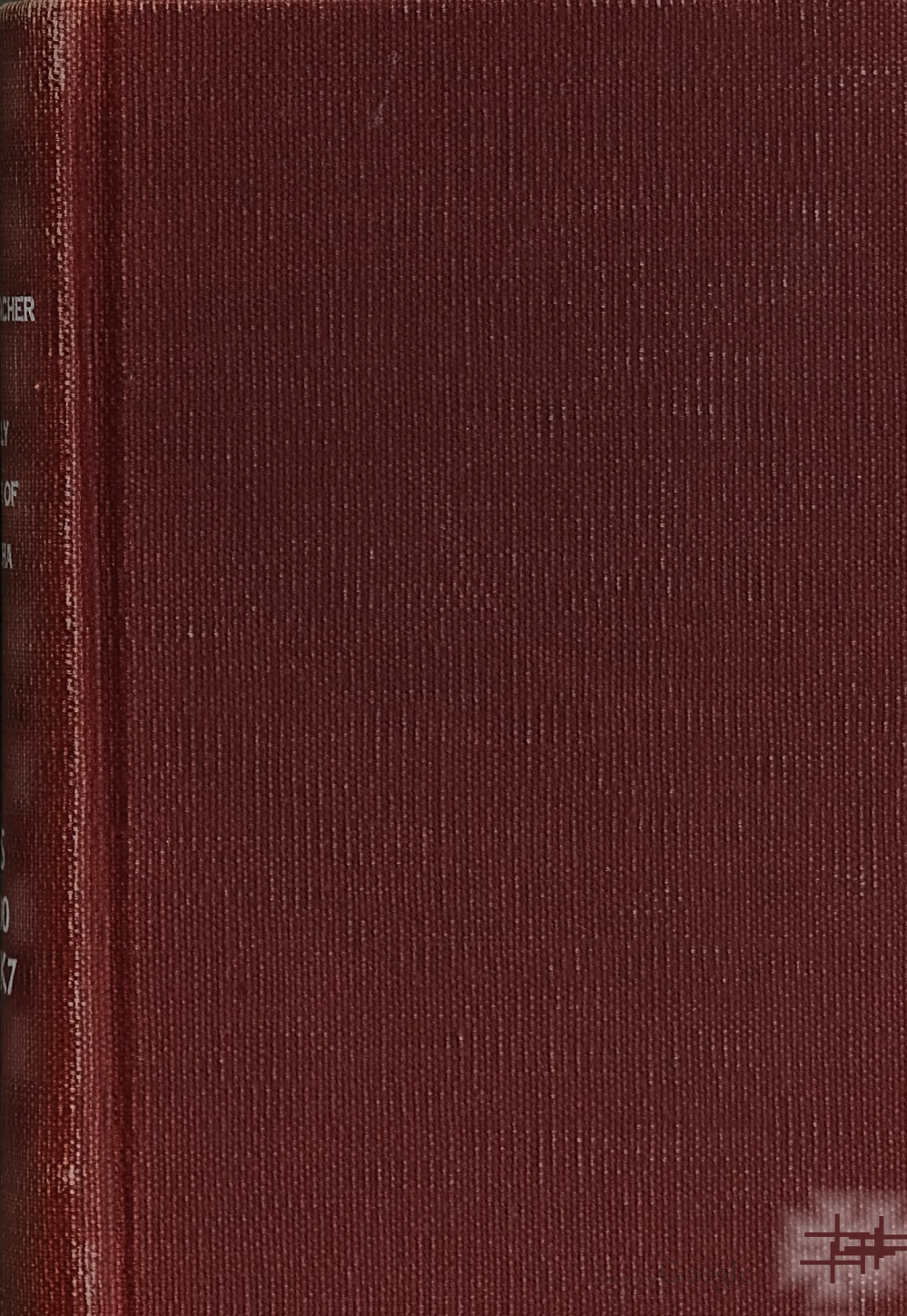

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Translated from the German

OF

F. W. KRUMMACHER,

Author of "Last Days of Elisha," &c, &c.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

GARDINER SPRING, D.D.

To be followed by other volumes of Krummacher's Works.

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INTRODUCTION.

HAVING had the pleasure of listening to the following discourses, while in the progress of translation, I am happy in introducing them to the notice of the Christian community. Though a very imperfect judge of the correctness of the translation itself, my acquaintance with the translator justifies me in saying that I have all confidence in his ability and integrity; and that if he has found it impossible, in every instance, to follow the *letter* of the original, he has given its *spirit*, and in most cases a literal translation.

The discourses themselves, with the exception of what may perhaps be called a slight Antinomian tinge in a single instance, will be found to contain the pure truths of Christianity. They are distinguished for simplicity of thought, beautiful and original imagery, and for that ingenious and striking expressiveness which leaves strong and vivid impressions on the memory.

The author possesses a remarkable facility in applying apparently unimportant facts in scriptural history to devotional and practical purposes; he abounds in delicate allusions to passages of the Sacred Writings, in their unobserved relations to each other, and to the

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thoughts he wishes to enforce, while the honesty and fervor with which he speaks indicate a mind deeply interested in his subject, and earnest in his high vocation.

The work also presents a cheerful and cheering exposition, not only of Christian truths but Christian emotions. As you read it, you cannot resist the impression that the favored writer was one of the happiest of men. Gloomy Christians, as well as stern and austere preachers, would be the gainers by perusing *these volumes.* Few minds are so cultivated and few imaginations are so poetical, but they may gather fresh flowers, and even fruit, from the well nigh redundant growth of this luxuriant vineyard. Although it contains nothing gorgeous, and no exotics, yet on every side the vine flourishes, and the tender grape appears. Few minds are so subdued by the tenderness, warmed by the fervor, or elevated and exulting in the triumphs of Christian truth, but may receive heavenward impulses from these glowing pages. They are *German* throughout, though they have no sympathy with sentimental dreams, or bold and unhallowed rationalism. It is enough to say of them that they are characteristic of their devout author, so long known as one of the most evangelical and attractive preachers of the age.

GARDINER SPRING.

Brick Church Chapel, Oct. 1852.

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THE

EARLY DAYS OF ELISHA.

CHAPTER I.

ELISHA'S FIRST APPEARANCE IN THE PROPHETIC CHARACTER.

MICAH, the prophet of the Lord, speaks of a happy time, when in the fourth verse of his fourth chapter he says: "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid." What a pleasant picture of quiet seclusion and contentment meets the eye in this prophetic passage! It is true, in Micah's days, that happy time was as yet far distant. It was the time which dawned with the incarnation of God—the time of the New Testament. Yet even in the days of the old covenant, there occurred shorter and longer periods, in which this bright future was wonderfully reflected, and delightful preludes of that long wished-for time, preludes rich in peace and joy, appeared to gladden mankind.

Such a period was the patriarchal age after the deluge. This period is stamped throughout with the characteristics of the era of the New Testament. It appears as a

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complete prophetic image of the evangelical year of peace, and freedom, and jubilee. Childlike simplicity and affection were the essential elements of the frame of heart, with which the holy men of that age approached the Almighty; as yet no Sinai smoked; as yet no constraining law stood threatening before God's peculiar people. Love, kindled by the condescension and gentleness of Him, who once more walked familiarly among men, was the prevailing impulse; and beneath the tents of an Abraham, or in the shadow of a juniper tree in Mamre, we almost feel as if in the cottage at Emmaus, where the man, who was also God in the Highest, sat familiarly at table with the two wanderers, or as if at Bethany, in the house of Lazarus, and his two happy sisters.

A similar season, rich in joy, and full of mercy, dawned with Elisha's first appearance in Israel. To this delightful period, a period illumined by the rays of the coming gospel, we will to-day direct our attention, and we purpose, with God's will, to linger for a while amid its soft and gentle light. May the spirit of the Lord of Lords, that sole interpreter of the divine writings, graciously accompany us upon this pilgrimage of contemplation, and enable us to find many a pearl of consolation, many a refreshing fruit, ripened beneath the suns of Palestine.

2 Kings II. 19–22.

"And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant as my Lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he

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went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land."

Thus then, we behold ourselves again transported to that remarkable time, to that soil so rich in miracles, where some months ago so many sources of consolation and of encouragement were disclosed to us, in the life and acts of Elijah the Tishbite. The region that we now visit, is one to which we are by no means strangers. Everything around appears familiar to us, and scarcely does a landscape, a mountain, a valley, or a village meet our eye, with which some great and cheering remembrance is not associated, from our earlier spiritual pilgrimages. Upon this field a new history will now unfold before us a succession of varied pictures, scenes, and occurrences—the history of Elisha, the man of God. Truly a rich and glorious narrative! Let it prove to us, what, after the purpose of Him who permitted it to be recorded in His holy word, it should prove, a source of abundant joy and refreshment in times of sadness, a well of constant solace in days of sorrow.

Our discourse to-day will be merely a preparatory one. It will perform the office of an introduction to those that follow. We will direct our glance *first upon Elisha and the peculiar character of his mission, and secondly, upon the first appearance of the man of God in a prophetic character.*

I. With the circumstances of the time, in which the hero of our narrative began his prophetic career, you are familiar. Elisha's labors were immediately linked

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with those of his great predecessor. But let us take a brief review of the condition of things in Israel at the time of Elijah's translation. The decree of the Almighty had destroyed king Ahab in that battle with the Syrians. Ahab's son and immediate successor, Ahaziah, was also no longer among the living. Because he had sent to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the God of Ekron, as if there had been no God in Israel, therefore the Tishbite was sent to him with the fearful message: "Thou shalt not come down from that bed, on which thou art gone up!" and a terrible death, a death unattended with repentance, put an end to his abominable and impious career. The regal crown, soiled with a thousand crimes, now passed from the head of this Ahaziah, upon that of his brother Jehoram, the second son of Ahab and Jezebel, and it was during his reign that Elisha reared the prophetic standard. Of Jehoram, with whom we shall presently become acquainted, the Scripture says: "And he wrought evil in the sight of the Lord; but not like his father and his mother." Terrified at the fearful judgment which had overtaken Ahab and Ahaziah, he had thought it advisable, at least to remove and break in pieces the abominable Sidonian idol, which his father had made and set up to be worshipped; still he clave to the worship of Jeroboam's golden calves, favored in every wise the priests of idolatry, and if, from time to time, he bowed before the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, he did so only with a momentary and hypocritical adoration. Under his reign, his mother, the widowed queen Jezebel, continued her shameful

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and profligate course of life, and exerted her entire influence over the weak Jehoram only to confirm him in his vices, and by his means to advance the moral corruption of the unhappy nation, to a fearful degree of maturity. A vile system of idolatry, with its thousand vices, was the religion of the kingdom. The whole land was covered with the darkness of an abyss, and the little church of God, although beaming the more brightly from the contrast, was but a green oasis in the wide and fearful wilderness—a lonely island in the ocean, over which every tempest broke with fury.

Amid the black clouds of this melancholy period, a friendly rainbow dawns upon us, a herald of good tidings, in the person of the prophet Elisha. Like a quiet, gentle moon, beaming forth consolation and peace, he rose upon the horizon of his people, after the majestic setting of that bright and burning meteor, which in Elijah's person had shone over Israel. His light was not the dazzling and destroying flash of the lightning; it *refreshed* only and rejoiced whomsoever it touched. Many have thought they beheld in Elisha but a weak copy of his far greater predecessor, and feel inclined to maintain that the life of the son of Shaphat, bears that relation to the Tishbite's, which a dying echo bears to the full original sound, or which a studied and artificial variation bears to the simple theme, simple,—yet in its simplicity infinitely more sublime, grand, and effective. Yet this view of the subject reveals anything but a clear spirit of perception. A slightly deeper glance leads to a very different conclusion. If Elijah was an original phenomenon,

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Elisha was not less so. God does not copy after his creations. Original forms alone arise from the abundant fulness of his creative power. Who would think of saying: He who has beheld a rose, can find no beauty in the blossom of the apple tree? Does not the latter appear to us as beautiful and admirable, in its way, as the former? Truly the apple blossom should neither be nor wish to be a rose; then there would be room for the comparison, and we might say that the former was but an ill executed, feeble, and unsuccessful copy of the latter. But now the one delights us in its peculiarity, not less than the other. Be sure of this, my hearers, it was by no means a part of God's intent to bring a second Elijah upon the scene in the person of Elisha. Had this been the case, then indeed such an opinion would be correct. Elijah's was the more imposing character. But there was an essential difference between Elisha's mission and that of his majestic predecessor, and with this his peculiar destination, the man's whole intellectual organization, as well as the manner in which he appeared and acted upon the scene, stands in the fairest harmony. What a false and perverse estimate would be the result, if, in judging the character of Melancthon, we should start with the supposition that Melancthon was called to be a second Luther! In what a false light should we view the life of an Arndt, a Spener, or a Tersteegen, if we should weigh them in the same balance in which we weigh the spiritual gifts and works of a Knox, a Calvin, or a Zuinglius! We should measure each man by the scale of his particular destination, thus

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we shall not overreach and miss the truth, in grasping after it; thus one will not cast a shadow upon the other, and each star, in its peculiar beauty, will maintain its place beside its fellows.

On several occasions we have already pointed out to you in what consisted the peculiar and distinctive feature of Elisha's calling and character. You remember the still small voice on Mount Horeb. This sound of a soft whisper pointed typically and prophetically to the coming of Elisha, and to the new period, which was to commence in Israel with the son of Shaphat, and by his ministry. Elisha was ordained to appear in Israel as an evangelist, as one of those messengers, whose feet "are beautiful on the mountain;" while Elijah was destined to enter upon the scene as a *second Moses*, and to contend for the dignity of the law, then forgotten, and trampled under foot. Elisha, as the herald of divine condescension, was to lead the people with persuasion into the paternal arms of the Lord, to bind up those hearts which his stern precursor had crushed with the hammer of the law, and startled from the death-bed of a prolonged and fearful security, with the thunder of his terrible and mighty deeds.

For this mild vocation, Elisha had long before been, not only divinely called, but also imperceptibly educated and prepared by the Lord. All his spiritual endowments had been calculated for this end; nay, more, his outward life, from youth up, with its innumerable, apparently accidental, apparently unimportant circumstances, had been constrained, although without his consciousness, to be subservient to his future

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ministerial position. His heart, like a harp, had been early tuned to soft accords. It was destined to sound songs of love, not the stormy tones of zeal. He grew up under circumstances especially favorable to the tenderer emotions of the soul. Amid a blossoming, calm, and peaceful landscape, and in the narrow yet familiar confines of a quiet rural life, he, for many a year, experienced no intellectual influence, except that, which, with the blue heaven and the green field, the mild sunshine of hallowed maternal love, and the plain, unvarnished piety of a faithful father, exercised upon him. When these dear parents rocked their new-born son in their arms, and said joyfully: "He shall be called Elisha," they were far indeed from foreboding that with this name they had pronounced the boy's future calling. For Elisha means, interpreted, "God is salvation," or "God is my Saviour," and the son of Shaphat was destined to glorify Him as such, with word and deed in Israel, while Elijah—"God is power" is the meaning of his name—was called, rather to display, unveiled, before the thoughtless people, the judicial sternness and fearful majesty of the Most High. Elisha's whole appearance, on reaching manhood, stood in the fairest and most perfect harmony with this, his peculiar mission. His exterior had nothing terrifying, nothing painfully imposing, nothing oppressive. Every one approached him without timidity. The most diffident felt undisturbed, and at ease in his presence. No mysterious gloom rests upon Elisha's origin, like that which so impenetrably veiled the origin and early life of his great master. While

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Elijah entered upon the scene of his labors, like one, who, without social connexion with the rest of mankind, was sent upon the earth immediately from heaven, no imposing halo of mystery indeed, surrounded his successor, yet instead he was illumined by the milder light of brotherly intimacy and social familiarity. His life, even from its commencement, lay unveiled before every eye. It was not for a day, a week, or a year, that those around him had known the devout and amiable son of the peasant Shaphat. They had seen him often behind the plough and the harrow, some of them were even connected with his family, or on terms of long friendship with it. In addition to this, there was something in his outward form and bearing which greatly facilitated familiar approach, and which at once awakened the thought that he was an apostle of another mission and another spirit than that of the man of Mount Gilead, with his stamp of dignity and reserve. Elisha, as it appears, was endowed, neither with the gigantic stature nor the powerful and majestic frame of his mighty predecessor. Instead of the consciousness of his high position, naught but humility and mildness shone in his features; and even his head, robbed of the ornament of manhood, must, as a symbolical expression of the truth, that God's power is mighty in the weak, have helped to interpret the peculiarity of his mission. "The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, dwells with the humble and the contrite." This was the great and joyful truth, which Elisha, preaching and laboring in Israel, was to set aloft, as upon a high candlestick; and

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the very personal appearance of this prophet was, as it were, a mirror in which this truth shone brightly to the eyes of the more thoughtful, even without deed or word.

As you well know, my dear hearers, the great and powerful of the earth are accustomed to conceal their hearts from the humble, and to make, more or less, a mystery of that which they feel towards them, whether of gratitude, or love, or friendship. At least, they seldom manifest what we call cordiality towards their inferiors; and even when they do this, they do not give to this *feeling* its complete and adequate expression. They speak more sparingly and coldly than they feel. They play the miser with the testimonials of their favor, as with their gold. They consider this self-constraint and reserve due to their dignity as rulers, which, as they fear, might be impaired by too unrestrained an expression of their feelings. How very different in this respect is the conduct of the King of kings. He does not hesitate to unlock his inmost heart to sinners. All his warm compassion, paternal favor, and love, he expresses towards them openly, freely, and clearly. And he does this without damage to his majesty and glory, for even in his condescension and familiar intercourse with the lowly and the humble, his divine splendor beams with the brightest lustre.

II. And now to our history. The narrative which lies open before us to-day informs us of Elisha's first appearance as a prophet. Remark if even here, that which we have said of the peculiarity of his mission does not find complete confirmation.

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His first act appears as a characteristic symbol of his whole career. He is in Jericho. He commences his prophetic course in the city, over which Joshua uttered a curse in the name of the Lord. It is not with threats that he begins it, nor with chastisement, nor with curses; but with benefits, with blessings, with the removal of a curse. He had repaired to that city immediately after his master's translation. Here, in the peaceful circle of the sons of the prophets, he purposed to wait for Jehovah's first commands. The pleasant season of repose which he here enjoyed, however, was but of short duration. After a few days he finds himself summoned upon the scene of public activity. The inhabitants of Jericho have heard what kind of a guest they have within their walls, and think that they ought not to neglect to profit by the presence of such a man. They know Elisha; they have often seen him by the side of the Tishbite. Some among them, doubtless, witnessed his miraculous passage over Jordan. They know that he is destined to be Elijah's successor. They have not a doubt that the Lord has endowed him with miraculous powers. They repair to him, therefore, to lay before him a supplication with which they never would have ventured to approach the Tishbite. No, they would sooner have expected that he would renew Joshua's curse, than that he would remove it from their heads and change it into a blessing. But from Elisha they expect nothing but good. In the gentleness of this amiable messenger a ray of hope dawns upon them. Fear and diffidence retire

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before his aspect, so full is it of the promise of help and healing.

It were a happy thing, my brethren in the Lord, if we also shone as such gentle stars on the horizon of the world. We should be such, if we aspired to be nothing but vessels of mercy, nothing but drops of dew, in which Jesus' image is reflected. Some among us—even they themselves do not know it—shine as such friendly, cheering stars. They are the crushed and bleeding souls, who have lost their own life that they might live in Christ, in the enjoyment of whose love, embracing him through faith, they no longer inquire after heaven and after earth. From the very aspect of these people, there proceeds something that is unspeakably soothing, something that inspires wondrous hope and consolation. We perceive the firm and sure hold which they by faith have taken upon the invisible world, and *our* doubts disappear at the sight. We see the deep, heartfelt peace which they enjoy, and feel as if a life of Sabbaths breathed its soft influence around us. The harassed, perplexed, and sorrowing, involuntarily seek their presence, as if among these blessed souls, and by their means, the light would dawn again, and the wished for help draw nigh. These people are like cheering moons, which reflect back an image and reflection of Jesus' love. In them is mirrored vividly, and with living power, the image of Him who invites the weary and heavy laden to him, that he may refresh them. He himself seems to greet us from their eyes, to smile upon us graciously in their features,

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to speak with us by their words. In their presence we seem to breathe the air that encompasses the throne of grace, and seldom do we leave them without having gained a more cheerful prospect, a higher station, and a more exalted point of vision.

The business which the inhabitants of Jericho had to bring before the man of God was this. The city of Jericho enjoyed originally a remarkably beautiful situation. An evergreen wreath of tall palm groves and perfumed gardens of balm encompassed it, and the surrounding soil, favorable to the growth of every natural production, was inferior in fertility to no other portion of the Holy Land. But since the time of Joshua, this delightful region was no longer what it had been. His well known curse had left fearful traces there. The branches of the palm trees drooped sorrowfully; there was no blossoming in the gardens; and the shepherds upon the once so luxuriant meadows, uttered continued lamentations over the stinted growth of their cattle, and especially over the barrenness of their herds. In addition to this, a wide-spreading disease prevailed among the inhabitants, and untimely deaths were of daily occurrence. All this had its origin in the quality of the water, which, since the curse of the Lord had rested upon the land, was, in the language of Scripture, "naught." Whether it flowed in immeasurable depths, over unwholesome mineral strata, or whether the cause of its noxiousness was a more mysterious, a less material one, it would be in vain to inquire. Enough, the wells were as if poisoned, and the manifold misery which ensued, rendered it almost an object of regret

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that, unmindful of God's warning, Hillel had taken it upon him to rebuild this unhappy city from its ruins. What could the inhabitants of Jericho desire more ardently than the removal of this memento of a fearful judgment from their land, which was once so fair and pleasant? Much labor, much gold and skill, doubtless, had been lavished to effect this object. But the evil had not abated; it rather extended its ravages. Well, Elisha is in the city. "How, if he would help us!" they think. They are sensible, indeed, that a judgment which God has sent upon a people, God only can remove. The evil came by a miracle; a miracle must banish it. With such thoughts, and hoping for the best, they hasten to the man of God. They find him in one of the cottages of the sons of the prophets, and encouraged by the friendly reception which they meet with at his hands, they say diffidently, barely intimating their desire: "Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the ground barren!"

Would that this description of the city of Jericho did not remind us of many a spot in this our native land, of which everything lovely and gladsome may be said, except that the *water* is naught—I mean the *spiritual* water—and therefore the field of the human heart is desolate and unfruitful. Yes, in a place where the spiritual wells are poisoned, where from pulpit and professor's chair, the people, instead of being fed with the unadulterated milk of the gospel, are nourished only with the fatal draught of that false and delusive doctrine of modern times, whited though it be with a gloss of

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Christianity—a doctrine which makes of man his own Saviour, and leads him aside from Bethlehem and Golgotha; there, in truth, there rests a heavier ban, a more fearful curse, than that which once ravaged the plains of Jericho. What though the fields and gardens of nature stand forth in luxuriant fulness; upon the fields of the heart rests the dreariness of an inhospitable wilderness. Although Art may there weave her fading garlands, and spread out before the world the treasury of her vain joys—in the desolation and emptiness of the soul, death holds its sway. In the inner gardens, weeds grow luxuriantly, but not the evergreen of hope, the rose of heavenly-mindedness, the lily of peace. Oh, that the Lord would send us Elishas, that here also they might cast the healing salt into the wells! The word from the cross is this healing salt. Wherever it is scattered the soul's desert is transformed into a blooming field of joy. Scarcely have the men intimated their wish to the prophet, when the latter at once evinces his readiness to comply with their request. Elisha does not fail to see in their prayer a sign from above, especially as, at the same moment, the Holy Spirit teaches him what he has to do. With the promptness of a man who is perfectly sure of the result, he says: "Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein." And the men hasten joyfully and hopefully to execute the holy seer's commission.

For the performance of this miracle then, Elisha is to employ an outward instrument, and one indeed, which, so far as its natural properties are concerned, instead of being adapted to effect the intended result,

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seems calculated rather to produce a contrary one. In a city which, like Jericho, stood not far from the Dead Sea, all knew that salt could only serve to corrupt water, and make it unpalatable. The dreary region around that sea rendered it, at the same time, evident to every eye, that water impregnated with salt, far from enriching the soil, only deprived it of its productive powers, and destroyed all vegetable growth. When we call to mind the general and well-known custom of strewing those spots with salt which were doomed to perpetual desolation, the command of the prophet was certainly calculated to excite doubt and astonishment. But the very unfitness of the remedy could only serve to make the miracle appear the more unquestionably an act of omnipotent power. Yet, apart from this, what other intent was there in prescribing the employment of this material instrument? The same intent, my dear hearers, with which Moses wielded that wonder-working rod; the same with which, in later times, the laying on of hands was commanded to the apostles. That rod, *without* which Moses could do *nothing*, was to assist in preserving in himself, as well as in the witnesses of his deeds, the consciousness of his dependence upon God, and of his own position as an instrument of the divine power; and it was with the same intent that the Lord prescribed the use of the means here mentioned to his servant Elisha. Had Elisha, by a gesture of his hand, or by uttering the words, "Let it be so!" healed the wells, it might easily have appeared as if this wonder-working power dwelt in him, and the miracle would have failed of its true purpose. But by

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the intervention of an apparently necessary means, the business assumed a very different aspect. The miracle now stood forth clearly as a work of the Lord's, whom it had pleased to blend with an element, inefficient in itself, something of his own divine power. Besides this, still another purpose lay concealed in the divine direction, concerning the outward form of this miracle of healing. It was not without a meaning that the inhabitants of Jericho were directed to bring the salt, nay, and the cruse also. This circumstance likewise, was calculated in a spirit of grace and mercy. Yes, it was to assist in advancing the great and blessed object for which Elisha was sent. What an honor for the inhabitants of Jericho, that the Lord permitted them to co-operate, as it were, in the great and wondrous work! What condescension on the part of the Most High is manifested in the fact that he vouchsafed to consecrate one of their poor household utensils to a vessel of his healing power, to a ministering instrument of his mighty strength! How familiarly, how graciously, did he draw nigh to them in this! Must they not have felt as *we* feel, when at the holy sacraments we behold the vessels of our households become the receptacles of the divine mysteries, the bearers of His testimonials of grace? Was there not thus brought near to their hearts a joyful foreboding of those happy days, of which it is written: "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord! And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be like the bowls before the altar." But that they should recognise Jehovah as a Saviour, as a God full of compassion,

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was the very object of Elisha's mission. How deeply and strikingly then, is the whole peculiarity of his divine calling, characterized in his very first act, and in the several circumstances under which it was performed.

After Elisha had received the new cruse with salt —it was necessary that it should be new, in order that there might be no room for any suspicion to the incredulous or superstitious, that it contained some mysterious or magic properties—he goes forth, in company with those men, to the spring of the waters. When he has reached it, he takes the vessel in his right hand, and while, without any pompous, formal introduction, he shakes its contents into the bubbling waters, he calls aloud, with a distinct voice, "Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land." Behold, how faithfully Elisha watches over the interests of his Master! How careful he is that all the glory shall be His to whom it exclusively belongs, and that not even a ray thereof may cleave to his hands, or to the outward instrument, as such. The Lord alone is to be glorified here, and the miracle appear as a mere act of God's, as a greeting of love from on high. With these words Elisha hedges it in, as it were, that no one may touch it with unhallowed hands.

Thus saith the Lord! It is with the words of Jehovah then, that the prophet steps to the well. Oh, with such words, in truth, one may easily perform miracles! What could hinder me from creating worlds if the Lord should place upon my lips his fiat of creation? His word knows no hindrances, no difficulties.

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Where it is uttered, even that which is not, must listen and do His bidding. That which *He but names* at once steps into existence. "He speaks and it is done, he commands, and it stands fast." Words, like the words full of healing virtue, with which Elisha was furnished, are indeed not given to *us*. But if we belong to his people, we have greater and more blessed words than these. We say, "Thus saith the Lord: No one shall pluck my sheep out of my hand;" and we are sure, for this very word's sake, that the whole might of Hell will not prevail against us. We say, "Thus saith the Lord, Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am," and doubt not, that if seas and mountains bar our way to heaven, the one must be dried up, and the other be scattered before us like empty foam." We say, "Thus saith the Lord, Behold the fowls of the air, are ye not much better than they, oh ye of little faith?" and live in the confidence, that before we shall perish with hunger, the very clouds will be compelled to rain down bread upon our tables. We say, "Thus saith the Lord, All things work together for good to those who love God," and know that these words will draw the poison from every vexatious and hurtful thing, and imbue it with the power of healing and with unmingled blessing. With words of God, like these, we are encompassed as with a strong bulwark, and truly, they will prove their efficacy, not less than the words, "*I have healed these waters*," which, Elisha, in Jehovah's name, uttered over the poisoned springs of Jericho.

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The words have scarcely left his lips, when already they have exerted their miraculous power. Whether the streams in the depths of the earth turned into a different channel, or whether the nature of the springs was changed, who can say? Enough, from that hour the water is all that it could be desired to be. It is palatable, refreshing, and salutary. It spreads life and health whithersoever it flows. By its fructifying virtue their former luxuriant abundance is restored to the fields and meadows, and, as they drink, men and beasts feel, as it were, like creatures newly born. Nay, after a short time, scarcely a trace is to be found of the former malady which prevailed in Jericho. The inhabitants, once perpetually sick and sad, grow strong, and become a blooming, vigorous race of men. All now is cheerfulness, life, and activity. A new and happy industry enlivens old and young, and everywhere there is fulness of blessing. Again the shouts of the gleaners, men and maidens, resound in the vineyards. The shepherd, surrounded by his playful flock, tunes joyfully his simple, rustic song. The peasant thinks of stronger horses to plough the rich and heavy clods of his fields, of new and larger barns for his abundant harvest, and the traveller boasts that nowhere has he met with water so sweet and so refreshing as the water of Jericho, and he boasts it to this day.

What a rich and glorious revelation of the Most High appears in this miracle! How brightly is his power, as well as his love, displayed therein! What a grand seal it stamps, also, upon the divine mission of

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the prophet! Who could henceforth doubt in whose name, and with whose armor, this man steps forth upon the field? And with what a sweet halo does this deed clothe the whole prophetic ministry of our seer! Never yet did a herald of Jehovah's begin his career so truly evangelically as Elisha. His first act is the removal of a curse which had weighed upon the land for more than five hundred years. The restoration of a perished earthly paradise is the first credential of his high mission.

We wait for a spiritual renewal of the miracle at Jericho in our days. We long for it, we pray for it. Alas! our wells are stagnant, noxious, poisoned, and send forth deadly streams, which threaten with moral destruction, not a city and country, but a world. What wells do I mean, you ask. I mean the prevailing philosophy of this godless age, the moral and political doctrines which, like an evil leaven, have already begun to pervade the masses of the people, and to influence the conduct, as well as the opinions, of many thousands. I mean the sciences, which, in fearful estrangement from all that is divine, would confine the whole universe of existing things within the narrow limits of the sensual world; the arts which have contemptuously turned their backs upon their original vocation, that of being interpreters of a world beyond, and have dedicated their colors or their tones to things of sense, and veil iniquity with the halo of celestial purity. I mean a poetry, whose wit is enkindled by Hell, whose inspiration is a brutish ardor, and in which an insolent scorn of all that is named decency

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and morality takes the place of genius. I mean a theology which, like the father of lies, "speaketh of its own," and which, like him, does nothing but *deny;* and although masked in the form of an angel of light, watches, like a faithful handmaid, only over Lucifer's interests, in the church of God. I mean a philosophy which strives to chain the God of all gods to the clods of the earth, and to annul the distinction between the creation and Him, whose word called it into existence.

Alas! who, as he glances at all this, can escape the conviction, that we are in a similar condition with Jericho, and that our wells are poisoned! When we view those foaming streams, the journals and newspapers of the day, in which those brooks pour their waters over the land, what remains to us except the lamentation of that inhabitant of the city of palms, "Alas! the water around us is naught, and the ground barren!" But scatter the salt of the good word, ye Elishas, scatter it widely abroad, ye to whom it is intrusted. Place it ever in new vessels, in new forms; but let the *salt* be the original, the old, the unadulterated, for *this* alone works miracles. In the name of the Lord, cast it into the miry waters of this world and this age. You will perform an infinitely greater work with this divine salt, than Elisha performed with his. You will heal the world. The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

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CHAPTER II.

THE JUDGMENT AT BETHEL.

"THEY compassed me about like bees." Such is our Lord's complaint in the twelfth verse of the hundred and eighteenth psalm. We well know what and whom he means. His glance rests upon Golgotha. His executioners, his murderers are the bees. *Bees* truly. Have they not stored up honey in God's lion? Had not the treasure chamber, Christ, been opened with spear and nails, had not his blood been shed, what interest should we have in Him? Christ *crucified;* He is our all in all.

"They compassed me about like bees." Yes, and He may say this at the present day. The whole world, each separate congregation, hangs full of wasps' nests. All goes well, and all is quiet, so long as the man with the crown of thorns is kept behind the curtain. But bring Him upon the scene and all the nests are in an uproar. Then the swarms set themselves in motion, whet their stings, and there is no end to the buzzing and the humming. They aim their stings at Christ, and at those who cling to *Him.*

"They compassed me about like bees." In a better sense, this applies to the faithful also. Christ is the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley. The faithful are

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the bees which swarm around the rose, now sighing, now sporting, now lingering, now banqueting, here upon the wings of prayer, there upon the wings of joy; and in the true congregation, there is no end to the humming about this flower, either by night or day. From it we take our honey every day; forgiveness, peace, courage, and strength, and its fulness is inexhaustible. Many Christians, in truth, are bees of labor only, and flutter and swarm about the flower, day after day, and can never find repose and quiet. How foolish are they!

Observe, on a summer's evening, how these insects act, and do thou likewise. Wearied with the heat and toil of the day, they sink gently to repose in the cups of the flowers. And the flowers close over them their tender leaves, and the gentle rustling of the evening breeze rocks them, while they sleep securely in their perfumed cradles. Sweet couch! Thus do thou rest in the rose of Sharon! Forget *thyself* in Jesus. Let Him be thine all, and let his promises and merits be the pavilion over thee, and the pillow beneath thy head. And then—what though the storm rages without, and croaking night birds swarm around thee? Thy bed is soft, and His banner over thee is Love.

2 KINGS II. 23–25.

"And he went up from thence unto Bethel, and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him: Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head! And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears

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out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. And he went from thence to Mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria."

A startling scene, my friends. It would be less so, if we met with it in the life of the Tishbite. In the history of Elisha it appears as a grating discord, for where, in this occurrence, flutters the evangelical banner of peace, whose bearer we pointed out as Shaphat's son? A deadly outburst of vengeance against a band of presumptuous boys! a fearful curse uttered over them in the name of God! How truly in the spirit of the Old Testament is this! how directly contrary to all that we have said of the peculiar character and calling of Elisha, as a herald of Jehovah's mercy! Yet I think, my dear hearers, that the summer is still summer, even although a November storm for once rushes through the air, to scatter the vapors, and to obtain for the all fructifying sun a freer access to the earth. The tempest, whatever may be its violence, which rends the icy bands that lock up the meadows, and which loosens the rigid soil, does not interrupt the gentle reign of spring, which it has invaded. Thus also, I think, that the single thunder peal, which to-day suddenly bursts upon the soft and peaceful harmony of Elisha's life, can in no wise weaken what we have asserted concerning the merciful intent of this prophet's mission. If this peal is a discord, it is only a seeming one, or it is a dissonance which, as we shall find, will not disturb, but elevate the harmony of the whole, and will resolve itself into the sweetest accord.

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Let us contemplate the narrative more closely. The mocking of Elisha is the subject of our present discourse. We will direct our attention, first, to the *origin* of the *mocking;* secondly, to the *act of mocking itself;* and lastly, to *its consequences.*

I. Again we find ourselves in Jericho; but only to bid this city farewell for a season. Elisha has received marching orders, and we prepare to accompany him on his first journey in the character of a prophet. He has now ceased to be his own master. Above his head there hovers the whispering of a voice which peremptorily prescribes to him his path, and whose "halt" and "forward," for ever relieve him of all care concerning the destination of his prophetic journeys. For the flesh it may be pleasanter to journey while a man is still master of his own movements; but infinitely *safer* is it, and infinitely happier, were it through the Red Sea, when we know that we walk at a command that comes from the clouds, and travel with a passport that is sealed in the cabinet of heaven. *In the name of God!* Oh, this is a strong, a wonder-working staff. Foaming billows divide before it; it transforms mountains into valleys. Elisha set out from Jericho without attendants; but not therefore alone. He took with him many hearts, full of gratitude and love. Thousands of fervent blessings formed his peaceful train. The sons of the prophets had passed happy days, days never to be forgotten, in the warm sunshine of his quiet presence. The whole city blessed the man of God as a Saviour, for they

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were indebted to him for that which was more than silver and gold. Elisha, indeed, had left behind him a glorious monument in the hearts of the inhabitants, as well as in the country about Jericho; a monument, however, erected, not so much to himself, as to Him, whose interpreter and agent he was, and who saith, "My glory will I not give unto another."

From Jericho, Elisha took his way to Bethel, which lay a few leagues distant. This city, which is already known to us from the history of the patriarchs, was no longer deserving of its happy name. The fiery zeal of the sons of the prophets named it Beth-aven, that is, the house of vanity; for, with Dan, it was the seat of that idolatrous worship, which, in obedience to the suggestions of a base and sacrilegious policy, Jeroboam had established, in order to complete the separation of the kingdom of Israel from that of Judah. A so-called sanctuary, which he erected there, was intended to appease the longing of the people after the temple at Jerusalem. Two golden calves were set up as substitutes for the cherubim over the ark of the covenant, or, perhaps, as symbols of Jehovah himself; for, "Behold," said the king to his people, "behold thy gods, oh Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt!" A caste of priests, chosen arbitrarily, without reference to tribe or divine consecration, took the place of the family of Aaron; and a multitude of unmeaning rites, borrowed from paganism, aped the beautiful and significant worship of the temple, and served gradually to erase from the minds of the deluded people, not only all hope of a Messiah, but

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even every remnant of an idea of a genuine worship of God. Terrible impiety! not only to force the highest gift to mortals into the service of worldly policy, but even, with insolent hand, to remodel it in accordance with its selfish interests. Israel has not afforded the only example of such an accursed attempt. The like has often occurred in the history of the world; but never yet has it happened that the bold deed escaped the most terrible retribution. Call to mind the infidels of France during the reign of terror; call to mind the hero of modern times, decked with the wreaths of victory. You know how they likewise, copying the policy of Jeroboam, not only changed times and seasons, but endeavored also to establish an idolatry like that of Bethel, and to eradicate the old faith as well as the old worship. And where now are those bold innovators? The thunder of God's vengeance has dashed them in pieces. Their bodies, covered with scorn and ignominy, lie in lonely graves, and their souls—may God be merciful to them!

That Jeroboam succeeded in his impious purpose at that time is not to be wondered at, when we consider the natural corruptness of the human heart. In our days, also, the spiritual Jeroboams of a hypocritical band of reformers, have succeeded in their purpose likewise—Jeroboams who, to draw the people from the temple of the true Church, proceeding, not directly, but negatively only, did not deny the need of a temple generally, but built a temple like that at Beth-aven, and then cried aloud, "Come hither! this is Jerusalem! here shines the pure light! here is the true

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church!" Nay, they have a god also, but a god not more difficult to distinguish from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, than the golden calves of Bethel from Him who appeared in the sanctuary on Moriah. A Christ also is worshipped there; but a Christ from whose head their sacrilegious hands have torn the crown of royalty, from whose breast they have rent the priestly breastplate, and left him but a few shreds of his prophetic mantle. There is a devotion there also. Imagine a feeble, languid warmth of feeling, and you behold it; view with self-complacency your own image in the mirror of a sickly sentimentality that stirs within you, and you have it. There is prayer there likewise, but a prayer of the strangest nature. A prayer of man *to himself*, an affectation of sensibility without an object, a repetition of exclamations that ask for nothing, and, when viewed closely, mean nothing. You are acquainted with the highly lauded books upon whose senseless, frothy contents, this modern temple to Christ is erected. You know how this Beth-aven swarms with worshippers. Israel has forgotten Jerusalem and the true sanctuary. But woe to the deluded people, and threefold woe to their crafty deceivers!

For a city like Bethel Elisha was not the man. What wonder that from this nest of infidelity and darkness, the hiss of mockery and railing was raised against this torch-bearer of Jehovah? It was not the holy men of the New Testament alone who were destined to experience the truth of the passage, "I came not to send peace, but a sword." Good men of

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all times have often been doomed to feel, painfully enough, the sting of that enmity, which, from the beginning, God placed between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. If the hatred of the children of the world against God's children, who have never harmed them, appears a mystery, we find a sufficient interpretation thereof in the words of our Lord, "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen ye out of the world; therefore the world hateth you." The world is unwilling that *we* should be otherwise than *it* is; it is unwilling that we should elevate ourselves above its moral sphere. It desires that we should follow quietly in its track, and make its views and feelings, its judgments, actions, and aspirations, our own. So long as we consent to do this, we enjoy the favor of the world. On the other hand, if we evince a disposition to turn from the error of its ways, the question is at once decided as to peace or war. But is it not easy to comprehend indeed, why, from that moment, we are intolerable to the world? For what is it that we do in separating ourselves from its ways and works? Do we not condemn it as unhallowed and perverse? What do we do when we withdraw from its vanities and pleasures? Do we not thereby utter a sentence of reprobation over it, louder and more powerful than could be spoken with words? The presence of a truly converted man, places before the eyes of the children of the world, too glaring a contrast with their own godless walk and life, for them to look upon him with favor. It admonishes them too

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powerfully of the necessity that they also should become changed, and of the possibility of soaring to a holier and higher rule of life than theirs. But they are unwilling to be reminded of that necessity, and would gladly leave all questions concerning this possibility at rest. It vexes them to be disturbed in the sweet, yet deadly repose of their security. They love darkness, self-delusion, falsehood. What wonder is it, then, that they abhor the *light*, and hate those who bear it about with them in their darkness!

If *we*, my dear hearers, experience but little of this hostility from the world, it is not the best sign in reference to *ourselves*. This fact should cause us to reflect, and the more so, since we know the words of the Lord, "Blessed are ye, when men shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake." And again, "Wo unto you when all men shall speak well of you!" It must be that the seal of a higher origin is not stamped upon us with sufficient distinctness, and that we, on our part, leave the unconverted too much room for the consoling supposition that it is nothing but the outward garb and religious form which distinguishes us from them; that in inward worth we stand upon a level with themselves. Yes, we must not conceal it from ourselves, my dear brethren, the world is thus gracious to us only because we keep on such good terms with the world. It is our lukewarmness as Christians that begets that tolerance on its part, which we congratulate ourselves upon enjoying. Let there be but a little more of the divine salt, and of the fire from off the altar of the sanctuary,

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in our intercourse with the world, and our relations with it will change. A man who has put on Christ will not pass unvexed through Dan and Bethel. To his enemies he is "a savor of death unto death, to his friends a savor of life unto life."

II. Alone, and buried in thought, Elisha pursued his journey. Narratives of past times hovered across his agitated soul, awaking a strange longing. The patriarchal world, with its hallowed forms and images of peaceful life, lay, like a garden of the Lord, before the eye of his memory. The spirit of the holy patriarch Jacob greeted him as he walked along. The wonderful shapes of that vision, which once entranced the sleeping patriarch in this region, passed, with all the vividness of a present reality, across the prophet's inward glance, and, like the palm trees of the Lord, those great words of promise rustled around him, which here resounded from the opened heavens upon the ear of the prince of Israel. A wonderful succession of emotions thronged across Elisha's heart. Powerfully as the contemplation of those pictures of the past elevated and strengthened him, equally painful and heart-rending must have been each glance, which, from the cheerful world of remembrance that surrounded him, he cast upon the present and its gloomy shadows. Alas! that soil once so sacred, so rich in wonders, what was it now! Bethel, a Beth-aven, a house of darkness! The spot which once had been consecrated to the glory of Jehovah, and to the honor of his name, was now a dwelling-place of lies, and

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all idolatrous abomination. "But *wherefore*," thought Elisha, "does the Lord send me this way to-day?" And many a sweet star of hope began to shed its consoling rays over the gloom of his sad reflections. "It may be, if it pleases Him, that it will soon become a Beth-el again!" Thus thought the man of God, as he advanced with quickened steps towards the benighted spot.

It had already been noised abroad in Bethel, what kind of a visitor was approaching its gates. It is hard to take the Prince of darkness by surprise. He scents the battle from afar, and his sentinels are wonderfully vigilant. Elisha was a dangerous man to the devil. The Evil one feared this herald even more than he had feared the Tishbite. How few would suppose this! How plain and insignificant appeared the peasant's son of Abel-meholah, when compared with that thunderer, who bore naught but lightning and flames of fire upon his lips, and spread abroad death and destruction. But it is not before those, thus zealous for the law, that Satan trembles most. He knows that the law engenders anger only, embitters only, and rather drives the sinner farther from God's presence, than leads him to a voluntary surrender to the Lord. The gospel, on the other hand, the message of mercy, always inspires Satan with serious anxiety. He knows how melting, moving, enticing, persuasive, are these tidings. He knows the attractive power which lies concealed within them. Therefore, he is never busier than when the wonder-working tones sound near his borders. How could he now remain

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inactive, when Elisha, that bearer of the divine banner of peace, was approaching one of his most faithful cities? He knew indeed what this messenger of help and healing had performed in Jericho, and how narrowly he had escaped the mortification of seeing the whole city turn to the prophet and to his God. How if Elisha should effect something similar, or even something still greater in Bethel? The very thought causes the old serpent to foam with anger. He hastens to take his precautions. He is by no means at a loss for instruments. The priests of lies are selected to execute his plan of operations. He acquaints them with the danger which threatens them; he fans their fury, and points out to them the weapons with which they may, most effectually, oppose the enemy of their influence and authority. The priests, however—it is thus that we imagine the farther course of the event—hesitate to engage personally in the contest. They inform their disciples of the impending peril. This youthful brood of adders, however, deem themselves strong enough to deal with the hated prophet, and pledge themselves, not only to drive him beyond the borders of their city, but to deprive him for ever of all wish to return.

Elisha has reached the boundaries of the idolatrous city. He does not come to curse and to destroy; no, to gather the backsliders beneath the banner of mercy, is the compassionate object of his errand. And behold, from one of the gates of Bethel, a noisy band of youths rush forth like a furious host, two-and-forty in number. "Little children," says the narrative. The word in the

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original signifies young people of from fifteen to eighteen years of age. They surround the man of God, keeping at some distance, burst into loud laughter, and are not ashamed to vent their malice against him, in the vilest and most vulgar mockery. They select the prophet's bald head as the target for their jeers. A bald head was considered by the common people in Israel as something disgraceful, because it was the ordinary effect of the leprosy to deprive the head of its *crown*, as they were accustomed to call the hair; and because the nakedness of the front part of the head was esteemed a token, not only of bodily, but also of moral weakness. Thus there was a bitter, rancorous meaning in the word "*bald head*," by which the youths addressed the man of God. It is not an outbreak of mere youthful heedlessness that we witness here. Arrows poisoned by Satan, and sharpened with intent, are flying through the air, shot by the hand of refined malice. What other meaning was intended by the words "*bald head*" than "weak fool! leper? We shall soon settle matters with thee, thou ridiculous hero! Thou dost not alarm us, thou false prophet!" and the impious exclamation "Alah!" means, translated, not "Go up!" but "*Ride up!* soar aloft!" What is its meaning, but "Harness to the horses, like thy master? Do thou also ascend the fiery chariot, and follow him through the clouds!" It was a scoffing allusion, then, to Elijah's translation; partly in insolent doubt of that miracle, partly in ridicule of Elisha.—"Thou ape of Elijah, confirm thy prophetic mission. If thou canst do anything, now is the time to prove it." It was

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more then than an outburst of youthful presumption. It was devilish malice, purposed impiety, bitter sarcasm, intentional mockery of the holy man. To the *Tishbite*, in truth, they would not have offered this insult. They well knew that he was not a man to be trifled with. Elisha's mildness, on the other hand, unchained the unclean spirits in their hearts. But the fact that their hatred was so bitter that it could resist the power of that love, which beamed upon them from the whole aspect of this man, rendered their iniquity so much the more abominable and unpardonable.

Alas, who can suppress an emotion of the deepest sorrow at the sight of these youths, lost, we feel it, lost irrevocably! How much better had it been for the young profligates, if they had been cast when sucklings into the fiery arms of Moloch, than that they should have escaped such a death to perish for ever, victims of sin and Satan. And, tell me, has yonder brood disappeared from the earth with those two and forty at Bethel? Oh, that it were so, and that the conduct of the youth of the present generation, here among us, as well as elsewhere, did not force upon our minds a very different conclusion. Yes, this is, indeed, the saddest feature in these evil times, that we look in vain among them after an anchorage for the hopes of a better future. This pierces deepest to the heart, that the poison of those godless, desecrating theories, which their parents have drunk, like strong wine, has been instilled into the rising generation. Yes, alas, the mischievous harvest of your sowing is already sprouting up luxuriantly around you. "The fathers have eaten sour

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grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." You have conjured up spirits, at which you yourselves now shrink back in terror. You would gladly lay them again, but where is the magic word which they obey? You reap the consequences now. You tore down about your children the bulwarks of God's word, and of reverence for its sanctity; and now ascribe it to yourselves, oh parents and instructors, that a band of youthful rebels swarm around you, which you despair of restraining. You taught them to look upon the Christianity of the Bible, as a degrading, slavish chain, forged by the superstition of a time of darkness; upon its advocates, as proud priests and ambitious hypocrites. Alas, you found pupils that were but too susceptible and docile! We bid them now, in God's name, honor their father and their mother. You perceive in what way they dispose of our admonitions. We do not look through dim glasses, while we utter this severe sentence over the youth of the present day. Listen to them from house to house, from school to school, and convince yourselves that our complaint is a general one, and is raised by none more loudly than by the parents and teachers themselves. An evil, poisonous mildew, lies outspread over the stinted growth of the rising generation. The inmost kernel is corrupted; the roots gnawed and eaten. It is an undutiful, insolent, stiff-necked generation; a generation initiated from very childhood into all the mysteries of shame and impiety, at the sight of whom no one is reminded of the words, "*Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" It is a generation estranged from everything like filial obedience, modest

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subordination, tender reverence towards parents and teachers, a generation which laughs at the mildness with which we seek to guide them, while against severity it rises in rebellious defiance. Yes, a band for the most part, in whose eyes there is nothing more that is holy, nothing that commands respect, and claims veneration; in the lower classes, rude, vulgar, unbridled; in the higher, morally enervated, imbued through and through with the spirit of lies, and full of insufferable, proud, and stupid presumption. May God have mercy upon the future, for which this race is ripening! My brethren, the foundations of the kingdom of Antichrist are laid; they are laid in the hearts of our children. The man of sin will need but shake the tree of the nations, and his disciples will fall like ripe fruit into his lap. The branches of the fig tree are full of sap—the summer is nigh! May God have compassion upon us, and avert the approaching destruction!

III. We now know in what light to look upon the impious troop before the gates of Bethel. It is no longer a band of thoughtless boys, it is a horde of youthful profligates, that, sold to the father of lies, have advanced boldly to assail the kingdom of light and of truth. They come as the deputies of their idolatrous city, and in the devil's name truly, who, through their instrumentality, hopes, by a single blow, to put an end to the prophet's career, and thus to inflict a deadly wound upon God's cause. And, in truth, the plan of attack is not ill arranged, and is completely worthy of

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its subtle inventor. For let us imagine to ourselves that the youths had been so far successful, that their mockery had escaped punishment from the man of God, and what would have been the result? Elisha's influence with the great mass of the people would have been gone for ever. The insolence of his antagonists would have reached the highest pitch, would have broken through the last barriers. As long as he lived, Elisha would have been a target for vulgar witlings and godless scoffers, and he could never have appeared unassailed among that idolatrous race. And it was this that the old enemy aimed at effecting, by means of his young auxiliaries. His object was to palsy Elisha's spiritual influence in advance, to crush his prophetic work at its very commencement, to strip away the halo of his divine mission, and to render him ridiculous in the eyes of the multitude, and stamp him in public opinion as an impostor, who would fain play the part of a second Elijah; yes, I may say, as a spiritual Don Quixote. Even yet we see the old enemy operate in this way against God's witnesses. If he fails in rendering them suspicious to the people as hypocrites and impostors, he contrives to fix a fool's cap upon their heads, and to render them ridiculous to the crowd as abstruse and eccentric pedants, or as extravagant enthusiasts and would-be imitators of the apostles. It was by means of this stratagem, as you know, that he, at one time, endeavored to destroy the influence of the noble Herminghaus, and to break the point of that mighty sword of the Spirit which he wielded. Yes, at that time, all was uproar within the borders of the

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prince of darkness. He felt that Israel and his horsemen were advancing against his kingdom. Then he sounded to arms, and, alas! there was no lack of those who put on harness. Here, also, there was a Bethel. The power of your preacher must be broken by vile scoffing. But he stood like a rock, and, with joyful lips, continued to testify of his master, Christ, not so intent as many of us often are to seek amends for the ignominy of the cross, in the vain renown of oratory and eloquence. And God was with the beloved man, and if He sent no bears among his scoffers, yet he sent the thunderbolts of bankruptcy, the staff of the beggar, conflagrations, public contempt. But he raised his servant out of the dust, and when they would have trampled upon him, he redoubled the weight and sharpness of his words, and put the seal upon his labors with such emphasis, that even the godless were forced in secret to confess, "God is with him; who will contend against the Lord?"

The act before the gates of Bethel then, was not a matter for silent forgiveness and forgetfulness. The assault upon God's cause was too serious, and, in case of success, would be too decisive, to permit the exercise of evangelical mildness and forbearance. Here tolerance was retreat, was overthrow. The words, "Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also," could bear no application here. The mighty stroke of hell must be met with might. Elisha himself felt this vividly. He could easily have forgiven the offence of those scoffers, so far as he himself was concerned, but higher views required a different

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procedure. As has already been remarked, the entire authority of the man of God was here at stake, and with it the success of his prophetic labors. The rising feelings of pardoning compassion and of forbearing love, must be repressed and sacrificed to the honor of God and of his cause. It was a severe task of self-denial for a man so kind and gentle as Elisha; but the Spirit supported him, and higher views gained the mastery in his bosom. The man of God turned, glanced at the band of profligates with holy indignation, and—thus the narrative informs us—*cursed them in the name of the Lord.* Many commentators have endeavored to soften the matter, and tried to explain it as if the prophet had merely reproved the scoffers as godless youths, and threatened them with God's judgment and chastisement, in case they did not repent. But this attempt to rescue Elisha's honor is as much out of place as it is destitute of foundation. The words of the narrative compel us directly to the conclusion that Elisha, from a higher impulse, called down upon them the immediate vengeance of heaven; nay, filled with zeal for the honor of Jehovah, he *cursed* them, "The Lord requite this wickedness upon thy head." And the Lord, of one mind with his messenger, that Satan's intended triumph must be marred at any price, and in an impressive, striking manner, sanctioned Elisha's curse upon the spot, and you know with what an awful seal it was corroborated. What followed? Behold, scarcely has the fatal malediction escaped the prophet's lips, when, from the neighboring forest, two furious bears rushed forth as the dreadful instruments of the divine vengeance;

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they fall upon the band of scoffers, and begin to rend the youthful sinners, one after the other, and do not rest until the two-and-forty lie all torn and mangled in their blood; then these terrible avengers return quietly into the gloom of the forest; they do not touch a hair of the man of God's head.

An awful execution! A mighty sermon spoken in words of thunder for Bethel and the whole land! That this chastisement was a visitation from God was palpably evident. At other times these furious beasts were never wont to show themselves so near the city, especially in broad day. Even when they ventured into the thinner outskirts of the forest, the slightest noise, or the sight of a human form, was sufficient to startle them back into their lurking places. Nothing but the extremity of hunger could ever induce them to attack man, and then only the solitary wanderer. That two of those beasts should assail a band of two-and-forty vigorous youths was a thing unheard of. But it was not hunger that impelled them to that attack at Bethel; this is evident from the striking fact that they did not devour their victims, but after having torn them in pieces, left them lying in their blood. It must, therefore, have been plain to every eye, that this fearful deed was nothing else than the visitation of an angry God, who, by means of his all-pervading power, constrained the two bears to become the ministers of his holy indignation, as he once constrained the ravens of Elijah to minister to his protecting love.

