Fire

OR

FROM

LONELINESS

TO RELATIONSHIP

FIRE

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From Loneliness to Relationship

A BOOK FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS

BY

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CHAPTER I

THE LAND OF LONELINESS

"And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden."—GEN. iii. 8.

LAST time we met together we were talking over the wonders that the Light had done for us, and of all the marvels that it had shown to us, and we listened while its voice cried to us of the great Creator God; but now we are going to talk over a subject more serious, and perhaps more solemn even than that—a subject about which it is very difficult to speak in simple words; so difficult that although this very title came into my mind as I closed our talkings on Light twelve years ago, I have been unable to take it up until now. I had to own to God that I knew nothing about it myself, and how then could I possibly talk about it to others? We cannot teach others what we do not really know ourselves. Many years ago I remember overhearing my parents

talking together, and my father said to my mother, "This governess will not do for us. I was listening to the lessons the other day, and I found that she merely sets the children their lessons out of books; she explains nothing to them; she has not properly mastered the subjects herself, so that she cannot impart them to others." So, for all these years, I have had to go to God's school, that I might be able to tell you simply, and by experience, about "The Fire," and of what has been done for us through it.

Not long ago a lady said to me, "What is Eastbourne like?" "I cannot tell you much about it," I replied, "for I have never been there. I have heard it described as a very pretty place, but that is all I know about it." But how differently I answered when asked about Scarborough! "Yes," I said, "I know Scarborough; I have been there myself." I could speak with authority, because I knew the place myself. And if I had not been in the Land of Loneliness, and had not myself trodden the way of escape from it, how could I hope to describe it to you? And if I

had not tasted in spirit something of the joys of "Relationship," how could I tell you about them?

God's school is called the "School of Experience." All His real children have to go to that school. He teaches them there what they could never acquire out of books, and He chastens them there, that they may learn their lessons thoroughly, and so be fitted to represent Christ in His absence, and to serve Him both here and hereafter.

But now let us begin this wonderful subject. Do you remember when we were talking about the sunlight I asked you to put your hand into the golden beam that was streaming in at the window from the far West? And you not only saw the light, but you felt "a glow of heat." Now it is about this "glow of heat" that we are going to talk this time. The Light affects one set of nerves in your body, and you see objects outside of you; the heat appeals to another set of nerves, and you feel something within you, that is "a glow of heat." It is just so with the things of God. The Light of God—moral light—shows you

objects outside of yourself. People say "seeing is believing," so when the Light of God streams upon a truth, the soul sees it, and there is faith. Your soul sees objects, and so these are called "objective" truths. But when the Holy Spirit of God comes to dwell within your body, He sheds abroad the love of God in your heart, and this is like the "glow of heat" that you felt from the warmth of the great furnace ninety-one millions of miles away from you. It is something within you. You are subject to the heat, so these are called "subjective" truths, because you are subject to them; you are the subject which they affect.

Now I do hope that I have made this plain to you, for when once you understand what these words mean, you will find it a great help to you. The truth that shows you the Lord Jesus as a living Saviour in heaven is objective truth; you see Him by faith, it is Light to your soul. The warm glow of love in your heart, and all that the Holy Spirit does for you, is subjective truth. You are acted upon by Another.

I have been praying that I may be able to make difficult things plain to you, but remember no words of mine will ever be able to explain the things of God to you. No; there is only one way by which these things can really be understood, and that is by the Holy Spirit. Your natural mind *cannot* understand the things of God; no effort of your own brain, no deep thinking, can ever unravel the mysteries of God. This is one of the mistakes Christian people have often made—they have forgotten one very solemn verse that God sent, by the Apostle Paul, in a letter to the Corinthian Church. He said, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. ii. 14). This means that not only must there be the moral Light that shows up the things of God, but also "the glow of heat" which is felt within. If you want to get any real help or cheer out of our little talkings together this time, lift up your cry to God, as you open chapter after chapter, that He will make

what is according to His mind plain to you by His Holy Spirit.

Perhaps some of you are thinking, "Light" is beautiful, but "Fire" seems such a dreadful subject that we almost shrink from looking into it. It may seem so at first, but no soul could ever live to God but through that which His "Fire" has done for it. Do not judge hastily, but let us see what we can learn about it. All God's illustrations are perfect, and if He pleases to use the natural fire as an illustration, we may be quite sure that it is a perfect picture of something which He has to teach us.

I was sitting one evening in a drawing-room, where a number of people were met together to read the Word of God. A gentleman read the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and when he came to those words, "Our God is a consuming fire," he paused for several seconds, and then added very solemnly, "And we would not have it otherwise." Could you say that? Perhaps not, but let us hope that when we have finished our Talkings on

Fire, you will be able to do so, and that your soul will have passed from the sorrows of Loneliness to the joys of Relationship.

And now it is time for us to look round upon the Land of Loneliness. It is a desolate land, a land of perpetual solitude and of fearful gloom. It is not to be found upon this upper earth, nor under the light of our golden sun; but it is an inner land, and as I tell you about it, I trust you will each of you find out whether you are living there now or not. Many people are living there who have hardly found it out. It is not a happy place, and people try to forget it. It is not exactly like the Land of Darkness, about which we talked last time, because we could all go there together, and grope about in its gloom in company; but in this Land of Loneliness we each one of us live alone, and nobody can get to us. You do not like being much alone, do you? Nobody does. If you watch animals, you will see that even they always like to be together. Sheep always keep together; if there are two cows in a meadow, they will graze and lie down

near each other, and birds fly together. But are you puzzled how you can be living in the Land of Loneliness and yet have fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and friends all around you? It is your soul that lives in solitude; your body does not live there. Fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters cannot get in to where your soul is. Shall I tell you how I first found out that I was in the Land of Loneliness?

The calm, peaceful light of a summer's evening was fading gradually out of my nursery bedroom. I was lying in a snug little bed in the corner of the room, and through the uncurtained window I was watching the tops of some old fir trees which were waving their dark foliage athwart the pale, clear sky. I was a very little child, but I have never forgotten that moment. Suddenly I felt that I was alone. It was not that my nurse and my brothers were not near me; it was a feeling of awe, a consciousness that there was something about me and beyond me which I did not understand. I think now that on that quiet summer's evening a loving Hand had touched

my soul where it was, shut in in loneliness, and it had been awakened to feel its condition. *Alone.* Fast streamed my tears as I buried my face in the bed-clothes to stifle my sobs. I knew no fear of loneliness on earth, but this secret awe, this strange, secret sense of unseen realities around me was terrible to my soul. A year or two passed, and again it was a summer's evening. The shadows of the great trees that surrounded my home lay long upon the pleasant lawn, while the murmur of the flowing river fell softly on the ear. The sun was setting in a cloudless sky, and all was lovely and peaceful, when suddenly the roll of distant thunder shook the closing day. I ceased my play, the merry shouts of my brothers died upon my ear, and over my soul again swept the never-to-be-forgotten sense of its utter loneliness, shut in in the darkness, far off from everybody. "There is something vast and wonderful which I do not understand," I said to myself. "Nobody knows what I think, or what I feel, or what I dread. I cannot tell anybody; I cannot describe it. Oh, where am I, and what am I,

and where am I going?" I was in the Land of Loneliness; I had been born there, but I had only found it out as I lay in my little bed in my nursery bedroom, and as I grew older the sense of it grew stronger, and the dread of my soul deepened.

What I want to try and explain to you is, that our souls are each of them shut in away from each other. I cannot tell what you are thinking about, or what you are planning. Your soul uses your mind, and is incessantly talking over things about which I know nothing. It can hide its fears or its joys, its hatred or its love; it is alone, and so is mine. You may have fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters on the upper earth, to whom you are linked by the ties of nature, but they cannot reach your soul, nor can you reach theirs. When we want to communicate with one another, we have to use our bodies to make our communications known. The tongue can tell of love, the arms can cling round a mother's neck, the eyes can shed tears of sympathy; but the lonely soul is wrapped in solitude,

and no one on earth can reach it, no one can help it, no one can dwell with it, no one can assuage its fear as it cries, "Where am I? What am I? Where am I going?" Oh, it is a lonely dwelling, and as I tell you about it, I trust you too will feel how sad and terrible a place it is!

How did we get there? We were each of us born there. Just as English people are born in England, and French people are born in France, so we each of us are born into the Land of Loneliness. Our fathers and mothers belonged to that land, and their fathers and mothers belonged to it also. Every one in the world, by nature, belongs to it, and the strangeness of it is, that though there are so many millions of people living on the earth, each soul is a solitary soul; no one knows it thoroughly—it is hidden in its lonely cell.

When God created Adam and Eve, their souls were not in that lonely land; they knew no dreadful darkness, no fearful secret awe; but on that sad day when Eve listened to the tempter's voice and sinned, she plunged her soul into that

dreary land, and Adam, thinking to be with her there, sinned also, and his soul was in a moment in the Land of Loneliness, apart from God, and apart from the wife he loved. How do we know it? Because as soon as they heard the voice of God they hid themselves away from God, —they were afraid of Him; and when He found them behind the trees of the garden, Adam laid the blame of his sin on Eve. He thought, you see, that he could screen himself. He had become *selfish*. True love had died out of his soul; it was alone, shut in to itself, and Eve was shut in to herself. Each of them loved Self better than each other.

At that awful moment something most terrible took place, which I will try and explain to you. Do you know what a shrine is? It is the inner part of a temple. It is the secret place where the inner worship is carried on. In heathen temples the figure of the god is set up there, and it is there that the priests worship him. Now, when Adam and Eve had fallen into the Land of Loneliness, Satan, who had tempted

them to distrust their Creator's goodness, and disobey Him, and who had displaced God from their hearts, set up an idol in the secret shrine of each heart. That great idol's name is Self. Adam loved him*self* more than Eve. Eve loved her*self* more than Adam. Yes, in the Land of Loneliness each dweller worships in solitude in a secret shrine, and the idol that he adores is Self.

Now, come! let us see if we each one of us have not been at our worship there this very day? Of course we do it in secret, because our souls are each of them quite alone. We often try to hide that secret worship even from our own thoughts. It makes us wretched, and yet we are always at it, for that dreadful idol is never satisfied. Morning, noon, and night he is ever demanding our worship, and terrible are the sacrifices that sometimes burn upon his secret altars. Let me explain it. Whom did you please when the knock came at your door to get up this morning? Did it please Self to get up, or did it please Self to lie still and be late? Whom did you please when you pushed through the crowd at the station door

and got nearly first on to the platform, and quite first into the carriage? Whom did you worship when you slipped into the corner seat on the shady side?

Let us go a little deeper. For whose pleasure are you dressing yourself? Is it not for Self? or perhaps you say, my father or my husband loves to see me look well. Who is it likes their admiration? Is it not Self? For whom are you making those deep, well-considered plans for advancement in life? For whom are you plodding so steadily through your daily labour or your office routine? Is it not for Self? No; perhaps you say, "My widowed mother, my helpless sisters are dependent upon me." Do they not love you for it? Do they not make much of such a beautiful Self as yours? Do you not admire your*self*, and please him by making every exertion in your power to keep up his noble reputation? Sift it to the bottom; you will find you pleased Self. You did it for Self. Who is pleased when the family is turned out neat and tidy? Who is pleased when the children are

made happy, or the wife is the best dressed woman in the neighbourhood? Sift it as you will, you will find the great idol sits in his shrine, and demands your worship hour by hour and day by day and year by year.

It is quite true that there is a beautiful Self and an ugly Self in the eyes of men. Some people's idols are very beautiful to look at, and some are very hideous. The young ruler who came running to the Lord Jesus when He was on earth, and wished to know what he must do to escape death and live for ever, had a very beautiful idol. He had been a good son and a good neighbour, as he thought; but the Lord Jesus just opened the shrine of his heart, and showed him that the Self he thought so good was really set on gold, and not on his God or his neighbour.

I once stood on a hill-top on a beautiful moor. Around me to right and left rolled the wild, free hills, and below through the valley meandered a shining river. It was a spot so chosen that both the rising and the setting sun could be

seen from it, and there long years ago the Druids had practised the awful rites of their heathen worship. On that pleasant greensward had been found the strangely marked stones that had formed the altars on which they had offered their human sacrifices, and my ear seemed almost to catch from afar the shrieks of their victims, while quietly down into the far west, amidst battlements of glory-tipped clouds, rolled the same glowing sun, whose fiery disc had commanded the worship of their darkened minds. And what did I think as I stood there? I thought that worse things go on now in the secret Land of Loneliness, for human sacrifices are ever burning on the altars before the idol, Self. The miserable victims are perishing there day by day, but the great idol *must* be worshipped, and we pass on and try to forget it.

Do you wonder what I mean? Come into this cottage; it is clean and tidy, but the little furniture that remains is very worn and old, and there, standing at the wash-tub, and the ironing-board, day by day, is the thin, wasted

figure of a woman. She is weak and ill, but there is no rest for her. On a secret shrine in the Land of Loneliness her husband is sacrificing her, day by day and night by night. He must please Self, and Self demands of him drink and gay company, and so he goes on week by week and month by month, and the weary wife toils to keep the roof over their heads and bread in the cupboard. It is cruel work. It is a slow fire, but one day it will be over, and the sacrifice will be complete. Is that man happy while he worships Self? No; he is wretched. Sometimes he struggles desperately to get the idol down and be a free man, but he cannot. For a little while Self is pleased to let him fancy he is a free man, and a better man, and suddenly cries out again for the drink, and down he goes before him, and sacrifices to him his nearest and his dearest. What bondage! you say. Ah! it is bondage. No poor slave under the lash of the taskmaster groans more bitterly than some of the poor dwellers in the Land of Loneliness.

But do not think that it is only in the cottages of the poor that these sacrifices are made. Come with me to this ancient mansion, and see it as I saw it many years ago. The gates are dilapidated, the carriage drive overgrown with weeds, the shrubberies a tangled wilderness; inside the house the dust is lying thickly on the faded furniture, and each room seems full of a dank and heavy atmosphere. Down from the walls in the arched-roof dining-hall look the portraits of bygone generations, and as I gaze at them, strange tales of the past are told me by my guide. Here is a sliding panel, and a secret stairway in the wall to the rooms above; there, a cellar or a dungeon door bricked up because of strange sounds that are said to issue from its narrow portal. A desolate old place it is, and why? Because the last baronet, whose handsome face is still portrayed upon those walls, had sacrificed a defenceless relative on the altar in the Land of Loneliness, and he had sunk lower and lower from sin to sin, till he had died, leaving behind him a dishonoured name.

Can children offer these sacrifices? Yes. I know a boy who is even now just beginning the cruel work; he is sacrificing his widowed mother to Self, and how many a daughter has sacrificed a loving father there! and oh, alas! alas! how many a father has laid his children one by one upon the altar of that dreadful Moloch!

I remember once a gentleman, who thought a great deal, and read a great many books of this world's wisdom, turned to me and said, "I have come to this conclusion, that if you go down to the root of things, you will find that Self is at the bottom of everything we do. Take natural affection, which is beautiful in itself, or whatever you will, you will find that the gratification of Self is at the bottom of it all with us." He was quite right, and it is the presence of this great idol that makes the Land of Loneliness. Yet there are some people who are trying hard to be happy there, and profess to find Self a wonderful and beautiful idol to worship. Only the other day I met a young man who owned

quite frankly not only that he worshipped Self, but that he believed in Self, and that his Self knew better than God. Of course he put the Bible quite on one side, because his Self did not like the book; but he did not know that all the while he was proving its truth, for he was showing quite plainly that he had fallen a victim to the very same lie that Eve had believed when she first thought for her*self* and acted for her*self*. He was doubting that God—his Creator—had spoken, and making his own reason the judge of his Creator. I asked him if his reason could raise him above him*self*, and he frankly answered, "No." I asked him what his reason had given him. If he had anything firm and sure to build upon? He answered, "Nothing." No; alas! alas! Self reigns in the heart of fallen man and rules the mind, and blinds the soul, and leads it in its utter darkness and loneliness to deny the very fall of which it is the victim.

Do you know what a centre is? It is a point in the middle of anything. You can make a magnet a centre, and all the needles you scat-

ter round it will fly to that centre. Self is an internal centre; all your thoughts, your wishes, your hopes, your fears centre round Self, and this draws you away from God, and from other people too. This internal centre for the soul makes the Land of Loneliness. An external Centre only can draw us all together, for as the needles spring to the magnet they get nearer to each other. Oh! that your soul may find an external Centre as we take our long journey together!

But do you know what surrounds the Land of Loneliness? A vast and fathomless sea. Hush! Did you not hear the church bell toll? Did you not see a hearse pass slowly along with something lying there upon it, something smothered up in beautiful flowers? What was it? You know it was a coffin holding a human body, that could no longer think, or speak, or act. The great tide wave of Death had swept away a human soul. Where?

Our souls, when in the Land of Loneliness, are dwelling, as it were, on an island of clay, from

which they see no escape, for the great sea of Death is round us on every side. Alone—alone we dwell, and round each one of us moans the ever-advancing tide, and very suddenly sometimes that great tide-wave sweeps away its victims.

The other day I was standing upon a magnificent ledge of rock which runs out for half a mile or so into the sea at a place on our eastern coast. At low tide it forms a sort of natural pier, where you can walk in safety, but at high tide the waters ramp and rave over its rocky barrier, and throw their spray-jets high into the air. As I stood there I listened to a sad tale of the past. About twenty years before a lady and a gentleman had walked on to those rocks just as I was doing that day. It was nearly low tide, and they wanted to see the ocean rollers come bounding in on to the jagged rocks, and to listen to the thunder of their voices as they swept into the caverned cliffs and rolled back baffled into the deep. They had stood far above the waters, at a spot seldom covered even at high tide, but suddenly—oh, so suddenly!—a monster tide-wave, which ever and

anon sweeps those treacherous rocks, came rushing in from the ocean depths, and flinging itself upon the rocky rampart, swept away in one second those helpless beings. There was no time even for a cry—they were gone, they had passed from human sight for ever, until that day when the sea shall give up the dead that are in it. So suddenly does the tide-wave of Death sometimes rise on the unwary dweller in the Land of Loneliness.

