

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

I.

INTRODUCTION.

EVERY child of Adam is of necessity placed in the relation of a creature to the Creator. All owe their being to Him (Acts xvii. 25-28). In this sense He is the Father of all (Ephes. iii. 14-15 ; iv. 6), and so Adam is called God's son (Luke iii. 38).

As creatures, dependent on God daily and hourly, confidence in Him as the Creator should always have characterised each one of us. For as Creator He takes thought, and has a personal care even for animals, even for all to whom He has given life (Jonah iv. 11 ; Matt. vi. 26 ; Luke xii. 6) ; and how much more does He care for those who must have an everlasting existence. Worship, then, and service should unhesitatingly have been rendered to Him by all the human race (Rom. i. 25). But in this, as Daniel boldly told the heathen monarch, Belshazzar, he had grievously failed : "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (Dan. v. 23). So that king, convicted by the prophet of his impiety, and of his failure as a creature, as he sat enthroned amid all the splendour of oriental sovereignty, passed away that night from earth to await, as far as we know, his doom, when he shall be summoned before the great white throne. Responsibility as a creature he could not shake off, though his failure in reference to it was enhanced by

the opportunity God had offered him of profiting by the well-known history and example of his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar.

As creatures, all of us have failed, all have sinned ; so to nothing but misery and everlasting perdition could we have justly looked forward, had not God acted, in the sovereignty of His grace, to quicken some, and to bring them into new relations to Himself as saints, as servants, and as of His household, &c.

Of what grace does this speak? Grace naturally foreign to the heart of man, and which has its origin only in the heart of God. For who of men would naturally entrust their interests on earth, and the carrying out of their purposes, to those who had sinned against them, and had evinced a life-long disregard of their wishes, if not a bitter enmity to their person? But it is out of such that God sets some apart as vessels devoted by Him to a holy use. *i.e.*, saints, sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. i. 2), chosen by Him "to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thes. ii. 13 ; 1 Pet. i. 2).

His servants, too, such are (1 Pet. ii. 16 ; Rom. vi. 22), and He has none others on earth ; all His work in this world, which is done by creature instrumentality for the advancement of His kingdom and the glory of His Son, being carried out through them. Of His household, likewise, they are reckoned (Ephes. ii. 19), for He would not keep them at a distance, though they only deserved everlasting banishment from His presence. In these relations to Him we, who believe on His Son, shall be found for ever. The character and sphere of service may, and assuredly will change. We shall not be always on earth, and in a scene where God's authority is disowned. For on high, when for ever freed from all toil and trouble, enjoying the Sabbath rest which awaits us, His name, with that of the Lamb, will be on our foreheads, the token to all to Whom we belong ; and the privilege

will still be ours of being engaged in His service : for " His servants shall serve Him " (Rev. xxii. 3). And in a special relation to God will Christians then be displayed, peculiar to those who are now His habitation on earth by the Spirit, for they will be His holy temple, in which He will dwell for ever (Ephes. ii. 21). What delight must He take in those of His creatures who are redeemed by the blood of Christ !

Saints, servants, of His household, His people, His dwelling-place, His temple, His elect, and His called-ones, what relations are these to God, we may well say, of which we can make our boast. Now all these are connected with the revelation of Himself *as God*. Favours, privileges, they surely are, in which none of us, and, we add, no creature, would ever have thought we should be called to have a part ; yet they do not exhaust the list of our privileges, for in another character God has been pleased to reveal Himself. He is our God, for we are His redeemed ones. He is *our Father*, too, as born of Him, which is relationship to God in the closest and best sense. We are His children by birth, born of water and of the Spirit (John iii. 5). We are also His sons by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. iii. 26).



II.

GOD A FATHER, AS REVEALED IN THE
OLD TESTAMENT.

PARENTAL relationship, whether natural or spiritual, is of God, who has been pleased to originate the former before introducing the latter, so that when such a spiritual relationship should be revealed and formed, His people might the better understand the privileges and blessings connected with it. For as we see the unfolding in the Word, step by step, of God's thought and provision for the welfare of His creatures upon earth, we come to discern what surely must have been in His mind, and the joy for His heart to which He looked forward.

Who can now doubt, that when Adam was put by the Lord God in the garden of Eden, to dress it and to keep it, and all the animals were brought to him to be named, that Jehovah was looking forward to the day when the Son of Man shall appear in glory, and all creation be subjected to His sway? Again, reading, as we are privileged to do, of what passed in God's mind as He looked on His creature Adam, then alone in the garden (Gen. ii. 18), it is not too much for us to declare that He had already in His thoughts the accomplishment of that purpose (which is still future), to make a marriage for the King's Son. So when instituting the relationships of parent and child, it can be no presumption on our part to assume that He had before His mind the day when He should be able to announce that such a relationship could exist between Himself and some of the children of men. For by Him, as was fitting, it was first made

known. In both Testaments we read of it. In the Old, it is in connection with the people of Israel: in the New, it is in connection with those who are really His saints on earth; and therein we learn that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of those who believe on Him.

This distinction, just noticed, it is important to bear in mind. In Old Testament times, in keeping with the dispensational teaching of the day; when God took up the nation of Israel to be His people, and He to be their God, the redemption enjoyed and the relationship known were national, not individual. Israel was God's son. With us it is different. Each saint now is God's child, and He is his Father; and every one who has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins is to know, by the gift of the Holy Ghost bestowed on him, what it is to cry, "Abba, Father." Further, it is helpful to remember that, in the Old Testament, it is God who is the Father of Israel: in the New Testament, the first person of the Trinity is the One whom we address by that name; He is God the Father.

Let us trace this out a little more in detail.

To Exodus iv. 22, 23 we must first turn, in which we read God's message by Moses to Pharaoh, King of Egypt,—“Thus saith the Lord, Israel is My son, even My first-born; and I say unto thee, Let My son go, that he may serve Me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy first-born.” It was significant and instructive that God sent this announcement to the proud Egyptian monarch, and not to Israel. To him was it to be made known; he was to hear that the nation of slaves, over whom he had ridden roughshod, was the son, the first-born of Jehovah of Hosts. It was significant, because it showed that God was not acting in accordance with the thoughts of man in such a matter. For who could have supposed that He would have passed by the dominant, highly-civilised, and cultivated race of the

day, to espouse the cause of, and to form so close a tie between Himself and a nation of slaves? It was instructive, likewise; for, considering the condition of that people, the announcement of such a relationship to God in heaven was a manifestation on His part of pure, sovereign grace. What had they done to deserve it? Nothing. In what condition were they when that revelation was announced? In that of hopeless and abject misery (Exodus i. 13, 14; ii. 23); and announced it was, not to them to nerve them for the conflict, but to their taskmasters, the Egyptians, to make them set the people free. The people's condition, then, was no barrier to the existence and assertion by God of such a relationship to Himself. The Egyptians looked down on them, and abhorred them (i. 12); but Jehovah was not ashamed to be the Father of such a people, and He would make the proud and haughty monarch know it, and subsequently have proof of it. Pharaoh might disavow all knowledge of Jehovah (v. 2), and refuse compliance with His commands; but the night of the 15th of Abib would come, in which he should bewail the death of his first-born, and learn in that bitter way what a wonderful privilege it is to be in such a relationship with the One, true, and living God.

This tie once formed, God never broke nor disowned. The failure of the people could not dissolve it, nor will God ever forget it. Hosea (xi. 1) reminded them of it in the past; Jeremiah (xxxi. 8-9) predicted that which will give them joy from it in the future:—"Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born."

Of this relationship Moses had reminded the people, ere they crossed the Jordan (Deut. xxxii. 6); and Jeremiah in his day sought to impress it on them (iii. 19), but all to no purpose, so captivity had to be their lot, and centuries of sorrow have that people now known. Indissoluble, however, is that tie. Of this Isaiah, too, bears witness in the language put by the Spirit of prophecy in the mouths of the godly remnant of the future:—"Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy name is from everlasting" (lxiii. 16); and again, "But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father: we are the clay, and Thou our potter; and we all are the work of Thy hand" (lxiv. 8).