The occurrence was not without its results. If it

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proved unavailing to change the hearts of idolatrous enemies, yet it placed a bit and bridle upon them, and for a long time secured, not the prophet only, but the whole church of God, in Israel at least, against rude assaults and injuries. According to God's purpose, that was obtained thereby, which had been obtained before, at the foot of Mount Sinai, by the sanguinary execution of the makers of the golden calf, that which on the threshold of the temple of the New Testament, was afterwards obtained by the awful judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira. "And great fear came on all them that heard these things." They saw the words, "*God cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked,*" no longer written with ink upon parchment; they saw them written in letters of blood upon the earth. A deep and awful impression of the divine severity, cast bands of iron upon the spirits of calumny and scoffing. The sons of the prophets, particularly those at Bethel, had now a season of repose from all the vexations and grievances which they had previously endured. The awe-inspiring images of those bears, kept watch, like guardian sentinels, at the threshold of their dwellings. Nay, Elisha himself bore them henceforth, as it were, in his escutcheon, as a testimonial of his prophetic authority, as a powerful seal to his credentials. They encircled, if I may so speak, his kind and amiable character, as the rose is encircled with the thorns necessary to its protection. Henceforth he also stood in majestic armor upon the field. Wherever he appeared, the shield of the Lord was seen above his head, and the sword of the Almighty ready to defend

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him, or, if necessary, to fight in his stead against his foes.

But how much soever this divine visitation upon that young band of scoffers, availed to confirm the authority of the prophet, and how important soever the countenance thus given to his labors in Israel, and to the progress of the good cause in every respect, the mind of the man of God was far otherwise moved by it than might have been expected. Not joyful, as became a conqueror after a great victory; no, deeply agitated and bowed down, he left the bloody scene of his triumph, and if there was any one who lamented with sorrow that that act of judicial severity had been truly *necessary,* for the sake of God's honor, it was Elisha himself. Most certainly another would not have withdrawn so quickly from the scene, but would have first waited for the glorious result of this terrible example, and would have wished to feast and banquet on the dismay of the inhabitants of Bethel, on the position of his adversaries, now so suddenly changed, and on the testimonials of humble respect with which they would now approach him. But Elisha, not coveting such a triumph, hastened away, as if *he* were the vanquished party, and sought solitude and stillness. Can we wonder at this? The amiable prophet had been suddenly transported in mind and deed into a sphere which was entirely foreign to his mild and evangelical character. He, inclined only to forgiveness and forbearance, *had been obliged* to cherish wrath and to utter imprecations; he, inwardly organized, as few are, for the office of consolation and of succor, beheld himself suddenly

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armed with the sword of the divine vengeance, and compelled to scatter around him death and destruction. Alas! he felt almost as if he had lost his own identity. He felt, as it were, his whole being torn from all its joints and hinges. The thought of the fearful deed which he had performed, lay with a leaden weight upon his soul; for it was not only the blood-stained *corpses* of the slain that hovered before his eyes, but much more, their lost *souls*, which *he—he*, by his curse, had hurled for ever down into the pit of Hell! Alas! how shall he regain his former peaceful composure, of which this awful deed has so completely bereft him? How shall he still the billows of emotion in his bosom, how the howling storm of grief, of dismay, of confusion and horror, that rushes across the soul? It is true it was not hidden from him that it was the Lord who bade him utter that curse. But the consciousness of this hovered, like a pale moon amid clouds, above the wild uproar of his bosom. It sent down only single, faint *rays of consolation* upon the stormy midnight landscape of his soul. The thought, "*I have done this!*" was the predominant tone in his inward tumult, was the note of thunder by which the soothing sounds of solace were swallowed up, as rain-drops by the ocean. Elisha must hold converse with the Lord his God. In Jehovah's arms he must find relief again, and regain his lost serenity of mind. Again, and with strengthened emphasis, he must hear it confirmed and ratified by Him that he had done rightly, and had acted only in *His* name and as *His* organ. Therefore, with flying steps, he hastens away from Bethel; therefore he seeks stillness, and

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repairs to Mount Carmel—there, in its lonely, silent, forest valleys, to pour out his unspeakably oppressed soul before the Lord, and to collect and recover himself from the heart-rending impressions of that awful scene.

We will now leave him and conclude our discourse, strengthened in the happy conviction, that in God's eyes the honor of his people and his *own honor* are *one*, and that in every assault upon that apple of his eye, he beholds an attempt against his own majesty. With this consciousness, in truth, it is a small thing to bear patiently the insults of the world. We behold the arrows that are shot against us, pass over us towards the clouds, and cherish no rage against the archers; rather do we tremble for them, and feel inclined to commend them to forgiving grace. It is true, God seldom now espouses the cause of His elect, so manifestly as was the case with Elisha at Bethel. If he wishes to avenge us on our scoffers, he punishes them at the present day, rather by concealing our true glory than by *unveiling* it before their eyes. This is a direct consequence of the nature of the kingdom to which we belong, as one which, in this world, is still a kingdom of crosses, and which bears as an inscription over its portal, and as an indication of the path which the Lord wishes to lead us, the words, "From faith to faith." There will come a day, however, when the king will take her veil from his daughter, Zion, and will display her, his chosen bride, in all her splendor, before the eyes of his enemies. Many will start and wonder then, and cast their eyes with shame to the ground.

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Until then, let him who will, misjudge and slander us. We know ourselves. We behold our beauty in the mirror of God's Word, and journeying incognito is not without its charm, and affords a peculiar pleasure. Amen!

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CHAPTER III.

THE MARCH AGAINST MOAB.

"My tongue is the pen of a ready writer." Thus sang the royal singer in the commencement of the forty-fifth Psalm, when he was preparing to indite a good matter, and to sing of a King who is fairer than the children of men, and whose throne is for ever and ever. Whom David meant by a writer that employed his tongue as a pen, is very evident. This writer is the Holy Spirit, by which the king harps and sings, utters prophecies and psalms. All God's prophets were the organs of that Spirit, which moved their lips to utter His sayings, used their minds as a channel through which to convey thoughts of eternity to men, and employed their tongues as a pen to express His instructions, His mysteries.

And it may often have been the case that these divine men themselves, understood but little of that which they were constrained to utter, although they never went away altogether without profit, from the exercise of their sacred functions as preachers of God's word. David himself says, not merely—"My tongue is the pen of a ready writer," but also—"My *heart* is inditing a good matter." His *heart* then was concerned in the business also. Yes, those divine messengers who

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spread the banquet for others, shared in the repast. It cannot be doubted, however, that much passed through their hearts that was but half recognised, much, in its inmost sense, but half understood, much that was completely enigmatical to them, completely veiled.

Never, indeed, have writers stood in so peculiar a relation to their works, and received from them so rich and prolonged an enjoyment as the psalmists and prophets. They were obliged to study their own writings. How often, long after, have they, doubtless, first discovered in their songs and discourses, depths and wonders, which, when they indited them, were completely hidden from their view. How many a treasure of instruction and consolation, of which, originally, they had not even had a presentiment, must they not, with their increasing light of knowledge, have discovered long afterwards in their works. And thus should it likewise be with our discourses, that, as often as we in after times take them in our hands, we may discover new depths therein, depths hitherto undreamed of. And, indeed, the more we speak from the Spirit, the oftener will this actually be the case.

Of the vines which the Psalmists and Prophets planted, we first enjoy the full harvest. Since the sun of righteousness has risen upon the world, all the wondrous realm of the mysteries and oracles of the Old Testament lies outspread before us in the clear light of day. Into our hands is given the key of David, which opens every lock and solves every enigma, and we drink, in full draughts, from those wells, of whose waters they who dug them tasted only drop by drop.

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Yet not in the *sayings* of its heroes merely, but in their lives and deeds also, does the Old Testament contain depths and mysteries. Not seldom were the kings and prophets themselves hieroglyphics; their deeds and experience a kind of picture writing, pregnant with meaning. A highly significant and far reaching type we behold, especially in Elisha, and in the events of his time. A bounteous tree of life blooms in the history of this holy man; a tree full of *evangelical* blossoms and fruits. Come, then, let us pluck from this precious tree, and banquet in the pleasant shadow of its branches.

2 KINGS III. 9–12.

"So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: And they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them. And the king of Israel said: Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hands of Moab. But Jehoshaphat said: Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered, and said: Here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah. And Jehoshaphat said: the word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him."

We march to-day into the field. The scene of our narrative is a camp. Banners and arms encompass us; trumpets and horns peal out their notes to meet us. The spectacle which we are about to consider contains much that is attractive, and worthy of being taken to heart. Let us draw nearer to it. *The peril of the kings*

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and *their resort for aid to the prophet*, are the two points which will occupy our attention on this occasion.

I. King Jehoram finds himself compelled by a vexatious event to draw the sword. The Moabites, a pagan people on the southern border of his kingdom, have set up the banner of rebellion, and are in open revolt. This restless nation, which God had given into the hands of the Israelites, and over which David sang in triumph: "Moab is my wash-pot," had already, on various occasions, attempted to shake off the Hebrew yoke, yet as often, however, had been taught by painful experience how hard it is to strive with the people of Jehovah. But now they had risen in greater force than ever. They had assembled in arms, and, with their king Mesha at their head, declared themselves independent, and seemed resolved rather to perish than continue to pay to the princes of Israel a tribute which they considered as disgraceful as it was burdensome. The revolt of the Moabites was unquestionably a culpable act; yet, for all this, it was not the less a rod of chastisement held over Jehoram. Jehoram had turned him from the God of his fathers, and had embraced the worship of the golden calves. He was now to be made sensible of the guilt of his apostasy; it was for this that God loosened the reins over the lion of Moab, and suffered him to rage for a season.

When Jehoram had received the sore tidings of the Moabitish revolt, he was troubled in his heart; still he set himself energetically to work, and far from entering into negotiations with the rebels, which he doubtless

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thought beneath his royal dignity, he drew the sword, and resolved to oppose force to force. In this undertaking no one stood in his way; for, far and wide, there was not a single power that felt inclined to recognise the independence of those rebels, to say nothing of assisting them in their wicked cause. On the contrary, at Jehoram's request, the king of Judah, the pious Jehoshaphat, expressed his readiness to lend the aid of his powerful arm to quell the insurrection, nay, to lead in person a portion of his numerous legions into the field against Moab. "I will go up," he wrote from Jerusalem to the king of Israel: "I am as thou art; my people as thy people; and my horses as thy horses!" After the two princes had united their forces, the question arose as to which way it was best to march forth. And Jehoram counselled: "The way through the wilderness of Edom;" and they took this way. They came to Edom. The viceroy of this land, who was tributary to Jehoshaphat, joined the army with his horsemen, and thus they advanced across the wide, inhospitable plains of Edom against the enemy, who stood drawn up in arms for the conflict, and at the sight of their numerous host and its warlike enthusiasm, doubted not for an instant in a glorious result to their cause.

Our three allies flatter themselves with the same hopes for *their* cause. The leaders on either side, at least Mesha and Jehoram, depend upon an arm of flesh. The excellent bearing and military skill of their legions exalt their courage, and leave no room for doubt, that their first conflict with the enemy will

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result in his total discomfiture, and open the way to his capital. But, as often happens under similar circumstances, so also was it in this case. Israel had miscalculated as well as Moab. The result proved very different from that which they had, on both sides, anticipated. The children of Abraham, not less than the heathen, were to experience anew that it is not an arm of flesh which decides war, nor the devices of man's wisdom, but the nod of a Being who does as best pleases Him, both with the powers in heaven and on earth; a commander-in-chief over all the hosts of the nations. As *He* decides and wills, so results the lot of kingdoms. He gives courage to whom he will—He takes it from whom he will. He guides the sword and the arrow, that they miss or reach their aim. The victory falls to him who fights beneath his banner. To dispense with his alliance is to be destined to destruction. When he leads his hosts into the field, who shall stand up against him? Instead of arrows, he sends scorching sunbeams from above, and the legions wither. He fights with the stiffening breath of winter, and the hands of enemies are bound in invisible chains. He calls the pestilence and famine into the field, then what profits to the general his skill, what to the hero his strength? He smites, as the prophet says, "every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness." Then all is lost, notwithstanding superiority in numbers, in wisdom, and cunning, and children defeat and disperse squadrons accustomed to victory.

It was an imposing force, at the head of which the

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two kings of Israel and of Judah marched against Moab. Every one was of opinion that such an army had but to show itself, to put an immediate end to the Moabitish revolt. "Ha! ha!" they said, "here is a war whose end may be seen in its beginning!" In the meanwhile, what happens? Suddenly, Israel finds itself confronted by a power of which, indeed, no one had dreamed—nature, with her thousand obstacles and thousand terrors—and, in truth, it was only by a miracle that the entire army of Israel escaped destruction before it had even reached the borders of Moab. When, to wit, the Israelites had advanced a few days' march across the wastes of Edom, a heat falls upon the land which, in a short time, dries up all the waters round about, to the last drop, and the army halts, faint, drooping, ready to perish. The burning thirst of the soldiers has soon exhausted the stores of water which they carried with them, and now the thousands stand there, weak, miserable, panting, and in danger of perishing by the most frightful of all deaths. The generals command them to advance. They will endeavor to reach a more favorable region, one more abundant in water; but in vain. As they make their way onwards, they penetrate deeper and deeper into the wilderness, and the glowing waste of sands. Nowhere is there a spring, nowhere a cistern; nay, in the wide desert, not even a cool grove for their transient refreshment. Everywhere they find the flat, burning plain, and the scorching wind, and the stifling sultriness. For seven long days they have wandered about, no longer knowing where they are. At last they halt.

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They can go no farther. The famished soldiers sink in deathlike weariness upon the ground; the horses stand, panting and powerless, and the beasts of burden droop, faint and exhausted, beneath their loads.

In this moment of utmost perplexity and danger, conscience awakes in the bosom of the king of Israel, the idolatrous Jehoram. Like a lion that has slumbered for a while, but only to gain new strength, it rouses itself within him, and begins to explain and interpret to him this unexpected calamity. And what is the explanation? We can easily imagine. That, indeed, is the unkind art of the guilty conscience, that out of every occurrence it knows how to bring forth a dark meaning. It is a gloomy painter, which finds no night-piece so black and fearful that it cannot add some new strokes of terror—a colored mirror, in which even the slightest mishap assumes the form of a flood of fire from the vessel of the divine wrath—an ill-boding prophet, who prophesies nothing but evil and destruction—a screech-owl in a stormy night, whose monotonous, spectral, fearful notes speak nothing but disaster. Life takes its hue from conscience, from conscience, our earthly lot. The conscience which is purified in the blood of the Lamb, throws out for us bright lights in all the relations of our being. It exhibits to us everywhere naught but kind and cheerful omens, and takes the sting from all calamities. A *guilty* conscience sharpens the sting, nay, supplies it where it is wanting, and weaves naught but shadows, shrouds, and weeds of mourning.

Where in the world is there a darkness that can be

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compared to that of an accusing conscience, which, with its condemning voice, startles the heroes who once trembled not at thousands, and from the mighty who are wont to fear naught, and even to look death calmly in the face, stronger than death, strips *in an instant* the iron armor of their courage and their coolness; which knows how to execute its sentence against us, even though the whole world denies and confronts it with songs of praise and honor, and which changes the choicest treasures we possess into gall, if we are doomed to enjoy them amid its reproachful thunders. "The voice of a guilty conscience," says Luther, "is not a single evil, but a multitude of evils. It is a barking hell-hound, a fire-vomiting monster, a raging fury, a demoniac spirit of torment. That," he says, "is the way and nature of a guilty conscience, namely, to fly and be startled, even when all stands well, and much vain prosperity is ours, and to transform such prosperity into danger and death." "The wicked," saith Solomon, "fleeth when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion." And Moses: "Thou wilt start at the rustling of a leaf. In the morning thou shalt say: would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say: would God it were morning!" A guilty conscience is like a raging sea, which can be stilled only with the sign of Christ's cross. It is a gnawing worm in the inward parts, to whose destruction nothing less will suffice than the blood of the Son of God.

"Alas!" began the king of Israel, pale and trembling, "the Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hands of Moab." Behold,

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thus doth the Lord appear in the camera obscura of a guilty conscience. "With the pure," says the Psalmist, "thou wilt show thyself pure, with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward." The mistrust of guilt-laden souls transfers its gloomy colors upon the Most High. Even in those acts where views of mercy alone influence Him, it scents mere snares and pitfalls. In the divine rod of chastisement, it sees only the scourge of his anger; the preparatory steps which He takes for the exhibition of his assisting power, appear to it as preparations to a penal condemnation. "These three kings," said Jehoram. So, then, he considers not the viceroy of Edom only, but the pious Jehoshaphat, as standing with him in equal condemnation. "God's anger," he says, "has given us over to destruction!" He is ignorant of the moral difference between himself and the prince of Judah. That he alone was the doomed man, to whom this sentence of condemnation was applicable, and not Jehoshaphat, this opinion he would fain banish both from his own mind and from that of others. The Lord has invited *us*, *us!* Yes, in that word *us*, there lurks a soothing drop, while *me* brings with it nothing but pricks and goads. That *us*, filling as it does a wide chasm, affords, in reference to the terrors of conscious guilt, at least the comfort of companionship. How readily, under similar circumstances, does this "*we*" come from the lips of the children of the world, when thrown in contact with God's children. "*We* have erred in this or that—*we* must do better in future." Thus, in a crafty and underhand manner, the true distinction between them and those

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who belong to the Lord is effaced. But the Lord knows his own, and knows in his own time how to resolve this "*we*" into "*I*," and all such phrases of plurality into their proper singular.

II. Scarcely has Jehoram broken the despairing silence with his cry of woe, when Jehoshaphat, the noble prince of Judah, lifts up his voice. But Jehoshaphat's words are more calm and composed, and appear as the expression of a heart which recognises, not a judge merely, but a helper also in heaven. But here it might be asked, why, if Jehoshaphat enjoyed God's favor, should he be included in the same misfortune with the recreant Jehoram? That the same calamity befel Jehoshaphat is to be ascribed to himself alone. He who goes hand in hand with the godless, and makes common cause with them, must not complain if he is stricken with them to the ground, when the lightning falls upon their dwellings. Jehoshaphat might, indeed, lend a helping hand to Jehoram, but that he should deal so kindly with him, so like a brother, that he should reply to him so quickly, and with such immoderate warmth: "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people," and did not remind him, even by a single word, that he had drawn the revolt of Moab upon him by his revolt from the God of his fathers—this was going too far in the path of complaisance. Such officious compliance with the wishes of an apostate, of a worshipper of the golden calves, was an error, and viewed in the mildest light, the fruit of a weak, unconsecrated hour. It was necessary that this should be

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brought home in the most impressive manner to the good king, to humiliate him, and as a warning for the future. Therefore, he also was not spared; therefore, he also fell into the same strait with Jehoram. He was smitten with the same rod, and still, when viewed closely, not the same; Jehoram was punished; Jehoshaphat received the chastisement of love. Vengeance and wrath can no more approach God's children. This He effected, who took all their sins upon Him, and then bore them up Mount Calvary to the cross. Thus, He has purchased his elect, as the Scripture says, from the curse of the law—not *torn* them from it, but purchased them by the payment of an equivalent, by a satisfactory surrender of his soul as an offering for sin. "And how," you ask, "do matters stand since then?" Excellently, if we but belong to Christ. They stand thus, that not only there exists nothing more in us unto condemnation, but nothing more can be done by us unto condemnation—much that is sinful, lamentable, and frail indeed, but nothing unto condemnation, nothing which can again subject us to punishment, and disturb and sadden the wonderfully beautiful relation of God to us. The entire old man, which we still bear within us, is evil, and will be evil, for his life long, but his deeds will no longer be snares and pit-falls to us; he has received his punishment. God has drawn up for us a certificate of his death. The old man will never come up in remembrance before him. He has given us a document of everlasting amnesty. It is written in the blood of the Lamb. How do matters stand with us since then, you ask? They stand thus,

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that if any one should still seek to terrify me with the threatenings of the law, I should laugh at him in honor of Christ; and should any one say to me: "Be on thy guard against this and that, lest God punish thee," I would rail against him as a slanderer of my Redeemer and his merits. They stand thus, that if I should hear a Christian say; "I have received this and that as a punishment for this and that fault," I should name him, at least, an unenlightened one. Punishment can and may no longer visit one redeemed of Christ, for all punishment lay upon the Saviour. To a Christian, there happens nothing more of evil, but only of good; even in sorrow, and what are called misfortunes, there is nothing but good, nothing but proofs of love and blessings. True, Job's cup was not sweet, the cup of Lazarus was as little so, and still less so was the cup of that brother at Corinth, who for a while was given over to the devil. Yet there was not the smallest drop of anger in these cups, not an iota of retributive wrath. If, as is often said, a thought of wrath had been therein, God's justice had been infringed, and the Redeemer must descend again from heaven; for then, he had not drained for his sheep the cup of anger to the dregs, then he had not atoned for all their sins. How do matters stand since then? They stand thus—If I sigh and grieve when sin overtakes me, it lies in the essence of my new nature; if I am *crushed to earth* when sin overtakes me, this arises not from a just view of my condition, but from my unbelief. They stand thus, my brethren, since then, that I can let the sins of my life pass in review before me, with emotions like those with

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which a victorious general views a hostile host disarmed, and bound in chains; like those with which a soldier views the spiked cannon and exploded bombs, for which he no longer feels the slightest fear. They stand thus, that all which the Bible contains that is fair and full of promise, and refreshing, I can bind together in a nosegay, and say: "That is my Bible," and that all that is terrible and threatening contained in the Scriptures, I am entitled to put away from me, and can say: "That is nothing now to me, for me that is nailed upon the cross." They stand thus, that as regards my eternal happiness, it is altogether the same whether I die to-day or this day fifty years, since the treasure of my good works will not then be greater than it is at this moment; for through Christ's works I shall stand before God; nay, they stand thus, my dear hearers, that it is all one whether I die in the weakest hour of my life or in the strongest, since in the strongest I shall not be less worthy of condemnation than in the weakest, since in Christ I am blameless, and in *Him* I am so always, and am so always *completely*. Behold, thus, by the blood of the Lamb, we have obtained a dispensation from the curse of the law, a divine passport of safety. No one now, be he who he may, can bring an action against us, or arraign us. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth? We can no longer incur guilt which is not already atoned for before God. So much has He who bore the curse obtained for us. Every new deficit in our moral treasury is made good, even before

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it occurs. All this is effected by the cross—that birthplace of our everlasting freedom.

But let us return to our narrative. The king Jehoshaphat then lifts up his voice. Instead of breaking out into pusillanimous lamentations, he points upward: With Jehovah there is help.—"Is there not here a prophet of the Lord," he says, "that we may inquire of the Lord by him?" How refreshing sounds this voice to us in the dismal wilderness. Like his nightingales, God's saints cannot disguise their notes. Although in the day time and in the sunshine they are often long silent, yet when the night comes they begin their song, and in storms they, for the most part, sing the most sweetly. And how is it, when, among companions in misfortune, even a single one of their number suddenly proclaims himself a child of God, a servant of the Lord? Is it not then, as if a consoling ray broke through the clouds, as if a rainbow shone in the darkness? Henceforth the scene is illumined with the glow of morning, and even to the godless, it appears as if a star of safety had arisen. The noble prince then looks around after a prophet. But why was it that he did not bring his business personally before God's throne? Does it not seem as if conscious guilt had barred the way, drawn to the bolts? That costliest thing, a conscience purified by the blood of the Lamb, the godly men of the Old Testament were unacquainted with. That relation of childlike confidence, in which they stood towards Jehovah, endured generally, only until new guilt interposed to interrupt it. When this happened, the dark partition wall of secret terror at

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once reared itself again, and the lips of the sinner were silent, and his eye looked timidly to earth, until a new reconciliation, and a new act of mercy, gave the oppressed soul breath again. But not merely when an inward ban barred their own approach to the throne of grace, were they accustomed to claim the mediation of the prophets. The prophets were the men, whom they were always and everywhere ready to thrust forward, when they had anything to transact with God. They were considered as Jehovah's nearest officers and servants, as his advocates and interpreters in the world, as the depositaries of his confidence. And all these they were indeed. They were God's mouth-piece, the messengers between the heavenly Jerusalem and this dark earth. Oh, let us not lay it to the charge of the princes and rulers of the people in these our days, that in evil times, we are unused to hear from their lips questions like the question of Jehoshaphat. We will not condemn them too severely, when, under such circumstances, we hear them inquire only, if an experienced general is not at hand, a skilful statesman, a dexterous diplomatist. It would sound indeed like a bitter scoff at the present age, were they to inquire after a prophet. A handful of flowers for the prophets' graves, this age might indeed perhaps furnish, but then, where should we look for even *one* Elisha?

To Jehoshaphat's question, some one of king Jehoram's train replies, that there is indeed a prophet at hand. And who is this seer? Oh, the unexpected apparition! It is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah, that is the

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servant and assistant of the Tishbite. Yet how comes Elisha here, so suddenly, in the neighborhood of the warriors' camp, and in the burning, inhospitable wilderness? You remember how, after the bloody scene at Bethel, he withdrew into solitude. His mild and gentle disposition had been so shaken by that unwonted deed of terror, to which the Spirit of God constrained him, so torn, as it were, from all its joints and hinges, that, before he could continue his prophetic career, he needed to collect himself anew, to soothe and refresh his mind, and to hear once again, and more distinctly, from the mouth of his master, that he had done rightly, and, indeed, had acted in accordance with his spirit and at his command. Therefore, with a soul deeply shaken, he hastened into solitude, and, as you know, it was to the silent forest glens of Mount Carmel he retired. After he had here passed some time in prayerful communion with his covenant God, and beneath his consoling exhortation had regained his composure and cheerfulness of temper, he returned, in the name of the Lord, to the sphere of his labors, and at once took his way back to Samaria. When he reached that city, the united armies of Israel were upon the point of marching out against Moab. Then the Spirit impelled him, and with the Spirit, Love also, to accompany the legions of his people into a distant land. The weapons truly with which he girded himself were not fleshly. He wore no sword except that of the Word. His shield, his breast-plate was Faith. Nevertheless, it seemed to him not unlikely that circumstances might arise, in which he might be able to do some service to

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the army of Judah. A word in season, he thought, has often helped to win battles; and prayer also, the prayer of faith, is a weapon of war. Moses's outstretched arms, and Samuel's wonder-working sighs, arose before his soul, and thus, with cheerful courage, bearing the whole people upon his priestly heart, he marched forth with them into the field. But who, in the person of this plain, unarmed follower of the army, in his rough garment of camel's hair, could have recognised the man, that, as an instrument of the great God of battles, was destined to decide the fate of the whole war, and save Israel's legions from the most fearful destruction? Scarcely is the name of Elisha uttered, when these trembling hearts revive again. "Yes," cried Jehoshaphat, with joyful lips, "the word of the Lord is with him." He knew the prophet then, and believed in his divine mission, consecration, and inspiration. The spirit which reigned in the bosom of this good king manifests itself in his every word and action. A man of God, in whatever disguise he walks among us, can never entirely conceal himself. The shining badge of his nobility, though hidden, emits a lustre which pierces ever through the veil, and under any circumstances, points him out as a man who is essentially different from the world, as the world is different from him. But what a clear, fresh picture of human life is the narration of the Bible. It can scarcely be said, indeed, that it *narrates*. It merely paints, with short and simple touches. Notwithstanding this, however, the pictures which it brings before the eye are most striking and life-like. The scenes which it describes to

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us, we think we have ourselves experienced; the persons of which it narrates, we see them as they are, in all their peculiarities of temperament and character. Well, the three kings must address themselves to the prophet. But how is this to be effected? Shall they send a messenger to fetch him? In any other case this would have done. Now no one counsels this step; even Jehoram, on this occasion, is of opinion that *in this way* they would not sufficiently honor the man consecrated by Jehovah. What happens then? The three kings unite in the resolution to visit God's seer in their own exalted persons. What they have resolved upon they execute at once. Without delay they repair towards that quarter where the prophet is said to have been seen upon the road. And, in truth, their search is soon successful; the man whom they so earnestly desire to see, they find somewhere in the wilderness, sitting, as my fancy pictures, beneath a solitary juniper tree. The princes step before him; already their submissive appearance and their gestures of supplication betray the object of their visit. What a scene! The three kings of Judah, Israel, and Edom, in a humbly imploring posture before the simple peasant's son, of Abel-meholah! They desire counsel of him under circumstances to which *their* wisdom is no longer equal; they expect from his hands a change in the condition of affairs, which they, with all their power, are unable to effect. Elisha is to negotiate for them, as a herald with the Almighty, and obtain for them rescue and victory. Elisha is their sole and last refuge in their distress. If a single hope of a happy issue to their

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present calamity, and to the campaign in general, still animates them, this hope rests solely in Elisha, in his intercession, in his mediation. What a triumph for the prophet, or rather for Him in whose service Elisha labored, and whose cause he advocated. Oh, yes, it often happens, that, in days of calamity, God's servants come suddenly to honor. When earthly props give way, when all the sources of human power and wisdom appear exhausted, then even slanderous enemies are inclined to confess that the righteous have a sure staff and stay; yes, then they are not seldom seen to crowd around the devout, as if in their neighborhood they thought themselves safer than elsewhere; as if they had a vague sense of the invisible horses and chariots of fire, by which the God-fearing are everywhere encompassed. Men who formerly answered the exhortations of the righteous only with bursts of anger, then all at once have an open ear for them; nay, they find consolation and solace in the thought that they may hold themselves assured of the intercession, even of a single one among their number. Now, indeed, a pious chamberlain is worth more to an emperor than all his ministers and generals; a prince and a king now hopes, perhaps, from his praying groom, greater things than from his own majesty, than from all his horsemen and horses. Thus the world is often obliged, against its will, to confess: "Yes, ye are a people blessed of the Lord! Ye stand on firm ground. Your Lord is God, and to you, as God's friends, an approach is granted to him, which is closed against us." Such testimonials, forced from the ungodly, greatly glorify the Lord and

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his gospel, and give renewed proofs to God's children, that the world possesses nothing in days of trial, but is poor and naked, and in want of all things. God's children, however, give him the glory, and praise him with loud hosannas, that he has chosen them from the desolate world, and led them into the bright and joyful precincts of his kingdom.

And if it is true, indeed, that no harm would have befallen the cities of the valley of Sodom, had even five righteous men been found within their walls, and if it is verily the case, that the Almighty listens to the cries of those who fear him, and if, indeed, one praying, simply in the name of Jesus, can obtain all out of God's fulness, then, in truth, it is not superstition merely and idle dreaming, when, in days of peril, the worldly ground their hopes especially upon the presence of holy men. No, they do not cast their anchor in shifting quicksands. Such men are living lightning rods for the countries where their dwellings stand. Where they abide, there abides eternal love also; there the wings of Almighty grace are overspread; there walk the protecting Mahanaim; the windows of heavenly blessing are opened above these spots, and invisible bulwarks rise around them, against which a thousand waves of mischief dash in vain, and retire, broken in empty foam. Therefore I call thee happy before others, thee, my beloved valley, since thou canst count by hundreds the children of grace which dwell in thee, and canst point to whole neighborhoods where every cottage is a house of God among the children of men; and to many an abode, indeed, in which not

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even a single Canaanite is to be found. Dost thou not remark that thou, therefore, liest, hedged in, as if with invisible walls? That, therefore, thy borders have a thousand times been the spot, at which clouds of danger have divided and passed aside, on either hand, and in thy sky there has yet been scarcely aught to be seen, except the rainbow of peace, and the unlocked treasury of all divine blessings? Scoff not, then, at the band of Israel which dwelleth in thee; nay, rather bless it. Thou art nourished from its table. And although it may not save thee from everlasting ruin, unless thou shouldst join thyself unto it, yet it is to thee as a body-guard, a line about thy borders, a rock, which scatters far around the showers of blessing that descend upon it; a stream which bears heavenly vessels, richly freighted, into thy midst.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE MIRACULOUS VICTORY.

WHEN the Lord, in Luke xxi. 28, exclaims: "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads!" he commends to us, for the calamitous days of these latter times, a bearing, which, in truth, very little resembles that which we behold in most Christians of the present day. No, we should not demean ourselves like men discomfited; we should not walk along with tottering knees, trembling and sighing. We should glorify the Lord through faith, and let our walk be worthy of the gospel which we possess, of the promises which are given to us of the adoption to which we have attained.

The Christian, although he is nothing in himself, possesses in Christ a nobility, a dignity, a majesty, which it is his duty to assert. For the sake of Jesus and his honor, his bearing should be suited to his position, and he should hold his head high. He who is and can be free should not be a servant; and he to whom God has appointed an inheritance among the princes of his people, should not, from false humility, take his place among the Gibeonites, those hewers of wood and drawers of water. Speak of thy personal frailty and weakness in as strong terms as thou wilt, thou canst

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not speak of them too strongly. But at the same time remain conscious of the glory and the beauty with which God hath clothed thee in Christ, and in the same breath wherewith thou dost judge and accuse thyself, boast of thy splendor and royal decorations. David did not forsake his throne when he served as a door-keeper in the temple. Cease not to speak, with troubled soul, of the serious aspect of this eventful time, and confess, that, so far as regards thine own strength, thou art seriously anxious concerning the approaching future. But at the same time demean thyself like a man, who, because Jehovah is his fortress and his strength, knows how to meet every calamity with a joyful brow, and be not found as one of those who are without hope.

It is true, we live in days that are critical in more than one respect. It seems as if the time of the great refining which is in store for the church, were approaching with the tempest's speed. Yet what of this? We stand upon a rock amid the breakers, and this rock is the mercy, love, and might of our great king. Lift up your heads! He will not suffer us to be put to shame. If God is for us, who can be against us? May the subject of our present discourse strengthen us in this faith!

2 Kings xiii. 19.

"And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab. And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth,

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before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look towards thee, nor see thee. But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him. And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord; he will deliver the Moabites also into your hands, and ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones."

In our last discourse, we followed the allied armies of the kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom, into the wild wastes of Edom. They had marched forth to suppress the Moabitish rebellion. But in these wastes they were overtaken by a great calamity. An intolerable heat came upon the land, so that a great scarcity of water ensued, which, even before they had reached the borders of Moab, threatened the whole army with destruction. This calamity robbed Jehoram of all his courage. "Alas," he cried, in despair, "alas, that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!" The noble prince Jehoshaphat, on the contrary, preserved his composure, and inquired if there were not a prophet of the Lord at hand, that they might inquire of the Lord by him? Certainly, there was such a man at hand, was the answer, Elisha, the son of Shaphat. The three kings at once set forth to seek him in person, and soon find themselves in his presence. What passed between them and the man of God, we learn to-day. Things,

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strikingly remarkable. Let us pause, then, for a while, and contemplate them. *Elisha's answer to the three kings, the minstrel,* and *the prophet's counsel,* are the subjects of the three parts of our discourse.

I. The three kings stand in a respectful attitude before the prophet. He, with whom God is, bears the sceptre and the crown. Elisha, easily conjecturing the cause of this unwonted condescension, does not wait for his lofty visitors to address him, but is the first to speak. Were the monarchs prepared for this breach of etiquette? We may doubt it. Ah, necessity is able to change many things! A heart throbbing with anguish submits to much. Still less can it excite our wonder that we behold our friend from Abel-meholah, so little surprised, not to say discomposed, at the visit of these exalted personages. Men of God, endowed with his character and holding his position, beheld the majesty of the Lord of all worlds, too closely and too clearly, for human grandeur to impose upon them. They lived almost uninterruptedly at the court of the king of all kings; they were his privy secretaries, his heralds, and advocates upon the earth, and thus there was insensibly imparted to them something of the views with which God himself and the holy angels look upon all earthly greatness and glory. Elisha directs his first words to Jehoram. This weak prince deserved a public rebuke. What had he cared, in times past, for Jehovah and his prophets? Now, suddenly, when the Almighty has laid his hand upon his neck, he condescends to a forced obeisance, and no longer deems it beneath his dignity to address the

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peasant of Abel-meholah, in the humblest manner, for counsel, mediation, and assistance. You may think, that Elisha should, notwithstanding, have rejoiced at this. But I know not for what reason. If Jehoram trembled before God, he trembled only as the devils tremble. If he desired supernatural aid, he desired it from mere worldly interests, and would have accepted it as readily from Satan as from Jehovah. It was *water* that the king wanted, not *mercy*. In that moment, when counsel was so needful, he thought to make use of the Lord and his prophet, and when his end was obtained, to inquire no further after the one or the other. But such selfish and time-serving trifling with the Almighty is impious. Desire first the *Lord himself*, and then his *benefits*.

After Elisha had gazed steadfastly at the monarchs, the usually so mild lips of the man of God are, as it were, transformed into a tightly drawn bow-string, and shoot arrows instead of words. "What have I to do with thee?" he says. "Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother!" See, it is Elisha's turn to bear himself proudly and to triumph. We may rejoice at this. But it is not a triumph of human vanity that we here behold. It is a triumph of Jehovah over Baal, a victory of truth over falsehood. Idolatry appears in all its nothingness. That which triumphs and rejoices in Elisha's breast, is love for his master, zeal for his master's glory. Yes, when the hour of calamity has come, and man's life is clothed in a garment of night, then is the time when Jehovah and Jehovah's word often gather their laurels

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of honor, even in the midst of their enemies. We grant it is a heart-rending spectacle, when the proud philosopher, with sudden trembling, perceives that all that wisdom, in which he took such pride, and from which he expected ample consolation, is nothing but a paper boat amid the ocean breakers; when the bold infidel, groaning in terror, stretches his clasped hands towards the clouds, and anguish extorts the confession, that he has scoffed at Him, who alone is able now to help him—when the betrayer of Christ and his cross utters, with sad sighs, the name of Jesus, and is forced to envy *those* who have resigned themselves in faith to this Savior—and when the foul-mouthed slanderer of God's people, sees himself constrained openly to confess that with them all is well, and that he would give a world, if he possessed it, could he purchase for his parched tongue a single drop of the consolation, which they enjoy in abundance. But however moving such pictures of despair and discomfiture may be, they have an aspect that is cheering and encouraging. In scenes like these, Jehovah is exalted; the gospel celebrates its days of victory and glory. But, oh, there is a fearful feature in such spectacles; it is when the groaning wretch, lifting his hands towards that God, upon whom he has hitherto turned his back, is treated like Jehoram in our narrative, and the doors of the Almighty which he seeks, are closed upon him without compassion—when his scorn is repaid with equal scorn, and, from on high, the words of thunder echo, "What have I to do with thee? Get thee to thine idols, and let them help thee." Such was the recep-

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tion of those of whom the Lord spoke in Jeremiah ii.: "They have turned their back unto me, and not their face; but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us! But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble!" A terrible repulse! May none, none among us ever experience it!

If the knees of the king of Israel already trembled, when he first stepped before Elisha, now, after this stern greeting, he can scarcely hold himself erect. "Nay," stammers forth the agitated prince, pale with terror, "we must not turn to the prophets of my father and my mother; we must turn to Jehovah! For the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab." Oh, yes, this wicked prince well knew that Jehovah was God. He had already been convinced of this by evidence the most palpable. But the idea of the Holy One in Israel was annoying to him, was too greatly at variance with his life of shame and sin; therefore he had endeavored to expel it forcibly from his mind, and preferred to serve the more tolerant divinities of the priests of Dan and Bethel. Now, however, when death is close upon his heels, he will hear nothing more of his golden calves; now Jehovah shall have due honor again. But what has the Lord to do with such recreants and changelings? What does he care for worship such as theirs, springing, as it does, from the merest selfishness? He values sycophants and parasites as little as we value them. He who loves his favors only, and not himself, need not approach his threshold. Elisha,

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little moved by the sanctimonious confession of this monarch, opens his mouth again, and, filled with holy indignation, replies still more sternly, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look towards thee, nor see thee." Well, this is speaking plainly. Jehoram knew now how matters stood. If help came, it would come—not for love of him, but for the sake of the pious Jehoshaphat; the godless, as a peculiar favor, ate at the table of the righteous, although the banquet was not spread for him. What a humiliation for the idolatrous prince! Still it did not sink very deeply into his soul. If help only came, this was all his mean spirit cared for. From whom, and for whom it came, was a matter of indifference to him. But remark, how, in a certain sense, the Lord, as well as Elisha, is a respecter of persons. How infinitely often may that which happened in the wilderness, have been repeated in this world. Here an army is preserved or conquers, it is said, because it is well drilled or skilfully commanded; and, after all, the sole cause of its success, lies in the presence of a man, who marches along in its ranks, silent and unobserved, but God had regard to his person, and for his sake, overspread the whole host with the shadow of his wings. There a threatening pestilence suddenly passes by a place. The exemption is ascribed to a happy accident, or to the wise precaution of magistrates. But the true cause thereof is to be found, perhaps, in the poorest, most unsightly hut in the neighborhood. There dwells a man therein whom God

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loves, and this man *prayed*. Yes, what the Lord may do to please his children, is not to be uttered with words. For example, he may, for the sake of a few sheep, whom he pastures in this valley, spare the whole district from that terrible scourge which now threatens us from the east. Let but one among these, the apples of his eye, veiling himself in the beauty of Christ, take courage to ask it of him, with child-like resignation, and he would do it doubtless. They possess his heart indeed. "I say not unto you," sait Jesus, consolingly and very significantly, "that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself lovet you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God."

II. After Elisha had told king Jehoram all that he had to say to him, a scene ensues, which, at the first glance, is, certainly, somewhat peculiar, striking, and inexplicable. Without assigning any reason for it Elisha demands a minstrel. "But now bring me a minstrel," he says. One is immediately brought, probably from the military band. At Elisha's command he tunes his instrument, strikes the strings, and begins to play before the prophet in the lonely wilderness. Elisha and the kings listen in silence to the sweet accords; the latter, full of expectation as to what may happen; the former, borne, upon the wings of those tones, to higher regions. What the minstrel played we are not informed. Certainly it was no worldly song, no march, nor war song. The solemnity of the moment, the presence of the man of God, upon whom

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now rest the hopes of the whole army, must have informed the minstrel what was suitable to the occasion. Without doubt it was a melody, of a high character, which rushed in full accords over the strings; perhaps it was one of the many psalms which were well known in Israel, and which were played and sung at times, even in the army.

Music is a creation and a gift of God's. True, it does not belong among the goods of the first class, which are vouchsafed to the needy, and, among which, we reckon daily bread, the word of God, raiment, and the like. Perhaps it may be ranked in a class with the flowers that scent the air with their perfume, and the various sweet fruits around us. We cannot say that it is a gift of Jehovah's paternal care, but rather of his liberal bounty—a gift, which should be employed to glorify his name, and to adorn and cheer our temporal existence. It is a wonderfully intelligible language of feeling to feeling. It weaves a suitable garment for emotions, whose tender life would die beneath the heavy attire of words. Its office is to invest with an ethereal shape, the tenderest emotions of the soul. Its sounds bear to the spoken words, the same relation, as it were, that the transfigured bodies, which, at the trumpet-call of the resurrection will ascend to heaven, from the graves of the saints, bear to the earthly tabernacles in which we dwell. Music is the most wonderful, profound, and mightiest of all the arts. Wherever she utters her harmonious voice, she often proves herself an unbounded mistress of the heart. Wielding her magic wand, she descends into the inmost depths of our

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being. With the rapidity of lightning, she gives to the temper what mood she will, and beneath her almost miraculous breath, the germs of the emotions unfold themselves, like the blossoms beneath the warm breath of spring. She awakens the slumbering passions; awakened, she lulls them to sleep again. In an instant, she opens the inward well-spring of our tears, and fills our bosoms with inexpressible sadness; the next moment she rushes through the heart with rapturous joy, and bears it aloft, upon the wings of ecstasy. It is a dangerous art, therefore, this mistress of the passions, when she is impressed into the service of the world, of vanity, and of sin. We cannot conceive the mischief she is able to produce, into what a fearful flame she can fan the lurid fire of godless passions. When, on the other hand, she remains faithful to her original calling, and in chastity and simple purity, dedicates her hallowed, solemn harmonies to the praise of the Lord, or celebrates the works of His hands, the lovely objects of nature, and gives speech and utterance to the better feelings of the human heart, oh, how she then assists to embellish and ennoble life, and how much that is beautiful, dear, and exalted can she weave into our existence! "Yes," says Luther, the enthusiastic eulogist of music and of song, "music is one of the fairest and noblest gifts of God, one, with which we banish much temptation and many evil thoughts. She chases away the spirit of sadness, as we see in the case of Saul, and is a cordial and a solace, by which the heart regains its peace, is quickened, and refreshed. Music is half a disciplinarian and correctress, such power has

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she to render men more mild and gentle, more discreet and reasonable." "Ah," he writes to a friend, who was a prey to sadness, "when you are sad, and heaviness of heart falls upon you, say: 'Come, I must sing a song to the Lord Jesus Christ upon the organ!' (a Te Deum Laudamus, or a Benedictus, or whatever it may be). For the Scriptures teach me that He listens gladly to cheerful song, and to the sound of stringed instruments. Strike, then, briskly upon the keys, and sing until all sad thoughts are banished, as David and Elisha did. If the devil comes again, and inspires you anew with sadness, quick, smite him on the mouth. Turn again to the organ, or fetch a cheerful companion or two, and sing until you can scoff at him; for the devil is a sad spirit, and makes sad people, therefore he cannot bear music and song. But the Lord is not a God of melancholy, but a God of consolation and of joy."

It is well known that music was in frequent use with the prophets, and was industriously practised in their schools. Thus, for example, a great company of prophets met Saul near Gibeah, with psalteries, tabrets, pipes, and harps, to the sounds of which they sang inspired songs. Here music occupied her true position. Here she was a handmaid of the sanctuary; her essence was God's love, her breath the spirit of the Lord, her aim and object the Lord's honor and glory. Thus consecrated from heaven, and bearing the soul towards heaven, she diffused around her peace and cheerfulness, helped to scare away sadness and care, awakened thoughts of eternity, and, by her influence upon the

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mind, prepared the way for the operations of divine grace. For to know that divine grace clothes its power, even in the breathing of tones, we do not need the example of Saul, on whom the sounds of David's harp worked so miraculously. We experience it often in ourselves, when we sit together, dull and constrained, perhaps even in ill humor, and inward strife and discord. And one among us says: "Let us sing a verse or so." And the hymn rises in harmony. We then feel as if a gentle softening rain had fallen upon our souls. All discontent vanishes. Everything grows green and blossoms, and breathes its perfume in the inward gardens, and our hearts grow wider and warmer.

Elisha also knew this power of tones. His mind, turned from its wonted composure by his indignation against that wretched prince, and disturbed in all its depths, needed to be calmed and quieted. Humanly speaking, the Holy Spirit was unable to find a voice, amid the tumult of his emotions. The din of holy anger and of zeal, which drowned, as it were, the whisperings of the Spirit, must first be soothed and stilled. And this kind influence, Elisha, from manifold experience, expected to find in music. It was for this reason then, that he desired a minstrel. Well, the minstrel appears, strikes upon the strings, and begins to play; and behold, the harmonious accords produce their effect. The minds of the kings grow more solemn, their hearts are tuned to devotion. The storm of passion is stilled within the prophet's breast, and his soul is able to soar again, unhindered, upon the pinions of those sweet melodies, up into the blissful presence of

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Jehovah. His bosom has become,-as it were, like a silent chamber, in which even the softest whisper of the Spirit is, at once, heard; it resembles the quiet mirror of a clear mountain lake, upon which no wave now ripples, and in which the stars of heaven are reflected brightly. At this moment of renewed calmness and composure, Jehovah bends, with the voice of revelation to his seer. "The hand of the Lord came upon him," it is said, "when the minstrel played." The Lord begins to speak with his servant. The Spirit informs the spirit of the prophet, what he has to utter, to counsel, and to do.

III. The harp is silent. Then Ellisha opens his mouth to utter good tidings. God's mercy is great. Israel shall both have water, and overcome the rebels. "Thus saith the Lord," begins Elisha, "Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord; ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord; he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand. And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones." Thus speaks the prophet. How the countenances of the anxious kings brighten! The prophet's counsel is followed without delay, and the ditches are made. But scarcely have they dug into the burning sand, when, wonderful to relate, fresh springs issue forth

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upon the laborers. The panting legions rush forward, and drink to their hearts' content. The army is rescued from destruction, and new strength pervades their faint and drooping limbs. Behold, my friends, you have here an example of the peculiar method, based in deep wisdom, by which, when he wills to reveal himself in rescuing love, the Lord is accustomed to proceed. "But, wherefore," some might ask, in reference to our narrative, "wherefore this circuitous method which the Lord here takes for the rescue of Israel? Might he not have preserved his people in a far simpler manner, by somewhat lessening the sun's heat, and thus preventing the springs and brooks from drying up?" Yes, in truth, my dear hearers. But then, Jehoram, henceforth as before, would have clung to his golden calves, and Jehoshaphat would have had one example the less of the faithfulness of his God, and the army would have thought; "We are the men! we are sure to conquer!" and man had become great, but Jehovah small and insignificant. Now, however, as the rescue came, after every arm of flesh was broken, Jehovah was glorified before the people, and his power and faithfulness triumphed. Now the backsliders were put to shame, the proud humbled, the believing strengthened, and the water spouted forth with a two-fold sweetness; for, with the water, they drank and enjoyed God himself and God's goodness. And do you, oh children of God, remark his ways, and tremble not in your dark roads, and in your wildernesses. If the sun of your prosperity sets, it is only that you may behold the star of Love, and if the supports of your

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own counsel and of human help, break beneath your hands, it is only that Jehovah's power and truth may rear their throne upon their ruins.

But in supplying Israel with water, God's help was not yet exhausted. A second miracle occurred on the ensuing morning. Before they were aware of it, a stream of water came rushing from the red mountains of Edom, which, in a short time, covered a great portion of the sandy plain, where the Israelites were encamped. The Moabites, who had, in the meanwhile, received tidings of the advance of the hostile legions, stood ready for battle on their borders. When the sun rose, and cast its purple beams upon the water, which was tinged with red, it seemed to the rebels as if they saw blood in the distance, and deceived by the divine will, they said one to another: "This is blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now, therefore, Moab to the spoil!" And scarcely has this delusive thought arisen in their minds, like a vain meteor, when, intoxicated with the joy of victory, they rush toward the camp of Israel. But who can describe their terror, when, suddenly breaking forth from their ambush and from their tents, the Israelitish squadrons assail them sword in hand. *In an instant* the rebels are scattered. The allied armies, pressing them closely, bear their victorious standards, with the tempest's speed, across the borders of Moab, rout the rebels, wherever they encounter them, demolish their strong cities, while, at the command of the angry Jehovah, they cover their fields with stones, hew down the fruit trees, and push forward even to

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Kir-haraseth, the capital of the land. They invest this city, surround it with warlike engines, and threaten to level it with the ground. The king of Moab, with the remnant of his routed army, had thrown himself into this place. But when he saw that he was not safe even here, as it was impossible for him to hold out long, he took the desperate resolution to cut his way through the enemy. He broke forth, sword in hand, through the gate, on that side of the city which was guarded by the king of Edom and his army, but was, at once, defeated by the superior numbers of the foe, and forced back again behind the walls and palisades of the fortress. And what follows now? A frightful scene! The king, bewildered and beside himself with terror, appears, with his first-born son, upon the walls of the city. Here an altar is erected, his son laid thereon, and offered to his gods for a burnt offering. When the Israelites saw this, great indignation came upon them. They were overcome with holy rage. They could not bear the sight of this fearful spectacle. They were moved with deep pain at having compelled the poor king to such a fearful act of despair. They at once became weary of all farther bloodshed, raised the siege, drew off their forces in silence, and left the unhappy monarch to seek safety in flight, with the trifling remnant of his army. The object of the campaign was obtained, Moab's strength was broken, the rebellion stifled, and the land subdued under the sceptre of the king of Israel.

"The Lord is a man of war, strong and mighty in

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battle." Happy is it for us when we stand upon his side, and He upon ours. Then our course is from victory to victory. We dash armies in pieces, like earthen vessels. Our enemies will fail in all their attempts against us, but we shall trample upon their high places. God willingly suffers his people to reach land upon the planks of a shipwrecked vessel. Willingly does he take from us cisterns, that we may drink out of fountains. Willingly does he strike the crutch from our hands; not that we should fall; but that He himself may be our staff and support. The trials of his people are but the scaffolding upon which his power, faith, and mercy, celebrate their triumphs.

A pagan philosopher once said to one of his friends: "Complain not at thy misfortunes, so long as Cæsar is thy friend!" What then shall we say to those whom the King of all kings upon the earth names his sons and his brethren? "I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." Should not these words once for all completely banish every fear and anxiety? He who possesses *Him*, possesses all things, yes, possesses all things!

Calamity is a thorn, yet one of God's, with which he pierces the leaves of pride. Many a tree grows better in the shade than in the sunshine. Oh, if God is but with us, then the fiery furnace is changed into a garden of roses, the prison into a palace, the wintry tempest into a summer's calm. Even the rod of his anger, like Aaron's rod, bears almonds and blossoms, like the rod of Jonathan, bears honey on its end.

It is a proof of the fearful pride of the natural man, that, when his own strength and help is exhausted, he

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despairs, and gives up all for lost, like the King of Moab. He is therefore his own God, and will know of no other, at least, vouchsafe no word of prayer to him. Blind pride of the fallen son of Adam! Do you not feel how just is the doom of the Despairing, when their part is assigned them in the pit that burns with fire and brimstone?

Israel has God for its solace. Union with God renders all other possessions superfluous. Nay, the poorer then, the better. "For when I am weak, then am I strong."

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CHAPTER V.

THE WIDOW'S CRUSE.

"THE mountain of the Lord is a fruitful mountain." Thus David sings in Psalm lxviii. 15. He means the hill of Zion, the spiritual hill. He justly represents the true congregation as a hill, or as a city upon a hill. In her mode of thought, her views, her pursuits and aspirations, she lies, in truth, high above the world and its grovelling ambition, and is, at once, and afar off, remarked, although not seldom with glances of vexation and anger. Thus loftily situated, she feels many a storm, in truth, of which those who dwell below perceive nothing, but, on the other hand, the latter have none of those prospects to delight them, which display themselves above in enchanting beauty.

David extols particularly the fruitfulness that prevails on the hill of Zion, and in the congregation of the Lord; and, in truth, flowers and shrubs sprout up there, beneath the dew of heaven, the like of which cannot be found elsewhere upon the face of the whole earth. For in what other spot blossoms the rose of genuine love to God, in the hearts of men? In what other spot blooms the sunflower of pure, trusting prayer? Where the lily of unfeigned longing after

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heaven, and the flower of humility, and that of child-like simplicity, and that of patience? All these sweet flowers, natives of Paradise, where else do we behold them in the wide garden of the world? And who can count all besides, that grows upon the hill of Zion? There healing herbs for all evils perfume the air. The balm of Gilead grows there, which makes us whole for ever; there bloom the plants of Life, that give us never-fading youth; nay, we miss not there the herb that heals even death. Enviable people they, who have found a heritage on such a soil!

"Ah," I hear you say, "but these are nothing but spiritual plants and herbs." Well, my friends, earthly ones, if you care for these above all others, are not wanting there. Upon the hill of Zion, grows flax for linen, wool for clothing, and wheat in abundance, and what is best of all, years of dearth and famine never happen there. When the rest of the world famishes, the fields of Zion always bear. "How, *always* bear?" "Yes, summer and winter; and horses' hoofs and hail-stones cannot destroy their harvests. For their field is God." "God is their field?" "Yes, truly, their field, their store-house, their treasure chamber, and who can say what else beside? Would you not be well pleased, my dear hearers, to convince yourselves of this more closely? Well, our present subject will furnish the occasion.

2 Kings iv. 4–7.

"Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and

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thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondsmen. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil. Then he said, go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest."

