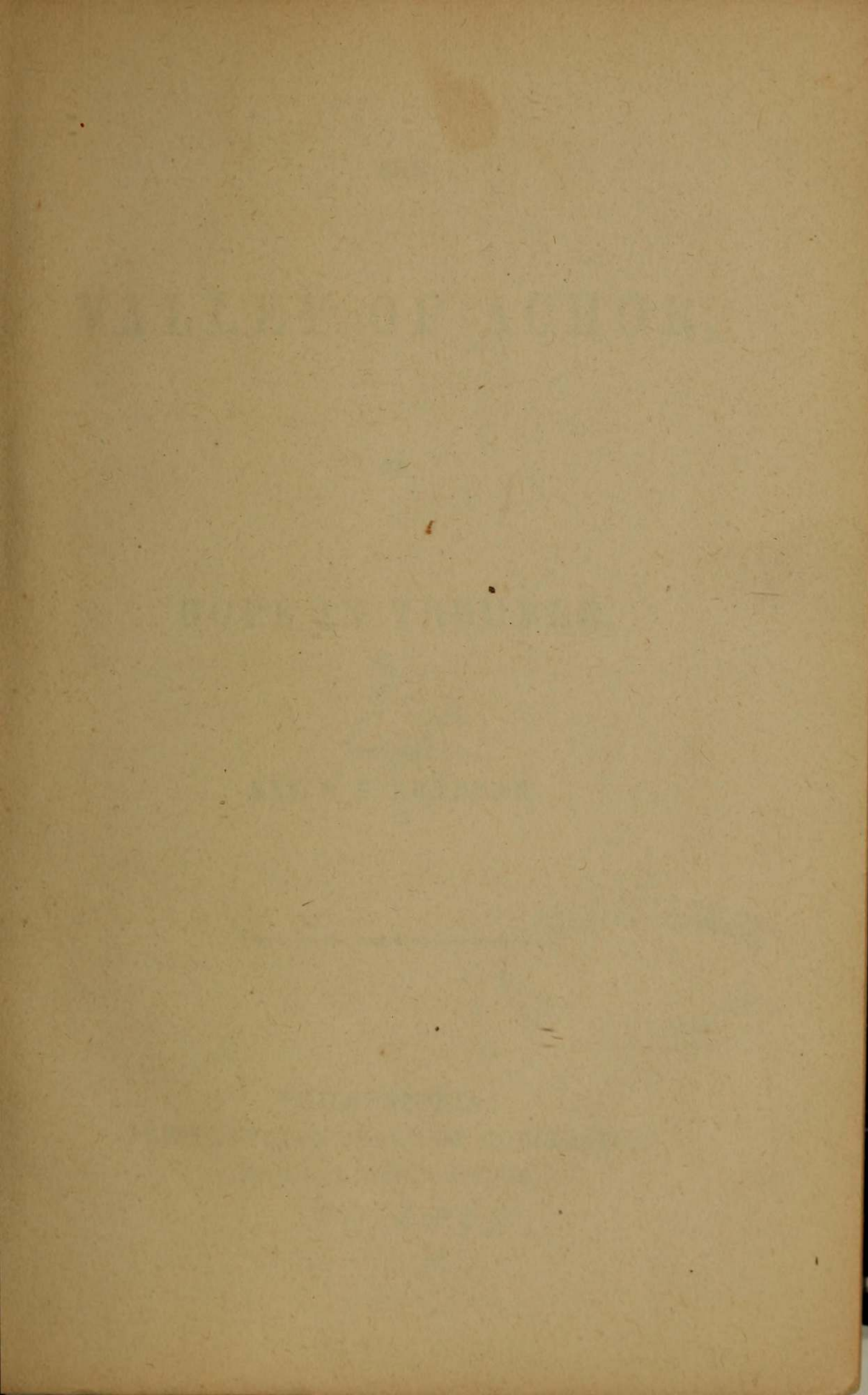


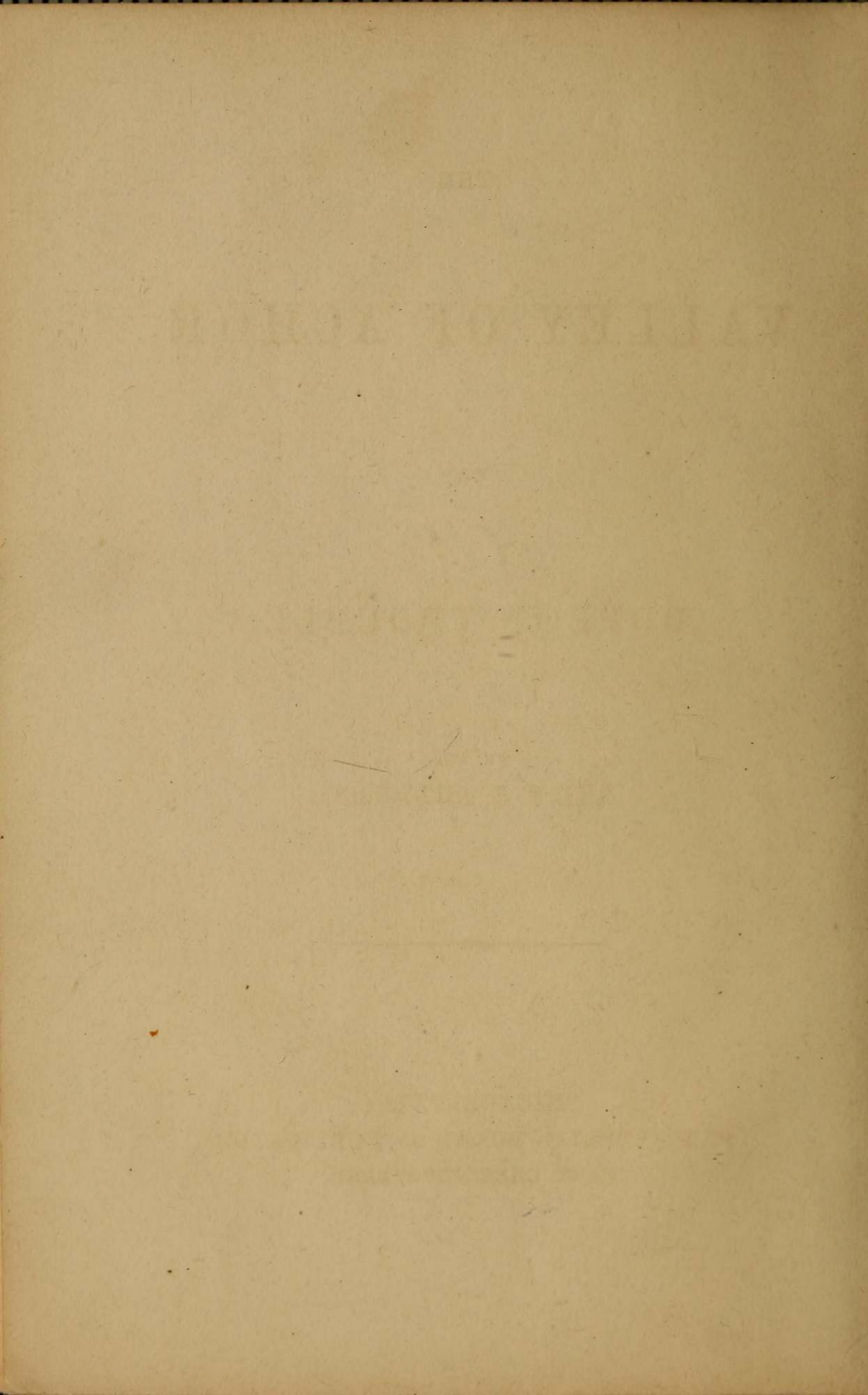


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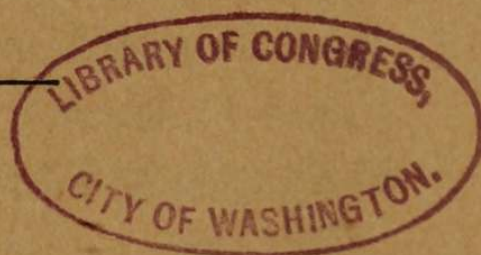


THE  
VALLEY OF ACHOR,

OR

HOPE IN TROUBLE.

*manuscript*  
BY THE  
REV. S. S. SHEDDAN.



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THE  
VALLEY OF ACHOR.

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“The valley of Achor for a door of hope.”—HOSEA  
ii. 15.

How strange the arrangement, that the day should rise from the bosom of night!—Yet more astonishing how grace brings light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow, and hope out of trouble.

Nothing seems more clearly written upon the workings of providence, and the economy of grace, than the scripture truth, “God’s ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts, as our thoughts.”

With a singularity peculiarly divine, he makes sweet waters to gush from Marah—he makes the vineyards to bud and give



their clusters in the wilderness—in the night he gives songs of joy, and in Zion's hour of desertion he speaks comfortably unto her. In workings that are divine extremes strangely meet.

Achor means *trouble*, and is the name given to a valley between Jericho and Ai, where Israel were greatly troubled because of the sin of Achan. Israel, flushed by their first and easy conquest in Canaan, were disappointed and humbled at Ai, and their discomfiture was overruled to their purity and success. Upon the seventh day, at the seven times repeated blasts of the rams-horns, the walls of Jericho fell, and Israel, forgetting that Omnipotence there worked for them, proudly said, "Let about two or three thousand go up, and smite Ai, and make not all the people labour thither, for they are but few." But their dishonoured God withdrew his hand, and the men of Ai smote them, "and the hearts of the people melted, and became as water."