Of everlasting grace this speaks; of the unchangeableness, too, of God's purpose it is a proof. Israel did not deserve such a favour, that is clear. If they could ever have deserved it, they have certainly forfeited all claim to it. But it was not, it is not, a question of deserts. The question is one of God's sovereignty; He formed the tie of His own will. He will never break it, nor will He cease to avow it. What comfort is all this for us, who now know God the Father as our Father as well as our God.

A Father! What are the thoughts connected with the enjoyment of such a blessing? On this we are not left in doubt. Each of us who have known our natural father may form some idea of what is involved in that parental tie. Some, however, there are who from circumstances have never known an earthly father's care or love, though they bear in life their parent's name. Such a state of things should not be the experience of God's children in these days. He desires that they should know the Father; so the Holy Ghost is given to us, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father." And what each of His children may find Him to be, He desires them to understand directly from Himself; so He graciously teaches us about it.

"A Father of the fatherless, . . . is God in His holy habitation" (Ps. lxxviii. 5). He cares for and protects those who have no natural protector. On this His people can count. Pity, too, for His children He feels, and as is needed will give proof of it, for "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. ciii. 13, 14). What consideration on His part thus to speak, calling attention to that earthly tie, which is of Himself, and to the feelings towards the offspring which are implanted in the breast of an earthly parent. What should we think of that parent who had no pity for his children? An unnatural father, all would call him. Alas! amongst men such a character is not unknown; yet it is but natural and right for an earthly father to feel compassion for his children. The relationship in which he is towards them should call it forth spontaneously, as circumstances require it. Now all that such an one should feel for his own, that God our Father really feels for His children, only, of course, with an intensity and depth beyond the capability of the creature to exhaust, or even to fathom. "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." Precious, surely, should that word "remembereth" be. An earthly parent may forget it or ignore it; God never will. His compassion can be always counted on by those who fear Him.

But other characteristics there are proper to a parent. He trains his child as is needed, chastening him, too, betimes, as wisdom, combined with love, may direct. Such, too, are the dealings of our Father with His children. "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." How the Spirit of God would encourage the saint, when passing through trials and sorrows here for the truth's sake. Would any cry out in bitterness, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" The answer comes—"We have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us,

and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness" (Heb. xii. 8-10). Many an earthly parent acts capriciously; our Father does not. Many a trainer of the young deals with them without telling them why; but if God puts His children to school, as He surely does, He graciously intimates the object He has in view—viz., that we should be partakers of His holiness—and He gives a word of encouragement, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (ver. 5, 6).

Again, not only has He tender pity for His own, and takes such pains with their training, but, like an earthly father, He delights to enrich them by tokens of His parental love. Of this we are taught in the Gospels:—"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" (Matt. vii. 7-11). These, be it remembered, are the words of the Only-begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father when He uttered them. They are part, too, of the revelation of the Father by the Son, given to us in the New Testament, and so would carry us into another branch of the subject, teaching not only what is implied in the thought of a father, but what is unfolded to us of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Father, too, of all who believe on His Son.

III.

GOD THE FATHER REVEALED BY THE SON
IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

"NO man (rather, no one) knoweth the Son but the Father ; neither knoweth any man (or, any one) the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him" (Matt. xi. 27). An announcement, this is, of very great importance. For,—

1st. It acquaints us with the blessed fact that there are intelligent creatures who can know the Father when revealed to them by the Son. Of His competence to reveal Him we are elsewhere fully assured. For He knows the Father (John viii. 55); He had seen Him (vi. 46); and He ever was and is in the Father's bosom (i. 18). Moreover, in seeing Him men saw the Father (xiv. 9); and those who knew Him knew the Father (viii. 19). Yet, though He only of all that ever walked on earth had seen Him, on three distinct occasions the Father's voice was heard by others; viz.,—at His baptism by John (Matt. iii. 17); at His transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 5); and in response to His request, "Father, glorify Thy name" (John xii. 28). On the first occasion, John the Baptist heard it; on the second, Peter, James, and John were privileged to listen to it; on the third, the crowd heard a sound, but evidently did not understand what was said.

2nd. The Lord's words in Matthew speak of the Father as distinct from the Son, thus telling us of plurality of Persons in the Godhead, a truth indicated in the Old Testament (Gen. xix. 24; Isaiah xlviii. 16), and fully revealed in the New, wherein we are taught of their number and relative position to each other;

viz., the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (Matt. xxviii. 19). The Son is, and must as Son be, distinct from the Father, as the Lord told the Jews (John viii. 16, 18), and subsequently stated to His disciples,—“I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world ; again I leave the world, and go to the Father” (xvi. 28). His departure to the Father ought to have been a cause of rejoicing to them, for “My Father,” He said, “is greater than I” (xiv. 28). Yet it is also true that He and the Father are one (x. 30).

3rd. Those words reveal to us the Son acting according to His sovereign will, who is both God and man—the eternal Son, as well as the Son of God born in time. Hopeless, then, must it ever be for any to know the Father who refuse to hear Him. Hopeless, too, for any to be able to know the Father, unless the Son is pleased to reveal Him. All, therefore, are dependent on His sovereign will in grace, if ever they are to know the Father. But who thus spake? and when? The answer to the first question is, It was the only-begotten Son of God (John iii. 16, 18 ; 1 John iv. 9), who was the First-born of all creation as well (Col. i. 15).* The answer to the second question is, that He declared this after His rejection by the Jews had been openly manifested. What they must lose who refuse Him He thus plainly intimates, as what He would reveal to those who received Him He distinctly sets forth. To the gospels, then, must we turn to learn from His lips about the Father : not to get a description of His appearance, for no man hath seen the Father, save He who is of God ; but to apprehend what He is as there told out—His desires, His ways, His acts—set forth for our instruction, who, born of God, are capable of knowing Him who is our

* The former of these titles reminds us of what is called His eternal generation, “begotten of His Father before all worlds,” or, as has been elsewhere expressed, “begotten from everlasting of the Father.” The latter title reminds us of His relation to and pre-eminence over all creatures, as one born into this world.

Father, and of enjoying the relationship of children. In all the gospels have we teaching about this. Matthew and John are full of it ; Luke more sparingly introduces it ; Mark very seldom refers to it. This is to be accounted for by the different aspects of the Lord Jesus Christ which the four Evangelists were directed to set forth.

Matthew and John are full of it, yet there are marked differences between them in this. The latter speaks of Him as the Father, what He is and does who is the Father. Matthew very commonly speaks of Him as the Father of those who are truly disciples of Christ. Hence the Lord therein frequently refers to Him as "your Father;" whereas, not till the resurrection is an accomplished fact, does the Lord in the gospel of John call Him aught else but The Father, or His Father.

Let us turn first to the latter gospel, so full in its teaching on this truth, yet not more full, surely, than was His heart, who as the only-begotten Son delighted to reveal Him, and on each occasion in a manner suited to His audience. His audience, we say. Not that He waited for a crowd, or a company even, to be assembled ere He would reveal anything of it. For in the dark hours of night, or at the well-side, ere the shades of evening had begun to lengthen over the landscape, He was willing to reveal truth about His Father to a solitary listener, and in characters, too, none would have surmised. Who else, indeed, but the Son was competent to dwell on such a theme? And who save the only-begotten Son of God, the eternal Son, could reveal God the Father? And to whom should such a revelation be made? By whom could it be really entered into, and enjoyed, but by those who should come to know what it is to be God's children, and God's sons? Such want to know the Father.