The war against Moab is ended. The hand of the Almighty has cast the rebels into the dust. Elisha has left the army, and again walks, aiding and healing, among the humble and needy of his people. The scene, which presents itself to us this day, gives us a new proof of that which we said on a previous occasion, of Elisha's peculiar character and calling, as a messenger of Jehovah's kindness and compassion. It is a beautiful, affecting, faith-confirming narrative. Let us draw nearer to it, and consider: *the poor widow's distress, her appeal to the prophet, and her relief.*

I. The place where this incident occurred is not named to us. Perhaps it was Gilgal, where at that time, there was a school of the prophets, as well as at Jericho and Bethel. What kind of schools these were, you know indeed, as the history of Elijah has afforded

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us frequent opportunities to inform ourselves as to their object and arrangement. We first meet with these excellent institutions in Israel, at the time of Samuel, who was the founder of these schools. They were free societies for youths and men, who dwelt in the places where they were established, partly in common under *one* roof, partly in single, separate cottages, and supported themselves by the labor of their hands, following the plough, or working in the vineyards or olive gardens, while at the same time they did not neglect other and higher pursuits, devoting their attention especially to the study of sacred history, of the divine revelation, to music, and other arts and sciences consecrated to God. A prophet always presided over these holy institutions, as an instructor and paternal guide, who, when the Lord did not require him elsewhere, dwelt among them alternately, now at one, now at another place, and at times wandered, a welcome guest, from house to house, with words of comfort; at times, in silent, blessed hours, gathered the brethren about him, to initiate them into the depths of divine truth and wisdom, or to pray with them, and tune a joyful song of praise to the Most High. In these free schools of enlightened and God-devoted men, with which of all in our time, the missionary seminaries may be best compared, the youths of Israel were educated, and from the days of Samuel down, they were the living hearths, on which the fire of Jehovah burned brightest and purest among the people. What Israel was to the world, these schools were to Israel; the depositories of the true light. Nay, during many

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a season, all that was left of divine and spiritual life in Israel, was concentrated in these schools, and from thence poured itself forth again, as if from the heart into the veins and limbs of the inanimate people. These institutions were God's living wells in the desert, springs of water for the whole land, blooming nurseries of the divine kingdom, and Israel's kernel, salt, and fairest crown. Therefore, it was usually from these that the Lord chose his seers and prophets, and set apart to himself the men who were to advocate his cause among the people. Now, many of these pious and enlightened men, whom the Scriptures usually mention under the name of the sons of the prophets, had wives and children, and this gives us a clue to the character and condition of the woman who figures in our present narrative, and who is mentioned here as "a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets." We enter in spirit a miserable cottage. The naked walls, the scanty household utensils that are scattered upon the shelves, the wretched table, with a wooden bench before it, and the straw pallet, yonder in the corner, tell us, with sufficient distinctness, in what sphere of human life we here find ourselves. We discover this more plainly in the pale, emaciated features, of the meanly-clad woman, who advances to meet us, her eyes red with weeping, and the expression of whose countenance reminds us of a midnight landscape, upon which a mild starlight is descending, softly illuminating the gloom. She is a daughter of Abraham, and this not after the flesh alone. She knows the Lord, and is the Lord's own. He loves her,

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he carries her in his bosom, and has a palace for her in heaven, and a crown of righteousness, and white garments, and who can say what else beside? The good woman has heard something of all this; alas! this is the only staff which still supports her, the only bright star which still shines upon her in her dreariness. Without this consciousness, that bears her heavenward, she would perish in her wretchedness, she would sink into the deadly abyss of despair. Hard and crushing blows have fallen upon her, the hardest and heaviest that can fall upon a mortal in this world. Her husband, the head of the house, has been long sleeping beneath the green turf. An early death had kindly snatched him away. No person, no object in the world can fill the vacancy in her bosom. His grave is still moistened by her tears. As long as she lives, a veil of mourning will wave about her life, and the wound will not heal, which this bereavement has inflicted upon her faithful, loving heart. But grief for one thus early deceased, is not the bitterest portion of the draught which is given her soul to drain. The deep sorrow with which, day and night, she mourned over one whom she never could forget, was still mingled with something sweet and soothing. The vivid remembrance of his dear image, which hovered in the brightness of transfiguration, incessantly before her eyes; the memory of his love and fidelity, a retrospective glance upon the holy, never-to-be-forgotten hour, when, resigned and trusting, he fell asleep in God; and, above all, the sure and enrapturing prospect of soon beholding him, there, where the Everlasting

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himself, with loving hand, dries the last tear of sorrow, for ever from the weeping eyes of his children, and where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" —all this diffused a gentle moonlight over her night of sorrow, softening and hallowing the pain of grieving love. Besides, this blow had fallen upon her directly from the hand of the Lord, and such blows, be they ever so hard, are not the hardest, especially when the heart knows the name Abba, and believes in the text: "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth." Oh, then, in truth, we may well say with David: "Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, and let me not fall into the hand of man." In every case he will fare better there: "For His mercies are great," says David. Men, on the other hand—but David thinks the rest, without speaking farther. Our widow, however, learns what it is to fall into the hands of the merciless sons of the dust, and this experience is the bitterest drop in the cup of her sorrows.

On his death-bed, her husband could only commit her to the paternal care of the Almighty. He left her behind, in the deepest poverty, in the little cottage which was probably even then mortgaged. And this was not all; in parting with her he was obliged to leave still another burden resting upon her, which, partly on account of the painful, almost insurmountable anxiety, which follows in its train, partly because by this she is exposed to the cruelty and severity of man, may, with good reason, be counted among the heaviest and most oppressive of all temporal burdens. He

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bequeathed her debts, but neither the means nor the prospect of ever being able to pay them. In what way these debts had been incurred we do not know. Extravagance had certainly no share therein. The account given us by an ancient Hebrew tradition is interesting, although we cannot depend with perfect certainty upon its accuracy. According to this old narrative, we behold, in the poor widow before us, a person who had been born and reared under very different circumstances, and who had been accustomed to a very different mode of life, from that in which we find her at present. According to that tradition, she was a woman of a distinguished family and of high rank; her husband's name was Obadiah, the same pious, god-fearing, man of that name who was minister at the court of king Ahab, and with whom we became acquainted in the history of Elijah. During the sanguinary persecution of the faithful, which was commenced at Jezebel's instigation, he concealed a hundred prophets in a cave, and fed them with bread and water. After a time Jezebel obtained information of what he had done, and had caused him to be dismissed from his post, partly on account of this act, partly on account of his belief generally. Obadiah —continues the tradition—now settled, with his wife and children, in the midst of one of the schools of the prophets, to earn a livelihood there by the labor of his hands, and to devote his life entirely to the Lord and his cause. The debt which he bequeathed to his wife, had been incurred in supporting those hundred brethren. He had hoped to be able, gradually, to

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discharge it out of his salary, but his dismissal had soon followed, and in his present state of poverty, he could do but little toward that object. Such is the old narrative, which seems indeed not improbable. But enough—the poor widow is overwhelmed with embarrassments. A hard-hearted creditor is pressing her for the payment of her debt. She has already sold everything in the house to satisfy his demands, every thing, with the exception of those articles actually necessary for life, and the sons of the prophets, themselves poor, have assisted her, according to their means. But all this is not sufficient. The whole sum must be forthcoming—and at such, and such a time. If not—this was the message the stern man had sent to her—"thy two sons are mine, and they shall for seven years follow my horses and my ploughs." And according to an Israelitish law, the creditor had actually the power to put this cruel threat in execution. We can easily imagine the poor mother's feelings, on receiving this terrible message. Her two sons, all that she still possessed, alas, after her God, were her only support, her only consolation, her only hope; and now, in a short time, she must behold them torn from her, and in so lamentable a manner. Alas, how many nights, has she not bathed her rude couch with her tears, since this stern message was sent to her! Truly her condition was desperate; she must have sunk under her misery, had not the Lord's word been her solace, a glance upon Him, her light in this present darkness.

"But was she not then one beloved of God?" you ask. She was, in truth. At times, out of pure love,

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God so takes his children in his arms, and clasps them to his heart so closely, that the tears *will* start into their eyes. How strange, and desolate, and forsaken, do not all things, at times, appear, in the life of a child of God! But what of this? There walks *One* through this wilderness, to whom it is a trifling matter to make the rocks springs of water, and call forth grapes upon every bramble. It is only in the wilderness, indeed, that he finds a field for wonders such as these. When calamity befalls God's children in this world, and all goes ill with them, it is as when one is led blindfold up a steep mountain, that, when upon its summit, the prospect may the more astonish and delight him; or as when the sun sets, not that it may be night, but that the starry firmament may unfold itself in all its glory; or, as when a shepherd, to cleanse his sheep, casts the helpless animal, unhesitatingly, into the water. "I am near thee," says the shepherd to himself, "no harm can come to thee." Why do ye bleat then, ye sheep of God's fold? Leave all to Him.

II. The day when the threat of her stern creditor is to be put in execution, is close at hand. Who can describe the grief and anguish of the helpless woman? The sons of the prophets, have, doubtless, done all that lay in their power, to intercede for her; but their interposition not only failed to soften the tyrannical heart of the creditor, it even rendered him still more severe and pressing, for he hated the Lord's people, and was an enemy to the humble in the land. The afflicted woman now beheld herself cast solely upon Him who

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calls himself "a Father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows." She bears her racked and harassed heart to God. To Him she flies for refuge with a thousand tears and sighs. You know, indeed, my hearers, that the godly, under the dispensation of the Law, were unable to approach the mercy seat with the same cheerfulness with which the children of the new covenant approach it. The way, says Paul, into the holiest of all, was not yet made manifest; the veil was not yet drawn aside. We have scarcely an idea of the clouds, through which, from a sense of their unworthiness, the pious men of old were obliged to force their way, with their prayers, especially when their object was temporal goods. Ah, when that throne was unveiled before their inward glance, that throne, whose foundations are judgment and righteousness, and the bright splendor of the divine sanctity flashed upon their souls, when, in their mind's eye, they beheld that Majesty, before which even the angels tremble, and cover their faces with their wings, and when, in the light of the infinite purity of the Most High, the deformity and blackness of their own life, presented itself doubly dark and abominable to their consciences, oh, how daring did it appear, for them to venture into the infinite splendor of that hall of glory, there to trouble the Almighty with their petty earthly needs! What a struggle, and what toil did it cost them, before the trembling sigh, which, at its first flight, scorched its wings, as it were, in the lightning of that Majesty, had forced its way even to the threshold, even to the outermost steps of the sanctuary. Yes, my dear hearers, to

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us it is a pleasant task, to pray to our God, made manifest in the flesh. We utter what no Israelite as yet could say: "Lord, thou knowest, from thine own experience here, how a poor child of the dust feels in our condition. We cry, Abba, father! for the sake of Christ, thy beloved son, for our brother's sake, hear and grant our prayer!" We behold this son, standing as our advocate before the Father, and know, that, in spite of our innumerable shortcomings, in Him we are blameless before God, and pleasant in his sight, even as Christ himself is pleasant. How lightly and confidently does prayer soar aloft, when wafted upward by such thoughts. How we fly in the magic car of this consciousness high above the clouds. With us, prayer is no labor; it is a pleasant, easy task, like breathing. It mounts on wings of confidence and joy. With those who lived under the old dispensation, however, prayer was, as it were, a wrestling with a thousand obstacles, a toilsome voyage, not with gently swelling sails, but against the brooding tempest, and amid raging billows. For how dark and deeply veiled, amid the mists of the distant future, did the great work of reconciliation hover before their eyes, and of how much were they deprived, in that they had not yet seen God made manifest in the flesh. Yes, we can easily understand why the pious men of the Old Testament, in their straits and calamities, so often took refuge in the prophets, instead of at once approaching Jehovah's throne, and using these, as it were, as agents between them and the Almighty. These holy men, they thought, might far sooner than they venture to

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appear before the throne of heavenly majesty. They, as members of the court of the King of kings, were much more familiar with the ceremonial of that lofty mansion, and would much sooner find admission and a hearing from the Lord of all worlds, than creatures so poor and humble as themselves. Accordingly, they availed themselves of their intercession, and thus the prophets were esteemed among the people, as living types, nay, as the vicars of the great advocate who was not yet come. Our afflicted widow also, we see hastening to Elisha, as to a man who stood nearer to the Lord than she; and who, as the minister of the divine gifts and power, would surely be able to counsel and assist her. She approaches him weeping, and says, "Thy servant, my husband, is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondsmen!"

Thus speaks the poor woman. She can say nothing more. Tears choke her utterance. She does not declare her wish, but it is visible, with sufficient plainness, in her imploring features, faintly illuminated by the feeble light of a scarcely glimmering hope. She was acquainted, doubtless, with the miraculous event which had formerly occurred in the house of the widow at Zarephath. Such narratives, in days of need and calamity, have a wonderful power to cheer and support the tottering courage and sinking faith, and to breathe a pleasant coolness upon the feverish brow. "That widow was helped," thought the mourner, "why should I be forsaken? Am not I also, a poor and needy widow, and will Elisha, in the strength of his

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God, be less able to succor than he whose mantle covers him?"

III. Elisha, deeply moved by the condition of the poor mother, and in the tenderness of his heart, weeping with the weeping, feels in his bosom the divine commission to dry the widow's tears, and by a miracle, to put an end to her distress. He gazes upon the mourner with friendly features, features beaming with encouragement, and impelled by the Holy Spirit, says to her: "What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house?" "Alas!" replied the poor woman, "thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil."—Everything else is already in the hands of the creditor.—Then Elisha said: "Go borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full." Thus spake the prophet. Then the poor widow's eyes are lighted up, like those of one who has wandered into some subterranean cave, and who, after straying long and hopelessly through the gloomy passages, sees, at a distance, the bright light of day break in upon him, and he shouts joyfully: "God be praised! yonder is the outlet." Already her rejoicing soul forebodes what is about to happen. Perhaps she would have doubted, perhaps she would not have deemed it possible, that help could come to her in this way, if that well-known miracle at Zarephath had not been present to her memory. But

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now she does not doubt, but believes that something similar may happen in her case. Behold, this is the use of these old narratives of God's help, and this, according to God's purpose, should be their use, even at the present day. It was for this end they were intended.

The widow hastens homeward with winged steps, and executes the prophet's command without delay. She goes, as Elisha has told her, to the neighbors, borrows a great number of vessels of all descriptions, carries them into the chamber, and locks herself in with the two darlings of her heart, and now—oh, what a hallowed, solemn moment!—she now takes her cruse in the name of the Lord, draws out the cork from the bottom of it, for such was the manner in which kegs for oil were constructed in the East, and—the bright oil begins to flow. Oh, wonderful! the first vessel, which is perhaps ten times larger than the cruse, has been already filled from it; another is placed beneath and is filled; a third, and this is filled also, and thus it is with vessel after vessel. There is no end to the flowing oil; it is as if a well of oil had spouted forth. All the vessels are now filled; the last is still standing beneath the cruse, and the oil is just rising to its brim; then the mother says: "Bring me yet a vessel." "There is not a vessel more," replied her son. "Then," proceeds the narrative, "*the oil stayed*;" it ceased to flow. Overcome with astonishment, gratitude, and delight, the widow leaves the full vessels standing, hastens back to the man of God, and narrates to him, almost breathless with joy, what a great and glorious thing

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had happened to her. But Elisha says: "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." The happy woman! How gloriously was the oppressive burden at once removed from her! She was released from the hands of her cruel oppressor, and her sons, the only support of her declining years, were left to console her. Oh, how had the gloomy sky of her life regained its cheerful blue and brightness; how sweet and promising a hue was shed upon the future! She felt like one in a dream, a blissful dream! The fact that help and rescue had come to her, so unexpectedly, and just in this way, so immediately from God, rendered it doubly sweet and glorious. By this means it displayed itself to her, as a manifest declaration of God's favor and love, as a pledge of his paternal care and guardianship; by this those words became an uttered fact: Fear not, for I am with thee, the Father of the fatherless, and the judge of the widow.

Thus you have once more seen, my dear hearers, how the Lord can save and preserve his elect, and how he has fulness of counsel for them, when all human hopes vanish, and the sources of this world's help are all dried up. "But in this way," you reply, "he now no longer rescues his chosen ones; in such a manner he is now no longer accustomed to pay the debts of his children." Are you so very sure of this? And even if, at the present day, He seldom vouchsafes his aid in miracles so striking, is the miracle less a miracle, because he employs human instruments, and blesses by the hand of Love? Listen to a narrative, my brethren. It is a true story. One Christmas evening, in a sad

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and lamentable time, a poor widow lay sick and faint upon her bed. In the houses round about, the lights upon the Christmas trees are sparkling, the children are happy and rejoice. She, the forsaken one, lies silent and tearful, her heart full of sadness, full of care. Her little ones stand hushed and sorrowful about her couch. There is not a morsel of bread left in the house, not a penny in the drawer, wherewith to purchase it. "Oh, dear Lord," thinks the poor woman, "what a path thou leadest me!" And a deep and painful sigh escapes her sorely oppressed soul. Suddenly a voice whispers in her heart: "What hast thou in the house?" "Alas!" she sighs forth, "what have I? Only a few empty dishes." "Serve them up!" proceeds the voice, "and borrow empty vessels from thy neighbors, and of these not a few." Remark, my dear hearers, thus this voice spoke to her, exactly thus; not a word more nor less. The widow sighs. "What can this mean?" she thinks. She then says: "Alas, Lord! look, here are my children, here thou hast empty vessels. They have nothing to eat, not a morsel." "*Believe!*" was the answer. At the same moment the door is opened, and some one enters with a friendly greeting, and lays a gift of money upon the table, and immediately hastens away. Soon after others come, and bring bread in various forms, and some bring meat and nourishment of other kinds. The dishes are already full, and still they bring more and more. The children must go to the neighbors, and borrow vessels, and of these not a few. And not one of them remains unfilled, and linen is brought in, and clothes for the little ones, nay, even

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toys for Christmas gifts, and what is still more than all, friendly countenances, and many refreshing words of love, and much solace, consoling, sweet, and encouraging. All these things happened in a few moments, one after another, and it seemed as if the people had arranged together to act in this wise, and still no one knew of the other's purpose. And when all was quiet again, and the gifts were lying there, covering the table, from one end to the other, the astonished widow felt as if what had passed was nothing but a pleasant dream. But then all that was within her, exclaimed: "Surely the Lord was in this place!" and her heart was melted with gratitude and emotion. At this moment it occurred to her, that her deceased husband, when on his death-bed, had said to her with his last breath: "Weep not, but be still; the Lord will be with thee and will not forsake thee!" "Ah!" she thinks, "I see it now; it was the Lord who spoke by his lips!" And as she thinks this, a confidence is breathed into her heart, more joyful than she had ever yet felt, that her husband was a child of God, and that she would surely meet him again in heaven. Then it seemed as if he was suddenly restored to her again, and from that evening onward, a new and heavenly tie united them. In the happiest emotion, the sick woman now lay upon her couch, while the children, their eyes sparkling with delight, skipped around the table, and gazed at the gifts. Then the mother thinks: "Dear Lord, thy kindness is so great, thou couldst also heal me of my malady." And scarcely had this short prayer arisen in

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her heart, when she at once feels cheerful, strong, and well, as she has not felt for years. She leaps from her couch, offers up thanksgivings to the Lord, she and her little ones, and on the following day is able to attend church, and also on the next Sabbath, and although she is, at present, feeble again, yet since that time she knows that it is but a small thing for the Lord, and costs him but a single word to put an end to all her maladies, at any moment, so soon as it pleases him. This is my story. Answer me now, is the hand of the Lord less visible here than in the scene described in our text, and was this assistance less miraculous and glorious than that? "But when and where did this event take place?" you ask. It is an occurrence of later times; it happened in the valley in which we dwell, in the midst of our community. It happened on the evening before the last Christmas festival, and happened literally, as I have related it to you. Until now, none have known of it except myself and that woman. Now, you all know it. But do not ask after her name. Of what moment is it who it may have been? Plant this incident in the garden of your remembrances. For you, also, there may yet come days and hours, when the strengthening perfume of this flower will sweetly refresh you.

My brethren, I know of a vast and wonderful mansion. It is placed beyond the clouds. The stars above us are the lamps, which shine down upon us through the windows of that house. The road to that dwelling is the most frequently travelled in the world. The larks ascend the path, and whatever of good and

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perfect gifts there are in the world, have come down to us by that road, and from that mansion. You have heard, doubtless, of the dwelling of which I speak. Yes, if the windows there are not opened, our fields and meadows pine, and our ploughing and sowing is all for naught. If due payment is not made there, the whole world is bankrupt. If a blessing is not there spoken over our labor, we famish, notwithstanding all the sweat of our brows; or "we eat," as Haggai said, "but have not enough; we clothe ourselves, but there is none warm; and that which we earn we put into a bag with holes."

In this mansion there dwells a great and rich lord. All eyes wait upon him, that he may give them their meat in due season. He possesses everything, everything in abundant fulness, and were he without something that he wished to bestow, he need but speak and it would exist. He sits there in majestic glory. All the powers of heaven and of earth are in his hands. He rules the world, and all that is therein. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without his will; not a hair falls from our head without his knowledge, purpose, guidance. Now he leads forth the sun like a bridegroom from his chamber; now he marks out a path for the stars, and calleth them all by their names; now he clothes the lilies in a garb more splendid than Solomon's; now he feeds the young ravens when they cry, or hangs the branches of the trees with golden fruit, or speaks kindly to the weary soul. He needs not that aught should be given to him that he may give again. He has bread for his people in the wilderness, without

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ovens; water for Israel, without wells and cisterns; meal and oil for that widow, without mills and presses; food and attendance for the prophet, by the brook Cherith, without the hand of man. Yes, he is never at a loss. Each word that he utters in blessing, is a horn of plenty overflowing with benefits. It is in vain for us to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows. To his friends he gives it while they sleep. Well, to this rich, this all-possessing, all-powerful God, we are directed in our needs, and he is well inclined to us in Christ. To his threshold we may bring an empty basket. Ah, how many are there among us, who, had they gone this path, would not now be beggars; how many would not pine in poverty and want, and how infinitely less of wretchedness would there be upon the earth!

"But this mansion is so distant!" you exclaim. Oh, not so distant as many think. "But the Lord who dwells therein is so great!" He is great, but still there is nothing too humble for him. "But the Lord there is so holy!" Yes, he is holy, unspeakably holy, but, nevertheless, a path is made for sinners to his lofty dwelling, a way to his heart. This way is Christ. He who has learned how to travel this way, with the basket of his needs, will never return empty, and without a gift. Know that, in Christ, thy prayers are no longer the prayers of a transgressor, but of a righteous man. In Christ no one comes to the Father's house as a wicked servant, but as a beloved child. In Christ no one approaches there, as one condemned to death, but as one entitled to life. In Christ no one appears

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there even as a poor beggar, but as an heir of all things. Yes, truly, if Christ had not come, then thou mightst well say: "The way to yonder mansion is so distant." For then there would be no way thither. Then a frightful abyss would yawn between this world and that, and didst thou bear within thee all human virtues combined, they would not suffice to cast a bridge for thee over this abyss, or lend thee wings to cross it. But now that Christ and his merits are revealed, thou needst no longer think of forming paths and bridges. See to it only that thou art one with Christ, and thou wilt no longer behold in that Lord above, a distant one, but one unspeakably near. Thou wilt no longer look upon him as a devouring fire, but as a tender father. Then thy wishes will no longer start back from him in terror; but with the words: "Abba! father!" they will fall confidently in his arms. Then thou wilt never scruple more, and say: "May I go to him with my little basket!" Thou wilt go, because it is a thing of course that thou mayst go, and that thou wilt receive. Then, upon joyful wings, thy praying thoughts will soar upwards. Whatever may be thy need, thou wilt away at once to his threshold. Then thou hast found the path to that mansion above the clouds, and He who dwells therein, will even come to meet thee on the way, with his blessing.

And when thou standest before his door, knock boldly; not as a beggar knocks; knock like one who belongs to the house; not as a vagabond knocks, who stands in fear of the police; knock as a friend, as an intimate acquaintance; not as one who fears that he

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comes inopportunely; no, as a guest, who feels assured of the warmest welcome; and if admittance is not at once granted thee, take the staff of His promises, and strike loudly at the door of his mansion. Speak: "Lord, thou hast said: Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." I beg therefore for this gift! Speak: "Lord, here is one, who is much more than the birds of the air, and the flowers of the field; and shall he hunger, and remain unclothed?" Speak: "Father, it is not a raven that cries for bread; it is a member of thy dear Son!" Speak: "Thou hast told us to say: Cast all your cares upon Him, for he careth for you. Now, father, care!" Look! with this staff of promises, smite and clamor at his door, and see, if help and rescue do not come. See if He do not give unto thee, and if, not out of love, yet like that friend in the gospel, because of thine importunity.

Courage then, courage, ye brethren in the Lord! All stands well with you. No good thing can, or will ever be wanting to you. No! goodness and mercy will follow you through life. The whole treasure chamber in heaven stands open to you in Christ. All is yours, all, all! Therefore be always cheerful, always confident, always of good courage!

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CHAPTER VI.

THE SHUNAMMITE.

It is true, my dear hearers, the way to Life is a way of crosses, a path of thorns. The Scriptures make no secret of this. The Saviour himself said to that rich young man, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." And what does Paul write upon the standard of Israel? "We must, through much tribulation, enter the kingdom of God." But let this deter no one from joining our train. It is a glorious, a wonderful, a blessed path, the path which leads to Salem, only that the words of the prophet are applicable to it, which we find in Isaiah iv. 5: "For upon all the glory shall be a veil." Well, let us for once lift this veil, and we shall wonder and rejoice.

The way of a child of God is glorious from the very cradle. When he is born into the world no miracle apparently attends his birth. A naked worm, begotten in sin, lies before us; a child, like other children. But let us lift the veil; behold, is that an Esau that is born? No, a Jacob. A Cain? No, an Abel, a Jedediah. Smiling angels stand about the young stranger, and a voice whispers near its cradle, the same that was

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heard at the cradle of Solomon, "Beloved of the Lord!" and if we listen attentively, it adds, "for ever and ever!" and a blessing is uttered over the child, a blessing which reaches far into eternity. This little favorite of heaven is brought to *baptism*. Here, also, nothing more happens to him than that which happens to all children of Christian parents. But let us remove the covering veil; behold, the Lord Jesus himself baptizes the child, and his baptism is truly a pledge and a seal! Without an *if* or a *but*, without clause or conditions, all the goods and rights of the new covenant are now solemnly promised to the newly-born child of grace. His name is written in indelible characters in the book of Life, and the happy mother rocks a royal infant in her arms, a co-heir with Christ. As the richly-endowed child grows in stature, there is nothing remarkable to be discovered in him externally. He speaks, and acts, and appears like other children. But look upon him with a spiritual glance, and what dost thou see? Behold, a wonderful plan of heavenly wisdom and love, outspread over the child's life, and a divine hand tenderly guiding him, a divine eye watching over him with paternal care, and educating him for eternity. Every thing is so ordered in the existence of this chosen being, that it may best subserve to his spiritual welfare. Exactly as all happens, all *must* happen. By and by, this is clearly recognised. "And I will take away my hand," thus spake the Lord to Moses, "and thou shalt see my back parts!"

Still the citizen of the blessed kingdom does not bear the seal of his high rank upon his brow. He is as yet

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among the sheep who are still without the fold of the good shepherd, but have yet to be led thither. Then the clock sounds the hour of his awaking to new life. What seest thou? Something by no means singular. Thou seest a weeping mortal, a sighing creature, a man praying for mercy and compassion. But remove the veil. What see we now? We see how the holy Spirit enters in person into the poor sinner's benighted soul, how he chooses there his workshop, the true comforter, how he there calls a new life and character into existence, and how God's angels then take their harps, and there is joy in heaven over the repentant sinner, and his soul blooms and blossoms like the garden of the Lord. And now the man walks upon the narrow path, and again all seems as if he were pursuing his way, like a thousand others. Only his path appears more lonely and darker; nay, oftentimes, like the path of one forsaken, like the path of an outcast. But we will lift the dark covering that shrouds it, and gaze with the eye of faith upon the humble pilgrim and his path. What wonders, what glories, are now revealed to our glance! We behold the lonely wanderer in the sweetest society. Around about him, wherever he stands or walks, is Israel's keeper, who neither sleeps nor slumbers. Above him, like a never-fading star, is God's paternal eye, full of tenderness and truth. Beneath him, although he *seems* to totter, eagles' wings and angels' hands bear him through life, that his foot may not stumble. Not a step does he take upon his glorious path, but he takes it, led by the bands of Eternal love. Does his path lead him through the water?

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Jesus is the pilot of his bark, and the dove, with the olive branch of consolation, sits upon the mast. Does his path lie through fire? The miracle of the fiery furnace is renewed; the flames do not burn him, for God is with him. Does he fall into distress and embarrassment? At once a band of angels stand before the face of the Eternal, and ask: "Father, in what way willest thou that he shall be helped?" Does he slumber? The wings of compassion softly cover him. Does he watch? Many kind eyes watch with him. Does he weep? His tears are numbered in heaven, and gathered in a pitcher. Does he pray? His sighs soar above the clouds; and how welcome are they in that audience chamber above, how gladly heard! Does he do battle? Invisible hands not only wipe the sweat from his brow, but contend for him that he may keep the field. And lastly, when he dies, there happens to him in appearance nothing that happens not to others. A dark cloud gathers about his dying hour. He lies upon a lonely couch, wrestling with death. But let us lift the veil, and what a spectacle is now disclosed to our eyes! A bright band of heavenly visitants surround his dying bed, and a gentle, friendly hand performs the office of the Angel of Death, the hand of Him who once said consolingly to his disciples: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Behold, my friends, these are a portion of the hidden glories of the narrow way, but a portion only. Who can utter all its wonders? Whatever there may

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be to sacrifice, to suffer, to renounce upon this way, all is nothing, in comparison with the thousandfold, incomparable amends, which are here offered to you. This way is, with all its discomforts, a pleasant way, a way of peace. Do we encounter storms upon this way? What of that? It is strewed with a thousand resting-places, secure asylums and lovely abodes of shelter. Does the remembrance of thy sins appal thee? Let thy soul take refuge in the wounds of thy Redeemer. Who will condemn thee then? Do cares beset thee on every side? The bright, cheering mansions of God's promises, open to receive thee into their halls of delight. Is the well-spring of thy sensibility, thy power, and thy devotion dried up? Well, feed thine eye upon the wondrous robe of salvation which is thine, and which will never be taken from thee, a robe made white in the blood of the Lamb. Is it dark about thee here below, is it lonely and gloomy? Ascend the fiery chariot of Hope, and soar in spirit to brighter and happier lands. And what shall I say further of the delights of this way, what of the joys which the communion with the Lord, what of the happiness which the fellowship of the saints daily affords us? Oh come and join us! learn for yourselves in what rich measure they are rewarded, even here below, who choose the way of which Solomon says: "The way of Life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath."

How wonderful this way often is, but also how pleasant, you will learn from the narrative, which is the subject of our present discourse.

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2 KINGS IV. 8–37.

"And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, nay, my Lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life. And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, It shall be well. Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding

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for me, except I bid thee. So she went, and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite; Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with thy child? And she answered, It is well. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her; and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me? Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thine way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any man salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in, therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out."

I am well aware, my dear hearers, that you are not partial to long texts; I myself am as little so. At first,

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therefore, I intended to divide our present narrative into several texts, but on a near view of it, I found that such a division would be very inappropriate. Its several parts are too closely connected, and form too complete a whole to allow us to disjoin and separate them. Besides this, it is so simple in all its parts and features, so intelligible and plain, that were I to make it the theme of several discourses, I should be compelled either to spin out the subject, or bring in much that is irrelevant and foreign to it. It would in fact be scarcely necessary for me to do more than to rehearse the narrative again, step by step, and the divine meaning which lies therein, would reveal itself to you at once. But I purpose something further than this; I will point out to you all that I find instructive and edifying in the separate scenes, and press out for you the grapes of the sweet vine, hoping, through God's grace, to reach to many a one among you a refreshing draught, to revive the faintness of his faith. There are five topics to which I wish to direct your attention. They are: *The cottage at Shunem; the grateful Guest; the dying Boy; Gehazi with Elisha's staff; and the Awaking of the Dead.*

I. About in the middle of the Holy Land, a few days' journey beyond Jerusalem, a wide plain, interrupted only by isolated hills, and partly intersected by the brook Chedron, extends from the sea coast to the vine-clad banks of the Jordan; a range of country, which, for fertility of soil, luxuriance of vegetation, and pleasantness of climate, has scarcely its equal upon

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the whole earth. Here, amid green olive groves, and waving corn-fields, stood, in times past, a quiet, blessed village, called Shunem; we will enter it to-day; for wonderful things are occurring here, of which we are presently to be witnesses. And while we are looking about us in the neat village, which is, for the most part, inhabited by peasants, and, perceiving its simple, yet cheerful rows of houses, among which not a beggar's hut is to be seen, are drawing favorable conclusions, not only as to the general prosperity of the inhabitants of this spot, but at the same time as to the simplicity of their manners, behold, a man walks down the street, accompanied by a boy—a man who attracts our attention by his unusual garb, and whose dusty garments proclaim him a traveller. A wide, coarse mantle covers his form, a leathern girdle is tied about his loins; but his countenance presents a striking contrast to his sober apparel, for it is brightened by a beam of infinite mildness and affability, and naught but peace and love are mirrored in his features. All who meet this man stop and greet him with profound reverence. Even the children, when they see him, cease their sports until he has passed by, or hasten to him and reach out their little hands. With paternal warmth he returns their greetings on either side, and then advances toward a house, which is distinguished even from the others of the place, by its charming situation and cheerful exterior. A neatly-clad woman at once hastens to the threshold, and with respectful joy bids the pilgrim welcome. She constrains him to

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enter, and the stranger accepts the warm and cordial invitation.

Who this pilgrim is I need not tell you. You have, doubtless, already recognised him. It is Elisha, and the boy at his side is called Gehazi, and is his pupil and servant. You need not wonder that the prophet is thus recognised by old and young in Shunem. He has often stopped at this village, when passing, to and fro, through the land, visiting the schools of the prophets; and, when impelled from the tumult of the world, he sought his lofty, pleasant chamber and closet, which, as you well know, was upon the summit of Mount Carmel, Shunem, for the most part, lay exactly in his way. But who is the woman that welcomes him so cordially on the threshold of yonder neat dwelling? Well, with her I must now make you somewhat better acquainted. That she belonged to the wealthier, or as it is called higher class of women, you have seen for yourself. Our narrative confirms it, for it calls her "a great woman." But this is the most trifling and unimportant thing that can be said of her. She knows of another wealth than that which the moth and rust corrupt; and not only knows of it, but possesses it. She belongs to the little band of those in Israel, who have not bowed the knee to *Baal*. She is a daughter of Abraham, according to the spirit; a soul living in God, a woman beloved of Jehovah, and from the unbounded reverence and child-like love which she displays in many ways, toward the holy man from Abel-meholah, we may presume that the latter had been God's instrument in her conversion, and was

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therefore her spiritual father. On what occasion she first became personally acquainted with Elisha, we are not informed. Enough, she has known him long. Often, in passing through the place, has he broken bread in her hospitable dwelling, and of late, he scarcely ever visited Shunem, without abiding there for the night. For one day, when the good dame was sitting with her husband, engaged in familiar discourse, and the conversation, as was often, doubtless, the case, turned upon Elisha, she began with a pleasant, entreating mien: "Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber for him, I pray thee, on the wall. Then, so often as he comes hither, we can give him shelter for the night, and at the same time enjoy the pleasure of having him longer with us than heretofore." Thus spake the Shunammite. Her husband, who also feared the Lord, acceded at once to her proposal. In a few days the little chamber was ready. A bed was set therein, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick, and when Elisha came again to Shunem, the worthy pair led him into it, and said: "See, we have made this chamber for thee: As often as thou comest to Shunem, turn in hither, and consider it as thine own; dwell therein as long as it pleaseth thee, the longer the better, and go in and out, according to thy pleasure." And he did so, for Elisha well knew that all beneath this friendly roof, was meant as it was spoken. And now, as often as the prophet lodged there, it seemed to the Shunammite, and her husband and all the house, as if the dwelling had suddenly been

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transformed into a temple, a sanctuary. They passed up and down the stairs with softer steps; the holy man, they thought, might be praying or meditating. Every countenance became more cheerful. They knew that this man stood in a wonderfully near and intimate relation to Jehovah, nay, they even felt, at times, as if Jehovah himself had taken up his abode with them.

The example of the hospitable Shunammite, reminds us sweetly of the words uttered by the Lord Jesus Christ, in Matt. x. 41, 42. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." What meaning does our Lord intend to convey by these words? This. He who is able to discern in the Lord's children, notwithstanding their mean attire and humble exterior, the brightness of the Divinity, which they bear within them, and he who shows any kindness, be it small or great, to one of his saints, in the name of a saint, that is, in this his peculiar character, or because he recognizes him as a saint, a man of God, shall receive a reward from the Lord, who will surely impart to him some share, out of the abundance of blessing, which he is accustomed to shower down perpetually upon the righteous. What say you to this promise? This is indeed exalting and glorifying His children, when the Lord views and rewards the good that is done to them,

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not otherwise than if it were done unto Himself. This is indeed dealing graciously with his people, and displaying a paternal heart towards them, when we see him thus earnestly admonishing the world to treat them kindly, and proclaiming openly to all mankind, with a "Verily, verily!" that he offers a high reward to *him*, who, in any wise, manifests kindness to his sheep upon the earth. Remember then these words. He who spoke them was the high and lofty One. He who acts in accordance with these words, and does any good thing to a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, that is, because he is a righteous man, as the Shunammite did toward Elisha, may be assured that he will not miss his reward; and this reward consists, perhaps, in the *most glorious* of all gifts, in the new birth, the first germ of which such a man already bears within him in this spark of love towards God's children; or if he is already born anew, the reward consists, perhaps, in that gift, which, next to the new birth, is the most precious; in uninterrupted peace in the blood of Jesus; in a thoroughly healed and justified conscience. But let *him* who hates the righteous in the name of the righteous, that is, because they are righteous and holy, reflect what *he* on the contrary may expect from a master who clings to his children with such tenderness, and let the love of Jesus to his people make him tremble. It is with shuddering and with terror that I read the curse contained in the cxxxvii. Psalm against hostile Babel: "Happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

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Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones."

II. To-day Elisha is in Shunem again. Yonder he sits, familiarly, with the pious, friendly pair. The hours fly, swift as an arrow, amid pleasant and devout discourse, and the weariness of the venerable pilgrim soon disappears in the refreshing, spiritual atmosphere that here surrounds him. Oh, how pleasant and sweet a thing is it, after we have been tossed about, and exiled, as it were, among the unleavened generation of this world, when we meet again, at last, a quiet tent of Israel, to which we can, for a few hours, fly, from the heathenish and godless crowd, and in which the name of Jesus, so long unheard, and the sweet friendly greeting of God's children, sounds again upon the ear from kindred hearts! We then feel, like one who, after a long and tempestuous voyage, lands again, at last, upon the green shore of a safe and hospitable island. Into these meetings something of that joy is infused, which we shall experience at that great and happy meeting in the heavenly paradise. Then how plainly do we see that immeasurable gulf, which separates the congregation of the Lord, even from the most refined and upright of the children of the world. We feel at once, as if stepping from an atmosphere of selfishness into an atmosphere of love; from an element of falsehood and of semblance, into an element of truth. We breathe a far different and purer air. The bosom expands. We feel as if immersed in a spiritual bath of marvellous efficacy, and exclaim with renewed freshness

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and conviction: "To this little band do I belong, not to the world. Here is my element, here is my home."

Elisha's heart was filled with gratitude and love at the kindness shown him by this worthy pair. He was well pleased that in his journeyings through the plain of Jezreel he had Shunem for a resting place, and in Shunem the hospitable dwelling of his friends. That little chamber was exactly suited to him. He would not have exchanged this cheerful apartment—this tabernacle in the wilderness, for a royal palace. Deeply moved by the numerous proofs of love and reverence, which he met with at every moment, we see him to-day reposing in the pleasant chamber. He utters his evening prayer. The names of his kind hosts are heard distinctly, amid the fervent whispers that escape his lips. He commends them to God, and then, as if lulled by soft angelic tones, he sinks into a sweet and gentle slumber. But scarcely has he awaked on the following morning, when he summons his servant Gehazi. "Listen," he says, "we must prove our gratitude to the Shunammite. Call her to hee and say to her: "Behold thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" Thus spoke Elisha to the boy. Since that miraculous victory over the Moabites, the prophet was again in favor at court; and most certainly an application from him to Jehoram or his ministers, would not have been neglected. Gehazi goes and performs his errand. "Well," asks Elisha, "what is her desire?" "Nothing," replies

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Gehazi. "The thanks," she says, "are due on her part. That thou hast vouchsafed to enter beneath her roof is reward enough for her trifling labor. She has nothing to ask of kings or captains, she dwells peacefully among *her own people*." "What then is to be done for her?" says the prophet. And Gehazi answered: "Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old." "Thou hast guessed it," says Elisha to himself, and he at once brings the matter before the Lord. A moment after he has already the divine answer in his heart: Be it so! "Call the Shunammite!" says the prophet!" The Shunammite appears, and Elisha, already girded for his journey, advances cheerfully to meet her. Then he addresses her with the earnestness and decision of one commissioned by God: "About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son!" "What do I hear?" thinks the astonished woman, "how can this be? Nay, my lord," she exclaims in wonder, "thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid!" But the prophet grasps his pilgrim's staff, reaches his hand in parting to the kind pair, thanks them heartily, wishes God's blessing upon the house, and departs joyfully with his young companion.

"I dwell among mine own people," replied the Shunammite to Gehazi. It was with heartfelt content that she uttered these words. God be praised, my brethren, that we are permitted to say the same. Many a one may boast that he moves in the most elevated spheres of human society; others that they are on terms of familiarity with the first geniuses of the age, with the

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masters of the arts and sciences in this world. These we envy not. But well may we envy that brother in the Lord, who is permitted to dwell in the midst of like-minded companions of the kingdom, if we are denied this happiness; but richly do we enjoy this prerogative; yes, as few enjoy it. We not only dwell among our own people, but we have the most unlimited choice among this people, for closer companionship and communion. Each one finds one, or two, or three, whom he comprehends at half a word, nay, with whom, even without words, in a kind of magic language, he can discourse concerning all that is deepest and tenderest in the realm of thought, and feeling, and experience. "I dwell among mine own people!" Sweet privilege! not to be bartered for all the money and goods of this earth. For it is in Zion only that true love dwells, with candor and pure fidelity; where one finds himself leagued with brothers and sisters, who are such indeed, and where the cup of sweet converse and communion is embittered by no thought of future separation. Ah, let us rejoice in the happy lot that has fallen to us, and join ourselves ever closer to the dear brotherhood in Christ Jesus. There may be many a wish unfulfilled, many a burden may oppress us, but the consciousness, "I dwell among mine own people!" at once makes amends for all.

But let us return to our narrative. It happened as the prophet had foretold. Scarcely had the year passed by, when the Shunammite was a happy mother, and a dear sweet infant lay upon her bosom. She had now a most joyful experience that the God of Sarah

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and of Hannah still lived, which, at first, from her unbelieving, "Nay, my lord, do not lie unto thine handmaid!" she seemed to have doubted. And the God of Israel, in the Red Sea, still lives, and the God of Daniel, in the lion's den also, and the God of the three in the fiery furnace. He lives and is the same; as he was yesterday, so is he to-day, and to all eternity. If you had but faith, you would *behold* God's glory, and view the king in his beauty.

III. Our narrative now takes a leap, and at once transports us several years forward. The happy mother's infant has grown up to boyhood. He is a very dear son, obedient and intelligent, the sweet hope and constant joy of his parents, the fairest star in the cloudless sky of their household. Yes, if upon the earth, there are antechambers of heaven, the house at Shunem certainly deserved this name. Here life flowed, like a clear brook, between flowery banks. An insurmountable barrier to care and sorrow seemed set up around this cottage. The days of the passing year visited the threshold of this house, as friendly messengers of Eternal Love, bearing to its occupants all the joys which heaven and earth have in store for the children of men; and hour seemed to follow hour only to shower new comforts and new blessings upon this highly favored household. But behold, when from the custom of possession, the thought begins to find entrance into their souls, that the pleasant light of these days cannot now be overshadowed, God places a dark cloud in the sky, and, alas! it hangs just over the

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house of this happy pair in Shunem, in the very midst of the spring-time of their joy. Listen to what happened. It was a bright, warm, summer morning. The father had been long out with the reapers in the field; the mother was tending the house at home. Then the boy said: "Suffer me to go to my father in the field. I should like to see them reap, and bind the sheaves." And the mother said: "Go!" She could let him go without anxiety, for the boy had understanding, and turned neither to the right hand nor to the left. Upon the way the boy fell ill. He felt a sharp pain in his temples, which every moment increased in violence. Holding his head with both his hands, he comes running into the fields to his father, and cries, "My head, my head!" The father does not think the matter serious, and says to one of his servants: "Carry him to his mother." And the lad did so. But what words can describe the dismay of the poor Shunammite, when she beholds her son brought in, pale as a corpse, already half unconscious, moaning from pain, and nearer death than life. With a stream of tears she snatches her darling to her heart, lays him upon her lap, tries to warm him upon her bosom, and sends in all haste for a physician. Every remedy is applied; but the boy grows weaker and weaker. Alas, for the unhappy mother! She sees the whole structure of her earthly happiness tottering to its foundations. Towards noon the boy is senseless. Somewhat later, signs of approaching death manifest themselves. At noon the boy has breathed his last, and lies pale and rigid in his mother's arms. He is at

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rest. His mother does not believe that he is dead, she cannot believe it. She calls him by name. She implores him to unclose his eyes for once, for only once. It is in vain. The bright star is extinct, the sweet flower has faded, and with it, *in an instant*, all the pleasant spring-time in the house at Shunem. Oh, wherefore did the Lord do this? I do not know, my dear hearers, for what reason he found it good to water his plants at Shunem, with so sharp and penetrating dew. Perhaps they needed again to be reminded that heaven is not on earth, but above the stars; perhaps the child had usurped from the Lord too great a space in their hearts, which he wished to regain; perhaps the good pair needed to be elevated, upon the wings of some great affliction, above this mound of earth; perhaps they were in danger of forgetting that their whole happiness, from moment to moment, was based in God's free grace and mercy, and it was necessary that they should be snatched from this danger. I cannot say, my friends, I cannot speak with certainty. This I know, however; the matter has a glorious issue, and the sorely-tried parents—ah, they pluck naught but grapes and figs from the thorn-bush of their calamity. The time will come, be assured of this, when they will kiss the hand that smote them, and exclaim joyfully: "God be praised that the Lord hath led us according to his will, and not according to ours." And they will blush for shame, that they could, even for an instant, complain of his providence, in which thoughts of love and peace alone prevailed, not thoughts of evil. To those who love God, all things

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must work together for good. They *must*. An almighty decree has given this in charge to them.

IV. But where is the poor mother? Yonder we behold her tottering up the stairs, sobbing loudly, with the dead child in her arms. Alas, in what a condition! "Thou little heart of man," she thinks, "what a world of pain and anguish canst thou conceal within thee!" Sorrow and mourning are well-nigh robbing her of her senses. She carries the lifeless boy into Elisha's chamber; she lays the dear child softly and gently upon his bed, as if he were only sleeping. Then she gazes upon him once more, calls him once more by name. Ah! with that name she recalls a lost paradise, a life of a thousand joys now vanished! Once more she covers the pale face with her tears and kisses; then she tears herself violently from the beloved corpse, shuts the door upon him, hastens back to the servant who had brought the boy home, and strictly enjoins him to say nothing of this sad occurrence to her husband, who, at that time of harvest, was wont to remain until evening with the reapers. "Alas," she thinks, "he will not outlive the tidings!" Then she directs the servant to go out into the field to her husband, and ask him to send her one of the young men and one of the asses, that she might go to the man of God and come again. Her commands are at once obeyed, and the servant returns with the ass. This sudden resolution of the Shunammite had somewhat surprised her husband. He sends back word, asking her why she would go to-day to the man of God, see-

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ing that it was neither new moon nor sabbath; for, on these days, doubtless, Elisha held public worship on the solitary summit of Mount Carmel, and the good pair were accustomed to attend on such occasions. The Shunammite returns an indefinite answer to her husband; then, after having saddled the ass, she says to the servant: "Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, unless I bid thee." And thus the sorely-tried mourner hastens to the holy seer, that he may ascend in prayer for her to the sanctuary of heaven, before the throne of the Almighty, that, if possible, he may move the God of all gods, by his supplications, to utter a word of power, and restore her dear child from the dead.

The Shunammite approaches Mount Carmel. The prophet sees her, and feeling some anxiety concerning her, sends his servant Gehazi to meet her. "Run now," he says, "and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with thy child?" "It is well," answers the poor woman, not knowing what she says, and hastens to the man of God. And what an affecting scene ensues when she reaches him! Before Elisha is aware of it, the deeply strieken mother falls sobbing at his feet, while her trembling hands embrace his knees. Gehazi, imagining such importunity could only be annoying to his master, and was little in accordance with the reverence due to him, acted, as afterwards, the disciples acted towards those mothers who brought their children to Jesus. With a gesture of anger, he draws near to the trembling woman to thrust her from the prophet's feet.

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Elisha, however, his heart full of compassion, says to the boy: "Let her alone, for her soul is vexed w. her: and the Lord hath hid it from me and hath told me." And now the poor creature, stammer. and with a choking voice, begins to tell the prophet of the calamity that had befallen her. Scarcely has Elisha heard the cause of her boundless sorrow, when an ardent wish at once arises in his heart, that God would vouchsafe to permit him, by a miracle, to raise the boy from the dead, and dry the poor mother's tears. Hoping the best from everlasting Love, he says to Gehazi: "Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man salute him not: and if any man salute thee, answer him not again; and lay my staff upon the face of the child."

Scarcely has Gehazi heard these words, when he grasps the staff and hastens away. This commission pleases him. "Ha!" thinks the presumptuous boy, "I bear the sceptre now, I am king to-day." Greatly delighted that, for once, the splendor and glory of his master would surround him, he runs almost breathless to the village, and if he had been permitted he would have called out to every one that met him: "Come to Shunem to-day, and you will see wonders." He enters Shunem. What a solemn mien the foolish boy assumes. With what gravity does he enter the house of death. "I come," he says, "to rob death of his prey, and to restore to you the son of the house. Where is the corpse?" He is led up the stairs, and the door of the chamber of death is opened. Slowly, with mea-

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sured steps, Gehazi approaches the dead body, views it with singular and mysterious gestures, lays the miraculous staff upon the pallid face, and doubts not but the child will at once unclose his eyes, and rise from his bed. The sorrowing servants stand around in anxious expectation, but the dead boy does not stir. "Patience! patience!" thinks Gehazi, and lays the staff in a different position. In vain! The corpse remains rigid and insensible. The would-be prophet again changes the position of the staff. It is all to no purpose. Well, in this way then, he may perhaps succeed. But no. There is neither life, nor motion, nor voice, nor hearing. Melancholy scene! The spectators cast their eyes to the ground. Gehazi, the ridiculous object of their compassion, does not venture to look up for shame; he would give anything in the world if he were well rid of the lofty part which he had assumed. "Well, well," he thinks, as if a stroke of magic had hurled him from his grandeur nto a position of the most painful embarrassment, "the staff alone, it seems, will not do it; neither will grimaces nor solemn mummery. I find that it is of *some* importance whose hand bears the staff, whether the hand of a master, or that of a vain, presumptuous boy. In thy presence, Gehazi, death and the devil do not appear to tremble." Thus thinks the mortified Gehazi to himself. It was necessary that the frivolous youth should be brought to feel thus. Elisha wished it doubtless. Nay, we are almost tempted to believe that it was solely with this intent that the prophet had sent him with his staff to Shunem.

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The instruction which Gehazi drew from this melancholy scene, it affords to us also. No, the *staff* of the man of God is not everything. What we have that may co-operate with it is the question. A wonder-working staff is prayer, adjuring, in the name of Jesus, a relying faith in this or that divine word of promise. How often has the kingdom of hell been vanquished by it, how often have the mountains been constrained to move from their places, and the seas to divide. Yes, the *world* is subject to its bidding if *Faith* but wields this staff. But where *formulas* are to perform the wonder, we behold a caricature of holy things, a farce like that in which Gehazi figured, whatever artificial emotions may co-operate with these formulas as a substitute for faith. To how many has that happened which happened to the sons of the high priest Sceva, when they would have cast out devils. As Gehazi tried to imitate his master Elisha, so they tried to imitate Paul. "We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth," they said with great pathos. But the evil spirit, far from fearing the theatrical wand of these vaporing heroes, answered and said: "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?—and the man, in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." It is an easy thing, my dear hearers, to clothe a prayer in the *form* of that prayer, to which everything is promised. It is an easy thing with the words: "In the name of Jesus!" to bid *this* one depart or *that* one to come. It is very easy to hold up God's promises to his face, and

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thereupon, in a heathenish tone, to desire this or that benefit at his hands, or to meddle with the keys of his kingdom, and with a parade of apostolic unction, to proclaim to one that his sins are remitted, to another that they are retained. But the formula is an empty sound. Faith alone elevates it to a word of power. Have faith, even as a grain of mustard seed, and all is subject unto thee. Feign to have faith, and be a master in the art of feigning, and thou wilt quit the scene disgraced and baffled.

V. Even from the very first the Shunammite was not quite satisfied with Elisha's sending his attendant. How could *he* benefit her in her sorrow? That death would not retire before his presence seemed a settled thing to her. It was necessary that Elisha himself should come. With all the earnestness of her bleeding heart, she urges him to follow her. "Thou *must*," she says. "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" Here was a kind of reproach, then. "Thou needst not have entreated a son for me of Jehovah, if he was to be taken away from me again." Truly in moments of calm reflection she would not have used such language. But it is her grief that speaks here; it is love that speaks, love, cast by *one* stroke out of all its earthly heaven. In such situations, even with the faithful, the whole landscape of their feelings, views, and temper, emerges from the veil which hides it. The sweet flowery fields of their *new* nature, arise in their grateful, heavenly beauty, but the wastes of their *former* nature also show themselves, with their

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smoking craters, with the torrents and cataracts of unhallowed emotions and passions. "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." An appeal like this, in truth, might have softened a heart of stone. But Elisha did not need such entreaty. He went with her willingly; he would have gone with her unasked. Love and compassion, and a desire to aid her, would not have suffered him to remain behind.

How happy is the sorely afflicted mother, when the prophet actually sets out to return with her. She feels as if her son were already restored to her. In spirit she again beholds her cottage in Shunem lying before her in the brightest sunlight; the clouds that lowered over it have divided, and given place to the bright dawn of new days of joy. To see the man of God at her side, lifted her above all her cares and sorrows. In his presence she beholds the surest warrant that all will turn out well. In her eyes he is a walking tree of paradise, from which she already plucks the sweetest fruit of consolation, and soon—she feels sure of this—will pluck the fruit of real help and succor. But if the mere presence of a human friend, in whom but a slight gleam of the divine power and grace was reflected, could strew her path with such roseate light, how joyfully may *we* pursue our path, *we*, who know that One walks at our side, in whom dwells the fulness of all love and power, and the latchet of whose shoe Elisha did not esteem himself worthy to unloose.

When not far from Shunem, Gehazi comes hastening to meet them, to announce, with shame, to his master

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that the staff had produced no effect; the child had not awaked. "Well," replied Elisha, who has his own thoughts about the matter, "I am coming." And thus he walks into the village, the woman riding upon the Ass at his side. And many who saw the poor mother coming may perhaps have started, and whispered, wondering, to each other: "How joyful and happy she looks of a sudden, as if she were going to a marriage feast!" Others may have guessed the reason of this, and thought: "To-day there will be something strange done in Shunem; for he, at her side, is the man of God." Elisha enters the gloomy house of death. The mother follows him. Her husband, who had returned home in the meanwhile, receives her with loud weeping, and the servants likewise. But she silences the mourners. "Weep not," she says, "the Lord will help us." Elisha at once directs the chamber of death to be opened to him. Without uttering a word he enters, far differently from Gehazi, seriously, calmly, and without any outward pomp; and after having begged those present to leave him for a while alone with the dead, he shuts the door of the chamber, and begins to storm the throne of majesty and grace. Now, Death and the Devil, arm yourselves for the fight! A greater than Gehazi is here; here is more than a wooden staff, more than a hollow formula. Here is reliance upon the Almighty's word and arm, here is the might of that faith which removes mountains, and the wonder-working breath of prayer.