Hopeless and despondent, Joshua fell to the



earth, and said, "Alas! O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan." With dust upon their heads, Joshua and the elders lie with their faces to the earth, their strength overcome, their self-confidence destroyed, and Canaan's door apparently closed against them. Their feet had just joyously touched the threshold of the promised land, when they slip; the promise darkens, the enemy too strong, their God angry, and they unexpectedly in the valley of Achor.

The wilderness had not taken away all of Israel's self-confidence and covetousness. The easy conquest, the silver and gold of Jericho gave importance to self, and strength to covetousness; and the door is closed, until they learn to lean upon God, and put away the accursed things of Canaan. By this reverse, the people were humbled, Achan found out and put to death, and Israel sanctified,



then God opens up a door and leads them on, and fights for them, and gives them the city and the people of Ai, and in the valley of Achor was opened a door of hope. Their weakness was their strength, their defeat was their triumph.

This light coming out of darkness was not the exclusive property of Joshua and the Israel of his day. Hosea seizes upon the very figure, that lies in this history, and holds it up as a gracious promise to tossed and afflicted Zion of his time. It is a delightful truth that still lives, a cheering promise hung out wherever the heavens gather darkly over any of God's children. It is the gushing well opened just at the fainting hour in the wilderness. It is the angel's voice, when the victim is bound and the knife lifted.