Nicodemus went to Jesus by night, as a Teacher, he owned, who had come from God. But that inter-

view did not end till he had heard of God giving His only-begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world through Him might be saved." Here was a revelation of God the Father as One who desired the salvation of guilty creatures, and who provided the needful sacrifice in the person of His only-begotten Son; or, as this truth was afterwards expressed by the Evangelist in his first epistle, "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John iv. 14). The necessity of the new birth the Lord had dwelt upon at the outset of His interview with Nicodemus,—a truth, and a blessing to which that teacher was personally a stranger. But He would not let that interview terminate without telling him of the mission on the part of God of His only-begotten Son. The introduction here of the only-begotten Son implied, of course, the truth and revelation of the Father, not as a new relationship into which He was pleased at the incarnation to enter, but of that in which He had always been to Him, whom Nicodemus only viewed as a Teacher sent from God.

A little later, on the Lord's journey from Jerusalem to Galilee, we read of Him at Jacob's well, there conversing with the woman of Sychar, with whose past and present history He shewed her He was fully acquainted. To her also He speaks of the Father. He had left Jerusalem, the centre of Judaism, and the city in which was His Father's house, and communicates to her, a Samaritan woman, and hitherto a staunch upholder of the Samaritan schism, thoughts about true worship, and of Him whom He set before her as the object of worship. "Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall

worship the Father in spirit and in truth ; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him " (iv. 21-23). The woman had spoken of the place for worship, but not of the Person to be worshipped. The Lord spake to her of the Father as the Object of worship. She had not raised such a question ; and considering the Lord's reply, "Ye worship ye know not what," her silence on this point was befitting. But His heart (surely we may say it) was full of the revelation it was His joy to make known. So He tells her of the Father, and of Him as seeking worshippers.

We might have pictured the Almighty as needing to be propitiated, ere He would receive the homage due to Him as Creator from those who craved the permission to render it. But to learn that He is the Father, and as such is seeking worshippers ; that men and women like her, deserving only everlasting perdition, might worship Him in that relationship ; this was new indeed and wonderfully gracious. In some private abode at Jerusalem—the name and locality to us unknown—He had spoken to Nicodemus of the mission of the only-begotten Son, and by consequence of something of the acting in grace of the Father. Now to this woman, when alone with Him, He unfolded the desire of the Father's heart to find amongst members of the ruined race of Adam, when become subjects of that grace revealed to Nicodemus, those who could, and should worship Him in the consciousness of filial relationship. Nicodemus had not asked Him about the mission of the only-begotten Son of God ; this woman had not asked about the Father ; but the Lord would have the joy on each occasion of making known the truth, which could minister rich blessing to souls. He made God the Father known as One desirous to save the lost, and as the One who was seeking from such a company His true worshippers.

But the Evangelist passes on, introducing to his readers in the following chapter the narrative of the

impotent man healed at the pool of Bethesda, with the instruction that flowed out of it. The Lord, persecuted by the Jews because of what He had done, answered them in language which only increased their opposition,—“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (v. 17). God the Father had been working, and they were ignorant of it. For not only did He compassionate His guilty creatures, and in proof of it send His Son to save them who should believe on Him from the everlasting consequences of their guilt, but He had never rested whilst sin was rampant on earth, and man was suffering in his person or in his circumstances, because he had sinned. The Father had been working in grace all along.

Of old, before the fall, God had rested from all His work, which He created and made (Gen. ii. 3). Of that rest in the past the Sabbath was a reminder; but man having fallen, that rest did not continue, for His creatures' condition, the consequence of sin, had called forth on the part of God activity in grace and in power, of which the healing of that impotent man was a sample. In their zeal for God, as they thought, they were clearly going contrary to His mind and practice in the past, as well as in the present. “My Father worketh hitherto,” attests that as to the past; “and I work,” proved it as to the present. Their opposition evidenced that the revelation about the Father vouchsafed on this occasion by His Son, was one quite new to them. “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do.” The Son by His acts, as well as by His words, was therefore revealing the Father; but God's professing people knew it not. Activity in goodness characterised the Father, as all might see.

Now, there is a danger lest the thought of divine mercy should weaken in the soul the sense of divine holiness. There was a danger too, unhappily illustrated in the Jews, of rejecting the Son on the plea of owning God. In view of all this the Lord revealed

something more, viz., that "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him" (v. 22, 23). So judgment must overtake the rejecters of the Son, who came from and was sent by the Father. On the other hand, life everlasting each one should have who heard the words of the Son, and believed the Father who had sent Him. It was a perilous thing to reject the Son who came in His Father's name.

In the following chapter the Evangelist conducts us to Galilee, the only narrative in this gospel of the Lord's ministry in that northern district subsequent to the Baptist's imprisonment by Herod. Now, to the crowd around the Lord who had crossed the lake to follow Him, after He had fed them in the wilderness, He presents His Father as the giver of the true bread from heaven (vi. 32), explaining that He was that Bread, which came down from heaven to give life unto the world. But in a double character of a giver is the Father here introduced: He gives the true bread, and He gives people to His Son. "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. . . . For this is My Father's will, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (vi. 37, 38, 40). Yet more. He draws men to His Son. For we read: "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard from the Father and hath learned, cometh unto Me" (vi. 44, 45).

Thus far we have had a revelation of what the

Father is, as made known in His ways in grace towards men. The Lord begins this teaching with the announcement of the way man's spiritual need can be met. From that He passed on to make known the present desire of the Father. He is seeking worshippers; but such a class is only formed of those who are first made subjects of divine grace. Was it then a new thing for the Father to take an interest in, and care for, men on earth? No. He had been working in goodness and in grace ever since the fall of man; the works of power wrought by the Son attested this, and His presence amongst men was the proof of the earnest desire of the Father to minister life and salvation in all its completeness to those who were dead in trespasses and sins. The Son had come as the Bread from heaven to give life unto the world. Every one who shall believe on Him, He will raise up at the last day; and all such are examples of the Father's power in grace, for none can come to the Son except the Father which hath sent Him draw them. There was a power then working, of which the unbelieving Jews were in ignorance,—a power put forth by the Father to gather souls to Christ, and thus to gather them out of the world to Him, who is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. ii. 11).

Hence the revelation of the Father in this gospel now changes somewhat in its character. It has set Him forth as seeking the best interests of fallen creatures; it will now present Him more in connection with those who have been drawn by Him to His Son, a company of people who are each and all really His children. For with the coming of Christ there was made plain, what indeed had been always true, the need of a divine operation on the soul by the word and the Holy Ghost. The individual must be born of God. The Jews declared God was their Father (viii. 41). Nationally that was true; but that could not secure to the individual everlasting blessing. This they had not understood, for they had not been

subjects of divine grace, and they showed that in the enmity they manifested against the Lord, as He told them: "If God were your Father, ye would love Me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of Myself, but He sent Me" (viii. 42). Something more was wanted than subscription to a creed, or the resting in national privileges. If God was their Father, they would partake of a new, the divine, nature, and then become special subjects of divine paternal care.

In the tenth chapter this last is alluded to, as the Lord announces the perfect security of His sheep: "My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and the Father are One" (x. 29, 30). We have heard in the sixth chapter of the Father's gift to His Son. Reminded of that here, we also learn how secure the sheep must be if kept by His hand; but surely this also intimates how precious they must be to the Father. He will never drop them, nor allow even one of them to be plucked out of His hand; nor can there ever be any divergence in counsel or will between the Father and the Son as to the present and ultimate security of the sheep, for He and the Father are One.

From the assurance of security we pass on in the twelfth chapter to the blessings of true discipleship, and the awful future for those who reject the Lord. If any man serve Christ, him will His Father honour (26). If any man reject Him, the word which He has spoken will judge him at the last day (48). A clear and most important announcement, which showed the earnest desire of both the Father and the Son that souls should be saved. With the echo of these words sounding in men's ears (ver. 44-50), and with the reminder that he was sent from the Father, and spake what the Father had said to Him, the Lord's public ministry as set forth in this gospel came to an end.