At the prophet's first entreaty the bands of death are not loosed. Then he lay upon the child, and put his

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mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands, and stretched himself upon the child, so that the flesh of the child waxed warm. Wherefore does he do this? He does it in the warmth of holy emotion. The child must live again to God's glory. Rather than death shall hold him, the prophet will pour out his own life upon him. It is as if he said: "Oh, Lord, I and this child are one. I cannot let the boy go. Either permit him to share life with me, or permit me to share the grave with him. If it is thy will, oh Lord, that thy servant should walk longer upon the earth, awake this dead body; for I am dead with him. If it is thy will to leave him in death's hand, thou hast pronounced a sentence of death over me, thy servant; for I cannot separate myself from this body." Behold, this was the meaning of the prophet's singular conduct. But even the importunity of this most urgent prayer remains without effect. Then the man of God rises from the body, opens the chamber door and steps forth, and begins to walk in the house to and fro; now hither, now thither, from chamber to chamber, forgetting himself, wringing his hands, and with his eyes directed towards heaven. It is necessary to force a hearing from God's unwilling ear; to break the bolts that close the gates of heaven. Hard strife! Desperate, agonizing struggle! He wrestles for the life of the dead child. His weapons are his fervent sighs, his groans, and tears. He brings up all before the Almighty, by which he has the slightest hope to touch His heart, or to move Him to grant his prayer; the honor of His name, which was

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precious to him above all things, His promises, the love which He had pledged to him, His prophet, and the Shunammite for ever, the mother's pain and unspeakable sorrow, the sacrifice of the promised Redeemer, and who can say what more of this kind beside? Then he hastens back to the chamber, stretches himself upon the dead child again, embraces him anew, prays, and sighs, and wrestles with such fervor, as if he had actually purposed to vanquish God, or to die at his feet. Then, oh joyful omen! the child begins to sneeze—a sign of returning life—and after he had sneezed seven times, he opens his eyes, looks at the prophet with a clear, bright glance, and—lives! Elisha at once calls Gehazi, and says to him: "Call this Shunammite." Gehazi performs his errand. "The master calls thee!" The happy mother then starts quickly from her seat, and her heart, like an instrument of strings, begins to sound: "Praise the Lord!" for that she is called to receive her darling alive again, she has not the slightest doubt. She hastens up, almost breathless for joy. Her hopes have not deceived her. Even at the threshold of the chamber, the prophet meets the happy woman, shows her the dear boy in all the rosy freshness of life, says to her in a few, brief, broken words: "Take up thy son," for his deep emotion will not suffer him to say more. Scarcely has the mother beheld the boy, when she falls at Elisha's feet, and covers them with a stream of joyful tears. Hallelujah after hallelujah arises from the depths of her agitated soul, to the throne of Him who has done such great things for her. Not only has she her son, but

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she has her God again. Her child restored to her is a renewed pledge of Jehovah's grace; a living monument, with the inscription: "Fear not, for I, the Lord, am with thee!" Nay, he is still more to her, infinitely more. Think what, after the sacrifice, Isaac must have been to his father Abraham. All this is her child now to the happy Shunammite.

"And she took up her son, and went out," says the narrative, in conclusion. Whither? Oh, we can guess indeed, yet we cannot follow her now. The narrative closes the door of the chamber behind her. With soft steps we walk by it. Within we hear sobs, half, as it seems from joy, and half from shame, and broken words interrupt them, words of contrition, adoration, and thanksgiving. Ah, let us leave her in her unspeakable emotion! She lies, with her child, at the feet of the Lord. She renews the surrender of her heart to the God of her salvation. She dedicates the boy to him as his everlasting possession. She lays down her all upon the steps of his throne. Hallowed, significant moment! But let us pass by, let us pass by, my dear hearers. At such moments we must not play the listener. But let us rejoice that the Lord has rendered his name so glorious among the sons of men, and that his goodness endures for ever, over those whose names he has once inscribed upon the Book of Life.

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CHAPTER VII.

DEATH IN THE POT.

WHO are they that have not seen death, and still have died? A singular question, is it not? To have died, without having seen death, seems folly, contradiction, absurdity. Yes, indeed, to him who is altogether a stranger to the mysteries of the gospel, it can appear in no other light than this. And still the question is not so foolish as it seems. It is a riddle only. The key to this riddle is not wanting. The solution is wonderful and glorious. How! there are actually men who have died, although the hour of their death has not yet come? Yes, there are such. Well, they may have died in a dream? No, in reality. They have died actually, although they still walk in the midst of us.

And who are these wonderful people? Ye are they, so many of you as have put on Christ. The apostle, in his epistle to the Colossians, iii. 3, addresses you thus: "*For ye are dead.*" How wonderful is this! You have outlived yourselves. Not your friends merely, you yourselves have stood beside your dying bed. You yourselves may visit your own graves; nay, if you wish, pronounce your own funeral discourse. Confess,

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you are not a little amazed at what I testify concerning you. "Well," you reply, "where then did we die, where was our death-bed, where is our burial-place?" How, you do not know? You do not know the burial-place of your Head? You do no know the dying bed of the second Adam? And have you forgotten that the Scriptures are wont to term those who belong to Christ, crucified, dead, and buried with him? "Ah, is it thus we are to understand the matter?" Certainly. Look up to Golgotha. What is it that comes rolling onward against the saints of Israel? Like a monster it advances upon the wings of night. It comes with a thousand terrors, horrors, torments. The anger of the Almighty is in its train, and rejoicing Hell among its attendants. It rushes onward, without bit or bridle. With the Man that hangs upon the cross, it may work its pleasure. No comforting angel stands at his side; no shield from on high protects him against the monster's fury. He is forsaken of God and of all the world. In this terrible condition he sees the hideous being advance against him. It quenches the light of his eyes, checks the pulses of his heart, covers his limbs with icy pallor, and amid hell's triumphant shout rends body and soul asunder. What dreadful monster is this? By what name is this fearful destruction of the everlasting Son, this bloody catastrophe and desolation, to be named? Its name is *Death*. And whose death is it that Christ died? It is not Christ's death. It is *thy* death and *mine*. It is the death of the curse which was pronounced against us sinners. But a holy substitute suffers it. He suffers it for us, in

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our place, in our name. *We* therefore suffered it in Him. We have died in Him. Died actually and really, so died indeed that we have paid the ransom from the curse once for all in Christ; so died that death so far as it is to be *feared* can no more touch us; so died that should we die again in the sense of the word death, as expressing terror, God's justice would be annihilated; so died that we can inscribe the old Adam in the book of death, and with the words: "Softly rest thine ashes!" or "adieu for ever!" count him among the things which no longer exist before God, but have been consigned to the deep grave of everlasting oblivion. Behold, my friends, this is the ground on which we triumph, and shout: "Death, where is thy sting? Hell, where is thy victory?" If we but take our stand upon this rock of truth, we shall see the king of terrors lying trampled beneath our feet, and all fear of death and of the grave will be scattered before us. Death lies behind us. *We have died.*

2 KINGS IV. 30–41.

And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds, his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof. But he said, Then bring meal... And he

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cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot.

It is possible that the narrative just read may not appear so attractive and significant as the one which last occupied our attention, still it confirms the words of the apostle that *all* Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. This narrative leads us to truths and thoughts which, while in themselves of great moment, have a double interest in our eyes, from the circumstances of the times in which we live. It brings before our view the living God as he discloses himself to his children, in days of trial and calamity, and do I mistake in thinking that scenes, like that described in our text, are especially adapted to the needs of our hearts at the present time?

Let us examine then the separate features of our narrative more closely. There are three points which will particularly invite our attention. They are the following. First: *The people of the Lord in the refining fire.* Secondly: *Death among the heirs of heaven.* Thirdly: *The unshortened arm of the Everlasting God.*

I. It is upon the road to Gilgal that we meet the man of God to-day. You are acquainted with the village of Gilgal. It lay in the plain of the valley of Jordan, not far from Jericho. Here, also, as you remember, in the midst of a deeply degraded and idolatrous race, there was a flourishing school of the prophets, and it was from Gilgal that we accompanied the Tishbite to

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the scene of his final triumph, his translation to heaven in the wilderness. Since our last visit how have the plains of Israel changed their face! Who would recognise the lovely land again? It has become a desert. At that time, as you remember, far as the eye could reach, we beheld ourselves surrounded by waving fields of yellow corn. Upon all the highways, heavily-laden harvest wagons passed by us, groaning beneath their rich burdens. The orange trees and the vines were scarcely able to support the weight of their luxuriant fruit. In short, naught but images of blessing and abundance met the eye on all sides, and the mirth of the reapers and gleaners, and the shouts of the vintagers on the hills, were scarcely interrupted day or night. Now all is changed. A fearful dearth has fallen upon the land. The fields are parched, as if smitten with a curse; the sickles hang, rusting, against the walls, and a great portion of the people are already suffering from famine, an evil which appears the more plainly as a visitation of the divine wrath, from the fact that they were so little accustomed to such want in this most highly favored and fruitful of all lands. The sons of the prophets also, whose worldly wealth, as you are aware, was not over-abundant, have their full share in the general calamity. Elisha is on his way to visit them. He might have remained at Shunem, if it had pleased him. He was entertained there with joy by his kind friends, and beneath their hospitable roof he would have experienced little or nothing of the distresses of that calamitous season. But there was nothing in the world, that could have induced Elisha

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to pursue this course. "No," he said to himself, "my post is at Gilgal." His heart, as well as his calling, bound him to the school of the prophets. And a good shepherd does not flee when his sheep are in extremity; no, this offers rather a sweet occasion to him to share all things, even death itself, with his flock. It was nobly done in Russia's high-souled emperor, that, at the time when that fearful scourge of God, the Asiatic cholera, impended over the land, he did not, like others, seek an asylum in a foreign country, but remained quietly amongst his people, nay, repaired to the infected cities, and there kneeling with his subjects in the open street, cast himself into the arms of divine compassion, and entreated the Almighty for mercy and rescue for himself and his people.

It was nobly done and worthy of all praise, that, at the time when that same pestilence prevailed, those missionaries in the far east, in answer to the well-meaning friends, who counselled them to seek refuge and safety in the hills and mountains, replied with holy zeal: "Be that far from us! The Lord keep us from a step so worthy of a hireling! It is true, only *he* will, with true joy and heartfelt earnestness be able to testify such fidelity, in whose breast a spark is kindled of love for Him, who said, in a sense in which no other could say it of himself: "I am the good shepherd. But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth

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not for the sheep. The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep!" Oh, may this shepherd's love consume within our hearts that monster selfishness!

Elisha reaches Gilgal. Sadness prevails in the little community. The sons of the prophets have already consumed the last remnants of their scanty stores. Their gardens are empty; empty are their cupboards and their purses. The poor creatures are actually suffering from hunger, and their wealthier neighbors feel rather inclined to ask them scoffingly: "Where is now your God?" than to hold forth a helping hand to them. There they are, the apples of His eye, and what advantage have they over the godless? Are they not pining in the same need? Does not the same cloud of anger rest upon them? Oh, how often do we meet with this strange spectacle! In truth it not seldom happens that God's children are visited even with greater evils than the children of the world, and that help appears far sooner to the latter than to them. Are there not many among you who can confirm this assertion by instances from your own life and experience? "But this is singular," I hear you say. Unquestionably it is, my friends, and to some indeed it might appear still more than that. "Where then," you ask, "is the distinction between those whom God loves, and those who are the objects of his anger?" In their outward condition this distinction is effaced. After the flesh they are both subject to *the same* calamities. And still it requires but slight reflection to discover an infinite difference between the condition of those who serve God, and those who walk in the ways of the

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devil. The same thorn-bush of sorrow, what different fruit it bears upon thy field, my brother, and upon that of thine unrepentant neighbor? To thee it bears figs and grapes; to him sour grapes that bring death. The same calamity, how differently does it enter thy dwelling and the dwelling of that man. With him it appears as a scourge, brandished by the hand of an angry judge; with thee it is but a rod of faithful, well-meant discipline, held with sadness by the hand of paternal tenderness and love. The same billow of misfortune, in what different directions does it bear thee and him; thee to the feet and the bosom of the great guardian of mankind; him upon the sand-bank of vexation, against the fearful rock of despondency. And the same clouds of sorrow that descend upon you, how differently do they approach thee and him. To him they are the shadows of death, beneath which harbor naught but care, anguish, and despair; to thee they approach as the smoke of the incense above the ark of the covenant, in which the Lord God comes nigh to thee, to breathe the strength of patience, and the balm of consolation into thy heart. Do I listen to thee in thy night of sorrow, what falls upon my ear? "Alas," I hear thee say, "had I not thee, Lord Jesus, what should I do?" In days of prosperity I have never heard thee sigh thus. Behold, what a blessing is here revealed to thee in thy cross; what a sweet gain, that thou art so vividly conscious of the happiness thou dost enjoy in Jesus. Do I watch thee in thy solitude, what do I perceive? I see, how, with many tears, thou hast bowed thyself in the dust, and hear

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again and again, the confession escape from thy breast, that thou art worthy to be smitten with the world, and that nothing is left thee, except to take refuge in God's free grace and mercy. Oh, what sweet new wine is this again, which is trodden out in the wine-press of thy sorrow. No, to thee it is no judgment, it is unmingled blessing, when thou art chastened with the ungodly. But to the ungodly it is a judgment, that God, instead of distinguishing thee from them by some miraculous rescue, places thee, apparently, on a perfect level with themselves, and thus veils thee from them. For this confirms them in the sad delusion, that it fares not otherwise with the righteous than with the unrighteous; this holds them captive in their unbelief, and leads them, in their blindness, to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

At the moment when, following our narrative, we reach Gilgal, a sweet and refreshing spectacle is offered to us. Where do we find the sons of the prophets? They are sitting together, with their master, like a father, in the midst of them. Elisha speaks, consoles, encourages them, and they devour the words of life, that flow like a stream of balsam from his lips. It is long, they think, since they have seen him so cheerful as at the present moment. How truly happy do they feel in his presence. The man of God has risen upon them like a bright star in the night of their affliction. The shadows of care vanish before his words, like the clouds before the beams of the sun, and every eye looks clear and bright again. Yes, my friends, even

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days of calamity bring their joys and sweets. They bring them to us, veiled merely beneath a mantle of mourning, while other days offer us theirs upon uncovered dishes, crowned with garlands. These days awake within us a sense of our dependence; they are like the storms of spring, which unlock the fountains, and cause their waters to flow forth. These are the days when the ointment of the divine promises gives forth its odor, and a breath of resurrection stirs amid the graves of God's prophets. Those old and bearded comforters then first speak with meaning to us, and their feet are pleasant upon the mountains. A multitude of texts, which, in summer days, we have known neither how to heed nor to value, now gleam up like blessed stars on the horizon. Chambers of light and peace are discovered in the temple of the Scriptures, of which, until now, we never had a presage. The spirit celebrates a joyful festival of paradise, while the heart lies often in the deepest mourning; and while the flesh writhes in the glowing crucible, the soul rejoices that the refiner is near.

After Elisha, with his words of consolation, had banished care from the dear circle around him and had tuned their hearts to a different key, he turns thoughtfully, yet cheerfully, to his servant and says: "Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets." But not a vegetable was to be had; not even a green leaf, was to be seen in the garden. Then one of the young men hastens out into the field, to see if he cannot discover some tolerably palatable herb in the thicket or behind the hedges, for to this extremity

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were they reduced. "Well," you say to yourselves, "for him God will have a plant or so still left in his wide garden." Yes, one would think so. "He will surely lead the good youth to the right spot, and guide his hands and his feet." Certainly, we are greatly interested in believing this. And the youth finds something. His glance falls upon a luxuriant vine, that is completely covered with what appears like round, glistening apples. Filled with joy he gathers the shining fruit in his garment. "It cannot be that the poor man has made a mistake," you say. Who could think that God, whose child he is, would suffer this? For what the man took the fruit is not told us. Enough, he feels sure that he has found a prize, runs quickly home, and begins to cut them up to make a pottage, and has not the slightest thought that he is casting poison into the pot. "Poison?" you exclaim. Yes, truly. The youth has gathered wild gourds. "And God looked on, and did not hinder it." God permitted it. "Oh, but that seems unkind and cruel!" Have patience, patience! His name is *wonderful.* Withhold your judgment until the end of his ways appear. He suffers strange knots to become entangled in the lives of his children; but only to reveal to them his glory in their perplexity. He guides the wretched aright. His ways are mere goodness and truth.

The pottage is prepared and served up. The brethren, suspecting no evil, take their seats joyfully at the table. "And still there is no warning from above?" No, the Lord does not interfere. They even help themselves and eat. But scarcely have they

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tasted of the poisonous food, when its ill effects at once display themselves. A malady, attended with severe internal pains, seizes upon them. They imagine they even feel the hand of death. With woful gestures they start from their seats, and cry, groaning and writhing: "Oh, thou man of God, there is death in the pot!" In truth, it was a heart-rending scene! They had gone to table so encouraged and cheerful in God, so full of heartfelt thanks for the renewal of his bounty. "No," they had said to each other, "the guardian of Israel has not forsaken us in our extremity!" And now, this sudden and unexpected calamity! What a sad contrast! What a jarring discord in the pleasant harmony of their lately-renewed confidence in God! Truly, upon Divine guidance such as this, the most child-like faith might have suffered shipwreck. But when the Lord surrounds his people with such enigmas of his providence, he does it, above all, to draw from their hearts the complaining cry of Job: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Secondly he does it to prepare for his assisting grace, a field of triumph and of glory. Thirdly, he does it to unlock those tears of shame, which, after hours of distrustful murmuring, pour themselves like a refreshing, reviving dew, over the noblest plants in the garden of our hearts.

II. But what shall we think of the fact that those heirs of heaven, there at Gilgal, could display, as it seemed, so strange a fear of death? It appears as if they feel already touched by the hand of this stern visitor; a tumult arises amongst them, as if some fear-

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ful monster of the abyss were threatening to devour them. And of whom were they so terribly afraid? They tremble before him, who bids them to the marriage feast of their heavenly bridegroom; before the pilot, who is steering from Meshech towards Jerusalem, before him who dries all tears, who guides us from a strange and desert land to the happiest home. But in this well-meaning friend and messenger, they behold a goblin, a dragon with flaming eyes, a yawning monster, at whose first, slight greeting, the hair stands erect upon their heads. And what if death were actually in the pot? Let but a few moments pass, and they would be seated with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, at the heavenly table, and recline by the rivers of everlasting happiness, and be for ever freed and loosed from all their cares and sorrows. But there was an evil blur upon their eye of faith, therefore they saw nothing of all this. The eye of unbelieving nature alone was open, and thus, like people at a masquerade, they could not penetrate the hideous disguise, in which the friendliest form approached them.

It is a disgrace, and a shame, and a sin, for God's children to tremble at death. If our brethren under Moses, were not always able to greet the darkness of the last hour and triumph, yet this, perhaps, was pardonable, because of those clouds, which, in their eyes, overshadowed it. But if *we*, beneath the open sky of the New Testament, and beneath the standards of the first and sixtieth questions of our catechism, with childish cowardice, and womanish fear, draw back in terror from that messenger of freedom, we pay but a poor

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compliment to the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as brand upon our brows a shameful stamp of stupidity and unbelief. Why, reflect how we are armed against this strong one! Reflect upon the breast-plate of perfect righteousness that covers our bosom; upon the sword of Jesus' blessed promises, that gleams in our right hand; upon the helmet of infallible hope, that rests upon our heads, and upon the assurances of certain victory, that form our greaves and gauntlets. Graves have been forced to open their recesses, to prove to us that they are but chambers of repose; the dead have been constrained to rise from corruption, to deliver us from all fear of annihilation; transfigured saints have come down from heaven to earth, that we might see with our eyes that death's trade is but a carrier's, and bands of angels visibly descend, to attest to us by their presence, as if with a bodily oath, that the world beyond is no dream nor fiction, but a reality more real than this earth. But what said I a moment since, of being armed against death, as if death to the righteous were an enemy, and his approach a hostile assault? Is that a hostile assault when a mother lays her nursling softly in the cradle? Is that a hostile assault when a friend approaches to open my prison doors, that I may hasten into freedom? Need I sound the alarm, when some one grasps me, to bear me from a couch of thorns and thistles, up to Abraham's bosom? Must I draw the sword when a solemn train approaches, to place a crown of life upon my head? And all this that I have named, happens in the act which we call dying, as He assures us, who confirmed

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his words, not with a seal, but with deeds of omnipotence, and who, that our hope might have a superabundant basis, arose to heaven before our eyes, in our flesh and blood, and left behind to us the joyful declaration: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." It is not against death that I need to arm. My death means kindly by me. His name is Jesus. It is against the devil only that I need to arm, that he may not shroud Death's true form, and clothe it in a goblin's mask; it is against my fancy that I need to arm, that it may not torture me with visions which have no reality; it is against my sinful flesh that I need to arm, that, in my stupid cowardice, it may not maintain the upper hand; to arm against my feeble faith, which, like Martha's, gets ensnared in the odor of corruption, instead of turning to the perfume that comes from the east. That strange emotions should disturb the Christian's mind, when the last visitor pays his greeting, is to be expected. From one world into another—what a step is that! From the sleeping chamber, in the twinkling of an eye, into the presence of the Most High, into the circle of the holy angels—what a transition! Why, at such a moment, should he not feel strangely, why should his heart not throb at the approach of such an event? But if it throb from aught else than a hallowed thrill of expectation, a solemn, foreboding joy, he mistakes his position, and has left his post.

A Christian, who is unwilling to die, is false to his word. What happened when we joined ourselves unto

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the Lord. The world then lost us, nay, we lost ourselves. We said: "Do what thou wilt with us," and surrendered soul and body to our Redeemer, for him to dispose therewith, according to his pleasure. And now, when he claims what we ourselves have surrendered, when he chooses to accept the offering that we freely dedicated to him, and perform his gracious will with us, as we desired, does it become us to shrink back, and withdraw an allegiance once voluntarily offered? When we turned to God, we died, inasmuch as we laid our all upon God's altar, even our body and our life. At the moment of our death he graciously accepts the offering. How reasonable is it then that we should bow in silence beneath his hand, and greet the hour of our departure as an hour of repose.

Death is a summons from God. No one dies by chance; but every one dies at the moment when he should die; no earlier, no later. "All our days," say the Scriptures, "are written in his book." Job exclaims: "Thou hast, oh Lord, appointed man his bounds, that he cannot pass." Dying is not the work of sickness, or of the sword, but of God. An everlasting decree rules our coming and our going. How ill therefore does it become a Christian to feel anxiety and alarm about dying. No fall, no arrow, no pestilence will harm him, until the hour has come, which stands marked opposite to his name upon the great book. And when it comes, what happens? Well, a voice of love, a father's voice, calls: "Return, oh child of man!" And who would not gladly obey?

Death, too, as you well know, stands inscribed in

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the inventory and register of the goods of God's children. Paul says to us: "Death is yours." Most true, and not we death's. To the Christian, death is indeed a stern, but still a well-meaning friend. He is to him, what that staff was to Moses, from which, at first, he fled, though without cause indeed; but which afterwards bore him through the Red Sea, into a land flowing with milk and honey. Death can no more injure me than David injured King Saul, when he cut off the skirt of his robe. He is to me like Sampson's lion, of which it is written: "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." "Death," says a wise man, "is a great teacher." If he quenches the sun and the moon to our earthly eyes, which would fain recognise no other light than a created one, yet a higher, spiritual, everlasting light arises upon us, in whose brightness all the painted lights of earth become as shadows.

Death comes, bearing the banner of freedom. He releases us from the most terrible of all terrors, sin. So long as we linger here below, we are united to a mass of corruption. We cannot hinder wicked thoughts from starting up, at times, in our hearts, like the sparks in a smithy. Sin, even although forgiven, still cleaves to us, and weighs us down to earth. We try to pray, but our heart is like an untuned lute. We would fain weep, and our eyes are like clouds without water. The flesh strives always against the spirit. No breeze of temptation need blow upon us—there is enough of its strong current in our hearts, to impel us continually into new pit-falls. Death then is the last and best phy-

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sician, and heals all injuries and frailties, the sick head, the faint and drooping heart. Sin was the mother of death; death is the grave, again to swallow up sin. The death of the body destroys the body of this death. It strips us of our unclean garments, to clothe us with the sumptuous apparel of immortality.

When the patriarch Jacob beheld the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him to Goshen, "then his spirit revived." Thus should a glance at his last hour affect the Christian. His death is but a wagon, which his Joseph sends him that it may carry him to Goshen; an Elijah's chariot, drawn by angels; a bark, with a sky-blue pennon, which, impelled by the breeze of mercy, steers toward golden shores. "The day of death," says Solomon, "is better than the day of life." It is the Christian ascension-day, the birth-day of his true life. To die is his gain, his highest advancement, his phœnix flight, from out the ashes of mortality, into the perfect day, into eternal brightness.

To the Christian, death is a herald decked with garlands, who invites him to the everlasting marriage feast, who guides him there where he will see *Him*, without a veil, whose sight he justly deems the costliest jewel in the crown of heavenly joys. And he will see him, not as Adam saw him, and went and hid himself, but as Esther saw king Ahasuerus, who graciously reached out to her his golden sceptre. He will bask in the smile of his countenance, and happier even than John, he will repose in his lap, on his bosom. Then all his desires will be fulfilled, all his senses satisfied; the eye, with the image of the fairest among the

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children of men; the ear, with songs and harmonies, to which the most ravishing sounds of earth are a harsh discord; the nostrils, with a living perfume, of which here below we have no conception; the palate, with the manna of the Father's approbation, with the sweet wine of his love; the understanding, with the light of perfect wisdom; the heart, with the power to love as it would wish to love; the will, with the most unbounded activity, and the whole soul with the most blissful consciousness that these joys will never end, for they are entwined with the evergreen garland of eternity.

How unseemly was it, then, in those holy men at Gilgal, that, when they believed themselves assailed by death, they broke out into such a noise and tumult. There are occasions, indeed, in which such cries would be perfectly in place. When a system of ethics would commend itself to us, which makes no mention of blood, which teaches us a way to heaven that turns aside from Golgotha; when a theology seeks to sustain itself without Christ, without a priesthood and an offering, be it in books or from the pulpit, concealed behind the mask of truth, or with vizor lifted, and in shameless nakedness, then indeed should we start back with horror, and cry: "There is death in the pot!" Then, in truth, poisoned viands are served up, wild gourds, plucked from the fields of the great Destroyer of souls. He who is tempted to partake thereof, imbibes *everlasting* death into his veins, and against *this* death there grows no herb nor plant of healing. No table, in our days, is more plentifully supplied than that of letters; in no kitchen are so many cooks employed, as in that

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of literature. Alas! that this kitchen has, for the most part, become a laboratory of the devil! Let us, then, be carefully on our guard against the daintily ornamented wares, which are there offered us, even though their symbols are a cross or a chalice. Often the inscription over whole libraries should read, "Death in the pot!" and alas, over how many school doors and church doors also, should this inscription be written!

III. Let us return to Gilgal. The condition of the sons of the prophets is certainly one well calculated to cause despondency. They were suffering from famine, they hoped in Him who feeds the young ravens, they praised him joyfully for the food that they had found, but when they would eat thereof, with hearts moved with gratitude, it proves to be—a deadly poison!—Death in the pot! In what a light does God now suddenly appear to them, in suffering them to fall into so grievous an error; in what a light the prophet, who was the immediate occasion of this noxious meal! Was it strange that the poor brethren should almost feel like persons maliciously deceived, and call to mind words like the words of the Lord, in Hosea: "Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them." The danger which threatened their faith, was to be rated infinitely higher than that which seemed to threaten their lives. In this hurtful food, they ate the germ of death to their child-like confidence in the Lord. The star of everlasting truth, the only solace which had hitherto been left them, began to grow dim to their glances and veil itself in dark clouds. The God of their hopes threatened to forsake

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them, and this abandonment was far more fatal than that death which called forth their cries of anguish. Yet how kind, how faithful was Jehovah's purpose towards them! This great misfortune was meant as a mirror, from which his rescuing mercy should be reflected with redoubled splendor. The more terrible the storm, the more cheering the sunshine that follows it. The more complicated the difficulty, the greater his glory, who is able to bring it to a happy issue. The prophet has already received his instructions. God will bring help. No one rejoices more at this than Elisha himself. His own anxiety had not been slight, when the harmony of their friendly circle was so fearfully interrupted by that unexpected cry of terror. But his anxiety, instead of driving him from God, bore him directly upward. He poured forth his startled soul, in ardent sighs, to *Him* who can rescue even from death, and the "Amen!" from on high did not linger in its coming. No, these brethren shall not die, they shall live; they shall not be justified in their mistrust of God, but find cause to condemn it, with the deepest shame. How lamentable would it have been, if these sole depositaries of the divine light and life, had been taken away out of the land! What a loss for the world, what a triumph for Satan and his idolatrous followers! Without doubt the cry: "There is death in the pot!" was already re-echoed on the part of Hell with a shout of victory. But disappointment of this kind often befalls the powers of darkness, often in the midst of their riotous joy, the cymbals of triumph suddenly break beneath their hands, and the shout of

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victory sticks in their throats; for, in the twinkling of an eye, the whole affair at once assumes another aspect, and the fancied conquest proves a total defeat. In their operations against the children of God, they are incessantly served thus. Conquering they submit, while these submitting, conquer.

Elisha asks for a little meal. Who could have thought that this simple means would conquer death, and spoil hell's triumph? Yet the prophet commands it in the name of the Lord. And what power cannot the most insignificant substance exert, when joined with a word from God? Then, a cruse of salt suffices to redeem a whole land from the terrors of a desolation which has endured a thousand years. A piece of wood renders the bitter waters of Marah sweet and palatable. A little earth, moistened with spittle, gives sight to the blind, a drop of oil restores health to the dying. But to the efficacy of these remedies one condition is necessary, *one* ingredient should not be wanting: the blessing of God. Without *this*, the most carefully combined recipe is useless. But when this is present, it matters little as to the substratum. A cup of pure water performs the same service as the costliest mixture, as the most aromatic pill.

The sons of the prophets are not surprised at the simplicity of the means required by Elisha. They knew that it was God's wont to select small things as the instruments of his power. He who scorns that which is lowly, is altogether unfitted for that kingdom, where One, crowned with thorns, is king and mediator, where blood reconciles, where fishermen and publi-

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cans are high officers and interpreters of his Most High majesty, and where a simple book, stripped of all that is dazzling to the senses, proclaims itself as the voice of Jehovah. The brethren have soon brought the meal. What a little meal can do, so soon as a word of God is mingled with it, you yourselves have often experienced spiritually. How often has it taken death from your hearts, the film from your eyes, the palsy from your limbs! How often, when you have partaken of it, have you eaten angels' food, felt the peace of heaven fall like dew upon your souls, and in the strength of that food, have henceforth walked along the thorny path joyfully, and with head erect. Of what am I speaking? you ask. Of the bread which the Lord breaks for us at his table, and which is called significantly "The communion of Christ's body." True, it is not the bread that effects all this, but the word which cleaves to it, which transforms it to miraculous food, and refines the earthly element to a divine pledge and seal of everlasting happiness.

Elisha takes the meal, and casts it into the pot, without pomp or ceremony, but filled with strong confidence in *Him*, to whom it is a small thing to display his power through the humblest instruments. He then commands his servant, saying: "Pour out for the people that they may eat." And the sons of the prophets do not hesitate; they eat in full faith. But true faith is never put to shame; its reward is *a crown*. The angel of the covenant when wrestling with Jacob, put his thigh out of joint, but not his arms, that were firmly clasped about his neck. He alone is put to

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shame, who stands fast in his own strength; he who *believes,* beholds God's glory. And as the brethren ate, there was no harm in the pot. The food was savory and wholesome, and that which they had before eaten lost its noxious properties. This handful of meal was a sufficient instrument in the hands of the Almighty, to destroy the power of death, and to preserve to the world its salt, and to *Himself* his little church on earth. He need never tremble, who knows that such a God is on his side. He is a living God, who does what pleases him, both with the hosts of heaven and of earth. Nothing in the world possesses absolute power of itself. Who can say with certainty: "This will effect that, and that will effect this?" Everything in *every particular* case, effects what it should effect. God hath reserved to himself a higher office than that of being an idle spectator of all that is passing around him; he interposes freely and effectually, and alters laws, and powers, and natures, after his good pleasure.

Thus then, that happened to those holy men of Gilgal, which, in after days, was especially promised to the faithful in Christ's name. "If they drink any deadly thing," said the Saviour, "it shall not hurt them." How many thousand times have these words been confirmed on this earth. Spiritually they are fulfilled, unconditionally, to all God's children. For them there is nothing more that is injurious, deadly, soul-destroying. Even although by nature a thing may be all this, yet for the Christian a wonderful antidote is mingled with it, a blessing from on high, so that nothing now can injure him, but all things must work

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together for his good. How many die an everlasting death of this book, that system, that error! Serve it up before a Christian, and behold! there is no harm in the pot. For him every temptation, every fiery trial and snare, has such a result, that not only can he endure it, but he is constrained to praise and bless God for it. The most destructive poison in the world, a poison far worse than hemlock and wild gourds, is sin; but even from this, the deadly power is taken for Christ's children. Nay, it is compelled to serve as a wholesome physic for them; to one, it is the clay that restores sight to the blind eye, to another, the cordial of humiliation, to a third, a drop of oil, to feed the dying flame of his joy in Christ, or whatever else may minister to their good. It is *compelled* to serve and benefit them.

Oh, happy security of God's children, against whom all arrows are blunted, and all swords dull; "they shall play on the hole of the asp, and put their hand on the cockatrice-den." And all that would fain injure and destroy them, advances, against its will, their interests. To them, this hostile world is but the workshop of a refiner and a polisher. Even the devil serves them only as an assistant in the laboratory of a great physician, and prepares for them salutary pills and mixtures. Everything in the world has received the order: "Serve these little ones!" Everything spins itself out into wonderful threads, which but bind them the more closely with the original source of their bliss. And should those thus encompassed, droop, and suffer their hearts to sink at the approach of any evil what-

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soever? Oh, they should blush with shame at the thought. Lift up your heads, ye who are as the apple of God's eye! Whatever may happen, for you there is no death in the pot. Grace mingles itself with all, and makes it wholesome.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN OF BAAL-SHALISHA.

WHEN some one entered Luther's house, the bearer of sad tidings, Luther said: "The Gospel brings good tidings, and these are certain. Except these I know but few good tidings in this poor world." He might well say it, the man of God. Yes, it is indeed so.

But what is the best tidings which the Gospel brings to sinners? It is this, that the sinner is not found wanting before God. That God holds a balance above, in which he weighs us, is beyond a doubt. "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." You remember also that fearful writing, which, according to Daniel v. 27, an invisible finger wrote upon the wall, for the king of Babylon, a writing which is written in the life of every man, in so far as he is out of Christ, whether he can read and interpret it or not. I mean the fearful words: "*Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.*"

Yes—whoever thou art, thou wilt one day be placed in the balance of eternal justice. Let us watch the scene for a moment. The weight which thou must outweigh, is the law with its requirements and its curses. In the other scale thou thyself art placed, and

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now the question is to be decided. Thou hast all thy good works beside thee, but the scale in which lies the law does not even waver, much less rise aloft. Thou mayst increase thy weight with thy purposes and vows, but they are as dust in the balance. And if to these thou couldst add alms, that amounted to thousands, and a righteousness admired by the whole world, all these would be but foam and gossamer. They would not weigh an atom; how could they raise the mountain weight of the divine law? And with what wouldst thou weigh down the heaviness of the punishment which thou hast deserved for thy sins? Thinkst thou the few sorrows thou hast suffered in this world, will stand as an equivalent for the curse which thou hast incurred? Do not imagine it! Reflect! The punishment threatened thee is *endless* damnation; how canst thou conceive the thought that thou hast paid off this debt with a little earthly affliction in this span of *time?* If thou dost step into the balance of the sanctuary, as one separated from Christ, the result is no longer a question. The sceptre of righteousness will write the word '*Tekel*,' that is, weighed and found wanting, but it will not now write it as a warning upon the wall, but as a brand upon thy brow, a token of thy destruction! and amid the triumphant shout of scoffing devils, thou wilt be hurried howling down the fearful road to the pool of Gehenna.

Who then is it that will have the required weight in the fateful balance? He only who possesses Christ, and is united with him. Into his scale a mighty weight is cast: Christ's merits, as if they were his own. Christ's

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sacrificial blood outweighs the curse which man has drawn upon himself; Christ's obedience the requirements which man should have fulfilled. And oh, how wonderful! the scale of the law now rises aloft as lightly as a feather, and that of the sinner sinks. The sinner has now more than the required weight. The Angels and the Just made perfect see it, and shout joyfully over a new companion in the eternal kingdom.

Christ's obedience even unto death is worth much then? Much, truly; you may see this in the Redeemer himself. That obedience led him to the seat of honor. All the glory and happiness of heaven were joined therewith as a reward from the Father. If this obedience belongs to *us*, why should it weigh less than it has weighed for him? It entitles us also to wealth unspeakable. The first and most precious treasure, which it procures for us, is, the heart, the love of God, his all-protecting, all-providing love.

How consoling and elevating is it, to view the operations of this love in the circle of its children. The present moment affords us a favorable opportunity for this. It is true the ways of this love are often wonderful, yes, hidden in gloom, but "upon all the glory shall be a veil," says one of God's seers.

2 KINGS iv. 42–44.

And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that

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they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, they shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord.

That which is *typical* in the person, life, and time of Elisha is becoming more and more clear. The longer we contemplate them, the less can we fail to recognise therein the stamp of the New Testament. The present narrative reminds us strongly of a similar scene in the gospel, one upon a grander scale indeed than this of ours, since, at most, the latter seems to bear that relation to it, which a soft prelude bears to the full symphony, or which a single blade of wheat bears to a whole sheaf. Yet the blade contains its own sweet fruit. If we but thresh the ears somewhat carefully, we shall certainly find our reward, and shall take home with us many a grain of enduring consolation. *The man with the bread, Elisha's command*, and *Gehazi's mortification*, are the three subjects for our consideration on this occasion.

I. We meet again to-day at the same place and in the same circle, from which we parted a week ago. We are in Gilgal, in the company of the still sorely-straitened sons of the prophets. Thus far, in truth, the Lord hath helped them. There has been daily need, but daily, glorious rescue also. In the morning there are sighs and groans; in the evening, thanks and shouts of joy. Other security against renewed want, however, except that with which they may, through faith, console themselves, had not been granted them.

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The food which they received sufficed always for a single meal, but no farther. God prescribed a course of diet for them, and provided for them dish by dish, not from sacks or baskets. It is true they suffered perpetually recurring anxiety; but then, when the table was supplied again, they knew with the more certainty who it was that supplied it, and the meal tasted better and sweeter to them. Finally it became evident to them that the God who had received them, not in the stead of servants, but of children, had taken it upon him to provide for them, both body and soul, here in this life. They now gazed with more courage at their empty cupboards; they felt the renewed pangs of hunger with less anxiety, for they had learned to believe in a store which they could, indeed, neither behold with their eyes, nor touch with their hands; but which they knew was always near.

To-day we find them again in want. Their last morsel is consumed; whence they are to obtain a new supply, no one, as yet, can tell. They would gladly eat, but they are obliged to hunger. The hour of noon has already passed. They glance inquisitively at the prophet to see if they cannot read some good tidings in his mien. The prophet appears calm, and seems not even to be thinking of food and drink. Then doubt begins again to trouble some among them. "Alas!" thinks one, "when will there be an end to our sufferings?" "We escaped the poison of the wild gourds," says another, "to perish with hunger at last." There they sit, looking as sullen and as sour as if the bitter question were upon their tongues, whether indeed it

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were worth the while to trust longer in God. What shall we say to these sadly distempered souls? I think it were best to concede the question to them in their faint-heartedness. We reply: "No, it is not worth the while to hope in the Lord." We say: "True, he has his only begotten *Son* to give you; but *bread* he has not for you." We say: "The Lord careth for the young ravens, that they perish not with hunger; but whether he will have compassion upon you, you, to whom he has given his heart and his heaven, that you perish not, is a question. It is true he has, with the tender labor of love, numbered the hairs of your heads; but whether he knows your need, or troubles himself about your wants, is a matter of doubt." This were, in fact, the readiest method to deal with such wayward children, who although they are infinitely more than all things beneath the heavens, demean themselves as if they might not trust in the God of the birds of the air, and of the lilies of the field. Such a course might be the best means to bring them to a sense of the utter folly of their faint-heartedness, to chastise suitably their unseemly despondency, to force a smile from their lips, and to fan the dying sparks of their confidence again into a bright flame.

We are an impatient and exacting race, and must always behold the help even before we need it, and instead of being contented with a daily ransom, insist that the Lord pay down in advance, and give us, for example, joy in death before the hour of death; courage in battle before the standards are uplifted; the martyr's spirit before the pile is lighted; and bread

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and money while the taste of our last meal is still lingering in our mouths, and returning need is not yet here. "But are not matters at the last extremity with the brethren, in Gilgal?" Not yet, my beloved hearers; they will still hold out for an hour or two. "But then?" Oh then, the Lord will care for them. Do you doubt it? Well, come and see. That hour or two has passed. And now, what happens? A knocking is heard at the door, a stranger enters, a man from the country, bearing a folded napkin in his hand, and inquires after the man of God. "He whom thou seekest is here," says Elisha, and cordially reaches his hand to the unknown visitor, and after he has questioned him as to his errand, the stranger, with respectful mien, begins to untie the clean, white napkin, and—twenty barley loaves, made of the first fruits of the new harvest, roll upon the table, and with them several full ears of corn, in the husk. "I thought I owed thee this trifling gift," says the pious peasant to the prophet, "for according to the law, they belong to the Lord and his priest. But thou knowest that our tribes can no longer go up to the temple in Jerusalem; therefore I bring these first fruits to thee, believing that in so doing I have also consecrated them to Jehovah." Thus speaks the stranger. The sons of the prophets stand around, and gaze upon each other with wonder, and venture not to lift up their eyes for shame at their despondency, and can scarcely contain themselves for emotion at God's faithfulness and kindness. But such shame and such wonder are always the conclusion to every song of sorrow in the dwellings of the righteous.

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Occurrences, like this at Gilgal, are not rare in Zion. How many among us have experienced a like, nay, a still more surprising assistance. So many instances of aid like this have occurred in the bosom of this community, and in this village, that I almost hesitate to cite new ones, for fear of relating things too commonplace. Yet to the great number of those already known, permit me to add one, which although it offers nothing striking indeed, is still worthy of a passing notice, since it also gives us a view of that God, who is great in small things. It was on the evening before last Christmas, that a God-fearing man called to his apprentice, and said: "See, to-morrow will be Christmas again. But now we have neither meat nor bread for to-morrow, or the day after. I have finished, as you know, the vessel for Mr. N——. It is at the silversmith's who is to ornament it. Go and see if he has completed it. I fear he has not thought of it, with the press of work he has had during these holidays. And what shall we do then? Mr. N—— expected the vessel to-day, and if it is not ready—you know the man—we shall get plenty of hard words, but not a penny. And hunger is but an ill companion on a feast-day." The boy hastens to the silversmith's. "He will go in vain," thinks his master, "he will not return with it." But while he thinks thus, his soul stirs its wings of faith, mounts above the mists of care, and says: "Whether he bring it or not, thou, Lord Jesus, hast help for us!" Scarcely has this sigh passed joyfully from his bosom, when the door is opened, and the man who had ordered the vessel entered. "Well,

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is the vessel ready?" "Yes," replied the master, startled, but still not downcast. "The lad has just gone to fetch it." "Well," continued the other, "if he brings it, send it to me; if not, see that I have it immediately after Christmas. Here, take the pay in advance." With these words he laid two dollars on the table, and departed. Scarcely had the door closed behind him, when the apprentice returned with a melancholy countenance. "Master, we must hunger," he said, "the vessel is not finished." "That is bad news," replied the master: "but look! what see you there?" "A piece of paper," said the boy. "But what is under it?" added the master with a smile, as he removed the paper—and behold! two bright dollars lay on the table. "Master, where did those come from?" cried the startled apprentice. "Well," rejoined the master, "whence should they come? From Him above"—and he then told him what had passed. "What think you now?" he continued; "does the faithful God still live, or is he dead? Behold, he well knows the dwelling of poor Jacob." Thus spoke the master. "Poor Jacob?" you exclaim. Yes, my hearers, all this happened to poor Jacob on last Christmas, that same Jacob who, a fortnight ago, shook off the dust of this earth from his feet, and needs no longer cut and carve to be able to keep his Christmas in undisturbed tranquillity. And I could relate to you many an occurrence of a similar nature, that has happened in the midst of our community; but here is one of recent date. For was not that affair of the letter last week a remarkable thing, in which was written:

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"I know not why it is, but I am *constrained* to send you this dollar. I am in great need of it myself, and still I cannot keep it. Here it is, since it must be so." And how seasonably that dollar came. But enough! I see no end to the task, if I should relate to you all that I could relate of this kind.

"In what places have you been?" asked a renowned professor lately of a young licentiate that visited him, and when the latter replied that he had been in various places, and among others in the valley of the Wupper, the professor interrupted him with a sarcastic smile. "So then," he said, "you have been in the place where all those wonderful things happen?" Oh, we bless God that our valley is not so poor in wonders as, probably, the life of that professor must be! And the wonderful things which we experience here, will one day brighten into histories, more significant than all the narratives of wars and conquests in this world. For are they not fragments of the history of Jehovah's loving intercourse with his people; are they not shining examples of his condescension, power, and truth?

We believe in a *living* God, and we experience him to be such. The God of the Rationalist is a mechanician, who, when he has once set his machinery in motion, has nothing further to do but to contemplate it; he cannot change and regulate it. The rationalist lets *Destiny* and *Nature* perform these offices. God is dismissed from the scene. Absurd and disconsolate idea! How much more cheering is the refulgence which beams in the Sacred Scriptures, which reveal to us a God, who is all life and activity, and who sustains all

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things by the power of his word. According to the Scriptures, not a lily emits its perfume, but the Lord clothes it; not a bird finds its food, but it is God who feeds the little songster. According to the Scriptures, God is a great provider; the eyes of all wait upon him —a majestic artificer, who not only created the sun and the stars, but leads them forth daily like a flock, and keeps them burning—a wakeful guardian, whom even the blade of grass, that he bedews by night, finds neither sleeping nor slumbering, far less the son of immortality, created for eternity—a faithful protector, who, at the due season, calls to the crane and the swallow: "Up, depart hence!" and rescues the young ravens from hunger. He is a mover of all powers; upon the strings of the storm and the thunder, he harps a song of praise unto himself; a vivifier of all that lives, without whose secret aid bread will not nourish, drink will not refresh, medicine will not heal, and to whose constant personal agency alone, we owe it, from moment to moment, that our lungs can breathe, our hearts beat, our hands move, and our minds think. Yes, the Scriptures give us such an idea of God's overruling agency, that we are compelled to believe that if it ceased to operate for a single instant, everything would sink back into its original chaos, and all life would be devoured by a vast, world-consuming death.

And this view of God's relation to all created things must necessarily be the right one, because it is God himself, who thus reveals himself to us in his word. He is the life of all that lives, he is the preserver of the worm of the dust, of the seraph before his throne, of

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man upon the earth, and even of the devil in hell. All things exist through him, from one instant to another. And as the living One above sustains and preserves all things, so he causes, guides, and governs all things. His rule is in thy mouth. "The preparation of the heart in man," says Solomon, "and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord." He marks out the path for thy footsteps. "A man's heart deviseth his way," saith the same wise man, "but the Lord directeth his steps." He has set up his throne in thine inward parts. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." Yes, thou canst set about nothing, but he guideth all thine actions. "Oh, Lord, I know," says the prophet, "that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." When Laban, foaming with anger, resolves to take Jacob's life, he is forcibly constrained to a mood of mildness, which disarms him in an instant, and causes him to say: "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad." Esau, burning with rage, marches out against his brother, but when they meet, then, says the sacred narrative, "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept." Balaam purposes to curse Israel, he purposes it with all his might, but at the moment when he opens his mouth, inwardly constrained, he is forced to bless that people, and to announce their prosperity. Saul, when he stands at last, face to face with his deadly

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enemy David, is suddenly transformed from a furious tiger to a gentle dove, and instead of vomiting forth fire and flame against him, he says; "Is this thy voice, my son, David?" and how far from him was it to do him hurt. Behold it is thus that the Lord's hand interposes, even in the most secret machinery of the human mind; it is thus that he rules always, and in the freest manner, according to the counsel of his will.

Consoling truth! but consoling only for his people. What does it profit the devils and the damned, that they know themselves to be under the government of this eternal majesty? It is only for his children to rejoice that Jehovah is a living God, and oh, with how much reason! for to them the divine Providence is—but what is there sweet that can be named, which it is not to them? It is a tender father, who is so entirely devoted to them, that they sleep in his bosom, breathe in his arms, walk at his right hand, and cannot find themselves an instant beyond the shadow of his wings; a kind protector, who spreads their little table that they may not hunger, who pledges his own honor that he will suffer them to want for no good thing; who exhorts those committed to his charge, most urgently, to cast all their cares upon him, and though a mother may forget her sucking child, yet he will never forget them. It is a guardian to them, faithful and watchful like no other; a wall of brass about them; a shield that covers them well. It can also prove itself the Strong, the Omnipotent One, who holds Satan by the bridle, with all the host of hell, and whose voice breaks the cedars like reeds, and consumes with flames

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of fire. It is a physician unto them, who from each blade of grass upon the soil of life, knows how to draw a balsam, and even from poisonous weeds to obtain the most healing juices; a consoler who speaks, and always at the proper moment, to the weary, and mingles with every sorrow, the manna of his sweet consolation. And as, at every instant, he walks, an unwearied companion, at the side of his children, so again he is ever a day or more in advance of them, and his hand is seen, not only in the present, but in the future, and he arranges all things for them, so, as in his loving counsel, he finds meet and good for them, and mingles for them, carefully balanced, both joy and sorrow, for a healing draught, and purposes more kindly and faithfully toward them, than any earthly father can purpose toward his children.

II. The man from Baal-shalisha has taken his seat. They would gladly have placed him upon silken cushions, he was so heartily welcome. And this, not only for the sake of the gift which he brought, but rather for the happy omen of this gift, which, as the first fruits of a new harvest, became a token full of promise, that Jehovah would now suffer the light of his countenance to shine again upon the sorely smitten land. The man came with bread to Gilgal, as Joshua and Caleb once came with grapes from Eshcol into the Hebrew camp; nay, as the dove with the olive branch into Noah's ark, and new and brighter vistas disclosed themselves at his appearance, to the dimmed glances of the disheartened sons of the prophets. Thus in these

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days of *spiritual* dearth and drought we breathe more freely and hopefully, when we meet with a man of a healthy, vigorous, joyful faith. In the heavenward impulses of this *single man* we find a palpable proof that the heavens have not yet withheld their rain of mercy; we behold therein, as we think, the first fruits of a more general Pentecost, we expect the wished-for hour with hope, when a new glow will be enkindled, a new revival dawn for the whole community; and even at the mere thought our hearts seem to soar aloft, and pleasant stars of hope shine on the horizon of our sad existence. No, we do not despise the day of small things. A miner, when he discovers in a vein of earth, but a single atom of gold, considers it as a happy omen, and rejoices in hope. "Now I shall find still more!" he exclaims joyfully. Thus *we* exclaim, when the like befalls us, upon the soil of God's kingdom. The tidings of a single, true conversion in the heathen world, fills us with great delight, because we understand its hidden, prophetic meaning, and from a solitary beam of light expect the near approach of morning. A single Jew, whom we see enlist in true faith, under the banner of the cross, places the *whole people* before us, in a more hopeful light, and the regeneration of this single man, is like a fresh breath which once more stirs the harp-strings of ancient promises, and wakes their slumbering tones to a louder, fuller sound.

The twenty barley loaves are lying upon the table at Gilgal. With what satisfaction do the *children* look upon them, and then glance so lovingly and kindly at the giver, as if they would fain kiss his hands, and say

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many a word to him if they durst, and were not too timid. And the *men* also confess freely, that they have not for a long while, seen such fair, white, well baked loaves in Gilgal. Some even think that bread such as this, was never before served up to them. Bread from the table at which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are sitting, it was not indeed; but it appeared to them more like bread from thence, than like common, earthly bread. Not that the loaves were particularly heavy and large; the children alone could have despatched them, and this circumstance was the only sad feature in the business. Nay, one or another among the men might probably already think in secret: "What sort of a way is this? If God wished to help us, why help us by halves; why not have first counted the mouths, and dispensed accordingly?" Such dissatisfied, presumptuous creatures are we, that God can scarcely ever suit us, and there is nothing to which we can be persuaded with greater difficulty, than to suspend our judgment concerning his ways until the moment when he himself has reached the aim and object which he had in view. If that which we desire does not lie at once before us, in full completeness, God's power, and liberality, and truth, are instantly loaded with suspicion. But when he lifts the covering from the gifts which he intends for us, then, indeed, we stand and blush with shame, and could smite ourselves upon the face for our distrust and presumption.

Elisha looks at the bread. "Ah!" he thinks, "this comes from the Lord. And for what? To feed his people. He places them in my hand that I may

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satisfy the hungry therewith. Will they suffice for a hundred men and more? will they satisfy their need? *They must.* He who sends them is Almighty. The quantity of the food is not everything. That which nourishes in the nourishment is his blessing. It is not the power of the bread that is here to be made manifest, but the power of him who sends it." Such thoughts, cheering and awaking faith, pass through the prophet's mind. He would have considered it a sin to count the number of mouths before distributing the food. With simple grandeur, and entering into the spirit of their divine provider, he says to his attendant: "Give unto the people that they may eat!" These were words of faith, uttered truly in God's name, nay, in God's stead.

This trait reminds me involuntarily of the deceased pastor Henke, who, as you well know, did something similar to that which Elisha did at Gilgal. One day a Christian friend entered the house of this excellent man, and although he knew not wherewith to satisfy his hunger, he at once invited him to dinner. As it struck twelve, the maid servant crossed the chamber once or twice with anxious looks, and with the intention to beckon her master out unobserved, if possible. Henke, however, did not remark her object, but merely reminded her that it was time to spread the table. The maid retired in embarrassment, but soon returned again, and requested her master to step out to her for a moment. "Master," she began, in a complaining tone, "you wish me to spread the table. Do you not know then, that we have hardly a piece of dry bread in the house, and you sent your last penny, as you said, to a

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poor, sick man this morning." "Ha!" replied Henke, smiling, "is that all you have to say to me? Do you but spread the table as usual. It will be time enough for the food, when we have taken our seats." The maid, wondering not a little, does as she is bidden. The table is spread; dishes, plates, spoons, forks, are arranged in due order; nothing, not even the salt-cellar is forgotten. "Let us take our seats," said the good man, with a cheerful countenance. They sit down at the empty table, and the meek and pious man utters a prayer, in which much was said of the birds of the air, the young ravens, and the like. And as he says the word "Amen!" there is a ringing at the house door. The maid flies to the door—and what does she see? A basket containing an excellent dinner. A neighbor had felt that he must send a meal to pastor Henke. With the utmost equanimity, as if nothing unusual had happened, Henke directs the maid to arrange all the viands upon the table; then he glances with a smile at the astonished girl, and says: "Well, hast thou any fault to find with the host who provides for us?" What think you, my dear hearers, was there one much less than Elisha here? Oh, these are precious things, yet things which cannot be imitated, however. It is easy to say: "Spread! spread!" but with this alone nothing is effected. Remember Gehazi with Elisha's staff at Shunem. If, however, thou hast aught of Henke's or Elisha's faith, then let the table be spread at once. A royal host will provide for thee.

