had

so many huge cannon, and such great walls and high cliffs and mighty strength, yet the sentinels kept pacing to and fro on all sides. No matter how strong the castle was, those who were in it had to watch ; day and night, in rough weather and fine, all the year round the sentinels were there on duty. Dear boys and maidens, remember that we have to watch. The Lord is our Refuge and Strength, but we have to keep the constant look out. Our enemy is very watchful and very cunning, and he will take us un-awares unless we watch and pray. When I was a lad, one of my favourite stories was that of one Peter Williamson, a soldier. He was fighting against the Indians in Canada. Now every night the sentinel was shot with an arrow. No sound was heard, but there with an arrow in his breast they found each man in the morning. At last it came to Peter's turn to be on duty for the night. It was not a pleasant thing, and he resolved to keep a very sharp look out. I dare say he prayed to God to help him too. He began his watch in the clear shining of the moon, looking all about him, and resolved to fire if he heard so much as the rustle of a leaf. Then he thought of the way in which an Indian could creep along unseen in the bush, and shoot an arrow before he knew he was seen. So he hit upon this plan. He took off his soldier's cap and coat, and fastened them on the stump of a tree close by. Then he stood in the dark shadows and watched. The night wore on. When it was nearly dawn there was a rustle in the leaves. In a moment Peter lifted his musket. But presently he saw that it was only

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a bear. He certainly would not shoot at that unless it attacked him. It passed on under the trees and was hidden in the brushwood. Then whiz came the arrow, and stuck deep in the stump. In a moment Peter fired at the retreating bear, and it fell with a shriek of an Indian. Wrapped up in the skin and creeping stealthily along, the cunning Indian had thus disguised himself, and so killed the sentinels.

This is like what our enemy does very often. He comes up, and looks as much as to say, "There is no harm in me. I won't hurt anybody." And the sentinel does not suspect any mischief until the deadly arrow brings him in the dust.

Get into the Tower, dear children, the blessed Tower. And when you are there keep a sharp look out. Watch and pray. Stand on the Watch Tower, looking out for the enemy, and be not ignorant of his devices. Remember what the Lord Jesus told His disciples

"What I say unto you, I say unto all, *Watch.*"



XIV.

CUR FATHER.

*"Our Father which art in Heaven."*—ST. MATTHEW VI. 9.



SUPPOSE that we all say this when we pray. Perhaps it is one of the earliest things that we learned to say. Let us be very thankful that we were ever taught to kneel down and pray to the Great God in Heaven as our Father.

You know that it is more than eighteen hundred years since Jesus taught men to use these words.

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And yet only four hundred years ago, the mothers in England were forbidden by law to teach their children the Lord's Prayer; for the priests wanted to keep the people as dark as possible, and only allowed them to say the Paternoster, that is the Lord's Prayer in Latin. And then afterwards, though it was allowed, the people remained so dark that thousands of children were never taught these words. The venerable Mr. Thomas Jackson tells us in his "Life" that when he was a boy the people were so dark and foolish that they knelt and said a jumble of rhymes about

"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,  
Bless the bed that I lie on."

So let us thank God, dear boys and maidens, that we have learned to say, *Our Father which art in heaven.*

But it is not enough to say it. You know when we pray it is not what our lips say that makes prayer, it is what our heart says. It is better, much better, to say a very poor stammering prayer that comes up from the heart, than it is to say even these sacred words if we do not think about them and mean them. I have heard a story of a little lad who was keeping his sheep one Sunday morning. The bells were ringing for the service at Church, and the people were going over the fields, when this little fellow began to think that he too would like to pray to God. But what could he say? He had never learnt any prayer, yet he felt in his heart that he should like to ask the Heavenly Father for a blessing, and to help him to do right, and to keep the sheep. So he knelt down. Now it happened



that a gentleman was passing on the other side of the hedge, and he heard a little lad's voice saying over the letters of the alphabet, A, B, C, D. He looked through the bushes, and there he saw this little fellow kneeling with folded hands and closed eyes, saying his A, B, C.

"What are you doing, my little man?" asked the gentleman kindly.

The little lad looked up, "Please, Sir, I was praying."

"But what are you saying your letters for?"