Henceforth He is found only with His disciples, till

apprehended by the officers on the night before His Cross. To the former He continues the revelation of the Father, telling them first of His own home on high—His Father's house, whither He was going to prepare a place for His disciples, for whom He will come to receive them to Himself, that where He is there they may be also (xiv. 2, 3). This tells us of His desire for His own, and of His Father's willingness to have them there; for who could have a home in that house without the Father's sanction? But between the Lord's departure and return an interval was to elapse, so another Comforter would come to be with the disciples, sent by the Father at the Son's request, and in His name (xiv. 16, 26). Hence of His Father's ministry to His saints consequent on His departure the Lord here assures us, and tells us on what conditions we may count on the Father's love (verses 21, 23). Now, that ministry would not be fulfilled by sending merely the other Comforter. It would also be exercised by the Father in making the living branches of the true vine fruitful for Himself, and He would be glorified by the disciples bearing much fruit, and so should they be the disciples of the Son (xv. 2, 8).

After this, in the seventeenth chapter of the gospel, the Lord hands them over to the keeping and care of Him He has thus revealed, whilst He Himself should be absent on high, after first going to the Cross that the world might know that He loved the Father, and as the Father had given Him commandment, so He would do (xiv. 31), manifesting thus in His death, that which He had always displayed in life, the fruit of the divine nature, love and obedience.

He had come from the Father; He had revealed Him; He would ascend to His Father. But ere He went on high, He sent that message by Mary Magdalene—a joy surely to Him to give, to her to convey, and to the disciples to receive—which, whilst marking the difference there must ever be between Him and

them, told of grace in which they shared "I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (xx. 17). The same divine person is God and Father of Him and of us.



IV.

THE REVELATION OF THE FATHER IN THE
OTHER GOSPELS.

IN pursuance of our subject, we must now turn to the other Gospels. We have seen traced out in that of John the revelation, first, of what the Father does in the activity of divine grace to those who need life, and deserve judgment ; and next, how He cares for those whom He has given to His Son.

Coming to the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord first presents Him as the One with whom those, who are disciples in truth, are brought into relationship, and have become partakers of the divine nature. His character, therefore, and His ways are to furnish them with instruction for their walk through this scene. So the Lord often calls Him "*your* Father," besides speaking of Him at times as *His* Father ; for obviously there might be occasions when He could only fittingly speak of Him in relation to Himself. Two examples will make this plain.

For the first, let us turn to Matt. xv. 13, where He replied to His disciples, on being told that the scribes and Pharisees who came from Jerusalem were offended by His rebuke, "Every plant which My heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." Now, what were His words in John vi. 44, 45 ? "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent Me, draw him : and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto Me."

It is plain, since they rejected His teaching, that they had not heard from the Father. They were not God's children. Had He said on that occasion "*your* Father," it would have reminded the disciples of the relationship in which *they* were to God ; but saying "My heavenly Father," the Lord would impress on all the absolute necessity of hearkening to *His* Father, and of being plants of His planting.

A second example is met with in Matt. xviii. 10, where the Lord is warning the disciples against despising a little child, assigning as a reason, that "in the heavens their angels" (*i.e.*, those of the heavenly host who represent them in the presence of God) "do always behold the face of My Father which is in the heavens." "My Father," He said, not "their Father," because it was not here a question of the relationship of the little child to God. The angelic ministry referred to is quite independent of that, being God's provision for the creature as such. Their need of salvation is taught in succeeding verses.

But when addressing disciples, taking them on the ground of their profession, He tells them of His Father as their Father. None but He of course could understand the full blessedness implied in such a relationship. Still, where it existed it was a very real thing. His Father was the Father of all those who were His disciples in truth. Such, as born of God, were partakers of the divine nature ; hence the character and ways of their Father should be displayed by them. No one on earth has seen God the Father ; yet something of Him should be learned by men from the walk, the daily life, of the Lord's disciples ; and their Father would be glorified, as men saw that which was right, and owned that it was right, practised by His disciples. Of this the Lord speaks in the sermon on the mount : "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in the heavens" (v. 16). Something of what He is would thus be set forth.

A new motive is here presented. Ezekiel had declared that the name of God was profaned among the Gentiles by the people of Israel, captives in a foreign land, and there manifesting by their evil ways what they were. Now, ere God can sanctify His name through their restoration (Ezek. xxxvi. 20, 23), the Lord taught His disciples of the opportunity and of the service entrusted to them in causing, by their good works, men around them to glorify their Father who is in the heavens. As His people, Israel ought to have shown the Gentiles what it was that was well-pleasing to God. As His children, the disciples should be illustrations of the moral character of their Father.

In daily life this should be ; but there would be occasions to call for it in a special way. Of such He reminded them when giving directions for their conduct under persecution ; for, loving their enemies, praying for their persecutors, and being merciful as their heavenly Father is merciful, they would be His sons who maketh His sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Thus they would be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect, profiting by the revelation given of Him who is kind to the unthankful and to the evil (Matt. v. 44-48 ; Luke vi. 35, 36). The Lord had spoken of persecutions to which they might be exposed, and persecutions at the hand of those who professed true zeal for God, and who were reckoned on earth amongst God's people. The Highest, then, whilst owning them as His sons, would not of necessity shield them from the hatred and opposition of their fellows. Rather would it be the occasion to show forth who and what was their Father.

But more. If God was their Father, they had to do with Him who seeth in secret, as well as to represent Him in their ways before men. He seeth in secret : this was to be remembered when engaged in those things which are commonly known amongst men as religious duties. So the Master continued His instruc-

tion : "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness* before men, to be seen of them ; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in the heavens" (vi. 1).

In a threefold way could they practice this—viz., in almsgiving (2-4), in prayer (5-15), and in fasting (16-18); but in whichever of these ways they practised righteousness, remembering from whom was their reward, they were to do it to Him who seeth in secret. This the Lord impressed on them. Their Father's eye was on them. Their Father was well acquainted with that which they were doing ; He would not forget it. "Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee"† (4, 6, 18). What encouragement ! and at the same time, what a wholesome reminder ! There is something, too, very gracious in the Lord's teaching here. "Thy Father," He said, not "your Father," referring thereby to the birth-tie formed between each true disciple and God. Each can say, "He is my Father ;" and, if finding himself alone on earth from whatever cause, with none to turn to here, there is always that eye looking down on him, the eye of his Father who seeth in secret. The eye of his Father. One sees in Ps. cxxxix. what an uneasy feeling the saint experiences under the sense of God's eye being on him, till he gets hold of God's thoughts (14-18). The eye of my Father being on me should produce no such uneasiness ; rather the contrary, assured that neither locality nor darkness can hinder that eye resting on me. On Peter at midnight, sleeping between two soldiers in prison, and on Paul at night in the storm, when for many days neither sun nor stars had appeared, that eye looked down. The lights in heaven could be obscured by clouds or thickness ; but nothing comes between our Father's eye and the object it would rest on, for He seeth in secret : a word

* "Righteousness," not "alms," is the better reading here.

† "Openly" should probably be omitted in each case.

of comfort, yet a word of warning also ; for is there not a danger of forgetting before whom we are, and who beholds us ?

The Lord now speaks of prayer. Vain repetitions are needless, for "your Father," He declared, "knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him" (8). He not only sees each one, but knows all about each one, being cognisant of all that of which each has need. What confidence should this impart. God is my Father, and He knows what things *I* have need of before I ask Him. But how often has each one surely in the past forgotten this, even if there have been times when the soul has stayed itself on the remembrance of it. Is prayer then unneeded, a useless exercise ? It is unneeded as the medium for informing God of what it is that we are in want ; but it is not an exercise thrown away, when the child unbosoms and unburdens itself to its Father who is in heaven ; for it is the appointed way of relief for the heart of the creature thus to pour out its requests to God. So the Lord goes on to teach the disciples how they were to pray, and in doing so teaches them about the Father, who has a kingdom, who daily cares for His children, and who can act in grace, forgiving them when they have sinned.

