

PETER'S "CONVERSION"



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I.—THE ROOT OF FAILURE.

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

"And he said unto Him, Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both unto prison, and to death.

"And He said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me" (Luke xxii. 31-34).

"And the Lord turned, and looked on Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Luke xxii. 61-62).

"But go your way, tell His disciples *and Peter* that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you (Mark xvi. 7).

"The Lord is risen, indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon. (Luke xxiv. 34).

"Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. . . . As soon, then, as they were come to land, they saw a *fire of coals* there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. . . . Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. . . . So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" (John xxi. 7-15).

I HAVE put together these passages from the Gospels, that we may have before us, at one view, all the steps in that "conversion," or restoration of Peter's soul, of which they speak to us. Conversion, in Scripture, is not by any means always the first grand turning of the

soul to God, but is the term used for any turning from sin also, into which even as converted (in the ordinary sense now) the soul may have got. Peter long before this had been converted (that is, in the sense of being born again,) as is plain by the Lord's words in Matt. xvi. He had had Christ revealed to him by the Father, and had believed that revelation—was a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus. The conversion the Lord speaks of is his restoration of soul after the denial of his Lord and Master.

The outward sin, which too commonly we judge to be all, is ever and only the out-cropping of a state of soul which was there before, and is the root of it. No force whatever of temptation would suffice to upset or draw away a soul which was finding its strength in God Himself. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able," is ever true here. So that a man is actually "tempted"—that is, temptation succeeds with him—when he "is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." That which exposes him to the evil is in himself, and not in his surroundings. A soul that in the thorough consciousness of impotence rests in God for help is impregnable to assault. "When I am weak, then am I strong." Self-confidence, therefore, in some form, is the secret of all failure—the root of all actual commission of sin.

That this was so in Peter is evident. It ought to be evident also that his is a pattern case. His restoration is the divine application in the last supplementary chapter of John's Gospel, of the feet-washing of the 13th, where Peter, too, is the resister, and is told that by-and-by he shall understand the meaning of what he understood not then. In pain and shame, indeed, he learns it, as more or less we all do, but a lesson well worth learning at whatever cost, and, indeed, absolutely necessary to be learnt;

a lesson it will be well for us if we learn, and at less cost, through his example as the Word gives it us, than by our own.

A root is a little thing apparently, and below the surface. Who would judge to be so grave a thing the expression of honest affection to his Master which spoke out of him in the words, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee to prison and to death." How easily such like things in us pass undetected in ourselves and others! At least, if detected, how little serious we deem them! Who would have thought that the fruit of this would be, "I know not the man." Yet it was, plainly. Not, of course, the fruit of the affection, which was really there—he was no hypocrite,—but of the wretched self-confidence, only able to carry him into the danger, but not through it; sure to break down, and needing to be broken down, at whatever cost; necessitating the perfect love of God itself to give him over into Satan's hands to break it down.

Look at Job. There is not one like him upon the earth, a perfect and upright man. That is God's testimony. Why put such an one through those sorrows which are the very type of suffering to this day? Alas! Job nourished and cherished this perfectness of his, as hundreds now their *Christian* perfection, as they style it. Therefore, "Behold, he is in thine hand." *Satan had asked the same thing concerning Simon Peter*; a lesson for perfectionists to the end of time, but a lesson for many more besides. "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired"—it is "demanded," rather—"to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Mark that "demand." It is *as* wheat he demands them, for he is the sifter of God's wheat. This applies to all the disciples; but there is one in special need among them, and him the Lord singles out from among the rest: "I have prayed for *thee* that thy faith

fail not." How tender that anticipation of the trial before Simon Peter, yet no prayer that he may escape it; it was necessary that he should be exposed to it, and that, too, with the certainty of breaking down. How solemn that warning! And how different yet the Lord's judgment of the matter to ours. In ours, that terrible denial in the high priest's palace would be the thing most thought of. In His it was the laying bare only of the state which necessitated it.

While warning it is, there is yet comfort in the warning. If I have fallen into the ditch, it is that I might be turned back out of the path which led to it. It was needful I should fall, and love allowed it for my recovery. But that recovery is not effected simply by my getting out of the ditch, therefore I must be got back to where my path diverged from the true one; yes, and have got the signpost up upon the by-path, too. It is for want of this that we fall again so often in the same way. To judge the open sin is easy, and no assurance at all that I shall avoid it for the future, no token in itself of recovered spirituality. "If we judge *ourselves* we should not be judged." To judge our *sins* and to judge *ourselves* are two different things. For the last we must have distinguished and judged the state of which the sins are only the issue—the root on which, if it be not removed, fresh fruit will surely grow.