Neither from the history of Israel, nor from the divine promises can we gather any assurance, that the people of God shall not be brought into "the valley of Achor;" for it is especially true, "many are the afflictions



of the righteous." The heavenly promise is hope in trouble.

"The valley of Achor for a door of hope" is a divine paradox, mostly and rightly applied to the dealings of God with his children. It is also strikingly verified in the dawning of faith in the heart of the penitent.

The "strait gate" stands at "the valley of Achor," and there it stands open. Human reason cannot well comprehend the arrangements of grace,—that hopelessness begets hope, and bitter turns to sweet, and trouble to peace. How God humbles that he may exalt! How he empties that he may fill!

The history of God's providences with straying Israel in the days of Hosea, remarkably describes his gracious leadings of the soul to penitence.

Many were the idols and lovers of backsliding Israel, but God lured her away into the wilderness, and there, when forsaken and desolate, he spake comfortably unto her.

The unrenewed soul has its idols and



lovers, but God touches these, and the heart is bereft of its comforts. Earthly joy palls, and self-sufficiency is shaken. By means peculiarly his own, he lures away the heart from its worldly delights. By the leadings of his Spirit the heart is brought into the wilderness, carnal ease is gone, worldly comforters have lost their power to charm. Their strength, which seemed equal to the overthrow of every difficulty, melts away. By the Spirit the self-righteous props are removed, and the evil passions, which seemed a few weak enemies, are seen and felt in their oppressive power. The law, that once talked as an encouraging friend, now terrifies with its curses. The holiness of God stands out with a consuming brightness, and Sinai, which before lay in harmless slumber, now breaks forth, and an awakened conscience and a lively sense of guilt echo painfully back all the thunders of wrath.

Truly dark and hopeless is the valley of Achor, where God opens up to the true penitent the door of hope. Just where hu-



man pride and self-righteousness die hopelessly away, grace opens the door, and throws the light. Strange, yet perfect, is the economy of grace. How it empties vain, important man, and writes loss upon the things he counted gain! His corn, and his wine, and his oil, his silver and gold lose all their lulling charm upon the heart. New moons, and Sabbaths, and solemn feasts fail to soothe the troubled conscience. Their trumpets, that once sounded out their fancied strength, and by a strange delusion appeared to demolish all the walls that shut them from heaven, are powerless and uninspiring. The proud heart slain by the law is in the dust,—dark and cheerless the prospect, as it looks within, hopeless and threatening, as it looks towards an angry God. Its boasted strength and fancied goodness have melted away. The once apparently few imperfections of the heart, that scarcely invited a manly resistance, now rise up an overwhelming force of wicked thoughts, carnal appetites, and corrupt passions.



The soul is indeed in "the valley of Achor." So far as human power can reach, or human eye can see, all is dark and cheerless; and here, at the very verge of despair, heaven opens the door of hope.

When the soul lets go its last hold upon its own strength and righteousness, and falls low and helpless before God, it discovers mercy's door, and sees heaven's cheering light. When Hagar makes her last effort for her boy, and turns away that she may not see him die, the angel speaks, her eyes are opened, the well is seen, her boy lives. When spiritual pride looking for the last time to her broken cisterns, turns from them to die, then mercy's angel speaks to the desponding soul, lifts it up, opens the way and leads it to the well of Bethlehem.

Life and light enter the heart. The horizon changes. The dread law becomes a peaceful gospel—the thundering Sinai becomes distant and is hushed, and Calvary lies between. A Tabor rises up from the deepest darkness of Achor's valley.



Cheering fact! Where the lights of earth go out, there heaven's light falls and guides. Pleasing thought! that the dying groans of the carnal heart are the birth song of the spiritual. How divine the wisdom, that places the open door just where man loses the way, and mistrusts every earthly path! How infinite the love to throw divine light upon the soul, just when it ceases to follow the luring and deceitful lights of earth, and is ready to sink down in rayless night!

Yes, to the penitent this valley of Achor is the door of hope. The soul, overwhelmed with a true sense of sin, may not at the time see it, or know that that godly sorrow, that emptiness of self, that lying hopeless and confounded in the dust was the strait gate—the threshold of eternal life. He knows it not, as he bemoans himself as lost, that his redeeming God is making his cheerless abasement and his hopelessness of feeling, the dawning of his spiritual day. Painful may be his wanderings, but let the penitent know, that when he lies humbled, abased, and lost,



he is then at the "strait gate," yes, he has entered, and shall soon see, that the "valley of Achor was the door of hope."

That afflictions shall work together for the good of the children of God, is no new thought in scripture, and has been the pleasant experience of many of the righteous. The apparent contradiction—God makes trouble a blessing, has often been explained in the lives of those, who have gone up out of tribulation, and are before the throne. In our short-sightedness, we often call sweet bitter, and bitter sweet, or say when God works for our good, "All these things are against me."

To our weak faith, it seems a strange misnomer to call sorrow joy, or the valley of trouble a door of hope. Still the history of patriarchs, of prophets, and indeed the history of Israel is a running and distinct commentary on that very truth.

Man, no doubt, often errs in his estimate of the providences of God; and more especially fails to see the *father*, when he holds the



rod, or to see that to his children God makes their troubles a door of hope.

After the easy conquest of Jericho, what a gloomy reverse to the Israelites must have been the discomfiture of Ai! Yet Achor with its humbling defeat,—its detection and stoning of Achan, its purifying of the people, and causing them to lean more upon their God, did more to fit them for the enjoyment of Canaan, than their unlaboured triumph of Jericho.