As to His kingdom, it will come, so they are told to pray for it—a kingdom which embraces heaven and earth, a kingdom really bounded only by the limits of created things, a kingdom which shall last for ever and ever. For doubtless the petition, "Thy kingdom come," looks on beyond millennial times for its full accomplishment, even to the eternal state, when, all things having been subdued to the Son, He Himself shall be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all ; for then He will have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father (1 Cor. xv. 25-28). Yet ere this is effected, to which we are taught to look forward, the heavenly saints will experience an answer to this petition in

measure, as they will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father throughout the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. xiii. 43). For it is our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom (Luke xii. 32); but into it only those on earth now enter who do His will (Matt. vii. 21).

If any ask, Who is our heavenly Father? the answer comes, It is God, who shall reign with undisputed sway for ever and ever. All that has resisted His authority, and every-one who has attempted to thwart His purposes, will then be completely and finally vanquished. Nor that only, but for ever and ever will such be obliged to acknowledge His might, and the impossibility of successful resistance to His will. Now, sin is rampant on earth; ere long, it will seem to triumph for a season. But He who is our Father will triumph fully in the end. To that He looks forward, and teaches His children to do the same. For it is not from lack of power that He has not already interposed. His will is done in heaven; it will be certainly done on earth. Nor is it from lack of interest in His saints that He lets them suffer. He is their Father; but He waits till the set time has come to deal finally with the power of darkness. His long-suffering is salvation (2 Pet. iii. 15). Of this, each one of His children is an illustration.

Almighty power then is His, yet combined with tender pity and constant thought for His children here on earth. Of old, in the wilderness, Israel experienced Jehovah's care, as they went forth on the week-day mornings to gather the needed supply of manna provided for that large encampment whilst they were taking their rest. They slept, but Jehovah was working—raining down for them food for the coming day, in the strength of which they could go forth for the ordinary occupations of life. Now, His children are to acknowledge and to prove that He daily cares for them. It is the part of a father to provide for his children; it is characteristic of our

Father that He cares daily for His. "Give us this day our daily bread," teaches that, and the Lord's instruction about the birds and the lilies is to impress it on us (Matt. vi. 25-34 ; Luke xii. 22-31). "Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" Again, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore ; ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. x. 29-31). To guard us from anxious care, we are told that our Father feedeth the birds. To keep the heart calm and confident in danger from enemies, the Lord reminds His own that they are of more value than many sparrows. Yet how slow, surely many a one will say, is he to learn these lessons based on the revelation of the Father.

But not only are we dependent creatures, we are also sinful creatures, and need, how often, forgiveness at His hand. Yet this will our Father extend to us, if we act as His children, showing a forgiving spirit towards others (Matt. vi. 12, 14, 15) ; and a later revelation reminds us that failure on our part does not break the link of relationship between the saint and God (1 John ii. 1). A most gracious intimation for the heart when it may specially need it.

All-powerful then in the universe, yet ministering to the weakest, forgiving the undeserving, and willing to direct and to deliver His children from evil ; such is our Father as set forth in this prayer by His Son. Nor need we fear to trouble Him by presenting our requests. Though He is God, who orders all things in heaven and earth, He would set each one perfectly free before Him to tell out his wants, since His Son has told us, "Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you ; If ye, then, being evil, know how to give

good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in the heavens give good things to them that ask Him" (Matt. vii. 7-11).

Another branch of this subject should be noticed, viz., the feelings of the Father's heart as revealed in the Word. And, first, in relation to Him who is His well-beloved Son? In the hearing of many dull of understanding, and unable to appreciate the truth which He was revealing, the Son, ever in the bosom of the Father, told out, as He only could, some of the secrets of that bosom, both when speaking in parables and when speaking plainly to those around Him.

In two parables He set this forth: the one, that of the husbandmen and the vineyard; the other, that of the marriage supper for the king's son. In the former, related by the three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the preciousness of the Son to the Father is declared. Messenger after messenger had been sent by the owner of the vineyard to receive its fruits from the husbandmen, but all in vain. What, then, was to be done? The husbandmen had slighted the messengers, and worse, had even put some of them to death, thus evidencing the spirit which animated them, and showing the treatment they justly deserved at the hands of the owner of the vineyard. But he was slow to anger, unwilling, if it could be averted, to pour out on them the vials of his wrath. Not a word had come from the husbandmen expressing regret for the past and promising amendment in the future. No suppliant came seeking for the owner's forgiveness. Obdurate these men had proved; unsoftened, unsubdued they remained. What could be done? In Luke xx. 13, the lord of the vineyard is described as taking counsel with himself. "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son." In Mark (xii. 6), the preciousness of that son to his father is dwelt upon. He had yet "one, a beloved son; he sent him last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son." Knowing, as we do, of whom the Lord spake—of His Father and of Himself

we are taught the Father's affection for His Son, as the object to Him most precious ; willing, indeed, to send Him, but only as the last resource !

In the parable of the marriage supper for the king's son, found in Matt. xxii. 1-14, we are taught of the Father's delight in His Son, and of the desire that others should share His joy. But all this fell on hearts estranged from God. The effect of the first parable on such was to make the chief priests and Pharisees seek to lay hands on Him ; the effect of the second parable was to make the Pharisees take counsel to entangle Him in His talk. Known, of course, to the Lord beforehand was all this, yet it did not deter Him from uttering those parables ; for if the chief priests and Pharisees could hear them unmoved, others might profit by them, and many in after ages get refreshment from what He then unfolded of the feelings towards Him of His Father's heart, which brings out to us the greatness of the grace displayed in sending His Son. Yet not till we see Him in the glory conferred on Him by His Father (John xvii. 24), gazing on Him as arrayed in all the tokens of His Father's love, shall we understand as far as creatures can understand it, what divine parental love is in its fulness.

Yet, thank God, we are not to be spectators merely of its display. We too share, and shall share for ever, in the Father's love, of which the Lord spake when on earth. To whom it can flow forth, we read ; and the parable of the prodigal son illustrates it, as the father therein welcomes to his bosom the one who had sinned against heaven and before him. We know of what the Lord was really speaking, desirous to acquaint men with His Father, and to tell out something of His love. Many and many a one has found light and warmth flow into his heart as he has perused that parable ; and, if the Lord tarries, many more may experience the same blessing. The story is told so touchingly ; the scene is described so graphically.

None need be afraid to cast themselves on His Father. None can say they cannot understand what it was the Lord intended to teach, yet none can fathom the love of which He was speaking. Thank God, none are asked to do that ; but they are invited to share in it.



V.

CHILDREN OF GOD.

IN the foregoing papers we have gathered up something of the revelation, as set forth by the Son, of His Father, who is called in other parts of the New Testament, as being their author, the Father of lights (James i. 17), the Father of spirits (Heb. xii. 9), the Father of mercies (2 Cor. i. 3), and the Father of glory (Ephes. i. 17); all instructing and comforting statements for those who are His children. For it will not satisfy His heart to be merely as Creator the author of lights, mercies, or glory. He desires to have saints, subjects of divine election, and gathered out in time from mankind at large, who shall know His parental love, and enjoy for ever the privileges and the portion He designs for His children. But who are these?