This is restoration in full result. We must notice, however, that there is another kind of restoration needed first and in order to this. Many overlook it or displace it, and to their own serious hindrance. To this the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter plainly looks on, and His own announcement of it to him, along with the announcement of the sin itself, would do its part in due time towards it. The tendency of sin—*all* sin—is to weaken faith, and put distance between the soul and God. And then this again

is what makes (so long as it lasts) recovery impossible. Not merely if you are not washed, but "if *I* wash thee not thou hast no part with Me." And we—we must have put our feet with all their defilement into His gracious hands, that they may be cleansed. For that we must be with Him. Distance will not do. With Peter we may think it only becoming to hold off and say—and say it with reverent consideration of His greatness and His holiness—"Thou shalt never wash my feet." We may try to cleanse them by confession and self-judgment, and so make ourselves fit to be with Him again. We shall accomplish nothing by all this. *He* alone washes. We must needs submit to the supremacy of love and grace in Him, and be with Him not as cleansed but as defiled, and let Him cleanse.

We will return to this, and look at it more in detail presently. What we begin with is, that in all cases actual sin is the out cropping of a state of soul which went before it, and necessitated that we should be given up to it. And moreover, this state is very generally, and at the best, some form of self-occupation and satisfaction. We never fall because of weakness merely. We fall because we do not realize our weakness. We have our hand out of our Father's hand. What could harm us if it were not so?

But there are many forms of this, and some so unsuspected, it will be well to pause and look at them a moment. Peter's might be plain; but his undoubtedly true affection to his Master, and upright honesty of purpose, disguised it for him. Such do you find with many a young soul fresh with a fervor most real but yet untried. What is the meaning of the miserable breaks-down and failure so soon experienced often after conversion? Not surely that God would have us fail! Not that there is a necessity of failure to which we are delivered! No, but that

even at the expense of failure we must be allowed to see what we are who would so fain serve God, and be something now, if we never were *till* now. Did He leave us to that, what should we not lose? How would our very piety soon shut out God from us, the Strong One's strength that beareth us and all our burdens; the love of Him who carrieth in His bosom! To know His worth, we learn our worthlessness, and that the lesson is cheaply learned will be proclaimed in eternal Hallelujahs.

There are others apparently not at all on this ground, and indeed at its very antipodes. They have learnt so fully (they would say) what failure is, that they can think of little else but this. Speak to them when you may, they have nothing but lamentation over their short-coming to respond with. Sunk under the load of a body of sin and death, they imagine that to be self-judgment which is mere self-occupation, and which gives no whit of power for the holiness they long after.

This is not self-complacency, it is true; but it *is* a *desire* after it. If not able to utter the Pharisee's "God, I thank Thee," they are at least miserable because they cannot do it. They have not reached that point of self-judgment at which we turn away in hopelessness from what we have no further expectation from. On the contrary, it is because they have this expectation that they find such grievous and continual disappointment. This, therefore, almost equally with the former condition, exposes the soul unarmed to temptation. If "the joy of the Lord is your strength," it is but little joy they have.

In both cases evil is the fruit, because did God suffer good, it would be but worse evil. We should dress up self with that of which we had robbed Christ, and all seeming good would be perverted and transformed to its mere opposite. "No flesh shall glory in His presence." Therefore the solemn and reiterated warnings of Scrip-

ture, not to bring us to content with fruitlessness, but to show us the way rather of bearing fruit. God takes up Job, a perfect man as none else on earth, and how painfully He has to teach him his vileness. The Lord takes up Peter with his honest love to His Master, and has to let him learn in the high priest's palace that he could deny that beloved Master with oaths and curses. He has to be in Satan's sieve that he may be "converted," *not* from the denial of his Lord,—that was but the bitter and painful means by which he was to find out where he was before;—but out of the self-complacency and self-sufficiency which was, in His sight who seeth not as man seeth, the deeper evil. Satan's desire in sifting was not this, of course, but this was God's use of it, and its end.

How slow are we to recognize this! Yet it is most important to do so, for if we look at the fruits in the life as isolated from the condition they manifest, we may judge and judge the former, and, leaving out the latter, leave still the root out of which again and again the evil springs. So in the case of another, equally with our own, we may address ourselves to the mere things into which one may have got, forgetting the deeper question of what got one into it. And here we shall find that Peter's fall is no exceptional one. Self-trust is ever our ruin. Never trusting ourselves we shall never be disappointed. The answer to all that we are is the cross whereon, for what we were, Christ died. We have died,—we are dead,—with Him, that He might be indeed the object of our life. "To me to live is Christ." If it be *that*, God, with all that He is, is with me. Power cannot be lacking to accomplish what is His own purpose. Alas, that it should be so easy to mistake my desire to be something for Christ, for this, the only rightful object of the soul!

2.—THE ADVOCATE AND HIS INTERCESSION.

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not," says the apostle (1 John ii. 1). It is important to ask of what he had been writing with this end in view. We may answer that essentially, communion with the Father and the Son had been his topic, and the fullness of joy in it—for "the joy of the Lord is your strength"—would be their safeguard. The two passages are evidently in close relationship to one another: "these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full," and "these things write I unto you, that ye sin not."

Thus occupation with Him in whom Divine love has visited us, is our preservative from the snares of the enemy, from the solicitations of the world around us, and from the lusts of the flesh to which these alone appeal, and which give them all their success. Lust is spiritually the beggar's badge, the sign of emptiness and dissatisfaction. The soul filled is the soul guarded. The earnest and reiterated exhortation of the epistle of experience, is the needed one for holiness and fruitfulness alike: "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!"

