

The Battle is the Lord's

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, Hampstead Road, on Tuesday Evening, July 29, 1851

"O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee." 2 Chronicles 20:12

It is one thing to read the Bible as a history, and another to read it as a mystery. The mere narration of facts in the Old Testament is interesting and instructive. How pathetic is the history of Joseph! How stirring is the combat of David with Goliath! How touching the lamentations of David over Absalom! How full of interest the whole life of Elijah! Read in the mere letter, there is in these ancient records everything to inform the mind and touch the heart; and many have wept over the pathetic narratives of the Bible who have never wept over their sins.

But when we penetrate through the shell into the kernel; when we read the Bible with a spiritual eye, and God is pleased to communicate a measure of faith which, as the Apostle says, is mixed with the word, and so profits the soul (Heb. 4:2); how different then are the Scriptures of truth! When we can appropriate the promises laid up in them, read our character depicted in them, feel their sweetness, and have the soul bedewed with the savour and unction that is diffused all through them, then the Scriptures are something far better than merely instructive or interesting. The sacred truth of God, as revealed in the Scriptures, reaches the heart, melts the soul, softens the spirit, touches the conscience, and brings, as a divine power accompanies it, blessed feelings and heavenly sensations into the bosom.

And in this way alone are the Scriptures profitably read. Thus read, the Bible becomes a new book, perused as it were with new eyes, and felt as with a new heart. Look, for instance, at the narrative of incidents contained in this chapter (2 Chron. 20). Read in the mere letter there is something very instructive in it; but when we penetrate beneath the surface of the letter, and read it spiritually, with a special eye to the church of God, it is invested with a new character, and upon it is shed a holy and blessed light.

Before, however, we enter upon the spiritual meaning of the text, let us look at a few of the incidents connected with it.

Jehoshaphat, the godly king of Judah, was, we read, attacked by a numerous company of enemies, and these of a race and from a quarter quite unexpected. They were not such as formerly had attacked them, Canaanites or Philistines, Egyptians or Ethiopians, nor the severed tribes of Israel. But they were those who had a kind of blood alliance with them. They were the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, who, you will recollect were the illegitimate children of Lot by his incestuous connection with his two daughters. They had thus an illegitimate relationship, a spurious, half-blood alliance with the people of Judah. We shall, with God's blessing, see by and by how this bears upon the spiritual meaning. Judah at this time was very weak. She had been brought low for her iniquities. And when this "great company" came against her, she had no strength, no army, no forces left to oppose them. Under these circumstances, what did the godly king of Judah as her head and leader? He "set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah." All human hopes, all creature help were utterly in vain; and therefore, as their only resource, they came to the Lord, who had rescued and delivered them again and again. The Lord heard their cry, and smote their

enemies with confusion and destruction. I need not enter into further particulars, but will proceed at once to our text: "O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee."

With God's blessing, in looking at these words, I shall consider:

I. First, What this "great company" spiritually represents.

II. Secondly, How the children of God have "no might against this great company, neither know they what to do."

III. Thirdly, How under these circumstances they cry to the Lord, "Wilt Thou not judge them?" And,

IV. Lastly, The fixed posture of their souls: "Our eyes are upon Thee."

I. This "great company" of hostile invaders was, as we before remarked, indirectly and illegitimately connected with them. They were not heathen idolaters, alien in race and language, but the same blood partly ran in their veins. An illegitimate flesh and blood alliance subsisted between the invaders and the invaded. View that circumstance spiritually. What foes chiefly invade our peace? Those that have a flesh and blood alliance with us. The enemies, then, that we have most reason to fear are those which claim relationship with our fallen nature. For instance,

1. There is a "great company" of *temptations*; for they come for the most part, not singly, but in troops. One temptation usually makes way for another. A single temptation resembles a burglar attempting to break into a house. The

most bold, or the most dexterous comes first, cuts through the shutter, lifts up the window, enters the house, and then admits the rest; so one temptation opens a way for the entrance of more. Let a man only dally with temptation; let him only entertain one lust, and give it lodging in his breast; let him only be allured by, and consent to, one powerful besetment, that one temptation will open a way for a whole troop of temptations to come and take possession of his heart.

