

THE
FAMILY TREASURY

OF
SUNDAY READING.

EDITED BY THE
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THE ACCUSER AND THE ADVOCATE.

BY THE REV. CHARLES BRIDGES, M.A., RECTOR OF HINTON-MARTEL.

Zech. III. 1-7.

IF we could see what is passing in the invisible world, there would be much matter for fear and trembling; still more for rejoicing confidence. Here, then, is the vision in a miraculous way put before our eyes. It is the cause of Zion pleaded in heaven against most powerful opposition, and with a most triumphant issue. The angel Jehovah (called Jehovah in the next verse) is the great and glorious Advocate. Joshua stands before him as the representative of the people of God. Like him, they are all "*brands plucked out of the fire.*" Against them all the power of Satan is employed to *resist*. On their behalf the boundless grace of the Omnipotent Jehovah is called into exercise. Here, therefore, we have before us *the resistance and the victory.*

I. *The Resistance of Satan*—resistance from a quarter where we could not have expected it. Think of Satan standing in the accuser's place (see Ps. cix. 6, 7),—acting against us here even at the mercy-seat! Accused spirit! Well does every Christian know him to be his enemy! Through him evil first came into the world; through him it still holds its empire. All the hindrances in any good work, such as those which Joshua and Zerubbabel met with, we know from whence they come; and yet more, all the hindrances in our own hearts. There is the proof of his working still nearer and more painful.

But could we have thought that "the adversary" would have made heaven itself—the holy place, the dwelling of the holy God—the scene of his enmity? What! the very mercy-seat besieged with his ceaseless accusations? Yet so the Scripture represents it. God's throne is a throne of justice (Ps. lxxxix. 14); and justice requires that, ere the suitor can gain his cause, all that can be urged against him, as well as all that is in his favour, should be brought into court. Hence Satan's accusations must be heard; and they are always at

hand. His name is "the adversary" (1 Peter v. 8). His office is, "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. xii. 10). In the earliest times, "when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came with them" (Job i. 6). His pleas were in readiness against the patriarch of Uz (i. 8-12; ii. 1-8). In the text he stands forth against Joshua, and still does he present himself against the children of God, with a malignity as fierce as ever to *resist* us, when we are pleading before heaven's mercy-seat, or labouring with energy and perseverance in our Master's cause.

1. What was the matter of accusation against Joshua and his fellows, we may gather from the history. We read of their early zeal when they returned from the captivity, and laid again the foundations of the Lord's house. But the opposition of their enemies slackened the good work. Lukewarmness became the prevailing habit. Worldliness crept in, and with it unbelief. "This people say"—while living themselves in cieled houses—"the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Hag. i. 2-4). In this low and heartless state, do not we see how much material the great enemy had for his accusing work? But let us search closely near at home.

2. What may he not have to say against us? We do not clothe him with the omniscience of God; yet proof enough have we of him as a spirit deeply conversant with our hearts, thoughts, and purposes. In our natural state, awful indeed is our connection with him. He dwells, works, and rules within us—"taking us captive at his will" (Eph. ii. 2; 2 Cor. iv. 4; 2 Tim. ii. 26). And even when One "stronger than he" has cast him out, yet will "he return to his house, from whence he came out" (Luke xi. 21-24), hoping to find entrance there.

Mark his continued assaults upon the children of God—how he follows them in their business and their pleasures, in solitude and in society, to the house of God

mortal soul. But by providential limitations, you are unable to trace the effects of your efforts for good, and your heart is often sick with the longings of hope deferred. Perhaps your hard-working week-day life, prevents you from looking after your Sabbath scholars in their own homes, and meeting them only from week to week on your one leisure evening, you can scarcely tell if any permanent impression is produced by your loving words and earnest exhortations.

Or you are an invalid, confined to your chamber, and unable to go about doing good. Yet, in the Master's spirit, you watch for and use every little opportunity of ministering to the spiritual welfare of those who are ministering to you, and through them also by book or message, you seek to reach those without who are beyond the reach of your personal ministry. You hear of others whose blessed life-labour it is to watch, and tend, and cultivate the up-springing of seed which their own hands have sown, and you feel that even to *hear* of one such vital growth resulting from your efforts, would be reward unspeakable for all your pains.