"God is light" and "God is love." These are but two aspects of what is essential unity, and in reality inseparable from one another. In Christ, God manifest, they are "grace and truth." In contrast with law, when God was hidden in the holiest, "grace and truth *came* by Jesus Christ." Here the real unity of these two things is apparent: for "grace" there cannot be where sin is untruly dealt with; while "truth" that came by the Son of God incarnate could as little be divorced from the love that brought Him down.

Yet there is an order in which these two are presented to us, and this order is not unimportant to us. How differently it would appear if we read "truth and grace,"

instead of "grace and truth!" for grace it is which (in the presentation of these to our hearts) comes necessarily first, and thus is "truth in the inward parts" established; while yet, so little can truth be *divorced* from grace that, until truth *be* established there, the proper *enjoyment* of grace there cannot be.

The order is plain in the first chapter of the epistle. If "the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you," is "that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all," who is He that has brought us the message, but He whose very presence among men is in itself a gospel? At His birth the angels had proclaimed not only "Glory to God in the highest," but also "on earth peace, good pleasure in men." In Him the Word of life (the apostle has before been telling us) was "heard," "seen," "looked upon," and "handled" by our hands. Thus Divine love had brought in Divine light; and now if we "walk in the light as God is in the light," what has rent the veil behind which in the thick darkness He had dwelt, and enabled our human eyes to take in the revelation? Surely, once more, Divine love, which in providing the precious blood to put upon the mercy-seat, has opened a way of access into the holiest of all.

A *righteous* way; and thus "grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life;" but surely love, not righteousness, has found the way, and righteousness exalts the love which has done so: grace reigns, though righteousness is the basis of its throne.

Love has let out the light; love invites and enables us to "walk in the light." That is not setting it aside, but the contrary. "Light" implies "manifestation": "that which doth make manifest is light." In the presence of God, Himself in the light, we and all things else are manifested. Repentance and remission of sins are preached to us in the saving name of Jesus (Luke xxiv.

47), and as we believe the grace which has visited us, we bow to its holy terms and drink it in. As confessed sinners we find God "faithful and just to forgive us our sin," and so to "cleanse us" inwardly "from all unrighteousness." The order of presentation of the truth is ever the same.

So far—and that is as far as the first chapter of John's first epistle carries us—we have to do with the first entrance of the soul into the presence of God. The latter verses (which are often taken as applying solely to the failures of Christians) are strikingly, and according to the apostle's manner elsewhere in the epistle, the testing of a profession which was already in his day beginning to be wider than the reality. In verses 6 and 7 he is defining how far amid such profession the efficacy of the blood extends. Love has let out the light. The light of the holiest carries with it the cleansing virtue of the blood with which the rending of the veil has furnished the mercy-seat. It is therefore "if we walk in the light," manifested to ourselves, "as He is in the light," manifested to us, . . . "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin." It is *where* we walk, not *how*, that is in question; and plainly to make it here a question of a believer's conduct morally, would be to say that the blood of Christ cleansed just in proportion as there was nothing to cleanse from.

The three verses following are really the definition further of what it is to walk in darkness or in light, and are thus the necessary appendix to the former ones. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," are in darkness, "and the truth," the product of the light, "is not in us." "If," on the other hand, "we confess our sins, showing the action of the light upon us, (we have sins and nothing else to confess) "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." This is the connection of repent-

ance and remission of sins indicated in the passage in Luke before quoted. It is so clearly parallel to the preceding verses, and so simply refers to the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, that to make it the introduction of a new subject,—and *that* the subject that we are introduced to, *as if for the first time*, in but the second verse of the following chapter,—seems really impossible to concede; yet that we find here principles in God's way of dealing which may be carried further, and applied in this and in other ways, is true, for light and love are ever one in God, and what He is He will be; He cannot deny Himself.

But these things the apostle puts before us, as he plainly says, *that we may not sin*. "If," notwithstanding, "any one should sin," that case is considered next. But observe how differently the matter is put. This kind of sin is put hypothetically only, not as if it were sure to be, but *if* it be, then "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins." It must be confessed, but the eye of the person who has sinned is thus not in the first place turned upon himself, but upon Another, his Advocate. It is of course implied that he knows he has sinned, but that is not at all the same as restoration. In this, grace must act, Christ must restore; and it is of the greatest importance that our eyes should be thus directed to whence alone all help comes.

"An Advocate" (Paraclete): One who takes our cause in hand to see it through for us; "with the Father," not God as God, but in settled nearness of relationship to us as His own. Were it as His creatures simply we had to do with God about sin, it would imply that we had no true position in righteousness at all before Him, and then intercession could not avail for us. Intercession with God as God is that of Priesthood, not of the Advocate;

and there "such an High-priest becomes us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and *separate from sinners.*" As long as the blood of Christ is on the mercy-seat, he who has come to God by Him is perfected by it, and the intercession of the Priest with God is on account of *weakness*, not of sin (Heb. vii., x.).

