

The Eternal God the Refuge of His Saints

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Sunday Morning, September 29, 1867

"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them." Deuteronomy 33:27

It is very beautiful as well as very interesting to observe and trace out, in the record of the wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness, the distinction which is so clearly visible between Moses, the man of God, as mediating between the Lord and the people in the giving and executing of the law, and as mediating between them as an intercessor. Let me explain my meaning a little more clearly and fully. Moses, as a servant faithful to God in all his house, sustained as such two distinct characters: 1. He was the mediator of the Old Covenant. When the Law was delivered from mount Sinai in all its terrible accompaniments of "blackness, and darkness, and tempest, the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words," all the people that was in the camp trembled. (Exod. 19:16, Heb. 12:18.) And well they might, for the Lord himself in his terrible majesty came down upon the Mount, as we read, "And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." (Exod. 19:18.) All these terrible accompaniments were designed to impress upon the people the majesty and holiness of God as revealed in the Law, and that he was indeed under that dispensation a consuming fire. They were, therefore, not allowed to pass beyond certain fixed bounds, but were commanded to stand at the nether part of the mount. As the

people, then, were not suffered to approach the mount itself, or at least the higher part of it, it was needful that there should be a mediator who should ascend it, and speak to them for and from God. Moses was this mediator; and we therefore find the apostle thus speaking of the Old Covenant: "It was ordained by angels in the hands of a mediator." (Gal. 3:19.) This mediator was not Christ, as some have wrongly interpreted, but Moses who mediated between God and the people as speaking to them in the name of God, and taking back their words to him. "And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord." (Exod. 19:7, 8.)

2. But Moses was also a *typical* as well as a real mediator, mediating between God as full of mercy, grace, and truth, as the covenant God of Abraham, as well as mediating between him in a fiery Law. We therefore see him sustaining, on various occasions, two distinct characters: one, that of a stern law-giver, and the other that of an earnest and successful intercessor. This may explain why sometimes he is so stern, and sometimes so meek; sometimes so severe, and sometimes so mild; sometimes armed with a curse, and sometimes armed with a blessing. It is not the man that differs, but the mission; and his conduct varies according as he speaks and acts as the real mediator of the Old dispensation, or as the typical mediator of the New. I call him a typical mediator because in that character he was a type of our blessed Lord who is the true mediator of the New Covenant. It is, therefore, very blessed to observe with what energy and success he stood forth on several occasions, as a mediator of mercy between God and the people when, but for his intercession, God would have let loose his anger upon

them and destroyed them from the face of the earth. One of these occasions was, when they had made the molten calf, and God said to him: "I have seen this people and behold it is a stiff-necked people. Now, therefore, let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation." Hear how Moses interceded with God: "And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people." (Exod. 32:11, 12.) You will recollect also how on another occasion after the rebellion and destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, when, in consequence of the murmurings of the people, God said unto Moses, "Get you up from among this congregation that I may consume them as in a moment," that Moses and Aaron fell upon their faces; and you know with what success their intercession was attended: "And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the Lord; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed." (Num. 16:46, 47, 48.) In both of these instances we see Moses acting as a typical mediator interceding for the people, and pleading on their behalf the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He thus stands before us in the Old Testament under two different characters, and representing two almost

opposite relationships—one that of a lawgiver, and the other that of an intercessor; and according as he sustained these two distinct characters he acted and spoke very differently. As a lawgiver, he was severe, harsh, unforgiving and implacable, for as such he was a representative of God's fiery law, and dealt forth the fire with both hands. Thus after he had interceded with God on behalf of the people, in the affair of the golden calf, and, as typical mediator, had obtained mercy for them, he resumes his character as lawgiver, armed with which he had come down from the sacred Mount; and observe with what stern severity he fulfilled that office: "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. (Exod. 32:26, 27.) Here was Moses the lawgiver dealing out the fire which was given to him by a fiery law. So when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram set themselves up against Moses and Aaron, at God's command Moses spake and the earth opened and swallowed them up. There again was Moses the lawgiver, executing the sentence of a burning, fiery law. So in the case of the blasphemer (Levit. 24:14), and the sabbath breaker (Num. 15:36), Moses, as lawgiver, executed the sentence of God in a fiery law. Similarly, when speaking in the name, and with the authority of God, he pronounced conditional curses and conditional blessings (Deut. 28), assuring the people on the one hand, that if they were obedient, they should be blessed in the city and in the field, when they came in and when they went out: but if disobedient, that God would rain down upon them every curse, he spoke as a lawgiver.