Or you may be one, through the pressure of many causes, limited very much to your pen in your direct efforts to benefit your fellows. Your heart here gets a vent in pleading with and exhorting sinners, which a timid nature or a stammering tongue would otherwise have denied it. But you cast your writings forth on the wide waters, and hear of them no more. You may know of those within the sphere of your own personal observation pleased or interested by them, but that does not satisfy you. The truths you scatter, contain the words of eternal life, and *living* souls, born of the incorruptible seed, to be in their turn seed-sowing centres, alone can meet your heart's desire.

Now this desire of *seeing* fruit is quite natural and quite proper, but it may or it may not be granted here. It is well to bear in mind, that it is one thing to *expect* fruit, and another thing to be permitted to *see* it.

It is our duty to sow in faith, *expecting* a blessing on the seed sown, but it is by no means necessary that we should see it. God may graciously permit us to see great results from our feeble efforts, to encourage our hearts and strengthen our faith, but he may also choose to purify our motives and simplify our faith, by hiding success from our eyes. Moreover, it often happens that a seed of prayerful effort cast forth in his name, takes no root in the spot directly aimed at, but, glancing aside, springs up in some unthought of corner, where the Spirit of God has guided it. Of such cases the original sower may never hear, but the Lord knows, and that is enough. It is no uncommon thing, in the case of a Sabbath-school teacher, to find that the truth carried home by a heedless child has lodged in the heart of a parent or friend, and there sprung up, and brought forth fruit an hundred-fold. The hospital visitor's earnest words and written verses, retailed in jest by the careless soldier to whom they were addressed, have sunk deep into the heart of

his invalid comrade, and there wrought the work, they had failed in the first instance to effect.

The powerful influence for good emanating from a Christian sufferer's sick-chamber may—as in the case of Fanny Bickersteth—spread far beyond the circle of home or friends, and leaven with blessing the character and home of many a life-long invalid; and the book or tract, with its testimony for God and his truth, may be carried away to regions which your personal presence may never reach, and when you have rested from your labours altogether, and received at heaven's gate the greeting, "Well done, good and faithful servant," your words may be still dropping seed into prepared hearts, and trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, be springing up here and there, where messengers—like birds of the air—have carried them.

Be encouraged, then, to go on sowing seed according to your opportunities, limited or narrowed though these may be. Be careful only, that it be first fruit brought forth *unto God*, faith working by love in your own heart, and then love working by faith and prayer, as it casts it forth into the hearts of others. God will then take care of it, and use it as seems good to him. It will, by no means, be lost, and hereafter, if not here, you will enter into the joy of your Lord, and in your measure be gladdened and satisfied with *seeing* of the travail of your soul, and *recognising* the unknown offspring which God has given you. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand, for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that; or whether they both shall be alike good." "But we know that our labour shall not be *in vain* in the Lord." c.

THE BLESSINGS OF DISAPPOINTMENT.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER.

"BLESSED be disappointment!" said we to ourselves one evening as we sat at the table of a distinguished civilian. He was one of the honoured of the land. A goodly group of "olive branches" were gathered around him. The sweet-voiced wife at the head of the table had in her early days been affianced to an aristocratic youth of great wealth and promise, but on the appointed day of their marriage he had eloped under circumstances of peculiar baseness. What a disappointment to expectant friends and ambitious kinsfolk! But the true-hearted girl swallowed her tears of mortification, and in fitting time gave her hand to a sturdy youth, who has since carried her as his wife to the American Capitol. She has lived to see her renegade lover reel into the grave of the profligate. How little did she know what an escape God had opened to her through the dark door of disappointment.

We might multiply instances of a like character from daily observation. A man hurries breathless to the wharf in order to reach a departing steamer. He is one moment too late! The plank is drawn; and as he

watches the stately vessel plough her way off through the blue waters, she seems to be ploughing through his very heart. "How provoking," he exclaims to the half-smiling, half-pitying bystanders. He goes home sulky; he retires sulky to his bed, and wakes up to read in the morning paper that "a few hours after leaving port, that steamer took fire, and when last seen was floating on the water a flaming wreck!" He fancies *himself* clinging in despair to a sinking billet of wood, and his very blood runs cold when he thinks how near he came to being on board that death-freighted vessel. And yet the very next time that man is thrown out by Providence from some favourite plan, he is slow to apply the lesson of the past, and to thank his heavenly Father for a disappointment.