When man by the providence of God is brought into the valley of Achor, he then in his very troubles has the door of hope.

Seasons have been, when the dark clouds were the hope of harvest. Sickness has been where free grief and bursting tears were the hope of health. The tree and the vine both have been, when pruning was life.

Often thus the hope-destroying and planthwarting providences, are the rescuing and love-directed acts of a kind father.

Infinite love takes a holy delight in making the hour of extremity, the hour of



help—the mount of danger the mount of deliverance. It seems the pleasing recreations of divine mercy, to put out the alluring tapers of earth, and then surprise the soul in its darkness, by the steadier and safer light of heavenly love. Or to unloose and be-reave the affections, which fasten too strongly to the things of earth, and as they lie bleeding, he would raise, and purify them, and fix them upon himself.

The dweller in the valley of Achor may not at the time recognize that his afflictions and thwarted plans are visits of mercy. The dim eye of faith cannot see it; but the strong faith which embraces the promise, and the heart leaning upon his God shall see it.

Sometimes the hurt and the balm, the thorn and the grace, the father's rod and the filial kiss, may so go together—the one, the earnest of the other—the first, but the shading of the last—that the soul then feels God makes darkness light.

How often at the time do the troubled only see the valley of Achor! The eyes of



Mary dim with tears can sadly see the empty sepulchre, but cannot see that its emptiness has put her risen Lord before her. Without living faith the day of trouble is dark and lowering.

We are far too apt to recognize kindness only in the soft and familiar voice, forgetful of the fact, that once a brother's heart could only conceal its throbbings, and restrain its yearnings, by the assumed, rough voice of a stranger. We are too forgetful of the fact, that our divine Joseph often comes in divinest love, when he appears a stranger to our family and social joys, and speaks in the rough voice of providence.

All know, that our richest valleys are where our highest mountains raise their heavy sides—that our purest waters are those, that leap and murmur along a rocky channel—that our freshest summer air is that, which is riven by the lightning, and shaken from its deep repose among the hills by the echoing thunder. Yet how forgetful are we that the lowest place at the cross is



the most favoured spot to catch a bright view of the far distant, and rich glories of heaven! How unmindful, that trial gives to the christian's clinging faith, a stronger and closer hold; that as the wilderness howls, and grows dark, the spiritual bride leans more upon her Beloved! Who does not know that some of the purest feelings, and freshest joys of the heart, were when God by doubts, or fears, or thwarting providences waked the soul from a half lifeless security, or unblest repose?

Such promises, and their repeated fulfilment constitute the pillar of cloud to the true Israelite on his way to Canaan. As he follows the leadings of providence, his is the assurance, that his God will choose and mark the way. If the sea stretches before him, as he obeys the voice, "Go forward," the sea divides. In his journey he may pitch his tent where serpents bite, but the Redeemer plants near him the cross, and the venom has no effect. His path may bring him to Mara, but Mara is sweetened to him.



Chequered, infested, and hedged may seem his way, valley may give place to deeper valley, but heaven's promise—divine grace—holds a nearer place. Affliction may succeed affliction, bereavement may chase bereavement; yet there is a brightness thrown over the affliction, and a comfort and sanctified strength in the bereavement, so that even the night has its songs—the valley of Achor a door of hope. While many afflicted ones could testify from their own experience to these comforting truths, a little turning to the history of God's dealings with his people, may more strikingly exhibit the promise in Hosea.

A difficulty arises in some minds from the prevalent but mistaken feeling, that the loved of heaven should be sheltered from trouble. Even David well nigh repined, as he saw the prosperity of the wicked, and the many afflictions of the righteous.

Notwithstanding nature tells us the vine cannot be healthy, and flourish without pruning, and the silver cannot be refined without



fire; and although scripture tells us, "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son he receiveth," man is so much the creature of sense, and so slow to walk by faith, that we stand amazed at the trials and afflictions God sends upon his people.

God chooses his own way of sanctification, and this is wisely chosen and adapted. For some the way to the throne lies through tribulation. They are almost always in affliction, and there only is their safety and sanctification.

The promise, "the valley of Achor for a door of hope," points rather to those upon whom sudden reverses had come.

In the days of Hosea, Israel had affiliated with the world, and the worship of Baalim. Too well satisfied with her fulness, she knew not that God gave her corn and wine, and multiplied her silver and gold. Her covenant God would heal her backslidings, and renew to her his love. He blows upon, and blasts her idols and her earthly joys. He claims for himself and takes away the corn,



the wine, the wool, and the flax. He causes to cease her mirth, her feast days, and her new moons, and her Sabbaths. He makes a forest of her vines and fig-trees. Thus by their removal, he parts her from her idols and lovers. He brings her into the wilderness. There, her earthly fulness gone—her propping externals gone—bleak and comfortless the heart,—Israel is brought where she will hear the voice of her forsaken God. In her fulness, she had no ear to hear. In her earthly and idolatrous joy, there was no access. Now in the cheerless wilderness, she remembers her God, and lo! he speaks comfortably unto her.

Adverse and unkind appeared the providences of God, but it was infinite wisdom planning, and divine love accomplishing her return. Heavenly mercy turned her ensnaring vines and fig-trees into forests, and led her solitary to the wilderness; there the unaccustomed ear listened to mercy's voice, and God gave her vineyards there, and wines upon the lees well refined. Again she sings



the songs of her youth, and free from that cold distance and awing fear, she no more calls her God, Baali—my Lord, but with confiding love says, "Ishi—my husband." The valley of Achor was her door of hope.