But these temptations are, like the Moabites and Ammonites, our blood relatives. Illegitimate, indeed, and incestuous is their birth, for Satan is their father and sin their mother; but they have in us a nature akin to them. The same blood runs in their and our veins. It is this unhallowed, ungodly affinity which gives temptation such wondrous power. When temptation knocks at the door, there is a half-sister, a traitress to the very bone, waiting in the hall to open it and let him in. Temptation is fearful only as it is suitable. If there were nothing in our heart in alliance with evil; if we could reject it instantaneously, and say, "Get thee hence;" if we could deal with temptation as the blessed Lord dealt with it, when Peter said, "Be it far from Thee!" if we could say to every temptation as the Lord then said to Peter, "Get thee behind Me, Satan!" temptation would lose its power, it would drop from us as the viper from the hand of Paul, when he shook it into the fire, and felt no harm. But, alas! there is that in our heart which has a blood alliance with it, which listens to it, parleys with it, and would, but for the grace of God, fall on its neck and embrace it.

2. But there is also a "great company" of *afflictions*. For as with temptation, so affliction rarely comes alone. Look at Job's case. How affliction came after affliction, as messenger after messenger came with evil tidings! You will find that

afflictions of body often bring affliction of mind, and that affliction in circumstances often produces rebellion, peevishness, and discontent. Thus we have to bear the load, not merely of natural, but also of spiritual trouble; one, as it were, helping on and giving force, weight and power to the other. A concurrence of trials is so frequent, that it is a common saying, "afflictions seldom come single." And if this be the case with men generally, much more so is it with the people of God. "Woe is me now," cried Baruch, "for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow" (Jer. 45:3). "Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves," complained Heman (Psa. 88:7). This combination of troubles much increases their weight. If they came alone, it seems as though there would be strength to bear them; but to have affliction after affliction, and when one has struck, as it were, the soul down, then for another to strike the dying dead—this, this it is that gives such poignancy, weight and acuteness to the trials of the Lord's family.

3. But, again, what a company there is of *lusts*! If we look at the evils of our nature, we shall find that they too are not single. To examine our heart is something like examining by the microscope a drop of ditch water; the more it is looked into, the more hideous forms appear. All these strange monsters, too, are in constant motion, devouring or devoured; and, as glasses of stronger power are put on, more and more loathsome creatures emerge into view till eye and heart sicken at the sight. Such is our heart. Superficially viewed, passably fair; but examined by the spiritual microscope, hideous forms of every shape and size appear; lusts and desires in unceasing movement, devouring each other, and yet undiminished; and each successive examination bringing new monsters to light. O what a company of lusts! how one seems to introduce and make way for the other! and how one, as among the insect tribe, is the

sire of a million!

4. And what a company at times there is of *doubts, fears, and distressing apprehensions!* What an alliance, too, not only with our carnal mind, but with one another! "The children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites." And all against Judah. Temptation comes first; with temptation comes the stirring up of lusts; and with the stirring up of lusts comes a whole troop of doubts and fears arising from guilt laid upon the conscience. Hart justly says, "Sin engenders doubt." It is the evil of the heart continually manifesting itself that gives such strength to unbelief, and adds such force to those doubts and fears which often come as a great armed company against the soul. A guilty conscience has a strong alliance with doubts and fears, and this indeed makes them so formidable.

5. What a company of *professors* also are arrayed against a child of God! How they are all watching for his halting! How ready to magnify his infirmities! how eager to catch up any slip that he may make, or anything he may say or do inconsistent. One hounds on another. "Report it," say they, "and we will report it." Thus they hunt in packs; and many who have never tasted the bread of life, nor fed on the flesh of Christ, have had a sweet repast upon the mangled limbs of a child of God.