But when we come to the last words of Moses, as recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, we see him laying aside all that severity and harshness which he wielded as lawgiver, and standing forth with nothing but blessings in his heart and in his mouth. There he wears again the character of typical mediator.

These remarks may, perhaps, throw a light upon the character of Moses, and clear up any difficulty which may possibly have presented itself to your mind in seeing in him, words and actions that may seem at first sight inconsistent with each other.

It is, then, under his character of typical mediator that we find him speaking in the words of our text, in which, I think, we may observe four leading features: two *statements*, a *promise*, and a *charge*. The two statements are,

I.—"The *eternal God* is thy refuge," and

II.—"*Underneath* are the everlasting arms."

III.—The *promise* is, "*He shall thrust out the enemy before thee.*"

IV.—The *charge* is, "*Destroy them.*"

I.—The first statement contains a grand, blessed, gospel truth: "*the eternal God is thy refuge.*"

But the question may arise, What right have I, what right have you to claim these words as ours? Were they spoken to us? When Moses in his old age stood and addressed these words to the people, did he speak to them that you, that I might take them as ours? Now this is a point very little

understood. I don't know that I ever heard it explained from any pulpit, or saw it made clear in any book, at least, in any full or satisfactory manner, why it is that we may take promises spoken to ancient Israel—that I may preach from them, and you may receive them as if they were mine and yours. Of course my knowledge both of books and ministers is but limited. I do not say, therefore, that this point has not been clearly explained both from the pulpit and from the press; but it has never fallen within the reach of my eyes or ears. I find it assumed again and again that every promise made to the children of Israel belongs to us; and most true it is, if indeed we are believers in the Son of God; for if so, "all things are ours," and amongst them all the promises, for "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." (1 Cor. 3:21; 2 Cor. 1:20.) Still it is well to know our title as well as enjoy our possession. I may enjoy an estate and lawfully possess both it and the fruits of it, but I ought to be able to show, if I am called upon, my title to it. It is a point which I have often thought upon and considered, and I have felt sometimes as if I should like, if life be spared and opportunity given, to lay before the church of God the nature of our title, and why, if we believe in the Son of God, we may take the comfort of such passages as are now before us and receive them as spoken by God himself to our souls. Many such thoughts and projects struggle in my breast; many sweet openings of the word; many rays of light illuminating my heart, and warming my soul, feed me in my hours of solitude, as I read the Scriptures; and in such moments I feel a desire to communicate the same light of life instrumentally to others; but alas! they often perish in the birth, and leave me too much as I was before, retaining perhaps the knowledge thus gained, but not retaining the power. For the present then, I shall only briefly mention two or three reasons why we are warranted in believing that such statements and promises as

are made in the text belong to us.

1. When our gracious Lord came in the flesh, Israel, instead of receiving him as the promised Messiah, rejected him. By this voluntary Act they broke the covenant which was made with them in Abraham, from whose seed Messiah was to come, and as a consequence were cast off for their unbelief and disobedience. This the Apostle (Rom. 11) calls "a breaking off of the branches of the good olive tree," and tells us why: "Because of unbelief they were broken off." But that the olive tree, which with its root and branches signifies Christ and the Church, might still bear fruit, God in pure mercy grafted into it what the Apostle calls "the wild olive tree," that is, the Gentiles, in order that they, by being thus engrafted into it, might partake "of the root and fatness of the olive tree." The root is Christ, the fatness is the oil of his grace which flows out of him into the branches, and, as in the case of the natural olive tree, fills them with that oil which swells and manifests itself in the rich and ripe fruit. As then in succeeding to Israel's place the Gentile church succeeds to Israel's blessings; and as among these blessings the promises are not the least or last, for "by them we are made partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), the spiritual promises made to Israel in the Old Testament belong to believing Gentiles in the New, as a part of the fatness of the olive tree.

2. Another reason is that Jew and Gentile are united into one mystical body of which Christ is the glorious Head. Now the consequence of this is, that by this union of Jew and Gentile into the one mystical body of Christ, all external distinctions between them, such as those of circumcision and uncircumcision, virtually cease, and Christ is all and in all. There are, therefore, no spiritual promises made to ancient Israel—I say spiritual, for the literal promises stand upon

another foundation on which I shall not here touch—which do not form a part of the inheritance that belongs to the heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, since they are all one in Christ Jesus.