There are some galleries so constructed, as to converge sound and bring it to a single point. Out of that point is confusion. There the softest whisper may be heard. The converging point of infinite love, of divine promise, and mercy's whispers, is the vale of sorrow. There the soul, divinely afflicted, catches the gentlest breathings of heavenly grace.

It is a law of nature, that sound can be farther heard, and more distinctly, in the valley than upon the mountain. It is a lovely law of grace, that the promises of the gospel, and the voice of mercy, are more frequent and cheering in the vale of sorrow—in the days of trouble—than upon the summit of fulness and in the bright day of prosperity.

Affliction may seem a dark, burning glass,



but when blest of God has the power to wonderfully concentrate the reviving and enlightening truths of God's word.

Strange and often mysterious are the providences of God, and the arrangements of his grace. Man is humbled that he may be exalted, brought into darkness that he may find the light, disappointed for his gain, hedged up that he may find a path, in trouble that he may hope, afflicted that he may be blessed. The providences of our heavenly Father are often as the aged patriarch crossing his hands, when he blessed the sons of Joseph.

The valley of Achor for a door of hope is more than the assurance, that "tribulation worketh patience," or that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

It does not come to the child of sorrow and talk of good *resulting* from his trials, but in these crosses *are* the good. The blessings are in these hands that cross each other. The chastisement is the love. The stranger is Joseph. The apparent frown is the smiling



face. These things may not be seen at the time except by the clear eye of faith, but they shall be known hereafter. Watch the dark, threatening cloud, and time will prove that in its darkness is the refreshing shower. Keep your eye fixed upon those black and ragged clouds of evening, and soon their blackness is lost in lovely hues, and their ragged edges are silvered with light.

Let the afflicted spirit watch submissively the dark providence, and know that it carries refreshing grace. Fix steadily the eye of faith upon the frowning face, and see through the disguise the smiling Father.

Go with Jacob down to his valley of Achor. "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me." With your eye upon "these things," tarry a while with the patriarch, and see in his very bereavements the divine forethought and infinite love of his God. The cloud brightens, *against* becomes *for*. The things that threatened to bring his gray hairs to the grave were hea-



venly acts to save him and his children from famine, and secure him comfort in his old age.

From Old Testament times, glean where you may from the history of God's afflicted ones, and you will find confirmed this cheering interpretation of the promise.

Poor Naomi! gloomy indeed was her valley of Achor. Her Elimelech was taken. Her sons, Mahlon and Chilion, were gone. Herself, a widow, and two widowed daughters-in-law dependent upon her. Distant her home, sad the journey—her lands in Israel were held by another—friends coldly asked, "Is this Naomi?" She speaks the language of Achor's valley, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty hath dealt bitterly with me."

Now from the house of Boaz, in Bethlehem, look back upon the widow's dark pathway, and see how it gleams with light. A Father's finger touched Elimelech and bereaved Ruth of her Mahlon, and brought them in widowhood and want to Bethlehem in the time of



harvest. Their poverty was their blessing. Their self-dependence brought the youthful widow to the field of the reapers. The points the most gloomy in their history, become the most radiant with divine wisdom and love. Painful providences! Blessed dispensations! Three Israelites, the father and two sons, die in Moab, and the Moabiteess Ruth is brought to Bethlehem, that her loveliness might be embalmed in scripture, and her name consecrated in the genealogy leading to Jesus. Call me not Mara, but call me Naomi, for the Almighty has dealt kindly with me.

Perhaps but few may see, at the time, good in their troubles, or even how they can work good. To any who would doubtingly ask, How can darkness be light, or trials blessings? it might be sufficient to say, Walk by faith, trust in the promise of God.

Let us rather go to the house of the Shunammite, and find an answer. Her son is dead. The prophet restores him, and her joy is full, her faith in God increased, and the mother's love tried and strengthened.



But learn further how her very trials worked for her good.

Gehazi stood by, as, in her deep bereavement, the prophet bowed down upon the lad and restored his life. Gehazi is driven leprous from his master. The Shunammite is forced away by famine from her home. Years had passed away, and the widow would return and cry to the king for her land.

In the nicely fitting providences of God, the darkest portions of her history are now the brightest. When the prophet bade his servant run, and lay his staff upon the child, she in her deep bereavement clung to the prophet. So they both—master and servant—went together. Thus Gehazi was made a witness of the miracle. Years afterwards the same overruling hand, that made him there the silent spectator, brought him before the king, and put it into his heart to speak of the great works of his master. The story of the Shunammite and her restored son is just told, as she came, and cried to the king for her house, and for her land. And



“Gehazi said, My lord O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life.” And the king directed, “Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day she left the land, even until now.”

Some may at the time, some afterwards, some while here, and some not until they enter heaven, see their afflictions in their blessed light. None may fully know until they have gone up out of tribulation, and are before the throne, then with joy and thanksgiving, they behold the bright summits in their valley of Achor.

Jacob no doubt saw upon earth the blessedness of being bereaved of Joseph. He may also, on his way to Ephratah, have felt the power of increased faith; but possibly not until at home in heaven did he fully see the divine light and love that fell upon Rachel's grave.

The future shall reveal the fulness of these disguised blessings. Then many of the sons and daughters of sorrow, to quicken



their thanksgiving for delivering grace, may look back from their happy home on high, to see the gloomy Achors through which they came. Seen in heaven's light, they are all turned to Tabors. Their afflictions were blessings. Their disappointed plans and their earthly losses were disguised blessings from their heavenly Father. The withering of their gourds was the reviving of grace. The drying up of their earthly springs brought them to the well of Bethlehem.