Of divine election angels are subjects (1 Tim. v. 21); as being holy, too, are they characterised (Mark viii. 38; Rev. xiv. 10). But relationship to God as children is peculiar to the elect of the human race. They only of God's creatures are connected with Him by the tie of birth, though angels, as deriving their existence from God, are called in the Old Testament His sons (Gen. vi. 2; Job i. 6; ii. 1; xxxviii. 7). But in the New Testament, none but those who share in redemption by the blood of Christ are called the *children of God*. Now it is God who makes this known. He might, of course, had it pleased Him, have rested contented with knowing the relationship of Father to His children as a joy for His own heart, and a secret to be kept in His own bosom; but He desired that the children should know of the birth-tie

which exists between Him and them, and of the privileged position before all other creatures which He has deigned to bestow on them. For not only are they His *children*, they are also His *sons*, and will enjoy the privilege of adoption for ever.

A word here on the meaning of these terms. *Child* tells of the birth-tie between the parent and itself, than which nothing can be nearer. *Son* speaks of the position enjoyed before others: "Not a servant, but a son" (Gal. iv. 7). One might adopt a person to be one's son, but only one's own offspring could be one's child. In human arrangements, children have not always the place and privilege of sons. An illustration may help the reader. Abraham had several children by his wife Keturah, as well as Isaac by Sarah. All of them could call him father; all were his children; but Isaac alone had the privilege and position of his son. He gave all that he had to Isaac (Gen. xxv. 5), who was known by all as his son. The inheritance was his, and his alone (Gen. xxiv. 36). To be Abraham's offspring was one thing, to be his son was quite another.

With us who are God's children it is different. We are His children, and we are His sons. All the privileges which belong to His sons are ours in the greatness of His grace. Both nearness to Him as His children, and position before Him as His sons, He has designed for us to enjoy for ever and ever. Moreover, with the birth-tie, as well as with the privilege of being sons, is linked the inheritance. Rom. viii. 17 speaks of it in connection with the former: "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Gal. iv. 7 speaks of it in connection with the latter: "If a son, then an heir through God." It is evidently the desire of our Father that we should be acquainted with His purposes about us. Purposes, we say, because the entrance upon our inheritance is still future. What it is, Ephes. i. 9-14 would teach us; meanwhile, we there too learn that

we have the Holy Ghost now given to us as the earnest of it, until the redemption of the purchased possession; for as yet the Lord Jesus Christ, with whom we are joint heirs, has not received it.

A passage in Old Testament history we may well here recall. There was a memorable day in the life of the patriarch Abraham, when God told him to survey the land which he should possess. He had just yielded to Lot. As the meek one, he did not strive for his place or rights. He allowed his nephew to choose his place of sojourn, which like a selfish man he did, though outwardly in appearance giving way to Abraham. Lot journeyed east, choosing for himself the well-watered plain of Jordan. Lot chose: Abraham left his interests in God's hands. Who was best off? History will tell us. Lot lifted up his eyes, and coveted the best pastoral district for himself. Abraham subsequently, but at God's command, lifted up his eyes to behold the land which was his. "And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Gen. xiii. 14, 15). Wherever, then, he looked around his eye lighted on part of the land of his inheritance, which God had promised to give to him. But all his security for the possession of that land was in God's promise; no other token as to it was vouchsafed him.

Like Abraham, we have the promise of an inheritance; and, like him, wherever we look around our eye lights on part of it. Northward, southward, eastward, westward, Abraham looked, but only looked on the land which would some day be his. Northward, southward, eastward, westward we can look, and still only look on part of our inheritance. But upward, also, we can turn our eye, and there, too, it rests on part of our inheritance. Nowhere on this

globe can we take our stand to look around, or to look up, where the eye will not rest on some part of that portion which is ours as heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. On *some part*, we must say, for as yet we have not surveyed it all. Abraham could walk through the length and breadth of the land of his inheritance. We as yet are unable to survey the extent of ours. Of its limits we have heard, but have never seen them. Like Abraham, we must leave earth ere we can enjoy the inheritance promised us ; but, differing from him, we have not only the word of our God about it, but the Holy Ghost has been given to us as the earnest of it (Ephes. i. 13, 14). Most extensive is it, since it embraces heaven and earth.

And what the proper portion of God's child is, a little word of the Lord Jesus Christ's, when on earth, recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Luke, shall tell us, in the words of the father to the elder brother : "Child" (as it really is), "thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (31). Such is the place, and such is the portion of God's children—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. And though revealed comparatively late in the world's history, we can see it was no afterthought with our God ; for the inheritance destined for Israel, and on which they entered, though never in any sense in its completeness till the days of David and Solomon, comprised the territory which they conquered east of Jordan (Numb. xxi. 24, 35 ; Deut. ii. 24, 31 ; iii. 12), as well as that on the west—a figure of earth and heaven, which we shall inherit with the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's children. This speaks of a class, a company of His creatures, chosen out of the children of men—born not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the living and abiding word of God (1 Peter i. 23). The characteristics of the Word, here described, as the instrument by which the children are begotten, tell us of the character of the life of those who are the subjects of the new birth. It is incorruptible and

everlasting. Born again ; born, or begotten, of God. In such terms are they spoken of. Born again shows it is an operation of God quite distinct from natural generation. Born of God reminds us of the grace He thus manifests to them. If we ask, What moved God thus to act? the answer can only be furnished by Himself, whose mind no creature can fathom, and of which none, as we have said, could know anything save as He was pleased to reveal it. "Having willed it" (or, "of His own will") "begat He us by the word of truth," is the answer furnished us by the Word (James i. 18). Sovereign will, which none can bend, and which none can successfully oppose, moved Him to have creatures of the human race in the relationship of children to Himself. Nor is this privilege confined to one nation upon earth ; for the evangelist John declares, "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name ; who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 12, 13). *Children*, not *sons*, is the term, for John never writes of *sons* till he has carried his readers on to the eternal state. Then, and then only, does he so describe God's saints. "He that overcometh shall inherit these things ; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son" (Rev. xxi. 7). Paul, on the other hand, writes of both as now true of the saints.

We have spoken of the inheritance as our proper portion, if God's children. Connected with that is the condition in which we shall enjoy it, viz., the being in glory. In this, creation has a deep and personal interest, for its condition, made subject to vanity, must remain unchanged till we are in glory. Then it "shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. viii. 21). Hence we understand its joy depicted in the Word at the prospect, as well as at the establishment of the kingdom in power. The joy at

the prospect, when the Lamb takes the book to open the seals, John has put on record in Rev. v. 13, 14. "Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth,* and in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four living creatures said, Amen, and the elders fell down and worshipped." Unanimity will pervade non-intelligent creation at that time. Every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea will be in accord in the earnest desire for the redemption of the purchased possession. Now, the whole creation groans and travails in pain together. When the Lord comes back in power, its key-note will be changed, and created things will accord Him a glad welcome. "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord; for He cometh, for He cometh to judge the earth: He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth" (Ps. xcvi. 11-13). What a contrast it will be, creation rejoicing instead of groaning. But another contrast, truly awful to think of, will then be displayed; creation rejoicing with one accord, whilst many of the human race will be angry at the return of the crucified One to reign, and will combine to keep Him out, if possible, of His earthly kingdom (Rev. xi. 18; xvii. 14; xix. 19).

We have spoken of the way by which we become God's children. How wholly dependent on His grace are all those between whom and Himself the birth-tie has been formed. By the word He begets them. Then He had to speak, and to speak to His sinful creatures, ere such a relationship could be formed.

* This is different language from that of Phil. ii. 10. There, by those "under the earth" the lost are referred to. Here, creatures neither human nor angelic are intended.

Had He not willed thus to speak, no creature could have shared in such a privilege. Had He not spoken, and that to each subject of divine grace individually, none of Adam's race could ever have become His children.

The thought, the desire, the carrying out of it were all of Himself. Creatures formed to enjoy divine parental love should for ever surround Him. Joy indeed would be theirs; but joy too would be His, a joy which never ends, as the Lord has indicated in the feast consequent on the return of the prodigal. "They *began* to be merry." Over whom did the father rejoice? Over one who deserved no favour, but the opposite, at his hand. No wonder the evangelist John wrote, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God. Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know if He (or it) shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John iii. 1, 2). Joint heirs with Christ; in glory with Him; and like Him: these favours will characterise us who are God's children.