"Why I don't know any prayer, only I felt in my heart that I wanted God to take care of me and help me, so I thought if I said all I knew, He would put it together and spell what I wanted."

"Bless your heart, my little man, He will, He will; when the heart speaks right the lips can't say wrong."

The prayer that goes up to heaven must come from the heart. You know that in this old England years ago there were no guns, but the people shot with bows and arrows. Now if they put the arrow on the string only, and let it tumble off again, it would never shoot anything, would it? It was when they got hold of the string and pulled it back, back to the very heart, then away went the arrow and brought down the bird or the deer, or the wolf, or the foeman tall. So when our words just fall from the lips, they go nowhere and do no good. But when our words go from our hearts they fly right up to heaven, and they bring down the blessings that we need.



Let us then think well of what this means—  
*Our Father which art in heaven.*

And FIRST, there is the word *our*. What a happy thing that we can all say it, and say it truly. All can claim Him as *our* Father. I am so glad that everybody can kneel down and say this with me—Our Father.

One day when I was a very little boy, as far back as I can remember at all, I had been dressed up in some fine clothes—a sort of plaid suit—and sent with the others for a walk. It may have been in looking for something in the woods, or it may have been that I was foolish enough to think that a boy in such fine clothes was big enough to take care of himself, how it was I don't know, but somehow I got lost. I suspect that I should have been very much frightened, but I came upon a ragged lad who looked so hungry and wretched, that I forgot all about myself, and as I looked at him the tears filled my eyes. He wondered at my looking at him so, and must have wondered more as I came up to him and said—

“Poor boy! why haven't you any nice clothes to wear, like I have?”

He told me that his father was dead, and his mother was very ill, and had nothing to eat, and he had come out to gather a few sticks to make a fire for her.

My heart was full enough before, now it ran over. I took hold of the ragged sleeve of his brown smock frock, and cried, “You must come home with me; you shall. And my father shall be your father,

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and my home shall be your home, and we will send and make your mother better, and you shall have my clothes to wear.”

Home we went, for he was bigger than I and knew the way. Then up through the streets of the town, the people looking out of their houses wondering whatever I could be doing with this ragged lad. Straight home, and still holding on to the torn sleeve, I led him from room to room looking for my mother, and told her all the sad story. Ah, I remember well how he went away—how the sleeves of my dress came far above his wrists; how he carried a great basket of good things and promises of ever so much more. I was very glad—and yet it was not all that I wanted. I wanted him to have my father for his father, to have my father’s love and care every day as I had. I just wanted him to say this, *Our Father*. Let us thank God, dear children, that we can all come to Him, and all have His love and care. Every one of us can call Him *our Father*.

However little we are, we may say our Father.

I know a man who lives in a pleasant little cottage down a leafy road. And in the dusk the children watch for his coming. They stand there flattening their noses against the window panes, and at last when they see him coming, away they run with such a shout of glee. Behind them all I have seen a little sturdy maiden waddling along on a pair of sturdy legs trying to say something like “Father’s come.” All the bigger ones were soon by his side, but do you think that he forgot the

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baby? No, no. He stoops and lifts her up on his shoulder, and whilst the rest cling about him, baby laughs and crows above them all. Ever so little, but he was her father too.

Do not let us ever forget it. We are children—little children, poor, weak, ignorant, sinful, helpless, and yet we may all say it—*Our Father*.

Then, **SECONDLY**, there is the word *Father*.

*God is our Father, therefore He loves us.*

How much He loves us I cannot tell. We may think of His love for ever and ever, but can never find out how great it is. It is like those seas and lakes that they cannot find the bottom of, they are deeper than anything men have to measure them with. Paul thought about it as much as any one and he says that it passeth knowledge. I should like you to think very often of what Jesus said: *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Some years ago a Judge lived near to the Indians in America. His daughter, who was a widow, lived with him, and her little son, who was the pet of the family. Now the Judge was very anxious to live on good terms with the Indians, for there were but few white people about them, and the Indians when provoked had often set fire to the houses of the settlers, and murdered all who dwelt there. Some of the tribes returned his kindness and gave him their confidence. But there was one old Chief of a very powerful tribe who could not be won in any way. At last the Judge sent him a

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message. The answer was that the Chief would call at his house next morning. The Judge received the old Chief very courteously, and tried to be as pleasant as he could. He brought in his daughter, and her little son. Then he began to speak of his wish for peace and friendship. The Chief heard what he had to say, and answered,—“Brother, you ask much, and you promise much. What pledge can you give of your good faith? The white man’s word may be good to the white man, but it is empty breath to the Indian. Now if you will trust the Indian, the Indian will trust you. Here is this little lad, your daughter’s son. Let him go with me to my camp for three days. At the end of that time I will bring him back with my answer.”