The intercession of the Advocate, on the other hand, is for sin, but with the *Father* for the *children*. It is needed, not to take away guilt, nor surely to turn the Father's heart towards us, but as regards the government of the Father's house. "Christ, as Son," is "over His house" (Heb. iii. 6), and all in it are under His hand. As charged with them it is necessarily His place to act in their behalf with the Father; and, as noted in the passage before us, being "Jesus Christ the righteous," Him the Father ever hears. If among mere men even, "the prayer of the righteous man availeth much," and this be a well-understood principle of holy government, how absolutely must avail, and how easily intelligible, the intercession of the One alone absolutely righteous! while in addition to this He is also "the propitiation for our sins." Such is our Advocate. Well may our eyes be directed towards Him, then, in the very first place, when the restoration of the soul is before us. We shall also comprehend that, as Son over the Father's house, He is more than simple Intercessor.

In Peter's case, which in this as in other places seems quite a typical one, we are permitted to see the Advocate in His place and hear the purport of His intercession. We find that before even the sin had taken place He had been with the Father about it. We find, too, that Satan also had been before God about Simon Peter among others. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired (*demand*ed, it should be rather) to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee

that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

The prayer of the Advocate had not been the effect of Peter's repentance plainly, but of His knowledge of the need and danger of His unsuspecting disciple. Satan had demanded them all for his sieve, as the permitted sifter of all that purports to be God's wheat; and, as in Job's case, he had obtained his request. The Lord had not for a moment asked that the sifting should not be, but the special need of Peter He had provided for by the special request for *him*—He does not say for *them*—that his faith might not fail. His failure otherwise He foretold. It is very noteworthy and solemn that He could not apparently ask that he should not fail. Simon must be permitted to break down, as Jacob his father before had to be broken down, that just as Israel sprang out of crippled Jacob, so Peter, the man of stone, might come out of sifted Simon. Jacob had to give up his cunning, Job his goodness, Simon his strength, for a like end in all. Our human virtues lie but too near our vices: our wisdom is our folly, our folly wisdom; our strength is our weakness, our weakness strength. This is the first lesson of our primer, and hard to learn: but when we have learnt it, our progress is wonderful. Jacob crippled is at once a prince with God, and Simon, just now shrinking before a maid, strengthens his brethren.

For us it is serious that if we are "wheat," or assume it, Satan has undoubtedly demanded us for trial, and that the Lord our Advocate does not refuse his claim to that. But He has prayed for us also, who can doubt? We may well trust ourselves, not in carelessness, but not in carefulness, to His hand and care.

We have already in some measure considered the purport of the Lord's intercession, that Peter's faith may not fail. That sin has a natural tendency to weaken the

practical confidence of the soul in God, I suppose by experience we are well aware. Upon this Satan works to produce a practical separation from Him, which he well knows to be fraught with disastrous consequences. At a distance from God self-judgment is impossible, and power of recovery wholly lost; further departure follows, and here may be the secret of a long period of declension, a night and winter of the soul, dark, cold, and unfruitful. The sins which may follow upon this are but its necessary result and sign. To deal with these as if they were the whole matter, or half the matter, is a most serious mistake; nay, they may be of such a character as to be little noted by the unexercised conscience of the man "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." He owns, perhaps, he is not spiritual, thinks of it rather as his misfortune than his fault; is a fatalist, when he thinks he is only owning creature nothingness; is "blind and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."

From this state we must carefully discriminate that which is indeed very different in itself, though under certain conditions it may verge into it. I mean the state of one who may have known peace, but not deliverance; who is trying to make something of himself—that self which the cross of Christ has set aside for him—and finds as the necessary effect neither power in himself nor help from God. This is not an unexercised state evidently, though through bad nurturing it may lapse into it, and "the good that I would I do not" may become at last but acquiescence in the evil from which there seems no escape.

Who can but groan when he considers how large a part of Christians really come under one of these two conditions? From hence schism, heresies, a worldliness great enough for the reproach of the world itself, and innumerable other evils! Oh, for the power of the Word, quick,

and sharper than any two-edged sword, to pierce even to the dividing asunder of joints and marrow, of soul and spirit, and to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart! God grant us, reader, honesty with Himself and in His presence, with whom we have one and all to do.

Peter's case was one of self-confidence, that is, of self-ignorance, the haughty spirit, sure precedent of a fall. The fall he needed, nothing but the humbling of it would do for him. The danger was lest he should, as one hopeless and reckless, drift away from Christ still further, and fall effectually under Satan's power. Confidence in Him whose grace he had begun to know alone could hold him fast, so that the break up of self should only the more make that grace to be exalted, and become the strength henceforth which in himself he lacked. Having learnt that, he could "strengthen his brethren."

3.—FOOT-WASHING.