"The wages of sin is Death," and there is no escape. Sooner or later it advances upon each soul who dwells in solitude. People are afraid even to hear about death. They do not like to see funerals go by; for with all our reasonings, and all our wisdom, and all our plannings, we cannot find any way by which we can shut out death. On and on comes the mighty tide-wave, and sooner or later we know that each little island of clay must be submerged.

I once met in a London drawing-room two ladies who had everything that this world could give them to make them happy. The conversa-

tion passed from various general topics to the real things of which the Bible speaks, and I remarked on the fact there revealed that man is fallen, that his heart is all evil by nature, and that God, because He is righteous, must judge sin. To this one of the ladies would not assent. She said, we must each do our best and live rightly, and God, being all love and all mercy, would not punish sins. She did not know that Self, however lovely an idol he might be, was even then taking God's place in her heart, and refusing to bow to what God has said about him, —"born in sin, and shapen in iniquity." I tried in vain to show her this, and then I asked her one question—"How then," said I, "do you account for death? You cannot reason away the fact that death is here." I knew that a few years before death had swept away her only daughter, a young girl in all the pride of her youth and beauty, and just upon the eve of her marriage. She was silent for a moment, and then added very seriously, "I cannot account for it. I am at a loss to explain it."

God says, "The wages of sin is death." Some say it is the result of natural decay. But why then do the young die? No; death is here, and reason cannot explain it. And not only the death-tide which is rising round each of us every day, but death is in us, the moral death which fell on us all through Adam's sin. Are you puzzled when I say moral death? Well, that young man, as he talked to me of what Self reasoned, and Self doubted, and Self believed, showed that moral death was upon him. His soul had no link with God whatever.

Have you ever seen a person die? If not, you can hardly have a sense of what a solemn and dreadful thing death really is. Not long ago I stood by a bed of death. The last of my father's family circle of his own generation lay dying before me. She was very aged, and her summons had come very suddenly. There were but a few hours of failing strength and gasping breath, and all was still. The soul had passed from the body. "She is gone," we said, as we looked at her ashen face. The light of the spring

morning was flooding over house and garden, and stealing through the closed blinds into the chamber where death was. There lay the loved form, but those closed eyes saw not the light. A chorus of exquisite music was bursting from the feathered songsters in the trees around, but those closed ears heard it not. We spoke to one another in low voices, but those lips that had spoken so many loving words were silent. That heart that had felt so keenly for every sorrow, and had throbbed so warmly in loving sympathy for us, was cold and still. "It is all over," we said, as we turned sadly away. "She is *dead*." Could she hear us? No. Could she see us? No. Did the links of relationship last? No. *Death* was there, and that poor body which had linked her with us must be buried out of our sight, for corruption was there also.

So when Eve fell there was death—not only the waters of death rolling round her because she had sinned, but moral death too. Her lonely spirit had lost all love for God, and all link between the creature and the Creator was at an end. She fled

to hide herself from eyes she dreaded. A void that she could not pass over lay between her soul and God. So the eyes of fallen man are closed—he cannot see God; his ears are stopped—he cannot hear God; his lips are closed—he cannot speak to God; his heart is cold—he has no love for God.

"And Adam and his wife *hid themselves*." Corruption was there. We bury our dead out of sight, because they are no longer fit to be with us, and Adam and Eve tried to bury themselves out of God's sight, for their consciences told them that they were no longer fit to be near Him. Dead bodies cannot see us; dead souls cannot see God or the things of God; dead hearts cannot love us; dead souls cannot love God. This is what is meant by "moral death." It is distance from God—a lower sphere into which the soul has fallen apart from God. Thus by the sad, dark door of sin Adam and Eve entered the Land of Loneliness, and we are each of us born into it, "born in sin and shapen in iniquity"; "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind"

(Eph. ii. 3). That is worshipping Self in the shrine of our hearts; drawn to an internal centre.

But I must tell you before I close that Adam and Eve brought one useful thing with them out of Paradise, and that was conscience. Conscience is the judge in us of right and wrong, and it is the one point where God can touch the fallen soul. It was conscience which put them behind the trees of the garden; they felt themselves unfit for God. It is conscience which makes you feel that you would fain keep out of His sight; which tells you of your condition, and urges you to flee from God.

It makes you cry, "Where am I? What am I? Where am I going?"

"Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" (Ps. cxxxix. 7).

CHAPTER II

THE FLAMING SWORD

"So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the Tree of Life."—GEN. iii. 24.

A LITTLE girl once sat beside her governess deeply pondering a knotty point. It was not how to do her sums, or parse her sentences, or repeat her lessons; it was a far more important question that filled her mind. She had just read about the flaming sword that kept Adam from getting back to the Tree of Life, and she was pondering what she would have done had she been there. Young as she was, she had found out that her soul was in the Land of Loneliness, and she knew well that the sea of Death was rising round her. She feared death intensely. If only old people had died, that would not have troubled her, but she knew well that there were many little graves in the church-

yard, and her soul was terrified within her at the thought of death. Her governess knew nothing of what was going on within her; the solitary soul hid its fear, but it worshipped Self, and Self was rebellious against the thought of death. "If I had been there," she said within her, "I know *I* would have found some way back to the Tree of Life. I would have made a tunnel under the ground, where the flaming sword could not have reached me, or I would have gone a long, long way round, and have crept in where no eye could have seen me." Ah! she did not understand that the Fire lay between sin and a Holy God; that the Flaming Sword turned every way, to keep the way of the Tree of Life; that God must judge sin because of what He is, and that the poor sinful creature, man, could not come near Him because of the Fire. Have you ever thought about it? Have you ever considered when you talk about going to heaven after death that "our God is a consuming fire"? If you are afraid of Him now, what will you be then? Oh, but you say, "God is love." That is true, but

if He is love He is also holy, and because He is holy He is righteous, and because He is righteous sin must be judged, and His wrath must flash out into judgment to destroy evil. Sin brings misery. A child is always unhappy when it is naughty. It is not because it fears punishment only—it is because its conscience makes it wretched. It is gratifying Self, and Self is never satisfied. It is impossible that a Being whose very nature is Love can endure sin—sin, which is the root of all misery. Besides which no throne can stand but through righteousness, and righteousness must bring judgment upon evil; so God's throne is always represented as guarded by fire—fire through which sin cannot pass; fire which flashes out upon sin.

Do you wonder why God represents His judgment by the picture of fire? It is, I think, because fire as we know it can destroy our bodies and almost everything that we use. But, on the other hand, fire is the outcome of heat, and we could not exist on this earth without heat. You may have a piece of metal very hot indeed, and there

will be no flame; but if you put oil or paper or wood near it, it will burst into flame, because the material exposed to the heat cannot stand the fire. So we shall see that though God is love, and His holy love is very warm indeed, it was when sin came in that the Flaming Sword was seen.

I remember well when I first learnt that there was heat in everything on the earth, and that nothing could exist as we see it but for this all-pervading heat. I will tell you how it was. The curtains were drawn closely over the large bow windows of our schoolroom, the candles were lighted on the table, and the firelight threw flickering shadows on the walls of the room. "There is fire in everything," said my governess. "Fire in everything!" I cried with alarm. "There cannot be fire in stones?" "Can't there!" she replied. "If you get two flint stones to-morrow when we are out walking, and go into a dark place and strike them together, you will soon see that there is fire in stones." The morrow came, and I quickly found the two flint stones, and as soon as the short winter's afternoon had

closed in and the curtains were drawn again over the windows, my brothers and I crept in behind them and struck our stones together. I well remember how the sparks flashed out, and how delighted we were, and how hot the stones became; yet a certain dread filled my mind as I pondered how near, how very near the fire we all were. But if my governess had gone on to say that there was heat in the crystal ice which covered the mere where we skated, I am afraid my belief in her would have vanished altogether. Heat in ice! you say. Yes, there is heat in ice. And if it were not for heat, the air you breathe would become a liquid of a pale blue colour. You must ask the learned professors about these things. I only want you to know that heat is as necessary to our existence as Light, and that Fire is a perfect picture of the jealousy of God's love, meeting sin like a "vehement flame" (Cant. viii. 6).

Now there comes sooner or later what I will call a terrible thunderstorm, which sweeps over the Land of Loneliness. You all know what a thunderstorm is. Some people are terrified be-

yond measure when they see dark clouds rolling across the sky, and when the lightning glitters and the thunder rolls, they will close their shutters, and even hide in dark cellars, that they may not see the fiery flash or hear so much of the tempest. The voice of the storm that rages over the soul that has found out that it is in the Land of Loneliness cries, "After death the judgment." The solitary soul might brace itself up to meet the rising tide of Death, were it not for the terrible consciousness that behind the advancing waters lies the Flaming Sword ready to execute God's judgment upon sin. "If I could but hide myself from God," cries the soul, "how glad I should be!" But it cannot, and Self trembles in his secret shrine, and the soul moans sadly in its solitude, "Where, oh where am I going?"

I read once of a strange and fearful sight that a sea-captain saw when sailing his vessel in the Archipelago. All was as usual on the wave and in the sky, when suddenly from out of the sea, at some distance from his ship, a column of mingled smoke and steam rushed up into the air. Around it the

waters boiled and raged, and presently a mighty flame rose up upon the smoke, while a dull roar like that of subterranean thunders shook his vessel, and filled his heart with fear. It was plain that under those waters fire was at work. Some volcano had poured out its lava into the sea, and for a moment showed itself above the seething waters. And even so there is fire behind the rising waters of death that surround you.

People laugh now about the Flaming Sword, and say it is all a fable; but no amount of laughing, or of serious reasoning either, can alter the fact that sin brings endless misery in its train, and that Self, set up as a centre within, causes isolation to the soul, and renders it wretched and unsatisfied. It is true God is love, but how can a God of love tolerate the wretchedness and the defilement of the object of His love? He must be righteous too, or He were not holy, and so you must own that when righteousness meets sin, judgment must follow, as surely as that natural heat when it is great, and finds that which cannot abide the fire, must produce flame. "The soul

that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. xviii. 4), and "after this the judgment" (Heb. ix. 27).

That little girl who thought in her pride that she would not have stayed out of Eden as Adam had done was just a specimen of us all who, in our blindness and folly, do not understand that sin and holiness can never dwell together, and that a sinful creature cannot abide the presence of a holy Creator.

Not many years ago there was an island in the Indian Ocean which had thousands of people living upon it. Over it shone the sun by day, and the moon and stars by night; round it rolled the water of the sea, and across its mountain heights and its groves of waving palm trees swept the fresh sea-breezes; but now no one can find that island. Waters roll where once it stood, waters that tell no tale of the awful catastrophe that once they witnessed. None lived to tell of the moment when the fierce volcanic fires burst forth upon the dwellers there, but vessels sailing many miles away were shaken by the terrific roar, the sky was darkened, the firmament shook, and

never more has human eye beheld that island with its woods and hills. A gentleman who was living in Ceylon at the time, which was more than a thousand miles away from it, told me that he had distinctly heard the roar of the terrible explosion, when the water and the fire met and destroyed that sunny land.

Oh! pause not, soul, if yet unawakened in the Land of Loneliness. Pause not, for while the Love of God broods over a fallen world the Fire is around you, above you, beneath you, and any moment you may be called upon to face judgment to come. Do you fear it? Has the sense of unfitness for God been awakened within you? Do you hear the Voice of the storm crying, "After death the judgment"? Oh, blessed moment! From behind the Flaming Sword a hand has reached your soul, and has touched it, and that first awakening touch is that which is called in the Bible "The New Birth."

It is when God touches the soul where it is, in sovereign grace, and it wakes up, as it were, able to be reached by His voice. I once thought

that the New Birth meant much more than this, and I will tell you how I was undeceived. Years ago, when I was first thinking over this wonderful subject, I asked a friend, who knew better than I did, if I could use the birth of an infant into a family as a picture of the New Birth? He replied by asking me a question: "When you were born into this world, had you a body suited to the life you would have to live here?" "Yes," I replied. "But when you were born again, had you a body suited to the new life which you are intended to live?" he asked. Of course I could only answer "No," for I knew only too well that my poor mortal body was the greatest hindrance possible to living that life.

So you see there is no new body when the soul in its Land of Loneliness is born again, but it wakes up to a keen sense of its loneliness, its lost condition, and its fear of judgment to come just where it is. It is capable of hearing God's voice and of believing it. No soul, in moral death, from Adam downwards, could have been reached, but through this sovereign touch from

the hand of the God of love. How He could draw near to a sinful person to do it and not at once destroy him we shall see as we go on.

Do you know what a penal settlement is? It is an island which is made into a vast prison. The waters that surround it shut in the convicts, and there they have to live and work under the governor's eye, afar from their native land. If they attempt to escape they are shot down; death is around them, and their doom hangs over them. When the soul hears the voice of the storm, crying, "After death the judgment," it makes a terrible discovery; it finds that the Land of Loneliness, instead of being a place where it can hide itself from God, is really a penal settlement, and that judgment is hanging over it, from which it is impossible to escape. "I seemed," said a gentleman to me one day, "to be hanging over the flames of hell."

Picture to yourself some red-handed murderer who dreams that he is in safe hiding from the judge's eye, who wakes up with a start to find himself really lying in the condemned cell, with

the warders beside him, and the gallows before him! There is no escape—none. Death and doom are his. So wakes up the soul to know that death and doom are before it, and it sees no way of escape.

I heard of a young man the other day who was so startled at the discovery of his sinfulness that he could not hide his terror from those about him on the upper earth. His body told out the tale of his soul's distress. He could not rest; he grew thin and ill, and wasted away. "He is gone mad," said his relatives; "he is no worse than other people. Why does he talk about judgment to come?" They were like the convict in his prison, asleep still in their cells, dreaming that they were hidden from the judge's eye. The young man had been awakened—that was the difference. Have you been awakened? If so, I know the first thought of your frightened soul is, "I must try and alter my ways, and improve my*self*." Why do you want to improve Self? "To please God," you answer. "And why do you want to please God?" "To save my*self*

from judgment." Ah, there it is! Self is still your object, your centre, and sits in the shrine of your heart. You would fain propitiate God, so as to save your idol from the doom of sin.

You see we are talking this time, not about sins that have been done, but about what we are by nature. And we are, I hope, beginning to see that our idol Self has the place in our hearts which is God's due. Do not be afraid to face it, however gloomy it may look; it is better to face the truth at once than to run away and hide your head in the sand like the poor hunted ostrich. Self being our object instead of God is sin, and our idol being independent and wilful wants to rule us, and does rule us, and so we live for our*selves* instead of for God who created us.

Oh, terrible state! Oh, terrible dwelling-place! Land of Loneliness, Land of moral death, girdled by physical death — well may the human soul quail as it wakes up to find that thou art its gloomy abode! Oh, soul in that dreary abode, far off from God and from life, is there no way

back for thee to the Tree of Life where it blooms in its beauty in the paradise of God? Is there no way save through the waters of advancing death? Is there no path save through the scorching breath of the flaming sword? There is *none*. Can death beget life? Can corruption produce purity? Can darkness create light? Ask of the cherubim who in silent majesty guard that closed gate. Ask of the Flaming Sword as it circles the Tree of Life, each flaming flash proclaiming that the fire-encircled "I Am" must judge evil—must destroy all taint of sin! Away, away, fallen creature, from that closed gate! away with your theories and your wisdom! Can you pass through the fire, and exist? Can you combat the dark waters of death? Away in your impotence and your sin; your hope lies in your fear, not in your false confidence. God is God, ramp and rage as you will; and Fire is Fire, laugh at and deride it as you will; and death is death, and sweeps on unhindered by your devices, choking in your very lips the words with which you question the acts of your Creator.

Help must come, if come it can, from without your gloomy land altogether. It must come from behind that wheeling sword, from beyond those ever-advancing tides; it must come forth to find you where you are by nature "dead in trespasses and sins," wailing through the darkness, "What am I? Where am I? Where am I going?"

"Clouds and darkness are round about Him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne. A fire goeth before Him, and burneth up His enemies round about" (Ps. xcvii. 2, 3).

CHAPTER III

A SMOKING FURNACE AND A BURNING LAMP

"And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces."—GEN. xv. 17.

NOW to-night comes the great question: If God and sin cannot meet, how is the soul, worshipping sinful Self, in the Land of Loneliness under death and fit for judgment, to be saved from its sinful Self, and be drawn to an external Centre near which its sin cannot come? How is the rescue to be effected? How is the way to be made for the sinful souls of men in the Land of Loneliness into the joys of Relationship? It is plain that God only can answer that question. He must draw near to His sinful creature in grace. But how? His righteousness demands judgment on sins, and the fire of judgment must light on sin. How can God draw near to save sinners? God is Light, but light

can only expose sin, and reveal His spotless holiness. But our God is also a "consuming fire." And the Fire can do what the Light cannot do.

What a strange and wonderful scene is before us to-night! There stands a man alone upon that great plain of Mamre, a man whose soul is dwelling in the Land of Loneliness, and yet a Voice is reaching him from another sphere. It comes from behind the flashes of the Flaming Sword, telling him of nothing but blessing. It is night; around him lies the vast plain, above him glitters all the jewelled panoply of the eastern heavens. "Fear not, Abram," cries the Voice; "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." Then follow promises rich and rare—given to him, an old and childless man—promises of earthly inheritance; and he is told that as the countless stars that glitter in those heavens above his head "so shall his seed be"; and more, in his seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Does he believe it? Yes; the Word works faith in that soul, the Light of God gleams in upon its darkness. He believes the promises, and from

that precious heaven-sent seed the Tree of Promise takes root upon the earth.

But do you ask, How could a holy God bless a sinful creature dwelling in the Land of Loneliness? Abram cried, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" God will show him in figure how He can draw near to ratify His promise; and that He has found a way by which His Fire and His Light can come in to comfort and to help, and not to destroy a fallen race, and to maintain God's right to bless man as He will and when He will.