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III. "Give unto the people that they may eat!" says Elisha to his attendant. Gehazi gazes in wonder at his master, as if to say: that is not meant in earnest. He counts the mouths. There are a hundred men, besides the women and the children. And what a famished crowd! The twenty loaves would scarcely satisfy the hunger of ten of them. "Master," begins the boy, shaking his head:—"What, should I set this before an hundred men?" And he says this in a tone, and with a mien, as though he would admonish the prophet that he had spoken as if in a dream, and had really commanded something ridiculous. The simpleton! to view the business thus in a mere natural light and to form a judgment concerning this command of the man of God, by ordinary human measure. The boy, with his vain scruples, seems to me almost like one, who seeing a cannon about to be loaded, should weigh the ball in his hand, and try how far he could cast it, and should say:—"Well, the ball will not reach that wall yonder, still less will it batter it in pieces." "Thou fool!" would be the reply of the experienced soldier, "dost thou not know that the ball is to be cast, not by the feeble hand of man, but by the might of fire?" And thus we might ask Gehazi:—"Foolish boy! dost thou not know what it is that gives emphasis and efficacy to thy master's order? Behind this order there lies a *faith* that moves mountains; a reliance on God's promises which prevails with the Almighty; there is an impulse of the Holy Spirit behind this order, nay, God the Omnipotent himself is there. How could it be otherwise than that the hungry people should be satisfied? But of all this the

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boy has not the slightest idea. He looks upon the words:—"Give unto the people that they may eat!" in no other light than as if he himself or one like him had uttered them. It is far from entering into his thoughts that such a "*Give!*" in the mouth of an Elisha, is an essentially different one, nay, that uttered in reliance upon God's word, and in God's name, it is all powerful, and works wonders. And then why does the boy presume to criticize the order of his master? It is for him to obey in silence. Let him distribute the bread. Whether the people satisfy their hunger with it or not, is no affair of his. Or is it his part to perform the miracle of feeding them? He is but to discharge the duties of a servant in the affair, and still he demeans himself as if the performance of the miracle was expected from his feeble powers. But how often do we act thus! When the Lord once said to his apostles:—"Go heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils," how silly would it have sounded if the disciples had replied:—"Not so, oh Lord, our skill and power will not suffice for this." "Ye fools!" would have been their master's answer, "do I expect such works from *your* hands? The commands of the Son of man are *promises*. What I say unto you that you should do, is nothing more than what I purpose to do through you." Many duties are imposed upon us also by the Lord; what should we do if we had to perform them of ourselves? We are commanded to conquer death, tread upon adders and scorpions, resist the devil, lift up our heads in great tribulation, nay even be perfect as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect, and

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who can number what other great works beside? What kind of a command is this? The faithful differ among themselves in their view of this; the various ways in which this question is answered, characterizes the two opposite conditions of the soul, which we are accustomed to distinguish by the words legal and evangelical. Many understand this command as one of mere injunction; then the precious gospel suddenly vanishes, and becomes an insufferable yoke; a *law*, engendering vain toil and death. *We* consider it, and rightly and justly, as a command like that directed to the apostles:—"Heal the sick!" Yes, it is a command of encouragement, of promise; and at the instant when the bare *thought* stirs vividly within us, a stream of boldness and courage, of peace and joy, flows into the agitated heart, and we lift up our heads, we overcome the world, and death, and all things.

Elisha, indignant at Gehazi's unbecoming interference, repeated his command with stronger emphasis:—"Give the people, that they may eat!" and adds thereto:—"For thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof!" Then the boy desists from his wilfulness, and begins to distribute the food. And behold, he breaks it, and reaches it to one and another, and the bread does not cease in his hands. The people eat to their hearts' content. Each one can have as much as he desires. At last, no one wishes for more. All are satisfied. And as the boy looks around him—who can describe his astonishment?—there is still abundance of bread upon the table. "Ah!" thinks Gehazi, "all this has not happened by natural means." Indeed, my good youth?

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But wherefore not? Was it less natural than when the tree grows in the garden, or when from the single sheaf there shoot eighty grains of wheat? Shall we not rather say:—"The latter happens no less wonderfully than the former. It is the same living and Omnipotent God, who, in the one case as in the other, breathes forth his creative breath."

Let this narrative prove a strengthening cordial to your faith, my brethren, as it proved to that of the sons of the prophets. Let it prove particularly so to *you*, who pine in manifold need and want, and are troubled about the issue. Ah, if you possess the Lord, my friends, you need not care! As truly as he liveth, he will care for you, whatever calamity may happen to you. Give good heed to the great deductions, which the Apostle, with a blessed and irrefutable logic, draws for you, from still greater premises, in Romans viii. 31–33. It is a mighty burst of rapture into which he breaks forth in those and the following verses. He reels with joy, and his heart threatens to rend his bosom. He represents to himself, in a *single* glance, all that is given to a child of God in Christ, and this glance transports him beyond himself, and wafts him in triumph far above the high places of the earth. He beholds all his enemies lying discomfited at his feet. He views himself clothed with a righteousness, whose brightness dazzles him; he finds himself in the possession of an abundance of gifts and goods, which he is unable to survey, and he beholds himself, at the same time, so encompassed with protection and defence, that he knows not what more he has to do on

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earth, except to let his breath stream forth in mere songs of victory and triumph.

Whence does the apostle draw this vast, this all-subduing joy? Not out of himself; he draws it from a source, which stands daily and hourly open to us also. The miracle of the manger and the cross is this source. His rapture flows from God's love to us in Christ. Hear him speak: "*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.*"

The apostle speaks in the plural number. "*We,*" says he, and "us," and thus binds himself and all his children in the Spirit into one bundle, and means to say, that it is owing solely to their unbelief, not to their privileges, if they do not all break out with him into the same joy. The first thing of which he boasts, is something incomparably great and glorious. He says: "God is for us!" In this truth you behold all Paul's glory and power; herein lies his stronghold and fortress. It is from this, that he takes the standard which he waves so proudly, the sword with which he marches so boldly to encounter the devil and all the hosts of Hell. He couches, in this truth, like a young lion, and who will rise up against him? From it he calls out his haughty challenge: "Who will condemn us?" "God is for us," that is, he stands upon our side; he favors us; he bears us in his heart; he graciously takes our part; he embraces us with

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all his love! Oh, this is indeed a truth to inspire rapture!

But is it so then? Can it be so? A sinful worm, a rebel like man, may presume to boast that God is on his side! The apostle says: "Yes, he may!" and places beneath the great truth which he has uttered, two proofs, as pillars, which no hand can shake. These proofs he draws from Bethlehem, and down from Golgotha. He infers God's love in the first place from the fact, that "He spared not his own Son," secondly, from the fact, that "He delivered up his Son for sinners." And, in truth, the logical strength of these arguments is overwhelming.

In the first place he shows us the Son, the only begotten, who was the joy of his father in heaven, and the dearest and sweetest of all things to him in the wide creation; yes, the father's whole and only love, because in him he beheld another self, the reflection of his glory, and the image of his nature. "And this Son," says Paul, "the Father has *not spared*. What words are these? They remind us of Abraham on Moriah, of the fatal pile, of the drawn knife, and it seems, indeed, as if they were intended to remind us of them. Yes, the Eternal Being has wrestled with his own heart, has done violence to his love, has forcibly vanquished the tenderness in his bosom, that he might dismiss, for a while, his dearest treasure from his arms, and resign him to the vale of sorrows, on this sinful earth. It is a cold winter's night; yonder he lies, in a dark stable, resting on hard straw; veiled in our nature, stripped of all glory, helpless, exposed to a

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thousand dangers, and even while a child, not only unrecognised by all the world, but an object of the most furious enmity, of the most savage persecution. And why did God do this? He did it, because he was willing, even at this price, to pluck a multitude of accursed firebrands from the burning pit of Hell. For this end he gave up his beloved, the delight of his eyes. No, Paul says too little, when he exclaims: "God is for us." Too little, when in another place he exclaims: "But after that the kindness and love of our God towards man appeared." There is no word in our feeble human language, that expresses worthily, the greatness of the divine love towards sinners, which is manifested in this unspeakable gift, this sparing not his Son. A sun of mercy and of grace shines upon us from the manger at Bethlehem, to praise whose splendor fitly, even the angelic harps are too weakly strung.

"*He delivered up his only begotten Son for us*," says the apostle, and herewith he names the second proof of God's love. We understand what Paul means. The words which he employs have a fearful signification. They express a complete abandonment, a forsaking, a sacrificing. The same expression is used in Matthew x. 21: "And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death." And this is its meaning in the present passage. The words "*for us*," mean also "*in our stead*," and thus we behold ourselves transported from the manger to the cross. Yes, it is with sadness that we contemplate the child in Mary's arms; for how long will it be before the fearful summons will resound: "Awake, oh sword, against my shepherd,

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and against the man that is my fellow;" and this also is a call from his Father in heaven. Oh, if for these tender feet, nothing farther were in store, than to stand in the workshop of the Father, and grow weary with wandering among the cottages of the wretched, the spectacle would be endurable. But they must wade through the sea of anguish, that the waves of that sea may be stilled, and these eyes must weep tears of blood, and those dear lips ask of the Father, wherefore he has *forsaken* his only begotten Son; and those dear hands must be nailed to the cross, and this innocent heart racked with the torments of Hell. Ah, would we not fain cast ourselves upon the blessed child, and cry: "Bind and pierce me, but not this lamb!" But if *we* feel thus at the thoughts of the sufferings in store for the Son of Love, think how the Father's heart of infinite Love must have felt. And still he delivered him up. Other rescue for us than this was not possible. The dear child *must*, for us, pass into judgment, for us, suffer the sentence of condemnation, for us, lie in chains, in death, in the terrors of Hell. And he has journeyed this path. God gave up his own life that *we* might live. Well then, tell me, does God love sinners, or does he not? You are silent, because to this question, the answer "yes" appears too weak, too poor. I also will keep silence and adore, and clasp my hands in wonder. Oh, love! oh, ocean of compassion!

After the apostle has thus established and demonstrated the proposition of God's love to sinners, he then draws his deductions from it. And oh, what deductions are these! While there is nothing more irrefuta-

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ble than they are, there is also nothing sweeter and more cheering. These deductions form the grave of all sorrow, and plant again for us a garden of Eden, in this vale of tears. The first of these great deductions he draws from his first proof of the divine love. "He that spared not his own son," says the apostle, "how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Admirable reasoning! Not the slightest objection can be advanced against it. A child can understand it. If his love to me extends so far that his dearest treasure was not too precious for him to tear it from his heart for my sake; it will suffice also to give me that which is less. Now all goods, that may be named, either corporeal or spiritual, are nothing in comparison with that unspeakable gift. If I were to say that I possessed a coverlet, that was large enough to spread over a world, but did not suffice to cover me upon my couch—would you not laugh at me as a madman for using such language? Or if I were to say, that I had a friend who loved me so dearly that he would send me a thousand dollars at any moment that I desired it, but whether he would give me a penny was a question, should I not lay myself open to the suspicion that I had lost my reason? And still, my friends, you are accustomed to think and speak thus foolishly without cessation. For how often do you say:—"Yes, he has given me his son; his compassion reaches so far as that, but whether he will give me clothing, bread, a roof, I do not know; that is a matter of donbt! Oh, thought of folly and of blindness! The Mercy, that casts her crown, and her whole heaven into your lap, will she withhold the

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money, which you need upon your pilgrimage? I almost hesitate to confute such absurd ideas, as I might thus excite the suspicion that there is actually some sort of reason for such senseless imaginations. Oh, will you not, at last, be wise, and find out the measure of a love that bears you upon its hands? And so often as you have a fear or an anxiety, hasten to Bethlehem, to the manger, view the child that lies therein, look at the Sun of Love that beams upon you, and call to mind the great question of the apostle:—"He who, for us, spared not his own son, *how*"—ah, tell me, angels, men, devils; combine all your wisdom, and tell me—"*how* shall he not with *him* also freely give us *all things?*"

The apostle draws a second deduction from God's love. He says: For God so loved us, that he delivered up his own son for us all. And from this he argues:—"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Here again his reasoning is admirable, and perfectly unanswerable. God so loved us that he delivered up his son in our stead under *the law* to fulfil its requirements; under *the curse of the law* to endure its penalty. The Son hath taken both upon him; he has fulfilled the law completely for us, he has borne the curse for us. Now, if I am one of the happy ones, for whom God delivered up his son, he will judge me according to the merits of this son. But if he does this there can nothing more happen, be it what it may, nothing to my last breath, that can take from me the right to exclaim with joy:—"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"—Yes, *who?*—Satan?—He will find no entrance to the tribunal above. The

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angels?—I am clothed with a righteousness before whose brightness theirs must grow pale. Our brethren? —We lament it, if they feel constrained to stand forth in accusation of us, but they will be refused a hearing. Conscience?—What should this subaltern do, when the court of last appeal has already acquitted me? God is greater than my heart, and knows me in Christ alone. Thus in the course of the coming week, a great accuser of our life, will withdraw in shame; a giant, who, alas, could bear documents of bitter accusation against us to the tribunal of heaven! This accuser is the old year. But how will he be received?—"Knowst thou not," it will be said to him, "that this debt also is paid?" And a millstone will be hanged about his neck, and he, with his documents, will be cast into the sea of oblivion. But we shall step free, and light, and joyful, into the new year. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

The apostle draws a third deduction. If God be *so* for us, he argues "that he spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all: *Who then can be against us.?*" Here again he reasons clearly and logically. "*Who?*" he says, and looks gravely around, as if he would address his question to heaven, earth, and hell. He sees terrible countenances. He sees the roaring lion as he rushes toward him, foaming with fury and showing his teeth; he sees the fearful host of the powers that rule the air; he sees the world, and in a two-fold aspect; as a seductive harlot, and as an adder swelling with hatred towards Christ. He sees a thousand ambushes, snares, nets, trials, and dangers; he perceives

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the lurking enemy, sin, in his own heart, and whatever else may excite alarm. But all these sights of dismay and terror disturb him so little that he rather advances triumphantly towards them:—"*God is for me!*" Buoyed up by this consciousness, he rides, as in a triumphal chariot, above all the shadows of care and fear, and shouts from it, as from the lofty window of a secure turret:—"Who, who? who, in heaven, upon the earth, in hell, is against me?"

And what hinders us, my brethren, from joining in the joyful shout, if we are only sure that God has given his Son to *us* also? Then we repose in the arms of the same love, in which Paul reposed, and our condition likewise is that of a warrior, within the walls of an impregnable citadel. We dwell in a stronghold. The battlements are of fire. Upon the turrets hang the shields, won from thousands of discomfited enemies. The bulwarks are stronger than brass and iron. The key to this divine castle lies beyond reach, above the clouds, in faithful hands, and its walls are proof against assault. David could speak from experience of this invisible fortress and of its strength. It was invested by Saul with horses and horsemen. He was shot at therein with darts and arrows. The Philistines and Canaanites besieged him in that castle; nay, he was assailed therein by devils, by the flesh and the whole band of hell. His enemies caused him affliction and fear therein; but they were not able to destroy him. He went forth unharmed at last, and could conclude his life like his psalms, with a shout of victory and a loud hallelujah! We also dwell in this fortress.

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God's love in Christ is our castle. With this, all other divine perfections encompass us, as with chariots and horses of fire. It is impossible that any hurtful or destructive thing should touch us here. We may be terrified therein, but not conquered; invested, but not captured. "We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Therefore we shout: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

With these three great deductions then, we proceed along the path of life. Are we anxious for temporal prospects, we retire, for a moment, thoughtfully, and confront the storm in our hearts, with the happy thought: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Would our sins threaten us, former ones or new ones, committed against our will: we think of God's position towards us. "He has *delivered up* his Son for us. Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." If anguish falls upon us at sight of the enemy, or at the clouds of calamity that rise, threatening, upon the horizon of our time, oh, we smile at those clouds, from the height of our stronghold; we plant the standard of triumph upon the battlements of our castle, even before the contest, and still all the billows of care, anxiety, and terror, with our third deduction, with the joyful cry: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"—Hallelujah!—Amen!

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CHAPTER IX.

NAAMAN.

THAT which oftenest saddens us in life, is anxiety about what may happen on the morrow or the day after. Walk around among the cottages of the sighing and afflicted; you will remark, in general, that, that which causes them to sigh, is not present need, but need expected in the future. Could we stop the Marah spring of apprehension, and place hope's bright tapers in the foreground of life, complaints would at once be changed into a song, and clear sunshine would surround the brow, instead of the dark clouds of gloom. Accordingly, mankind have in all ages looked after a sign, that might pledge them some good thing; after a favorable prognostication for the future; after a something upon which they might base a firm hope that no misfortune would befal them, but that blessings and benefits would attend them. They watched the constellations in the firmament, consulted oracles and priests; drew many inferences from dreams and visions, nay, the birds that built their nests, whether upon, or beneath the roof, were required to perform the office of Noah's dove with the olive branch. Things of this kind, truly, have lost much of their credit in our days, but the desire after signs, betokening good fortune and

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prosperity, is still by no means extinct in man. How prone are we, for instance, in all our more important steps and enterprises in life, in forming marriages, in setting out on journeys, and the like, to find an omen in everything that happens at the time. The slightest and most trivial occurrence, is able, often, either to produce the most sudden and complete transition from hope to despondency; nay, to cover the gayest festival with a veil of sadness; or to tune all hearts to the highest pitch of joy, and consummate the general happiness, according as we think we behold therein a sign of good or evil.

But all augury of this sort is of little value. There is, however, a sign of blessing, and an infallible one. Let him, to whom it is vouchsafed, rejoice, and cast all his cares from him. But let no one mistake. This sign is not every man's possession. Is money and goods this sign? Far from it. Remember the rich man in the parable. Is it honor and fame? That bay tree in the Psalm possessed these, yet after a short time it stood withered by the way side. Is it understanding and intellectual endowments? Understanding is no safeguard against need, and death, and God's anger. Does the sign consist in a man's merits as a citizen? These merits, I say, are as nothing in His sight, who can destroy soul and body in hell. Neither is uprightness the sign. Uprightness will prove no shield, when God's holiness sits in judgment. And as little is Christian knowledge this sign. A Judas had this, and destruction followed upon his heels. The sign to which I refer, the sign betokening blessing, is of another kind.

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It is that which is mentioned in Psalm lxxxvi. 17: "*Show me a sign for good.*" It is not an outward sign: it exists within, yet its beams flash forth upon the eye. By nature no one has it. The King of mercy must show us this sign. The sign is first of all a wound. A wound?—Yes, and a wound of the heart indeed. It is self-knowledge that inflicts this wound; a wound which no herb, no balsam of this earth can heal. The publican had this wound when he smote upon his breast. The thief on the cross had it, when he said: "Lord, remember me!" Mary Magdalen had it when she washed her master's feet with her tears. And if you know of one who prospered in time and in eternity, be sure he had it; and those had it who prospered, although we have not known it. "It is the wound of repentance then?" It is, my brethren. The deep, overwhelming feeling that we are condemned and accursed before God; this is the wound that I mean. The sign of which I speak is not a comely sign indeed, but it is a sign of unspeakable value; a sign little esteemed by the world; but the only one that betokens salvation. God's word is our witness. But the wound is not all the sign. Something else is joined with it. That which the Lord in Ezekiel ix. causes to be set as a mark upon the foreheads of the people for their rescue. "Mark upon their foreheads," he there says to the angel, "a Tau"*—the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. But this letter had the form of a cross, as is evident from the Greek and Latin T, which was formed after it. You now know what completes the

* German version.

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good sign. It is a cross, not painted upon the lips, not heard in the speech, not drawn in the thoughts merely; no, but engraved by the Holy Spirit, and branded into the heart, into the marrow of the life, deeply and indelibly, so that the man sees it, sees this cross of Christ, as his dearest object on the horizon of heaven and of earth—so that his warmest love blooms and twines closely about this bloody tree; so that he hangs all his hopes and his whole happiness upon it, and confesses with Paul: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Where these two things meet together: the wound and the cross; the contrite sinner, and faith in the Lamb; the broken heart and reliance upon the ransom; there we see the good sign; but there only, and nowhere else. It does not glitter indeed like yonder chain of gold, like that star of nobility, like that emblem of royal favor; but how will the brightness of these tokens one day grow pale before it. It is not rated high by the world indeed; it gives no rank in society, but God's angels see this sign, and stop joyfully, and greet with reverence him who bears it, and know that they are commanded to be at his service. God be praised, many among us are decorated with this precious sign, although the garment of frailty is wrapped around it. This sign proclaims their high rank, and vouches for their adoption. They need not ask after any other sign to promise them good things. This single one, the wound and the cross, is pledge sufficient that all will go well with them in time and in eternity.

The glorious scene in Elisha's life, into the ante-

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chamber of which we are to step to-day, is a practical commentary upon the words of the Psalmist: "Show me a sign for good." May we reap a rich blessing from our contemplation of it. The Lord vouchsafe it in his mercy!

2 KINGS v. 1, 2.

"Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria; he also was a mighty man in valor, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel, a little maid."

A new narrative is about to unfold itself before us, bringing with it scenes of great significance; a narrative, which we should expect to find rather on a page of the Gospel than in a book of the Old Testament. If any where in the Bible, that which is typical in Elisha's history, that which is characteristic of the New Testament appears to view, it certainly is here. Here that Love is seen, completely unveiled, which came, not that it might be served, but that it might serve. Here the partition wall between Israel and the heathen has already fallen; yes, we find already here a sweet picture of the baptism of the New Testament, and oh, how much that is in its spirit, how much to remind us of the Gospel.

Our present discourse, which will serve as an introduction to the following ones, purposes to make us more closely acquainted with the hero of our narrative, *Naaman, the Syrian*, and the instrument of his eternal

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salvation, *an Israelitish maiden.* May this acquaintance afford us true joy.

I. Our narrative transports us to Damascus. This ancient city, the capital of the Syrian kingdom, situated in the blooming plains beyond Lebanon, is the scene on which its occurrences will first develop themselves. Here we at once step beyond the borders of the Holy Land, and cross for a while into the deadly shadow of the pagan world. Deep darkness is round about us. We behold altar after altar erected to idols. Nowhere is there even the slightest gleam of pure light, of a true knowledge of God among this barbarous and benighted people.

We here feel separated from the land of the divine revelation, the land of seers and of prophets, as if by oceans and boundless plains, and still it is but a mountain ridge that shuts us out from Canaan. But a more lofty dividing wall rises elsewhere. It exists in the national hatred, within which the Syrians always entrenched themselves against Israel, their hereditary enemy. The pride of these Pagans raised an interdicting barrier against the light of Judah, and led them to treat every spark of the divine revelation which flashed across their borders, as contraband, and speedily to trample it out at the very gates of the kingdom.

But the Almighty had, in his mercy, purposed to hurl the torch of truth into the very heart of this benighted state, and to rear beside the altars of dead idols, a new altar, upon which his name, Jehovah, might be inscribed. Where the Lord wishes to cast

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light, it is in vain to erect barriers and close windows. His command, "Let there be light!" bursts victoriously through all shadows. His mercy goes hand in hand with his omnipotence. He speaks, and it is done. Who can withstand his will?

But God is not a God in heaven merely. He is a God also among men, and it is his purpose to be so. He means to be recognised as one who dwells and rules in the midst of us, and whose governing hand interferes in all things, even the most trifling. It is for this reason that we so seldom see him perform his works of grace directly from his abode on high. In general, he is accustomed to interpose by various human instruments. He proceeds by the path of contingency, and disguises his royal intervention in a confluence of manifold, and seemingly accidental circumstances, which afterwards, however, appear as the arrangements of his divine providence, and thus he gives us, not his work merely, but himself, as one personally nigh to us, as a living and ever active God. In this wise he proceeds in our narrative.

Upon the throne of the Syrian kingdom sits the warlike prince Ben-hadad, the same whom, in the time of Elijah, we saw take the field against Israel, and who, in his own person, commanded in that bloody battle, in which Ahab, accursed of God, fell, pierced by an arrow. Among the shining circle of magnates which surround the throne of this mighty Pagan chief, there is a man whose intellectual eminence has raised him to a place at the king's right hand, and whose renown in arms has made him an idol of the whole

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nation. He bears a name not less suited to his outward form than to his rank in society and in the state. He is called Naaman, that is, the well formed, the comely. A name, which at a later period indeed, became, as it were, a scoff and a mockery, but which soon regained its truth and appropriateness in a far higher sense. At present it is only in the equivocal splendor of transient, earthly greatness that this man appears to us. A blooming crown of laurels, plucked upon the field of battle and of conquest, surrounds his brow. Upon his breast beam, in dazzling splendor, the badges of honor and of power, bestowed by the royal hand. The public voice, in enthusiastic unanimity, proclaims him the bravest hero, the first soldier of his time, and his deeds have found a lasting monument in popular and patriotic songs. But Naaman is a heathen, born and brought up in the blind idolatry of his people; often, indeed, has he crossed into the land of the divine revelation, but he has remained untouched by its light. It is only in an attitude of hostility that he has, thus far, approached the people, from which salvation came to him; like the madmen of our days, who, in lamentable blindness, leave all in peace, bear with all, harmonize with all, except the people among whom the tree of life blooms for them, and who, by virtue of their heavenly possessions, are alone in a condition essentially to serve them. But how fortunate is it that man's happiness is not chained to his own courses and to his own wishes, and that salvation is given by God, not as a reward of the desire for salvation, but the desire is given as an earnest of salvation. How fortu-

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nate is it that converting grace begins its operations, not seductively and invitingly only, but with irresistible power, and does not seek her followers merely, but makes them. Who would obtain eternal life if it were otherwise? Naaman is destined to experience this constraining mercy. The God, of whom he is, as yet, ignorant, purposes great things towards him. He will find a way to reach his holy aims in him and by him, however slight the apparent probability, and however abundant the elements of resistance. As in the realm of Nature, the Lord operates with power, so also he operates in the human mind. He calls not merely the stars in the firmament, but the thoughts of our souls also, that they come or go, stand still or move. The hearts of all are in his hand. At a movement of his royal sceptre, the universe goes its path, and man goes his, that insect of an hour. Under such circumstances, it is true, all idea of the independence of nations and of individuals vanishes. But a belief in the dependence of the creature can only tend to our greater solace. All the cheerfulness with which we contemplate the universe, reposes upon the idea, that everything which lives, is sustained and moved by invisible cords, held by the hand of the Almighty. What would become of this world if the will of man and not God's will, held the sceptre?

As we draw near to Naaman to-day, a dark cloud has gathered about his splendor. Although he is still the exalted warrior, the hero crowned with laurels, yet he is no longer an object of envy. Alas, a bitter drop of wormwood has, in a short space, transformed his cup

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of joy into gall, a worm is gnawing upon the core of his greatness, and this favorite of fame and of fortune has sunk to a level with the most pitiable object upon the earth. Naaman is afflicted with the leprosy, that fearful, hideous malady, in which Israel beheld the emblem of that most terrible of all evils under the sun, Sin, and the healing of which, the Lord stamped as the type of that highest of all goods, salvation in Christ. His body is, from head to foot, one ulcer, his skin is an inflamed, gaping, festering crust. All turn their eyes from him, for his aspect is disgusting and loathsome. All fly at his approach, for the atmosphere in which he moves is poisoned, and his breath is the breath of pestilence and of death. The hero of the day must crawl into a dark, secluded chamber, and should he wish to appear in public, he can do so only with veiled head, and amid the cry:—"unclean! unclean!" and those who met him, would fly, with averted faces, from this warrior, crowned with conquests; and he, who, formerly, would have felt honored by a passing greeting from this distinguished man, would now, even were the hero to reach out his hand to him, shrink back and hesitate to take it. Behold, to this has it come with a man, who but lately was extolled as the happiest among the happy; and now, who, in the whole world, is so poor and wretched, that he would exchange places with Naaman, and not infinitely prefer to be Naaman's servant than Naaman himself?

Yes, you often think:—"Such a man sits in fortune's lap!" "What a rich, what a distinguished man is that?" But ah, if we knew what often lies concealed

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behind this greatness, it would seldom excite our envy! Thousands who seem to sit enthroned upon the summit of all happiness, would as readily exchange with you, as you, who behold but the outside of their lives, would exchange with them. Oh, how gladly, perhaps, would they resign all their state, if with their roses, they could also cast from them the sharp thorns which prick them secretly. Be content, my brethren, with your condition, however mean it may appear; a shining exterior is not everything. Cease to harbor envy. Ah, if we but possess the peace of God! this peace is everything. This transforms the crust of bread into manna, and the clay hut into an antechamber of paradise.

II. You can readily imagine that no means were left untried, to heal a man of such importance as Naaman was. The king, who looked upon him as the mightiest support of his throne, sent to him his most skilful physicians. These vied with each other in zealous attendance on the exalted patient. But no medicine availed, and the most faithful watching proved useless. It had never yet happened indeed, that, that incomprehensible and obstinate disease, the leprosy, had been removed by medical treatment. According to the Scriptures it was a plague, an immediate visitation from God, and as such could only be healed by a miracle of divine power. There are diseases of a like nature at the present day. They exist that they may subdue the pride of the sons of earth, that they may restrain man's art and wisdom within the limits of becoming humility, that they may preserve awake within us, the consciousness

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of an entire dependence upon Him above, and that they may banish from our minds the vain conceit that the preservation of our breath is a work of our own cunning. What a signal overthrow did the learning of this world meet with lately, in the presence of that fearful malady, which, more terrible than the destroying angels of Egypt, advanced from the east, spreading over a great portion of the globe, and which has not yet terminated its ravages. We confess that, after the new man, we could heartily rejoice at this discomfiture of human science. The height of wisdom to which man had now attained was lauded to the skies, and there was no end nor measure to the boasting. But they now begin to draw in their swelling sails. Their former charlatanry has become evident in all its hollowness, and is the scoff of the people. Proud science, which had puffed itself up almost to the throne of the Divinity, was forced to confess, out of the mouths of her most distinguished votaries, that she could not comprehend this mysterious malady. That presumptuous Art, that demeaned herself like a worker of miracles, to whom everything was possible, suffered a sad shipwreck with her panaceas and preventives, and left the scene humbled and ashamed. The temporal authorities no longer hesitated to recommend a resigned and trusting frame of mind as the most approved remedy against that fearful disease, and we now find many who restore the honor robbed from Him, who says: "I am the Lord, thy physician," many who join in David's words: "In the Lord I put my trust: how say you to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain."

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To Naaman also his scourge will become, not a draught of poison and of death out of the cup of anger, but a healing draught out of the cup of mercy. God was merciful to this heathen and loved him. Was it because the heathen loved Him previously?—Oh, no. For what reason then? God wished to glorify *His Grace* in this man. This was the first reason, the second, and the last. The Syrian was a brave warrior. Fair wreaths of victory adorned his brow. But this was of no account to *Him*, who "delighteth not in the strength of the horse; who taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man." And if he possessed other qualities also, which we call shining and amiable, yet he possessed them before *men* only and for men; in the eyes of Jehovah they had no value. Did he love the Lord? How should he? Did he live for *His* honor? No, but for his own. Did he do God's will? No, the will of the flesh. He was a worldly man, given to the follies of earth, and dead in sin. But this did not hinder the God of mercy from entertaining thoughts of rescue concerning him. Does it vex you that God's grace operates thus unconditionally? It does not vex *us*. We would rather rejoice aloud, when we hear and experience that he is no respecter of persons, but has compassion on whom he will, without reference to the sins or virtues of any man.

But how shall he approach the lost sheep? How shall he grasp, how find the man, who has not even the slightest knowledge of him, the living God, and who, far from the sound of his word, sits in the dark magic circle of his unbelief and superstition? Oh, do

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not fear! He will discover a way to reach his chosen one. God's rescuing hand knows no hindrances, no obstructing bars. At Jerusalem and at Damascus its grasp is equally rapid, equally sure. The leprosy with which the Lord has smitten the man, is—who would think it?—the first link in the chain of the operations of mercy, which aim at his conversion. The second link in this chain, is an occurrence, apparently even less calculated than the former to effect this object. The circumstance to which I refer is this. Some months before, at the time when the war between Benhadad and the king of Israel was still raging, a band of Syrian warriors made an incursion by night into the enemy's territory, cut in pieces the outposts on the frontier, fell sword in hand upon an undefended village, plundered the houses and cottages, and, among other things, carried off a young Israelitish maiden. The poor child was mercilessly torn from the arms of her weeping parents, bound like a victim, and thus dragged across the borders of the strange, inhospitable land, there to be taken to the market, and at the first suitable offer sold as a slave. What shall we say to this occurrence? We burn with indignation at this deed of barbarity. God's conduct in this affair amazes us. "Why," we might ask, shaking our heads, "why did he not prevent such iniquity? Where do we find here that keeper of Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps? Where are his promises?" Yes, such are the thoughts that flash across our minds as we contemplate this occurrence; but here again it becomes plainly apparent, how easily we may err in our judgment con-

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cerning God's ways, when we anticipate their termination. For exactly here, where we short-sighted mortals are unable to discover the slightest trace of the divine hand, the Lord is commencing a plan of operations, which, by the wisdom of its arrangement, will, in due time, constrain us to the most profound admiration. Exactly here, where the consoling doctrine of the existence of a living God, of an omnipresent keeper of Israel, of a paternal, loving guardianship over the people of the sanctuary, seems entirely to vanish, we find—who would imagine it?—a new and shining confirmation of this truth. Have a little patience, and oh, how gloriously will this dark affair brighten and disentangle itself! But this, at least, I will tell you in advance—these warriors have but taken a nightingalé, which will sing the songs of Zion in the dark places of Syria; have carried away a star for the starless firmament of their land; they bear a torch in their hands, which Jehovah purposes to cast into the heart of their benighted kingdom, and have transplanted into their native soil, a flower from Israel's garden, whose balmy odor will serve for everlasting healing, and not of the sick Naaman alone. Yes, this mysterious occurrence will so develope itself, that the poor maiden will gratefully kiss God's hand, that he did not hasten to her rescue in the moment of her captivity; that our leper will, with loud praises, confess to the Lord, that a good angel had been sent to him in Damascus in that captive girl; that the entire pagan city will be constrained by this occurrence to acknowledge: "The Lord he is God; there is none

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else besides him;" that even we shall strike our hands together in astonishment, and in newly revived conviction, be compelled to confess that we should suffer the Lord quietly to pursue his own path, that his counsel is wonderful indeed, but that he conducts it to a glorious issue!

Oh, happy is he, who is led by the bands of this Lord, and is entitled to believe that his life rests like a woof upon the loom of this great workman. He may count with confidence, that, in the very moments when the threads seem to cross each other in the most tangled and aimless confusion, he will discover the most wonderful and glorious traces of that great artistic hand which guides and orders everything. Whatever of discordance, whatever of inconsistency may appear in our lot of life, the time will come when the plan of divine providence will stand before us completely unveiled, and will fill us with admiration and delight. For that is for ever true, and stands firmer than God's mountains, which the lips of the royal harper chant to us from the hills of Zion: "Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies."

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CHAPTER X.

THE ISRAELITISH MAIDEN.

ONE of the most significant sayings which king Solomon has left to us, we find in Proverbs i. 17, "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." The meaning of these words is abundantly exhibited in the life and experience of all God's children. *These* birds also, are as Paul says, caught with craft and guile. The Lord sees indeed that it would be in vain to spread the net before their eyes. Hadst thou known in advance, my brother, that the hearing of this or that sermon would pierce thy heart, that intercourse with this or that man would lead to thy humiliation and contrition, that this or that book would cast the spark of repentance into thy soul, would break thy heart, and sadden and embitter the world and its joys; truly, in thy natural blindness, thou wouldst have hastened to cast the book aside, to break the bands of friendship, and to avoid the church on the day of danger. But the net was hidden from the bird, and before thou wast aware of it, the string was drawn, and thou wast caught.

And as the Lord proceeds at the beginning of a life of grace, so also he proceeds during its continuance.

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The maxim: "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird," still preserves all its force. He still casts the net to draw us nearer and nearer to him, to unite us more and more closely with him. But the net is concealed. He does not tell us previously, with what he intends to visit us, neither does he initiate us into his plans. He withdraws himself, gives us over to our own ways, lets us feel his anger anew, in order to renew our repentance, to strip us of every remnant of self-righteousness, and afterwards to bring us to a more lively sense of all that we possess in Him, and in his mercy. He does not reveal to us, however, that this withdrawal, anger, and abandonment, are but *apparent*, and that nothing but *love* is disguised in this harsh procedure, for, if we knew, in advance, that he was not in earnest, in all that we have just named, then indeed the net would be spread in vain. Therefore he is accustomed to conceal the toils carefully from our eyes, and thus he never misses his aim. In his course towards our Syrian also, he does not forget how vain it is to spread the net in the sight of any bird. The snare is deeply, deeply laid, and who will venture to say that, to-day, or to morrow, we shall not see this strong man ensnared in the meshes of God's mercy.

2 KINGS v. 3.

And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.

Damascus, the Syrian city, has received us once

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more. A pleasant acquaintance, which we have made here, begins gradually to reconcile us to this heathenish spot. It is the people indeed, that render a place habitable and pleasant, or disagreeable and irksome, and not the walls and the buildings. Naaman is the acquaintance whom we meet here, the brave leader of the Syrian host. That, however, which attracts us towards this man, is not the renown in arms by which he is distinguished, it is something quite different. The eye of the divine love and compassion rests upon this man. It is this that enchains us to him. In this we behold his highest glory, his real grandeur. It is true at our first meeting with this warrior, we saw but little to lead us to believe that he was one favored of Jehovah. He was a blind, benighted heathen, and the very condition in which we found him reminded us rather of a visitation of the divine anger than of aught else. Afflicted with that terrible malady, the leprosy, he was, as you have seen, banished from human society, a revolting spectacle, and secluded in a solitary chamber of his palace. We left his gloomy retreat with melancholy reflections upon the vanity of all earthly happiness. But at the moment when, with painful sympathy, we saw the temporal glory of this mighty man sink, withered and dead, into the grave, the first dawning beams of an infinitely higher glory, began to rise before our eyes over its ashes. The Almighty was taking the first steps for this man's everlasting healing. But how strangely was this work of love begun. We saw a band of Syrian marauders burst across the frontiers of Israel. Here they assailed an

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undefended village, plundered it, and dragged away with them a young daughter of Israel, to sell her in Syria as a slave. In this heart-rending scene who could imagine that the Lord was commencing the execution of that divine purpose of mercy, of which Naaman was the object—to what extent will be rendered somewhat visible to-day, since the strangely complicated threads begin to disentangle themselves in the portion of our narrative that lies before us. We will consider at present *the momentous purchase; the development of God's flower in a pagan land*, and *the first beams of hope in a dark night of mourning*.

I. Let us first take our station in the public market in Damascus. Affecting scenes are here displayed to our view. Numbers of poor wretches, torn forcibly from their families and homes, are driven into the square, handcuffed together, rated at a price like horses and oxen, and set up for public sale. Purchasers collect about the unhappy creatures, scrutinize them, test their suppleness and strength, and then proceed to bid and to traffic for them, as if for merchandise. And when a bargain is struck, the buyer drives his slave home, and is entitled, not merely to load him with what burdens he sees fit, but even to dispose of his life. With inward compassion we wander in spirit among the sad groups; but behold, our glances fall upon the unhappy maiden of Israel, surrounded by her captors. The poor creature stands before us, trembling, like a lamb led to the slaughter, her weary head drooping upon her breast; the paleness of death in her grief-

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worn countenance. Alas, so young, and already doomed to such a fate! The heart of the unhappy girl is racked with anguish, especially when she thinks of her father and mother, thinks of her dear but distant home. Oh, that a mound reared of that beloved soil, covered her weary head! The pains of death would be more tolerable than this woe of saddest loneliness in a foreign land. Oh, Jehovah, thou God and Saviour of her fathers, where art thou? Her soul consumes itself in such anxious inquiries and sighs. But behold a chariot comes rolling hitherward, and stops near the unhappy captives. Attendants start forward to open the door, and a dame steps forth, whose superior rank and high condition cannot be disguised by her simple costume, and the air of deep sadness and anxiety that is visible in her countenance. She also has come to purchase a slave. Her husband's malady renders it necessary, perhaps, to increase the number of her servants. Is it the wife of Naaman then that we see before us? The same. She steps nearer and examines the slaves. Many a young damsel is brought to her, and praised extravagantly. She is well pleased with more than one. Yet she cannot, she knows not why, think seriously of selecting any one among them. Suddenly her glance falls upon the captive out of Israel. To see her, and form a choice, is the work of a moment. What it really was that attracted her so instantaneously and irresistibly toward this maiden we do not know; whether it was the deep, heart-moving sadness in her features, or the delicacy and modesty that was visible in her demeanor, or the fact that she recognized her as

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a daughter of Israel; for the Israelitish female slaves, on account of the greater refinement of their manners, as well as their singular honesty and fidelity, were usually preferred to all others. Enough. "It shall be none other than the daughter of Israel!" cries a voice in her heart. Who was it uttered this decisive sentence? Not the purchaser. It was uttered by the voice that called the universe into existence, and which does not disdain to disguise itself, even in the whisperings of the human heart. In a few moments the bargain is concluded. What a happy, momentous purchase! Had the buyer a presentiment of that which she was obtaining in the maiden? A slave, she thinks. Deeper than this her perception does not penetrate. But we are better acquainted with the value of that which she is about to take with her to her home. Most certainly a cheaper purchase was never made in any market upon earth. As she looks upon the young girl, she looks upon nothing less than the angel, by whose means her dwelling, now a house of tears, is to bloom again like a paradise on earth. She has purchased in this child a messenger of heaven, who is to lead her and her household into the arms of the living God; she is taking home with her in this slave, a star, chosen by eternal Love, to light the way for her and hers, out of the shadow of death—not to a source of corporeal health merely, no, into the abode of an everlasting sabbath rest; and who is able to utter all else beside which this simple blossom from Canaan's hills will become to her? As yet, in truth, you do not dream a syllable of all this; but it is well known to Him who sends this child

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so opportunely into her hands, who to-day, and not earlier, not later, bade her ride to the market-place, who had so ordained it, that of all the maidens brought before her, none should exactly please her, and who, at the moment when she beheld the Israelitish maiden, had guided her choice to a rapid and firm decision. Yes, you will here perceive anew how true it is that "He giveth to his beloved, in their sleep!" and how slight was David's boldness, when he exclaimed:—"I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." The world, it is true, says, that each one is the architect of his own fortune. We know otherwise, we know better. But one thing is needful; it is this, that we enjoy Jehovah's favor and protection. Then we may suffer our bark of life to drift onward in God's name. It will now of itself pursue the right course. Instead of human wisdom, everlasting Love holds the rudder, and the wings of almighty grace repose outspread above it.

A glance at the varied chain of incidents, by which the Lord prepared help and rescue for Naaman, awakes in us the question, why he did not proceed by a simpler and more direct path. He could have relieved the sorely afflicted man from his malady, by a single word, uttered immediately from heaven. Certainly he could have done this? Wherefore then these numerous secondary causes and connecting links, such as the capture of the Israelitish maiden, the purchase in the market, and the like. I reply: God's ways are different from our ways. We have, in general, but *one* object before our eyes, towards the attainment of which all

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our efforts and thoughts are directed. The Lord never conceives a plan isolated in itself, but his projects, like the clouds of heaven, are always full and freighted heavily. With one chief object, a hundred secondary objects go hand in hand, all of which are to be realized in a single operation. As his words, unlike the words of a man, are wont to express not a single thought, but whole creations, so also his deeds and actions engender thousand-fold results, and call into being successions of the most varied consequences. There is a kind of rocket, which, when kindled, ascends aloft, in a single flame, then suddenly bursts asunder, and we see balls of fire, flashes, stars innumerable dart out, in a twinkling, on every side, in dazzling splendor. In such wise, if we may compare the most sublime of agencies, with a petty sport, is it with Jehovah's actions as well as with his words. What was the Lord's purpose in our narrative? Chief of all, to heal and convert Naaman. This was his first, his principal aim. But how many designs of another kind revolved around this, as the planets revolve about the sun! The Lord had views also upon Naaman's wife and all his household; views upon the prince Ben-hadad and king Jehoram; views upon the Israelitish maiden, upon all Israel, upon us, the children of the latest posterity, and who can say upon what and whom beside. All these divine intentions were to be accomplished in a single operation. We should carefully contemplate and heed this procedure of the Almighty. It will illuminate many a darkness in our own lives, afford us the key to many enigmas, and especially interpret to us the mystery, why the Almighty

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is accustomed to vouchsafe the good and help we sigh for, not at once and on the spot, but in ways the most singular and circuitous.

II. Let us leave the market-place in Damascus, and return to the palace of the sick Naaman. The leper is still sitting, depressed and downcast in his chamber. His wretchedness has reached its highest point, and his last hope of recovery has vanished. In an adjoining apartment we find the wife of our unhappy Syrian. Near her, busied probably with some needlework, is the young Israelite. The sweet maiden had already gained the favor and confidence of the whole household, by her retiring, gentle, and unpretending conduct; but they have not yet a presentiment of half that they possess in this damsel. Neither have we yet become thoroughly acquainted with the maiden. Her inward form is still hidden from us. But the veil is about to be lifted. The wife of Naaman, who now does not deem it beneath her dignity, to select the sweet damsel as her companion, and to enter into familiar discourse with her, feels constrained to pour out the grief of her soul into her sympathising bosom. Suddenly her work drops from the maiden's hands, and a tear starts into her eye, such as love weeps, or sympathy, or home-sickness, and with an expression of the deepest emotion in all her features, she exclaims with a sigh :—"*Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.*"

In this earnest ejaculation, "Would God!" we behold the maiden's heart first unveiled to our view.

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In these words we discover the true daughter of Israel, and, indeed, more than an Israelite after the flesh. This "Would God!" is like a gleam of silver in the workshop of a refiner, which gives the first indubitable evidence of the precious metal's presence in the crucible. It is like the note of a nightingale from a distant grove. It is like the soft, low murmuring of a deeply hidden, subterranean spring of water. Yes, this "Would God!" casts the first illuminating beam of light upon her inward world. A flower of God here unfolds itself before our eyes—a rose of paradise amid the wilderness of paganism—the dew-drop of an everlasting dawn sparkles in its cup, and its leaves rise, trembling, towards the heavenly light. For the maiden's longing after the land of her fathers, the heartfelt simplicity of her faith, her childlike confidence in the interpreters and messengers of Jehovah, how sweetly all this, and infinitely more, gleams forth in this sadly uttered "Would God!" No, we can hesitate no longer to reach to her the fraternal hand, as to a daughter of Abraham after the Spirit. She is a sister in the Lord, a child of God, a co-heiress of the kingdom of glory.

This "Would God!" may have been the first distinct sound, in which, since her captivity, she has proclaimed the veiled mystery of her inward life, in the presence of others. Ah, she was not understood in this strange land, and she could not have borne scoffing and mockery! Locking the fire of her faith and of her longing within her oppressed bosom, she lived on in stillness and in silence, like a bird that

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mourns solitary in its cage, or like the yellow leaf that droops sadly on the flower, which, from a green, well watered meadow, has been transplanted into a dry potsherd. Oh, how often must the wide world have appeared too close, for the boundless sadness which consumed her soul, when she thought of the dear and hallowed land, trodden by the feet of God's prophets, and of the quiet cottage, where dwelt her father and mother, and her beloved brothers and sisters; and of the familiar discourses and narratives, in the shadows of evening beneath the fig tree and the vine; and of the psalms and sweet songs, in which she had there joined with deep emotion; and of many other blessed and never to be forgotten scenes and occurrences; oh, how often has the sadness of death fallen upon her, how often has she wept and sobbed, until she could bathe herself in her tears. How often has she experienced that in her little heart there was room for a world of woes, and that the words "to be consumed with sorrow" are no empty phrase. It is true, a mighty consolation was still left to her; otherwise she would have perished in her misery; the consolation that Jehovah's arm was not shortened, and that his eye surveyed all lands. Then how tightly, how convulsively must she have striven to clasp this thought, like a good staff, with both her hands, and most certainly she was never alone in her little chamber that she did not sink at the feet of her covenant God with the question, "Ah, Lord, speak! am I here forsaken and alone, or may I, even in this distant land, console myself with the thought of thy presence?" And undoubtedly

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Jehovah had not withdrawn himself from the poor child, but ever, at the right time and hour, had surprised her with his gracious visits, and, with kind solace, cheered her drooping soul. Still it is a trial, doubtless, for us, poor children of the dust, to be alone with God in the wide world, and nowhere among men to find an echo to our dearest convictions, our holiest interests. Oh, how pleasant is it to the faithful, and worthy of all gratitude, to be able to say with the Shunammite: "I dwell among mine own people!" We, my dear brethren, enjoy this happiness in superabundant measure; oh, that we might learn to prize it as we ought! If the heart is heavy, or if, after the toils of the day, we desire a pleasant solace, it costs us but a few steps, in whatever corner of the city we may dwell, and we stand in the cottage of an Israelite, where a circle of kindred hearts surrounds us, and where our complaints find an open ear, our scruples a cheering solution, our words and thoughts a living echo, and where our joys and sorrows are understood and shared. Oh, were we but once, like this poor Israelitish maiden, banished, for a while, into a lonely, foreign land, and destined, like so many of our distant brethren and sisters, to stand alone in the world with our faith, how would these privileges rise in value, towards which the custom of possession now renders us almost indifferent! Thousands envy us the happy lot of brotherly communion that has fallen to us, and think that we may well bloom and flourish, spiritually, amid the streams of impulse and encouragement, which daily ripple around us. But, alas, how do we bloom? Ah, that we our-

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selves did not but too often disturb a source, from which we could drink so much that is good and pleasant! Did we love each other more, my brethren, did we cling together more closely, harmoniously, and warmly, and did we conduct ourselves towards one another with more confidence and candor, than is, for the most part, the case, how would our lives gain in blessing and in joy. Ah, if you have this matter at all at heart, let me admonish you with Paul, "to consolation in Christ, to the comfort of love, to the fellowship of the Spirit; so fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, and in lowliness of mind, each esteeming others better than themselves."

III. For a time, then, the maiden had been able to conceal the inmost kernel of her being, her relation to the living God, behind the veil of deep and timid silence. But the more the fire of faith and of longing after God is confined and hemmed in from without, so much the higher rises its inward intensive power. A man, whose heart is truly imbued with the life that comes from above, cannot long disguise his eagle, heavenward nature from the world. Before he is aware of it, he stirs his wings again with power, and betrays himself in all his beauty. This was the case with the daughter of Israel. The inmost depths of her life broke forth in that ejaculation, and just at the right hour, the right place, and in the right way. The Lord so ordered it, who guided her to this house, for the everlasting salvation of the household. This great aim, however, required that she should conceal herself no

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longer, but should open her mouth, and declare of whose spirit she was the child, and whence she drew her birth.

Whether the maiden had been well taught and instructed I am unable to say, but I doubt not that she had taken sufficient with her, from the mine of God's word, into this foreign land, not merely to supply her own needs, but also to kindle a beacon flame in the darkness, for some soul in want of help and comfort. That single noble passage in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, 1 Kings viii., might have been sufficient; "Moreover, concerning a stranger, that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm), when he shall come and pray towards this house; Hear thou in heaven, thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house which I have builded is called by thy name." Yes, who can say, if in that momentous instant, this or a similar passage of Holy Writ did not actually arise before her soul. This, at least, was certainly not unknown to her, to wit, that God was not merely the God of the Jews, but the God of the heathen also. Most surely she had not the slightest doubt, that Naaman, if he would bend before Jehovah, would, as well as another, recover in the pleasant light of his countenance, and enjoy a blessed experience of the consoling truth, that God's mercy extends not to

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the boundaries of Canaan merely, but "is great above the heavens, and his faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." But what then did the maiden say to her mistress? You have heard. "Would God," she sighed forth, "would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!"—she meant the man of God, Elisha, of whom she had heard such great things, or perhaps she had herself seen him—"for he would recover him of his leprosy," literally, "gather him from his leprosy," that is, lead him back healed, from his seclusion, into human society.

It is true the maiden said nothing more than these few words. She spoke also carelessly, in her simplicity; not having the most distant idea of the importance of that which she had uttered. But scarcely have the words escaped her lips, when they, at once, perform their deeds, their wonders. Her mistress glances upon the slave significantly, as if to say: "Maiden, what words are those thou speakest?" then she leaps quickly from her seat, hastens to her unhappy husband, calls him joyfully by name, and tells him, with great agitation: "Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel!" Oh, then a beam of cheerfulness, the first for a long time, flashes across the gloomy countenance of the sick man, and his soul, emerging as it were from a dark and dismal grave, beholds itself torn suddenly from the terrors of despair, and restored to the happy spheres of hope. Oh, what had not that daughter of Abraham effected by those words, "Would God!" She had demolished, *in a twinkling*, walls high as heaven that were reared around

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the grieving pair; the dismal walls of hopelessness and despair, and cast the first beam of a new hope into their night of tears. She opened for them golden, rapturous prospects, through the dense, dark clouds, which had gathered over their lives, and with those simple words conjured up a bright bow of promise, in the sullen tempest of their existence. Ah, the unhappy pair, who dreamed of naught but separation, of death, and the grave, see at once unfolded to their glances, the sunny regions of a verdant future. They who thought themselves already a helpless prey to the billows, now, upon the mounting seas of calamity, suddenly call out, "land! land!" in their hearts, and once more hoist the rosy-colored flag of hope. They behold a new world lying before them in the distance, as yet in a mist indeed, but a mist tinged with the blush of morning. They feel a strong, nay, a sure presage, that yonder, yonder a star of hope rises for them again,—and thousands of bright, enrapturing images pass, half veiled, half disclosed, before their inward glances.

We also, my dear hearers, may call to mind a delightful moment in our lives. As we felt at that time, so Naaman and his wife may have felt, when they had received that first whisper of promise from the maid of Israel. I speak of that time, when, after having long walked onward unsteadily and full of sadness, amid the dim mists of keen inward discontent, of deep dissatisfaction with the world and its vanities, and of a sense still indistinct indeed, of our estrangement from God, suddenly the first beam of evangelical light broke in upon our darkness. We felt then not other-

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wise than as if some one had burst the iron bars, behind which we had been imprisoned for years, and, in a twinkling, we beheld before us, as it were, a new and wonderful world in the soft, blue distance. Oh, how our hearts beat then, and what sweet, blissful forebodings chased each other across our souls! We felt: "That is the world in which I shall find what I seek; there blooms my happiness, my life, my rest; in yonder mysterious vapory distance lies the wished-for Eden of my heart!" Like the tones of bells inviting us to an eternal sabbath, the words echoed upon our ears: "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Like songs in the night the words resounded to us: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." We beheld a form like the Son of Man pass through this world of wonders. We then thought: "Thou art he who can help us, or no one can." We perceived in the far mists a dawning sign, shaped like a cross, and thought: "Yonder blooms the tree of everlasting life. By this sign I shall conquer or never." A yearning hope, a boundless joy, unknown till then, flamed through the bosom, which seemed touched, as by a celestial magnet. And tell me, my dear hearers, now that we have crossed into this world, were our hopes then vain? did our forebodings deceive us?

Oh, happy is he who has found a place in this world of light, in this realm of love; in this invisible truly, and still so real world, through which echoes the tread of Jesus' feet, and in which there is counsel and solace, and help for every evil! in this world, where God's

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angels ascend and descend, and where sinners repose on Jehovah's bosom, and find a couch in the arms of everlasting Love! Oh, in what colors can we describe the happiness of him, whom the Lord's hand has guided into the peaceful region of this paradise of grace! Enter, enter therefore, you who yet linger and tarry without! Let him who loves his soul, join himself to our ranks. Here alone is peace, safety, and life, here is God's house; yes, here is the gate of heaven. It is true, the inscription over the portal of this kingdom sounds harshly: "Whosoever forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple." But on the reverse of this portal we read the words: "Here the wicked cease from troubling, here the weary are at rest!" and from a thousand pillars, which stand firmer than the everlasting hills, the bright inscription shines: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and with loving kindness have I drawn thee. Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

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CHAPTER XI.

THE PILGRIMAGE.

You remember the consoling words spoken by our Lord in Luke, xix. 10: "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "The Son of Man!" Sweet appellation! Upon the wings of this expression, he bends down to us familiarly and graciously. This appellation is an olive-branch, not an awe-inspiring sceptre; an alluring: "Come unto me;" not a "Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet." The Son of Man *is come*. God be praised for it! Had he not come I should curse the hour of my birth. But now, that upon the pillars of our earth we can read the bright inscription: "The Messiah came!" let no one term it a vale of tears. I can never grow weary of reading these three words. In these three words three stars beam upon me, in whose light I am more than repaid for the loss of Paradise.