If a sword had pierced the mother, she could not have felt a sharper pain than that which went to her heart. She clasped the boy in her arms and was about to rush from the room with him. The Chief frowned darkly and rose to leave too.

“Stay,” cried the Judge kindly, as his lip quivered. “The boy is dear to me as he is to you. I would not risk a hair of his head. He must go, God will watch over him. He must go.”

Who can tell the agony of the mother, as she kissed the little lad and made him ready for the journey, and then set him beside the Chief, and buried her face in her hand.

The Chief did not say a word, but took the wondering child by the hand and led him away.

Three days and nights! it seemed almost as many years to the mother. Tossing sleepless at

night, or dozing only to start at the cry of her little son calling to her for help. So the heavy hours passed away until the third day came. The morning went, but there was no sign of the chief. And now the sun was setting behind the forest trees. The mother pictured her worst fears as having come upon her boy. The Judge went troubled from room to room. At last as the day had nearly closed, the Chief appeared, leading the lad dressed as a young chief, with eagle feathers in his hair, and a beaver skin about his shoulders and the mocassins on his feet. Looking proud and happy in his strange dress, the little fellow came on toward the house. The mother rushed out with a wild joy and pressed him to her heart.

“Now,” said the old Chief, “we can be friends. You have trusted the Indian; the Indian will trust you.”

That was a great deal, a very great deal to do. But all we have ever heard of or thought about falls very, very short of this,—*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*. Think very much about it, dear children. Think of it when you want to be quite sure that the Father in Heaven loves us. Think of it when you want to know how much He loves us. We are so dear to Him that He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die upon the cross for our sins. Because He is our Father, He loves us.

But this is not all. Because *God is our Father, He takes care of us*.

Sometime ago I was walking through the street and came upon a couple of boys who were almost

quarrelling. "Eh!" cried one, "you should just see my father, how clever he is; why he can do it better than anybody, I know he can."

"Not better than my father, I'm sure," said the other lad. What it was I don't know; but I heard enough to say to them, "That's right, my lads, you stick up for your father, only don't quarrel about it."

"As I came away, I thought of what David said, — '*My soul shall make her boast in the Lord.*'" And I began to think of what wonderful stories I could tell of *our Father*. You can think of very many if you try. You remember the story of a little lad crying in the desert, under the shade of a shrub, and his mother sitting down with her face hid in her hands, and her heart breaking. And we are told God heard the voice of the lad, and sent an angel to open the mother's eyes, and showed her a well of water, and cared for the poor lad.

You remember another story, I am quite sure, of a brave little fellow who was one day keeping his sheep, when there came a lion crouching behind a rock, and it sprang out upon a sheep and bore it away. And up rose this brave lad after it and killed the young lion, because his Father in heaven helped him. And another day a bear came and took another sheep, and he killed the bear too. And even when the mighty giant came defying all the army, this brave shepherd lad said that he was not afraid. His Father had taken care of him when he went against the lion and bear, and his Father would help him to kill the giant. Ah, boys, he who has such a Father should always be a very brave lad.



You remember the little child Moses, and the three Hebrew young men who were cast into the fire; and the story of Daniel amongst the fierce lions, and how they did not harm him. One was a pillow for him, perhaps, and another a foot-stool. God did all these things. And He is *our* Father. Yours and mine. And because He is our Father too, He delights to take care of us. Do not think that all these wonderful things belonged to a wonderful age, and that there are no such wonders now. Things quite as wonderful are going on every day, through our Father's loving care.

THIRDLY, God is our Father.