He will come forth as Fire and Light! Strange and wonderful scene! As the next day wears to its close, that God-directed man passes out on to the broad plain of Mamre with a heifer, a goat, a ram, and two birds that flutter in his hands. In that vast solitude he slays the beasts and the birds, —and as the shadows of evening gather round him, he stands there alone with death. The earth at his feet is dyed with blood, and before him, in awful array, lie the cloven carcases of the slain beasts. Afar off the heifer, "cloven in

twain," the one half on the one side, the other half on the other side; then the goat, "cloven in twain," the one half on one side, the other half on the other side; then the ram, "cloven in twain," the one half on the one side, the other half on the other side; then at his feet a bird stiff in death on the one side, and another bird stiff in death on the other side. It is a ghastly, blood-stained avenue. As the sun sinks low in the glowing west, the scent of blood rises on the evening breeze, and the whirr of eager wings is heard, as the carrion birds of the desert gather to the scene of death. Shall they touch those silent witnesses to the mastery of death? Never! the lonely watcher drives them away—no beak or claw of theirs must feed upon or tear those sacred cloven sacrifices. Suddenly the sun's fiery disc dips in the far horizon, and a strange, deep sleep masters the lonely watcher, and even as the rapid darkness of an eastern night sweeps up over the valleys, the plains, the mountain heights of the outer earth, so does a horror of a yet deeper darkness fall upon that soul in its inner Land of

Loneliness. "A horror of a great darkness fell upon him." Surely it is the darkness of its distance from God—a darkness that might be felt, a sense of the sin of its nature in its far-off land, growing stronger every second as the great and holy God draws near—draws near to show him in figure how He can come forth from behind the Flaming Sword of judgment, through the deep waters of Death, in Fire and Light, to fulfil His promises of blessing. And then the soul of the prostrate patriarch beholds a strange procession sweeping silently and solemnly through that avenue of death. "Behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces."

God was coming into the Land of Loneliness by Fire and Light; He was coming in to ratify His promise of an earthly inheritance to Abraham and to his seed by Fire and Light — Fire and Light, that he saw in vision, coming in through death. So, surely, must our souls, if they would enter on the enjoyment of a heavenly inheritance, understand that it is through Fire and Light alone, as they have reached us through

death, that they can be rescued and led forth into the joys of Relationship. "Our God is a consuming fire." Sin must perish at His presence, but through death the smoking furnace has drawn near to purify and not to destroy. "God is Light," and Light must expose the guilty, but through death, the burning Lamp has come in to manifest darkness on the one hand and to reveal God's way of escape on the other hand.

They must come to work out the counsel of God, whether for an earthly or for a heavenly inheritance, on which counsel all His promises are founded. And we shall see that as His Fire and His Light led Abraham's descendants out of Egypt into the earthly land of promise, so His Fire and His Light must conduct our souls out of the Land of Loneliness into the joys of Relationship. "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children"—that is, sonship,—"by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. i. 5).

Now, I am sure you all know what a promise is, and I am afraid some of you know very well

that human promises are often broken. The worth of a promise depends on two things: the faithfulness and the power of the promiser. I once had a promise made me by a person that she would repay me a certain sum of money. I knew her well, and I could trust her; her promise was a good one. But when the time came she had not the power to fulfil it; that promise was broken, not through want of faithfulness, but through want of power. I heard the other day of a man with plenty of money, who had promised to pay what he owed another, and never did. That promise was broken, not through want of power, but through want of faithfulness. Now God's promises cannot be broken, because His faithfulness and His power are both perfect, and His promises are only the outcome in time of His purpose which was fixed in eternity.

The other night, as I was standing at the door of the house in which I was staying, I saw a long straight beam of white light stream across the dark sky above me. It startled me at first, but when I saw that it moved, and

sometimes streamed over the sea and sometimes over the land, then I knew that it was an electric search-light. Sometimes it showed objects before it, sometimes behind it. That is something like the light that is thrown from God's Word; it opens up things in the depths of eternity, and it opens up things in the past and future of time.

When I was a child I was told that no one could understand that word Eternity. I used to sit and think and try to understand it, but of course I never could.

How can we understand just a little of what it means? Let us try. I once climbed up a very lofty mountain in Scotland. We were hours getting to the top, and when we were there, we could see all the country below us for many miles. There was a town called Stirling in the distance, and a line of railway ran from this town for many miles to another town. I could see the train start, and I could see its journey's end all the time. The engine-driver could only see just a short way before him, the passengers could see less. If a bridge had suddenly fallen

which was hidden by a curve from the engine-driver, I could have seen it; and I could have said, "There will be an accident to that train," and it would surely have come to pass.

Now, God is in eternity, and time is like the little railway, with a beginning and with an end. We know nothing of what is coming to pass—God sees it all. He reveals what He pleases by His Word, which comes from Him in eternity. We see by that wonderful light, whose crystal ray bridges all time, that from the height of eternity's great changeless amphitheatre God had foreseen that when the Earth had been created, and Adam and Eve had been placed upon it, the great Enemy would tempt and ruin His feeble creatures. Do not ask me what great contest between good and evil was above and beyond the creation and the fall of that creature Adam. It is well to bow our heads and veil our faces in the presence of things too high for us, and to leave the great issues of that awful question to Him, who alone knows the end from the beginning. But so it was, that God purposed to

bring glory to Himself out of all the ruin that the power and the malice of the Enemy and the feebleness of the creature should make. What! Did He foresee how the one who had set up the idol Self in our hearts was to be destroyed? Yes. Did He foresee how sin was to be dealt with? Yes. Did He determine how a pathway should be made through the death that surrounded the Land of Loneliness? Yes. Did He purpose how the Fire and the Light should get into that dreary land, not to destroy and to convict the dwellers there, but to purify, to comfort, and to lead them out of Loneliness into Relationship? Yes, that was the purpose of the God of Love. Oh, thrice wonderful purpose! Love inaugurated, Light disclosed, Power effected its deep and blessed counsels.

But who would be found to go to the rescue of these helpless beings, saturated with sin, and therefore unable to approach God, unable to stand the fire? Who could be found that would go down from heaven's glorious heights—out of eternity into time—to carry help to those woeful cap-

tives? Who? Who could be found that could become Man, and as Man face the flashes of the fiery sword that shut fallen man out from God, that could pass through its scorching blast unscathed because of righteousness, and open once more to man the closed way to the Tree of Life? Who could be found who could plunge into the fathomless, bridgeless waters of Death that circled the Land of Loneliness, to burst its dark waves asunder, and to tread out a path in righteousness as Man through Death to Life? Who? Did an angel, excellent in beauty, pure as the fire, answer to the summons? He could not. Did an archangel, mighty in power, excelling in wisdom, undertake the commission? He dared not. There was but One who could. There was but One who would, and in the volume of the book of those secret counsels were written these words, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." Who was the I? Who was the Person who dared to face this great stoop out of eternity into time, out of heaven to earth? It was One of the Three Persons of the Godhead. It was the

eternal Son Himself; it was He, because He only could, because He only would. Then God spake to Him, saying, "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee." "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows" (Heb. i. 8, 9).

Did the angels understand it? No, not then, "which things the angels desire to look into." Did the ancient prophets understand it? No. "Unto whom it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you."

For prophets might wonder as they sang their spirit-taught chants of Him "whose name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 6), and angels might long to understand it in vain; all was hidden in a closely-veiled mystery, till man had reached that point in Time, at which God from His lofty eternity was always looking—

Calvary's Cross. Then the Voice of the Lord of Hosts was heard crying, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My fellow." And the Son of God sheathed that Flaming Sword of righteous judgment against our sin in His own sinless breast.

"For when we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died for the ungodly; for scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 6–8). "That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. ii. 14, 15).

I have read a story, a touching story, of the devotion of a young American officer to his country's interests. It was a time of war, and blocking ingress or egress from a port, floated a huge ironclad man-of-war belonging to the enemy. What could be done to relieve the city?

to save its inhabitants from surrender or starvation? The small vessel on which this young officer was serving was quite unable to cope with the mighty foe, or to drive her away. But so it was, that she had on board of her one of the first torpedo-boats that had ever been constructed. This boat was so formed that she could go down under the water out of sight, and be directed to the keel of the enemy's vessel, and then the men in her could explode the deadly torpedo. But what a terrible service it was for any to undertake; for none who entered that boat, and went down in her under the waves, could ever hope to breathe the upper air again. Shattered by her own weapons, she must perish in the struggle, and her brave occupants must lay down their lives in that awful death-grapple with the enemy; they must be willing to perish to win the victory. The captain in command of the steamer could never order a man to go on such service as that, so he called his crew together and asked for volunteers. Would any one be found to face that dreadful death, under the deep waves, to save his

beleaguered friends, to destroy the great enemy which lay between them and liberty and life? There was a pause—but presently out stepped this young officer and said, "I will go." Then a brave seaman came forward too and said, "I also will go." What a day that was upon that vessel! A day never to be forgotten. There was a farewell banquet made for the two heroes, who were to lay down their lives for their friends. The hours passed all too quickly, and as the sun rolled down into the west those devoted men took their last look upon the fading daylight, the heaving waters, their comrades' faces, and hand clasped hand in a last embrace, while hearts swelled with feelings too deep for utterance. As the darkness deepened the steamer moved quietly in nearer and nearer to her mighty foe, who lay on the waters in all the pride of her magnificent strength; and the men who crowded her decks little dreamed that two heroes would be found to go to the death to work out her destruction. The moment came, the steamer lay to, and the torpedo-boat was launched with its living freight. There was a

pause of terrible expectancy, then a mighty shock, a dull roar, shouts of terror, cries for help, and the great vessel sank out of sight amidst the seething waves. The blockade was over. The port was open. Their friends were saved, and all that was needed could be carried to them. Long afterwards divers went down below the waves, and there they found the little torpedo-boat lying beside her mighty foe, with the entombed heroes within her. They had perished in the death-grapple, but they had done their work.

Our hearts thrill as we recount the story of human heroism, but how little have we entered into the wonderful deed that opened for us the way from death to life; the way from Loneliness to Relationship! All human illustrations fail beside it. On the Cross the question of the judgment of sin was settled for God, and then He who hung there went down into the great sea of Death, that surrounds our Land of Loneliness, and He entered into that dark Land, into distance from God, for our sakes. He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou

forsaken Me?" He as the Sin-bearer was utterly alone. We cannot follow Him there, but with awe we can hear His Voice from out of those vast depths crying, "Out of the belly of hell, I cried unto Thee" (Jonah ii. 2). "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts: all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me" (Ps. xlii.).

He was there under the deep dark waves of Death, not for His friends, but for His enemies. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Oh! marvellous love that fathomed that, to us, fathomless sea, and met there, and conquered our foe. The Fire of Judgment might search Him through and through, but it could not destroy Him; it could only "enfold itself"; the waves of Death might overflow Him, but they could not hold Him down; for while amidst the roar of that wild storm He laid down His human life for us, and gave Himself a sacrifice for sin—He "could not be holden of it," but He rose again in victory. Thus through Death He destroyed him that had the power of death, and He "spoiled the strong

man's house"; and because He was the Son of God, He came up out of those deep waters still as Man, bringing with Him the keys of Death and of Hell. He ascended to the right hand of God, and down from above with the sound of rushing wind, with the glow of burning fire, came the Promise of the Father—promised so long ago—to lead lost human souls out of their Land of Loneliness into the inheritance of Relationship. He, the Holy Ghost, the third Person of the Godhead, came in through the avenue of Death, strong to purify, wise to direct; glowing with love, mighty to fulfil the promise founded on the purpose, formed in eternity ere the world was. Oh, thrice wonderful plan! This was God's way by which sinners in death and loneliness could be led into Life and Relationship. Through death to life.

As we talk together this evening we look back on that great work accomplished for us by the Son of God. Nothing remains to be done for the expiation of our sin. The Holy Spirit dwells upon the earth to-night. All is clear on God's

side; but each soul born into the Land of Loneliness has to become conscious of its woe, conscious of its danger, to see by the Light the way of escape that God has provided, and to avail itself of the Power which can alone lead it on in victory. It is this journey of experience that we are now about to begin, during which the work that the Light of Faith shows us was done *for us* is made good *in us* by the power and the warmth of the Spirit of God. You do not understand this, I daresay. But I trust that as step by step we tread along our wonderful journey of experience, God may teach us what He would have us learn about it. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren" (Rom. viii. 29).

And from the opened heavens the Voice of a living Saviour cries through the dreary Land of Loneliness: "God is Love"—"Fear not; I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. i. 17, 18).

CHAPTER IV

THE BURNING BUSH

"And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of-fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed."—EXODUS iii. 2.

NOW this evening I feel sure it will help you just to glance at what we have already talked over together. First, we had the Land of Loneliness, where our souls dwell by nature, and how we came to be there, and how the idol Self is the centre of our worship there; and how our souls are morally dead,—that is, apart from God,—and how the great sea of Death is ever rising round us, each one of us. Then the next evening we saw the Flaming Sword that stood betwixt Adam and Eve and the tree of life on earth. We saw there was no way back to life and to a holy God because of the Fire. That because He is righteous His judgment must ever lie betwixt Himself and sin. Then last evening we saw a wonderful sight; for we saw that in

eternity God had purposed a way by which His Light and His Fire should get into the Land of Loneliness—where man was shut up under His righteous doom—to save, and not to destroy. We saw how the great enemy who lay between us and life and liberty, and used God's very righteousness to seal the doom of the feeble creatures he had ruined, was defeated, struck from beneath by One who went down under the waters of Death and through the Fire of judgment to do it, and who rose triumphant and came away with the keys of death and of hell. We saw how that One left the way open for God's Light and Fire to pass into the Land of Loneliness, to lead us out of it unto Himself. Yes; all God's side is settled—settled for ever: but now to-night we must see how it all affects us individually, and we must talk about the Call of God.

Long ago there was a guilty man who lay down to sleep under all the midnight glory of the eastern heavens. He had just sacrificed his elder brother to Self on the altar in the Land of Loneliness, and as he lay and slept, with his head upon a stone,

a vision rose upon the sight of his soul in its inner Land of Loneliness, and he saw that the angels of God were about him, that God's providential care was over him; and a Voice reached his inner ear, a Voice full of grace and love, assuring him of blessing because of the promise given to his forefather Abraham. Was he delighted? No; he was terrified, and awoke saying, "Surely God was in this place, and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Would you be glad to find yourself at "the gate of heaven"? Not with your sins upon you; and when the Call of God reaches the soul in the Land of Loneliness with its sins upon it, it wakes up and cries, "How dreadful is this place!" A sense that the darkness cannot hide from God is upon it. Is this your feeling, your cry, just now? I went once to visit a dying man, who told me that he had always done what was right, and his hope of mercy lay in the thought that he had never, as he thought, sinned badly. I read him Psalm cxxxix., and, as he pondered those

solemn words, God let in the Light upon his soul. He saw that his ways, his words, his thoughts, were all known to God: "Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether." He started to find himself in "the condemned cell," with the tide of Death even then sweeping in upon him. He cried like Jacob, "How dreadful is this place!" The Voice of God reached his soul, and well was it for him that the Light and the Fire were there to show him God's way of escape. To him, indeed, it *was* "the gate of heaven."

Have you ever been suddenly called by name when you thought you were quite alone and that no one could see you? I remember once, when I was quite a child, how startled I was at being called by name in that way. I was running about in the garden near my home looking at the currant bushes, which were then laden with their ruby clusters. I had been strictly forbidden to touch the fruit, and I was not thinking of doing so, but

suddenly a voice called my name. I started; who could be near me there? I looked as far as I could over the garden; over the currant bushes, through the espalier trees, under the old mulberry tree, and all round the quaint, ivy-grown sundial, but no one could I see. While I still paused wondering, the voice called again, and again it was my name. I knew it well, it was the voice of a stern yet loving father. Then my eyes turned in the direction from which the sound came, and I saw him standing behind the parapet on the roof of our house, his eye watching his little daughter anxiously from above in her place of temptation. I had not touched the fruit, I had not sinned, and with a fearless smile I could answer to my name; but the soul in the Land of Loneliness, when the Call of God reaches it, is only too conscious that it has sinned, and that God's eye has seen it sin.

Do you remember in what misery the children of Israel were in Egypt? Pharaoh was working their lives out of them; yet all the time the promise of God was standing sure to Abraham,

and to Isaac and Jacob, that they should have a glorious earthly inheritance. They saw no way of escape, yet God saw it. I will tell you what they did; they called out in their misery, and their cry reached the ear of the great God who dwelt behind the Fire, but who had given His promise to Abraham that His Fire and His Light should come in to deliver them.

It is well when the soul, feeling its sin and its danger, cries out as they did. Such a cry is always heard. Have you cried out to God, "My sins are on me. They are chains which I cannot break. Satan drives me on in bondage. My doom hangs over me. Help! help!"?

While the Israelites were calling out in their misery there was a shepherd feeding his flock in a quiet wilderness, with the grand and lonely mountain heights all about him. And so it was that one day his eye suddenly caught sight of a mountain bush wrapped in flame. Perhaps you have never seen the gorse and bushes of a common on fire, and you do not know how sad a sight it is to see them swept off the scene, and the

greedy flames springing in sudden snatches from bough to bough, blackening the bushes that but a few hours before were covered with pink-tinted wild-roses, or festooned with the sweet-scented honeysuckle and the clinging clematis? But in other countries it is not only a sad sight, but it is a fearful sight. "While I am writing to you," wrote a young farmer in America to his friends in England, "there is a fearful glow on the horizon; it is drawing nearer every moment: the prairie is on fire. I have been out all night with other fellows trying to beat down the flames, but they are spreading fast, and if the wind does not change, or rain come, all that we have must perish." And no doubt it was with an anxious eye that this shepherd, long ago, saw the mountain bush on fire, and he thought of the danger to his helpless flock. But how strange! Could it be true? The leaping flames played harmlessly in the fragile bush, and its leaves and its twigs were uninjured, though it glowed with fire. That shepherd was skilled in all the wisdom of the wisest nation then upon the earth; but how

could all the wisdom of Egypt account for this great wonder? Who, amidst its lordly princes, or its learned magicians, had ever seen such a sight as this?