But for whom was the visit of this great Prince of Peace intended? Where was the magnet which drew him from his blissful height, down to this poor world? We might suppose it were to be found in a chosen circle of devout, repentant, holy, and righteous men.

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But it is by no means so. Wert thou, in the slightest degree, pure and holy of thyself, we should not be justified in offering to *thee*, the gospel of peace. For those for whose sake Christ came, he terms in that text, not righteous, but *apolólos;* and this word is so far from signifying any thing which is praiseworthy and good, that it expresses rather the extremity of woe, of ruin, and of evil.

This word reminds us of a sheep without a shepherd, lost in a desolate and fearful wilderness, and, nowhere finding a hospitable shelter, is exposed a helpless prey to the wolves, and ignorant of the path, advances toward dire destruction. This word points us to a sunken ship, which, with broken mast and rudder, lies in the depths of the sea. The waves roar above it, mountain high. It is lost, and there is no hope that it will rise again to the surface. It reminds us of a man who has borrowed vast sums of money, but when the time of payment has come, he has squandered all; he is without a penny, and he cannot hinder his creditors from selling the roof above his head, and carrying tables, chairs, and beds to the market-place. This word brings before our eyes the condition of one who has trifled away and irrevocably forfeited every thing that he possessed, happiness and honor, all strength, nay, life itself. Yes, this word signifies something thoroughly corrupt, spoiled, ruined, in which there is nothing more to be repaired or bettered. Lo, all this lies in this word *apolólos*. Examine now thyself, and see if thine own situation is in any manner depicted in this word—and if thou dost find thy form and condi-

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tion mirrored therein, then tremble, then mourn and sigh; but at the same time spread forth the wings of joyful hope; for it was even *such* lost sheep that God's mediator came to seek.

The sinner's wretchedness is the card of admission to the temple of the New Testament. He who suffers himself to be terrified instead of encouraged at the consciousness of his lost condition, is a fool. Holiness is a coin that is not current at the throne of God. But he who approaches and says: "I bring naught but sins!" need not fear a repulse. If I wished Jesus to help me, I would say: "Lord, I am lost!" If I had really good points of character, good works, I would for no price appeal to them. The Lord could reply to me: "Where have I said that I came to seek the righteous?" But he cannot say to me: "Where have I declared that I came to seek the lost?" I should have evidence against him in Luke, xix. 10. No, do you appeal if you will, to the reality of your repentance, to the warmth of your devotion, to the honesty of your purposes, or whatever else it may be, I will say to him: "Lord, I am a lost, lost man, *therefore* have compassion upon me!" and I know that this "*therefore*" would prevail with him, even if he were unwilling to have compassion. In this "*therefore*" there lies an irresistible motive for him to hear me and to help me. As little will he be able to close his heart, against this "*therefore,*" as he will be able to deny himself, and to contradict his word.

Yes, the lost are the objects of his redeeming love. He has come to *seek* and to *save* them. This he him-

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self designates as his peculiar calling, as the essential object of his coming. God be praised that things stand thus, and that *the seeking* is not first expected on our part. For then who would come to Jesus? Not a *single* soul in the wide world. For we are not lost like a traveller, who has strayed from his path, and who, by careful reflection and with the help of guides, may, at last, find the right way. We are lost like a lost penny, which will never return of itself into thy purse; but which thou must search after with lantern and the broom. Joy to us, therefore, that He who alone can save us will seek us, and not *expect* us merely. And what he seeks, he will be able to find, wherever it may be hidden. We shall behold this truth beautifully illustrated in the history of Naaman, the Syrian.

2 KINGS v. 4–7.

And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, Go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now, when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me, to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.

The strangely complicated knots in our narrative begin to disentangle themselves most gloriously. There

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is a gleam of light, nay, the day is dawning. Already we clearly distinguish what the issue of the affair will be. Three topics will to-day claim our most earnest attention; *the preparations for a journey to Canaan; the passport; and Naaman's arrival in Samaria.*

I. The exclamation of the Israelitish maiden: "Would God, my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!" produced its effect. It is wonderful what a few words, spoken carelessly and without a purpose—let who will utter them—are able to set in operation, and bring to pass, when the Lord is with them and makes them strong. How could it have occurred to the maiden at Damascus, to attribute any importance to the words, "Would God!" that escaped her so involuntarily; and still, what a succession of the most precious facts must gradually be developed from this exclamation. Wherefore? Because such was the purpose of the all-seeing God. These simple words: "Would God, my Lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!" came speeding to Naaman and his wife like a dove with the olive branch of hope in its mouth; like an illuminating gleam of lightning they flashed upon their gloom; like a sweet star guiding to the fountain of mercy, they shone upon the dark, clouded sky of their life; and to the Lord they were a battering ram against the walls of paganism, a weapon of assault which conquered fortresses, a victorious sword, with which he rent from Satan his prey.

Ah, well may it be said of God's children, that they are the salt of the earth, and scattered abroad by Him

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for a blessing. They pass through the world, like clouds big with heaven's bounty, and not even their words are lost. How joyfully will they wonder, when the Lord takes the veil from their life here below and shows them how good a harvest, of which they themselves knew nothing, shot forth, silently and in secret, beneath his mercy, from the germ of their deeds and words upon the earth. Then they will see that they have not lived in vain. And their works will *remain*. No stream of time will ever wash them away. They will follow them into eternity.

But let us return to Damascus. Naaman, who, after he had heard of the exclamation of the slave, hovered upon the wings of hope, has formed his resolution. That he should follow the suggestion of the maiden was not a matter of doubt with him even for an instant. "Towards Samaria!" was the watchword of his heart. In the first place he hastens to obtain his king's permission to undertake the journey. His conduct, in this respect indeed, was very proper, although where it concerns *spiritual* journeys to the fountain of Israel, we should ask permission of nothing and of no one, and pay little regard to the approval or disapproval of those who are of the world. Naaman informs his master of what has happened. "Thus and thus," he says, "said the maid that is of the land of Israel." "Go to, go!" replied Ben-hadad. He was, indeed, most deeply interested in the preservation of a life, so precious to him as that of his general. It is true, if he could have nourished the slightest hope that help might be obtained for the distinguished patient, from the phy-

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sicians and priests of his own land, the jealous monarch would have grudged the honor of his cure to the hated nation of Israel. Now, however, he submits and grants his permission, nay, even expresses his readiness to give the sick man a passport and a letter of recommendation written in his own hand, to take with him upon the road. This royal missive is at once written and sealed. The address reads: "To Jehoram, king of Israel"—its contents are as follows: "Now, when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman, my servant, to thee, that thou mayst recover him from his leprosy." It must be confessed that the letter is like the writer, and betrays the great blindness of his heart. He thinks, that if any one in Israel possessed miraculous power, it could certainly be no other than the noblest after the flesh, the prince of the land. As if God saw as man sees, and in the distribution of his gifts and grace, took into account the person, his rank and condition; or as if God usually bestowed miraculous powers in such a way, that one thus endowed could use them at pleasure, as often as he felt inclined, as though it were a permanent possession. Oh, what follies and absurdities always start into view, when the unenlightened venture into the region of those things which belong to the spirit of God! The wisest then appear as fools, and the most learned become the mockery of children.

After our patient has thankfully received the royal passport and letter of recommendation, he hastens to make further preparations for his departure. He purposes to travel in a manner suitable to his rank. His

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most splendid chariot must be got in readiness; his finest horses saddled and bridled. His officers and armor-bearers must accompany him, and a numerous band of servants upon camels close the train. Money for the journey is not forgotten, and a vast sum is placed upon beasts of burden. Ten talents of silver, somewhere about sixteen thousand dollars of our money, and besides this, six thousand pieces of gold, a good portion of which is to be the reward of him who shall effect the desired cure. For this fortunate personage, the ten costly changes of raiment also are intended, which Naaman directs to be packed with his other goods. Thus royally equipped, the leper takes his departure, and hastens, by the shortest road, towards the blessed land, the land of his hopes.

From all this pomp and ceremony, it seems as if our good general's views of spirituality and divine illumination, are not elevated much above those of his royal master. He expected to find in the "prophet in Samaria" scarcely anything more than a kind of magician and enchanter, like those among the heathen. Of a God who blessed and suffered others to bless, without price, he had not the slightest idea. And, in truth, the economy of Jehovah's throne and household is not so very easily comprehended. That one, for example, should be the more welcome there, the poorer and emptier he approaches, and the greater his desire to receive what he wishes gratis, cannot make its way into the natural mind. How difficult it is even for those who have received grace, to offer up as a sacrifice

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to this truth, their ideas of servitude and reward, of drudgery and hire. Alas, a thousand times do we approach the Lord, like Naaman, loaded with gifts, or if we have nothing to give, with vows, to offer these. A thousand times, before we are aware of it, we relapse into the foolish thought, that it is for us first to present, this or that, to the Lord, and that, not until this is done, does it become us to console ourselves with one or another of his promises. Here one kneels with his prayer, oh, not like Daniel before God, leaning upon God's mercy; he founds his confidence, so far as phrases go, in truth, upon the merits of the Redeemer, but, in fact, upon some merit of his own, however finely drawn and carefully hidden. But what a way is this? We have not the privilege merely, we have the strict command to ask and to receive wine and milk without price. This is the conduct which is in place before Jehovah's throne. May we all conform to this blessed order!

II. Naaman advances along his road. Ben-hadad's passport does him good service. Wherever he goes it procures him a free passage, together with the most respectful reception. We also have a similar document to console us, but one of an infinitely higher kind, and of more comprehensive significance. It is the document, which, with other things, was given to the woman in the gospel, to whom Jesus said: "Go in peace!" The document which the disciples received in the admonition of their master to his enemies: "Let these go their way." It is a passport—"A passport?" you ask.

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Certainly; or have you never heard of the passport of the children of God?

Behold, *we* also are upon a journey. We are flying onward. Whether we know it, and wish it, or not, we are flying. Without cessation or pause, we are borne onward. We are travellers from the very cradle. The hour of death is the last station upon our road. We sail indeed in no ship, we sit upon no horse, and ride in no carriage; but the wings of time upon which we repose, stir more mightily and rapidly than all these. Each stroke of the clock, reminds us that we have already advanced a stage farther. Nay, every movement of the pendulum utters the solemn warning: You are journeying! Our path has hardly yet led us through the smiling fields of spring. It was here but yesterday. Now the roses have already faded. Soon the leaves will turn sear and yellow, and drop, rustling, to earth. Then the snow will fall. And before we are aware of it, the flowers of spring will bloom again—and thus on and on. And how long will it be before the leaves will drop from our branches, for all flesh is but grass. The grass has withered, the flower fallen. And whither do we journey now? *Eternity* is the goal. Here empty all the murmuring brooks of human life. One to-day, another to-morrow. But Eternity has two apartments, two provinces, two regions of a very different kind; a great gulf lies between them—the burning lake, and paradise, heaven, and hell. In one or the other, *all* will land. However tortuous may be the voyage, the last wave will cast the sailor into the former or into the latter.

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Matters may go very ill with a man upon this journey. He may fall into the hands of fearful powers, undergo terrible assaults, suffer arrests, whose horrors are not to be described. Thousands get entangled in the delusions of sin, and, encircled by this fearful serpent, whose coils daily contract more and more closely about them, they die and perish for ever in its hideous embrace. Think of Ahab, Judas, and Herod. Thousands, Satan bends beneath his yoke, casts into his chains, and in the net of falsehood and delusion, he saves them up for his dungeons of torment. Think of that unhappy race, over which Jesus cried: "Woe! woe!" Thousands fall into the hands of Moses, who enters an accusation against them, and brings them to trial, and the accusation is substantiated before the highest tribunal, and the delinquents are condemned, and their names are entered in the book of the accursed. Thousands, awaking conscience casts into the fiery furnace of despair—and despair is the brand and stigma of the lost. Thousands, the king of terrors, the last enemy, drags, at the bidding of the Almighty judge, into everlasting wastes—alas, to what an execution, to what torment! And thousands, in their last extremity, turn towards the gates of Jerusalem, and cry: "Lord, Lord, open unto us!" But hear the answer: "I know you not whence ye are, I know you not, I have never known you! Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!"

These are severe misfortunes, terrible calamities. What in comparison with these is everything which we are accustomed to call misfortune on this earth?—Nothing. What is it in comparison therewith that a man

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loses his property?—Nothing. Is reduced to beggary?—Nothing. Loses his honor with the world?—Nothing. Writhes with pain?—Nothing. In comparison with the former all these are not worthy of mention, do not come into account. Happy Job, Lazarus, and Bartimeus by the way side! Better a thousand times to be you than the rich man in his purple, than Saul and Herod, although they sat upon thrones of state. But I hear you anxiously enquire:—"Can we escape these fearful calamities?" My dear hearers, many have escaped them. "How?"—They have a passport. Whoever travels without a passport, will infallibly be arrested to-day, or to-morrow, as a vagabond and a criminal, and such a one is lost. But a passport does good service, only be sure that it is *the right one*. With false passports no one can journey safely; they plunge us rather into greater misery. Many, alas, journey with false passports, and I fear many among yourselves. Some write out their own passports. They consist in self-boasting. "I am not a bad man, I give to the poor, I act honestly and uprightly in all my dealings!" Oh, what a disappointment is in store for these blind forgers! For another, his passport is written by the world. It praises him as an excellent man, one who has done good service to town and state. But who gave the world a commission to write passports? Its seal is illegal, and possesses no validity. Even if thou hast a passport written by God's children, who bear witness for thee that thou also art God's child—do not depend upon it. How often have God's servants, through shortsightedness and ignorance drawn up false passports,

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although without knowing it, in truth. No, thou must have thy papers from a higher authority; from Him who said to his enemies: "Let these go their way;" and to the woman: "Go in peace!" Yes, this woman obtained the right passport, the only valid one, the only one that suffices always, and under every condition; and *this* all receive who are Christ's own. Let us unrol this document a little farther, and examine its wondrous contents.

In the first place every passport has its *coat of arms.* If ours has one, we are already acquainted with its significant shape. It is a cross, the sign under which we conquer. Upon it shines the inscription:—"He bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Near by is another: "God hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." At its foot we see rent bands, broken chains; significant symbols of great deliverances and victories. Around the shaft of the cross, there twines a green olive branch; the peace of God has grown forth from this dry, blood-sprinkled wood. Near the cross, on the one side lies a dragon with bruised head; on the other the shattered crown and broken sceptre of a King of Terrors; you know what king I mean. Above the cross, a rainbow spans itself, in brilliant splendor; you comprehend its signification. White and red, green and blue are its prevailing colors. Above the rainbow we behold heaven open. Smiling angel faces appear in the rosy vapor, and a standard is unfurled; it is—red, I think, and displays the words: "On earth peace, and good will towards men!" This is the coat

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of arms on the wondrous passport, mysterious, cheering, full of meaning, and, in truth, of higher worth than the most gorgeous eagle or the proudest lion, than the most brilliant coronet, or sceptre, in the escutcheons of the passports of this earth.

Where was the passport, of which we speak, drawn up? Very much depends upon this; for passports have greater or less validity, according to the power of the state, whose seal they bear. The passport of God's children bears a lofty stamp; the stamp of the most glorious and mighty state in the universe. Where was it written? In the cabinet of the Most High. With what? The writing is red. The blood of the Lamb was the ink. Upon what? Upon imperishable parchment. By whom? Written and signed by Almighty God, the Lord of all Lords. It is true, God could have drawn up no passport for a sinful child of Adam, without preliminary conditions. Justice to the transgressors would have caused them to be arrested, and placed in the hands of the executioner. But bail was given for them. The Son took it upon him to present the dishonored, honored, the sinner worthy of death, blameless, before the Father. He paid their debt. He took their curse upon him, and, in their stead, submitted to endure the torments which they had so justly merited. And he performed, in their name, their duties, and thus accomplished their obedience, without which safety from destruction, and an inheritance of life, was out of the question for them. Thus he fulfilled in their stead, and for them, the everlasting and irrevocable conditions of salvation, and

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thus it became possible, that now not merely grace and mercy could write their passport; the divine holiness and justice also could sign it, with a steady pen. And indeed, mercy alone would never have signed it. *God*, therefore, wrote the passport, the *merciful* and *righteous* God. He wrote it on the ground of the bleeding merits of the great Ransomer.

Let us contemplate the glorious document somewhat farther, and direct our glance to the *description* of the holder of the passport. We find the same rubrics that we find in the passports of the world. The descriptive marks, however, read somewhat differently, and are partly mysterious. Name: Jedediah, beloved of the Lord. Age: this is specified otherwise than in human registers of birth. Parents: God is his father—his mother the Jerusalem above. Birth-place: at the foot of Mount Sinai. Abode: Zion. Rank: a priest and king. Vocation: sometimes a combatant, sometimes a player on the harp. Attendants: the Holy Spirit. Object of his journey: the enjoyment of that which *He* has prepared for him. Mode of conveyance: upon eagles' wings. Dress: a seamless coat. Language: the dialect of God. Form: pleasant before God. Eyes: enlightened. Ears: open to God's word. Lips: anointed to confess the name of Jesus. Particular marks: well, what follows here? Perfect holiness, you say? Uninterrupted sanctity? Continual devotion? Oh, no, in this rubric but *one* thing is designated; but this is never wanting in these passports—deadly enmity to sin, and a sincere love to God in Christ Jesus.

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What *route* is mentioned in this passport? We look and read: "Good for Jerusalem." Jerusalem is the city of a great king. Oh, Jerusalem, how beautiful thou art! how brightly dost thou shine! how sweet to listen to thy songs of praise, in calm repose within thy walls. Oh joy and rapture! Now the sun rises. Now the day begins which will never have an end. Yes, it begins already! Oh, thou city of our hopes, we greet thee, greet thee with tears of longing! How the heart pants to walk thy streets! How often does the soul tremble impatiently at the sweet sound of thy name! Ah, there is an end for ever there to all suffering, all strife. There, faith is exalted into contemplation, hope into enjoyment. There, there is no more coming nor parting; no lamentation nor trembling. No darkness; everlasting, undimmed light. No want; bounteous, never-failing abundance. Oh, what will be our emotions, thou city of God, when thy doors close behind us! "If I forget thee, oh Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning!" "Good for Jerusalem!" that is; Enter into her gates, into her streets. And who was it uttered this? The Almighty upon his throne of glory. Oh, what power does this give to the words: "Good for Jerusalem!" Now it is no longer favor merely, and permission, but command, decree, injunction. How if a king wished to have a body of troops transported rapidly and safely, in wagons, to this or that place, and for this purpose should give them a writing, of the following tenor: "By the direct road to ——" whatever the city might be called, and should write beneath it: "The King,"

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and affix the royal seal. This would signify, not that they *might* journey thither, but that they *must*. And what zeal would be displayed by the authorities on the road to further and expedite their transportation in every way. Behold, thus it is with the words "Good for Jerusalem!" in the passports of the children of God. A mortal king could indeed declare his wish, yet he could not warrant that it would actually be put in execution. He has no command over storms, inundations, diseases, and whatever else might bar the road, and hinder the passage of the train. But He, who writes the passport of Israel, has command over all these. Therefore if He writes: "*Good for Jerusalem!*" we shall certainly arrive there. Whatever may happen, whatever may oppose us, in the words, "*Good for Jerusalem,*" lies a warrant that we shall arrive there. And every thing, even against its will, must further our progress. If our path leads us over mountains high as heaven, and across foaming oceans, we shall arrive there. We cannot fail of our goal. However adverse may be the voyage, we shall anchor in—Salem.

Lastly, what is the import of the orders and instructions that we read in this blessed document; for these, as you well know, are found in every passport. You have often read: "We request all the civil and military authorities," or perhaps, "We direct them to suffer the holder of this passport, which has been duly inspected, to journey freely and unhindered, and in case of need, to afford him every assistance and protection." Similar to these are the instructions in the passport of which we are treating. They are threefold. So far as they are addressed to the holy angels, they run: "Bear

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him up in thy hands, lest he dash his foot against a stone!" So far as to all the hostile powers of the world, they run: "Let this one go his way, and whatsoever you do let all work together for his good." In so far as they are addressed to the holder of the passport himself, they run: "Be of good courage; fear not; go thy way in peace." And the angels obey with joy, and enemies from necessity, for God's command compels them. And the holder of the passport is a fool if he does not anoint his head, and leave all care and anxiety to others.

It is true this passport has been written for many a one who himself knows not of it. He bears it sealed about him, and is ignorant of its sweet contents. Well, the document even when under cover will perform its office for him, and obtain him a free passage. But it is a double grace to be conscious of the possession of that instrument, and to be able to read it. Let him who can do this have the good document often in his hands. If Moses, the devil, or thine own conscience, would advance a complaint against thee, do not enter into disputation with them. Instead of thinking of apologies, cut the matter short, hold up thy passport to the inquisitors, and request them resolutely to show their authority. Doubt not that they will retire in silence and embarrassment; they mistook thee for another, and thou wilt continue upon thy road rejoicing.

III. Our travellers have proceeded one or two days' journey, when the mountains of Israel are seen in the blue distance. Oh, in what a different light does Naa-

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man now behold them, from that in which they appeared to him when he approached them at the head of his armed legions, and when, upon his war-horse, in the proud play of fancy, he selected from afar the one among those heights from which his victorious banner should flutter. Now he greets them as he would greet his home, with the tender greeting of Love. He beholds the land unfold itself, in the vapory distance, like a quiet haven. All his hopes are blooming among those hills. He stretches out his arms as if to embrace them from afar. Now also he is to lift up a banner upon Israel's soil, but to inscribe thereon: "The Lord is my helper." Now also a battle is to be fought there; but Naaman's idols will fall in the fight, and he himself will be conquered by Jehovah. Now also he will not quit the field without spoils, but they will be spoils that will endure unto everlasting life. As formerly, so on this occasion, he advances to songs of victory and shouts of triumph; but to songs and shouts which will be re-echoed in heaven, and in which the angels of God will joyfully mingle their voices. Of all this, in truth, our Syrian has no presentiment. A fountain for the healing of his bodily infirmity is all that he seeks, all that he hopes for. But God has greater things in store for him. The wings of the freest mercy bear him, as it were in slumber, to a paradise, whose flowers of joy will never fade.

They cross the borders of Canaan. What now disturbs the leper? A thrill of foreboding joy stirs his frame. He feels as if the dark region of sorrow and of mourning lay for ever behind him, and a blissful realm

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of wonder had received him. He enters the Holy land in a mood that borders on devotion. The road leads them first along the foot of a lofty mountain range, towards the Lake of Gennesaret, then by Capernaum and Bethsaida, down into the plain of Jezreel. And soon Samaria, the lofty capital of the kings of Israel, the goal of his journey, is seen in the distance. No city in the world had ever beamed upon our hero in fairer splendor. He beholds it rising before him, in the rosy light of hope. With beating heart, he hastens towards it without delay; but I will leave it to others to describe the emotions which attend him, as at last he passes through the gates of the city. Scarcely has he entered Samaria, when Naaman at once sends to inform the prince Jehoram of his arrival, and of the object of his journey. A messenger is despatched to the royal palace. After Jehoram had readily granted him the audience sought in the name of his general, Naaman himself, attended by his train, his head closely veiled, sets out to visit the king of Israel, appears before his throne, and after having gone through with the usual ceremonies of reception, at once reaches him, respectfully, his sovereign's letter of recommendation. Jehoram, not a little startled by this unexpected and mysterious visit, breaks the seal and reads: "When this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." But even while he reads the monarch changes color, and scarcely has he reached the end, when he hurls the letter from him with a gesture, in which fury and embarrassment are strangely

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mingled, rends his royal garment in token of his indignation, and cries with a violence that astonishes all present: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me, to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me!"

A pleasant scene, in truth. What needless anxiety! What unfounded, superfluous warmth! As if he himself were to perform the miracle! But still who can fail to see that there is much to excite our satisfaction in the strange conduct of this indignant king? W should rejoice if similar tasks, when required of you, were accustomed to call forth similar emotions, and as often, for example, as you were told to care for your own sanctification, your own salvation, you were disturbed by the same passion as Jehoram, and were hurried away to a similar reply of indignation and embarrassment: "Am I God, that I should do this thing?" If the blindness of the benighted heathen is manifested in Ben-hadad's letter, yet, in Jehoram's burst of emotion, we find evident characteristics of an Israelite, one sadly fallen, indeed, but as yet by no means completely torn from his stem. For not only does he know that the leprosy, as a visitation from God, can only be removed by an immediate act of the Almighty, and thus the healing of a leper was to be esteemed equal to raising the dead; for which reason he exclaimed: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive?" but besides this, although he clave, as his father clave, to the worship of the golden calves, yet, in the inmost depths of his soul, he is conscious that Jehovah is God, and that

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in Jehovah's eyes there was no greater nor more heinous abomination than to rob him of honor, in order, by deifying the creature, to transfer it upon man. Therefore he is unable to suppress a feeling of deep terror, when suddenly he beholds a request addressed to him, which, according to his inmost conviction, should only be addressed to the living God. You wonder, do you not, to meet with so much truth, so much of the genuine spirit of Israel in a Jehoram. But judge by this, into what an abundance of divine light the Lord had, as it were, immersed the people of his choice. The heavenly fragrance of all wholesome knowledge was poured in such profusion over the land, that even the most unclean vessel often unconsciously received something of its perfume; the stream of divine wisdom and revelation flowed onward so mightily and boundlessly, that its waves dashed even into the most distant lurking places of darkness and of sin. A striking proof of this is afforded by this very king Jehoram, who, though standing as he did in the full reflection of heavenly knowledge, was still a pitiable mortal; how plainly does the distrustful anguish mark him as such, which he exhibited, without the slightest reason, on reading Ben-hadad's letter, as if the latter were only seeking an occasion to make war upon him anew; an anguish, which to this degree of violence, at least, should not have mastered the heart of a man, who had already witnessed such mighty proofs that Israel had a keeper that neither slumbered nor slept, and was able to break the jaws of the Lion of the north. Jehoram's spiritual deformity, however, appears

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still more plainly in the utter helplessness with which he looks upon the leprous Syrian; inasmuch as he demeans himself as if a leper had never been healed in Israel; nay, as if in the whole history of his nation, not even a *single* deed of aid and mercy was to be found, which could give Naaman the least ground for hope, and inasmuch as it did not once occur to him that there lived a prophet in his dominions, whose miraculous powers he himself had already experienced. To this extent had the ungrateful king succeeded in banishing the man of God and his act from his remembrance. No, you see that, that which still, in a measure, reveals a son of Israel in the king, is but a slight gloss, of which even a Jehoram could not entirely divest himself; in other respects he stands before us as an object of contempt, an apostate, without faith, without desires above this earth, and completely destitute of all true life.

Jehoram's embarrassment at the Syrian's request, fills us with indignation. But let us turn the weapon against ourselves! How often do we, in like manner, expose the honor of God, and of the kingdom to which we belong, for a mere song, as I might say? Let the slightest mishap, the most trivial embarrassment occur to us, and we conduct ourselves as if we had been imposed upon and miserably cheated in the Lord and in his promises. It was an excellent remark, and one worthy of being taken seriously to heart, which I heard a Christian address to a brother Christian, who, shrugging his shoulders, and with bitter severity, told him how long the Lord had suffered him to want for the very necessities of life. "Ah," replied the other, "we

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should not be so ready to give the Lord a bad name, nor, when he, in appearance, deals somewhat strangely and harshly with us, straightway to talk against him to others." These are true words. Our spiritual patriotism should be too delicate to allow us, even under the most mysterious visitations, at once, to put on a mien, which might bring the good city of Jerusalem into discredit with others. When anything singular occurs to us there, instead of proclaiming it with sound of bell, we should rather feel constrained in divine reverence, to speak boastfully of all the proofs of mercy and of truth which we have experienced therein. The thought that we could give others an occasion to think disparagingly of our land of Canaan and its delights, should make us tremble; and, in every case, where one thing of the two is unavoidable, we should feel infinitely more inclined to raise an outcry against ourselves, than against the kingdom of which we have become citizens. And from the book of our experience, indeed, we have infinitely more to relate of divine assistance and compassion, than of the opposite; and our complaints at the latter, always end at last, in deep shame and humiliation before His face. For the enigmas of his guidance, which so often surprise and bewilder us beyond measure, what are they but mysterious preludes, discordant in appearance only, to the grand harmony of the divine mercy, which inevitably follow them! In spite of all the strange manifestations, by which his actions are oftentimes intermingled, the name of the Lord remains for ever glorious in Israel, and in the end always emerges, from its cloudy veil,

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with the greater brightness, and more resplendent glory.

But what shall our patient do now, the poor man, who had come hither so full of confidence, and who suddenly beholds himself cast from the heaven of his hopes. Ben-hadad had no counsel for him; the Syrian physicians and enchanters as little; and now that he has come to Jehoram, the only star that shed courage and hope upon him, in his night of sorrow, the latter stands, suddenly, like one in despair, and confesses that he is unable to help him, nay, cannot even point him to a helper. This is a sad condition for the afflicted Naaman. But be still, my friends, be still! All was destined to happen as it has happened, and no otherwise. A field is now prepared for the Lord, upon which he may glorify his name, and magnify his power. The moment has come when Elisha can step forth, and gloriously prove that his Lord is God, and not Baal, nor any other. Yes, other counsel, other help there is now none, except from this humble and despised man. Now then, at last, we may exult and rejoice, and this in honor of that God whom Elisha worships.

Yes, when the world has exhausted its help and consolation, it then becomes evident, indeed, that the band of Israel is not so valueless upon the earth as is reported. How pleasant then the love and fidelity of a believing Christian! how desirable his solace, more costly than silver and gold. Where the region of human skill and help ends, the sphere of a genuine Christian's power and action has its beginning. Where the sun of earthly

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might and glory sets, there God's children rise, like pleasant stars in the gloom. Where kings and princes shake their heads, and are forced to confess: "We are at a loss for counsel!" those stretch their hands upward in their closets, and procure from heaven what the world has not to offer—and when sorrows assail the heart, which no wisdom of the wise, and no art of the skilful can dispel, they approach with the balsam of God's word, and the wounds close, and an everlasting healing is accomplished. The sources from which they draw help and solace never dry up. Their strength is the Lord; who then will bend them? God acts through them, they through him. He is the fountain of their works, they his pipes and conduits.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE BEGGAR'S STAFF.

"THROUGH death to life." This is the law of the kingdom of heaven. "Whosoever will lose his life shall find it." A day of repentance precedes the day of exaltation. John stands at the gate of the sanctuary of Mercy, and calls: "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." But the Sunday apparel does not make a day of repentance; neither does attendance on public worship, nor the drooping head, nor the formal countenance. When will a day of repentance be solemnized in the proper manner? I will tell you when. When the *right bells* ring out, my dear hearers, and not till then. "The right bells?" you ask. Yes, the right bells. "They must be the bells of our church?" Oh, not so. "Well then, the bells of our city?" Would that they were! We would sound them day and night, until the metal glowed, and the ropes were rent asunder. The right bells hang high indeed, but in no turret of stone. They give a clear sound, but they are not made of bronze. No mortal hand sets them in motion. They sound of themselves, or never sound. "Where do they hang?" High above the stars; in God's kingdom of mercy. When the words: "Thou

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shalt weep at my feet," are uttered there, then the right bells sound, and there is upon earth a day of contrition, a day of repentance. Saul no longer kicks against the pricks; Nebuchadnezzar becomes a crushed worm, and the king of Nineveh sits in sackcloth and ashes.

"When will a day of repentance be solemnized in the proper manner?" Then, I say, when the *right church* is opened. "The right church? is it the church of stone, in which we are sitting?" Oh, that it were! But the present day affords us another example, I fear, that the opening of its doors does not make a day of repentance. The church, to which I refer, you bear within yourselves. It is the heart. Alas, and how fast closed is it by nature! What a fearful bolt the enemy has drawn before it! There is no lack of visitors to this church. We who preach the gospel send many thither every Sabbath with the admonition: "Repair to this or that church!" These visitors are—the sentences of the living God, the words of everlasting truth. The text: "Awake, thou that sleepest," is among them; and the text: "Save thy soul;" and the text: "Believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ;" and the text: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." These, and similar texts we send, with a passport, among you, and say to them: "Enter into the heart of this or that, or those unconverted sinners." And they go forth; but when they reach you, they find your bodily ears open indeed, and in a few cases, perhaps, the dungeon of your memory and understanding, in whose coldness they are chilled to death; the church of your *heart* is fast locked,

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and all within is dead and desolate, and naught but the foul birds of unbelief, error, love of the world, and love of sin, hoot and clamor and fly to and fro therein. How gladly would we open the doors to those good visitors, the hallowed sentences of truth, that they might drive out this brood of Satan! But as often as we try to gain admittance, whether smiting with the hammer or the axe, or gently, with the golden keys of persuasion and entreaty, it is in vain, in vain! It is no work for man. Another must do it. "Who?" *He* who opened the heart of *Lydia*, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul—and the apostle's warnings, teachings, admonitions, burst into Lydia's heart, as if carrying it by storm. When will the true day of repentance come? Then, my dear hearers, I say, finally, when the *right preacher* appears. "Who is he? I, or this, or that one?" No, not even Paul, Peter, or John. These, with all their preaching, would never bring on a day of repentance. There is *One* alone who makes such days: a preacher from on High. "How does he appear?" His apparel is light. "Is he learned?" He searches out *all* things, even the deep things of God. "Is he eloquent?" His tongue utters sparks, and flames, and fire. "Is he strong and powerful?" Powerful to melt hearts of adamant with a breath. This preacher is the true Comforter, the Spirit from above.

But let us see, my dear hearers, perhaps we shall find a day of repentance and submission in the narrative that lies open before us. I fancy I already hear the right bells sound, and already see the right key in

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the lock of that church, the heart, and the right preacher on his way to the pulpit. Come, follow me to the solemnity!

2 KINGS v. 8–10.

When Elisha, the man of God, had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go, and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

Naaman is now in Samaria. The last scene of which we were witnesses, occurred in the palace of the king of Israel. Naaman delivered his monarch's letter of recommendation, and you remember with what strange astonishment Jehoram read the words: "When this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman, my servant, to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." With a violence that threatened to prejudice the dignity of his high position, he rent his garments, and broke forth, like a madman, into the cry: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me." Let us now attend to the farther development of our narrative. Three points will, on this occasion, especially claim our consideration. *Elisha's interposition, the Journey to*

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Jericho, and the Prophet's directions to Naaman. Let us examine them more closely.

I. Matters do not look very favorably for our patient. Alas, if the words of the Israelitish maiden were but a delusive meteor! Was it his imagination only that mirrored to him hopes, which reality was destined to destroy? He has reached the end of his journey; but—terrible to think!—the whole journey seems undertaken in vain. He is obliged in fact, to reflect whether he heard Jehoram's words waking or in a dream. How, no help even in Israel! His very last hope has now vanished. But have patience and be still! The worse matters now stand apparently for our patient, so much the better, if I may use the expression, do they stand for the Lord. It was *necessary* that the world, with its wisdom, skill, and help, should first be put to shame. The reason is palpable. Should divine help arrive after all these had failed, it would the sooner be recognised as divine, and the Lord would be assured of that honor, which was due to his name.

The rumor of the arrival of the distinguished stranger in Samaria, and of the scene in the royal palace, has soon spread itself abroad throughout all Israel. The tidings reach Jericho, and even penetrate Elisha's cottage. When Elisha heard how the king had demeaned himself towards the pagan, who sought his help, he was seized with unspeakable anger. God's honor was his bride. To see it thus insulted was a poniard-thrust to his heart. "Oh, prince," thought the prophet, "hast thou forgotten that there is a living God in Israel, and

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that the foundations of thy throne are laid in his miracles? Thou, the child of a land that is strewn with the monuments of Jehovah's power and mercy, dost thou expose this land to the calumny of the heathen, as if the fountains were here dried up as they are elsewhere, and all help exhausted when false idols and their priests are at a loss for counsel?" Such are his thoughts, while his bosom burns with holy indignation. They may scorn *him* as much as they will—that is a matter of indifference to him. But let no one, who values his friendship, venture to assail the honor of his master and of his native land! This is his most vulnerable point. He who wounds him in this spot awakes a lion. Noble sensibility! glorious pride! holy patriotism!

The prophet's zeal ripens into action. He hastens to dispatch a messenger to the capital, who shall enter the monarch's presence, and say to him:—"Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." Mighty words! With what glory does the man of God enter upon the scene. Like a sunbeam he breaks forth from the clouds of his seclusion, after the stars of all human power and wisdom have, in vain, combined their rays, to illuminate the gloom which overshadows the life of the Syrian. His words sound loftily and proudly indeed. And well they may. They are not mere emptiness. They have a real foundation. Let men elsewhere rend their garments; in Israel it is blasphemy. Jehovah's kingdom is no paltry state. What a noble feeling of national pride is here exhibited by the man of God! We share in it, when we glance at *our* kingdom.

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Standard of Zion, flutter proudly and brightly! Beneath thy shadow it is not as elsewhere. *Come to us, to us*, ye who need help and counsel. That which the world has not, *we* hold in our possession. Dost thou seek truth? Do not shake thy head, and ask where and what it is. It exists, it is found! We hold her torch in our hands. Dost thou desire peace? Do not rend thy garments, when the wastes of human wisdom fail to offer it. These wastes are not the universe. Come to our meadows! Its stream flows there. There is heard its soft rippling. Is righteousness the good of which thou art in search? Courage! courage! even although servitude under the yoke of the law has not obtained it for thee. In *our* land the heavens rain down righteousness—and what righteousness?—God's. Light is the garment, which is here allotted to thee. It is the strength to overcome the cares of life, the terrors of death, of which thou art in pursuit? Thou canst not purchase it at the warehouse of that mountebank human reason. But, what of that? There is no need of trembling. Come to Salem, and—everything which opposes thee—we pledge it—thou shalt behold lying as a footstool at thy feet. Yea, search out thine inmost need, let thy most secret wishes find utterance, and bold as they may be, indulge them; within the bounds of our kingdom we promise thee abundant satisfaction and fulfilment. Here the toils of poverty have an end. Here heaven has poured out its fulness. Here stand the boundary stones of all sorrow. Come then, ye who are thirsty, come! Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labor, for that which

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satisfieth not? Come to us, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

II. Elisha's messenger arrives in Samaria, hastens to the palace, enters the king's presence, and delivers his message. Jehoram hears the tidings with pleasure. He finds himself relieved thereby from a secret perplexity, and easily brooks all that is bitter in Elisha's words. He sends to inform Naaman that there dwells a prophet in Jericho; that it were well if he should go to him. Never did a wooden sign-post perform a more grateful service than this. Naaman's joy at the unhoped for tidings is indescribable. The message sounds to him, as the sound of approaching oars to a shipwrecked mariner, buffeting with the raging billows; as the sound of rescuing voices to one buried in the depths of a mine. "The maiden at Damascus *also* spoke of a prophet" he thinks, and he feels almost as those wise men from the East may have felt, when, on issuing from the gates of Jerusalem, they saw themselves still lighted by that star which was to guide them to the aim of all their wishes. The withered and sadly drooping world of his sweet hopes, at once blooms again in all its splendor beneath the mild spring rain of these tidings, and his confidence in approaching rescue is more sure and joyful than it has ever been before. Oh, upon every pilgrimage, let it lead whither it will, all depends upon this alone, to wit, that God commands us to go, and puts us in motion; then we cannot miss our aim. All of us, who belong to Christ, are journeying on a pilgrimage like Naaman, and not only toward that

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city, that has a foundation, but also toward many other aims, manifold in their nature. We who preach God's word are journeying towards a blessing, which is promised to our labors. Ye needy in Zion, would fain see both you and yours fed and clothed by God, because that is promised to you which happens to the birds and the lilies? Ye afflicted are tarrying for the moment when you may exchange the sackcloth for the harp; for "unto the upright there arises light in the midst of darkness." Ye parents, with the hope inspired by God's promises, in your trusting bosoms, that you will yet behold your children bound with you in one bundle of the living, are journeying towards the happy, joyful moment, when you may say with rapture:—"Behold we are here, oh Lord, and all whom thou hast given to us!" Thus we are journeying onward one towards one, another towards another aim; and the Lord has given the signal for the march, and God's word and promise have set us in motion. Doubt not, my brethren, that we shall reach the goal of our journey; but, probably upon Naaman's path. All holy men have been obliged to follow it. A hundred times we see the vista close before us; but a hundred times again it opens brighter than ever. A hundred times all looks as if our hopes were at an end forever, but then a hundred times, like sweet stars, they break through the clouds with redoubled splendor. And, at last, in spite of all the red seas and hostile squadrons, Moses stands upon the mountain, of which it was once said to him:—"Thou shalt serve God upon this mountain." At last our lips are constrained to utter Joshua's confession of God's glory:

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"And ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you."

Scarcely has Naaman heard the joyful tidings of Elisha's message, when his servants are commanded to prepare immediately to pursue their journey. Then the camels and the horses are hastily harnessed, the carriages are got in readiness, and in a few moments the motley gorgeous train moves forward again through the streets of Samaria, amid a numerous throng of spectators. "They are going to Jericho!" says one. "Will the prophet heal him?" says another. "Yes," thinks Naaman, "he will," and he reclines in his chariot happier than he had ever been after a won battle. The journey is soon accomplished. When at the gates of the city, Naaman's first question is after the prophet's dwelling. Now there is not a child in the streets of Jericho that knows not of the man of God, that does not utter his name with love and reverence. By that healing of the waters Elisha had won the grateful affection of the whole city, and undoubtedly Naaman, upon his very entrance into Jericho, received on all sides the joyful assurance, that if he had come to ask counsel of the man of God concerning his leprosy, he might rest assured that he had not undertaken the long journey in vain. The expectations of our patient are raised to the highest pitch. "Where does he dwell?" he thinks, "and how looks this marvellous man?" Then suddenly some one exclaims, "Halt! we are at the spot!" "How! here?" asks Naaman, with an astonishment that borders upon dismay, "in

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this wretched cottage am I to seek the man who shall afford me that aid which I have sought after in vain of the whole world, of the most famous physicians and priests, far and near?" Thus he asks, and a fearful tempest, big with rage, disappointment, and despair, begins to gather in his soul. Our good general does not yet seem to have an idea that it is weakness only that needs ornament and outward splendor, behind which it may conceal itself; while power, in the simplest guise, stands forth as what it is; that emptiness, when it would appear of worth, must, in truth, dazzle the eye and bribe the fancy, by gorgeous trappings and glittering pomp, but that which has value in itself may despise all external show, and does despise it, not to its disadvantage. And there are many other things of which Naaman seems as little to have an idea; but one after another they will soon place themselves beneath his eyes, and effect a complete revolution in his views and mode of thought; a revolution which each one experiences, who, like him, emerging from the kingdom of darkness and of falsehood, approaches that of light and truth. But if the humbleness of Elisha's dwelling was a stumbling-block to Naaman, the prophet's strange and unexpected conduct was still more so. Unquestionably our patient had imagined that, as soon as he arrived, with his splendid retinue, before the door of the man of God, the latter would hasten forth respectfully to meet him, and offer him his services. But the general, who had formed his conclusions from the style and etiquette of his own country, was sadly disappointed in his expectations. The prophet is well aware who it is

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that now stands before his threshold; but this seems to have but slight effect upon his composure. As if the matter were quite unimportant, he remains quietly in his cottage, and does not even step to the window to see the remarkable cavalcade. The only thing which he condescends to do is to send out a messenger to Naaman, probably Gehazi, that he might inform him, in a few brief words, what he had to do to be relieved from his malady. This conduct, in truth, appears the more striking, the less such a supercilious reserve was consistent with the calling and character of Elisha, as a representative of the divine graciousness. But Elisha is well aware of what he is doing, and his entire conduct, although it wears an appearance of self-importance, nay, even of pride, only manifests his remarkable sagacity as a shepherd of souls, as well as his nice tact in appreciating the interests of his Lord and master. It was necessary that this proud stranger should at once be made sensible, that he was not now dealing with a Syrian magician, or an idolatrous priest, but with the servant of a king, who is no respecter of persons, and before whom human ideas of great and small, of high and low, disappear into nothingness; that the distinction which exists in the world between the ermined robe and the jacket of the laborer, does not exist in the eyes of Him who looks upon all as sinners, and destitute of that glory which they should have in his sight; and that the splendor of exalted rank, of high-sounding titles, and sparkling coronets, is numbered among the things which dust and ashes have some cause to value as a covering for their wretched-

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ness and nakedness, but that before God, who does not weigh the trappings, but the man alone, they are but a shining vapor, and far from being calculated to establish a claim to his favor; that, therefore, he, Naaman, must not imagine that the splendor of his rank will give him the slightest preference before God over any one whatsoever; but that for a single reason alone he might hope for the Lord's assistance, namely, because Jehovah is a God of mercy, and willing, of his *free* grace, to have compassion upon *sinners*. It was these thoughts, and others like these, that Elisha wished to impress, with the utmost emphasis, upon the mind of his illustrious visitor, and therefore we see him lay aside his usually so kind and obliging demeanor, and assume a bearing that enforced reverence and submission; a bearing in which the stern command; "Draw not nigh hither: put off the shoes from off thy feet," might echo upon the stranger's ear, and his eyes behold less the mild light of the divine graciousness than the dazzling splendor of His majesty, whose place among men the prophet was called to occupy. Oh, with what dignity does the man of God now appear before us! Can we, who preach the gospel in these times, venture to cast a glance into this living mirror? Is there not in Elisha's example a withering rebuke to us, who, alas! in the exercise of our pastoral duties, often act, as if the thoughts of the Lord, whose interpreters and expositors we are appointed, were as the thoughts of a man, and had a particular regard to rank, vocation, property, and things of this sort, and as if he stood in a very different posi-

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tion towards the noble and the wealthy, from that in which he stands toward those in humble life. But the truth is, men generally do not think to look upon us, as the representatives of God and of his views. This is the well merited reward of an unworthy sycophancy, toward those in the higher spheres of life. Nay, those very persons in whose presence we, with time-serving cowardice, can furl the sails of serious truth so skilfully, must only scorn us in their hearts, highly as they may laud and extol us for our polite forbearance and tolerant liberality. Oh, that the Lord would look down in compassion from on high, and restrain with power the despicable sycophancy of his poor servants, and place them upon the eminence occupied by the prophets and the apostles, viewed from which the fancied magic of rank and wealth vanishes into empty nothingness!

It is Elisha's warmest wish that it might be permitted him to place the hallowed staff of beggary in the hands of his visitor. No malicious spirit inspired him with this wish, it was prompted by love; for he also knew the promise of the Seventy-second Psalm, according to which the Lord "shall deliver the needy," that is, the beggar, "when he crieth." *Blessed staff of poverty!* It is true, this seems to sound somewhat inconsistently. All men shrink in abhorrence from the beggar's staff. No one goes willingly to the poor-house. Poor indeed is the son of the dust by nature, terribly poor; of spiritual riches there is nothing left to him, but he does not know this, and does not care to know it. He would not be poor, but rich. He would

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live upon his *own capital*, feed himself with his *own money* like the Pharisee: "I thank thee that I am not as other men are." And like the rich young man: "What lack I yet?" He is very willing to bear a sword or a walking stick, or have a feather in his hat; but the beggar's staff! ah, no! How he looks down upon those who are obliged to walk with it. All such expressions as, to live by grace, to rest upon another's merits, to cast himself into the arms of compassion—oh, how revolting are they to the natural man! And when it comes to phrases like these: to be a dog beneath the rich man's table, to take shelter in Christ's wounds, to embrace his feet; then he turns away in a fury. He cannot bear to hear anything of this kind. Poor, paltry pride! strange blindness! But such is man. Self-love leads him into sad straits. And dreadfully impoverished as he is, think you that you and I can bring him to a sense of his true condition? or that misfortune is able to banish his self-delusion, or that even sin can do it? Alas, no! We might exhaust our breath to convince him that he possesses neither righteousness, nor strength, nor wisdom; he will spit upon us in fury, but he will put no faith in us. Be assured of this. Misfortune may scourge him with its rods, and heap woe on woe upon his head—what will he do? Break out into open murmuring against God, and inquire bitterly wherefore he has incurred all this; but he will not bend; he will not give admission to the thought, that he is dealt with according to justice and his merits. His sins may stand mountain high before him; vices, the most abominable, which he has committed, may encompass him; even

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sin will not make him think himself a sinner. He will contrive to excuse himself by his good intentions and by the force of circumstances, but no catalogue of his sins will bring him to the beggar's staff. Chained in a prison, or upon the gallows, he will still maintain that he is an honest man.

We can make much out of a man by instruction, education, example, discipline, and chastisement, but we cannot make a poor sinner out of him. That is a task to which no mortal, were it even Paul, or John, is equal. Self-righteousness and self-love is the toughest monster in the world. Hew *one* head from the dragon, and ten new ones will at once grow in its place. It laugheth at thy weapons. It esteemeth thy iron as straw. Send a whole army into the field, composed of biblical texts, of words of admonition, of philosophical proofs, of faults of which the man is guilty, of judgments, of misfortunes, and of whatever else thou wilt, and let this host march, with levelled bayonet, against the son of Adam—verily he will still maintain his ground. Thou mayest madden him with vexation and fury, but thou wilt not bend him. Thou canst not bring out the poor sinner that is within him. Not even an angel could do it. It is a gigantic task, which One only can accomplish; *One only.*

Who?—the living God alone. Of him, therefore, it is said with reason; "He gives repentance to Israel." The staffs of spiritual beggary come from heaven. They are distributed by the Almighty. "A fine dowry!" you think. Truly a better one than your ingots of gold and silver, than even princes' sceptres

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and kings' crowns. The time will come when all the sons of Belial will see this. Generals' truncheons, and all else of that sort, are mouldering trifles. A beggar's staff gleams in the escutcheons of the highest nobility. And still, as we have said, no one of his own impulse takes it up. Is any one to bear it, God must thrust it into his hands. How does God do this? As it pleases him. He is not uniform in his ways. He does not measure all by the same measure. Often, however, he uses Moses for this work. He sends him to such a man, and sets him to deal and bargain with him. Moses offers in the name of God, everlasting happiness. The man asks: "What does it cost?" Moses says: "A perfect fulfilment of my commandments." The purchaser does not think it too much, and is willing to pay the price. The Holy Spirit then interposes, and explains to him Moses' requirements in their true meaning. The man counts over his moral treasury, and what is the result? He starts and trembles. His stock of virtue will by no means suffice for the amount of the price required. But he must have the proffered good. He wishes to enter heaven, not hell. The creditor admonishes him. "Have patience with me," says the debtor, "and I will pay thee all." And now he sets to work. The commandments *must* be kept. But, alas! the more earnest his endeavors, the more vivid becomes the conviction: "This does not answer—I go backwards instead of forwards; I fall daily deeper, and become poorer instead of richer, and increase the debt instead of diminishing it." Moses cries menacingly: "Pay, or thou art condemned!" The debtor asks with

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a sigh: "Is there no abatement of thy claim?" "None," is the stern, decisive answer, "none, not even an iota!" The poor man's anguish rises to the highest pitch. Renewed efforts are followed by renewed falls, and renewed convictions that all his efforts are in vain. Moses continues to thunder, to rebuke, and to threaten. At last the poor tortured sinner breaks like a reed. "I can do nothing more; I am a bankrupt; I have nothing wherewith to pay! Oh, wretched man that I am! I feel that I am accursed! What shall I do to be saved?" "Believe in Jesus Christ!" cries a voice from above, that echoes in his soul, "and thou shalt be saved!" "Jesus Christ! who is he? What can he offer me? May a sinner, a servant of the devil, a child of death like me, hope aught from him?" He asks, he hears the gospel of peace. He hears the message from the cross. Then a star of hope, of mercy, rises upon his midnight gloom. He sees himself cast upon Jesus. Jesus is his only hope. "Lord Jesus, have compassion upon me!" is the prevailing sound that echoes in his soul. Sighing, panting, weeping, he sinks in the dust before the throne of grace, and in his hand rests—ah, look! the *hallowed staff of beggary* of which we spoke. For the consciousness of his sinful condition, and the conviction: "In Christ's blood alone is my salvation," is this staff, which is not to be broken from a hedge, nor to be obtained by running, nor by borrowing, nor by purchase, but which, as we have said, falls from heaven upon the earth, which God alone can give, and which he reaches to all his elect, at the hour which he has appointed to himself.

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This staff of beggary, however despicable it may be in the eyes of the world, as soon as it is placed in the sinner's hands, gives signals on all sides; signals to the visible world, and signals to the invisible world; signals for vexation, for triumph, for joy, and jubilee. The world begins to rail: "*He* also has suffered his head to be turned!" and who knows what more. The devil foams with vexation; for the staff in the sinner's hand is but too sure a sign to him, that a stronger than he has come, and has wrested another prey from him. The children of God throng together, and whisper joyfully in each other's ears: "Do you know that *he* likewise has obtained a beggar's staff, and has become a poor sinner?" and the staff signals to them the happy tidings, that a new brother is born to them, and that the Lord is still active in the field, and that the Spirit still breathes its influence, and its kingdom grows and prospers. Nay, the staff of the newly-awakened sinner is seen even in heaven, and gives the signal there for the most lively emotion. "For there is joy in heaven," say the Scriptures, "over one sinner that repenteth." For the devil then suffers a new defeat, and at this all holy beings triumph. The blood of Christ proves its regenerating power; this impels them to boundless joy. Their king has glorified his almighty grace that changes all hearts; this makes them grasp their harps. In the sinner, sighing beneath the cross, they greet a new companion in their glory; this causes such rejoicing. They see new tears of gratitude entwine as the loveliest ornament in their monarch's crown; this tunes them to such cheerfulness. And in this simple occur-

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rence how many other reasons do they find for breaking forth into hymns and loud hallelujahs. That there is joy in heaven when a man receives a chain of gold, or a star of honor, or obtains a brilliant post, or a share in the laurel wreath of earthly fame—of this, I find nothing in the Bible. But the beggar's staff of which we are speaking, sets everything in jubilee; the good angels, the just made perfect, the saints on earth—God's whole kingdom, therefore. And the sight grieves only the devil and the gloomy followers of Belial. What a striking evidence of the value of the beggar's staff!

But it is not others alone, that view this staff with joy. He also who receives it becomes, by degrees, happy in its possession; nay, he learns to boast of it, hard as it seemed to him at first, to take it into his hand. But whither does the staff lead him? Oh, not to strange houses, not to sullen faces. It leads him to a dear threshold, where he need not fear a rude reception, harsh reproofs, words of repulse, and threats of the police and houses of correction. A rich and mighty lord dwells there indeed, the mightiest and richest in the whole world. No man, however wealthy or noble, no prince nor king is what he is. Yes, mildness dwells enthroned upon his brow, and nothing but love and graciousness speak in his aspect. His children come hastening forth, and take the abashed beggar by the hand, and name him, to his astonishment: "Dear brother!" and embrace him as if they had known him for a long, long time. But when *He* himself comes, the master of the house, oh, what a sun of

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graciousness and compassion then rises upon him! With the words: "My son!" he steps to the timid beggar, and with the kindest greetings of peace, he begins to shower gifts and presents upon him, such as the world has not to offer. Whatever the broken-hearted sinner may wish for, and more, he casts into his lap. What a garment is that in which he arrays him! What shoes are those with which he adorns his feet! What a seal ring which he puts upon his finger! And what pledges and promises with which he crowns, and arms, and harnesses him. "My beloved," he says, "all that I have is thine. Care for nothing. Cast all thy cares upon me. Thou wast given in charge to me from thy mother's womb. I will sustain thee all thy life, I will lift thee up, and rescue thee. I will guard thee as the apple of mine eye. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." And thus the sweet words continue to sound, as if they would find no end. And there stands the poor sinner, and knows not what to say, and would fain kiss his staff for having led him to such a house, to such a kind, good master. And shall we not, my brethren, grasp our staffs with increasing warmth, and press them more and more joyfully to our breasts. Oh, contented, happy life, to be a beggar at Jesus' door, and to subsist upon the alms from his treasury! This alone is wealth and true delight. Let the world believe us, or believe us not—it is a glorious possession, the beggar's staff of God's children.