How God delights to tell us about the present and about the future! Now are we children of God. By and by we shall be like His Son, bearing the image of the heavenly One (1 Cor. xv. 49); or, as elsewhere expressed, our body of humiliation changed into conformity to His body of glory (Phil. iii. 21). And since that will then be true, *moral* conformity to Him should characterise each one of us now. For as born of God we are partakers of the divine nature, and as such should be imitators of God, as dear children (Ephes. v. 1), doing "all things," we read, "without murmurings and disputings; that ye may be blameless and harmless, children* of God, without rebuke,

* "Children" is the word here.

in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world ; holding forth the word of life ; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain " (Phil. ii. 14-16).

On this line of teaching John dwells in his first epistle, in which, telling us of the characteristics of the divine nature, in that God is light, and God is love (1 John i. 5 ; iv. 8), he reminds us of the manner in which they were displayed in the Lord Jesus on earth, viz., in obedience and love, and sets Him before us as the One from whom we are to learn, and to shew in our walk what it is to be partakers of that nature. It was nothing new in the world's history for God to have children from amongst men. Every saint as born of Him is, and was, His child. But the revelation of this relationship to the individuals awaited the coming of His Son, though, as we have seen, something of the character of God as a Father was at an earlier time made known. The Son, however, having come, what is suited for those who are God's children becomes a subject of divine revelation.

On this, as we have said, John particularly dwells. In the gospel he had written (i. 18), "No one hath seen God at any time ; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." In his epistle he writes (1 John iv. 12), "No one hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us." What God is, whom no one hath seen, was declared by the Son. What He is, whom no one hath seen, saints know about, who love one another, for He then dwells in them.

Born of God, righteousness should characterise us (1 John ii. 29). Born of Him, brotherly love should be in action (1 John iv. 7), loving those who are born of Him (1 John v. 1). All this is instruction for God's children in common, flowing out of the character of the nature of which they are all partakers. And on

this the apostle dwells pretty fully, recognising at the same time different stages of Christian life, some being babes, some young men, and some fathers, and for each class he has also a suited word, as may be seen in 1 John ii. 13-27.

For each and all of His children has God a Father's heart. Here we can say nationality cannot come in to separate. One family it is, one company. The Lord died, the evangelist John tells us, not for the nation of Israel only, but that He should gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad (John xi. 52). Hence the privileges of some as children are the privileges of all who are born of God. So Paul, writing to the Galatians, who as Gentiles had never been enrolled as burgesses of the earthly Jerusalem, could tell them that as Christians they were children of the free woman, as Isaac was, and belonged to the heavenly Jerusalem which is free, he writes, and "our mother" (Gal. iv. 26). For they, like us, lived after the cross of Christ. What a difference that made, as the Syro-phœnician woman can attest—a privilege of the children she knew well, but only to own that it was not hers. The children have their place at the table, the dogs are underneath it, so can only eat of the crumbs which fall from it (Mark vii. 28). Whilst the middle wall of partition was to be maintained she could only be as a dog, and could not occupy a child's place. Thank God, it is not so now. All believers on the Lord Jesus are born of God, and thus are members, through divine grace, of His family, and are to look forward to the Father's house as their abiding, everlasting home.



VI.

SONS OF GOD.

"SONS" of God. Such is the dignity bestowed on all believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle John, as we have remarked in a previous paper, dwells on the favour of our being "*children*" of God, whereas the apostle Paul treats of both. This is in keeping with the ministry of these writers. As John's gospel is full of the revelation of the Father, so his first epistle, as we have already pointed out, treats of the fruits of the divine nature, which should be, and *as* they should be, displayed in all those who partake of it, viz., those born of God. Yet he does not treat of the subject in a dry, didactic way, as one laying down a law, for he presents it to us in One, whose walk through this world was the perfect expression of it. "We show unto you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us" (1 John i. 2).

"God is light" and "God is love." These two short sentences, penned by the evangelist and apostle John, briefly sum up the characteristics of the divine nature. Hence, when fully displayed in a man, they will be manifested in obedience, righteousness, and love. But where could be found one who would furnish the sacred writer with a perfect example of it? An example of one who manifested hatred of his brother the apostle finds in Adam's firstborn. For an example of One in whom brotherly love was perfectly shown forth, he had to run through four thousand years of the world's history, and then could point to it as displayed only by Him who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary (1 John iii. 12, 16). How great the contrast, though easily stated. In the

one case, life was taken by force ; in the other, it was willingly laid down. Cain in hatred slew his brother Abel ; the Lord in His love laid down His life for us.

But more than this comes out ; for the ruined condition of Adam's race by the fall is clearly displayed, and the virulent poison of sin is seen to have rapidly developed itself. The first man of Adam's race who had a brother, slew that brother ; and to no one born in sin could John point as perfectly illustrating in his ways on earth true brotherly love. Such facts speak volumes to those who give heed to them, and sound the death-knell to all pretension that the natural man has in him at the bottom that which is really good. So to Him who is the Second Man, the Last Adam, the Beginning of the Creation of God, John turns ; for in Him true love was perfectly displayed by His dying for us on the cross. "Hereby know we the love, because He laid down His life for us : and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John iii. 16). Let us mark the apostle's language : "Know we," he wrote. This is more expressive to us than "perceive we." We have known love, for it has been perfectly displayed, and that in a way which never can be equalled, and never can be repeated. There is but one Only-begotten Son of God, and He dieth no more (Rom. vi. 9).

But we are *sons* as well as children. So as all the nearness to God, which the birth-tie expresses, is ours who are His children, all that is connected with the blessedness of His sons is ours too, who are saints of God. And as the characteristics of the divine nature, and how they should be manifested in us who are God's children, the Word, as we have seen, sets before us ; so, on the other hand, to certain features of the walk of saints attention is directed, as proofs that such are thereby to be known as sons of God. In the one case, we learn what we should be because we are children ; in the other, we show that we are sons by that which we do. In illustration of this last remark,

the following passages may be cited :—" Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again ; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be *sons* (not *children*) of the Highest : for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil " (Luke vi. 35). Again the Lord speaks, " Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the *sons** of God " (Matt. v. 9). And St. Paul writes, " As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are *sons* of God " (Rom. viii. 14).

In further confirmation of the way this term "son" is used, and as helping, it may be, the reader the better to seize the import of it, we would remark that the Jews, whilst by natural descent they were Abraham's children, are called, as having a recognised position on earth in connection with that patriarch, "sons of the stock of Abraham" (Acts xiii. 26). So also are they always really styled in the New Testament, "sons of Israel," never "children of Israel." "Sons," too, "of the kingdom" are they designated (Matt. viii. 12). By natural descent they claimed a right to the kingdom on earth, though really only the godly remnant of them will receive it when the Lord comes in power (Dan. vii. 27). Christians, on the other hand, are called "sons" of Abraham, but never children of Abraham. We *are* his sons who are justified by faith, he being the father of all them that believe, for "they which are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham" (Gal. iii. 7). We *are not* his children as offspring of his stock—*i.e.*, by natural descent.

Other instances of the use of this term, but in awful contrast to what has just been stated, may here be noticed. Scripture writes of those who refuse the gospel of God's grace as "sons of disobedience" (Eph. ii. 2, v. 6). They were, in common with all of us, "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. ii. 3). They are known by their rejection of the Gospel as "sons of disobedience," having refused to obey it. Judas Iscariot

* The Revised Version, if consulted in this and passages which follow, will bear out what we write as against the Authorised Version.

and Antichrist are respectively termed the "son of perdition" (John xvii. 12 ; 2 Thess. ii. 3). The tares are designated as "sons of the wicked one" (Matt. xiii. 38). Bar-jesus, the sorcerer, was addressed as "son of the devil" (Acts xiii. 10) ; and the Lord termed the proselytes of the hypocritical Pharisees sons of hell—or, rather, "of Gehenna" (Matt. xxiii. 15). Each and all of these openly evidence by their ways what they are, and whither they are going.