It was not the heathen that attacked Judah, but the Moabites and Ammonites; a spurious blood, but indirectly allied. So it is not the profane, but the professing world, a spurious race, who attack the living family. And surely they are "a great company," unmindful, like the children of Ammon, of all former benefits (ver. 10), and bent only on Judah's destruction.

Now all these "great companies" come against the children of God at some time or other of their spiritual life. It is true that all may not come at once; but at one time or other most of the children of God have to fight against them all; a "great company" of afflictions, of temptations, of lusts, of doubts and fears, or professors, who hate the truth of God which they see in them.

II. And what can they do? They are in the same plight and spot spiritually in which Jehoshaphat and the children of Judah were literally and naturally.

1. Jehoshaphat speaks for himself and his people: "We have no might against this great company." We have no weapons, no power of resistance; we cannot meet them hand to hand, or foot to foot; they are too many and too mighty for us; we have no power whatever to withstand or resist them. This every true Christian is taught and brought more or less to feel. None but Christians really feel it, because others have their weapons. But what makes a living man powerless is this: he knows there is no use to fight flesh with flesh; that is, by weapons of our own contrivance, or our own forging. A pharisee can fight in his own strength and righteousness; he can make his vows and promises, form his resolutions, and combat hand to hand against this "great company." But a Christian is stripped of his carnal weapons. To afflictions a natural man can oppose stoical endurance; to temptation a hardened conscience; to doubts, impenitence, or self-righteousness; to attacks from men, blow for blow. But all these weapons have dropped from a Christian's hand; God must fight his battles, for he cannot. He has therefore no power, nor wisdom, nor strength, nor might against this "great company," for his weapons are not carnal, but spiritual; so that if he fight, it must be in the strength of the Lord, and the power of His might.

Now when the Lord denies His gracious presence; when He does not come into the soul in any measure of divine power and grace; when He leaves us, as He often leaves us, to prove our own strength by feeling utter weakness—then we come into this experience, "We have no might against this great company."

In what a wonderful way was the Lord pleased to teach Paul this great lesson! He was caught up to the third heaven; there he saw and heard things unspeakable; his soul was indulged with the greatest revelations perhaps ever given to any mortal. He comes down from heaven to earth. And then what takes place? He has a messenger of Satan, a thorn in the flesh to buffet him. Thus he falls, as it were, from the heights of heaven down to the very gates of hell. He leaves the company of God and angels, and the presence of the glorified spirits above, and comes down to be buffeted and plagued, harassed and beaten about by Satan. O how mysterious was this dealing of God! How the Apostle himself was unable to enter into this mystery, that one recently so highly favoured should now be so deserted; that one upon whom the Lord had bestowed such blessings should now be left in the hands of Satan! But he learnt afterwards why he had such an experience. The Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." But how could the Apostle have learnt this weakness but by soul experience? Was it not necessary for him to be buffeted by Satan, to be beaten and roughly handled by the Prince of darkness, and to have this thorn in the flesh continually puncturing and lacerating his soul in order to learn it in and for himself? And can you tell me any other way whereby we can learn the same lesson? Can we learn it from the Bible? from books? from ministers? or the experience of others? We may learn the theory. The experience must be learnt in another school; and that is the

school of painful and personal experience. The Lord, to convince us then of our weakness and to make His strength perfect in that weakness, suffers in His providence this "great company" to come against us; and thus teaches us that we have no might, that we cannot lift up a finger, that we have no weapons to fight with.

Now look at your experience, you that have any, and see when this "great company" came against you, whether you had any strength of your own. What could you do with *temptation* when it came in a powerful way? Could you master it? Could you throw up a bank against it, and say, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no further; and here thy proud waves shall be stayed"? Could you say to any one temptation, "Get thee behind my back; thou shalt not tempt me"? O when temptation creeps in like a serpent into the carnal mind, it winds its secret way, and coils round the heart. As the boa constrictor is said to embrace its victim, twining his coil around it, and crushing every bone without any previous warning, so does temptation often seize us suddenly in its powerful embrace. Have we in ourselves any more power to extricate our flesh from its slimy folds than the poor animal has from the coils of the boa constrictor?