3. Another reason is, that not only is there "one body," but there is also "one new man;" in other words, not only are Jew and Gentile united eternally and mystically in one body, but they are also united in time spiritually by being baptised into and made to drink into one Spirit. The possession of this one Spirit obliterates all external distinctions between Jew and Gentile, which are at best but national and natural, and knits them together as one in Christ, as the apostle speaks: "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him; where there is neither Greek or Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all." (Col. 3:10, 11.) And again, "For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:27, 28.)

It is, chiefly, for these reasons that such passages and such promises as lie before us in our text become the property and the privilege of all the believing family of God, and allow and embolden me to preach from them, and you to listen to them as ours through faith in the Son of God; and if this morning we are enabled to lay hold of and appropriate them as our own, and they are blessed to our soul by the power of God, they are as much ours and are as much spoken to us, as if we had stood among believing Israelites in days of old and heard the words as they were spoken to them by the lips of Moses.

In the hope, therefore, that what I have just said may strengthen your faith and dispose your hearts to listen to the voice of God in the words before us, I shall now address myself to our text.

i. It contains, as I said, a *statement*, "*The eternal God is thy refuge.*" Let us look first a little at what a refuge is, and see how and why the eternal God is the refuge of his saints.

There are several reasons why the word "refuge," conveyed to the mind of a believing Israelite stronger ideas than it may carry to ours.

1. First, you must observe, that the natural position and circumstances of the land of Canaan differed widely from our own. Protected by the sea all around our shores and by our powerful fleet, we are not exposed to the sudden incursions and invasions of enemies; and, therefore, our towns, except a few on the sea coast, are not walled or fortified. But it was not so in Palestine. There they were exposed to continual invasions from the warlike tribes that lay upon their frontier, and from the unsubdued Canaanites who dwelt in their very midst. They were obliged, therefore, to have strongly fortified cities, situated usually on elevated spots to protect themselves, and especially their women and children, their flocks and herds, from these invading foes. This will explain why in the Psalms David so continually speaks of the Lord as his "fortress," his "strong tower," his "high place;" for these fortified cities were generally situated on mountain tops.

2. Another circumstance which made the figure of a refuge so prominent in the Old Testament is connected with the peculiar nature of the climate of Palestine, which required accessible and speedily reached shelter, sometimes from severe thunderstorms, in which not only was the lightning

very dangerous, but which were usually attended with destructive showers of hail; sometimes from the intense rays of a burning sun; and sometimes from hot pestilential winds, such as the sirocco, which blew from the wide and vast Eastern desert. We find, therefore, the prophet speaking, "For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall." (Isa. 25:4.) And again, "And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." (Isa. 32:2.)

3. But there was another reason why we find the figure of a refuge to occur so frequently in the Old Testament. As you well know, Moses set apart six cities of refuge for the manslayer who had killed his neighbour unawares. But into this point I need not enter, as you are no doubt well acquainted with it, and I have much that lies before me in our text.

But the main reason why I have endeavoured to explain the scriptural meaning of the word "refuge" is, that we may understand more fully, and grasp more believingly, the blessing intimated in our text, "The eternal God is thy refuge." A refuge, then, signifies a shelter into which we may run when danger threatens, and find in it, as a hiding place, safety to be obtained nowhere else. Even natural men will sometimes seek a refuge in what they think or believe is religion. Natural conscience works in the breast of many sufficiently to make them feel that they cannot die as they have lived without something like repentance and amendment of life. They know sufficiently of the anger of God revealed against sinners, and of their own sinful lives, to show them that something must be done, or at least known

and felt to remove from their conscience the sting of death. It is from this instinctive sense of needing a refuge that all the false religion springs which we see on every side. Ignorant of Christ and of salvation by him, they trust to their own good works or to some form of godliness whilst they deny the power. Now all these refuges God has declared to be "refuges of lies," and he tells us very plainly how he deals with them in the case of his people. He says, "Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." (Isa. 28:16, 17.) We gather from these words that even his own people may make lies a refuge until the Lord drives them out by laying judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet. This he does by the application of his law to their conscience, by which "judgment is laid to the line, and righteousness to the plummet." The figure here is that of the law, measuring a sinner's words and works in the same strict way as a mason measures, by his plumb line and level, whether a wall stands perfectly horizontal and perfectly perpendicular. Now no sooner does this strict and unerring law detect the crookedness of the wall we have built up, than the hail sweeps it away as a refuge of lies, and the waters of God's wrath overflow the hiding place. And what is the consequence? The covenant with death is broken, and the agreement with hell no longer stands. Can you not recollect the time when you made as it were a covenant with death? Were not these, or similar ones, the thoughts of your mind? "Was not God merciful? What had you done worse than others? If you went to hell, what would become of thousands? Who could charge you with any great or open sins? Were you not as religious as most, indeed a great deal more than many others?" Now all this was making