"Glorious?" you say. "Why, that cannot be! It is a condition without honor." Yes, thus each one thinks at first, when he is obliged to grasp the staff, and there-

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fore no one does so willingly; but by-and-by he views the matter differently, and observes that, that which introduces him into the highest circles, into the loftiest spheres of rank and nobility, is not the sceptre nor the crown, but this very divine beggar's staff, of which we are speaking. For all the holy men of God, all the favorites of Jehovah—and these indeed form the highest order of nobility—bore that staff, bore it indeed as a peculiar badge, as their most important credential and —glory. An Abraham walked with the beggar's staff, a Moses, a David, a Solomon, have borne it. All the prophets and apostles boast of it as theirs. The early fathers of the church, the reformers, appeared with this staff, and counted it as an honor. How then should we not hold that in honor, which brings us into *one* class, *one* order with these men; and that is even this staff of beggary. What have we to do with aught else, however pompous it may appear in this world. This pomp even a harlequin can assume, but sooner or later it will dissolve into dust and ashes. Not so the beggar's staff. No rogue nor knave bears it. It stamps those in whose hand it rests, as priests and kings, as heirs of everlasting life, and leads them even to heaven.

"Even to Heaven?"—So it is. But there it ceases to be a staff of beggary. There it is transfigured into something else. There it flourishes as a palm of triumph. There this old friend blossoms with a thousand sweet remembrances. There it becomes the staff of an eternal banner of victory. Nay, it changes there into a sceptre; for according to the Scriptures the Saints of the Most High will judge the world, and reign with

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Christ for ever. Behold, how many things unite to offer us reason upon reason why we should not be ashamed of this staff, nay but rather rejoice in it, and boast of it with all our strength.

And this, we will not fail to do, at least, so many of us as have received it from God's hands. Yes, we are a band of beggars—we say it openly—and we are glad to be so. But we are not beggars at thy gates, thou poor world! From thee we desire nothing. Do thou keep thy wealth. Thy trifles cannot satisfy us. We bend before another door; and ah, glorious and pleasant is it to bend there; as those who "having nothing, yet possess all things," as those to whom it was once said indeed:—"Ye are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," but then again also:—"All is yours." Let him then who has obtained it, swing his staff high in the air, and press it to his heart. In it he has found the true divining rod. To those without it, may they be rained down from on high. I know of nothing better to wish you. For:—"*The needy, when he crieth,*" that is, the beggar, "*shall the Lord deliver!*"

III. What is the purport of Elisha's message to his exalted patient?—"Go," he says, "and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." In truth, an unexpected and singular counsel this, a counsel which not a little astonished Naaman, and completely cast him out from the heaven of his hopes. But who can mistake the deep, prefigurative meaning of this message? Against that moral leprosy also, sin, we can prescribe nothing

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else than what Elisha prescribed to his patient. A bath, a washing, an immersion; but in other waters than those of an earthly stream. "There is a fountain opened," says the prophet, "for sin and for uncleanness." This is so. Enter it then, thou guilt-laden soul, for elsewhere not a spot will leave thy skin. "If I wash thee not," said the Saviour once to Simon, "thou hast no part with me." Read the first portion of this sentence with a threefold accent, and the one thing needful is completely unveiled before thee. First, place the emphasis upon the word "I." "If *I* wash thee not." *He* must do it. Wash thyself, howsoever, and with whatsoever thou wilt, if Jesus does not wash thee, thou remainest unclean in God's sight. Wash thyself with good works, alms, attendance on divine worship—it will avail thee little. The world will praise thee. But despair of all praise from the Most High, so long as Jesus' hand has not washed thee. Let others wash thee with flattering opinions, favorable testimonies, good reports. True, it will bring thee something. But if thou desirest more than the good opinion of the world, take to heart the words:—"If *I* wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." If I *wash* thee not. Thus sounds the sentence with another accent. The emphasis lies upon the word *wash*. It is not enough that Jesus should do this or that to thee; He must *wash* thee, *wash* thee; for thou art filth from the crown of thy head to the sole of thy foot. "But he teaches and instructs me!" Well, a Judas could boast of this, and—was lost. "But he has listened to my prayer, and showered his bounty upon me!"—That he has done to

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many a man, who now writhes in the flames of hell. "And he has preserved me from many outbursts of sin, he has knocked often at my door, and many a time refreshed me with his word." Be it so! But the question here is—"Has he *washed* thee?" If he has not, whatsoever else he may have done to thee, woe, woe upon thy head. It is the *washing* that is effectual. Read for the third time:—"If I wash *thee* not." Emphasize the word "thee." "Yes, I know it is necessary to be washed." Ha, but this knowledge will not help thee. "And then I have pointed many a one to the well of David!" It may be so; but hast thou thyself ever bathed therein? "This and that one has received forgiveness of his sins through my instrumentality." So, this and that one. We wish them joy. But listen! "If I wash *thee* not," says the Lord, *thee*, *thee*, "thou hast no part with me." Listen, and awake from thy delusion. Oh, take home with thee the words of the Lord to Simon, as if they were directed to thyself. I know indeed of nothing more weighty to write upon the tablets of thy memory, than these words, with their threefold emphasis. *He* must wash thee; he must *wash* thee; he must wash *thee;* or thou remainest what thou art, a sinner worthy of death.

But with what is this washing performed? "*The blood of Jesus Christ*, His son," cries the apostle, "cleanseth us from all sin." The church triumphant have "washed their robes, and made them white—in *the blood of the Lamb.*" To those justified before God, it is said:—"Ye are come to the blood of sprinkling." He who has obtained the fruits of Emmanuel's passion, pos-

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sesses the garment washed in blood, and is purified and cleansed of his leprosy. To him there cleaves nothing more worthy of condemnation. The sins of his life have received their reward. They have been punished, repented of, atoned for, erased, put away out of God's remembrance. They are buried as soon as they are done; they were buried before they were done. And if the blood of the lamb removes spots, it procures ornament and honor also. To him to whom Christ's sufferings are ascribed, Christ's shining obedience is ascribed also. Yes, as *justification* proceeds from this blood, so *sanctification* likewise proceeds from it. If thou but live in this blood through faith, like a miraculous dew it will unfold the germs of virtue planted in thy new nature. Like a nourishing oil, it will flow into the flame of thy love, and will help humility to gain the victory within thee. It will make thee merciful, and forgiving, and patient. It will render the vain pleasures of the world bitter to thee, and give thee courage and steadfastness in the calamities of life as in death. Yes, understand it as thou wilt, what the Scriptures say, is true:—"Man's life is in the blood."

With good reason, in truth, may the redeemed in heaven, sing the song of the Lamb. What they have and are, and enjoy, they owe to his blood, and to it exclusively. That the Lamb was slain for them is the cause, the *only* cause, that they are above. By this they obtained their dignity and their inheritance, in the easiest and simplest manner, and altogether gratuitously. Their blessedness has cost them nothing, unless, perhaps, the delusive phantom of a self-righteousness, which

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they were constrained to sacrifice to the truth. The entire purchase-money of the glory, which is allotted to them, was paid by another. And with this payment, once was enough, for all. The ransom was complete and needed no addition on their part. Oh, thou blood of the Lamb of God! thou wonderful, all-powerful blood! Let the world deem thee unclean, and trample thee under foot, I will praise thee so long as I have breath, as my highest, dearest possession. What were I if thou hadst not flowed for me? Thy stream engulfed the deadly image of the old man within me. From thy sprinkling I stepped forth a *new creature*, and from thee bloomed the palm of triumph over death and hell. But who can praise thee worthily, or the immensity of thy power and efficacy? Blood, a drop of which suffices, in an instant, to render the blackest deed as white as snow—that, in a moment, washes me cleaner than are the angels, who have enjoyed the bliss of heaven for ages—that adorns me with an innocence and a loveliness before God, to which Adam's beauty in Paradise cannot compare—that covers my sinful head with the crown of everlasting life, and opens to me the way, even to the audience chamber of the Triune God; gives me a place where I may stand joyfully before his face, nay, elevates me, capacitates me, entitles me to rest forever in his arms, on his paternal bosom. Oh, glorious wonder-working blood, who can praise thee sufficiently! Oh, if thou only dost not vanish from the horizon of my soul, in that hour, when to my bodily eye, this world veils itself in night and darkness! Oh, that I may see thee glimmer then, thou blood of

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the cross, when eternity unfolds itself before me, and all the sinful blackness of my life, passes in array before me, more distinctly than ever! Oh, then I shall be strong. Then I shall fear nothing. Beholding thee, I shall overcome all terrors. Remain, then, near, and present to my faith. Dye the threshold of my heart with the brightest splendor. Oh, descend upon us all, thou hallowed blood! upon us all, for an everlasting reconciliation!

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE WAY OF SALVATION.

NOT far from Bethlehem, in the midst of the desert, there stood for many centuries, a simple stone covered with the moss of years, which, with its dumb lips, uttered to the ear of the listening pilgrim much that was sorrowful, as well as much also that was consoling and encouraging. The patriarch Jacob erected it over the grave of his beloved Rachel, and it still stands in history (Genesis xxxv. 18), an unpretending witness of an event full of significance. Come, let us gather for a few moments familiarly about this stone, and listen to the wonderful voices that whisper around it. Voices are they of deep and glorious truth, bearing thoughts of death upon their wings, and thoughts of life.

Where this stone stands, Rachel was gathered to her fathers. Almost all believing Israel died "upon the way to Bethlehem." In the prospect of the rising of the great morning star, they lived and were glad, wept tears of joy, and heeded not the shame and toils of life; but in this prospect, alas, their eyes closed, their hearts ceased to beat! They heard the bells of Bethlehem sound at a distance—Bethlehem's glory they might

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not see. Yes, Rachel's lot was the lot of her children also. They died upon the way to the city of David. Rachel died, indeed, upon the journey, but not the less did the sweet soul reach her home. And thus it is with many still. Oh, if the pole of the chariot be but directed towards Bethlehem, even if the wheels do not reach the spot on this side the grave! Many here below remain entangled in the Old Testament. As long as they live they are busied only with Moses and their sins. We pity these oppressed and panting souls. But God alone can supply the horses to draw them through the sandy waste. Whether he does this, or suffers the pilgrims to stand unsolaced on the way to Bethlehem's fountain, in either case they reach home. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower," says Solomon: "the righteous runneth into it, and is safe."

The beautiful Rachel died upon the way to Bethlehem. She died as an emblem. A death must always occur before we reach Bethlehem, or we come to Bethlehem as to any other place, and to find Christ there, is out of the question. What kind of a death? The beautiful Rachel must die within thee; the child of man that would fain be its own mediator, and thou must become a sinner, anxious for mercy. Rear a tombstone over the ashes of thine own wisdom, righteousness, and strength, and then advance boldly towards Ephratah.

But when such a death occurs, God provides a suitable burial. He lays the old self-righteous man in the silent depths of oblivion. In His eyes he no longer exists. A Peter may speak of a buried Simon, a Paul

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of a coffined Saul. The old Saul may still stir and move at times, but before God he lies buried for all eternity. *These* dead, the trumpet-call of the archangel will never waken.

Rachel died in giving birth to a son. Whenever a man dies spiritually, a joyful chime joins in with the tolling of the death bell. What may this signify? That out of the ashes of the old man, a new one is born into the light; a man with the tears of repentance on his eyelids; and with the words of David on his lips: "Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem that is at the gate." This man must no longer hold back, but do as it is written of the son of Rachel, with whom his father Jacob journeyed onward, and set up his tent *beyond the tower of Edar*. This man has received a divine invitation to Bethlehem. For him the sun of righteousness has arisen in the dark midnight; for him the tree of life has blossomed; to him the blessed mystery of the manger and the cross will give its balsam.

Rachel's son must have a name. What name? The dying mother named him "*Benoni*," that is, "The son of my sorrow." Ah yes, many there are who are ready enough thus to baptize the awakened sinner, that thirsts after Jesus. The prince of Hell names him "*Benoni*," enraged at his newly-suffered loss. The blind world names him "*Benoni*," vexed at his forsaking its path. Father and mother, perhaps, will sighing name him "*Benoni*," because he can no longer sanction their sins, their vanities. His own flesh and blood name him "*Benoni*," for the young son crucifies the old

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Adam, and can no longer do as he would wish. But here and there one and another dear soul, who travailed of him in birth, as Paul travailed in birth of the Galatians, name him "*Benoni*," yet in a sweet sense. His mother in heaven, eternal Love may, above all, name him "*Benoni*;" for what has it not cost her to save him? But let who will name him "*Benoni*," let him even name himself a son of sorrow, on account of the cross which the Lord Jesus has laid upon him, his true and proper name is another, as the true name of Rachel's son was another.

The right of giving a name to a child is the prerogative of the father, and the name that he chooses is the true one. Neither did Jacob suffer this right to be taken from him at the birth of his youngest son, but protesting against the name which his mother had given him, he said: "Not Benoni—he shall be called Benjamin," that is, the son of the right hand. And the Lord also says "Benjamin," protesting against any titles of humility or shame, which his children would give to themselves, or which others would give them. "Let his name be Benjamin!" this is his paternal ultimatum. *This* name then is the true one. May its sound never leave our ears; may its blessed signification dwell in our memory!

2 KINGS v. 11–13.

But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus,

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better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

A scene as instructive, as it is interesting. It seems as if not a veil was to rest for us on Naaman's heart. But what is there, in its hereditary features, more alike than one human heart to another. Remark, while we examine Naaman's bosom, if, before we are aware of it, we do not light upon something of our own. *Naaman's singular vexation*, and the *judicious admonition* which he receives, are the topics which will claim our attention on the present occasion. May the path of this day's contemplation prove a path through a fruitful field which the Lord has blessed!

I. It is no longer safe in the presence of our hero. The barometer of his features announces a storm. Yes, the lightning already flashes across his brow. His bosom is in a fearful uproar. "No," he mutters to himself, "matters shall not pass in this way. A long journey undertaken, neither trouble nor expense spared, bandied from one to another, and after all—this pitiful result! 'Wash thyself seven times in Jordan.' What, to find a cold bath, was it necessary to journey down to the utmost point of this so-called land of wonders? What do they imagine? Can it be that they are trifling with me, making a fool of me?" Thus he rages, reclining in the corner of his chariot, and his arm

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moves convulsively as if to reach the handle of his sword. He feels most deeply injured, offended, mortified, for he conceives that he has been the object of intentional deceit, and his fury and thirst for vengeance is as great as was the keen pain and despair with which he saw the happy bark of hope that bore him, wrecked for ever, as he fancied, at the very entrance of the harbor.

It is a singular spectacle that presents itself to us in this indignant warrior. An outburst of anger like devouring fire. And for what? For nothing. A flaming ire! a despair that cannot be more complete. And where? A step from the goal of his sweetest hopes. Happiness lies at his door, and the gate of peace has just opened before him, only it is done in a somewhat different manner from that which he had anticipated, and for this reason the strangely blinded man stands ready, here, at the very threshold of the spot where health and healing await him, to return home with the whole burden of his wretchedness. Who is the object of his inward passion, his railing, and fury? First of all, the maid of Israel, whose words had impelled him upon an errand apparently so fruitless; next, king Jehoram, who, in his opinion, would have done better to keep to himself the deceitful counsel which he had given him; then the inhabitants of Jericho, who had only strengthened him in his "vain and airy hope," and last of all, the prophet, who, as was but too evident, possessed not a shadow of power. Yet, if instead of railing against this imaginary league of hostile conspirators, he had railed against

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himself, Naaman would have acted far more sensibly and reasonably. For if he has actually taken this long journey in vain, if he returns unhealed to Damascus, if he perishes there of his fearful malady, to whom should he attribute it? To no one in the world but himself. In his own heart towers the rock which threatens to dash his hopes in pieces for ever. This rock is his opinion, his preconceived idea, his human thinking. Help is present, in truth. Why does he not seize it? Simply because it offers itself in a different shape from that in which he had made up his mind it would appear.

"Behold, I *thought*," he begins, as he directs his charioteer to turn the heads of his horses, "I thought it would happen so and so." Oh, this thinking, this accursed thinking! I do not know a more pernicious thing upon the earth than this thinking. It is the Devil's chain, Hell's house of arrest, Death's warrant, and the mightiest bulwark that towers between the sinner and his only Savior. Many a one is brought to see plainly that he is a sinner, but then he begins to *think*, and thinks that God will take his weakness into consideration, and not require more of a mortal than he can perform. And this thinking becomes a snare to the unhappy man, and keeps him far from the throne of grace and from salvation in Christ. Many a man's conscience has admonished him: Thou dost stand in need of an atonement! But now this *thinking* arises again, and the man thinks that reconciliation is a thing which he must work out, of himself, and his thinking brings him death, by completely hiding from

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him the only place of refuge for poor sinners. Very many who would gladly view the God of Gods, more closely than he reveals himself to them in the dim mirror of their imaginations, grope perpetually in darkness, because of their vain thinking; they think it inconceivable that the Most High would stoop to manifest himself in the flesh, and this opinion casts a thick veil over God in Christ. And others, through all whose lives the voice of warning has almost perpetually thundered, rush, notwithstanding, in incredible security, to everlasting destruction. Their *thinking* solves the enigma of their madness. The leading strings, by which the prince of darkness holds them, is that dark and groundless idea, imbibed with their mother's milk, that they have in no wise any evil to fear at the hands of a God, who is Love itself. Oh, unheard of presumption, to venture out into life's mysterious future upon the treacherous plank of human opinion! Upon a bare opinion that this or that speculation *might* succeed, no prudent merchant would hazard his *earthly* property. He must feel some certainty of a successful result to his undertaking. But to venture *the soul's salvation* upon the uncertain chart of an opinion, is to very many a trifling matter. But this hazarding of all that is holiest and highest will be fearfully avenged. Thousands who close their career here below with an "*I think!*" will begin their existence in another world with an "*I thought!*"—"I thought that all would go well. I thought that sin was not a matter of such moment. I thought God would forgive me. I thought that hell did not exist, and that the

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devil was a fiction, and the curse a bugbear, and everlasting damnation a scarecrow. I thought this; but woe! woe! I find it otherwise. My *thinking* has fearfully deceived me." But what then had Naaman thought would happen? Various things of which he lived to see the contrary. "I thought," he mutters, "that the prophet would surely come out and stand before me." A visitor such as I am, he means to say, does not stop every day before his door. Naaman expected a reverential regard to his person and high position, and he experiences a treatment which places him on a level with the humblest suppliant. This vexes the proud man to the last degree, and he is now perfectly satisfied that there is nothing in the prophet and his power. A singular deduction this! Yes, a singular, but by no means an *uncommon* one. And how is it with the Gospel that we preach? Does it fare better than Elisha fared at Jericho? You know that this also recognizes no distinction, founded on rank, education, or moral worth, but treats all men, without exception, as publicans and sinners, and directs them to seek salvation in *free grace*. But for that very reason the world contemns it, and will not acknowledge it as the word of God. What a strange confusion of ideas! nay, what madness! And what did the blinded Syrian think besides? "I thought," he continues, "that he would surely come out, and stand before me, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." Yes, here we have it! Such was the fancied image he had brought with him, an image, drawn not from the realm

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of truth, but from that of falsehood and of darkness. He had imagined a spectacle of vain parade, a pompous scene of magic, like those of the heathen—many forms and conjurations—the wonderful man in a strange garb and with solemn bearing—his gestures mysterious and awful—his steps measured—his movements grave and enigmatical—many dark sayings and sentences in his mouth—in his right hand a wand, a golden censer, or the like—and now a magic circle drawn, then an adjuring of the invisible world, a calling upon the name of the Lord; and at last, a solemn touching of the patient, a majestic laying on of hands, and whatever more there is of ceremony and jugglery.

Behold, of such a nature, was the fantastic picture that hovered before his imagination. In such a manner, he had thought, must the miracle be performed. But now, when nothing of this expected pomp takes place, his faith that anything like divine help was to be found here, vanishes. He considers himself deceived, cheated, and gives his last hope to the winds. Lamentable blindness! Had he but left *his thinking* at home, the very simplicity of Elisha's conduct would have led him to quite opposite conclusions, and have forced upon him the joyful conviction: It is impossible that this man can be a cloud without water; something of God's power must be given into his hand; he must feel certain of the result of his deeds and promises, otherwise he would not so entirely renounce all show and ceremony, and would scarcely stake his whole reputation upon a direction so concise and unequivocal as this:—"Wash in Jordan seven times, and thou shalt be clean."

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But Naaman is a captive to his thinking, and measures what is divine with a human measure, and has no idea that only that which is human, because it is poor and trifling in itself, requires a glittering exterior to give it worth, while that which is divine, because it is intrinsically great and exalted, is only dimmed and obscured by every addition of outward pomp. But how many are there that share in Naaman's perverse views, and sharing these, share still more sadly in his lot.

Their unhappy thinking, springing from flesh and blood, becomes a curtain before their eyes, and veils the kingdom of truth with impenetrable shadows. For them there is no Word of God in the world, because they have drawn a very different picture of the way in which God would speak, in case he opened his lips, from that which they find realized in the style and tone of the Holy Scriptures. As little do they know of the great deeds of the Most High among the children of men, because of all that claims to be so, nothing reaches the pompous or airy notions which they believe themselves bound to form of the interposition of the Almighty in the world of sense. They know also of no divine plan on earth for the salvation of sinners, because that which, in fact, exists, does not suit with that ideal image of God's arrangements, which they have invented arbitrarily, and in vain darkness. Thus their speculating, their reasoning, their thinking, robs them of all that is truly great, divine, and blissful in the world, while, on the other hand, it leads them to deify things, which, in their essence, are vain and empty, in proportion to their outward glitter and swelling pomp.

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Therefore let him who desires to enter the sanctuary of *truth*, first of all sacrifice his *thinking* upon the threshold. It is not the form in which things divine have appeared, that is to blame for the world's unbelief, but the preconceived and erroneous opinion, as to the way in which they should appear, is the mother of this unbelief. It is in man's *thinking*, that the mightiest pillars which support the throne of the Prince of darkness upon the earth, are based. It is by means of human opinions that the devil rules the world, and it is only when these opinions begin to dissolve, and man commences to distrust the infallibility of his natural conceptions, that hell trembles. As soon as the conviction forces itself upon him, that the manner in which things reveal themselves is only to be learned by experience, he is surely no longer far from the kingdom of God. For the childlike temper inherits it, which does not pretend to *know* before it is *instructed*. The childlike temper, which says: First, let me see the sun, and then tell you *how* it shines and warms. A man who should wish to draw the map of Germany, before he had become acquainted with the land, would be called a fool by everybody, especially if, when he afterwards travelled through the country, he should maintain that this could not be Germany, because it did not correspond with his map. But in the realm of faith, thousands are guilty of this folly, and in the face of truth, deny that it is the truth, because—oh, unexampled error!—they have drawn a description of this daughter of heaven, *before* they had known her or beheld her features.

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II. Yet that which proved so great a stumbling block to our patient, was, not only the unexpected manner of Elisha's interposition, but much more the simplicity of the remedy which the prophet proposed to him: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." "What, Jordan!" replied the furious general. "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?" It is true, viewing the different waters in the light in which he viewed them, he was right. Even to the present day these Syrian rivers are considered to possess more healing virtue than most of those of the Holy Land. But who bade this stranger compare the Jordan with the streams near Damascus, with reference to their chemical properties? What should we think if any one were to say that the water at this or that watering place, was more efficacious than that which we use in baptism, or that in such and such a place, better and more nourishing bread was made, than that which we are accustomed to break at our communion table? Could we wonder sufficiently at the impiety and absurdity of such an assertion? It is in the category with these that we must place the opinion of our hero. He does not reflect that a divine word of promise now rests for him upon the waters of the Jordan. The assurance is given him in the name of the Almighty, that by this water he shall recover of his leprosy; henceforth no water can compare with this in healing power. Nay, if the Lord have but joined a word of promise with it, a cottage is better than a king's

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palace; a crust of barley-bread sweeter than the richest banquet; a staff in the hand of a Moses more powerful than a prince's sceptre; nay, a debt and a deficit more than any capital and surplus whatsoever. What were all the apothecaries' shops in the world, to the brazen serpent in the wilderness, after the Lord had said: "He that looketh upon it shall live." What were barrels of oil to the poor cruse at Zarephath, after the words had been uttered over it: "Cruse, be thou filled!" Whether a thing goes hand in hand with a promise from Jehovah or not, is, chief of all, the test of its value. The needy tables, the empty cellars, and hard beds of the poorest among God's children I rate at a higher price, than the well filled store houses, silken cushions, and groaning boards of those for whom the words of promise were not spoken: "I will care for you; I will feed, clothe you, and cover you, and will withhold from you no good thing."

Naaman then judged from appearances, not from faith. He looked upon Jordan's waters, simply as the waters of the Jordan, without reflecting how much more they could become to him after the divine word of blessing, like the angel at Bethesda, had troubled them. Besides this, bathing in the Jordan seemed to him a far too simple operation to justify him in expecting any actual benefit therefrom. Had Elisha imposed upon him a somewhat more uncommon, circumstantial, and difficult task, Naaman's heart would far sooner have given admission to hope. In this respect also the prophet's direction ran directly counter to the *thinking* of our patient, and its simplicity heightened his de-

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spair. "So then," he thinks, "there remains no prospect for me but a fearful death! I see that a conspiracy has been set on foot against me. Leaguing with merciless fate, they wish to complete my wretchedness by cruel deceptions." Thus he thinks, and sternly commands his charioteer to turn his horses' heads, and to depart without delay. And this is done, in truth. The chariots are turned, the attendants enter them; the servants mount their camels, and the cavalcade moves forward. But what are *our* emotions at this moment? Do we not feel as if impelled to seize the horses violently, and close every barrier before the blinded stranger? Truly, we could weep to see how the poor man, when before the open gate of his Zoar and his Bethel, is resolved to return home again with all his misery and wretchedness. And undoubtedly he will depart as he came; no earthly power can bend his obstinacy and shake his purpose, if God himself does not interpose compassionately, and, with almighty hand, remove the bandage of delusion and error from his eyes. But the great author and finisher of faith resolves faithfully to do this. Such fidelity he displays also to all whom he purposes to heal from the leprosy of sin. And how necessary is it that he should display it! For suppose that the consciousness of guilt, together with the need of atonement, had already been awakened within thee, but he guided thee no farther; truly in the very sight of the manger and the cross, thou wouldst still go astray and perish miserably, in some dark path of thine own choosing.

Naaman needed to be enlightened, humbled, and ad-

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monished. Remark now how admirably the procedure of the Lord is calculated to effect this threefold object. Before interposing in the leper's behalf, he suffers the whole fury of his darkest passions to burst forth; that the Syrian, as he was already *bodily* unclean, might be *morally* unclean also in his own eyes. Neither does He prevent him from actually setting out on his return; on the contrary, it appears as if He concerned himself but little about the Pagan. This reserve on the part of Jehovah could not fail, in truth, to inflame the fury of the haughty stranger to a higher pitch; there was something mortifying and deeply humiliating therein, which was by no means lessened by the fact, that God used, as the instrument of his further action, not the prophet, nor one of Naaman's officers, but directed Naaman's servants to set their master right, as Balaam's ass once did his rider. The train has already proceeded a good distance onward. Elisha, praying for eye-salve for the blinded heathen, remains quiet in his chamber; then, suddenly, the servants, who view the business with a more simple eye, throng around their master's chariot, and begin in a respectful, yet earnest manner, to entreat that he would follow the prophet's direction, and, at least, try the remedy recommended.—"My father," they commence, in a tone of affectionate familiarity. We may, therefore, conclude from this address, that in his ordinary relations, Naaman was a kind and well-meaning master. And many a one, under the usual circumstances of life, is a kind, good man, until something is expected of him, like that expected of our Syrian. "Wash in Jordan, and thou shalt be clean." How

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quickly then can a lamb become a tiger. But when in such a case the result is happier than this, you may be sure that *grace* has a hand in the affair. To no heart, except one *touched by the divine power*, is the blood of sprinkling anything but a stumbling block and foolishness. Where this power is wanting, thou wilt, with the tenderest words: "My father!" "My brother!" make no farther progress, than with the most thundering admonition: "Sinner, be converted, or thou art lost!" The man will show his teeth to thee—not the moist eye.

But listen to the arguments with which they enforce their prayer. Remarkable words issue from their lips. We are almost tempted to distrust our ears. "My father," they say, "if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather, then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" Well, tell me, whence do these simple men draw such wisdom? To what school are they indebted for so deep a knowledge of the mind of man? Who enabled them to cast such penetrating glances into the human heart, and in such brief and striking words to disclose to us one of its most delicate and deeply-hidden features. Oh, they were right, indeed! If Elisha had made some great thing a condition of his cure, say, a pilgrimage through the Arabian desert, the climbing of a mountain on the bare knees, a many days' fast, a rich votive offering, or something of this sort, Naaman would have taken courage, and would immediately have consented to perform it. But to wash in Jordan seems a thing too petty, for him to entertain the thought

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that the God of Israel would combine a miraculous cure with an act so trifling. How deeply is the covenant of works, with its ideas of labor and reward, imprinted in the heart of man, and how unable, as well as disinclined, is he to believe in free grace. The gospel of peace he puts away from him with displeasure, because instead of burdening him with toil, it would enrich him gratis, and, as it were, in his sleep. He wishes first to *do* something, and then to enjoy the reward. The proud beggarly fool, who, if salvation were to be purchased by the complete fulfilment even of a *single iota* of the law, would remain in debt for the price, to all eternity. He is dead in sin. At the best he can but pay in *false* coin. Still he will have nothing given to him; nay, he breaks out into bitter anger, as often as forgiveness of sins is commended to him as an emanation of unconditional mercy, and the righteousness of Christ, as the robe in which he has to veil himself on the day of judgment. "I desire no foreign ornament," is the language of his puffed-up, self-righteous heart. As a *pattern* Jesus is dear to me. Jesus, *the Redeemer*, I leave to you. *Works, works* obtain the crown, not a sluggish repose in God's mercy!" How often do we hear such language. It is the mother-tongue of *human nature*, which, an hereditary adversary of the gospel, may truly boast in our days, that in the so-called rationalism, she has formed the lying web of her conceits into a system, and elevated it to the rank of a confession of faith.

How hard is it at times, even for us, to harmonize completely with the gospel, although the scales of self-

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delusion have fallen from our eyes, and although the heart, overwhelmed with a sense of sin, in casting its anchor, aims directly at Jesus. We feel actually annoyed by the *liberality* displayed in the economy of the New Testament. The easy path to the blessings of the divine covenant, becomes toilsome to us from its very freedom from toil. We would so gladly pay, at least *something* for them, although we possess *nothing*. To receive all, for nothing, seems despicable to the pride of our nature; to its Mosaic tendencies, doubtful and venturesome. We *hope*, indeed, that in the end we shall depart hence in peace, but will not boast already of our title to a heavenly mansion. "More penitence first," is the cry, "more sanctification, more love, and then we will console ourselves with Christ, and speak of what is *his* as *ours*." What a mistaken view of the peculiar character of that kingdom, which is based in the mediation of the Son, and in which God, after his *justice* has been satisfied by the works of the Redeemer, wishes only to glorify his *mercy*. But Mercy makes no conditions. Mercy seeks sinners, not the just and the righteous. There are two paths, at the termination of which, the crown of Life invites thee. Over the entrance of the first thou readest the inscription: "Do this, and thou shalt live!" That over the other is: "Come and buy *without money!*" They are the way of *works* and the way of *faith*. But that which either is, it is pure and unmingled. Choose then! Which of the two paths wilt thou journey? The first is a path of honor. There, thou wilt be the architect of thine own fortune, there thou wilt pay the price of

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thy salvation out of thine own treasury, and after thy course is run, thou wilt receive the palm of reward, not from the hands of *compassion*, but of *justice*. But before thou dost enter on this path, so tempting, know that indulgence is not found upon it, but severity; that perfect holiness is the price here required of thee; nay, that the most faithful endeavors will not protect thee from the *curse*, if at the end of this path thou dost owe a single penny to the law, and that *forgiveness* is an idea for which there is no room upon this road. Upon the path of *faith* the *flesh* will not be satisfied. It is a path of humiliation, a road of abasement. We must enter upon it, travel it, and reach its end, with the beggar's staff in our hands. Here the crown shines, not as a prize of desert, but as a gift of mercy. Here there is nothing now to *pay*, but every thing to *enjoy*. Another has run, has striven and conquered for thee. The slightest desire to take a cooperating part in the *attainment* of the proffered jewel, is here a robbery committed against the honor of the Son. But he who will be content *to receive without price*, will find every thing in readiness for him—Mary's good part without Martha's care. Choose then! Upon the former of these two roads, thou wilt taste, at first, the pleasure of manly pride; as thou advancest, the vexation of melancholy disappointment; at the end, the wretchedness of a fearful bankruptcy. Upon the other thou wilt experience, at first, the pain of complete spiritual poverty; as thou advancest, the joy of a blessed lifting-up out of the dust in Christ; at the end, the rapture of an everlasting and unspeakable exaltation. Upon the former,

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thou wilt think thyself free, while thou art a bond-servant; laboring honorably, while thou dost bring forth fruit only unto death; serving the law, and dost reap only the curse of the law. Upon the other, an imaginary glory vanishes from thee, but instead, thou obtainest a glory that is true and real; thou art at variance with thyself, but *one* with God; thou dost resign a self-gained, paltry splendor, and obtainest the decorations, goods, and rights of a king's son. Upon the former, thou dost spend thy money for that which is not bread; and thy labor for that which satisfieth not; and the garments at which thou toilest are spiders' webs. Upon the other, thou art Jehovah's guest of honor, and dost fare sumptuously every day at his cost, and art decorated with the marriage robe of thy eldest brother. Upon the former, thou art *accompanied* by the taskmaster with the lash, *visited* by the creditor with the bond, *expected* by the executioner with the sword. Upon the other, nothing urges thee to holiness but thine own heart, nothing visits thee but God's love and God's blessing, and nothing awaits thee but the open gates of God's everlasting city.

Come hither then, ye who love your souls! Say farewell to all ideas of self-righteousness and works. Salvation will not blossom for thee out of thine own deeds. It must be received from the hands of Mercy. But Mercy does not chaffer and bargain. She gives, and upbraids no one. She delights only in tears of gratitude. The sweat of labor, seeking its reward, is poured out in vain.

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE HEALING.

You remember the words in Mark ii. 17; you know also who uttered them, and where they were uttered. Our Lord is sitting at table with a publican, whose reputation is by no means of the best; around him are a circle of the same stamp. Yet no devouring fire proceeds from the Holy One of Israel against these brambles; on the contrary it is the light of his graciousness and mildness only, that he suffers to beam upon these sinners. That this caused no slight scandal to the devout Pharisaic sect, we can easily comprehend. And indeed these men of the law are almost to be excused for losing all faith in Him, and naming him angrily a companion of publicans and sinners. If he had, at least, observed a certain degree of reserve, and had generously held out a hope of forgiveness only to such sinners, for instance, as had given proofs of actual reformation—then his conduct might, perhaps, have been tolerated. But that he should mingle in familiar intercourse with them, before they have yet manifested penitence, and given promises of improvement, is a procedure that stands in a striking contrast with all the principles of a reasonable method of salvation. Look,

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yonder stand these devout men before the open window of the dining hall, and shake their heads sullenly, and cannot refrain from assailing the disciples with the bitter questions: "How is it that your master eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?" When Jesus hears this, he glances significantly at the scoffers, and says to them from the midst of the band of sinners, decidedly although mildly: "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." And that they might have no doubt concerning the meaning of this figurative address, he adds, interpreting it: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Sweet words! Precious inscription over the gate of God's kingdom! But what is the meaning of the inscription? Who are the "*righteous?*" Are they the self-righteous? Impossible. If Jesus did not come to call the *self-righteous* to repentance, he calls *no one* to repentance, for we are *all* self-righteous, through and through. And *sinners* already conscious of their wretchedness do not now need "*to be called to repentance.*" Repentance is already aroused in their hearts. Therefore it is beyond a doubt that the business is to be otherwise understood. The "*righteous*" mentioned are those who have satisfied the requirements of the divine law, and are righteous indeed. Under the name "*sinners,*" on the contrary, we are to understand those, who, as *debtors to the Law*, have fallen under the curse. "But there are no such *righteous* persons upon the earth," you say. You are right, my dear hearers. Neither does Jesus intend by those words to maintain the contrary. "But if there are none such, why then

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this unnecessary assertion, 'that he had not come for their sake?'" The matter stands thus, my brethren. The Lord means to say to the Pharisees: "You wonder at my conduct. You would have reason to do so, if I had come to seek and reward virtue. But I have not come for the righteous. My errand is to sinners, to the fallen. If you are one of those who have satisfied the law, you will be saved by your own deeds. I leave you in peace as men who do not need a mediator. But why should you, who are so fortunate as to enjoy spiritual health, prevent me from hastening, compassionately, to the assistance of the sick, who are unable like you to appeal to their own virtue? Permit them that they also escape from death." This is the meaning which the Lord intends to convey to the indignant lawyers. Do you not feel the sharp sting of these words? With that simple declaration, he has more than gained his cause against his carping judges. The lofty calmness which he opposes to their bitterness, compelled their admiration, and put them to shame. The intimation: "If you are righteous, I have no errand to you; I seek sinners!" closed their lips, and disturbed their consciences. In this example of our Lord's, indeed, the speediest method is placed in our hands of confounding those who scoff at the gospel. We also can do no better than to say to them: "If you are righteous, according to the law, it shall never enter our thoughts to trouble you with the admonition to repent and to believe in the name of Jesus. But there are here also persons of another stamp, who—ask them—frankly confess that they do not share in your boasted virtue.

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Without a mediator, without mercy, they know not what to do. Why then, we ask you, would you be so cruel as to grudge them the good, without which they would fall a prey to despair, nay, to destruction?" Thus we address you, ye Pharisees, and what will you reply? Must you not keep silence, and stand abashed and ashamed?

Jesus then came upon the earth for the good of *sinners.* According to this, it is far from being the worst lot in the world to belong to this last class. A *holy* man would be saved indeed, but he would have no interest in the *Saviour,* and his tears of gratitude would not, one day, shine as pearls, in Jesus' royal crown. He would not be a member of that great Head, he would not have for a mediator the everlasting High Priest, he would not be adorned with the costly robe of the Prince of Life. A *sinner,* who had obtained mercy, would always enjoy a great advantage over a man thus holy. Nay, in the light of the sweet words of which we speak, the cry "*I am a sinner!*" is no longer a subject of anxiety, but a consolation. Art thou a sinner? Well, let Jesus become one with thee, and do thou become one with Jesus.

But let us hasten to guard against certain misconceptions, for many among you seem but too prone to misunderstand, nay, even to distort our words. Let it stand an everlasting truth, that, not the righteous, but sinners may boast, that the Son did not come to leave them in their sins, but to transform them into new creatures dedicated to God. If he is the shepherd who seeks the lost, he seeks them to lead them

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back into the way of life. If he is the Saviour who inquires after sinners, he inquires after them to call them to repentance, and to set them at variance with sin. If he is the physician, who is searching for the sick, wherefore is he searching for them, except to *heal* them. *Forgiving* grace is always a *regenerating* grace also. I rejoice that I have an opportunity to-day, to impress this truth upon you, in the history of our Naaman.

2 KINGS v. 14–15.

Then he went down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company.

Thus then all is constrained to turn out for the best. Naaman reaches the goal. God be praised for it! A weight is now taken from our hearts. Or could you have borne it if the patient, in spite of the proffered help, had returned home unhealed? It is impossible. It would have been too sad a spectacle. And still it was near happening. In such a lamentable way can a man stand in his own light, when he ventures with blind reason amid divine things, instead of bowing beneath them in humility and resignation; and when he is resolved to decide arbitrarily out of his own imagination, as to the marks by which the *Divine* is to be recognised, instead of learning them by experience, from the presence of the *Divine* itself. The *Healing of Naaman* is the subject of our present discourse. We

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shall see how the Syrian is cured, first of *his folly*, and then of his *malady and misery*.

I. You remember to what a sad condition matters had come with our patient. Elisha's singular directions had sent the blood boiling through his veins. He could rend his garments for indignation. "Forward!" he cries, "forward!" and resolves to hasten back to Damascus, there, if it must be so, to die in his wretchedness, but dying, to testify that all the skill and wisdom of the world is vain deceit, and that even Israel's boasted glory is but a glistening bubble, the miracles of its prophet jugglery, and its "all powerful Jehovah" an unreal phantom, a fiction of the brain, and nothing more. Thus then this narrative, begun so significantly, is inclining apparently to a highly lamentable issue, when suddenly *He* interposes who does not repent him of his purposes, and who, where he has once laid a foundation, will not cease from his work, until the building is completed. You know what follows. God fastens a drag-chain to the chariot of the departing Syrian. No Elisha appears. Elisha thinks: "Struggle, fish! thou wilt not escape from the net!" and remains without anxiety in his cottage. Naaman's servants must now perform God's work. In what manner you have already heard. The words with which they entreat their master deserve an abiding place in your memory. "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?"

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No sooner has Naaman heard this simple address, than the scales fall from his eyes, and the blind intoxication of his anger vanishes. A beam of heavenly light flashes through his soul; a light of the Spirit. "Yes," he thinks, rubbing his brow, "you speak truth. With a *harder* thing I should have been better satisfied; why, at least, should I not *try* the easier? Can it be that the God of Israel purposes the more to glorify his name, by accomplishing this cure by a remedy, which, to judge from its natural properties, gives hope of any thing rather than a favorable result, and which therefore, more than anything else, may serve as a foil to exalt the strength and power of this God, as well as his liberality and mercy?" Thus he thinks. The words of the servants have done wonders. As if by magic the vanished world of his hopes rises again, renovated, out of its ashes. The words of the Israelitish maiden, which but now he esteemed a delusive meteor, shine once more with the splendor of a consoling star. The prophet, strangely as he conducted himself, appears now in an entirely different and more advantageous light, and the thought that the rivers of Abana and Pharpar at Damascus, were better than the waters of the Jordan, withers and dies within him. The tempest in Naaman's bosom is stilled. A calm serenity returns into his soul. He orders the chariot and horses to be turned again, and cries: "To the Jordan! to the Jordan!" Thus then, at the very last moment, we find him submitting to Elisha's directions. An earlier resolution to do this would have spared the foolish stranger much care and anxiety. But this

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interlude of despondency and anger has done him no harm. On the contrary, it may yet do him a service similar to that which the sight-restoring clay did to the eyes of the blind man in the gospel. For, if after all his sinful murmuring, he should still be helped, he needed nothing further to teach him that he was indebted for his recovery to a *God of Mercy*. His heart and conscience would then preach this to him loudly enough, and the bending knee and the blush of shame would follow of themselves.

We heartily rejoice that the film has been removed from Naaman's eyes. It was God who performed the operation. The servants were but his probes and lancets. It is a great thing when a man becomes heartily willing to bow beneath God's arrangements for his salvation. Without the divine interposition no one comes to this submission. It requires a self-denial which cannot exist except with the *regeneration* of our whole being. Our natural reason will always contrive to look upon those divine arrangements as foolish, our natural conscience to consider them unnecessary, our perverse feelings to esteem them as unseemly, degrading, and insufficient. We need a new spiritual organization before they can be properly appreciated on our part. Therefore when thou seest a man constrained to enter the evangelical path of salvation, stop and contemplate thoughtfully such a spectacle. Thou beholdest more here than the simple exterior leads thee to expect. Thou standest in the presence of a great miracle. A work of creation, equal to that in the *beginning*, has stepped into existence. To the human nature, a

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second, a divine nature has become associated, and eye, ear, taste, reason, and heart, all have become new.

The cavalcade reaches Jordan. Naaman descends from his chariot, and steps to the bank. You can imagine with what feelings. The most momentous instant of his life has come. His last hope floats upon the waves of this stream. Does it float there above its grave, or do health and happiness bloom for him beneath those waters? Naaman's life and death hang in the balance, nay, much more than this. To us, indeed, the issue of the affair is already known. Let but a few moments pass, and the leprous pagan, leprous in body and soul, is no longer in existence. The waves of the stream have engulfed him, and a *new creature*, new within and without, stands in his place. But if we would comprehend Naaman's cure completely, we shall do well to bear in mind the light in which the leprosy was viewed in Israel. You know that, according to God's purpose, this loathsome disease was an emblem of sin, and, in truth, we should in vain look around after a more significant and striking one. Commencing deep beneath the skin, that malady betokened the radical corruption, the death of sin, in which we were begotten and born. Infecting by the breath and contact, it shadowed forth the pestilential influence, which, however moral may be our lives, so long as we are not born anew, taints even the dearest friends around us, since, by our example, we, at least, strengthen them in the soul-destroying opinion, that conversion to Christ is not so very necessary. Developing itself externally in loathsome tumors and ulcers, that malady

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depicts also those actual sins, the fruits of hereditary corruption, which, an abomination before God, appear daily, in a thousand forms, in our hearts and in our lives. Incurable as this malady was, unless God healed it, it mirrored forth also the truth, that salvation from sin, and its lamentable consequences, was a matter which did not lie within the reach of human power. He who was afflicted with the leprosy was excluded from the camp, from the citizenship of Israel. This signified symbolically: "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight." Such a one might not venture to approach the sanctuary even afar off. This meant interpreted: "Depart from me, ye cursed! what have I to do with you?" If the disease, however, reached such a pitch that it covered the whole man from the crown of his head to the soul of his foot, then, strange to say, the priest pronounced the leper clean. "Where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound." So long, on the contrary, as even a single spot on the body was sound and clean, such a sentence from the priest was utterly out of the question. So long as a man does not become all sin, but still finds, as he thinks, many a good thing within him, he will hardly hear the words: "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee!" from the lips of the everlasting High priest. But if the leper was completely covered with the leprosy, then he must show himself to the priest. More than this is not obligatory upon us, even when we feel constrained to cry: "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me." The

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priest took two birds. One he killed, the other he dipped in the blood of the bird that was killed, and let it loose into the open field. The latter signified the regenerated man, who, on account of another's death, was set at liberty in the most comprehensive signification of the word. The leper was next sprinkled with the blood of a slaughtered lamb, in which hyssop had been dipped. The meaning of this ceremony did not escape David, who, acknowledging himself a spiritual leper, exclaimed in prayer: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." The blood was sprinkled upon the ear, the hand, and the foot. This, applied to the spiritual leper, signified: "Thine ear has not hearkened aright, thy hand is full of iniquity, and thy feet walk the way of death." All needed atonement. The same members were then anointed with oil, an act which had reference to the anointing of the pardoned sinner by the Holy Spirit, for a new obedience, life, and walk. After these ceremonies the leper was admitted again into the camp, and received a writing from the High Priest, that he was clean, perfectly clean, clean throughout. And even if the scabs of the leprosy had not entirely fallen from him, yet no one might venture to esteem him any longer unclean, who had once been pronounced clean by the High Priest. The shell which holds the kernel of these last words is so transparent and delicate, that you may discover their consoling meaning, without any interpretation from me.

These ceremonies, it is true, were not performed in

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Naaman's case. Being a heathen, he was not so unconditionally subject to the rites of Israel, and it rested with the Lord to make or allow an exception to his Levitical ordinances as often as it pleased him. But in the healing of this Syrian, these holy rites appear, if I may use the expression, translated into the language of the New Testament. A *washing with water* was to become, for him, the bath of a bodily and spiritual regeneration. This token was, on the one hand, symbolically more intelligible to the heathen than the ceremonies of the priest; on the other, it led his soul more surely and directly to the Lord, inasmuch as it afforded him less room to confound this act of divine power, with a work of heathenish magic.

II. You can imagine how our leper's heart must have throbbed, when, separating himself from his train, he descended alone the rocky verge of the river, and placed his foot in the rushing waves. It was a great, a solemn moment. This moment was to decide whether Jehovah was God or not; whether Elisha was his prophet or an imposter; whether Israel was worthy of the name of the *holy* land, or whether it termed itself thus merely out of presumptuous stupidity, and whether the stranger would bear back to the pagan world a song of praise to Jehovah's honor, or the tidings that there was no strength in him. There is not one among his train who does not powerfully feel the importance of the present moment. Deep, expectant silence prevails upon the shore. The Syrian has reached the middle of the stream, and begins to bathe in the

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waters. He bathes once—but nothing follows. He bathes again—his leprosy does not depart. He bathes once more—with the same result. This does not disturb him, however. "*Seven times*," said the prophet. He has bathed six times. Now for the last trial, the *one* with which the promise is joined. What are the leper's feelings now? How his heart beats with redoubled pulses, how his bosom is agitated between fear and hope. He feels reluctant to stoop beneath the flood the seventh time, for we so gladly defer the last means to the last moment, for the very reason that it is the *last*, beyond which, if it proves useless, we behold the open jaws of despair. "This is the seventh time," thinks Naaman. "If the water refuses its aid, woe, woe upon me! my lot is cast, my hope dead, my destruction certain. But still," he continues, speaking to himself, "I cannot remain standing here, and the prophet said: Wash seven times. Down then, in the name of God and of his prophet!" He speaks and—stoops beneath the flood. An anxious murmur arises among the spectators. "Now we shall see," whispers one to another, "now the matter will be decided!" Naaman holds his breath. He wishes to remain beneath the water as long as possible. Ah, what an anxious sigh must have escaped his bosom, while there beneath the waves! How our heart-broken bather must have wrestled with God, how urgently implored him: "Jehovah, help! God of Israel, if thou art a living God, let it appear! Heal the poor Pagan man! Jehovah, heal him, in mercy, in compassion!" Thus he cries in his soul. Well, what follows? Good, good,

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my brethren! While beneath the waters Naaman already feels a change, and what a change! Wondrous powers are transfused through his limbs. A new stream of life trickles through his frame. He feels the rapture of recovery, and more, more than this. With a thrill of the most joyful, eager expectation, he rises from the flood—then a thundering shout of joy greets him from the shore. For truly he is healed! Oh unexampled wonder! Who has ever witnessed such a miracle! Not a leprous spot is to be seen upon him. His countenance shines like that of a youth. His eyes beam like radiant stars; and not only has the whole festering crust of scales remained in the stream, but the consumed flesh is restored again. His body is fresh, and sound, and full, like that of a young child, and pure and white almost as alabaster, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. Oh, joyful, solemn, sublime moment! *One* feeling stirs in every heart: "How holy is this place!" *One* impression fills every wondering mind: "A greater than Baal and his priests is here." *One* universal acknowledgment and confession bursts from every lip: "The Lord is God! To Israel's God be the glory!" The scene on Carmel is renewed; but in the splendor of evangelical glory.

If we consider now the water of the Jordan as an emblem of Christ's blood, we witness something here which must be repeated in us all. Down into this healing, wondrous bath, or you will die and perish in your sins. You behold in this blood the last means for your purification, the only means, a means more than sufficient. Why do you run hither and thither,

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seeking a remedy of your own! Why do you heap vows upon vows, which still you do not keep? Why do you torment yourselves about rites and ceremonies which are but specious filth. If you would commend yourselves to God *obediently*, discover first what God has commanded. Your preconceived opinions are without prop and foundation. A washing of your garments in your own works, is not enjoined upon you. God would have you washed in the *blood of his Son*. You must submit to this ordinance, or he considers you as *rebels*, notwithstanding all the holy earnestness which you may assume. Do not talk of your obedience. We are the obedient, who, for God, and his word's sake, entirely abstain from wishing to be our own helper in ways of our own choosing; we, who do not lift a finger with the view to reconcile God; we, who, leprous in our own eyes, judge ourselves, condemn ourselves, despair of ourselves, and with a feeling of abject contrition, bow beneath the gospel which commends Christ to us as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and salvation; we, who behold the whole foundation of our hopes not in ourselves, and confidently trust that, beside the merits of the Redeemer, we need no other; we, who honestly and earnestly consider ourselves as judged and dead with Christ, risen and justified, nay, elevated above the heavens with him, and pure and blameless before God, and repose and rejoice in this consciousness of our justification as a thing already accomplished, and renew this conviction every day and every hour, and with it overcome all rising accusations, all the shadows of fear

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and doubt; we, at whom the world so often rails, as sluggish idlers, quietists, as if it were a reproach to the sun, that it shines and warms without labor; as if the lily were less beautiful, because God clothes it; as if a man in health should be blamed because he breathes, and performs his work easily and freely, and not like one consumptive; we, I say, as many of us as belong to the redeemed in Christ, we are the obedient, the true subjects of God and his ordinance. For we bow beneath the words: "Without me ye can do nothing," beneath the words: "By *one* offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified," beneath the words: "There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," beneath the words: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, he took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross," beneath the words: "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit," beneath the words: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness," beneath the words: "For God hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." We bow beneath the gospel of the ever living God. *We*, therefore, are the obedient, the submissive, we, who renouncing everything of our own, call it reason, or self-opinion, or self-righteous striving, give due honor to the all-powerful God, to his will, his arrangements, and esteem his foolishness as infinitely wiser than all the wisdom of all creatures; yes, *we*, who are accustomed to consider the slightest doubt that Christ's blood is not sufficient for our justification,

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nay, the slightest desire to complete by any works of our own, the merits of the Redeemer, and to make us still more pleasant in God's eyes than Christ has already made us, as a spark of revolt, as a hellish impulse of rebellion against the God of all gods. And judge, if we are not right in this. If the Bible is God's word, submission to it is necessary above all things. Now, it says: Wash in Christ's blood, wash in it with every fibre of thy hope, and thou shalt be healed. If you refuse to do this, bear yourselves along your *own* paths of salvation, like corpses upon the tables of the law. No one will reward you for it. Not even Moses. He will condemn you, in spite of all your toil, and point you the way to hell, as men of uncircumcised ears.

Naaman is transported with joy at the miraculous cure which he has experienced. He expected much when he set out from Damascus, but scarcely a thought entered his soul of a healing like this. How must he now congratulate himself, that he had renounced his own *thinking* in good season, and had yielded, although not without a struggle and exertion, to the apparently so foolish directions of the prophet. If he were now to enter into the midst of us, in what strong language could he address the doubting and timid among us. "My friends," he would say, "trust in Jesus' words! They are a rock. Judge not *his* counsels by human views. Follow them, and—judge according to the result. Do what he tells you to do, oh, do it in simplicity and reason not. Does that which he commands you appear too easy? Wherefore do you desire toil?

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Does it seem to you too simple? To what purpose much art? Does it appear to you dangerous? Well, the responsibility rests with him. Does he point you to a path, in which you may be rich without labor, crowned without a conflict, and righteous without effort? Be satisfied with the easy path. To *pant and toil* is not everything." Such and similar words he would address to you, and he would earnestly rebuke those, nay, rail at them as Pharisees, who think that to embrace Christ and his cross, does not suffice for their justification before God—or that, for their sanctification there is needed something more on their part, than an abiding "in Jesus' love"—or that a resolute "casting of all cares upon the Lord" is entirely too easy a way to the haven of peace—or, in what other respect soever the path of the gospel may appear too plain and easy to them.

And now behold our Syrian. Oh, it is a miracle of God's! There he stands, a *new* man in body and in soul. Not the leper merely, but the benighted Pagan also, the blind child of the world, the unbending and accursed sinner, remained behind in that watery grave, and an Israelite—what say I, an Israelite?—a *man of God*, a servant of Jehovah's, a saint, arose out of that baptismal bath. And this thorough renovation is the work of an instant, yet, in truth, not a work of divine caprice. The mercy which displays itself therein, rests upon the ground of justice, and is based upon the satisfaction of the Lamb which was slain from the beginning. Here also it is *this great sacrifice* alone, which frees God's helping hand from the

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cords of righteousness, and opens a free path for his creative power, where, without this, the destructive flames of his anger only would have been poured forth. Yes, in every instance of God's help and blessing that is experienced in the world, the *blood of the Lamb* alone is glorified. Remove this foundation from the love of the Eternal towards sinners, and the earth would smoke and blaze, in the flames of his anger.