“These severe afflictions

Not from the ground arise,

But oftentimes celestial benedictions

Assume the dark disguise.

We see but dimly, through the mists and vapours,

Amid these earthly damps.

What seem to us like dim funereal tapers,

May be heaven's distant lamps.”

Christian, you have no promise that afflictions shall not come, but you have the assurance, that the darkest valley has light. Know, that according to the economy of God's grace, “The far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” may have its be-



ginning, and will have its maturity in those afflictions, which for the moment are not joyous, but grievous. The darkness of mysterious providence is the pavilion of your covenant God.

Afflicted one, get thee up. "Wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" By these trials and troubles, thy God is preparing thee for triumph, and for heaven.

Look up, and see the refiner sits before the refining pot, and applies heat not to consume the metal, but to remove the dross and make his image perfect.

To the child of the covenant, all things work for his good. Sickness, bereavement, and death, are dark valleys without heaven's light, but full of hope to the called of God. He may take away luring and ensnaring idols, and let the heart feel its desolateness, that it may hear his voice, renew his love, and sing again the songs of spiritual espousal. External trials cannot make portionless, and should not make joyless, the heir of grace. He may say, "Although the fig-tree shall not



blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat ; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls : yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

In death's valley, where so much darkness and terror reign, the child of God has his door of hope. Sad may be the Sunderings, and painful may be the dissolving of the earthly house ; but he recognizes in it all the doings of Him, who said, "I will come again, and take you to myself."

He has within him the pledge, that it is "gain to die." To him the trying hour changes to light. "The Lord is my Shepherd—I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Yes, christian, to you this last valley of Achor is a door of hope. Here the imperfect becomes the perfect—the militant, the triumphant—the cross, the crown—to



die is gain. Death is stingless or rather to  
you—

“There is no death ; what seems so is transition,  
This life of mortal breath  
Is but the suburb of the life elysian,  
Whose portals we call death.”



die is vain. Death is stingless or rather to  
you—

There is no death, what seems so is transition  
This life of mortal breath  
Is but the night of the life of day  
Whose portals we call death

THE

CROSS PROVIDENCES OF GOD

ORDERED IN WISDOM AND LOVE.

( 31 )



THE  
CROSS PROVIDENCES OF GOD.

THE

The crossed hands of Jacob, as he blessed the sons of Joseph, are very significant of the providences of God. God sees the end from the beginning, and directs wisely, often thwarting the plans of man. The patriarch's blessing may serve as an illustration of the doings of providence, showing that those doings are not chance, but the wise acts of Him who knows. In Israel the law of primogeniture prevailed. There was an honour and privilege pertaining to the first-born—a larger patrimony, the family name, the father's blessing, the hope of being in the line of



THE  
CROSS PROVIDENCES OF GOD.

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THE crossed hands of Jacob, as he blesses the sons of Joseph, are very significant of the providences and grace of God. Man is short-sighted. God sees the end from the beginning, and directs wisely, often thwarting the plans of man. The unexpected manner of the patriarch's blessing may serve as an illustration of the doings of providence, showing that those doings are not chance, but the wise acts of Him, who knows.

In Israel the law of primogeniture prevailed. There was an honour and privilege pertaining to the first-born—a larger patrimony, the family name, the father's blessing, the hope of being in the line lead-



ing to the Messiah. The profane Esau alone was reckless of his birthright.

The right hand was the more honourable, and a seat there was a mark of distinction. Benjamin, "the son of the right hand," is a name expressive of his nearness and dear-ness to his father. The laying of the right hand upon the head was significant of consecration or blessing. "Thou shalt bring the Levites before the Lord, and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites." "Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hand upon him." So in setting apart deacons, "they prayed, and laid their hands upon them." So Christ, as he parted with his disciples, "lifted up his hands and blessed them."

The right hand is the symbol of power, of consecration, and of blessing, and at the right hand sit the blessed.

In conformity with that law of honour to the first-born, and of power in the right hand, and according to the good patriarchal



custom of the aged blessing the young, or the dying giving their benediction to their children,—we find, as the aged Jacob, now dwelling with his long lost Joseph, was about to die, Joseph would have his father bless his sons. He leads them to his father, now dim of sight, bringing Manasseh the elder to Jacob's right hand.

Joseph comes with his plans of respect and honour for the first-born. He seeks the blessing, but he had planned in his own mind, *how* and *where* they should be distributed, and thus he comes to his father.

None could accuse Jacob of a want of love for Joseph and his sons. His heart seems full, as he kissed and embraced them, and said, "I had not thought to see thy face, and lo, God hath also showed me thy seed."

The natural eye of the old man is dim, but he has a prophetic view of the future, and he guides his hands wittingly, as he stretches the right across the left, and rests it upon the head of Ephraim. Joseph, strong in the eastern prejudices of primogeniture, and per-



haps partial to his first-born Manasseh, was displeased, and held up his father's right hand from the head of Ephraim, that he might remove it to the head of Manasseh, and said, "Not so, my father, for this is the first-born; put thy right hand upon his head."

The decided rebuke, so kindly uttered in the father's answer, might often be addressed by our heavenly Father to those, who would change his providences, as though they were unwise, or he were ignorant of the circumstances: "*I know it, my son, I know it.*"

Joseph, in his preconceived views, and in his movement to teach his father how to bless his sons, is a fair type of man under thwarting providences. The quiet answer has also its exhortation, "Trust in my wisdom and love."