a covenant with death and an agreement with hell, and saying, "When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto me." O how numerous are these lying refuges! Some fly to good works, this is their refuge; some to the sacrament and the prayers of a minister, called almost at the last hour, as if that would save them. Some fly to man's opinion, as though man's opinion would pass with God, and endorse them for heaven like a banker's bill; and some, of whom we should hope better things, fly to church membership and church ordinances, not knowing there are many members of churches who never were members of Christ; that a man may be baptized in water, who was never baptized with the Holy Ghost; and that to partake of the Lord's Supper is not the same thing as eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of God. In fact, everything short of Christ made known to the soul by the power of God, everything short of the eternal God, as experimentally known, believed in, looked unto, laid hold of, and embraced by faith, is a refuge of lies, and will be found so in that day when God will break up the covenant which so many have made with death, and disannul the agreement which thousands and tens of thousands have entered into with hell.

But O what a mercy it is for the family of God that there is a refuge provided for them. I showed you when I was describing the places of refuge in the land of Canaan, that sometimes an invading foe, merciless and cruel, sometimes a terrific thunderstorm, sometimes the guilt of having shed blood, made a refuge both needful and desirable. And is not a refuge on similar grounds, spiritually viewed, needful and desirable now? Have we not cruel and merciless foes on every side, without and within, who would spare neither body or soul, but trample the one into the grave, and the other into hell? Is there not the storm of a fiery law ready to burst upon our head? Does not guilt, if not of actual blood, yet of

crimes of as deep and dark a hue, at least in our feelings, lie upon our conscience? O the unspeakable mercy then, O the unutterable blessing, that there is a refuge provided for those who have no refuge in themselves, who have been hunted out of house and home, whose false refuges the hail has swept away, and whose hiding place the water-floods have overflowed.

But let us look a little more closely into the meaning of the words "*the eternal God.*" How these words, as opened up and applied by the Holy Spirit, set before our eyes a blessed refuge for the poor guilty sinner who knows not where to hide his bleeding soul. "O where, O where," he sometimes cries, "shall I hide my guilty head? Wherever I go the wrath of God pursues me; wherever I turn all is darkness, blackness, and despair. If I look to self, what find I there but a wreck and ruin? If I look to the law, what are there but curses and bondage? If I look to man, I must say with Job, 'Miserable physicians are ye all.' If I look to friends, what can they do for me upon a dying bed, when the cold sweat will stand upon my brow and I must soon pass into eternity? Wife, children, relations, even the dear family of God, or the servants of his choice, may surround my bed, but can they speak peace and pardon to my guilty soul when I need it most?"

Now as the soul is thus hunted here and there, and driven out of false refuges, then does the eternal God begin to open his blessed arms, and to unfold what he is as the refuge of poor sinners who are driven out of every other.

But who is this eternal God? He is the great and glorious Jehovah, eternal in his Trinity of Persons, and in the Unity of his Essence. As such, the Father is the eternal Father, the Son is the eternal Son, and the Spirit is the eternal Spirit;

and these three eternal persons in a glorious Trinity form one eternal God. Must it not needs be so? Can one of the Persons in the Trinity be eternal and another not eternal also? How weak then, how more than weak, how wicked to own an eternal Father, and an eternal Spirit, and to deny and disown an eternal Son. What dishonour is thereby cast upon the glorious Person of the Son of the Father in truth and love, and how the Trinity itself is riven asunder and made no longer a Trinity of three co-equal, co-eternal Persons in one eternal, undivided Essence.

But what a depth of blessedness there is in this God being an eternal God; and that in and of this eternity, each Person of the Godhead has an equal share. Look at the *love* of the eternal God. How eternal was that—not a thing of time, not fixed upon us when first brought into being, not issuing out of his bosom first when we were quickened into divine life; but a love from all eternity, as being the love of an eternal God. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." And how eternal are the thoughts of God—those *thoughts* which were of good, not of evil. They were eternal thoughts of peace to the Church; eternal thoughts of mercy to his beloved family; eternal thoughts of manifesting his grace in the Person and work of his dear Son; eternal flowings forth of goodness and love to those whom he had chosen in Christ, that they might be one with him, members of that glorious body of which his dear Son should be the Head. And eternal *purpose* also that nothing could defeat, that all the waves of time could not break through; eternal *wisdom* also to devise, and eternal *power* to accomplish. O this eternal God! We look back into eternity; we see what God was from all eternity; and then we look forward to what he will be to all eternity. And we see him unchanging and unchangeable, resting in his love without variableness or the shadow of a turn, whether in