We must now turn to that 13th chapter of the gospel of John which furnishes the text, so to speak, of which Peter's "conversion" is the significant illustration. It is evident that here, as in connected chapters of this gospel, the Lord is anticipating the results of His death, and looking on to His service in resurrection. He is teaching in acts and words whose true significance is not upon the surface, but must be sought for deeper. "What I do thou knowest not now," He says to Peter himself, "but thou shalt know afterwards." The prefatory words of the chapter carry us on to the time when He "should depart out of this world unto the Father," and expressly connect the lowly and tender ministry recorded here with the place taken with God as possessing all things. If love uses its wealth in behalf of His disciples, it is their need before a holy God which dictates this form of service. A "part *with*" Christ, of which He speaks to

Peter, necessitates cleansing according to and in the power of that Word which is so often symbolized by water: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."

Part *in* Christ is not at all the question, though here also the Word it is which acts and must act; but this is that primary washing which the Lord distinguishes from the washing of the feet. For when Peter, passing from one extreme into the opposite, from refusing the Lord's condescending grace, would have his hands and head washed as well as his feet, the Lord replies: "he that is washed (or "bathed," *leloumenos*) needeth not, save to wash (*nipsasthai*) his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all."

The first washing is of the whole man, and sets its indelible seal upon the soul, not needing and not allowing repetition. "Whosoever is born of God doth not practice sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot be sinning, because he is born of God." Such is the real force of the apostle's words (1 John iii. 9), which shew us on the one hand the indelible character of the washing, and how at the same time there may be needed such a cleansing from defilement contracted by the way as is expressed in the Lord's action in this chapter.

The washing is "water-washing by the Word;" not as the blood cleanses, therefore, from the guilt, but from the defilement, of sin. The foundation of all is the precious blood of Christ. "Without shedding of blood" there could be no more the one than the other. Being delivered from wrath, our moral purification is necessitated and assured.

The "washing" here is of the feet, the purifying from defilement contracted in the walk: it is the application of the Word to set right what has been wrong, and deliver from the effect of it morally. But there is much more than this to be considered. There is the One who

washes, as well as the washing, and the style and manner of its being done also.

It is Peter who, beside the Lord Himself, is prominent in all this scene; that Peter whom we have already seen specially mentioned in the prayer of the Advocate. All have need of the cleansing, and all, no doubt, are remembered in His prayer; but Simon Peter it is who in both cases illustrates the Saviour's care of His own. We have remarked too that the tenor of the prayer is that Peter's faith may not fail, and Peter it is who is found in this chapter demurring to the Lord's taking that lowly place in which here we find him. All this is in harmony with the self-confidence which we have seen to be the root of failure, and which lurked under the form of love to his Master in the words: "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I." But the same self-confidence in no dissimilar shape showed itself in his words at this time: "Thou shalt never wash my feet;" in answer to which the Lord presses upon him his necessity and helplessness: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."

Self-confidence and faith are contradictory things; and as the former would lead into the open failure, so it would tend to separate the soul, in the time of its need, from Christ,—to make faith fail in view of the break-down. And still (and that is why Peter is kept so steadily before us in all this) the same cause everywhere brings about the same results. Under the plea of the holiness of God Satan will seek to cast the failing one away from Him in whose hand alone is power to help; and sin too clouding the soul, it will be led into some legal means of self-help in order to set itself right with God, rather than betake itself to Christ in simplicity for cleansing.

It is here that the mis-use of such a passage as 1 John i. 10 works so injuriously. Applying this to cases of this kind as the Divinely prescribed remedy for such, the soul

falls back upon a process of what it deems self-judgment, hoping by this to restore itself to the communion it has lost. To be forgiven and cleansed, the sins have to be confessed: a very simple condition, it may seem, indeed; but he who has learned himself aright will easily recognize that the simplest conditions to one away from God are absolutely impossible. Two ways the endeavor to perform this condition works, according to the actual state of the soul in question, as it is either light and careless at bottom, or really distressed and legal; but either way restoration to communion is not in fact attained.

A careless soul will naturally make most disastrous use of such a passage. The confession of sins may become with such really very much what it would be with a Romanist, a means of readily wiping off (only here without even a penance) what has never caused it much trouble, and what will cause little in again contracting. The sins that such an one feels are gross enough at least for an unspiritual person to recognize without much difficulty. He has only to confess these, and forgiveness and cleansing are assured. I believe many and many an one is thus deceiving himself with the belief that he is thus again all right with God, nay, must be, because he has fulfilled the condition, and that it is a matter of duty, against the plainest evidences, to believe this, because has not the apostle said, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"? Carelessness may in this way be taken for the spirit of one who has apprehended the gospel, and is free from the gloomy shadows of an oppressive legality.

On the other hand the person who is not thus indifferent will indeed become a prey to legality, to find, as always, that the law is the strength, not of holiness, but of sin. If confession of sin is to be made before there can

be forgiveness or cleansing, he will not find it so easy to know if he has performed the condition. Occupied with himself, with his confession and self-judgment, he has no security but that a treacherous heart will deceive him here, as it has so often deceived him elsewhere; and what right has he to happiness or forgiveness, until he has performed the requirement?

But, with Peter, he has missed seeing that the cleansing water is in Christ's hand alone; and the needed word for him is, "If *I* wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." Still the Lord waits upon His own, girded, and with the basin and towel, ready Himself to do the work so needful to be done, so impossible for self-accomplishment. "If *I* wash thee not." So that He expects, not clean feet, but feet *to be* cleansed; and the cleansing is what He has undertaken to perform, with whom we may safely (not carelessly) rest it.