*Then we should honour Him.* You remember His commandment, the first commandment with promise. "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." And if we are thus to honour our earthly parents how much more should we honour our Father Who is in heaven? Let us always think of Him with reverence. The Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods, let us therefore give unto the Lord the glory due unto His Name. We are sinful and unworthy to come to Him at all. Let us always come to Him in the way He has taught us in His Word. Jesus said *No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.* We must come bringing with us the precious blood of Jesus as our sacrifice. Cain came to the Father bringing only the fruits of the earth, and his offering was not accepted. Abel brought with him the blood of the lamb, and with him God was well pleased. It

pointed on to that Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world. He is the great, the holy, and the high, and He accepts of us only when we come to Him through Jesus Christ.

There is yet another thing that we must not forget. God is our Father, *then we must love Him.*

Love always wants love back again. It won't take anything else, it must have love. One day little Mary said to her mother: "Mother, I love Jane so much, but I think Jane only likes me."

"Why? Isn't she kind to you?" asked the mother.

"O, yes, mother, she is kind enough, and all that. But she is not glad when I come, like I am when she comes. She does not love me just like I love her." Little Mary was just finding out what I have said, that love must have love back again.

We can never satisfy our Father in Heaven with anything but our love. He loves us, and we must love Him. How do you think I should feel if I had a little child who was always very good and proper, always spoke very nicely and did what he was told, but did it all because he *ought*, and not because he loved me and tried to please me? I am sure that I should feel grieved, and say with little Mary, my love wants love back again.

You may sometimes see, in old churches, the image of a knight carved in stone. There he kneels, with his hands clasped, and his eyes shut, and looking so very good. But it is all cold and dead. There are hands and eyes, but there is no heart in it. Many men and women pray like that stone

knight. Indeed, you may find in the Bible where God sent one of the prophets to tell the people that they drew near to Him with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. Our Father wants our hearts. Dear boys and maidens, try with all your might to think in everything,—What will please our Father in Heaven? In your play or in your work, at school or at home, in the business that you are learning, and in the friendships that you are forming, have this in your mind—let me please my Father in Heaven. Ask Him to help you. Because He is the Father let us love Him with all our hearts.

And again, if God is our Father we must *obey Him*.

I have heard of a lad whom some boys were urging to get into his father's orchard and steal some apples. "Come," said one, "you know very well that if your father finds you out he is so good to you that he won't say much."

"Yes," said the boy, "and it is just because he is so good to me that I won't do it." He felt that with such a father as he had, it would be a shameful thing to disobey him.

God is the Lord, and because He has commanded us we ought to obey Him. But still more. God is our Father too, and thus we are doubly bound to obey Him. Let us read His word and find out what He commands, and then let us die sooner than disobey. Like the three Hebrew young men before the great king, with the furnace waiting for them, and the cruel men standing by, ready to seize them and fling them into the flames, let us stand very

bravely by the word of our Father. They said, "Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

We must obey God like Jesus did. He always said—Not My will but Thine be done. We must obey like the angels, who always do His will. Do you remember what the little girl said when some one asked her how the angels obeyed? She said, "*I expect they go right off at once without asking any questions.*" And that is what we mean when we pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven." Let us obey without any "buts" or "ifs." I know some children that ought to be called Master and Miss "Well, but—," for they never obey without beginning with that. Let us obey right off.

Then, *LASTLY, If God is our Father we must trust Him.*

How foolish and how wicked a thing it is to doubt the love and wisdom of our Father in Heaven! Let us never doubt Him. He cannot forget the youngest. And He can only lead us rightly. Once I was coming home from school in the wild winter, on board a steamer. The tossing sea made me very ill and very wretched, and I lay down in the cabin as miserable as I could be. I felt all so lonely there in the steamer by myself, and so far away from everybody that cared for me, and was altogether as miserable as ever a little lad was in the world. But how foolish it was of me. For by-and-by the steamer got to the pier, and before I stirred there

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was a hand on my shoulder, and looking up I saw my father. And he told me how he had been watching for a long time. How he had climbed up a high hill and had watched the first far off streak of steam. How he had kept his eye on it as it came nearer. How he pictured me on board, and then as soon as it drew near to land, hurried down himself to welcome me. Foolish little fellow, thinking myself so lonely and forgotten. Let us trust our Father, dear children. Be quite sure that He stands on His holy hill watching us with tenderest love, watching when it is wild and stormy. And by and by He too shall come to welcome us home to the Father's House.



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