So with the *corruptions and lusts* of our fallen nature. Can you always master them? Can you seize these serpents by the neck and wring off their heads?

The *doubts and fears* and distressing apprehensions that come into your soul when guilt lies hard and heavy upon your conscience, can you say, "Begone, doubts and fears; I will have none of you; you shall not touch me"? You might as well, when the storm came down this morning, have said, "Storm, cease to fall;" as say, when doubt and fear and apprehensions of God's anger come down upon your soul,

"Hailstones, beat upon me no more."

And what can you do against *afflictions*—afflictions in body, in family, or in circumstances? Can you bear them with a patient resignation, and say, "I can endure anything or everything"? Who can bear one affliction in his own strength? Can you bear your little finger to ache? Can you bear a sharp toothache, half-an-hour of *tic douloureux*, or a night's ear-ache? Can you bear to see a dear child suffer? Can you endure the frowning face of God in providence? Are you never chafed? Is not your mind cast down, and does not the rebellious wave sometimes flow over your breast?

When *professors* speak against you, and cast out your name as evil, can you always bear it? Can you put your mouth in the dust? When one cheek is smitten, can you always turn the other? O you must be made of different material from Adam's fallen race; you cannot have the same heart that beats in the bosom of him that speaks to you, if you can always be patient and resigned; always believe, and hope, and love; always be calm and unruffled; are never tempted, never slip, and never backslide. Surely, surely, you are not yet perfect in the flesh, nor out of the reach of gunshot.

2. "Neither know we what to do." That seems worse still. Know not what to do! To be in such perplexity as not to know how to act! If a man were to say, "I am very weak, but I have a plan in my head which I am sure will succeed; or, although I cannot do the thing myself, yet I have a friend that can;" such a person we should not consider without resource of some kind. He could not with truth say, "I know not what to do." To have no strength is to be very low; but to have no wisdom is to be lower still.

Now when a "great company" comes against you, do you

always or often know "what to do"? Is there a treasure of wisdom in your heart? Can you take inward counsel, and say, "I see how I can manage this; I can easily overcome that; I have a plan for this difficulty, and a contrivance for that annoying circumstance. It does not therefore much matter what trial comes, I know exactly how to meet it"? If you are there, you are not in the experience of Jehoshaphat, and the people for whom he was interceding with the Lord. He was compelled to confess for himself and them what many a poor child of God has said in substance, if not in word, "We know not what to do!" We are fairly brought to our wits' end, and are altogether baffled and confounded.

Apply this experimentally to your own case. When afflictions come, do you know what to do? You may have heavy losses in providence. Can you always meet the trial with calmness and resignation, and say, "Well, to be sure, it is rather a loss, but then it does not much signify"? A man who can talk so, does not know much about the matter. Apathy is not submission, though one of that spurious brood that often walk abroad under Christian surnames. This is the trying point, not to "know what to do"; not to see what way to take, nor be able by any contrivances of our own skill or wisdom to meet the difficulty.

Again, when your lusts and passions are stirred up—and I suppose sometimes they move, they do not always lie calm and dead in your soul—you find now and then a little working of the old Adam nature; sin is not always taking its nap, nor torpid like a snake in winter. I suppose that now and then there is something not altogether spiritual or gracious, some sensual desire, some pride, some base imagination at work in your carnal mind. O be assured there is a veil of unbelief on your heart if you do not see, and your conscience is not very tender if you do not feel it. But when your old Adam

nature is stirred up, do you know what to do? "O, yes," say you, "I do; I am at no loss or standstill whatever. Directly I find sin stir, I make a firm resolution that I will not be overcome by it. I never give way to pride, covetousness, worldly-mindedness, evil tempers, or any of the works of the flesh." I really cannot believe you. You may make resolutions; but how long or how often do you keep them? Is it not as long as a little child keeps its resolutions to be good? When the parent is about to punish it, O what resolutions it makes! The tears run down its little cheeks; it will promise almost anything to avoid punishment: "I will never do it again, I will never do it again; I will be so good, so good." How long? how long? Perhaps not half-an-hour. And thus our resolutions, if we make them, are not much better than the promises of a child. I have long given over making any. But if we are so foolish as to make resolutions, how long will they last? Just as long as a feather lies quiet upon the roof of a house; it only waits for the first puff of wind, and then it is gone. And so our resolutions are like feathers; the first puff blows them to the winds.