eternity past, or in eternity to come. We think of the spirits of just men made perfect; we follow in faith and hope the souls of our dear departed friends; we view their drinking the pleasures which are at his right hand for ever; and so they will be there to all eternity, ever basking in the smiles of an eternal God, ever living in his favour, ever conformed to the glorious image of his eternal Son, and ever drinking fresh draughts of love and bliss in his eternal presence. O this eternal Father in the depths of his fatherly love in the gift of his dear Son! O the love, condescension, and tenderness of this eternal Son in the depths of his mercy and grace in suffering, bleeding, and dying for poor guilty sinners! O the wisdom, the power, the grace, and the blessedness of this eternal Spirit, in taking of the things of Christ, unfolding the Person of Jesus, bringing him near, revealing him to the soul, sprinkling the conscience with his blood, and making him known and precious! What a depth of gratitude is everlastingly due from the redeemed church of God, to all the three sacred Persons of the glorious and undivided Trinity, and that both in his Trinity of Persons and his Unity of Essence the eternal God should be their refuge!

Now, poor sinner, upon whose head the beams of a fiery law are darting; now, poor sinner, distressed in thy mind, guilty in thy conscience, plagued with a thousand temptations, beset by innumerable doubts and fears: canst thou not look up a little out of thy gloom and sadness, and see that the eternal God is thy refuge? Dost thou not cleave to him with the utmost of thy power, as being beaten out of every other? Hast thou not taken hold of his strength that thou mayest make peace with him? Art thou not looking to him? And does he not say: "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth?" He bids thee look at him as Moses bade the Israelites look to the brazen serpent. Poor sinner, groaning under the weight of thy transgression, he bids thee look to

him. Has the blessed Lord, he into whose lips grace was poured, not said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out?" Why should you not look? Why should you not come to him? Will he cast you out? Do you not feel the secret drawings of his grace, movements upon your heart which make you come often with strong crying and tears, with groans and sighs, earnest, vehement, and continual supplications? What are these but the inward teachings of God? as our Lord said, "It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." (John 6:45.) And do you not know that the Lord himself said, that no man can come to him except the Father which hath sent him draw him? These comings, therefore, of thy soul in earnest and vehement desire are, according to his own testimony, from the special teachings and gracious drawings of God in thee. Having made his dear Son to be the refuge of thy soul, he is now drawing thee unto him that thou mayest find pardon and peace in him. But perhaps you will say, "I am so sinful, so guilty, I have been such a sinner, much worse than you can form any conception of; and it is this which sinks me low." Art thou lower than brother Jonah when he was in the whale's belly, and, in his own feelings, in the belly of hell? And yet what said he? "Yet will I look again toward thy holy temple." Canst thou not look again toward the holy temple? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? So David felt and feared, but it was not so, for "his mercy endureth for ever;" and that is a long and strong word. Look and live, look and live! What! Hast thou no eyes to see the suitability of Jesus? No eyes to see the glorious Person of the Son of God? No eyes to see his bleeding wounds? No eyes to see his dying love, no eyes to see his power to save, no eyes to see what he has done for others, and what he can do for thee if he has not done it yet? "The eternal God is thy refuge."

ii. But I must not linger here. I must go on to the other statement, equally full of Gospel truth, if I am able to unfold it: "*And underneath are the everlasting arms.*" How Moses brought before the people the eternity of God. He will have nothing to do with time. What is time? A fragment, merely like the foam of the sea compared with the mighty ocean. The ocean is eternity; time is merely the foam upon the wave. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." And depend upon it, if the everlasting arms are underneath the saints of God—for it is of and to them that the words are spoken,—they are there for some purpose. Let us see if we can find some of those purposes for which these everlasting arms are underneath them.