"I will now turn aside," said the shepherd, "and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." And so he did; but, as he approached it, a Voice suddenly called to him out of the bush, from behind those leaping flames, and it called him by name. "Moses! Moses!" it cried. It was the Voice of One who knew him; and the soul of Moses in its inner Land of Loneliness had ears to hear, and he answered back to his name, "Here am I." "Draw not nigh hither," it cried; "put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Then the Speaker declared His Name: "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob"; and the shepherd hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

Moses was a man of faith; he had chosen to be an exile there in the wilderness rather than to be a prince in the land of Egypt. He had

believed that the great God of his fathers meant to rescue his countrymen from their miserable bondage, but he had never before heard the Voice of God calling him by name, he had never before stood face to face with the Fire. It is no wonder that he was afraid, and that he hid his face while he listened to what God had to say to him. "And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and heard their cry; . . . for I know their sorrows, and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large" (Exod. iii. 7, 8).

The Voice called Moses to be their leader; it called to him out of the Fire, yet it said to him, "Draw not nigh hither." But why, if "our God is a consuming fire"—why was not the fragile bush burnt? Could all the wisdom of Egypt explain it? No. Can you? Moses was face to face with the Fire that Adam and Eve had seen, like a flaming sword, guarding the way to the Tree of Life; with the Fire that Abraham had seen in

vision sweeping into the Land of Loneliness through the ghastly avenue of Death. It was because of the way by which it came in that the bush was not burnt; God's eye from His lofty eternity was full upon Calvary's Cross, and His Fire and His Light had come down to fulfil His promises, and to lead His people from Egypt to Canaan. He, the holy God, could be amongst them in figure, and yet not consume them, stiff-necked and guilty though they were. The Fire that Moses saw had come to be the Guide, the Guard, the Comfort of oppressed Israel. It meant that a righteous God had come down in grace. Do you ask why Moses was warned not to "draw nigh"? I believe because he had not yet kept the Passover by faith. Though a man of faith, Self was still there: he pleaded hard that he might not have to obey the call of God. A holy God was there, and Moses, honoured servant though he became, was but a sinful, mortal man. What we are by nature cannot stand the Fire, and to approach God as a natural man, even though He had come down in grace, would have

been to have perished. This is what I want you to see. God and sin *cannot meet.*

Yet, He had "heard their cry, seen their sorrows." Is He changed, think you? Has *your* cry been unheard? Have *your* sorrows not moved His heart? Impossible! To you the word is not "draw not nigh hither." To you it is, "Come unto *Me.*" To you, lonely, desolate soul, in your far-off land, with Satan's cruel bondage over you, with the idol that he has set up in your heart still demanding your worship, to you a Deliverer has come through the waters of Death, through the Fire of judgment; He has reached you where you are, and His call rings in your ears. It is, "Come." Alone? No; His Light and His Fire will be your Guide, your Guard, your Comfort, and your Strength, upon the way. Have you answered to the summons, "Here am I"? You may well tremble, you may well wonder, you may well stand hiding your face like Moses, for the holy God, who is "a consuming fire," is very near you; but, nevertheless, He calls you by name.

"Arise, He calleth thee!" said the multitude to a poor blind beggar long ago, as he wailed through his gloom for light and comfort; and "Arise, He calleth thee!" cry I to you this night, who, feeling your bondage and your sin in the far-off land, raise the cry through the gloom, "Oh, for Light and for Love!" But let me warn you ere we part for to-night that not all who hear the call of God's servants are saved. The Lord Jesus said, "Many are called, but few are chosen." Felix heard and trembled, but he never answered to the call. I ask you again, Have you answered, "Here am I"? The Call of God comes quietly, sharply, like an arrow. It comes in some word of Scripture that goes in beyond the mind and reaches the heart. And the soul that has been born again answers to the call like Moses; it says, "Here am I."

Now the Call of God is not always to the same kind of blessings. He called Abraham to leave his country and his family, and to wander as a stranger through the land that was to be his, to walk by faith in the promises. He called Moses to be the leader of His people Israel, to be a type

of the Lord Jesus Christ, to a place of great honour as a servant. He calls our souls to come out of the Land of Loneliness into the joys of Relationship to Himself. And when your soul answers to the summons, it begins to stir; and when it has learnt what the Light has to reveal to it, and what the Fire has done for it, and can do for it, it will reach the end of its journey, and will be able to look up with a smile into the Father's face, and to cry with reverent awe, "Abba, Father."

We will close to-night with the Call that comes to the soul from behind the Flaming Sword, that reaches it in its distance and its loneliness and guilt, and reveals to it the fact that there is a Person in another sphere who knows where it is, who has heard its cry, who has seen its sorrows, and has been down to seek it, and to deliver it. "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called" (Rom. viii. 30).

CHAPTER V

THE LAMB "ROAST WITH FIRE"

"Your lamb shall be without blemish. . . . kill it in the evening, take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. . . . roast with fire; . . . and that which remaineth to the morning ye shall burn with fire."—EXODUS xii. 5–10.

IT was on a cold afternoon in December, when the bitter north wind was sweeping over the hill on the side of which our house stood, and carrying with it showers of fine, hard-frozen snow, that I drew my chair close to the fire and said, "I shall not go out this afternoon. It is really too cold." Spreading my hands out over the cheerful glow, I thought with pleasure of a few hours in the warmth and comfort of my home, and I said to myself very feelingly, "What a comfort the fire is!" But not many minutes afterwards, a sudden cry rose from the road without. It was the terrible cry of "Fire! fire!" Half a dozen little boys pealed it forth as they

ran with all the speed they could make up the road. A minute later, and "Fire! fire!" shouted the men on the engine, as they lashed their panting horses up the steep hill-side. What a cry that is! None can hear it unmoved. Away went my thoughts of the snow, away went my fears of the cold and the wind, and I was soon hurrying along the road to see where the fire had broken out. In a minute or two I reached the spot, and stood silently before the burning house. Volumes of smoke were rushing out of the upper windows and were oozing up between the tiles of the roof. Here and there busy little flames were creeping rapidly along the window sills, licking with their scorching tongues the beams and rafters of the roof. "How terrible is fire!" I thought, as I watched it working its dreadful work of ruin. With the clatter of many hoofs, with the shouts of many voices, engine after engine dashed up to the spot, and very soon the water was splashing and hissing as it was poured into the glowing furnace within the house. Clouds of white steam now mingled with

the gloomy smoke, and the men worked with a will to try and subdue the terrible destroyer. I could not wait to see the end, for a large crowd was gathering, and I went back to my home, and again spreading my numbed hands over the cheering glow, I said as before, "What a comfort the fire is! What should we do without the fire?" Ah! what indeed! Yet how different were its aspects on that December afternoon outside and inside, and how different were the aspects of that other Fire of which we are talking, on that dread night when the Sword of Judgment swept through the land of the Pharaohs, and death was in every house in Egypt and in Goshen! In Egypt each firstborn struck down in judgment, in Goshen the slain lamb, "roast with fire," on which a blood-sheltered people were feeding in haste. What a terror to the one! what a comfort to the other!

And yet pause, and consider. Death was in each house in Egypt, and in Goshen, too; judgment had fallen on each family in both lands alike. It seems to me that a voice cries to our

ears, as we gaze at the outstretched sword over Egypt, "God is righteous!" and this is why we see each firstborn die; for God, the holy God, had drawn near in Fire to a sinful nation. But do we not hear the same voice in Goshen, thundering over each bleeding lamb, "God is righteous!"? Yes; there was no difference, all were sinners alike, and the righteousness of God could not waver; God and sin could not meet. If a holy God drew near, death and judgment must sweep on before Him, declaring in awful tones that the supreme Governor of the Universe could not change, that His righteousness must be vindicated, that rebellion and sin must meet their doom.

Perhaps you do not quite understand what "the righteousness of God" means? It means that God, who is holy, governs by law, and, therefore, when He has established what is *right* and perfect, anything that interferes with the perfection of His ordering must meet with judgment. The interference must be removed for the good of all, so that any breach of His laws

must meet with judgment, or righteousness would cease to exist. Even in earthly government, which is imperfect, we see this. The laws are made for the good of all, and any breach of those laws must bring in judgment. Earthly sovereigns are gifted by law with the power of showing mercy to a culprit, but if they do, they only do it through sacrificing righteousness; and woe be to the land where the sovereign does not reign in righteousness! It is *right* that offenders should be punished. Years ago there was a king in France who loved mercy and did not execute righteousness. He would not sign a death-warrant or maintain the laws of his land. Rebellion soon broke out, blood flowed in streams, no life, no property, was safe. The weak and the feeble were massacred wholesale, and anarchy ran riot. The poor, feeble king tried to fly from the ruin which his weakness had wrought, but he and his queen and his helpless children paid with their lives the dreadful debt to outraged righteousness. Yet is not mercy beautiful? Yes, it is; and it is well that a wise

sovereign can use it: for all earthly things are imperfect, and so at times earthly righteousness can be set aside.

There was once a nobleman who had broken the laws of his land by rebelling against the sovereign who was then sitting upon its throne. He was taken prisoner, tried by his peers, found guilty of high treason, and doomed to die. The sovereign signed the death-warrant, and all was settled. But as the day fixed for his execution drew near, his friends tried every means in their power to obtain the royal mercy for him. They tried and they failed. Just at the very last, when all was ready for the dreadful doom—if I remember rightly, it was the very day before—a lady who had entrance to the court thought of a plan which she hoped would touch the heart of the sovereign and bring mercy into power. The condemned man had one little daughter, just twelve years of age, and this lady thought that if she could only get the child into the Queen's presence, she would best plead for her loved father's life. She dressed the poor little girl in

the deepest mourning—as befitted the child of a father actually under the doom of death—and then putting a petition for mercy into her hand, led her into a corridor in the palace down which the Queen always passed at a certain hour of the day. "When that door yonder opens," said the lady to the child, "the Queen and her ladies will be coming. The Queen will be the one who walks first; and when she comes near you, you must drop on your knees and offer your petition." Then kissing the pale face of the frightened child she hastily withdrew. Trembling with fear, the little girl waited till the door which the lady had pointed out to her was thrown open, and then the Queen, followed by her ladies, walked slowly towards her. Falling on her knees, the poor little girl held up her petition to the sovereign. The Queen stopped, spoke kindly to the child, and took the paper from her hands; but when she saw the name upon it she frowned deeply, rejected the petition, and moved to pass onward. The little daughter, in her agony and fear, thought all hope was past, and she clung

to the Queen's dress, sobbing passionately; she could not speak, but she turned her tear-stained face and looked intently at a portrait hanging on the wall beside them. It was the portrait of the Queen's own father, for whom her father had fought only too faithfully. The Queen's eyes followed the child's. "Why do you gaze so earnestly at that picture?" she asked. "Because," sobbed the child, "it seems so hard that *my* father should die because he was so true to *your* father." It was done. Mercy sprang into the Queen's heart, and righteousness was bade to stand aside. The sovereign's eyes filled; she stooped and kissed the weeping child, and said, as she passed quietly on her way, "Your father is pardoned."

Thus you see that Mercy and Righteousness could not dwell together; one or the other must be set aside. The law of the land righteously demanded that nobleman's death. That means, that by its decree it was *right* that he should die; but his little daughter pleaded for mercy so well that the sovereign extended her royal

mercy to the culprit, and he lived. Now, as I have said, there was imperfection in this; but there cannot be imperfection with God, or He would not be holy. His broken laws must be vindicated. His judgment must fall, or He would not be righteous. Mercy could not come in like that with Him. Sin is the root of all misery; He could not let it pass undoomed; no sinner could approach His fire-circled throne without perishing. Yet, for all that, God delights in mercy. He is not like the frowning Queen, slow to show it; and we have seen that He Himself purposed in eternity how mercy could triumph and yet Righteousness not be set aside. He planned how the Flaming Sword of Judgment should uphold the righteousness of His throne, and yet His mercy be freely granted to the sinners. That is why there was death in Goshen. That is why the Passover lamb bled and died. The righteous judgment on Adam's sin fell there in figure, and the fire, with its burning breath and its leaping flames, made of its flesh food for the sheltered host. It was God's picture. God's own picture

of what from His lofty eternity He could always see as if it were present, and that was the Cross of Christ on Calvary's hill; where His Passover Lamb bled and died, and took the stroke of the fiery sword, to declare that Righteousness and Mercy dwell together in a holy God.

Now, you whose ear has heard the call of God, do you own that God was righteous to demand a victim for sin? Do you say God was *right*? Death and judgment are the necessary doom of rebellion? As soon as you own this, that moment your soul is sheltered under the Passover blood. For the Light of God, that has swept in to your soul's Land of Loneliness through what Christ has done for God—the Light of God shows you that the blood of Christ has answered to God for *you*, and that death and judgment have fallen on Christ instead of on *you*. This is how "God is just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Seeing this in your soul is *faith*. The Light of God has shown you that the Passover Blood has been shed and sprinkled for you.

Do you not think that some of the sheltered

Israelites trembled very much as the midnight hour drew near? I expect they did. But their trembling did not alter the fact that the blood of the lamb was where God could see it, and He had said, "When I see the blood I will pass over." He did not say, "When *you* see the blood you shall be saved." Trembling soul, in your gloomy Land of Loneliness! Do you see how you are sheltered by the Blood of Another from the judgment of your sins? And, believe me, the Fire you once dreaded has drawn nigh through that Sacrifice to become your guard, your strength and your comfort. God righteously forgives you. Mercy flows out because Righteousness has been maintained. When you justify God by owning that He could not let Mercy set Righteousness on one side to save you, then He stoops to justify you, and He not only says to your sinful soul, "You are pardoned," but He goes a great deal farther; He says you are "justified *freely* through His grace." He counts you righteous.

I do not think the Queen ever forgot that that nobleman had been a condemned rebel; his doom

was averted, but the stain was still on him. God says of the believer that He justifies him; that is, He sees no stain upon him. Perhaps you say, "How *can* that be, for I am the same person who sinned?" Well, God says it; accept it; and by-and-by, when you have learnt what the Fire has done for you, you will, I trust, understand how vast and complete God's salvation is. "Whom He called them He also justified" (Rom. viii. 30).

CHAPTER VI

THE PILLAR OF FIRE AND TONGUES OF FIRE

"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, to go by day and night."—EXOD. xiii. 21.

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind. . . . And there appeared unto them tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them."—ACTS ii. 2–4.

WHAT a thrice wonderful moment it is for the soul in the Land of Loneliness when the blessed Light of God shows it the shelter of the blood of Christ! I once stood under an archway while a sudden thunder shower swept the streets, with mingled rain and hail. "Sheltered," I said to myself as I watched the streaming gutters, "sheltered; and so am I sheltered by Christ from the storm of divine judgment." It was true, but oh, how little I knew! Yet that

little made me very happy. The soul in its Land of Loneliness, where no one sees it but God, where no one hears it but God, congratulates its idol Self on being sheltered from the righteous judgment of a holy God. "Saved!" it cries; "saved from death and judgment through the mercy of my righteous God." But is that all? No; it would be a poor thing if you were left to dwell in the gloomy Land of Loneliness, afar from the God who has saved you. When Israel had fed on the Lamb "roast with fire," they were not left to find their way out of Egypt as best they could. The Fire that Abraham had seen coming in through the avenue of Death, the Fire that Moses had seen glowing in the mountain bush, that Fire could come nigh them, through the death of the Passover Lamb, and not consume them; it came to be to them their Guide, their Guard, their Comfort. It came to lead them out of the house of bondage home to God.

Do you remember how the Pillar of cloud and of fire led them to the borders of the Red Sea?

and how, when they heard the roar of the pursuing host of Egypt, and cried out in their terror, it passed quickly from before them, and took up its post behind them, standing betwixt them and the foe while they passed through the sea? Jehovah was there, shrouded in that fiery glow; for we are told that He looked from out of it upon the foe, and fought for His redeemed people. The Egyptians had entered upon the domain of Death unsheltered by the Passover Blood, and the roar of the advancing waves as they closed over them told Israel that Jehovah had fought for them, and had redeemed them unto Himself.

When the Israelites came up on to the shore on the other side of the Red Sea, they were like a people that had gone through death, and had come to life on the other side of it. They were free. And then it was, if you remember, that they began to sing; and their song was not about themselves, it was about Jehovah. "The Lord hath triumphed gloriously," was the song; and we are told that all these things "are written

for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the age are come" (1 Cor. x. 11).

Now, I daresay you have sometimes wished, as I used to do, that you could go on pilgrimage on the earth, with the fiery cloud in front of you, rather than have this spiritual pilgrimage of which we are talking. But, believe me, it is just as real as the other. Do you think God has left your soul alone to find your way out of the Land of Loneliness as best you can? Oh, no! His Light and His Fire are with you, just as surely as the Pillar of cloud and of fire swept on before Israel's host. Listen. John the Baptist said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with Fire" (Matt. iii. 11). And not long after Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us, and after His disciples had seen Him rise from earth to heaven on the Mount of Promise, with the roar like as of a rushing mighty wind, God the Holy Ghost came down to earth. He came down heralded by wind

and Fire. The Fire of God fell, and "cloven tongues like as of fire" sat upon each head of those men and women gathered together in that blood-stained city of Jerusalem.

Did a "horror of deep darkness," such as Abraham felt, fall upon those orphan souls as that Fire fell? No. Did they hear the warning Voice of mercy that Moses heard out of the midst of the burning bush crying, "Draw not nigh"? No. Did they hear the voice of the demanding trumpet pealing from its throne of fire and smoke, on Sinai's Mount, crying, "Keep afar off! Keep afar off!"? No. The tongues like as of fire rested on each believer's head, and crowned each feeble brow with a glory not of earth. For where the Fire of God could rest the Holy Spirit of God could dwell, and He entered in through the avenue of Death to testify that the "Jesus" whom Adam's race had crucified in weakness on Calvary's Cross of shame was the Son of God, and that He had been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and that He sat a Man, at the right hand of God. He came to tell that Christ was there

a Victor over Satan, death, and judgment, as head of a new creation which He would form according to the purpose of God, out of Himself, as the Last Adam. And strange, new realities were thus to burst upon their souls, for He had come through the avenue of Death, to reveal to their hearts that secret purpose of God, formed ere the world was, that their souls should live, and pass by His power from the Land of Loneliness into the joys of Relationship. He had come to be their Guide, their Guard, their Comfort on their journey through the world; to make good *in* them all that had been accomplished *for* them. The mighty Power of God had come in through the death of Christ to save them.

But was that wonderful Gift only for them? No; every believer is indwelt by the same Spirit, for God sets His seal on every one who believes, and the Holy Spirit is His seal.