And how can you manage your doubts and fears? Do you take them by the neck and strangle them? Can you put your hand down into your heart and cast them out like a nest of vipers? You will be stung in the attempt.

The real cry of the soul is, "We know not what to do!" In times past we thought we knew what to do; we were tolerably strong, we would pray, would read God's Word, would keep our eyes and ears and tongues, would set a guard over the movements of the heart, and perhaps to a certain extent we succeeded. But it was because we knew little of this "great company." It was a little company, perhaps; and when it was only a little company, we might know what to do; but when this "great company" came, it

put the soul to its wits' end, and brought forth the exclamation, We know not what to do!"

Now, till the soul is more or less brought here, it knows very little of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must be brought into trying places to know anything of God. I have often thought of poor McKenzie's words, and striking words they were, in his last illness. When the blood was gushing from his mouth, he said, "It is here we want a God!" Aye, it is here we want a God; but very often, too often, we do not want a God. Am I going too far when I say that nine-tenths of our time, perhaps, we can do without a God? Take this day. You have been engaged in your business, in your lawful occupations. Have you not been doing the greater part of this day perhaps without God? Have you in many hours, many quarter-hours, many minutes this day, really felt your need of a God, really wanted God; feeling in that state and case that you wanted a present God, a God to help, a God to bless, a God to appear, a God to come down into your soul? I do not mean that there has been no aching void, no looking upward, no secret prayer or supplication; but not such extreme desires and earnest cries as if you needed Him in a special manner. Base creatures are we with all our profession, that we can do so much and so often without a present God; that we keep Him, so to speak at a distance; pay him compliments, and yet can do for the most part so much without Him.

But when brought into trying circumstances, then it is we begin to want a God, and such a God as is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, such a God as alone can bless and comfort the soul.

III. Now under these circumstances does Jehoshaphat plead with God. And how tenderly and affectionately does he plead!

If you will read what precedes our text, you will see how he pleads with God, and chiefly on three grounds. He pleads with Him first on the ground of His power and might: "Is there not all power with Thee?" He pleads with Him secondly on the ground of His covenant: "Art not Thou our God?" He pleads with Him thirdly on the ground of His dwelling with them in the sanctuary: "And they dwell therein, and have built Thee a sanctuary therein for Thy name, saying, If when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in Thy presence (for Thy name is in this house), and cry unto Thee in our affliction, then Thou wilt hear and help." By the "sanctuary" we may understand the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, that sanctuary and true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. He comes therefore to God with these three powerful pleas: as a God of great strength, and therefore able; a God in covenant, and therefore willing; and a God in Christ, and therefore loving and merciful. These three powerful pleas he brings, and lays them at His sacred feet, interceding with Him to do that for them which they could not do for themselves: "Wilt Thou not judge them?"

There is something, to my mind, very striking and suitable in this expression: "Wilt Thou not judge them?" It is as though he put himself, so to speak, into close communication with God, and identified Judah's cause with the cause of God; so that God in delivering her was actually fighting His own battles; and as a judge upon His judgment seat, was passing a judgment upon His own enemies.

Now this is the most prevailing plea we can make with God; when we can look up to Him as our God in covenant, and take our enemies, our temptations, our afflictions, our doubts, our exercises, so to speak, into our hand, as so many enemies to God, and ask the Lord to pass a sentence

upon them, not because they are our enemies, but because they are His. We may perhaps thus illustrate it. In war time there is in the garrison a traitor who is conspiring to betray the fortress. A soldier detects the wretch; he seizes him upon the spot, brings him to the general, and denounces his crime. Now when the soldier arrests the traitor, he does not arrest him as his enemy, but as the enemy of his sovereign. So, if we can arrest our lusts and base passions, seize them as traitors, bring them before God, and say, "These are Thy enemies; do Thou judge them and punish them, and for Thy name's sake deliver us from their treachery;" this seems, as it were, to put God upon our side, and to call in His justice to execute judgment upon them as His enemies.