We do not pretend to be a very apt learner, but many of our best lessons through life have been taught us by that same stern old schoolmaster, *disappointment*. And one lesson we learned was that *this world was not made only for us*. If it had been, the sun would have shone just when our hay needed curing, and the rain would have fallen only when our gardens needed to be watered. But we found that God went right on and ordered things as pleased him best, without consulting us. And when our schemes were thwarted, the stern schoolmaster said, "The world was not made for you alone. Don't be selfish. Your loss perhaps is another's gain. The rain that spoils your new-mown hay makes the blade of corn to grow faster in your neighbour's field. The fall in grain that cuts down your profits will help the poor widow in yonder cottage to buy bread cheaper for her orphan babes. So don't be selfish."

On a grand scale we sometimes see this lesson taught. When a certain greedy self-seeker once clutched at the empire of the civilized world, stern disappointment met him in his ambitious path, flung a Russian snow-storm in his face, and out of the tiny snow-flakes wove a white shroud to wrap the flower of French chivalry! "Go back! go back!" he cried, "all Europe was not made for you." The lesson the proud usurper would not learn at Aspern was taught him in blood and agony at Borodino, and on the frozen banks of the Dnieper. So, too, have we been taught in the defeat of our humbler schemes and in the failure of our humbler plans—"Don't be selfish; God did not make this world all for you." This lesson is worth all it costs us.

A second lesson which disappointment has taught us is that our losses are not only gains to others, but very often the richest gain to ourselves. In our short-sighted ignorance we had "devised a way," and set our hearts upon it. Had we been allowed to pursue it, we must have been led by it to ruin. God could not have sent a greater judgment on us than simply to have let us have our own way. In a thousand instances we have seen this made true, both in things temporal and in things spiritual. A merchant is thwarted in some enterprise in such a manner as to excite his bitterest mortification. But the far-seeing God knows full well that he

has been saved from a much sorer sorrow. The pecuniary failures of 1857 made many a man of business rich in the priceless treasure of a Christian's hope. It was a dark door which disappointment opened during that calamitous year, but it led tens of thousands into the pathway of heaven.

Mayhap these lines may reach some one who can recall the remembrance of some earthly idol which once held too high a place in the temple of her affections. Her life was bound up in the life of the boy. She worshipped him more than she worshipped her Saviour. At length the trial came. In terror and dismay she saw the colour fading out from that cheek of roses. Fainter and fainter fell each sweet "good-night" from his faltering tongue. In her agony she oft cried out, "O God, let me not see the death of the child!" And when the chestnut curl at last lay motionless on the silent lip, her grief burst out in David's passionate wail, "Would God I had died for thee, my son, my son!"

At length the first agony has wept itself out. She has come to herself. Above all, she has come to her Saviour; and as she beholds how ungrateful was her idolatry—how her best affections had been stolen from Christ—and how frail a reed she was leaning on, her trembling soul looks back with wonder to see from what a posture of guilt and peril she has been delivered. It is not, therefore, only the melancholy pleasure of knowing that her fair hope—plucked away by the angel-reapers—is now blooming in the fields of light which alone sustain her, but the sense of *rescue* from a state of fearful forgetfulness of Christ and of duty. She is done with idols. She never again will let any earthly object have that central place in her heart which a crucified Saviour earned for himself, and himself alone.

The record-book of every Christian life has some such pages as these. Tears have blurred and blotted the page at the time. But as you turn over to that page now, and read it in the light of experience, you can write across it, Thank God for these losses—they were my eternal gain; thank God for bereavements—they have saved my soul from being bereaved of a hope of heaven! "There," said a young man once, as he pointed to a diseased limb that was destroying his life; "there it is, and a precious treasure it has been to me. It saved me from the follies of youth: it brought me to this room, and made me cleave to God; I think it has brought me now almost to my Father's house on high."

Good reader, if you and I ever reach that Father's house, we will look back and see that the sharp-tongued, rough-visaged teacher Disappointment, was one of our best guides to bring us thither. He often took us by thorny paths. He often stripped us of our over-load of worldly goods; but that was only to make us travel the freer and the faster on our heavenward way. He often led us into the valley of the death-shadow; but never did the promises read so sweetly to us as when read by the light of faith in that very valley. The cross of Christ was the point toward which he oftenest made us look,

and the favourite passage he gave us for our encouragement was, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." Dear old rough, harsh-handed teacher! we will build a monument to him yet, and hang it with garlands. And on it we will write—*Blessed be the memory of DISAPPOINTMENT.*

HEAVEN'S LIGHT IN DARKSOME DWELLINGS.