What does a seal mean? I once had some very valuable papers given to me. I was told to put them into a deed-box, and place the box at the bank. When I reached the bank, the

manager said, "Have you sealed the box?" "No," I answered. "We prefer to have it sealed," he answered. So I had to get some sealing wax, and make a seal upon the cord, and then to stamp the hot wax with my own name. That seal showed that all that was in that box was my very own. Now, God sets His seal on every believer. Do you think He would set His holy seal upon a heap of sins? *Never*. He has purged the sins away by the blood of Jesus, and He sets His seal upon a forgiven person. "My own": He means by that "My very own." "In whom after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. i. 13).

There is a very solemn word to be found in the Bible; it is this, "Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. viii. 9). And this has terrified many a soul still in the Land of Loneliness which is really sheltered under the Passover Blood. Many a trembling Christian has said to me, "How am I to *know* that I have the Spirit of God?" I have answered, "Because the Word of God says so." But an aged

servant of God, now gone to his rest, answered that question far better, I think. He wrote something like this, "Have you one spark of love for the Lord Jesus? If you have, where did it come from? It never came from your own cold heart. You would not have one spark of love for Christ but by the presence of the Holy Ghost. 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us'" (Rom. v. 5). Ah! that is the glow of heat about which we are talking this evening. The Comforter dwells within the sealed person, and the warm glow of love is there, where all was once cold and dead.

And now I have come to a most important point in the soul's history, and one without which it can go no further in its escape from its dreary Land of Loneliness. The Holy Spirit attaches the soul to a living Person who loves it. Now stop. Do not pass on, listening to this lightly, and saying, "Yes, of course, it is in the Bible, 'Christ is risen from the dead,' and I believe in the resurrection." That will not do. *Do you know Him?* I

ask you solemnly, "Do you know *Him*?" I do not want to know how much you know *about* Him, but do you *know Him Himself*? I have been a Christian many years, and I have, through His grace, known Him Himself for many years, but I have been astonished to find how many who know a great deal of truth do *not* know Him. I have said to those who are guides over us, "What is to be done to help those who do not know Christ Himself as a Person?" They have shaken their heads and answered sadly, "Nothing can be done but to pray for them." So, you see, here I stand helpless as I ask you, "Do you know *Him*?" You say, "I do love Him; the report of Him has won my love." That is not enough; you must know *Him* if you would go a step further in this wonderful journey from Loneliness to Relationship. The Holy Spirit has come to reveal to you that Jesus Christ is living at the Right Hand of God in glory. Saul of Tarsus saw Him there, Stephen saw Him there; your soul by the Spirit can know Him there. "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for

the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. ii. 9).

What would those citizens have said, in that beleaguered city of which I told you, if by any means they could have raised those two heroes alive out of the deep waters? The report of their gallant deed had made them love their memory, but how they would have lavished their love upon them could they but have known them as living men! And, oh! how can I tell you, if you do not know it for yourself, the deep, wonderful joy of the soul that looks up the ray of Light that has reached it in its Loneliness, and discovers that the Person who died for it on Calvary's Cross lives for it in heaven. That it is His Voice that has called it, His Spirit that has warmed it, His arm of Power that is drawing it unto Himself. Oh, what joy! Jesus lives, "who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. iv. 25).

If resurrection is real to your soul through the Power of the Holy Ghost, you can burst into songs of praise. For you are free.

Years ago, I travelled in Switzerland, and during my excursion I went to stay for some weeks at a hotel which had been built very high up upon a mountain's side. One evening, when we were all seated at dinner in the large dining-room, I noticed a number of people leave their seats and crowd round the windows. What are they looking at so intently? I said to myself, and I hastily rose and followed their example. Ah! I shall never forget what I saw. Opposite those windows, towering up into the very clouds, stood the snowy peaks of a mountain range. High up as we were upon our mountain side, those snowy peaks rose thousands of feet above us, and on that evening they were glowing with the loveliest rosy tint I ever saw. The sun setting behind our mountain crest was throwing a deep shadow on the valley between us, but was swathing those snowy peaks high up in the clear vault of heaven with a glory all of its own. No one who has not seen that rosy sunset glow on those crests of perpetual snow can have the least idea of the loveliness of the scene. Those moun-

tains in their fairy loveliness appeared to be quite close to us, but really they were miles away, and if we had wished to reach their snow-wrapped crests we must have descended our mountain-side, and then have crossed a valley some miles wide, and then have toilsomely climbed as far as we should dare up those lofty heights.

Now, I was telling you a few evenings ago that the purpose of God, formed in His own eternity, spanned all time, and He sees things in what we call the future as though they already were. So He sees your soul, as it stands like Israel on the resurrection shore, in all the glory and the blessings of the great inheritance which He has for it. It makes no difference to Him that you do not yet understand the love of His heart or know the great power of His arm, or that you think a great deal of your dear idol, Self, and think it will learn to love God and be able to serve God. No; all this on your part makes no difference to God at all. He only sees you swathed in the preciousness of His Christ. He looks at you in Him, and He has nothing but love and grace for

you, but you have to go through the deep valley, that you may learn by experience what He already knows about you. He led Israel "forty years" through that valley. Do you ask, Why is this necessary? God suffered His people to hunger that they might value His manna; and so when your soul has the experience of hunger, it will know how to value Christ. You have to learn two great lessons. One is what God is, the other, and I think the harder, is what your dear idol, Self, is.

I can well remember, when I was a very little child, how on one sunny summer afternoon I was running about with my little brothers and sisters, on a grassy slope near a flowing river. My nurse was sitting amidst the flowers upon the grass, and we were gathering the daisies and buttercups and bringing them to her. Such beautiful daisies they were, and she made them into daisy-chains for us; and some of them were so large, and, oh, I was so happy! She saw my childish glee, and presently she said sadly, "Ah, this will soon be over for you; you will have to stay indoors and

work at your lessons. There is a governess coming for you." Her words came all too true. That was the last sunny summer afternoon that I spent with my kind nurse among the daisies, and my life grew clouded and sad. I had to be fitted for life. My father did not love me the less because he wished me to be educated, and to be fitted to enter into his mind and plans for me.

And so it is that our souls have to go to God's school of experience, in which we learn to prove what His great heart of love is yearning to teach us about Himself, and also what Self is really like. Before children go to school, their parents set up their clothes for the term. New coats and jackets and dresses and books are bought, and everything is neatly packed into new boxes. The father's love provides all that may be wanted beforehand. And the soul that is starting on its journey of experience is furnished with two great realities—it has the actual forgiveness of all its sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

I used to think that I must believe I had the

Holy Spirit. Nothing of the sort. The Holy Spirit is actually within the one who has come to Christ. It is no matter for faith; it is *fact*. He is the *gift* of God to you. Every glow of love towards Christ that warms your heart springs from His presence within; and if He is there, as we have seen, the heap of sins is gone. Forgiveness has been administered. It is not for faith; it is *fact*.

"Who *hath* delivered us from the power of darkness, and *hath* translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we *have* redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. i. 13, 14).

The Holy Spirit is not only God's seal; He is also spoken of as the "earnest of our inheritance."

"In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of your inheritance" (Eph. i. 13, 14).

Do you know what this means? For before you start on the journey it is well to look thoroughly at the Gift with which your Father

has furnished you. "Earnest" means, a little portion of a vast blessing which He has for us.

I heard some time ago a touching little story of a poor lady whose history will, I think, help you to understand this subject, and I will tell it to you as nearly as I can remember it. At the time when I first heard of her she was living in a small room in a cottage not far from the place where I resided. She had been a governess, and she still earned her daily bread by giving lessons in German, for she was a German by birth, and had been brought up in her native country in wealth and luxury. Her health had failed, and she was a victim to rheumatism; little by little she had spent her savings, and in her old age and feebleness she was chiefly dependent on the help of others. Her father was still a very rich man, rolling in wealth, and she was in a foreign land in poverty and suffering because she had early in life heard and answered the Call of which we were speaking last evening. She had learned the shelter of the Blood of Christ, she had received the Holy Spirit, and she had turned

to leave the world in which her father lived. He had entreated and he had threatened, but she had counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and at last he had turned her out of her home and told her that she need expect nothing from him, she might earn her daily bread as best she could.

When I first heard of this poor lady, she was no longer young, and poor and sick and aged, she lived in poverty and struggled hard to pay her way. A short time afterwards she became so very weak and ill that, as winter was approaching, her English friends advised her to move to the South of France, and by their kind help she went to that warmer climate. There she settled in the deepest poverty, hoping to eke out her existence by teaching English and German.

Weeks and months passed on in need and suffering, and yet, strange to say, for some time she had been possessed of an immense fortune, for her father had repented of his act, and when he died, his will declared her to be the sole possessor of all he had. Far and wide they

sought for the wandering exile, from place to place they traced her, till one day a letter that had been following her hither and thither was put into her hand, and on opening it she found that she had been for some time entitled to a large inheritance. Dazed and bewildered, she read and re-read that letter; she believed its report, and wrote to tell her friends that she was a wealthy woman. Yet at that time not one penny had she touched of her golden store. Her actual surroundings were unchanged, she still dwelt in her cottage room, she still lay on her poor bed, she still wore her worn and shabby garments, she still ate her plain and scanty fare. In a sense, she was in the possession of wealth, but she was not yet in the enjoyment of it. The father's will, laid up in her native land, silently, yet surely, maintained her right to it, but many a legal form had to be gone through ere she became the actual possessor and enjoyer of all that it bestowed on her.

That is very much like the case of the soul sheltered under the Blood of Christ, sealed by the

Holy Spirit, and just starting to leave the Land of Loneliness; only the illustration would have answered better if the solicitor who wrote to the poor governess had put a twenty-pound note in the letter, as an earnest of the fortune that was to follow. You could not take one step in the journey from Loneliness to Relationship if you had not this blessed earnest.

So now you are ready for your journey, and singing the glad song of your Saviour's triumph, you start in earnest from the Land of Loneliness. God, from the height of His lofty eternity, sees you already at your journey's end, enjoying His vast inheritance. You on the little line of Time see only the rolling waters of the sea of Death before you, which encircles your gloomy prison land.

The Israelites, when they left Egypt, packed up all their treasures, and just so you are bringing with you in the arms of your affection the idol Self. He is heavy to carry. You feel the weight at once, but you love him dearly, and now that he is, as you hope, converted, you feel

sure that he will help, and not hinder you on your journey. You smile: "How could I leave *myself* behind?" You cry: "It is true I am converted, and I am off on pilgrimage with a right good will." Well, it is not for me to tell you at this early stage of your journey what God thinks of that wilful idol of yours, but I know His eye does not see him in the bright inheritance reserved for you. *You* are there in His purpose, but not your idol. Yet you smile and you sing as you start away—

"Through Christ to God—the God most high,
  Praise for all grace be given,
Whose gifts through all eternity
  We'll gladly sing in heaven.
His Christ has loved us, given Himself,
  And died to do us good,
Has washed us from our scarlet sins
  In His most precious blood."

I once started with a party of young friends to go to an island which lay in the midst of a lovely lake; there were deep waters all around it, and there was no way by which we could reach

it but by taking a boat, and by rowing from the mainland to its heather-grown shore. When we reached the place, we moored our boat to the stump of a tree, and gladly landed on the lovely spot. Then we climbed up the wooded banks, and sat down on the flowering heather to enjoy ourselves. We were alone there, and no one could reach us save by crossing the waters, nor, if our boat had drifted away, could we have escaped from our island home. But the soul finds no boat waiting for it as it stands before the great sea of Death that surrounds the Land of Loneliness.

Not long ago I saw a bridge building across the waters of a flowing river. To me it was a marvellous sight to see the mighty shafts of iron that were being placed in order, and then to look at the tiny men perched here and there upon the stupendous work. They were busily hammering the bolts into the iron shafts, or moving the machines, which were much larger than themselves, for they were making a strong highway over the flowing waters. But the soul finds no

bridge over the broad sea by which it stands. Death cannot be bridged.

Only a few weeks ago there was quite a commotion in the neighbourhood where I live. The shop windows were decorated, and streaming flags were spanning the streets; the church bells were ringing merry peals, and clashing again and again, as though they were too full of joy to sound as they usually did; crowds of people were gathering in the streets. What was it all about? The heir to England's throne was coming by, after opening a great tunnel that had been made under the deep waters of the flowing river. He was to drive to the opening on one side of the river, and pass under the waters and come up on the other side. But the soul finds no tunnel under the waves of Death by which it can pass from the land of Death and bondage to the land of life and liberty beyond. Through death to life is the only route.

What does this mean? It means that the only way for the soul to pass consciously from the Land of Loneliness, in which it is by nature, to

the joys of Relationship, where God sees it in Christ, is through a living death.

Does the thought terrify you? It need not. For the Son of God has trodden the path before you, and the proud waters are scattered to right and left; and remember your gifts. Sins only could sink you in death—they are gone, and the Power of the risen Christ is in you to bear you on in the steps of your Forerunner to your journey's end. As the Pillar of Fire brooded over Israel, so the warm love of God broods over you, and every step of the way through Time you will learn His grace and His love and His power.

Now bear in mind that this journey is not acts of your body done on the earth: it is the acts and sufferings of your soul gone through in its inner sphere. The acts of your body will often show to other people which direction your soul is taking, though the soul is out of their sight.

I was once staying on the shore of a Scotch loch, when a small whale came into the loch. How did we know it? We could not see him,

but we saw the water thrown up from his nostrils when he spouted. We could tell the way which he was taking by his spouting. He was underneath the water, but his acts were shown on the surface.

And so the direction which your soul is taking under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit will be shown to others by the words and acts of your body. Listen: Through the solitude of the Land of Loneliness, a Voice reaches your soul; it is, "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." In your own strength? *No.* "When I am weak, then am I strong," cried Paul. You do not understand it, you do not know it yet; but a chariot of fire, as it were, is yours to bear you from earth to heaven.

As soon as your soul starts out of the Land of Loneliness through the secret pathway that Christ has opened for it through the sea of Death, the mouth declares upon the upper earth that it is off for heaven, and as soon as "confession is made with the mouth unto salvation,"

the Holy Spirit floods the soul with light and warmth, and, full of the joy of the Lord, it sings as it goes. Have you tried it? Then you have known the joy of the Lord, but like Israel you soon, oh, so soon! reach Marah. Do you want to know what is meant by Marah? Bitterness is the meaning of the word. You have, as it were, to drink the bitter waters of death. "I cannot go here, I cannot go there," you have to say to worldly relations and friends. "I cannot join with you in idling time away, or in dressing my body gaily, or in reading foolish books. I am off for heaven." Then down on you fall taunt and jeer and bitter sneer, and your friends forsake you, and cast you out of their company. Self groans: "This is death to me; I smart under all this; but how can I go with them—they will not hear about Him whom my soul loveth?" But what happens within? "If the world hate you," whispers a Voice, "ye know that it hated Me before it hated you." "*He* has been here before me!" cries the soul. "How sweet to prove Him with me in these bitter circumstances! Why,

this strange, new joy makes even sorrow sweet to me!"

It is not my purpose, nor indeed in my power, to touch on all the steps of your wilderness journey through death. The Israelites drank of Marah, sweetened for them by the tree cut down and cast into it, and passed on; but we drink of a sweetened Marah to our journey's end: only we daily learn more and more of what the tree cut down means, which I cannot even explain to you yet. Enough for you at present that it is in times of trial and sorrow, when suffering directly or indirectly from following Christ, that He reveals Himself to your soul as "the Lord that healeth thee." He binds up the broken heart, He cheers the fainting spirit, He nerves the failing arm—*Jesus* does it; and the sweetened water strengthens your soul. You learn in all these things His power and His love. There are times of cheer, as at Elim, when you get over the Word of God, and draw water out of the wells of salvation, and rejoice under the waving palms of future victory; and there are times of temptation

from within, as at the wilderness of Sin, when Self suddenly asserts himself, complains of the straitness of the way, and craves for the pleasures of the world; and the soul grows faint and hungry because its idol murmurs incessantly.

Do you remember when Israel came near before the Lord after their murmurings at Sin that the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud? The Fire was there; but it did not break out upon them. No; God loved them, and He had redeemed them. It was all grace. The warm glow of His love was there, and He gave them two kinds of food. In the evening the quails covered the camp, and in the morning the manna lay upon the face of the wilderness; the quails were ready to hand in the camp, the manna had to be gathered from the wilderness. Jehovah said that He did it "to prove them" (Exod. xvi. 4). So at Rephidim, they murmured again, and Jehovah gave them water from the smitten rock. Grace met them at every turn, and the more naughty they were the more full was Jehovah's grace.

Do you wonder at them? Take care; you are treading a wilderness too, and their hearts are only a picture of yours. I heard an old gentleman say one day, "I believe God chose the Jew because he was the very worst type of man that ever was, to prove that He can save the worst." Ah! when we come to be "proved" in our soul's journey we learn that Self is just the same sort of idol, whether in Jew or in Gentile. He is always grumbling, always murmuring against God and His ways.

I have often wondered why there were two kinds of food given to Israel; but I think I see now. The quails were to satisfy hungry Self, and the manna was for the fainting soul. When God comes in, in His love and power to relieve us in our circumstances on earth, I think those acts of His are the quails for us. We get wonderful answers to prayer about things here; and Self is delighted with God's many mercies. His murmurings are hushed for a little while, for he loves to use God's grace and power for the things of this life. I once thought that it

was the very height of Christian experience to get these delightful answers to prayer about earthly things. I gazed in wonder on those who had them, and when I had them myself I greatly enjoyed them.

Yes; savoury quails suit Self, and he grows fat and flourishing on God's mercies, and too often, I fear, the heaven-sent manna lies ungathered, while we try to persuade ourselves that the hungry soul can thrive on mercies, instead of on Christ Himself. Has your soul fed on manna to-day? Has it rejoiced in the grace of Christ to it to-day? Has it availed itself of His grace?—wonderingly, rejoicingly proved that, however it fails and stumbles, Christ is always the same, always nigh to help it, always at its service; that His unfailing grace is the heaven-sent food for its pilgrim journey? Thirsty! How can it thirst, when He cries, "If any man thirst, let him come unto *Me* and drink?" Ah! I shall never forget how once when I had been trying to feed my soul with quails, and it had become very thirsty and very weak, I went to a large hall where meetings were

held, and there I sat, weary and down-hearted. Speaker followed speaker, but there seemed nothing for my fainting soul, and Self cried that Egypt was better than this, that it was better to return to the world and enjoy it, rather than to perish in the wilderness. Presently, I lifted my eyes, and blazoned on the wall of the building, just opposite the spot where I sat, were these words, "If any man thirst, let him come unto *Me* and drink." Down into my inmost soul plunged that living word; the hall, the people, the speakers faded from sight and sense, while my weary soul drank its fill from the living stream that ever flows from the Smitten Rock.