1. You are *burdened with sin*. Guilt lies hard and heavy upon your conscience; you feel what a wretch you are and have been; you sink at times very low in your soul under the weight of your iniquities and backslidings, in thought, word, and deed; you want something to support your troubled mind, and relieve your anxious heart from it. Now, this very burden under which you sink so low, is laid upon your conscience for an express purpose. God has laid everlasting arms underneath your tried, condemned, and guilty soul, that your very guilt may bring you down upon them. You would not want, still less, would not prize everlasting arms spread beneath you, unless your guilt pressed down your soul so heavily as to make you sink down into them and fall upon them with your whole weight. Few sink low enough to feel the everlasting arms underneath. They have still some strength left of their own; they are not thoroughly helpless; they cannot bear the thought of ever sinking, sinking, sinking, as if they would sink to where there was no bottom, or as if nothing were beneath them but the very pit of hell. They do not know, they do not feel, that everlasting arms are spread beneath to catch them, so to speak, before they fall,

and bear them up, even as on eagle's wings. They, therefore, try to struggle out of them, like a timorous child that cannot trust its mother to hold it up. They don't see they must sink low, very low, to fall upon the everlasting arms. They are like a person who cannot swim, that has fallen into a river, and who is often drowned by his struggles in the water, and his very trying to save himself. How often it has happened, that a drowning man has defeated the attempt to save him, by struggling with his deliverer, who could have borne him easily to the shore if he were but passive. His rescuer has, therefore, to sometimes wait till the man has nearly gone, that when his struggles have ceased, then he may lay his strong arms beneath him, and bear him safe to land. Is it not better that he should passively fall into the arms of the strong swimmer, who has gone in to his rescue, than lose his life by struggling to save himself? Of course, this is but a figure, and therefore you will not press it too far, or surmise from it, that I think any saint of God can perish. But do you not find, if you carefully examine the movements of your own heart that you are still struggling in some strength of your own; that you have not given up all your own righteousness, or some lurking hope of gaining the favour of God by your prayers and supplications, and thus are really making good works out of them? If so, like a drowning man struggling in the water, you are wasting your strength by your attempts to swim, and, perhaps, drinking in the water that may drown you. Sink, sink, sink, and then you will find the everlasting arms underneath.

2. But again, you have *many afflictions*. "O," you think, "there never was a poor wretch like me. Wave upon wave, billow upon billow roll over me. Sometimes trials in providence, then trials in my family, then trials in my soul; trials with the children of God, trials with the men of the world; and my poor body often as much afflicted as my soul.

Painful days, and sleepless nights seem allotted to me, and such a sense of bodily weakness and exhaustion as I cannot describe, making every little exertion a difficulty and a burden. Was there ever such a poor, afflicted creature as I?" You want the everlasting arms underneath. What else can support you under your distressing afflictions? What else can bear you up under your severe and cutting trials? You are looking sometimes to this or that friend, this or that Christian brother or sister to get some help from them. But what can man do for you? Let man try it. Are man's arms everlasting arms? Are *your* arms everlasting arms? Who has everlasting arms but the eternal God? And why should the everlasting arms be underneath unless there were afflictions to bring you down upon them? God puts affliction upon affliction to bring the soul down, that it may fall into and upon the everlasting arms, and find how firm and strong they are. And have you not often found it so? Do not lie against your right. How many trials in Providence you have been brought through. How conspicuously the Lord has appeared in this and that instance, so that your unbelief and infidelity were, for the time at least, thoroughly silenced, and faith saw the hand of God so clearly that you felt as if you could never doubt again. Have you not had many sweet supports on your bed of languishing, many precious seasons when you could bless God for laying upon you his afflicting hand? And have you not found that strength was always given to you according to your day, that with every trial power was given you to bear it, and that out of your deepest afflictions came your greatest blessings? Why are you not in hell? Do you not deserve to be there? Why still upon praying ground, with a good hope through grace, and your soul waiting for the Lord to appear, more than those that watch for the morning? If these arms have once supported you, will they not support you again? Would they be everlasting if they could part asunder and let you fall through? Rest upon them and you will find how

strong they are.

3. But you say, "I have so *many temptations*." Well, do you expect to go to heaven without temptation? What does James say upon this point? "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." "Aye, but my temptations are so peculiar." You may think so, but do we not read that "there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man?" And do we not also read, "But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it?" (1 Cor.10:13.) "Ah, but I am so peculiar." Well, then, you are one of those peculiar people who think, and feel, and are different from every body else. "I cannot tell any body what my temptations are." It is good you cannot, but you can tell God. Was not the Lord tempted on all points like as we are, yet without sin? Don't speak, then, as if your temptations are so peculiar that nobody else was tempted like you. The blessed Lord was. But this is the grand point: do your temptations bring you down upon the everlasting arms? Can you grapple with your temptations yourself? "No," say you, "I cannot." Well, then, your temptations bring you down upon the everlasting arms, and these arms will support you under them and bring you through them.