[We have pleasure in inserting the following appeal, from the pen of an esteemed contributor, Mr. Arnot. It has been issued on behalf of the Edinburgh Institution for Imbecile Children, but it may lead readers in other parts of the country to interest themselves in similar institutions in their own immediate neighbourhood.]

"HAVE you given thanks to God to-day for the use of your reason?" said a stranger, as he planted himself suddenly in front of a passenger on the street. Taken aback, and somewhat overawed by the abrupt but solemn manner of the interrogator, the citizen answered in all simplicity, "I confess I have not." "Go then, and do so instantly," continued the maniac, "for I have lost mine." It was one of those glimpses of deeper than ordinary wisdom that burst at times from the insane, like flashes of sun-light through momentary rifts in the thick black covering of the sky, on a still, electrically disturbed, summer day, seeming all the more intensely bright and burning because of the darkness before and behind. Thus, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God ordains his own praise and our reproof.

Even among those who are generally well-disposed, there is a vast amount of sluggish forgetfulness and thanklessness in regard to the mercies which they enjoy every day and all the day. The proverb, "You will know the worth of it when you know the want of it," is a standing reproach to mankind. Why should we not know and acknowledge the worth of our mercies before they are taken away? They are no better than atheists who forget God as long as he blesses, and think and speak of him only when he smites them.

There is a class of persons, interused throughout the community in every corner of the land, considerable in point of numbers, very interesting, but very helpless; much neglected in the past, yet capable of great improvement,—the imbecile or weak-minded. We have a machine fit for doing the needful work, and we are looking about for a stream to drive it. We must draw upon the same river that makes so many other useful mills go round, and that is LOVE. It is in the form of gratitude that it exerts its power. By gratitude we do not mean the ghost of a name; we mean gratitude for God's goodness, incarnate in actual beneficence to needy men. As thankfulness for the gospel embodies itself in efforts to diffuse its blessed light through the world; and thankfulness for freedom embodies itself in efforts to emancipate the slave; so those who really are thankful to God for the possession of their mental faculties, will experience a desire, amounting, when fully de-

veloped, to a craving like hunger, to alleviate by all available means the sad condition of the imbecile. Love to Him who makes our cup full will impel us to run to the rescue of those whose cup is almost empty.

Combined and systematic efforts to instruct and train children of weak mind is of recent origin. Scarcely any attempt was made before the beginning of the present century, and few of the existing institutions are more than ten years old. If we have been late in beginning this department of philanthropy, we should now work all the more vigorously to make up our lee-way. Former generations of the imbecile were permitted to grow up corrupt and corrupting, hurting themselves and shocking the passengers on the public highways. Of late years a veil has been drawn decently over that open sore by the removal of those children, graphically in our own Scottish vernacular styled *objects*, into workhouses or other places of shelter. This, though an improvement on the barbarous practice of the past, is only the half, and that the lower half of our duty.

In Switzerland, France, America, England, and also to some extent in Scotland, systematic efforts have of late years been made, with an encouraging measure of success, for the mental and moral training of imbecile children. In one state of America, whose case is not worse than that of other countries, but only more accurately known, there are 1087 idiots in a gross population of 1,225,000, which gives the proportion of about one in a thousand; and this is exclusive of 2632 persons who are, properly speaking, insane in the same community; so that there is one person of either unsound or feeble mind to every 302 of the general population. In Scotland, as nearly as can be ascertained, there are about 2236 imbeciles, and of these about 600 are of an age suitable for being admitted into educational institutions.

We cannot in this paper afford room for details of the methods employed in the education of idiots, or of the measure of success which has been attained. For these we must refer to documents, which are rapidly multiplying, in the shape of reports from institutions both in England and America; but on the faith of the experience already obtained, we are able to affirm that the success has been great as to the number of cases over which it is spread, and in some examples also great as to its amount in the individual. We scarcely know any greater luxury to a tender and pure mind than the history of some of these cases. If doing good in ordinary forms be to a Christian like meat and drink, the successful introduction of these helpless children to a measure of civilized habit, and intellectual light, and moral purity, and Christian hope, is like a cordial to the spirit, both sweet and restoring. Reader, have you ever, when somewhat weary, sat down to rest on a stone by the wayside in a warm summer day? And as you mused, happy and half-dreamy, have you observed a flower at your feet, much crushed by a stone that had accidentally fallen upon it while it was in bud, struggling ineffectually to escape from the pressure, twisting its body and