Generally when man comes before God, professedly to ask blessing, he has his plans, his right-hand favourites. He comes that these may be confirmed and prospered. These preferences and desires may be all right, for



man is not made to be indifferent as to what he is, or to what he has, nor to wish without point or reason. Neither is it strange, that the heart should be set upon plans, formed, so far as he can see, wisely, and for his good. He only errs when he is unwilling, that infinite wisdom should overlook, and if necessary change his plans. The child may have his desires, and tell his wishes; but he should be willing that the father, who is wiser, and loves him, should give, withhold, or modify, as he sees best.

It is well to discriminate between the providences of God, and our own wrong actions. A man may be displeased at himself, because of wrong that he might have hindered; but he may not be rebellious at the providences of God, which thwart the desires of his heart. In every-day duties and comforts, there are many things that seem so plain, that man is ready to think, a different arrangement would be an act of ignorance or unkindness. So Joseph thought, when he lifted the right hand of his father from the head of Ephraim.



So Joshua and his men thought, when flushed with victory at Jericho, they went up and were defeated at Ai. So Peter thought, when he drew the sword, and smote off the right ear of Malchus.

When providences come athwart all our views of comfort, and change our aims, and dash our well matured plans for good, and our fondest hopes; then often even the covenant child of God is disposed to put aside the hand and to say, not in the way of entreaty, but rather instructing the Almighty, "Not so, my Father," this is my first-born. Joseph is not charged with rebellion. His preconceived opinions were so strong, that he thought his dim-sighted father mistook Ephraim for Manasseh. Thus thinking, he is a better type of those, who, under sorely thwarting providences, can scarcely refrain the thought, these are the doings of shortsightedness or of feeble love. Joseph was silent, as his father justified the act, by declaring prophetically the future greatness of Ephraim.



Joseph who had been sold, that he might save alive his father and brethren—he who had been in prison, that he might come to the throne, was not the man to doubt a dark and crossing providence. He had learned to believe that God knew and did all things well. Here, however, he thought it was his father's mistake through blindness, or not fully knowing his sons, that made him stretch his left hand with its less blessing to the head of the first-born.

There is something in the manner, as well as the spirit of the father's reply, well befitting a wise providence, when finite man with his preconceived views would murmur or rebel, as though God was ignorant of the circumstances. How generally man would acquiesce in the providences of God, were they but a confirming of his plans, or a fulfilling of his wishes! It is natural and right that man should have his prepossessions, and it is certainly right that the arrangements of to-day should look to the duties of to-morrow. A provident man looks beyond the



present, and it is incumbent upon him to plan as seems to him best. Where he has pondered well, it is not strange that he should be slow to yield to human foresight no greater than his own. The error is, that he becomes so confirmed and wrapt up in his own plans, and the objects they embrace, that he is disposed to counsel the All-wise, and to deem those providences that thwart his own views and devisings, as unwise and unkind.

Man will acknowledge a special providence when it harmonizes with his own wishes, or when he can see the immediate good, but is not willing to yield to divine control, unless he can at once comprehend or have the good. With him, his thoughts and ways are as settled as in the East were the rights of primogeniture.

As Joseph led his sons to his father, arranged, without a doubt in his mind, just as they should be blessed, so man goes to his God, his mind decided as to what would be mercy and what an evil. His pursuits, the



objects of his affection, all the things dear to his heart are presented, with a confidence that, just in the way he has arranged, they ought to be blessed.

If the divine hand were to employ itself in preventing evils we foresaw, but could not in ourselves escape, then we would praise the wisdom, and be satisfied. If God were only to commission death to remove those who had outlived their days of usefulness and comfort, or those who were friendless and cheerless, few or none would stay the hand, and say, "Not so." Or were he to make his left hand empty of blessings, and lay it upon the head of those who trampled upon his law and defaced society, all would acquiesce in his wisdom and justice.

Whenever God does not cross our paths, or our views of what is right, and for the good of ourselves and those we love, he acts wisely; but of all else we hesitate to recognize the wisdom and kindness.

Murmuring at the thwarting providences of God has at its very foundation the wrong



view, that we are entitled to favour at the hand of God; and next is the half-acknowledged thought, that all the connecting circumstances and deep feelings of the heart were not known, or the heavenly love was feeble.

The confidence of Jacob, and his tenderness so well uttered in the language, "I know it, my son, I know it," exactly represent what God claims in the control of his children, and what man must admit, if he acknowledges a covenant God. His all-seeing eye can see how step depends upon step, and his infinite wisdom teaches how and when to change the path.

He knows how prosperity, and how adversity will tell upon the heart of each child—what the immediate, and what the distant results of their plans. None, who own him as the All-wise, can object to his claim of knowledge. All must bow, when he claims, "I know it." But to have the cheerful acquiescence, the heart must receive all—"My son, I know it." It must include the love



with the wisdom. He not only knows how to plan, but has the promptings of a father to guide him.

Joseph, I know that this is Manasseh your first-born upon my right hand, and, my son, your sons are dear to me, "I had not thought to have seen your face, and God has shown me your seed." Your children are my children, but God has shown me, that thus, by my right hand upon Ephraim, shall accrue the richer blessing to your family and to the household of Israel.

At the time God may not always show the reason or the good, but he would have his children so confide in his wisdom and love, as not to doubt under the darkest dispensations. "All things work together for good to them that love God." For those who doubt it and would repine, claiming that there are so many reasons, why the providence should have been different, where shall we find a more decided yet milder rebuke, than in the touching language of Jacob? Infinite in



wisdom and in love, his thoughts are not as our thoughts.