4. But there is a day to come upon us all; a day in which we shall specially need the everlasting arms to be underneath; and that is a *bed of death*. It may be a bed of languishing, a bed of long and painful illness, when the poor body may be racked with torture, or brought down to such a state of weakness and suffering, that life itself shall be a burden. Perhaps, too, it may be a season of much darkness of mind, though we would not anticipate unknown evils, and God may be better to us than all our fears. But shall we not want, if we

never really felt our want before, everlasting arms underneath both body and soul in that day? A languishing body, a sinking soul, a holy God above, and a conscience naked and open before his eye, death in sight, eternity in prospect—shall we not, then, want everlasting arms to bear us up through the dark valley and land us safe through Jordan on the happy shore? How many of our dear friends have found upon dying beds everlasting arms! How these everlasting arms were so sensibly spread underneath their afflicted bodies and their believing hearts, that they could die in peace, with a sweet testimony of pardoned sin, and that their souls were going to glory. What could human arms do for them then? The soft arms of wife, the strong arms of husband, the tender arms of mother, or the kind arms of friends, what could those arms do for them, vitally and spiritually, when they lay upon their dying pillow? But underneath them were the everlasting arms, and those arms held them up and bore them through, and landed them safely in eternal bliss.

III.—But I must pass on to the *promise*: "*And he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee.*" This was true literally of the Canaanites and other nations whom God thrust out before his people; and what he promised to do for them (and did accomplish in a literal and temporal sense), he has promised to do for us, spiritually, and will do it as effectually, who have succeeded by faith into their place.

i. "He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee." You will often hear people of a murmuring, fretful, repining spirit, of whom, alas! there are too many in the Church of God, continually complaining "I have so many enemies." No doubt you have your enemies, and so we have all. It is one of our evidences that we are on the Lord's side, if we are hated of all men for his namesake. But I will tell you where you have

an enemy, and a greater enemy than ever you have found yet in man or woman: *yourself*. I have said what I have often felt, that I could do myself more harm in five minutes than all my enemies could do me in fifty years. I have had many enemies: do I care for them? Not a whit. Have they hurt me? You, who have known me so many years, know whether they have hurt me or not. Where are all the books that have been written against me? Sunk and forgotten, and their authors either mostly dead, or sorry and ashamed that they ever wrote them. Of course my flesh has felt their cruel sayings and hard speeches, but I have never really felt anything which they have said or written, unless it touched my conscience, and I had deserved it. I desire not to fear my enemies, but to fear God, to fear myself. I don't fear enemies unless I give them reason. If I myself tip the arrow with a feather from my own wing, I may well fear my enemies; but if I give no real ground of attack to my enemies, I need not fear what they may do or say. I fear myself more than them all, knowing what I am as a sinner, the strength of sin and the power of temptation. But be sure of this, that you are the worst enemy you ever had; and you, that know your hearts, know it to be so. Well, therefore, has the Lord said in the text, "the enemy," instead of "the enemies." Thy sin, thy lust, thy covetousness, thy pride, thy self-righteousness, everything in thee that works against God and godliness—this is "the enemy" which God has promised to thrust out from before thee. You observed, perhaps, in the chapter which I read this morning (Deut. 7) that the Lord promised to put out the nations before Israel "by little, and little" (verse 22.) It was not all done at once; and we have a remarkable reason given in the book of Judges, why so many enemies were left. It was "to prove Israel by them; even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan, that the generations of the children of Israel might know to teach them war, at the least, such as before knew nothing thereof."

(Judges 3:1, 2.) Thus, there were two reasons why these enemies were left in Canaan: 1, to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord; and 2, to teach them how to fight. The Lord has, therefore, left this enemy in our heart, for the same two wise reasons; but he will thrust him out, little by little, so that he shall not have dominion over us. Once he was in full possession, held sovereign dominion of all our heart and affections. The strong man kept his palace, and his goods were at peace. But a stronger than he came, dispossessed him, turned him out, and divided his spoils. And the strong man armed has not possession of the palace of the Son of God now. But still he knocks at the door, peeps in at the window, and would creep in at the cellar hole, unless kept out by the mighty power of God. But God has promised to thrust him out; that Esau shall have no portion with Jacob; that the Canaanite shall not be for ever in the house of the Lord of Hosts. And every token for good, every sweet evidence, every visitation of the Lord's mercy and goodness, is a thrusting out of the enemy of our souls.