Grace, grace, nothing but grace. "My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. ii. 1). That means, feed well on manna.

There are terrible times in the journey, too, and things seem to get worse and worse as you go on. The enemy, always on the alert, offers Self, who has grown fat and strong by feeding on God's providential mercies, sudden outward temptations. Something that you have given up

for Christ comes before you again. It may be drink, it may be gambling, it may be novel-reading or story-making, it may be swearing or foolish talking, and jesting, or passion, or some other vice. You are off your guard, the Spirit of God is grieved and silent, Self-will asserts itself, you yield, you fall. "There's a Christian for you!" jeers the world. "That's following Christ, is it?" sneer your friends.

Now perhaps my voice is reaching some one of you to-night who has been thus tempted, and thus has fallen. Is it all over with you? Will the waves of Death cover you? Will the Fire of judgment break out upon you? Perhaps you have taken some step which you cannot undo, made some worldly alliance which no power of yours can break? You cannot undo what is done. You cannot escape the consequences. Oh, terrible position! I knew a young girl once who, in the anguish of her mind at such a fall, hurried her soul into the presence of its God, rather than face the world's triumph over her failure. Ah, downcast soul! *Who* turned and looked at Peter

as the oaths and curses fell from his lying lips? Who sought his love again with the tender yet searching rebuke, "Lovest thou Me more than these?" Unseen by you, amidst the storm of your struggling and of your failing, Christ, your Advocate, lifts up His hands on your behalf, and the grieved Spirit within awakes your soul to cry for help, and the power of God delivers you from the foe who was too strong for you. It is a power outside yourself that delivers you. Take heart, commit yourself to God. God is for you.

It is not my purpose however to enter into all the difficulties and dangers of your journey. You will each learn for yourselves the tireless grace and love of your God in guiding, guarding, feeding and warning you on your onward way. My subject is Fire, but I want you just to notice, ere we close this evening's subject, that at every step of the journey from Marah to the wilderness of Sinai, Israel's murmurs grew louder and louder. The grace, and mercy, and goodness of Jehovah never reached their hearts.

And have you not found in this school of

experience that there is an evil heart of unbelief within you? that you still doubt the love of God at every fresh turn of the way? that there is a principle of murmuring and self-will within you that grows worse, instead of better, all the way along? I am sure you have. Now it seems to me that every one comes to the point, sooner or later, when the idol Self springs up and cries, "I will fail no more; I will find my own way back to God, and I make up my mind once for all that I will live to please Him."

We are only too apt to do as a young man I was hearing about the other day did: try to find our own way to our journey's end. That young man started with a party of friends on a day's excursion. His friends chose to take the train and be carried to their destination, but he said the way by the sea-coast was the nearer way, and he would walk there by himself. He thought it a short cut, and so it was, but it did not prove a short cut to him. His friends who went by rail reached the place in good time. Hour by hour slipped by, but the young man did not join them. At last the sun

sank in the west, and fears arose as to his safety; the tide had swept in over the shore, and the ocean waves washed the precipitous cliffs that formed the coast. As the darkness settled down, the anxiety of his friends changed to alarm; they appealed to the weather-beaten men who knew the coast, and they hastily formed a search-party, and, armed with lanterns and ropes, set off along the cliffs.

The guides knew the way, they knew its dangers too, and they knew the point where they thought they should find the young traveller set fast. They were right; there he lay asleep upon a ledge of rock, utterly worn out with his vain exertions to gain his destination. He had struggled and struggled to get further in vain; the rolling waves washed the foot of the cliffs, the ramparts of the rocks towered above him. Writing his name upon a slip of paper and placing it in his pocket, he had climbed up to a ledge where the surf could not reach him, and slept upon his rocky bed from sheer exhaustion. It was the strength of others that rescued him from his

perilous position. And, like this, we too often leave, in our soul's journey, the line of God's way for us, and struggle by efforts of our own to reach the end of our journey. Our efforts only hinder us, and we have to begin again the pathway of faith and dependence just where we left it. We learn by failure after failure that Self was a very heavy weight when we started carrying him, but now that he essays to lead us, it is a very bad case indeed, for converted Self takes us straight away on to the plains of Sinai.

Farewell, then, for to-night; and to-morrow we will talk of the difficulties of those who, rejoicing in converted Self, believe that his energies—and talents, it may be—and devotion will find the way for them through the Fire into the very presence-chamber of a holy God.

CHAPTER VII

THE BURNING MOUNT

"And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." —EXODUS xix. 18.

"Ye are come unto Mount Zion."—HEBREWS xii. 22.

NOT many years ago, when I was travelling in Switzerland with some friends, we came to a point in a deep valley where our road parted to right and left. On either hand towered a lofty mountain, and our destination was a house built high up on one of those heights. We were strangers in the place, and had we chosen our own way, the night might have found us lost upon the desolate mountains, but we listened to our trusty guide, for we saw that the success of our journey depended on the skill and the wisdom of another. And, sooner or later, in the journey of a soul from Loneliness to Relationship, it comes to a point where two roads diverge.

Now both of these roads lead to mountains; and the Spirit of God, who is your guard and your guide, would lead you in your experience straight on to the mountain called Zion: but the Pillar of Fire that guided Israel long ago led them right away to the mountain that is called Sinai, and the track they made lies open still, and the journeying soul halts before the parted way. Close at hand, with its glorious summit bathed in the perennial sunshine of grace, stands Zion. No fiery sword flashes there betwixt God and man; all is serene, and calm, and peaceful in the white, shadeless Light of heaven. "This is the way, O Soul," cries the heaven-sent Guide. "Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, which they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more, but ye are come unto Mount Sion" (Heb. xii. 18–22). Will the soul listen to its Guide? It may—the sunshine of grace is over it. Free, unmerited favour

is its portion for ever in Christ; but its idol Self is on the alert, as we have seen, and has been gradually coming more and more to the front of late. Self leans to the other road; Self has bat's eyes: he hates the sunshine, it blinds him. The other road looks shady, and at the start it is downhill, and he too often succeeds in leading the soul on to the plains of Sinai.

I wonder if my voice is reaching a soul just at the meeting of these two roads to-night?

If you keep close to a living Saviour, you will not take the wrong way. "My sheep hear My voice and I know them," He cries, "and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John x. 27, 28).

But, alas! it is not always that people do listen to the Shepherd's voice, for false teachers drown His still small voice with schemes of doctrine, and Self loves the path where he is owned and considered, and the soul following his lead soon joins the large encampment that is always to be seen upon the plains of Sinai.

An encampment is a pretty sight. I remember years ago there was a large encampment of soldiers formed at a place about fifteen miles from the spot where my father lived. He used to drive us over to see the white tents dotting the hills in such perfect order, and to watch the troops deploying hither and thither over the country, having sham battles with each other. We were never tired of going there with him, to walk about in the camp, and see how the soldiers lived and slept in the tents, and how the guard was always on the watch, and to hear the silvery tones of the bugles ringing out the orders from post to post. All is order in a camp, and in this encampment under the Burning Mount the external order is complete. Do you say, What a strange place in which to make an encampment! Strange indeed! It was first made by some Christians called the Galatians, so that it is a very ancient encampment. They listened to false teachers crept in unawares, who made much of Self, and chose the wrong road, and camped where the Israelites had been encamped so many

years before. And, strange to say, I am afraid there are very few, if any, souls who take this journey out of Loneliness into Relationship who do not at some time or another in their journey of experience get decoyed into this encampment. Self likes the place. He is looked upon as converted there; for he can "observe days and months, and times and years" (Gal. iv. 10), and the order of the camp is perfect.

Now I think a mountain in Scripture means something that is established; and so, you see, to-night, in our journey of experience, we are considering two established orders of things. How can I explain to you what I mean? Let me try. You all know very well that when the Israelites in their real journey on the earth reached Mount Sinai, Jehovah said that He had brought them unto Himself as on eagles' wings,—that meant by His own mighty power,—and He came down upon Sinai's crest to meet with His redeemed people. But He came down upon the mountain wrapped in fire. Why was this? Because Self was still the idol of their hearts. As sinful children

of fallen Adam, Self was their object, and their souls were still in the Land of Loneliness. All the patience, and grace, and mercy of Jehovah to them on the way had not made them love Him one little bit, and all their own murmurings, and rebellion, and waywardness had not taught them what Self was really like. When Jehovah offered to make them His great treasure, and to give them "a good land and a large" *if* they would keep His commandments, they shouted with one voice, "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do." Self wanted the good land, and Self was quite sure he could mend his ways if he chose, and leave off murmuring, and obey God.

Then when God, the holy God, drew nigh wrapped in fire, the mountain rocked, and the thunders roared, and the demanding trumpet pealed out its commands from the clouds and darkness, and God bade Moses set barriers round the mount, lest the people should draw near and be consumed; for, as children of fallen Adam, there was no way for them back to God, because of the Flaming Sword. The Fire and

sin could not meet. It was this that they had not learnt in all their journeying. They had not learnt that grace alone would do for such sin-stricken beings as they were; and the God who had redeemed them out of Egypt, who had fed and clothed them, borne with their murmurings, and guided them by the skilfulness of His hands, saw them flee to hide themselves from the sound of His voice and the flaming Fire, just as Adam and Eve had fled in Eden. Their own righteousness would not stand the Fire.

But perhaps you say, "There is not any real Mount Sinai now to which we can get." It is true; the thunders and the lightnings and the fire of judgment have long faded from Sinai's crest; but what God would teach our souls is, that it is established for ever before Him that, as children of sinful Adam, we can never pass through the Fire that circles a holy God, never be led by a vowing and struggling Self into the joys of Relationship. There is no way to God that way. Yet, strange to say, Self ever leads that way, for he dreads Zion more. The

fire that glowed on Sinai's crest was swathed around with clouds, and God was hidden in the thick darkness. Self could stand trembling before that Mount, afar off, and promise to do great things, but Zion's Mount of established grace makes nothing of him or of his efforts, and he cries "I *cannot* face *that* Mount. Let me stand upon probation; let me *do*, to live; let me make the Holy Law my rule of life, and some day I shall be fit, through my own efforts, following up on Christ's atonement, to stand before a holy God." For the Galatian teachers teach that the Blood of the Passover Lamb is for all past sins, but that Self must look sharp and change his ways for the future, and keep the Holy Law of God. They say that as a child of Adam you stand on probation, and that to save you, you need many fresh applications of the Blood which alone will shelter you from the Fire.

But suppose the day should come when wilful Self will not cry for mercy? "Then," say they, "you must perish everlastingly; the Fire of God's just judgment upon sin must be your portion for ever."

A year or two back there was a signalman employed on a great line of railway, who, of course, kept his place in the employ of the company by his deserts. It was his duty to be on the watch all night, and to work his signals so as to show when the line was clear for the midnight expresses to rush on their rapid journeys. For years he had done his duty faithfully, but one day sudden sickness had invaded his home, and while he was taking his daily rest his little baby girl had died beside him in the bed. Robbed of his sleep, weary and heart sore, he felt himself unfit to fulfil his duties that night; but he sought in vain for relief: no help could be procured, and, dazed and stupefied with grief and fatigue, he went to his post as usual. He sat in the signal-box on the watch, but how it was he could never tell—a few minutes' sleep, broken by the ringing of a signal bell, a rush to his post in confusion and bewilderment, an awful crash, never to be forgotten, and he stood on a line strewed with wreckage, he stood amidst the blood of the dead and the groans of the dying. He was beside

himself with grief, but no grief could undo the dreadful mischief which his failure had wrought. When he came before the jury, and they heard all the facts of his case, they were greatly puzzled, and they gave a strange verdict. They neither convicted the man of guilt nor did they exonerate him, but they bound him over to appear whenever called upon in the future to receive judgment. Then came angry letters in the newspapers. "It was not just," they said, "to give such a verdict." If the man were guilty of manslaughter, he ought to be punished; if not, he ought not to be left all his life with a stain upon his character and a possible doom hanging over him. Even earthly righteousness demanded this. If the man had sinned, he must be punished; if not, acquitted: for how could his future good conduct undo the terrible past?

Yet this is just what so many Christians think a righteous God has done—forgiven them their past sins for Christ's sake, and said, "Now you stand on probation; if you do not make My holy Law your rule of life in the future,

you will be called upon to receive your doom at some future date." No wonder that with such a fear before you Self struggles hard to make the Law his rule of life; and vows upon vows are made to give up this sin and that, and to do this good thing and that, to continue, if possible, under the benefit of Christ's work.

Do you understand what "probation" means? It means, on trial. I once had a servant who came to my house on trial. She was to stay with me for a month, to see if she had the will and the strength to do my bidding. She came into my house and became part of my household, but she stood on probation, and she failed—for she had not the strength to do what she had engaged to do, and she had to leave my house. Now you see "standing on probation" makes something of you—of Self. It supposes that *you*, as a child of Adam, have the will to please God, and a little strength too. This is why men like it, and this is why the Galatian encampment is so large. On the other hand, grace makes nothing of you and everything of Christ.

"Child," said an elderly relation, who was visiting at my father's house, to me one day, "come into my room after dinner this evening; I want to talk with you." When the time came, I went to her. She was lying upon the sofa with her open Bible in her hand; and as I approached her, she raised her eye-glass to her eye and surveyed me keenly. She had a mortal complaint upon her, and she knew that the tide of Death was rising rapidly around her. It needed but one glance at her anxious, clouded countenance to see that her soul was alarmed in its abode of solitude. "Child," she said, as her keen scrutiny rested upon me, "I want to talk with you. I am not happy; I do not rejoice as you seem to do. I study my Bible, and I pray regularly, but nothing is real to me. What is the matter? Can you tell me?" I paused, puzzled. I knew very, very little myself. I was not then in my own experience out of the Land of Loneliness, but I knew and loved a living Saviour, and I was happy. How could I answer her? She was a woman of singular ability, and of the highest culture. She

could read her Testament in Greek, her Bible in Hebrew. Men sat at her feet to be taught, and she was well pleased that it should be so, and yet there she lay, with death pressing in upon her soul, owning that she was in a darkness from which by all her efforts she had found no way of escape. I sat down beside her, and said, "If I were you, I would give up reading and praying, and take to trusting." A bombshell bursting in the room could hardly have startled her more. "Child!" she cried, almost starting from her sofa, "what do you mean! I should be an infidel." "No," I said, "I think not; I am *sure* you would not: but you would fall into the arms of a living Saviour, 'able also to save to the uttermost them that come unto God *by Him*'" (Heb. vii. 25).

For a few moments she pondered my simple advice, but then shook her head, and discarded it. "That would never do," she said; "I should be afraid to try it." Poor soul! she stayed on in the Galatian encampment, trusting to her own efforts for a sense of acceptance until the closing

scene on earth came; and she sank out of view in darkness and in fear.

Now you must not think that it is only people who are trying to make the holy Law their rule of life who have joined the Galatian encampment. No; many who have been taught that the ten commandments were given to the Jew, and not to the Gentiles, find their way to that same encampment. Self offers his intellect, his talents, his wealth, his energy, his education in the service of God. "I must serve," cries Self. Perhaps you yourself are there to-night; and you have almost unconsciously slipped into a state of constant effort. The glad song has died upon your tongue, and you are *trying* to love Christ, *trying* to overcome, *trying* to please Him. Then I am sure that you are weary and downcast, and finding out that all your desperate efforts to overcome evil only end in deeper failure and more constant defeat. The darkness deepens over your soul, and fears that your sinfulness must bring you into judgment at last from time to time assert themselves.

A young Christian once sat in her room with her face buried in her hands; burning tears were rising ever and anon to her eyes, and her soul was full of wonder and of fear. Only a short time before she had been joining in the song of God's deliverance by the Red Sea-shore; she had drunk of Marah's bitter waters, and had found them sweet to her taste: she had fed on manna from day to day, and had thought that the joy of the Lord was to be her portion for ever. But silently and surely Self had been growing confident within her, and had pressed upon her at last that she ought to serve her Deliverer.

All had gone well for a time, and Self had grown more and more delighted over its own devotedness. But suddenly she had found herself face to face with a service from which Self shrank. "But it ought to be done," whispered the soul. "Are we not told to take up the cross, and follow Christ? I have lost my joy, and all is dark around me; surely it is because I do not serve as I ought." No Voice answered the passionate cry for help to do that service; no light shone on the

path: all was gloom. Self and doing had brought that soul to join the Galatian encampment. That young Christian, having begun in the Spirit, wanted to be made perfect by the flesh. She wished to merit God's favour by doing; she thought that the darkness over her soul was because she had failed in service. "That service can be done, and it shall be done," shouted Self at last from within. "I *will* do it, cost what it may." The difficulty had been met, the mountain had been climbed, and Self had shouted from the summit, "See, I can dare and do for Christ!"

But darker than ever the clouds had covered the sky; there was no light, no joy for the soul. The voice of the Comforter was hushed, and terror reigned within. "Why is this?" cried the soul to its Saviour. "Have I not obeyed Thy behest? have I not served Thee? Oh, give me the light and the joy again!"

Have you seen sometimes on a stormy day a sudden gleam of sunshine stream down through a rift in the gloomy clouds, and pass as quickly as it came? So did the light shine to that soul

in answer to its cry, lighting up for an instant these words, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal. v. 1). "Here is the light again," cried the soul. "I will be a readier servant next time; I will keep my joy now that I have it." And in an instant all was gloom, for "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified."