There is one in the tremblings of old age. Life is well nigh a burden, and he longs for the Master's coming. Near by, perhaps in the same house, is the child of bright eye, and dimpled cheek, and merry laugh—"the well-spring of the house," the joy of parents, who know how to care for, and train the little one. Their heavenly Father comes, and his hands are crossed. The life-preserving and upholding hand is stretched to the trembling old man, while the hand that loosens the heart strings and chills life, is upon the babe. Distressed parents would cry, "Not so, not so." Here is the aged, useless in this life, waiting to be called, and before this our child is long life, a bright career, and our hearts are bound to him with all their freshest and tenderest ties. In his life are centered our highest hopes, and our prayer is, that he may here serve God. "I know it, my children, I know it." I see the man of palsied limbs and enfeebled mind.



I see this child nestling in your affections. I know your hopes, and what your bereavement would be. I see, too, what your child would be if spared, and how he would engage your affections and efforts. I do these things not through ignorance, but because I know, and because I have a father's love for you. I uphold the old man that his patience may have its perfect work, and that his feebleness may admonish the strong to use their strength and youth aright, for old age lies beyond.

There again is one of unbalanced mind, and in the babblings of idiocy, he spends his years, the sport of the rude and the grief of friends, apparently a painful blank in creation. By his side, perhaps in the same family, is one of bright and acute mind. In social duties, and in the hearts of kindred, he fills a large place. His position, his prospective usefulness, the affection of others, would present him to the right hand for the blessings of long life. The hands of providence are crossed, and life is upon the head of the idiot, while the cold hand of



death is upon the broad brow of useful mind. Not merely affection, but all the views of human wisdom rise up, and counsel, "Not so,"—let useful mind live, and let the mindless be taken. All the prepossessions of man would hasten to tell God, of position and use and endearment. To all which, heavenly wisdom may reply, "I know it." I too love society, and care for the ties that are natural. I may bless society by holding before them this imbecile, that they may see their indebtedness, that such is not their state; and I may remove the strong mind, that they may make God and not man their trust.

You may have seen the poor orphan, homeless and friendless—none to weep for it should it die, and no kindred hand to guide it should it live, only cared for by temptation and sin. Near it is the only son of a fond mother, cared for by her deep love, guided by her pious counsels, and hereafter the needed prop of her old age. In the providence of God the orphan is spared, and the



hand of death is upon him—the love, and the hope of the mother. Affection, dependence, and the wisdom that is of this world, cry, “Not so,” and plead to reverse the providences. Yet He, who rules wisely and loves tenderly, changes not his dispensations. For the richer displays of comforting and strengthening grace, for a lesson to others of the uncertainty of earth’s comforts, and their need of the heavenly, perhaps in infinite love to a doting mother, perhaps to the too well loved and too much indulged son,—God saw best to remove him. That orphan boy may be spared to exemplify, by a good life, God’s protecting care of the fatherless, or by a bad life, to teach others the blessings of parental guidance.

Inexhaustible is the wisdom, and boundless the love of our heavenly Father, and a thousand reasons, hidden from us, are seen by him, why he should cross the plans, and dash the hopes of his children!—His providences are prompted by love, and planned in infinite wisdom.



God would have his children believe this, and not rush with rash hands or displeased hearts to reverse his doings, and thus charge the All-wise with not knowing, or a heavenly Father with not caring for, the feelings of his children. How often to rebuke his murmuring people, may he use the language, "I know it, my son, I know it!"

The circumstances, the relations of life, the prop, or the dependence are all known to me. My son, I know your heart in all its affections and ties, for I made the heart. I know the endearing traits of your child, for I gave it that loveliness. I know its promise and your hopes, but I knew what lay before it and you, and for its safety, and to spare you an anguished heart, I took him.

God does not demand that man should be indifferent to the ties of relationship, or to the things that promise joy. No, he may weep at disappointment, he may feel bereavement; but let him believe in the love of his God, and that there can be no endearment or dependence unknown to him, and when he



reaches forth his hand contrary to the wishes and plans of man, know it to be the rescuing act of love.

The son may feel the smarting rod, but the loving heart of the Father feels it also. I know this is the loved idol of your heart. I know that the joys of your home centered there; but, my son, I know this continued is neither for my glory nor your good. Will you arraign my providence as the act of ignorance and unkindness?

Can you look upon the displays of heavenly wisdom that founded the way of salvation, or upon the love that gave my well beloved Son a sacrifice to make you my child, and with these before you, doubt my wisdom and love, as I choose the way to bring you to heaven?

Can you hear the voice of the heavens and the earth as they speak of my wisdom, and then pretend to teach me in the family circle? Can you look upon the Son of my bosom, as he hangs upon the cross for you, and doubt my love for you? Must the



dying Jacob lift his hands from the heads of Ephraim and Manasseh, and prove to Joseph his love, by recounting his deep sorrow in Canaan, when he "was not," or his joy, when it was told him, "Joseph is yet alive?" Must he recall their meeting at Goshen?—Joseph, you and your children are dear to this heart, but God hath shown me the glory of Ephraim.

Son of the covenant, need your heavenly Father point you to the undying evidences of his love, to make you submissive to the dispensations you cannot understand? Must he who created nature with its ties, the heart with its affections, relationship with its support and dependence, prove that he knows their strength and tenderness? You may love your own, you may weep under bereavement, and feel disappointment, but never doubt God's love for his children. He may cross his hands, and thwart your cherished plans, and should your heart say, "Not so," and begin to instruct him, hear the gentle rebuke, "*I know it, my son, I know it.*"









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