Again, speaking in this figurative manner, we meet with the term, "sons of the bride-chamber" (Matt. ix. 15 ; Mark ii. 19 ; Luke v. 34), as being professedly and openly connected with it ; and Christians are called "sons of light, and sons of day : not of night, nor of darkness" (1 Thess. v. 5). Then saints, in the parable of the tares, are designated as "sons of the kingdom" (Matt. xiii. 38), for they will certainly inherit it ; whilst mere men of the world are called "sons of this world" (Luke xvi. 8), being in their generation "wiser than the sons of light."

Instances enough, it is hoped, have been adduced in illustration of the bearing of this term, which, it will be seen, has reference to the position of those thus described. Let us now turn, in connection with the subject, to that which more immediately concerns us who can really rejoice in the privilege of being sons of God. That such a class should be found on earth, Hosea (i. 10) foretold, and though writing of Israelites, uses the term "sons," which, St. Paul teaches us, makes the passage applicable to those who had been Gentiles : "And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people ; there shall they be called sons of the living God" (Rom. ix. 26). In proof of God's grace to Israel, the apostle quotes Hosea ii. 23 ; as showing God would bless Gentiles, he quotes Hosea i. 10.

On this truth, viz., that believers are God's sons, the Apostle Paul, we have before remarked, at times dwells, distinguishing it from the blessing of relation-

ship as a child, as well as from the condition of a slave—a condition similar to which those under age were found. In Romans, in a passage already referred to (viii. 14-16), we read about the former; in Galatians iv. 7, we are instructed about the latter,—“Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.”* Now this privilege, we thus learn, is common to all God’s saints in the present time; and though foretold centuries before the Lord’s first advent, it was only consciously known after His incarnation. A passage in 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18 may here be quoted illustrative of the development of revelation in connection with this line of teaching: “Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you.” So far is the teaching of the prophecy (Jer. xxxi. 9), and of Old Testament revelation. The apostle now adds, “And ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” Whose sons and daughters will such be? The sons and daughters of Jehovah, Israel’s God, the self-existing One, who showed that He was the true God when He executed judgment on the idols of Egypt. The sons and daughters, too, of God Almighty, the God of the patriarchs, and who revealed Himself as the Almighty to Abraham when as yet He had no son.

But here we must make a distinction. It is one thing to show by our ways that we are God’s sons and daughters, and to be allowed because of them consciously to enjoy in our heart the sense of that privilege; it is another thing to become His sons. How is this brought about? Scripture on this point is plain. “Ye are all sons of God” (so the apostle wrote) “through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. iii. 26). We become God’s children as born again by the Word (1 Peter i. 23); we become God’s sons through faith

* So we should read the passage.

in Christ Jesus. Any word of God may quicken a soul. In all ages of man's history has God had children. Faith, however, in the Lord Jesus Christ is needed for any in the present time to become God's sons. So, only since the ascension has the privilege been known of being God's sons. "Through faith in Christ Jesus," writes the apostle. Now the Lord is never called Christ Jesus till after the ascension.

Sons of God! The apostle, writing to the Galatians, calls their attention to this, as he points out the difference between an heir under age and one grown up. The former differs nothing from a slave, being under tutors and governors, till the time appointed of the father. Old Testament saints were always, and indeed all saints till after the cross were, really, in that condition, which may be termed nonage. Now, saints are sons as well as children, being viewed as grown up—come of age, as it were—and so no longer infants; and this is true of all real Christians—as Scripture would view a Christian, whatever the stage of Christian growth, whether little children, young men, or fathers. For of little children, John writes (1 John ii. 13, 27), that they knew the Father, and had received the Holy Ghost. Now it should be remembered, we do not become sons by receiving the gift of the Spirit; we are sons through faith in Christ Jesus. "And because ye (*i.e.*, Galatians) are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our (not your) hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6).

The importance of this to meet Galatian error becomes manifest. They conceived that they needed more than they had got, and that they would secure it by being circumcised and keeping the law. The apostle demonstrates that they were grown up children already. To put themselves under law would be to get into a state of nonage, out of which those Christians, who like Paul had once been in it, had been delivered by the death of Christ on the cross for them (Gal. iv. 4, 5). The Galatian saints were not

only children but sons. To have told them simply that they were children would not have helped them ; to teach them that they were already sons met the snare set for their feet. They enjoyed what those under law did not and could not, the privileges of sons. Hence was made transparent the folly of being circumcised and keeping the law to obtain full Christian blessing.

The privileges, we have said, of sons. What are they? To one connected with this relationship the Lord referred in Matt. xvii. 25-27—"What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own sons, or of strangers? Peter saith, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the sons" (for of such He speaks) "free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take, and give unto them, for Me and thee." The Lord here associates Peter with Himself in the relationship of son to the One to whom the kingdom belonged, intimating that which would be subsequently taught as true of all believers now, that they are sons of God, and therefore free.

On another occasion did the Lord touch on this theme, when, surrounded by publicans and sinners, He uttered the parable of the prodigal son, and told His hearers what the son thought to say to his father: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." Full well did the prodigal know the difference between a servant and a son. A child he was by birth, but the position of a son in the house was a different matter. To be reinstated* in that he did not expect, nor was he

* A word on the form of this parable may be helpful. The occasion which called it forth is stated in the opening of the chapter (Luke xv.): "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear

thinking of asking it. But could he be anything but as a son in that house? That, he owned, was for his father to settle. A son's place he clearly did not deserve. Yet he was to have no other. His father settled the question, and rightly so. And he let his son hear of it, as he called his servants to rejoice with him, saying, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." All of grace, surely; all of grace to us it is, certainly. Like the prodigal, we do not deserve a son's place, but the Father is pleased to give us nothing less; for nothing less will satisfy His heart.

This brings us to notice another privilege connected with our subject—that of adoption. God will not rest till we are displayed before all in the position of sons. To Israel as God's first-born belongs the adoption (Rom. ix. 4). For any, however, to share in that, they must be descended from Jacob. But a better blessing by far is ours, though similar in character, for we are "foreordained unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Ephes. i. 5). We shall be before God, holy and without blame. But more than that is the desire of our God for us; He would have us before Him in the position of sons, and He acquaints us with it as part of that to which we are called, and of which now we are to know the hope (Ephes. i. 18). Hence the Holy Ghost is given to us as the spirit of adoption (Rom. viii. 15), whilst we await adoption, the redemption of our body (23); for God's purpose in this stops not short of blessing for our whole person. For this, then, we wait; and for it creation, which now groans under the weight and

Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." The prodigal, then, was the publican and sinner, who was an Israelite in common with the Pharisee, and therefore had shared in all the privileges belonging to Israel. Hence he could say, "am *no more* worthy to be called thy son"—language which could not suit a Gentile who had never enjoyed the privileges of Israel.

sorrow caused by sin, also waits, even for the manifestation of the sons of God (19).

What a day that will be! Till then, in the words of the hymn, we may say—

“All creation
Travails, groans, and bids Thee come.”

He will come (Rev. xxii. 20). Meanwhile, we are furnished by the Son Himself with a revelation of the Father, and are taught of the privileges which belong to those who have a place in the Father's heart, a home in the Father's house, and a portion in what belongs to the Father, as God's heirs and joint-heirs with Christ. For we are free; we are sons in the house; we shall have a son's place before all for ever.

Here the sketch of our subject, relationship with God, naturally ends; but the blessing and the joy of it will surely for us only deepen throughout eternity.