Did the Pillar of Cloud and of Fire leave Israel when they camped under the Burning Mount? No; it waited on them there. Does the Spirit of God leave the believer when Self has brought him to try to live by the principle of Law, and he cries, "I must serve to please God; I must do, to live"? No; grieved and silent, He waits and waits, till the hard lesson has been learnt that Self in his inner shrine, strive as he will, cannot please a holy God. And why not? Because he always has him*self* for his object. Do you not see that all the efforts he makes, and the good works he makes you do, are to save your*self* from the Fire of judgment. He is trying by hard efforts to make a tunnel back for a child of Adam to the

Tree of Life. Anything—anything—rather than meet death and the Flaming Sword. He will not believe that there is no way to relationship with a holy God save through death and the Fire.

The mountain rocked and the thunders rolled when the Fire-encircled "I Am" heard Israel say that they would keep His commandments, and stand before Him on the ground of their obedience. He was but trying them when He asked them if they would stand on this footing; for He knew their selfish hearts, but He wanted them to see that all their past failures, and His abounding grace, had not changed their selfish hearts one little bit. They had not learnt themselves. Nor had that young Christian, nor have you, if you are thinking that you can merit God's favour by any efforts of your own.

I am sure you all know what a marriage is: it is the forming of a solemn bond between two persons.

More than fifty years ago there was a quiet little wedding at Kensington Parish Church.

Girls often think lightly enough of getting married; but when the time comes, and the solemn words have to be spoken, and the vows made, then they feel what a great step they are taking. The young bride trembled as she stood beside her bridegroom repeating the solemn words. "Don't be frightened, my dear," whispered the kind old clergyman, as he saw her fear. And then the words were uttered, the ring was slipped upon the tiny hand, and those two were wed "until death do us part." Could nothing but death undo the bond? Nothing.

And at this time what I may call a strange marriage takes place within you: Self is married to the Law. In hope of getting into "the good land and large," it vows to keep the Law; it engages to "make the Law its rule of life." And what is the consequence? "Sins, sins, sins." The fruit of that marriage is nothing but sins, and Self's true character comes into view, "For by the Law is the knowledge of sin." Can the bonds be broken? No; it is "until death do us part." Oh, what trouble the poor soul is in! It

has walked after Self into distance and gloom, and it is held in captivity now to Self's yoke of bondage. Self fails, and makes fresh vows, and fails again. All is effort and weariness.

Have you ever made vows? I made one once, and wrote it out and signed it. I vowed to God to do this and that for Him, if He would only let me go in a course against which Conscience was warning me. Can God accept the fruit of sin, or sinful Self's efforts? *Never*. I knew a young man once who made Jacob's vow: he promised to serve God, if God would give Self one great earthly blessing that he craved. And do you ask, Did he get the blessing? for God gave the quails to Israel, in answer to their cry. That is true. And if he had asked it without the vow, he very likely would have had it. But if you read the history of Israel carefully, you will see that after they had made their vows to serve God, and broken them, the Fire which had been their guard and comfort under Grace was constantly breaking out upon them. The Fire of

God was testing their righteousness, and it would not stand the test. "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. x. 3).

Do you know what a test is? It is something that is used to try the quality of an article. I once had to learn by experience what a test fire can be. It happened that I changed a half-sovereign at a railway station, and when I reached home and looked at the coins, I thought one of the florins felt very light, and a fear came into my mind that it was not a real silver coin. I was not at all rich in those days, and had very little pocket-money to spare, so I was tempted at first to pass it on if I could, and not to make sure if it were a sham coin or not. But that would not have been honest, and I prepared to test it. If it is a real florin, I said to myself, it will stand the fire. So I made a hole in the fire where it was clear and hot, and kneeling down before the grate, I dropped my florin into the midst of the flames. Very anxiously I watched

it, lying in the little furnace. For a moment or two all went well; I could still see the Queen's head glowing in the fiery light. But suddenly the whole thing doubled up and disappeared, while a little stream of some worthless metal ran down into the cinders. I remember feeling quite strange for a moment or two, for I had been hoping against hope that the coin would stand the test. I think I was hardly prepared to see my two-shilling piece disappear like that; but it was really gone, and I was two shillings poorer than I ought to have been. The fire had been a test.

So the Fire of God is a test of righteousness. Moses knew this, and that is why he moved the tent of the tabernacle so quickly out of the camp, when, after all their vows to serve God, Israel had made the golden Calf. The Pillar of Fire stood over that tent; and Moses set it afar off, lest God should consume the people. Nadab and Abihu, priests of the lineage of Aaron, who had been in safety on the Burning Mount, fell before that Fire, when they offered incense to God with fire that had not first consumed the

burnt offering. When the people under vows murmured at Taberah, the Fire of the Lord burnt among them. When the quails were granted to their self-willed prayer, the tide of death suddenly rose and swept thousands from the scene; it was one thing to murmur under Grace, another to do so under broken vows. And then in that awful moment, when Self in Korah and his company declared that he could draw near to a holy God and worship, the Fire of God flashed out, and swept the "sinners against their own souls" from the scene, while their censers "lying amidst the burning" told out the solemn warning that Self, however religious he might seem to be, could never stand the test of Fire, could never pass the Flaming Sword, or draw nigh to a holy God. For "Stand afar off!" had been cried to vowing Self at Sinai's fire-capped mount.

But Self cannot bear to be set on one side altogether as utterly sinful; that is death to it. It dreads death. It persuades you that it is an improvable, teachable idol, and perhaps week by week you cry, "God have mercy upon us miser-

able sinners." For you gradually become only too conscious that Self, however much he promises, neither will nor can keep the law, and that the more effort you make to overcome this evil thing or that, the more often you fall, the stronger grows the bad habit, and the greater the inclination to indulge it. Vainly you plead "incline our hearts to keep this law"; for you find that the mind of Self is "*not* subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. viii. 7).

Self can observe days, and months, and times, and years; he can enjoy exquisite music, beautiful architecture, an outward religion of forms and ceremonies; he can force himself to observe a weary service of effort; but the holy Law is spiritual, and condemns him at every point. "Thou shalt not covet!" it cries, and sins innumerable are brought to light.

O soul! you have mistaken the way; there is no path for you into the joys of Relationship by the efforts of Self to obey the law; for the bond which it has so wilfully formed with law only brings sin into light, and can only be broken

by death. You can never earn a righteousness by law-keeping which will stand the Fire.

It is at this juncture in our journey of experience, when we grow daily more conscious that there is a law in our members which is enmity against God, and that Self is "carnal, sold under sin," "for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be," that a terrible battle begins within, and the distress of the soul is very great. The fact that it has no strength against Self, no strength to love God or to serve God, comes incessantly before it. What is to be done? People give all sorts of advice. Some say, "It must always be so till you die; you can never know till the judgment day whether you have really succeeded in getting saved or not." Others say, "Make greater efforts still; pray more, read more, rise earlier, fast regularly, attend the services of the church more religiously." I heard of a gentleman once who tried hard to beat Self into obedience! He not only fasted from his daily food, but he beat himself till he was covered with bruises. But

when he fasted, he found he was too faint to pray; and when he smote on his breast, it pained him so much that he thought more of the sufferings of his body than of the sin of his soul. He found he could not punish Self into obedience. No; do what you will, you cannot possibly bring Self into a fit state to enjoy relationship with a holy God.

"Oh!" said a little girl to me one day, as she watched me fill in a cheque, "so you have got one of those wonderful books. My father has one. Now you can have all the money you want." "Provided," I answered, smiling, "that the money is in the bank; the book would be of no use if I had not the money in the bank." "Oh, dear!" she added, with a sigh, "is that it? I always thought if only any one could get one of those books, they could have all the money they wanted." Ah! downcast soul, encamped with the bewitched Galatians under law, finding all your efforts to escape from its gloom worse than useless, you have a promise-book which commands a treasure that knows no limit, every leaf

of which is signed with a Name before which all heaven bows. Why are you thus struggling and failing, failing and struggling? Why do you not pray for strength to overcome? "Pray for strength!" you cry; "why, I am always doing it. My petitions come back to me, so to speak, with 'none to be had' written across them."

It is true, *there is none to be had.* It is of no use asking God to incline our heart to keep the law, for He has said of Self that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" You are like a poor traveller lost in the vast bush in Australia: you are entangled in a yoke of bondage, and you cannot escape by any efforts of your own. You are wandering round and round in one unvarying circle, ever returning to the same spot from which you started. You start with trying, and you return with failing, over and over and over again.

"We see strange and sad sights in this vast bush," wrote a traveller in Australia to his friends. "One day, as I was riding through it,

something bright flashing from a tree caught my sight. I went up to it, and found that the sunshine was reflected from a tin mug, which was hanging upon the bough of a tree, while beneath it lay the body of a young man, who could not have been dead many hours. As I looked at the poor fellow, I thought how many, many times he had struggled to escape from that trackless labyrinth! how he had wandered on and on, ever returning to that same dreadful tree, to start again and fail again, till at last, weary and starving, he had laid him down to die, alone and lost in that vast solitude. I looked at the tin which had attracted my notice, and on the bottom of it, scratched with the point of a knife, was his name and the date, and below it these words, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then I scooped for the poor lad a shallow grave, and rode upon my way."

So Self leads your soul round and round, entangled in a yoke of bondage. You start, as I said before, with trying, and you return with failing ever to find your*self*, with the Fire lying between you and a holy God. "Therefore by

the law shall no flesh be justified, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. iii. 20). What a discovery you thus make! Religious Self is *sin*, and cannot be altered. As a child of Adam fallen, you cannot establish righteousness, and thus get to life on the principle of law-keeping, for you have no power to keep it. You are without strength; you cannot alter or control your*self*. Well is it for you when, like the lonely traveller in the Australian bush, you give up your vain hope to get on by your own efforts, and lay you down in death with a mute appeal to that One who has become "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. x. 4). For Death only can deliver you.

I was looking the other day out on to the restless, rolling ocean, and I saw the shadow of a dark cloud lying over miles of the swelling waters; but beyond that cloud was a snow-white sail, shining in all the glory of the golden sunlight. It was plain that the sun was shining on behind that cloud, which alone shut out his glory from the dark expanse of waters. So has the

soul "in the Galatian encampment" passed under the guidance of Self out of the sunshine of perpetual grace into the distance and darkness which belong to what you are as born of Adam. Self wishes to merit the grace of God by Law-keeping or effort, but grace can only flow out when its object has no merits to plead. If the soul follows Self's lead it is fallen from grace, and its efforts to get back into the sunshine are all in vain.

O soul, you have mistaken the way! "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. iii. 3). Are your own efforts, as a child of Adam, needed to perfect what the Spirit of God has begun in you? The "fiery law" that pealed from Sinai's smoking crest to trembling, vowing Self can only thunder, "Do or die!" can only curse the servant that has "no strength"; can only bring to light the sin that cannot face its fiery gleam. There is no way back to a holy God that way; for there the Flaming Sword still wheels betwixt God and sin, and turns "every way to keep the way of the Tree of Life."

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIERY SERPENT

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live."—NUMBERS xxi. 8.

HAVE you ever been out on a picnic into the country? How pleasant it is to leave the bustle and noise of the town behind you, and find yourself seated on the grass under spreading trees, beside a flowing river, perhaps, enjoying a good meal with your friends! Only the other day a gentleman was telling me that when a boy, he went out with some young friends thus to enjoy himself, and as he sat upon the grass, full of life and joy, he saw an adder close beside him. It was creeping into its hole, and he, in his thoughtless folly, laid hold of its tail and drew it back. In a moment it turned and bit him. To his horror he found that he was serpent-bitten. What was to be done? The scene was

just as bright and beautiful as it had been before, the grass was just as green, the country just as pleasant, the sun shone just as brightly, the blackberries or the nuts were just as plentiful—but what was it all to him? He was serpent-bitten, and the poison of the adder was already coursing through his veins. "We must get home as fast as we can," said his young friend, but before he reached his home, quickly as they went, he was so swollen and disfigured that his own mother did not know him. The bite of an English adder is not always fatal, and after days of suffering he recovered; but if a man is bitten by a cobra or a rattlesnake there is no hope. He is what people call "a dead man."

I was hearing a little while ago, from a lady who had lived in India, of the terrible effects of a cobra bite. Two young officers had quarrelled, and, as they were not allowed to fight a duel with pistols or swords, they determined to fight it with a cobra. Who suggested such a terrible and wicked thing I do not know, but they chose their seconds and fixed the time. The seconds arranged

that a cobra should be placed in a dark room, into which the young officers were both to enter by themselves, and, of course, the one upon whom the snake sprang would be the conquered one. The time came; the cobra was procured by the natives and placed in the room, the poor foolish young men entered together, the door was closed, and the seconds stood without, listening breathlessly. Suddenly a terrible cry rose from within; the deadly cobra had fastened upon one of the young soldiers, and the poison was pouring through his veins. The seconds rushed into the room in horror, finding out too late that the natives had not extracted the poison fangs from the snake as they had been secretly ordered to do, and that the victim was even then dying. They rushed for brandy, for help, for a doctor, but it was all too late; before any help could come the young man died.

And it is at this point of your journey of experience from Loneliness to Relationship that the soul suddenly becomes conscious that Self is serpent-bitten! It is aghast, and well

it may be, for it discovers that its idol which it has loved so fondly and has hoped to improve is utterly corrupt — "carnal, sold under sin." Has it just happened? No, Self is the nature which we all have from Adam, and it was serpent-bitten in Eden's lovely glades. There is no cure for the serpent's bite, and death must follow; and moral death has followed, and the soul gazes in horror at its once loved idol as it beholds it one mass of corruption from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot. It can never be made to keep its vows under law, and the righteousness of God demands its doom.

Once, when I was walking across a lovely meadow in the spring-time, I was startled by the sudden motion of some animal starting from almost beneath my feet. It was near hay-time, and the grass around me was very long and covered with flowers of white and of gold. I saw this long flowery grass wave from side to side with an undulating movement as the creature I had startled passed hastily through it. It was the trail of the serpent that I watched, though I

could not see the creature itself; and so all this way upon our journey we have come upon the trail of the great Serpent who poisoned Eve in Eden. What would be the use of God's forgiving your sins over and over again if *you* were to remain unchanged, corrupt, serpent-bitten? And how, let me ask you, if the idol, Self, had remained unjudged—how could the soul ever have been fit for the presence of a holy God?

A few years back a very sad event happened in the south of Africa. It was a time of war there, and a foreign prince had gone with the English army to gain experience in warfare. One day, this prince wished to ride a long distance from the camp into the neighbouring country, and a young officer and two or three troopers were sent with him as a body-guard. After spending a pleasant time in the wild open country, they were about to mount and return to camp when the wily foe suddenly rushed upon them. There was no hope of resistance, for they were completely outnumbered; the only chance of safety lay in the speed of their horses. The

prince gave the word to mount, and in a moment the troopers sprang to their saddles, and turning their spurs upon their horses' flanks, rode for their lives. No one knows how it happened, but the prince missed his hold of the saddle, his horse broke from him, and bounded after the retreating escort, and the poor young man was left alone to die covered with wounds taken while facing innumerable foes. The young officer who had thus deserted his charge was tried by court-martial and sentenced to be shot. But ere the sentence could be carried out, the widowed mother of the fallen prince pleaded with the Queen for the young man's life. She gained her plea, the Queen held out her royal mercy to the offender; he was pardoned, but never more could he be trusted with a post in the British army; never more could he serve his sovereign; he might live, but it must ever be as a disgraced man, pardoned, but not justified. And I have been told that in about two short years he died broken-hearted, and so death ended his sorrow and his shame, as death only could.

"The wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi. 23), and constant forgiveness for sins committed cannot bring the corrupt sin-stricken being back to life, for moral death is within it. It is in distance from God, and death is His judgment upon sin. So it is plain that forgiveness only for things done could not fit you either now or after death for the presence of a holy God.

"I do not see," said an aged Christian gentleman to me one day, "how we can ever be fit for the presence of God. For my part I find my*self* no better than ever I was. I used to laugh at the Roman Catholic notion of the fires of purgatory for the purification of the soul after death, but now I really do not see how without something of the sort I can ever be fit to meet a holy God." There he stood—grey hairs were on his head, but when those hairs were brown he had been working hard for Christ; his eyes were growing dim, but when those eyes were bright in youth he had fought a fearless fight for the Saviour that he loved.

Perhaps you cry with horror, "How could he

think of such false doctrine as that? Let me tell you that that man had been used to the conversion of hundreds of souls. When but a lad of twenty summers he had stood between the living and the dying, while the cholera swept London like a flail. Bible in hand, with the black death flag waving above his head, that young soldier of the Cross had preached the free forgiveness of sins in the Name of Christ in the poisonous back slums of the London of those days. He had seen men stricken down beside him in the agonies of death, he had stooped over the dying in their poor close rooms, and had pointed the passing souls to the Saviour of sinners; he had carried the glad tidings of forgiveness of sins and of deliverance from Satan's power, from village to village in the neighbourhood of his country home. Pelted with rotten eggs, hailed before magistrates, scorned by men of his own class of life, he had stood for the Lord he loved; supported, cheered, strengthened by His unseen power. That was the man who now, in his grey old age, had for the first time caught

sight of what Self really was in the sight of God —serpent-bitten, corrupt. And if you smile at his surprise and fear you have never yet seen it yourself. He had hoped against hope from year to year that by watching, and by prayer, and by reading the Word of God, and by preaching to others, that religious Self would be gradually changed into the likeness of Christ. He had hoped—and now with death rising swiftly around him, for he knew that his end was approaching, he had discovered that Self could not be justified, and could never stand before God. Ah! God only knows what that moment is to a soul. Israel was just upon forty years getting to that point, and many dear Christians are as long. They spend their lives here, under the shadow of the Burning Mount, in the Galatian encampment, still on the journey from the Land of Loneliness, but not reaching the joys of Relationship, and all because they do not know what the Fire has done for them.