The needed thing on our part is then to be with Him, our feet in His blessed hands in the confidence of faith. There He assumes the responsibility. But what is implied in our being thus with Him? This, in the first place, and above all, that distance between us and Him is of *our* putting, not of His putting; and of our *keeping* also, not of His. There is no possible place in which we can be, where we may not turn to Him, and find Him with us. The contrary thought is really unbelief. It reveals that tendency against the fatal effects of which the Lord had prayed for Simon Peter, that his faith might not fail. How often do His people dishonoringly speak of God hiding His face from them, when, if there be hiding, it must be they who are doing it, not He. God who looks ever upon His Beloved with unchanging complacency, sees us ever in Him, and cannot turn away. The clouds that obscure the sun are not from the sun but from the earth; and so with what failure and unbelief produce

as to our state. The Father shuts no door behind His prodigals, but runs forth to meet them. The Shepherd of the sheep is always He who seeks them out. Nor could His withdrawal be needful for them in order to self-judgment: it would be withdrawing the light that we might better discern. For in His light alone we see light.

But of course turning to Him must be a real thing. It is not the mere seeking of joy from Him, or seeking communion with Him in indifference to evil. Indifferent He cannot be, and thus His words fully apply: "If I *wash* thee not, thou hast no part with Me." True turning to Him must be for cleansing, and cleansing according to His mind. There can be no bargaining with Him, no reserve. The honest desire must be to be with Him at all costs; the prayer of the heart, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me." Here, alas, is apt to be the real difficulty. Days, months, years of unhappiness and evil are passed while we are fruitlessly endeavoring to induce Him to make terms with what indeed we may not choose to consider sins, but what we feel nevertheless a scrupulous strictness would oblige us to give up.

Thus "little communion" means almost always, "little integrity of heart with Him." Joy we want, no doubt, and rest of heart, and many another thing; and we are very sincere in the desire for self-gratification: but, alas, we would have these upon terms incompatible with His bestowment of them. We offer the blind and the lame and the sick in sacrifice, and wonder why we have not the tokens of His acceptance. In this application how many of us have yet to learn that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

Here then is the decisive point. The Lord is abun-

dantly desirous to have us with Himself, and is ready with His basin and towel to cleanse us after His thought of it, that we may have part with Him. Are we as willing to submit ourselves into His blessed hands, that love may have its perfect way with us? Or is He too severe a taskmaster, and can a "part with Him" be purchased at too great a cost?

If not, we shall find love's girded Servant ready to take our feet into His hands,—soiled, not clean,—and for that we must be with Him to begin with, in the faith that admits no distance, the faith that (whatever we are) should never fail. If now our hearts would value, above all that the world can give, a part with Him; if we will let Him shew us what evil, what defilement is, as measured by His word, and not our thoughts nor the thoughts of those around us; then we are welcome to Him without any preparatory work to make us so. Coming to Him without reserve, we shall find Him meeting us without reserve also, and in His presence learn self-judgment, as we can nowhere else.

We shall now be prepared to see in Simon Peter the Scriptural illustration of this perfect way of a perfect Love.

4.—RESTORATION OF HEART.

"I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." Such words from the lips of the great Advocate, the more they are pondered, the more will they assure us how important that must be which forms in fact the whole purport of His prayer. Repentance, restoration, and all that is implied in these, are evidently connected with this maintenance of Peter's faith. And it is not so difficult to understand how. A ship at anchor will ride out the storm, and, however tossed, recover herself, if only the anchor holds. If it does not hold, she drives before the storm. And as

it is just such a time that tries the anchor, as well as the ground it holds in, so it is with us in seasons of failure such as this with Simon Peter; only of the goodness of the ground there is no question here, and all the strain is upon the anchor.

How naturally apt faith is to fail, may be better understood if we consider how little, with the mass even of true Christians, it is at all in lively exercise. How many sharp decisive statements of the Word are pared down to almost meaningless nothings because there is not faith to entertain them! How many blessed promises which should cast all care out of our hearts, leave them yet weary and burdened, for the self-same reason! It will be a not unprofitable work, perhaps, to search ourselves out honestly by such questions, and take stock of our faith, even when perhaps not where Peter's self-confidence placed him, and where our deficiency would be so apparent.

Now, if we consider also, we may be easily aware that faith and self-confidence—trust in another and in self—are ever opposed. Any deficiency in the one implies a corresponding increase in the other. What but a real confidence in our own superior knowledge could make us refuse, as we so often do, the guidance or the comfort of the inspired Word? Peter could contradict his Lord up and down, and so can we, without realizing, no doubt, what is implied in this. Our self-ignorance is lamentable. Little do they, often, who can talk well about the deceitfulness of the human heart, imagine what is in their own. And thus we must needs so constantly expose ourselves, in lesser ways, but as really as Simon Peter.

Thus it is no wonder that the Lord's prayer for Peter should be that his faith might not fail.