How Naaman demeaned himself on his return to the shore, we are not expressly informed, but if I ever felt myself authorized and entitled to supply the narrative from my own imagination, it is certainly here. I see, in spirit, how the deeply agitated man comes, I might almost say, creeping up the shore; how he casts himself, in silence, upon the hallowed soil, covers it with burning kisses and with tears of gratitude, places his face, adoring, in the dust; he would fain speak indeed, but is unable, because language fails him in the tumult of his emotions, because no words are sufficiently full and comprehensive, to express the feelings which glow within him. "Oh, what a God art thou!" cries a voice in his heart. And who among us would not unite in this ejaculation? And now from the goal, cast a glance back along the path, upon which this pagan has been led, and confess that nothing fairer, nothing more consistent, more deeply planned, and wisely calculated can be imagined, than this course of the divine guidance as it is displayed before you. Now indeed you see that all that happened must have happened, and happened thus and not otherwise, if that goal were to be reached. To this end Naaman *must* first seek all the help of earth,

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to learn its nothingness. He *must* be directed to Israel, not by the mouth of a sage, but by a simple captive girl. He *must* behold king Jehoram rend his garments, and hear him confess that the Almighty God alone was able to heal a leper. He *must* experience, at the prophet's threshold, all those mortifications which we have witnessed. He *must* there receive counsel, which seemed folly to his reason; and when this counsel was revolting to him, he *must* be permitted to commence his journey homeward. And exactly in the moment, when his *spiritual* leprosy burst forth most fearfully, when the most furious anger boiled in his bosom, and, when like the barking hound, he assailed Jehovah and his prophet, nay, when, in all the fury of despair, he was upon the point of swearing irreconcilable hatred to the religion, as well as to the God and land of Israel, exactly then and not before, *must* the hour of his recovery strike. For by means of all this it was abundantly provided that to the healing of his body should be joined also the healing of his soul. Thus things were now so ordered and arranged, that when he had become clean, he could no longer separate two thoughts—the one: "It was *Jehovah* who helped me!" the other: "He helped one unworthy, a wretch, a sinner, out of pure mercy!" And these convictions now occupied his whole soul. Yonder he lies upon his face, the happy, healed leper, and melts in gratitude, adoration, and contrition. We behold him with deep emotion, and wish Israel joy of such a proselyte. And if we may be permitted to think also that Naaman's servants, hurried away by such a revelation of the living God,

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are no longer able to withhold their knees from the dust, ah, then, upon that silent shore, we behold a spectacle, at which old Jordan itself, might have dashed onward in exulting joy, and upon which God's angels looked down with deep emotion and rejoicing.

After the healed Syrian has offered his first sacrifice of homage, he lifts himself again out of the dust, changes his clothes, leaps, with the strength of youth into his chariot, blesses once more the dear and hallowed stream, and gives orders for their return. "Back to Jericho!" he exclaims joyfully, and the cavalcade at once moves forward—a triumphant train, than which a fairer was scarcely ever seen in Israel! Not Naaman's triumph truly, but *God's*. Naaman is but the candlestick, upon which the power of Jehovah's grace displays its glory—a trophy of the Lord's, a mirror of his beauty, a living bulletin of victory, to proclaim God's honor. He is all this; and he desires also to be this. It is for this reason that he sits so loftily and proudly in his chariot, as if he would say; "Behold here, in my countenance, in the cleanliness of my limbs, in the joyful light of my eyes, the reflection of the mercy and glory of the Lord!" Oh, what emotions are his! A new world has received him; a new life has bloomed for him. The dungeon walls of his former darkness have sunk in ruins, and the kingdom of truth opened to him its doors of pearl. He has found a prize—the living God. He has bathed in the mild sunlight of his countenance. He reposes in his arms, a happy child of grace. Oh, prize, in which is locked a thousand treasures, from which a whole firmament

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flashes up, full of hopes, sweet stars, and which illuminates his existence, even beyond death and the grave, and secures him *life!* For finding God, he found in himself a child of the dust, a son of immortality; he found eternity in time; and beyond the deadly shadows of this vale of tears, the never-fading glory of heaven. He feels like one dreaming of blissful things. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

It is with heartfelt joy that we gaze at the renovated pagan. He stands before us a hieroglyphic, full of deep meaning. We behold in him a gospel in essence and in fact; an incarnate revelation of things unspeakably sweet; a leaf written over and over out of the book of everlasting truth. From the aspect of this single man we may read more than from all the libraries of all the wise men of this world. In it we behold the problem of the existence of a living God, established in a demonstration the most conclusive, the personal agency of this God in the world, placed beyond all doubt, and the sway of a free, royal mercy, as well as the creative breath of a vivifying spirit over the graveyard of dead humanity, gloriously established, and raised above all contradiction. Nay, this is not all which reveals itself to us in this man. As he shines as a divine seal upon the prophetic mission of our Elisha, so also he adds a practical, yea and amen, to thousands of God's promises; is a living missive from Jehovah to sinners, telling of his willingness as well as of his power to save them, a sheaf of the first fruits of the great harvest

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of the heathen, a meteor proclaiming safety, amid the deadly shadows of our dark earth.

And, like him, so all the redeemed of the Lord are walking monuments, engraved over and over with writing from God's hand. The stars in the firmament indeed are God's writing, and the flowers of the field, and the birds of the air—significant sentences. The *regenerated* form *whole* volumes, often unsightly as to material and binding, but full of the deepest meaning, if we but know how to turn the leaves and read therein. To endeavor to understand God in the way of his deeds, and yet hasten carelessly by this, the greatest work of his hands, is the capital folly of human philosophy. The renewal of a man in Christ, tells us more of God and of his essence, than all the rest of the creation. In the experience of one thus spiritually renovated the whole New Testament is mirrored, and at the same time finds its strongest confirmation. Let him who would discover a treasure in the field of humanity, study here, enquire here, dig here. "Thy friends who sit before thee," says the Lord to the High priest Joshua, "are *mere wonders.*"*

* German version.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE ARK OF SAFETY.

"MAKE thee an ark of gopher wood, and come thou and all thy house into the ark, that thou mayest not be destroyed from off the face of the earth." Thus spoke the Lord to Noah, who found grace in his eyes. And Noah took no counsel of flesh and blood, but yielding his reason captive to the word of the Lord, and unheeding the scoffs of a disbelieving world, he began to build that wonderful vessel, and by this blind submission gave God due honor.

A fearful judgment was impending over the world. A flood, which should laugh to scorn the strongest dams, nay, should dash its billows above the tops of the highest mountains, was chosen as the instrument, to destroy all flesh from off the earth. What a prospect for the children of Adam! Do not deceive yourselves, however. The same anger, from which that devastating flood burst forth, burns to this very hour against all who are not born of God, and still daily sweeps its unhappy victims down the way of death, to Hell. Would you build for yourselves a vessel against this danger? Build it not out of virtues and good works. The justice of the Eternal is a sharp rock. Your bark

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will be dashed against it, into a thousand pieces! To the ark, my dear brethren! to the ark, he who loves his soul!

"To the ark?" Yes, an ark is at hand for us. Look toward Bethlehem. Yonder it lies, as if still on land. But soon it will be borne aloft, and of pleasant days it will have few. We shall behold it struggling against winds and waves. It will sail amid whirlpools and rocks. All tempests will beat upon it, the billows of scorn and persecution will cover it. Nay, it will at last be engulfed in the red waves of death, but soon to rise again, to unfurl the flag of victory, and steer, with swelling sails, into the haven of everlasting rest. "But why this fearful voyage?" I hear you ask. Look at Noah's ark. Neither does it remain lying on the land, but sails forth amid the storm and dashing billows. "For what?" To bear Noah and his household through the tempest. With the same intent the living ark, Christ, exposes itself to the billows of the divine anger; for thus it becomes an ark of safety for all who take refuge in it.

When Noah's ark was building it was to all who beheld it a prophetic sign of evil. When the engines rattle through the street, we presume that there is fire. When men run with carts and spades to the dams, no one doubts that there is danger of an inundation. When a king enlists soldiers, and establishes outposts and erects bastions, it is evident to what a pass matters have come in the kingdom. And when the Almighty himself sends, for the rescue of the world, not a prophet truly, not an angel, but *his only begotten Son*, what

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then should we think? How great must be the danger that is at hand, when such a measure is necessary to avert it. Yes, the bare existence of Jesus in the world, is the mightiest sermon, upon the lost condition of mortals, that was ever preached. The cross, that wondrous sign of our exaltation, at the same time admonishes us with a power that nothing else can equal, of the depth of the corruption in which we lie sunk by nature.

Noah's ark was completed. Then the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened, and Noah entered into the ark, as God had commanded him. It is under similar circumstances, that the entrance into the *true* ark takes place. It does not happen *until the waters come.* With dry feet and dry eyes no one enters it. God's anger must be felt, before the curse is removed. Through the pains of sin, lies the road to Jesus' heart! Such is the rule.

If you now ask what it means to enter into the true ark, know in the first place, that we can enter into Christ with the *eyes*, and this we do, so often as we thoughtfully contemplate the fullness of the riches which are contained in him—with *prayer*, and we enter into him with this, when we desire this or that of him, like that leper: "Lord, heal us!" But to enter into Christ in this way does not yet suffice for everlasting safety. An entrance into him, like Noah's entrance into the ark, occurs, because oppressed by the anger of the eternal judge, we see no other refuge in heaven and on earth, except in his wounds; entrance into his media-

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tion, into his bloody sacrifice, and with the whole hope of a heart, panting and thirsting for mercy—this is the right entrance, this the true entrance, this the entrance that brings life.

When Noah had entered the ark "the Lord shut him in." This shutting in does not always take place at once in the spiritual ark. For many who cast themselves into the arms of Jesus, the door remains long open, that they may have a free and humiliating view of the wilderness of their past life. Before they are aware of it, however, the Lord suddenly shuts them in. The mountains of sin are removed by a mighty hand. They know that they are in grace, and that all is expiated, forgotten, and forgiven.

When the Lord had shut Noah in, the latter was suddenly separated from the wicked world. Yes, when the Lord separates us from the world, then are we truly separated from it. We can separate the body from the world indeed, but not the *heart*. But when Jesus shuts us in, then is the door closed in truth. Then we are estranged *inwardly* from the world. If we should then even wish to return to the world and its ways, we should not be able; we should everywhere find bolted doors and insurmountable barriers.

"And the Lord shut him in." When this had occurred, Noah was snatched from the eyes of those that remained behind. This happens to all who enter the true ark. The world no longer knows them. They journey in disguise. Their life is hidden with Christ in God. But what matters it to them, whether the world understands them and knows how to value

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them or not? It is enough for them that "the Lord knows his own." They are conscious that he looks upon them with pleasure, and that he loves them. What can they wish for more?

The Lord shut him in. Then Noah was safe. The waves could no more break in upon him, neither was he in danger of falling into the flood. In this manner those are shut in, who are in Christ. "My sheep," saith the Lord, "shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." "My father which gave them me is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of my father's hand."

When Noah was shut in, the ark sailed out into the open flood. "And the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth." Among what whirlpools and rocks, must it not have often passed! How often must the waves have broken over it, threatening all with destruction! But what of that? Our voyager suffered no harm, and even in the most fearful depths, he found himself encompassed by a secure bulwark of waters.

Thus do thou sail boldly through the sea of Life! If thou art in Christ, the true ark, let the waters dash around thee as they may, thou art safe. What though the billows of temptation and affliction break on board thy bark; thou needst not fear. What though a shock casts thee from thy bench or from thy bed, yet thou hast not fallen into the flood; thou art still in the ark. And thou wilt remain there until the day of landing; until thou dost cast anchor upon the Ararat of an everlasting sabbath rest. Happy voyager, sail on in

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peace, and rejoice in the olive branch of promise in the mouth of the dove.

To-day our Naaman also enters into the ark. Come, let us rejoice with him, and wish him joy at this pilgrimage of peace.

2 KINGS v. 15, 16.

And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, as the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused.

The miracle of healing has been performed. We saw the happy Syrian, renovated in body and in soul, step from the waves of the stream. To-day we pluck flowers from the garden of his regenerated heart. The door stands open. Every veil is drawn aside. We will contemplate, first, *Naaman's confession*, secondly, *his offer*. May the Lord vouchsafe to us a draught of heavenly solace and refreshment, even out of the earthly vessel of our present discourse!

I. Three wonderful transformations present themselves to us in the kingdom of Nature. The first is, when a seed dies in the bosom of the earth and rises again, a young tree, covered with foliage and blossoms; the second, when beneath the warm covering of wings, life developes itself in an egg, and a bird breaks, singing, through the shell; the third, when a creeping caterpillar is changed into a butterfly, that, with bright

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and delicate wings, flutters from flower to flower. Three transformations similar to these, but far more sublime and wonderful, present themselves to us in the kingdom of Mercy. The first, an invisible one, is, when in the act of justification, a naked sinner is, *in a twinkling*, transformed into a *spotless* saint; the second, when in the act of regeneration, the Almighty lays his creative hand on man a second time, and breathes a new life into one spiritually dead; the third, when in the moment of transfiguration, the weary pilgrim of earth lays aside the heavy travelling mantle of his body, and, beautiful as an angel of God's, soars into the circle of the just made perfect. The two former spiritual transformations, Naaman has already experienced. All that he now is *in the eyes of God, faith* indeed alone can measure. On the contrary, the *personal* transformation which he has experienced, appears brightly to view, and is like a city upon a hill, like a light upon a lofty candlestick.

Naaman arrives in Jericho with his attendants. The train moves slowly through the streets, amid a crowd of wondering spectators—a conqueror's train, in truth, and the conqueror is Jehovah, who is leading the healed Syrian around in triumph, and displaying the prey torn from Satan, at a *single* blow. What then is to be seen in this man? Oh, not a little that is beautiful and cheering. What a sweet escort is that with which he returns! He brings the living God with him from Jordan. The angels hover about him with shouts of joy; peace, with the olive branch, sits at his right hand, at his left, hope, with images of paradise. What an

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incomparable splendor is that in which he shines; that body, clear as a mirror, which the Almighty has washed with his own hand; that soul, purified in the bath of God's forgiving mercy, clothed in the righteousness of the fairest among the children of men! What fullness of light, of rapture and of love swells his bosom! Never indeed did diver return from the mine of waters with so rich a jewel as this diver, who has found a pearl that will delight him through all eternity. With joyful emotion, he utters the word: "halt!" a second time, before Elisha's cottage, and now a scene ensues, which, compared with the former ones, will but complete our wonder at the thorough change which Naaman has experienced. We now look in vain for the proud warrior, who, at that time, felt so deeply insulted by Elisha's reserve. The lion has become a lamb. A mild and humble man steps from the chariot, and hastens to enter the cottage in person, and to offer to the prophet assurances of his most respectful love. The perverse pagan, with his "*I thought*," has remained in the depths of the river. A man enlightened by God has taken his place, a man who now knows the way in which that which is truly divine manifests itself. The rude warrior who could not contain himself for rage and anger is dead, and a man soft and peaceful as a dove has arisen out of his ashes. The benighted heathen to whom the prophet's command: "Go, and wash in Jordan seven times," appeared as a mockery and an absurdity, has retired from the scene, and in his stead we now greet a child of light, with the living faith in

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his soul, that Jehovah is glorious and holy in all his ways.

Naaman is about to enter Elisha's cottage, when the prophet advances to meet him, with a friendly greeting and congratulation. Oh, what heavenly streams of hallowed love and rapture here flow together from Naaman's heart and from Elisha's! What feelings of gratitude, like clouds of sweet incense, here ascend, united, from these two living altars, to Jehovah's throne! Deeply agitated, the two men stand face to face, in silence; then the happy stranger lifts up his voice, and pours forth the emotions of his soul, in a confession, which, not less by its glorious purport, than by the decisive tone with which it is uttered, fills us with wonder and with joy. "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." Thus speaks the man, who, but a few hours ago, was still in the bands of the most lamentable darkness. Satan's magic is dissolved, the net is torn, the bird is free. A new creature, born of God, stands in unveiled beauty before our glances. That confession is nothing else than the irrevocable letter of divorce by which Naaman separates himself from the service of his idols; than the weapon of Samson, with which he, for his part, at *one* blow lays the temples of Baal and of Rimmon in everlasting ruins; than the exulting farewell which he shouts to the kingdom of darkness; than the joyful war cry, with which he enlists beneath the standard of Zion; than the first garland of homage and dedication, which he lays upon the altar of Jehovah! With these words he declares all those to be servants of falsehood, who

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cleave to another God than the God of Israel. With these words he hurls the religion of his country from him, as a web of lies. How this might please his train, what Ben-hadad would say to it, Naaman does not stop to inquire. And if it cost him office, dignity, nay, life itself, he will let all go. He will still maintain: "That there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." And this confession for ever preserves its truth, if under the name of Israel, we imagine that people, who, believing in his sure prophetic word, press through the gate of repentance, into the blood-sprinkled sanctuary of the kingdom of mercy, revealed in the New Testament. Here only, is God recognized, experienced, and felt, and no where else. Here only, does he step forth from his inaccessible light, and the heavenly inhabitants shout rejoicing: "Behold, a tabernacle of God among the children of men!" Here only can we hear the echo of his footsteps, behold the light of his countenance, listen to the words of his mouth. Jerusalem is here, here the temple, here the ark of the covenant. The rationalist, the deist, the pantheist, have an *idea of God* indeed, but no God. At the best, he is but an *ideal God*, not the *living* one. Their closets are empty. They have nothing to tell us of the *friend* of *solitude;* nothing of his ear open to their complaints; nothing of his bosom open to their cares. And empty as their closets is their *heart.* Ah, it is a dark world, a world unvisited by God's divine promises, and destitute of all experience of a heavenly agency, a world in which the gloomy spirits of fleshly thoughts and appetites, throng to and fro in wild confusion. Vacant and

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desolate is their whole existence. They behold no Jacob's ladder rising toward heaven, and they experience no scenes of Horeb and of Tabor. They hear no steps of an Invisible one at their side; and *guidance*, *visitation*, and *answer* to prayer, are for them words without sense and meaning. Yes, John's words are true: "Whosoever abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God." "There is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." Joy to thee, oh Israel! Who is like unto thee, thou people who art blessed in the Lord!

The happiest man on earth, nay, the only happy man, is the "*man in Christ.*" In him thou seest at once the most significant and the most mysterious phenomenon under the heaven. His exterior, it is true, for the most part, reveals to thee little or nothing of his high importance. That which distinguishes him from others, dwells *within* him. But let us for once interrogate such a man, and listen to his answers. We will first inquire after his home and kindred. We ask him: Whence art thou? He points above. Where dwells thy father? "Far and near," is the reply. How far? "As far as the heavens are from the earth." How near? "As near as the mother to the infant, which rests upon her bosom." What is thy father? "An architect." What has he built? "The world." What is he? "A sustainer." What does he sustain? "All things by the word of his power." What is he besides? "A host." Who feeds at his table? "The eyes of all wait upon him." What is he besides? "A pilot." Where does he stand? "At the helm—even of my little bark." And his

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name? "Jehovah Sabbaoth." How! God thy father? "God is my father." Well, as he is the father of all. "No, as he is the father of few only." Why dost thou call him father? "Because he loves me with a father's love." Why besides? "Because I am begotten of him." So then, thou art of high rank. "The highest of all." And art thou rich? "My treasure is God." And wouldst thou exchange with no one? "Not with a seraph." Art thou not then a sinner before God? "No." What art thou? "Righteous and pleasant." In thyself? "Oh, that be far from me!" In whom, then? "In the everlasting Lamb!" Well, you hear how he speaks. But this boasting has a deep and holy foundation. He, be he who he may, who has received the baptism of the Spirit, is entitled to use such language to us. For him everything is put away, that can inflame God's anger, and everything is brought near, that can enkindle his love. Here, there is no more transgression. Christ took it upon himself. There is no more debt. Christ paid it. There is no more curse. Christ suffered it. There is no more nakedness. Christ covered it with glory. Here Moses finds no more cause to protest against the *sinner's salvation;* Satan no more cause to revile the Lord for *pardoning* one *worthy of condemnation;* everlasting justice no more cause to restrain forgiving love, and to bind her hands. Here no law of justice or of righteousness is infringed or abrogated, in any way, by the exaltation and glorification of the offender. Here, there is nothing but obedience and deserving virtue on the side of the exalted sinner. All that the holy Mediator was, prac-

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tised and fulfilled, the ransomed sinner, is, has practised and fulfilled. All was set down to his account. Upon him it was transferred undiminished. What wonder is it then that God does not barely, in mercy, spare this heir and possessor of the whole beauty of his Son, but embraces him with tenderness, presses him to his heart with joy, and in the fullest sense of the word, chooses him for a child and favorite?

But let us continue to search out the "*man in Christ.*" He will have still many a pleasant thing to tell us concerning his wealth and his prospects. We ask him: How do you live?—"I feed at another's table" is his answer. Have you property?—"None, and still the greatest." None?—"I live on daily charity." The greatest?—"A capitalist rich beyond compare, has said to me: 'All that I have is thine.'" Then thou art in want of nothing?—"But one thing." And that?—"I have not sufficient faith in my wealth." Where dwells the one who feeds thee?—"Yonder, above the skies." And he provides for all thy wants?—"Cast all your cares upon him; he will care for you." Thou art anxious about nothing, then?—"Why should I be anxious?" Nothing evil more will happen to thee?—"Nothing evil." Nothing but blessings will attend thee?—"Nothing but blessings." Thou wilt no more fall into temptation?—"Oh yes, but I shall conquer." And no affliction will befal thee more?—"I cannot tell." And still thou sayst that nothing but what is pleasant will happen to thee?—"I do not say *pleasant.*" What then!—"I say good." So then, nothing but *good* always?—"Yes, for I trust and doubt not that God will

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turn all the evil which he sends me in this vale of tears, to good, because he *can*, as an Almighty God, and he *will*, as a faithful father!" Behold, these are sounds from Jerusalem. This is the language of the Christian. He who is in Christ, and hesitates to speak thus, is ignorant of his position. His *privileges* entitle him to use even bolder language.

Let us return to our Syrian. "Now, I *know*," he cried joyfully, "that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." Yes, now he knows that Jehovah lives; for he bears the seal of this truth in his own purified body, in his washed, new-born soul, clothed with the peace of heaven. His knowledge is based upon his own consciousness and experience. And truly, faith blooms and flourishes only in *this* soil. So long as it stands upon hearsay alone, it is a feeble plant, unworthy of the name. It becomes the "victory which has overcome the world," only when it has struck root in the experience of an intercourse with God, and of manifestations of his grace, and when we can say with Peter: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but *were eye-witnesses of his majesty*" —not until then has our confession an enduring sound, and our conviction marrow in its bones and feet of bronze—then the storms of impious assault roll high above us, their lightnings do not strike us, their thunders do not disturb us. No contumely enfeebles us. We believe, although a whole world denies, for "we were eye-witnesses of his majesty." Ingenuity and wit may succeed, even to evidence, in proving that the

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Gospel contains but a myth, a cycle of fables—we stand beyond the reach of this arrow. "*We were eye-witnesses of his majesty*, and witnessed it in a light so unequivocal, that our compassion only is excited, when we hear it called in question, whether he is God, and whether he lives. We bear the seal that he is God, in our inward man. The new heart that he gave us, the new spark from above that he enkindled in us, the unspeakable peace, which we enjoy in him, the granted prayers of which we can speak, the wonderful aid which we have experienced, the refreshing encouragements which he has vouchsafed to us—all these and many other things place us upon a height of conviction, from which we behold the scruples of those destitute of such experiences, floating, like the mists of the valley, deep beneath our feet. "*We were eye-witnesses of his majesty.*" Yes, this is the hearth, upon which glows the fire of that boldness with which we confess the Lord; this our armor in an antichristian age; this the impenetrable, golden shield, which protects us even against the best aimed strokes of the father of lies. A faith that rests upon demonstration only, will never breast the storms of life. The armor of philosophy Satan has never feared. But the war-cry: "*We were eye-witnesses of his majesty,*" makes him tremble; for it is the signal of the approach of a legion, which will surely trample him beneath its feet.

II. With this joyful, resolute confession Naaman combines an offer to the prophet. "Now, therefore," he says, "I pray thee take a blessing of thy servant."

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He means to say: Be pleased to receive a gift of gold, silver, and costly raiment. Naaman's intention in this matter was most kind. No thought of payment and remuneration entered his mind. He felt impelled only, in some form or other, to express the emotions of his gratitude in deeds, and to lay a token of homage and of love, at the feet of that God, who had healed him, by his instrument and servant. That nothing more than a delicate feeling of gratitude like this, prompted his offer, is clearly manifest from the fact, that he, a man of such distinguished rank, not only humbly calls himself Elisha's servant, but also *begs* him, with a certain noble timidity, not to despise his gift, as if he would say: I know indeed it is doing *thee* no favor, but by this thou wilt cheer and lighten *my* heart." And who of us, to whom a thing had happened, like that which happened to our healed leper, would not understand how to appreciate such emotion? Who, upon whom the sun of righteousness has once shed its healing power, has not felt the impulse to homage, dedication, and sacrifice, which, in such moments, is wont to kindle in the soul, and must, must be satisfied? These are the blessed moments, when forced "by the constraining love of Christ," those mites flow into God's treasury, which the Lord values above talents of gold, from other givers. These are the hours of compassion, in which those works are done, of which it is said: "Their works do follow them," and of which "the left hand knows not what the right hand doeth." These are the happy seasons, when we give Christ food, and drink, and raiment, in our brethren; and still, at

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the last day, we shall not be able to remember a single act of kindness, which we have done to Jesus. These are the sunny moments when the vine buds, and puts forth its grapes, yet is itself unconscious with how fair an ornament it is clothed. Yes, that is forever true, which the royal harper sings: "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." Ye Christians also resemble those flowers, which at night withhold their perfume and bow their closed and scentless leaves to earth; but no sooner are they touched by the first beams of the sweet morning sun, than they at once open their cups again, and rise aloft, spreading abroad their freshened leaves to the king of day, and again stand, like lovely altars, diffusing fragrance and delight. Thus, therefore, you can take no better thought for your sanctification, than by seeking how you may descend deeper and deeper into God's love, and continually bathe in the billows of his mercy. Ah, if but a *single* beam of that love falls upon our hearts, how fruitful can it render the dry field, how cause the wilderness to blossom! And it is for this reason that we preach so often to you, of the "treasure that you possess in Christ Jesus." Yes truly, with this we shall water the soil, or else with nothing in heaven and upon earth. "Joy in the Lord," is the gushing fountain of all that is holy and lovely. Oh, that this fountain might flow more abundantly among us! If we, alas! in glancing around us, are forced to join in the lamentation of that father in the church: "God help us! how is it, that, with all this talk of spiritual life, so little, in fact, exists?" We account for this sad phe-

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nomenon, simply by the fact, that so many of our brethren *know* indeed how gracious the Lord is, but do not taste it, do not feel it inwardly; otherwise this congregation would be a field of lilies, and the smoke of sacrifice would ascend continually from our domestic altars.

Unquestionably Elisha, felt his heart refreshed and rejoiced by the sweet spiritual blossom, which disclosed itself in Naaman's offer: "Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant." Merely to behold it, however, sufficed for the prophet. The offered gift he could not accept. "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand," he said with solemn earnestness, "I will receive none." Then Naaman begins to urge him. "Do not imagine," he replies, "that I would repay Jehovah for his kindness, or that I confound the instrument of his help with the helper himself. Neither suspect that I thought to do thee a service. The obligation will be mine, if thou dost not despise my gift; for I feel constrained to praise the Lord with hand and tongue. I pray thee take the blessing!" But Elisha, who shared in the sentiment of the great apostle: "I seek not yours, but you!" persists in his refusal: "Speak no farther of it! As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none." Why he refused the gift is easy to be comprehended. It was necessary that everything should combine, to illustrate the truth that, where Jehovah blesses, *grace* rules, and grace alone. Here again, it was *the Lord's honor* solely that decided the prophet's conduct. It was that no one in Syria might be able to say, that God's gifts were to be had for money, or that

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He was a respecter of persons, that he declared so decisively: "As the Lord liveth I will receive none." The glory of Jehovah was always the first aim of God's servants. Like faithful vassals who desire to serve their king without reward, they burned only for the *honor* of his name. This sublime disinterestedness gave to their whole conduct that wonderful stamp of nobility, which inspires us with a reverence towards them, as towards men of a higher, supernatural origin, and endowed them, under all circumstances, with that holy tact which never failed to teach them what was suited to their position as ministers and officers of Jehovah.

Elisha was poor; the sons of the prophets were not less so. At Naaman's offer, another, in Elisha's place, would have thought: "The gift comes seasonably. It is God's purpose to care for us in this wise." And joy at the approach of corporeal aid, would so have darkened his spirit, that no room would have remained for the higher reflection, whether the honor of Jehovah did not rather command a refusal than an acceptance of the gift. But Elisha was not so anxiously careful concerning outward comforts, that, when a temporal benefit fell into his lap, he was incapable of any other feeling, than extravagant joy at the gift, as such. The conviction that He who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies, would not suffer him to want, was too present to his mind, to allow a manifestation of divine assistance in hours of need, even to take him by surprise. He stood therefore with a calm and free glance *above* the earthly benefits which flowed in upon him, and found no difficulty, where it seemed advisable, in subjecting

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temporal gain and advantage, to views of a higher nature, nay, to sacrifice them joyfully, in the sure confidence that relief would be afforded him in some other way.

I cannot here help relating a sweet incident from the life of a holy man of the Romish church, a man distinguished for his ardent love for the Lord, as well as for his childlike faith in God's word, and his unalterable confidence in the letter of the Biblical promises. He was the prior of a cloister, and the little community, over which he presided, was poor and destitute, except that the Lord ever and again, moved some compassionate soul to stretch out the hand of charity to them. Accordingly a meagre fare was not unfrequent, among the brotherhood, and there were days, and of these not a few, when they were forced to console themselves with the words: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Such a day had occurred again, and as the hungry brothers collected for dinner in the refectory, they found the table covered indeed, and the dishes laid, but after searching through store-house and cupboards, nothing had been found but a piece of dry bread. To spread the table for this was hardly necessary, yet they heartily welcomed even this poor remnant of their stores, served it up, blessed it, and sat down to share the dry crust among them in crumbs. Before they began to divide it, however, the prior rose from his seat, and with a heavenly cheerfulness in all his features, opened his sweet and eloquent lips, and spoke to the brothers, words of encouragement and consolation,

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of God's love in Christ, and of the great promises which he had given to his own, so that they all rose from table delighted and refreshed, and returned to their cells satisfied, although not with bread. But scarcely had the deeply-moved brethren reached their cells, when there was a loud ringing at the cloister gate. When the porter opens it, a man enters, bearing a large, covered basket in his hand, and gives him a letter, directed to the prior. The porter leaves the stranger standing with his burden in the passage way of the cloister, and hastens with the letter to the prior's cell. He finds the pious father upon his knees in prayer. "Pardon me, father," he begins respectfully, "here is a letter for thee." The prior rises, takes the letter, breaks the seal, and begins to read; but before he reaches the end, his hands sink at his side, he casts his eyes to the ground, and he begins to weep bitterly. The porter, astonished at this, says: "Father, why weepest thou? Hast thou not often said that we should weep and grieve at nothing except our sins?" The prior then answered: "My brother, it is not without reason that I weep. Think how weak our faith must appear to the Lord, when he believes us unable to endure a little want, even for a single day, without visible help. He has seen that before evening we would become perplexed and desponding, if he did not quickly send this alms to the support of our faith. It is because our confidence is held in such slight estimation by the rich Provider, in whom we are permitted to put our trust, that my tears flow. But since such is the Lord's will, go and receive the blessing which the Lord sends us."

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Thus spoke the prior. Behold, this man also, like Elisha, stood *above* the earthly gift, and the appearance of temporal aid did not so entirely occupy him, that there was not room in his heart for far other and higher feelings, than that of delight at the proffered good.

Oh, may the Lord place us also, upon so open, free, and cheerful eminence! May he give to our glances, so untrammelled a flight; may he refine our emotions, to so hallowed a tenderness; may he more and more strip the coarse, fleshly leaves, from the flower of divine life within us! The new man *in freedom* is the fairest thing to be seen under the sun. How could it be otherwise? He is created after God, and out of God, and is an image of Christ, like the image of the sun in a morning dew drop—but a *living* image; an image that has become a reality—Christ in us!—God transfigured in a worm!

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE IMMOVEABLE KINGDOM.

You remember the words, Heb. xii. 27: "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that may be shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." Words like a deep sea. Who will fathom them? The plummet is wanting. In its absence let us sink the net, at least to draw forth a handful of pearls.

In the verses preceding these, the apostle reminds the brethren, that they have passed from the economy of Mount Sinai, under that of the New Testament. To this admonition he joins the earnest warning: "That to despise the gospel of mercy is worthy of much sorer punishment than the transgression of the Law." Farther, he reminds them, how the voice of the Son of God shook the earth at the giving of the law, but how, a thousand years later, the Lord had spoken by Hag-

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gai: "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." These words of prophecy referred to the time of the new covenant, and began to be fulfilled with its establishment in Christ. What kind of a movement then dated its commencement upon our earth, we are taught by history. The sound of the Gospel penetrates through the world, and wherever it reaches, there is revolution, rumor, and the dashing of waves. Sleeping lions awake and show their teeth, but at the same time the children of darkness become light, and cry, Hosanna. The buildings of superstition, that have endured for thousands of years, fall in ruins amid the sound. Old prejudices, usages, manners, suddenly give place to a new order of things. Whole nations change their form, both within and without. Laws, constitutions, civil regulations, all are hurried away in a whirlpool of revolution. Institutions of Love, until then unknown, rise out of nothing, and prosper joyfully. Entire new creations start into life, as if by magic, in spite of enemies that foam with fury. Movement of a thousand-fold character is seen on every side; nay, not a corner of the globe was without movement where the gospel penetrated, and not a corner of the globe is without movement where it penetrates at the present day. And it is not to this earth merely that the movement is confined, which began with the entrance of Christ's kingdom in the world. Heaven was moved also. What a movement was there there, when the everlasting Son arose to clothe himself in our flesh; and the astonished angels descended to earth, to sing the first song over his

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cradle; what a movement, when He, who is life itself, sank a prey to death; what a movement of joy, at his return as High priest, into the upper sanctuary, with the thief at his side; what a movement, at the entrance of so many of God's children, into everlasting glory! "And this movement continues so long as the heaven must receive Christ," as Peter says, "until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets, since the world began." How! heaven has not yet received Christ? No, it is still receiving him. For he and his spiritual members are *one*, and not until he has them all with him above, has heaven completely received him.

But let us listen to the apostle farther. What he chiefly wishes to disclose to us in those words, we have not yet heard. He reminds us, that, in that revelation of the Lord by Haggai, more is meant than a prophecy of those movements of the heavens and of the earth, which were to accompany the entrance of Christ's kingdom into the world. With those words: "Yet once I will shake the heavens and the earth," the Lord had intended also to point out great changes, which were to occur in course of time. "This word, yet once more," says the Apostle, "signifieth the removing of those things that may be shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." There is something in the world, then, that may be shaken, that is, something moveable, something that is subject to transition and change. This something comprises everything that was made and called into being, with the destiny that it should exist only for

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a certain period, in order that that which is *immoveable* might alone endure and remain. To things moveable belonged, for example, all that was prefigurative and typical, in the Levitical law. It was to serve but for a time, and then perish. But the Jews, in the blindness of their hearts, clung to it, as if it were of things which are immoveable; hence their despair, when the torch of dissolution was hurled against it. That the Immoveable was to be found in the quiet shepherd tents of an Abraham, and an Isaac, or in the humble cottages of a Simeon, a Zacharias, or a Hannah, they were far from dreaming. That which struck the eye, as, for instance, the pomp of the typical priesthood, they took for this, and when this, together with the whole temple was destroyed, they cried, "Ichabod! our glory is departed!" and then, instead of joyfully embracing the *Immoveable*, they walked astray by thousands, in the vain hope of restoring the *Moveable*. To things moveable belongs all that is of this world, however it may gleam and shine, and however durable it may appear. When we open before us the history of nations, where do we wander? Beneath our feet lie whole strata of perished states, extinct dynasties, mouldered thrones, buried systems of religion, faded glories, spiritual and material. The dust of destruction covers them, and we no longer know the place which they occupied. Everywhere the storm of annihilation blows rudely and keenly upon us, on every side we behold, written in the plainest characters, the inscription: "That which is moveable changes; that which is moveable passes away." Nay, thou beholdest it upon almost every

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thing that meets thy glance. It is written upon the foundations of the city in which thou dwellest; for it also fulfils but the time which God has appointed for it, and then, is never more. It is written upon the political and civil relations, amid which thou livest. They also belong to the realm of things moveable. It is written upon the dear, domestic circle in which thou dost take such delight. This also is a flower of the grass. Thou dost behold it upon thy official station, upon the rank which thou dost occupy in society, nay, upon thine own forehead; for *thou* also belongest in part to the Moveable, the changeable. Thus all around thee is a passing play of shadows. How glorious soever it may be, it fulfils an appointed period; then a storm of movement flaps its wings above it, against which it is unequal to contend. And were it the earth itself, and the heaven, with its suns and stars; the former will one day be dissolved; the latter roll itself together like a scroll. What folly, then, to cling with our hearts to the *Moveable!* No, my brethren, make your abiding place in the *Immoveable.* Do you ask whether such a thing exists? Yes, it exists in the midst of all change and movement.

If we retire to the great graveyard of history, we behold amid the universal ruin a something which remains, which outlasts all things, and emerges, unharmed, from all the whirlpools of change, whatever else they may devour, and seems indestructible, everlasting. We go back to the beginning of the world, and that something is already in existence. We look through centuries upon centuries, and when do we not

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find it? First, we behold it isolated upon a little spot of earth. Since eighteen hundred years it has filled many countries, islands, and nations. What is it then? A temple, a living one; but one that no Nebuchadnezzar can plunder, one to which no Titus can apply the torch of destruction—a band of men—a band of quiet brothers. We find them gathered cheerfully about a table, which first shows us a Pascal Lamb, then, mysterious bread and a cup of blessing. They sing, and the prevailing sound of their psalms is, Hosanna. One like unto the Son of Man stands, like a friend, in the midst of them. He is their beloved, their all, their only hope. They bear his cross. Despised every where for his sake, they esteem their shame higher than all the treasures of Egypt. They are in the world indeed, but like a silent pilgrim train, that only passes through it. They cast their anchor upon the shore beyond. They cry: "Abba, father!" and hasten into the arms of Him who loves them. You have already guessed of what I am speaking. The *Kingdom of Grace* is this something, as it stands based in the councils of everlasting compassion, and in the blood of a holy and unspotted Lamb. The silent kingdom of hallowed souls, which clothed, ah, in what robes! and baptized with the Spirit of Life, esteem themselves dead unto sin, and alive unto God in Jesus Christ. Yes, this hidden kingdom, with its rights, estates, prospects, customs—this is the only thing *immoveable*, in this world of change and transition. This will remain when heaven and earth shall pass away, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. It will remain in

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its king, in its constitution, and in its individual subjects, and when it can no longer endure on earth, heaven will open its gates to it. It will exist when all else has passed away and changed its being. It is true, much of the framework, many of the forms and relations, in which it appears here below, are moveable; but the kingdom itself is immoveable. The outward structure of the church is moveable, moveable many of its regulations and ordinances; the kingdom itself blooms for eternity, and will exist even without creed, without catechism, without external organization. Yea, it will outlast the fire and the faggot, it will outlast the universal conflagration; it will outlast all the terrors and desolation of death.

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace," admonishes the apostle. Like the kingdom, so also is the rule of this kingdom "saved through grace," everlasting and immoveable. Therefore let us not act as some, who after they have received grace, suddenly fall back again upon works, and make their peace dependent upon the height of personal holiness, to which they have attained. These mistake the Immoveable, and class it again among things Moveable. With these the kingdom of grace changes its essence, and becomes transformed into a kingdom, in which the law rules, although in a subtle manner. But in this they act unbecomingly. No, the kingdom of grace, will remain a kingdom of grace to all eternity. Here grace alone has ruled, here it still rules, here it will always rule. Therefore bear in mind this one thing only, that the sun of mercy shines

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upon us, but in this one thing let us be contented also, and let our hearts feel that they have reached the goal, if they have but received mercy.

To-day we stretch out a brother's hand through many centuries, to a man who stands before us, a living witness that our kingdom is an immoveable one. His heart is like our hearts; his hope like our hopes, his condition like our condition, his faith like our faith. And in the way in which he received salvation, we also receive it, down to the present hour. Naaman has found the Immoveable in the world of movement. We heartily congratulate him, and rejoice with him over the great prize.

2 KINGS v. 17.

And Naaman said, shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord.

The inner world of our Syrian is to be still further revealed to us. Even the secret chambers of his heart open their doors to us. Commonly, the regenerated are like closed gardens, above whose walls a tree top only, moved by heavenly breezes, towers here and there. Here we are permitted to walk around at leisure, in such a garden of the Lord, and to take a near view of the flowers and running brooks. And how pleasant is it to wander in such a quiet world, where streams the light of Paradise, and where the harsh discords of the

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natural passions, are drowned by the tones of divine voices and emotions; where the sigh after God, like the note of the nightingale, proclaims a fairer spring than this world knows; and the rose of pure love betrays to us that gardener, to whom the last farthing is paid, which is his due, when we fall at his feet with Mary's "Rabboni!" Naaman's *inward condition*, *resolute declaration*, and *singular request*, are the three points on which we shall dwell to-day in contemplation.

I. You have already heard from his confession, what kind of a man we have now before us, in the person of our Syrian. We have here, not a mere temporarily awakened sinner, whom the artillery of grace has but slightly wounded, not completely prostrated. We behold in Naaman a decided champion of all that is holy in Israel. A man, who is what he is, *completely*. The *kernel* has become new. What a source of delight to Elisha to see the Pagan so soon, and so thoroughly, regenerated. I could envy him the enjoyment, and the more so, the more seldom Micah's words: "They have broken up and passed through the gate," are fulfilled among ourselves. There is a want of *completeness*, among the Christians of the present day. *Half, half*, is the word applicable to most of them. Whether the world is their mother or the Jerusalem above, seems a question. Whether they are the slaves of the law, or the freemen of the gospel, remains undecided. When awakenings occur, it is slow work, wearisome to the patience. The children struggle for birth, but there is not strength to bear them. There is a rush

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to the narrow gate—then a sudden pause—then—a faint retreat. Soon there is a new impulse again: "I will seek the Lord!" the foot is raised also; but there is no resolute treading of the narrow path. Always resolves, never performances. Always a mien to enlist under Christ's banner, but the joyful oath of allegiance is never taken. Often indeed the vine puts forth leaves; but when we would sing songs of spring, a night frost falls—and the young foliage is black and dead. At times there is even the hope-inspiring blossom of a tear, of an agitated confession, of an ardent vow—but the blossom is barren. Fruit, fruit will not appear. There is a striving upwards to Him who is above; but like that of the pillars of mist, which, in the early summer morning, wreathe about our hills, and try to soar aloft, held by the clods from which they spring, they cannot, and at last evaporate into nothing, amid the cliffs. There is a fluttering like that of the swallows, around the towers of Zion, but there is no alighting, like that of which the Psalmist sings: "Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself."

The explanation of Naaman's firm and vigorous decision, is found in the fact that he had not chosen the Lord, until the Lord had first chosen him. There is a kind of seeking after the Lord, which arises entirely from ourselves. The impulse has not flowed from God, and has awaked a *human* purpose. Dear relations have been converted; we wish to be so likewise. An intimate friend has entered upon the path of salvation; how can we remain behind? The times are fraught

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with danger, and we would gladly possess a God of help and consolation. We see, that, with God's people all stands well; well then, we wish to share in their prosperity. We then seek, in a certain sense, the kingdom of God; but: "Many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, but shall not be able." A man may pray, observe his hours of devotion, and glide into godliness, as into a ready made garment, but all this is mere mummery. To wish to embrace Christ, without being embraced by Christ, is wasted labor. As a plant does not grow to meet the light, until it has felt the magic touch of the light, so a man does not come truly to Christ, until Christ has first miraculously drawn him. The Lord must make the beginning; not thou. The relation of the needle to the magnet, interprets to thee the mystery of true conversion. His "Awake!" must wake thee; his attraction draw thee. When he has once encountered thee, as he encountered Saul near Damascus, or the woman of Samaria, when he led her before the mirror of truth, or Matthew, when he cast a: "follow me!" into his soul, that burned like fire, and impelled like the breath of the tempest, then things stand right, between thee and him, then thy seeking him is no longer a toilsome striving, but irresistible impulse, unconditional surrender. Thou dost suffer violence. A strange spirit came upon thee, was too strong for thee, and gained the victory. This was the case with our Syrian. In him you behold a man converted, not of his own, but of God's will. He is a prisoner of the Lord's, and still, nay *as* such, he is a free, a royal man, who bears the command: "Live to

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the Lord!" not as a chain, but as a wreath and crown. If the Lord purposed to slay him, he would not let Him go. His direction towards the Lord is involuntary, like that of the well known flower toward the sun. Like the mountain torrent, which in its passage to the ocean, stops for no hindrances, all that is within him, soars upon the fiery wings of Love, toward the Saviour, and it seems a happiness and an honor to him, not a yoke, to sacrifice all that he has, and all that the world can give him, as an incense and a burnt offering to the Lord.

II. Naaman's inward resolve is manifested in a delightful confession. "Thy servant," he says to Elisha, "will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." This is his oath of allegiance, this his signature to the covenant, which God has established with him. He calls himself Elisha's servant. In him he beholds an interpreter, a substitute, and favorite of the Most High, and this glory he considers greater than all royal splendor, all princely pomp. A different scale is now placed in his hand, from that with which he was accustomed to measure human greatness. He no longer views things, as they appear to his bodily eyes. He has learned to judge spiritually. "Thy servant:" He utters this with a deep feeling of sincerity. Reverence, love, and heartfelt submission, place these words upon his tongue. Whether his attendants could properly appreciate such condescension on the part of their master is a question. But Naaman does not trouble himself

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about this. Released from the falsehood of worldly ceremony, he finds himself elevated to a frame of mind like that of David before the ark of the covenant. A sneering Michal would have received from his lips also the reply: "I will be yet more vile than thus, and of the despised in the land of them shall I be had in honor.*

"Thy servant," says the Syrian, "*will* henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." He *will* do this no longer. His resolution is taken. This *purpose* is a divine act, as that purpose always is which God effects. This never changes, but is permanent as the spirit which engendered it, and makes the man. Naaman will henceforth no longer sacrifice to his gods; and even if he should do so again, and do so often, yet still *he* would not do it. His true and inmost *self* would take no part in the deed. The divine *purpose* in the Christian is the *Christian*, and thus a Christian never sins and cannot sin. A non-Christian only can sin. In every regenerated man a non-Christian and a Christian are found together in the same person. A man born again is the most mysterious phenomenon under the heavens. He is two persons in one. He has dealings hourly with another, who is himself, and still again, is not. He smites him, and can rejoice in his wounds, although he himself feels them. He nails him to the cross, then he himself writhes upon the cross, and yet

* German Version.

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again, at the same moment, he stands below, and triumphs over a crucified adversary.

Naaman *will*. His purpose is divine constraint, in the form of personal freedom. Every conversion is neither more nor less than this. "So then the converted are machines," you exclaim. Well, is it a misfortune, I ask, to be a machine of the Holy Spirit? What is the natural man? Free? He thinks he is so, the poor, blind fool, and ah, in what chains he walks! He *sins*, not indeed out of *constraint*, and yet, out of *necessity*, as the Christian is holy out of necessity, and still willingly holy. Freedom in the common acceptation of the word has no existence. But if it is necessary to be subject to some power, who would not rather be controlled by a heavenly power, than be sold under the sway of darkness? And a third power there is not.

"Thy servant *will*." To such an "I *will*," all come, whom God brings home. It is the watchword of true conversion. Where it has not been uttered, the great turning point has not yet been reached. There are many souls among us, from whom we hear an: "I should like to resign myself to the Lord!" an: "I feel truly inclined!" an: "I would gladly!" But this does not answer. Such a faint: "I would," is no protection against Hell. With this, thousands remain their lives long in the power of the devil. This: "I *would*," must be changed into an: "I *will!*" into a resolute, a joyfully defiant, a vigorous and energetic: "I *will!* I *will!*" and then draw a bolt behind it. My family shake their heads; but "I *will* belong to the Lord

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Jesus!" My friends endeavor to dissuade me;—but I *will.* What can my friends offer me? The world threatens me with scorn and shame. *That* for the world! I *will.* It will make a noise, if I suddenly quit the gay scene of the world and its vanities, and join myself to the band of Israel. Be it so! I *will* seek the Lord. I *will,* although all the devils stood in my way. If men should trample upon me in the streets—I *will!* Away, ye idols that I have hitherto served! Farewell, ye circles of vanity, in which I have too long lingered! Be ye accursed, ye follies, in which I have squandered my time! I vow to the Lord my God, that I will observe the conditions of his covenant, and—*so it shall be.* Yes, such an "I *will*" must be born in our souls; an "I *will*" like a buttress, against which all the waves of protestation and opposition will break in vain; an "I *will,*" like a sharp-edged sword, that cuts right and left, and severs everything that is incompatible with Christ; an "I *will,*" whose powerful tones will be heard far and wide, in the sphere in which we live, and which will imprint the stamp of its decision upon our whole life, and acts, and aspirations. So long as this "I *will*" is not uttered in the soul, our faith is emptiness, our Christianity semblance, delusion, falsehood. Christianity is not recognition, contemplation, feeling; it is *purpose.* Mark that, and mark it heedfully, for a mistake here brings with it its own terrible retribution.

Naaman will no longer sacrifice to his gods, but to the Lord. We wish him joy of his holy and blessed resolution. Oh, that it lay in our power, to open a way

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for it into your hearts also! If ever an age deserved the epithet "idolatrous" it is the busy, agitated one, in which we live. There are, to wit, two idols, which, in daily, widening sway, hold the world imprisoned in their enchanted circles. The first is named *worldly enjoyment.* Clothed in the seductive, variegated garment of sensual beauty, it exerts a magic power over all ranks and all ages. To it, millions sacrifice the last serious thought, nay, even the wish for immortality. An intoxication of the senses for the coming hour, a new one for the following, is all that their refined materialism desires and claims. The second idol before which this blinded age bends the knee, is the unhallowed splendor of the *human intellect*—genius, sparkling wit, the creative power of thought, whatever hosts of darkness they may serve. Admiration of this or that wonderfully endowed poet or philosopher, has almost reached the height of religious worship. Subjection to another's mind, for example, Goethe's or Hegel's, is openly extolled as the culminating point, the acme of all culture and refinement. In conscious or unconscious pantheism, they adore such heroes in literature, and do not shrink from the open confession that they do so. Where such gifts unfold themselves, they prate of the revelation of the Divinity in the human intellect, and of the devout contemplation which is its due. But a step farther, and the abomination of the time of antichrist will appear completely developed. May the Lord look down in compassion, and dissolve the spell, wherever it has found a way into the midst of us, and preserve our feet from the snares of the

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devil! May Naaman's watchword save us from destruction! "I will henceforth sacrifice to no other gods but unto the Lord alone."

III. With his joyful confession Naaman combines a singular request. When Elisha refuses the proffered offering of love, the Syrian implores a gift of him, and says: "Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." This request on the part of our healed leper, might appear strange to us, and cause us to suspect the reality of his conversion. But let us not exercise unchristian harshness, and, deciding from appearances, pronounce a superficial judgment. Naaman desires Israelitish earth, material earth, but earth which to him is spiritually transfigured—a few sacks full. This he wishes to have transported to Damascus. For what purpose? He himself indicates it. As soon as he has returned to his home, every mark of his former blindness shall be removed from his presence. No idolatrous image, no heathenish symbol, shall find a place longer beneath his roof; on the other hand, an altar consecrated to the living God, shall be reared in his house, which may testify to all, of the great mercy which has been vouchsafed him. He does not intend to make a secret of the new birth which he has experienced. Every one shall know and see under whose banner he has enlisted. Whatever may be the result, this altar shall bear the tidings, far and wide, even to the latest pos-

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terity, that Naaman has become a servant of the God of Israel, and that Jehovah has become his tower, refuge, rock, and Saviour. Yet this altar is not destined to be merely a *memorial.* Naaman intends to sacrifice thereon, and by this significant rite, to renew daily the confession of his sins, as well as the expression of his ardent hope for the promised Mediator. Elisha does not forbid him to perform the duties of a *priest* himself. As a man of God, isolated in a distant pagan land, Naaman might consider himself as standing in a freer position, to the Levitical law. If in this, he anticipated the time of the New Testament, the Lord himself did not oppose this, especially, as this man endowed so abundantly with grace, was, by the lofty elevation of his faith, entitled and capacitated to perform this office. In addition to this, a sweet presage of coming times, of times, rich in mercy, dawned upon the earth, in the person of the sacrificing pagan proselyte. His appearance gilded the dark clouds of the idolatrous world, with the light of a morning star, that proclaimed good tidings. It pointed prophetically to a priestly race, which, crossing the boundaries of Canaan, as well as the barriers of the Levitical Law, would gradually, like a vein of living gold, ramify through all people and all tongues. And this prophetic prefiguration was also, as Elisha doubtless felt, a *divine purpose.*

That Naaman's altar was to be reared upon Israelitish earth, must not, through narrow-mindedness, be interpreted to the disadvantage of the joyful, deeply-agitated man. He who should imagine that any super-

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stitious expectation was connected in Naaman's mind with this earth, would only betray his entire inability to appreciate the manifestations of a delicate and sensitive nature. What is a leaf, from the tree of the Mount of Olives? We saw one lately, and were moved. What is a flower, from the summit of Mount Golgotha? And yet if we possessed one, it would bloom with wondrous virtue for us. So also our Syrian well knew, that Israelitish earth, in its material properties, had no advantage over that of Damascus; but still it was earth of the land, which the Lord had chosen to himself before all lands; earth above which, the echoes of his steps were heard as they were heard no where else; earth, illuminated a thousand times, by the miraculous splendor of the divine glory; and, at the same time, earth, from the never-to-be-forgotten spot, where everlasting salvation had become his portion, and where he had found the living God, and in *him* eternal life—therefore *holy* earth, if any earth deserves the name. And now if it seemed to him sweet to possess something of this earth in a remote pagan land; sweet to the memory to pray and to offer sacrifice upon this earth; nay, if he even felt as if treading upon this earth could strengthen and invigorate the consciousness of his brotherhood with the servants of Jehovah in distant Canaan, shall we compassionately shrug our shoulders and smile thereat, as at childish weakness? Oh, not so, my beloved hearers! Let the *heart* have its rights. We bear our treasure in earthen vessels, and cannot grasp as a spoil the "spirituality of the angels," neither do we need to do so—we

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are not forbidden to be men, and *feel as men.* Christianity does not require the death of our human nature, but only the crucifixion of the *old man.* The endeavor to put off all, and every feeling of sense as such, rests upon mistaken views of sanctification, and has never produced any thing but caricatures of holiness and formal Pharisees.

And now, as I behold Naaman depart homeward, with his singular freight, many a thought occurs to me, and it seems as if much was shadowed forth in this simple incident. Earth from the land of Canaan borne into a distant heathen world; what a significant symbol! "Upon Judah's soil grows healing for the nations." Naaman would fain pray upon Israelitish earth. Our altars of prayer still stand upon Israel's soil—I mean upon the soil of its promises and blessed experiences. Naaman's altar is to be reared in a house, in which a short time previously what boundless misery met our eyes. The path by which *all* the elect are led, ends before an altar of praise and thanksgiving. Alone, that altar of Naaman's will stand at Damascus. Round about, all is still heathenish and dark. An altar, dedicated to the Lord, but not seldom placed like that, is found in the heart of every regenerated man. However gloomy all around it may be, however desolate, however stormy, yet there the altar stands, and an incense-cloud of secret sighs, ascends from it at *all* times up to heaven. Ah, that in the dwellings of us all, there stood an altar like that which Naaman reared; an altar with the inscription "salvation has come to this house," an altar, inscribed with the

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names of all who dwell beneath the roof! an altar, above which the smoke of living incense is never intermitted, and upon which all are joyfully resolute to sacrifice, every thing which Emmanuel'shonor claims! Oh, may the Lord rear such spiritual altars in our dwellings, and soon bring on the happy moment when the declaration of our Syrian will sound from a thousand voices among ourselves: "I will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord!"

THE END.

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