But observe, also, that it shall be "*from before thee.*" Thou shalt see that God himself has done it. He will make it manifest before thine eyes and in thy conscience that he is thrusting out the enemy. He will make thee first feel that he is an enemy. Thou shalt see something of his accursed designs; how sin has deceived you, betrayed you, brought guilt upon your conscience; how God, in consequence, has hidden his face, and made you a burden to yourself. You shall be brought to feel, and say, "There is nothing I hate so much as my own vile heart, my own dreadfully corrupt nature. O what an enemy do I carry in my own bosom. Of all my enemies, he is surely the worst; of all my foes, he is the most subtle and strong." Now, as you feel these things, God is thrusting out this enemy from before thee. He shows you

his hideous face beneath his fair mask, manifests his plots, discovers his contrivances; and as he does this by his Spirit and grace, there is a thrusting out this enemy that he may not dwell in thy heart in power.

IV.—But there goes together with this sweet and blessed promise, a solemn *charge*, which is closely connected with it: "And shall say, Destroy them." God takes us, so to speak, into partnership with himself in this matter; to enlists us on his side, puts weapons into our hand, and bids us go forth in his strength to make use of them, and so do his work. As Moses bade the Levites arm themselves against their brethren and slay every man his friend and companion; so God the Spirit puts into our hands the weapons whereby we are made willing to destroy these enemies, though they are our own flesh and blood, and a very part of ourselves. And why are we willing to do this work, and smite them hip and thigh, and if we could, would destroy their very life? Because they have been and are such a plague to us; because they have wrought in our heart such havoc; and because we have found and felt them to be enemies of God and man. Now have you not sometimes felt in your soul as though you could take your lusts by the neck and dash their heads against a stone? Have you not felt you could, if possible, take out of your breast this vile, damnable heart, lay it upon the ground, and stamp upon it? And when tempted with pride, or unbelief, or infidelity, or blasphemy, or any hateful lust, how you have cried out again and again with anguish of spirit, "O this heart of mine!" Upon your knees some blasphemous thought has rushed in; in reading the Scriptures some infidel suggestion has darted into your soul whether it is the inspired word of God; in talking to a friend, some loose desire has crossed your mind; some vile thought, only fit for the worst purlieus of sin, or a cell in Newgate. "O," you say, "was there ever a heart like mine? O that I could take it out

of my bosom, and have no more to do with it. I would be holy in body and soul; but O this heart of mine, it has no more holiness in it by nature, than the very devil himself." Now this makes you understand the charge: "Destroy them." God says, as it were, "Take my weapons into your own hands, and execute vengeance upon your sins, that I may see your sincerity; not sparing one of them, as Saul spared Agag, but hewing them all down, without pity or mercy." Now, when we hate them, when we would, if possible, have no more to do with them, and can say to this lust, idol, or temptation, "O thou filthy creature, What an enemy thou art to my soul; O that I could for ever have done with thee," here you are doing what God commands. "Destroy them," God says; "This is what I charge you to do." But if you are indulging your lusts, feeding your pride, gratifying your covetousness, seeking how to satisfy every base desire,—are you fulfilling the charge, "Destroy them?" You never will fulfil that charge till you learn what an enemy sin is in itself, and what an enemy it has been personally to you. But when you have suffered, groaned, sighed, cried, loathed yourself in dust and ashes, and wondered at the long-suffering of God, that hell is not now your place, then he gives strength and grace, and you are made willing that these lusts of yours should be destroyed. This indeed will not be accomplished till death, for only

"Death that puts an end to life
Will put an end to sin."

But let us now see, by way of conclusion, how the whole text harmonises, and how we have in it a description of the work of grace from first to last. First, we have the poor sinner without a refuge, brought to see that without a shelter for his guilty head he must perish under the wrath of God. The eternal God opens his arms as his refuge; he flees to that

refuge: "I flee unto thee to hide me." "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe." The eternal God becomes his refuge. He is led up and down this world; trials, temptations, and afflictions are his portion here below. Now come "the everlasting arms" to bear him up. Grace still goes on with its blessed work. He finds the enemy strong within. God fulfils the promise to thrust him out. And then, as he gets further on in the blessed things of God, he feels more and more a holy indignation against himself, a solemn vengeance upon his cruel sins, and he is made willing to take them in his own hands, if power were given him, and to dash them against the stones. And then he fulfils the charge: "Destroy them."

Thus the words take in the work of grace from first to last, are a sweet epitome of the dealings of God with the soul, and lead our thoughts to the eternal God as our refuge, to see what this God is in himself, what this God has promised, and what this God will surely perform.