Moreover, in this failure of faith, it is first of all implied, that where man failed at the beginning he fails again. It

is divine love that is in question first, and which brings divine truth into question; and thus man, slipping away from confidence in God's love and care, becomes a weary worker on his own account. Lust, which is nothing else than this self-seeking away from God—lust thus entered, and all "the corruption which is in the world" is "through lust."

Hence the preservative and remedy for a soul that is slipping away from God must be in the careful strengthening of its confidence in God's love. This will not exclude, surely, the maintenance of divine holiness, for grace is ever linked with truth, and introduces it to the soul; but it will give character to it. It will be the basin and towel in the hands of One meek and lowly in heart, who will stoop at our very feet to wash them. Wonderful and blessed picture, which is given us too, not for our comfort and admiration only, but for our imitation also, in our dealings with one another: "Ye call Me Master and Lord, and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

But how little yet do we understand that mere righteous dealing—absolutely righteous as it may be—will not work the restoration of souls; that judgment, however temperate and however true, will not touch and soften and subdue such hearts to instruction, as by the very facts of the case are shown not to be in their true place with God. Man is not all conscience; and conscience reached, with the heart away, will do what it did with the first sinner among men, drive him out among the trees of the garden to escape from the unwelcome voice.

The whip and the scourge may be righteous, but there is no winning the heart of man with these. Nor is it righteousness that reigns among the saints of God, but grace that reigns, through righteousness, unto eternal life. Alas, how many sins that might have been washed away have been retained! how many brethren alienated for all time that might have been won back to God and to us, because we have hammered at the conscience merely with the heart ungained—with the heart, I may say, almost unsought! We have not overcome evil, because we have not overcome it with good. We have taken readily the judge's chair, and have got back judgment; but the Master's lowly work we have little done.

But let us return to Simon Peter, and see how, (where it is the perfect work of the Master Himself, instead of the work of His failing disciples,) Divine love steadfastly manifests and asserts itself towards him. How much pains taken that his faith might not fail! What careful, tender dealing until Peter learns, what he had not really learnt before, to put his feet into the hands of One who in love had set Himself to serve him in such a fashion.

The Lord's forewarning words must first be considered. They were not merely a warning; indeed, as that, they were not accepted, nor availed to keep Peter's feet out of the snare that was laid for them. Surely they availed much more, when recalled to Peter's mind by their fulfillment, to bring home the sense of His love who had not only warned of the failure, but prayed for the failing one, and predicted the restoration along with the failure itself.

When we look at the prediction too, as the apostle John records it, at the end of that thirteenth chapter to which we have made such constant reference, we find (if disregarding the artificial division of the chapters we read on without a break), that it is immediately followed by

familiar words of comfort, but which in this connection may appear new to us:—"Jesus answered him, wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice." And then come the words: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, *believe also in me.*" How Peter's soul, as the circumstances of that solemn night were recalled to him, must have drunk in the words! Who can doubt the design all through? He who had prayed for him that his faith might not fail, had enjoined him to believe, in the very presence of his sin.

In the high priest's palace we know too that, at the very time of his denial, "the Lord turned and looked on Peter." We may not imagine what that look conveyed, but we are told that it brought to remembrance the Lord's word: "And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly."

All this was not enough for the object of the Lord's care. The next thing we read is, after His resurrection, when the angels say to the women at the grave: "But go your way; tell His disciples *and Peter*, that He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you." Thus an angelic message assures Peter of his place still among those other disciples, with whom it might be thought he could no more be numbered. No notice is taken of any breach; no repairing of any therefore attempted. It is the Master of former days, and the old words to be fulfilled, and the disciple as of old. There is no breach: *He* will not allow one.

And this too is only a message to prepare Peter's heart for the Master Himself. He will not see him with the rest merely. Might he not shrink back if first met with the rest? No: his heart must be yet more effectually

prepared by a private meeting before the public one. What a lesson for the heart of any poor wanderer, who is mis-reading the Lord's by his own! Peter is the object of special care and love at this time. A John even may wait, but Peter cannot wait: "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon." "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve."

Again we have no account of what took place there. It is just the fact itself that is left to impress us. And it is evident that the aim is still restoration of heart. The searching comes by-and-by. But oh, how much pains taken, and how much needed, to assure the soul of a poor wanderer like this!

When the Lord meets the twelve, Peter is in his place with the rest, and no special notice is taken of him. He hears, as others, that "Peace be unto you," and looks once more at the wounds in His hands and side. And so after this, how many times we know not.

The last scene takes us to the sea of Tiberias, and Peter is seen in his old foremost place among the disciples. They follow him fishing, and all night catch nothing. But with the morning Jesus stands upon the shore, but they know not that it is Jesus. He says to them, speaking in the intimacy of affection: "Children, have ye any meat? They answered Him, no. And He said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes."

How it must have recalled the time past, when a similar draught of fishes was made the means of awakening Simon Peter's conscience, and of making him cry at Jesus' knees, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Yet it is not Peter but John, very noticeably, who says, "It is the Lord." But then Peter's warmth is again manifested: "Now when Simon Peter heard that it was

the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him (for he was naked), and did cast himself into the sea."