There is no use fighting the battle in our own strength. We have none. There is no use when sin has made a breach in the conscience to thrust into the gap a stout faggot of self-righteousness. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. The strength of Christ, the blood of Christ, the grace of the gospel, the sword of the Spirit—these must be our weapons. "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." But how few fight with these weapons! How many take their self-righteousness as a weapon against their sins; and thus they only fight flesh with flesh; they only combat self in one form by self in another form. This is popery. Poor weak creatures go into convents and monasteries. For what? To fight against sin. By what? By self-righteousness. They macerate their bodies, wear sackcloth, repeat their prayers, and attend to their ceremonies. For what purpose? To subdue their sins, arming flesh against flesh. And what is the consequence? If they have any conscience at all, they are crushed down in this ineffectual struggle, as Luther was in his cell at Erfurt. This is popery in full blossom—a gaudy flower, of which Protestant self-righteousness is a swelling bud. The essence of popery is

creature righteousness, and to fight against sin by self-righteousness is next door to going into a monastery, wearing a hair shirt, or flagellating the shoulders with a scourge. The gospel has brought to light a better, a more effectual way. "Wilt Thou not judge them?" "Here are my lusts, I cannot manage them; here are my temptations, I cannot overcome them; here are my doubts and fears, I cannot subdue them; here are my enemies, I cannot conquer them. Lord, I know not what to do. But wilt Thou not judge them? Wilt not Thou manage for me? Wilt Thou not subdue mine enemies and Thine?" This is, so to speak, taking these lusts and passions by the neck, and laying them down at the feet of God as God's enemies, and thus bringing the power of God against them, setting in array the omnipotence of Jehovah against what would otherwise destroy us. This is prevailing. To fight thus under the banner of the Lord is to make head against sin; but to fight against it in our own resolution and strength is only to fall its victim. This is taking the weapons of God to fight against our spiritual foes; and these weapons are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. This is fighting against sin, not in the flesh, but in the Spirit; not by the law, but by the gospel; not by self, but by the grace of God. And if your soul has had many a tussle, and many a wrestle, and many a hand-to-hand conflict with sin, you will have found this out before now, that nothing but the grace, power, and Spirit of Christ ever gave you the victory, or the least hope of victory.

IV. "But our eyes are upon Thee." Jehoshaphat did not know what to do; he was altogether at his wits' end; and yet he took the wisest course a man could take. This is the beauty of it, that when we are fools, then we are wise; when we are weak, then we are strong; when we know not what to do, then we do the only right thing. O had Jehoshaphat taken any other course; had he collected an army, sent through

Judah, raised troops and forged swords and spears, he would certainly have been defeated. But not knowing what to do, he did the very thing he should do: "Our eyes are upon Thee." "Thou must fight our battles; Thou must take the matter into Thy own hands. Our eyes are upon Thee, waiting upon Thee, looking up, and hoping in Thee, believing in Thy holy Name, expecting help from Thee, from whom alone help can come." But this is painful work to be brought to this point, "our eyes are upon Thee," implying there is no use looking to any other quarter. It assumes that the soul has looked, and looked, and looked elsewhere in vain, and then fixed its eyes upon God as knowing that from Him alone all help must come. This I believe to be the distinctive mark of a Christian, that his eyes are upon God. On his bed by night, in his room by day, in business or at market, when his soul is in trouble, cast down, and perplexed, his eyes are upon God. From Him alone all help must come; none else can reach his case. All other but the help of God is ineffectual; it leaves him where it found him, it does him no good. We are never safe except our eyes are upon God. Let our eyes be upon Him, we can walk safely; let our eyes be upon the creature, we are pretty sure to slip and stumble.