He is in full restoration of heart back with the Lord, and ripe for closer dealing. But notice again, how gently he is prepared for it. "As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a *fire of coals* there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." A striking thing upon the shore there, that fire of coals! The only other place we find it in the gospels, is in that other well-remembered scene in the high priest's palace. How that fire must have spoken to Simon Peter! But the Lord says nothing. Their food is prepared there, and He says simply, "Come and dine"; and Peter dines with his Lord in the presence, so to speak, of his sin. Face to face with it, he is with his Lord as he had ever been. No more than that? Aye, nearer than ever surely! with a deeper, tenderer gladness; knowing better, fully known, distance impossible again! Surely that fire of coals robbed Peter's heart of no element of gladness there as he sat and dined!

And after they had dined, and not till then, the Lord, still on the old terms with His disciple, but those terms now fully understood,—the Lord had a question for Peter's conscience, which it was time to ask,

Then, and not till then!

5.—FULL RESTORATION.

We have now seen Peter fully restored in heart to God. The full searching out of his conscience is yet to come; but the time for it is reached when that strange dinner by the fire of coals is ended. "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me *more than these?*" We cannot but recall, and see that the Lord is recalling, Peter's fervent yet boastful words; "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I." His answer to this, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love

Thee," declines the comparison which he is thus reminded of. But the Lord does not allow it to rest there. Again he asks, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" and when Peter again affirms his love, He once more repeats the question. Not once too often surely, as we know, and as the result proves; for then only do we read, "Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him, Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." This threefold repetition connects Peter's first boastful affirmation with the threefold denial in the high-priest's palace. Root and fruit are connected together, and Peter's answer testifies of the omniscience that has searched him out, "Lord, Thou knowest all things;" if that only deepens the conviction that where he had signally failed to manifest his love in outward act, yet He who knew all could read it in his heart.

The Lord's questions vary, however, somewhat in their form, as often noticed. In the first two He uses a different word for "love" from that which He uses the third time, but which is that which Peter uses all through. This latter is the term for affection, ardent and heartfelt, but it may be unintelligent and unappreciative also; the former is a love guided and sanctioned by a deliberate judgment also. Both terms are used in a bad sense as well as a good, and the more discriminating and deliberate love is, the worse it is if set upon evil. Yet this intelligent love which can give a reason to itself is otherwise the higher quality. It is the love of the Spirit, as Scripture would put it, as Peter's word expresses the love of the soul; and although the Father in both ways is said to love the Son, yet when it is said, "God is love," the word used is necessarily the former.

The Lord then uses this higher term first, and descends to the lower, thus searching out Peter more and more.

In the first place, too, he adds, "more than these" (the other disciples); then asks, "lovest thou Me" at all? And when Peter urges still his, "Thou knowest I have affection for Thee," He takes him up lastly even there, and asks, "Hast thou affection for Me?" Then the disciple's heart gushes out. Even this poor "affection," alas, might be questioned now;—yes, but thank God, *not* by Him, who knowing all things, could discern what others could not. He dare not say, "I love Thee more than these," dare not claim for himself the possession of love in its higher quality at all; but be it what it may, he *has* "affection."

Thus his self-judgment is complete. Searched out by the Divine eye, he is found and owns himself, not better but worse than others; so self-ignorant that he cannot claim *quality* for his love at all, nothing more than something that he feels and is conscious of, and which (he has so failed in showing it) omniscience alone might see.

And now the needed point is reached. The strong man "converted" to weakness, is fit to "strengthen his brethren:" as Peter step by step descends the ladder of humiliation, step by step the Lord follows him with assurances of the work for which he is destined. "Feed my lambs." "Tend my sheep." "Feed my sheep." He, the faithful Shepherd, who could give his life for the sheep, could give those sheep, so dear to Him, into the hands of this humbled, ruined man. How sweet and assuring this grace to Peter, and to us. When brought to nothing, He can use us in our nothingness, and when He can use us He will.

But the Lord does not even stop here. He takes Peter back once more to his first zealous protestation, "I will go with thee to prison and to death," and He says, Peter, you shall have this honor also: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young thou girdest thyself,

and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this He said unto him, Follow me."

Thus in that path in which human energy had broken down, and the strength of flesh availed nothing, Peter was henceforth to walk indeed as having proved this. The Lord takes up that prompting of affection for his Master, separates it from the mixture of self-sufficiency that had spoiled it, and now gratifies the affection itself. Peter had lost the opportunity of manifesting his love just now; but he shall have it nevertheless, and it shall be patent to every eye at last as surely as omniscience could read it in him now. Blessed Lord! He knows how to take forth the precious from the vile, and will lose not even the fragments that remain of what is true and of Himself, out of the shipwreck which may seem to have shattered hopelessly all we had. May these last words linger in our ears to whom as much as to this beloved disciple He says, "Follow Me." Yea, Lord, we follow: who would not follow? "Draw us; we will run after Thee," sustained by that grace, as sufficient for us as for Simon Peter. The path will soon end in glory,—with *Himself*.