"Our eyes are upon Thee." And O, how simple, suitable, complete, and blessed a remedy is this, when the Lord is pleased to open our eyes, and fix them on Himself. He must do it all. If the eyes are to be upon Him, He must first give us eyes; if lifted upon Him, He must raise them upwards; if kept upon Him, He must hold them waking. It is good to be in this spot. There are times and seasons, perhaps, when we seem to have no religion whatever; when we look, and look, and look, and cannot find a grain. Where is our spirituality? Where our heavenly affections? Where our prayerfulness of spirit? Where our tenderness of conscience? Where our godly fear? Where our meditations upon God's Word? We look, and

look, and look; they seem gone. Now perhaps, in the midst of this uncertainty we are brought into some painful exercise, some affliction, some temptation, some apprehension, something that lies with weight and power upon the soul. Now is the time we want our religion. But it is gone, it is gone, leaving us empty, needy, naked, and bare; religion, as regards its blessedness and comfort, we seem to have none. This is emptying work; this is stripping the soul, as it were, to the very bone. But what a preparation to receive the religion which is from above! How the vessel must be emptied of the dirty water of creature religion, well rinsed, and washed out, to have the pure water of heavenly religion communicated from the divine fountain. God never mingles the pure stream of heavenly religion with the dirty, filthy water of our own creature religion. We must be emptied of every drop, so to speak, of our natural religion, to have the holy and spiritual religion, which is from above, poured into the soul. But to look, and look, and look, and find nothing but emptiness, nakedness, barrenness, and destitution; to have a "great company" of enemies all coming against us, and we as weak as water; what an emptying for divine filling, what a stripping for divine clothing, and what a bringing down of self for the raising up of Christ! True religion consists mainly in two points: to be emptied, stripped, made naked and bare; and then to be clothed and filled out of Christ's fulness.

Thus, of all people the children of God are the weakest, and yet they are the only persons really strong; of all they are the most ignorant, yet they are the only wise; of all the most helpless, and yet they alone are effectually helped; of all the most hobbling, yet they alone have a good hope through God; of all perhaps in their feelings the most unbelieving, and yet are partakers, and they alone, of the grace of faith. "Great is the mystery of godliness;" a paradox is the life of a Christian; a mysterious path he is called upon to tread; and

he can rightly learn it in the school of experience alone. By a series of lessons in the school of Christ the people of God have their religion burnt into their souls; and what they thus learn becomes a part of themselves. It is not lost on the road from chapel, nor left behind in the pew, nor shut up in the hymnbook till the following Sunday, nor dropped at the street-door. It is not a passing notion, nor an empty name, nor towering smoke, nor earth-born vapour; but a divine reality lodged by the hand of God Himself in the heart, which will shine more and more to the perfect day. Be not then discouraged, if the Lord is leading any of you in this path; say not, "a strange thing has happened unto you;" things you little thought of in times gone by. Does not the Lord lead the blind by a way they knew not? And in paths they have not seen? Does He not make crooked things straight before them, and rough places plain? Is not God in Christ alone to be our King, our Leader, our Help, our Hope, our All? It is a mercy to have something of the teaching of God in the soul, if it be only to empty it, at present no further than to strip and lay low; to take away every false covering, to bring down into the dust of self-abasement, with the eyes upon the Lord, looking for and expecting a revelation of His mercy and love.

There are few who have got so far as this. There are few, comparatively speaking, who know they are nothing; few who are low enough for Christ to stoop down to; few who feel they are fallen among thieves, and want the good Samaritan to pass by and pour oil and wine into their wounds. There are very few who have got so far as to know their own sickness and their own sore. Yet would we hope there are those here whom the Lord is leading down into the valley; and though they are perhaps writing bitter things against themselves, their names are written in the Lamb's book of life. It is the poor and needy whom the Lord has respect unto, and those that humble themselves in God's own time and way shall be

blessedly exalted.