"My dear!" said an aged relative to me one day, "I do not know how it is, but I feel my

heart is *so bad*, oh, so very bad! It is awful, so sinful—so exceedingly sinful—I do not know what is to be done." She was the widow of a clergyman; she had led a singularly blameless, loving, unselfish life, and now at eighty years of age, she stood before me with her once stately form bowed with age, and trembling with emotion, as she told out the sight that she had just caught of what Self really was; and she was wondering how possibly she could escape the judgment and stand before the God she loved. *Her* soul also had awakened in her grey old age to find itself in the Land of Loneliness, chained to Self, and wondering how sinful Self could escape the Fire. I could have wept, while with stammering lips I tried to point out the way of deliverance that had been planned in Eternity before the earth was; the way that had been opened through Christ's death and resurrection. Did she see it? I do not know. I only know that when a few months later I stood beside her death-bed, and took her cold hand in mine, and stooped over her sightless face, I whispered: "When thou passest through

the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee"; and in a firm voice she added: "When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isaiah xliii. 2). Oh! the tender love of Him who thus shines forth in the warmth of His grace, to draw the dwellers in the Galatian encampment, at their last moments, out of their self-chosen gloom into the sunshine of His measureless Grace!

Now with these dear aged Christians it was Self which was their trouble. To their surprise they found him unimproved, yet still sitting within the shrine of their hearts, and still demanding their worship. They had grown to hate him, and yet there sat the grim idol, still under the power of the dread divinity of the Land of Loneliness, and still, as far as their experience went, bringing them under the doom of the broken law; serpent-bitten, corrupt, abominable.

In the Word it is written that "through this man (Christ) is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." *That* they did understand, but

"by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses"; *that* they did not understand. They had believed it in a way, because it was in the Bible, but when they were coming to the point in their experience of facing God Himself, they wanted to know how He, a holy God, could say they had no stains upon their characters; how He could count their faith to them as righteousness. They did not understand what the Fire had done for them, and what God had wrought for them in the resurrection of Christ. They believed it as a doctrine, and all the time in God's sight they were justified; but they could not understand how it could be, while sinful Self was still unimproved within them.

And have you not discovered that the very fact of your knowing the holy Law rouses this evil principle within you to greater opposition, and while your soul consents to the Law as holy and good, it finds that it is yoked by Self to a law of sin which positively cannot do right? "For the good that I would, I do not, but the evil

which I would not, that I do; now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. vii. 19, 20). No sooner is the soul brought to own that its once-loved idol is serpent-bitten and hopelessly corrupt than the in-dwelling Spirit of God shows it that sinful Self and it are no longer one. What a discovery this is! Yet, at the same time, the soul feels its own utter powerlessness to control the evil principle that dominates it. It is then that suddenly, like a cobra-bitten man, it ceases its struggles and raises that pitiful cry, "Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 24).

Now, I am sure you have often heard Christians talk about a person being in the "seventh of Romans." No words of mine can conduct you through this stage of your journey; you cannot imagine yourself into it, nor can you be warned against it—you must go through it in your own soul's experience. None but those who have passed this way can understand it, and to any whom my voice may now be reaching who are

just in the throes of this terrible discovery that Self is serpent-bitten, I say it will be a blessed moment for you, when, ceasing your vows, your struggles, and your tryings, you sink down in death, like that young traveller lost in the bush, with a mute appeal for a deliverer. Then—then in a moment help is near, for the Spirit of God has brought you back from your long wanderings after wilful Self to the line of God's purpose of grace for you. You may be on the very verge of despair, but the darkest hour is that one before the dawn. Death, and death only, can deliver you.

I know well what it all means! I know how, when on the very verge of deliverance, the soul will start up and make one desperate effort more against the mastery of sin, but it is not till the last struggle is struggled, and the stillness of death is over you, that God gives you deliverance. Take courage. Your case was all foreseen from Eternity, before Time was; and while you are looking at things from your own side of the journey of experience, God is looking at

them from His side — that of eternal purpose; and God, who is love, because He is love, has long done everything for your deliverance.

Death will deliver you. God only waits till you accept death on Self to come to your aid in power. How can I help you? I cannot help you. I speak with reverence, God Himself cannot help you, save by bringing you to own your*self* serpent-bitten, corrupt, your soul without strength against sin. Then, by His Divine Light, you may lift your eyes to behold Christ raised up as the "Serpent on the pole."

Do you remember that when the children of Israel were drawing near to the end of their long wanderings in the wilderness, and seeming only to get more rebellious and wicked every day, that they were suddenly bitten by "fiery serpents?" Every one who was bitten died of the serpent's venom, till Moses, by God's command, made a "fiery serpent" and set it upon a pole betwixt earth and heaven. It was a lifeless representation of that which had bitten the people, and whosoever looked at it lived. I used to wonder

if any one could have been so foolish as not to have looked. I used to think that if I had been there I would have lived with my eyes upon it, lest one of those fiery serpents should have bitten me. I did not know that I was bitten even then, and that one day I should be asking my Saviour in terror how a being serpent-bitten and corrupt could ever reach eternal life.

Other Christians often talked to me about Deliverance. They said it was found in the eighth of Romans. Do they talk to you about it? I did not quite understand what they meant. Do you? I saw that some of them had really gone further in their soul's journey than I had, and they talked of joys that I did not enjoy. I read about "no condemnation," and I felt sure I could trust the Lord Jesus to keep me out of it; but how He could do it, seeing I was all sin, I did not know.

Souls would get on much faster in their journey of experience if they would only cry to a living Saviour, "What I see not, teach Thou me." They go and carry their difficulties to

Christ's servants, and say, "Can you help me?" Then they get doctrines into their heads, and think they know all about Deliverance, when they have never really seen "the fiery serpent on the pole." If you go to Christ Himself for help He will then use His servants to show you the truth, and His light will reveal His own grand work for you, and the Spirit will work it into your soul.

Do you understand the fourteenth and fifteenth verses of the third chapter of the Gospel of John? I thought I did, but when I found out that I was serpent-bitten, that I was hopelessly corrupt in my very self, I sat down before the third of John, and covered my face like Moses, in the presence of a holy God. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"As Moses lifted up *the serpent*," cried my soul. "What can the Lord Jesus have meant? *The serpent! The serpent!* I do not understand it. What does the serpent represent?" Then hastily, with a heart mute with astonishment, I searched the Scriptures, and turned from passage to passage to find out what "the serpent" meant. Have you ever done so? As I read Eve's dreadful ruin by the serpent-tempter, and then passage by passage from Genesis to Revelation, my amazement and, I may say, my horror deepened. "As Moses lifted up *the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up!*" "If Thou hadst not said it Thyself," I cried to my Lord, "I would not, I could not have believed it." *He* the sinless One, He my spotless Lord, *He* pictured by the loathsome fiery serpent! Impossible. I was like Peter; I said, "Be it far from Thee, Lord." I had seen by the light of faith the spotless Passover Lamb, in all its innocence and purity, go to the death. I had rejoiced under the shelter of its precious blood; but the hateful fiery

serpent, raised up between earth and heaven, I had never seen that before, and I gazed on it aghast. No wisdom of my own could account for *such* a picture of *such* a Victim. Then He, the Spirit of God, who by Fire and by Light was leading me on into the Purpose of my God, He brought suddenly to me these words, "For He—God—hath made Him *sin* for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. v. 21). *Made sin. Made sin.* He the spotless One! His body given to death, that the body of sin might be destroyed! I saw it all. I gazed like Israel on the fiery serpent with its mighty brazen coils flashing in the blaze of the eastern sunlight; but it did not move, it could not stir, it hung there a lifeless thing—*Sin.* I saw it there, the serpent that trailed, as it were, through the whole human race from Adam to me. I saw that serpent-sin hard hit upon its head on Calvary's tree, where between earth and heaven hung our sinless Saviour "made sin" by God "for us." I saw *the root* of all the evil things which I had ever said or done

or thought—sinful Self—beneath the judgment of God, bearing the stroke of the Flaming Sword, and so not only removing the sin that had made it impossible for God to approach His sinful creatures, but removing my sinful Self in judgment from before Him. I heard the voice of the Lord of Hosts, crying, "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, against *the man that is My fellow*" (Zech. xiii. 7). I saw that the One who had been in Eternity had come down in Time as Man, to sheath the Flaming Sword that guarded the way to Life in His own breast, and thus to bear the judgment of Adam's sin and of my sinful Self, which was part of it, by the sacrifice of Himself. I saw that the great blockading enemy Sin was gone from before God's eye, for it thus had already met its righteous doom from the Flaming Sword on the Cross of Christ. Then I opened the shrine of my heart, where Self had so long sat and ruled, and lo! by no hand of mine, he was fallen from his throne, and like Dagon before the Ark, he lay a broken idol before the One who had now come in to rule;

the One whose vast measureless love had thus wrought out my deliverance from sinful Self's righteous doom. I saw too that with the root—sin—the fruit of sins had all been consumed for faith in the person of my Substitute, and now I understood how that ever since I had believed in Christ, I had had the benefit of free forgiveness for Self's wilful actions, and how it was that perpetual grace was ever shining behind the clouds under which religious Self had led me. All, all was gone that lay between my soul and a holy God. I saw that a living Saviour as my Shepherd had led me through all this wilderness journey that I might learn *myself*.

Oh! the serpent on the pole. What a divine glory lights up that awful picture of the Cross!

"Oh, mystery of mysteries,
  Of life and death the tree,
Centre of two eternities,
That look, with rapt adoring eyes,
  Forward and back to thee.
O Cross of Christ, where all His pain
And death is our eternal gain."

I will not say that a shout burst from my lips, but it burst from my heart as I thus saw what the Fire of God had done for me—for us—as believers in Christ. The flames of the burning Mount faded from my view, and its thunders died upon my ears. Sinful Self of Adam's stock who had striven to live on the ground of law-keeping and effort had been judged, had met his doom, and my soul was free from him and from the condemnation of his broken vows.

Not so very long ago I stood in silent awe in the chamber of death. The once young bride, who had been wed so timidly in Kensington Old Church more than fifty years before, lay there in the quiet hush of her last long sleep. I stooped over the little figure, lovely even in death, and gazed upon the tiny folded hands. The ring was not there. A thrill went through me. She would have wished it left, I thought; and I slipped it back upon the finger. Foolish act! The bond had been broken. Death had broken it. It had been made "until death do us part." She was free in death. So, O Soul, Self is dead before

God. And thou art free from all his vows, from all that to which the law was linked. Death hath delivered thee. "But now are we delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held" (Rom. vii. 6). "Ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. vii. 4). "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive."

This is just what those dear aged Christians had needed to understand. If they had seen the fiery serpent on the pole, and had understood what the Lord meant when He said, "Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"; they would have seen that they needed no fires of purgatory to set their souls free from their Adam connection. The Flaming Sword had done it for them long before. The doom of the sinful Self within them was past on Calvary's Cross of shame.

The work had all been good for them; and

they now reap the eternal blessing of it in the Paradise of God; but they never enjoyed it on earth. That is why I am making my feeble effort—if perchance God the Holy Spirit can use it—to show one of you what the Fire has done for you. "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the Man that is My fellow," saith the Lord of hosts (Zechariah xiii. 7).

CHAPTER IX

IN THE MIDST OF FIRE, LOOSE

"Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."—DANIEL iii. 24, 25.

AS I stood at my window one fine spring morning I saw two birds which were fluttering about in the greatest agitation. First they perched on the branches of a tree just in front of me; then they flew down to the earth, and without resting there an instant, they winged their way up again, twittering and fluttering all the time. I was wondering what could be the matter with them, when I observed two little brown fledglings crouching on the earth beneath the tree, and hiding themselves as best they could under the shelter of the fence. They had been startled from their nest by the gardener who was at work upon the ivied wall, and had fallen helplessly to the earth without the strength to fly. The parent birds, who knew that they were in a place of danger, were doing their utmost to induce them to make the effort to use their wings,

and make their escape; but they could not fly. They had wings, it is true, but they had not as yet the strength to use them; yet all the while they were safe, though not as yet saved, because I, who had both the will and the power to deliver them, was watching them where they were; and I soon lifted them up, and put them in a new place—a place of safety. A strength not their own had to do it.

And now this evening we have come to that stage in our journey when the soul is conscious of deliverance from judgment on Self. But it would be of little use to it to know that its link with Adam was broken through the condemnation of sinful Self in Christ "made sin" unless it could rise up and live. The young man, of whom I told you, who was lost in the Australian bush, sank down and died, and there was an end to his weakness; the young officer who could not undo the act that had disgraced him, died broken-hearted, and there was an end of his sorrow and his shame. But he who looked on the Brazen Serpent *lived*, and the soul that beholds Christ "made sin for us" by God,—*lives*.

Do you ask how? By a power not its own. "For the spirit of life *in Christ Jesus* hath made me free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. viii. 2).

Your soul's journey of experience through the sea of Death that surrounds the Land of Loneliness is drawing to its close, for the fulness of the grand work done on the Cross of Christ is now being made good in your soul by the Holy Ghost. The idol Self, whom you so fondly thought could live before a holy God, has been dropped at last from your weary arms, and is buried from God's sight in the death of Christ. You have proved now by painful experience that in you, that is, in your flesh, there dwells no good thing, nothing that even God can improve, and you see that the Fire of judgment alone could free you from the idol which had made your soul solitary. Now you understand how, with the sound of rushing wind and the light of glowing fire, the Holy Spirit of God could come down at Pentecost to dwell within mortal bodies, not to consume them, but to energize the soul, and to shed abroad in the heart the warm glow of the

Love of God. God had seen the end of man in the flesh long ago. He knew what the Fire had done for you; the Holy Spirit has now made it good in your soul, and by His indwelling power you now live unto God. Very, very near the end of the journey are you; very, very near to the God you love, to the Home for which you yearn.

"Spring up, O well," sang the children of Israel, after they had seen the Brazen Serpent; and now the mighty Power within you is free to lead your soul into deliverance by Power, that is, into Liberty. "There is therefore now no condemnation,—or judgment,—to them that are *in Christ Jesus*; for the law of the spirit of life *in Christ Jesus* hath made me free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. viii. 1, 2).

What does it mean: "The spirit of life in Christ Jesus"? It means a new power and a new place. Like those little birds who had wings but could not yet fly, you have now to enter into the enjoyment of a new place by a new power. You have to learn your origin, and that you are at liberty to rise to your Home.

I remember hearing some years ago the account of an eagle's escape from captivity, and as it now comes before me, I will tell it to you as something of an illustration of this last stage of our long journey from Loneliness to Relationship. The eagle is, as you know, a royal bird. He lives among mountain peaks, and builds his nest upon the crags, where foot of man can rarely climb. This eagle, whose story I am about to tell you, lived among the wild, free hills of Donegal, upon the north-west coast of Ireland. How he had been tempted down from his home among the mountain crests to the lower earth, I do not know, but he had fallen into a snare, and at the time when my story opens he was living on the plain, chained by the leg to a heap of stones, which was placed in the grounds of a large house, situated in Donegal. He was kept there as an ornament to the place, but he did not belong to it. His captors fed him and admired him, but he was not happy with them; he did not love them. He was a free bird of the hills, and he pined for his native heights. Their dainties had tempted him down,

but they could not satisfy him, and day by day he turned his wistful eye upwards, and night by night he crouched to rest upon his pile of stones, with drooping wings and fallen crest,—a sad-hearted, despairing captive.

Now, so it was that one day, after months of captivity, this eagle found out a secret. How he found it out I cannot tell you, but certain it is that he had done so, before he actually made use of it, for on that day, his captors coming round as usual to admire him and to feed him, were astonished at his beauty. "What has happened to the eagle?" they cried in wonder; for they beheld his eye full of new light, turned upwards to the sky, his crest raised, his large wings half spread, quivering with excitement. "How beautiful he looks!" they cried, little dreaming that down, far down in that captive's breast, a wonderful secret was hidden. "The chain can't hold me; I am free." He wanted not their dainties; he cared not for their company; it was for his home he was yearning—for his home among the crags. And even while

they watched and wondered, with one swift bound he left his clanking fetters behind him, and sped along the mountain road.

He was free, but he was not safe. It is true that his fetters were powerless to hold him, but his long wings could not raise him from the level surface of the ground; he must reach some mound or rock before he could get air enough below them for the mighty strokes that should raise him upward to his native heights. It was a desperate race, a race for liberty. Beating the dust with his long wings, he rushed along the mountain road, while after him in hot pursuit ran his breathless foes. Little chance of escape would the bird have had, had not a mound of rock beside the road caught his eager eye. Up its rugged sides he fluttered, and as he reached its summit, flight and pursuit were over. Well he knew that on that rock he was free indeed; for it gave him the power to use his wings, and well did his pursuers know also, that once there, no power of theirs could retake him. The day was wild and stormy;

masses of dark clouds were sweeping across the sky, swathing, in their volumed folds, the mountain peaks where was the eagle's home; but so it chanced, that, just as he paused on the top of that friendly rock, the wondering onlookers beheld a sudden gleam of sunlight stream through the drifting cloud-rack, and bathe with a golden glory the mountain road, the jutting rock, the eagle's dusky form upon it. Up that ladder of light they looked, up through the drifting storm, up through the rift in the volumed clouds, and there bathed in perennial sunshine, poised on its outspread wings, half seen, half lost in the blaze of light, floated another eagle's form, watching with piercing eye its comrade's gladsome escape. Not another instant paused the bird, but away and away up that pathway of light it sped, to its friends and its home among the crests of the mountain.

Oh, that secret! the eagle's wonderful secret! Is it yours? Has it dawned upon you, as you see yourself freed from the doom of indwelling sin,—of all that you are, of all that you have done

as a child of Adam, that "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world?" (1 John iv. 4). If so, I am sure a gladsome sense of liberty at hand has flooded your soul with a new-found joy. No vows that Self has made, to do, to live, can bind down the free-born soul, for it lives in a life beyond the reach of Self's death and doom. "Because I live ye shall live also," cried the Deliverer. No bad habits that Self has allowed, strong as iron though they be, can bind down the soul that the Fire has freed from the doom of sin, for then the Fire itself consumes all that has bound the soul. The chains won't hold, glad soul; you are free. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal. v. 1).

"I am free," cries the soul; but then begins the race for liberty.

I was reading this morning the words of the Lord Jesus, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny him*self*, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it" (Luke ix. 23, 24).

What does this mean? It means a living death to Self. But you say, "A living death to Self. We thought Self was gone in Christ 'made sin for us.'" So he is, in God's sight, but after you gaze on the Brazen Serpent you have to tread through Jordan. For it is soon very plain to us that though Self has gone from before God, and can no more bring us into judgment, yet while we are in our present mixed condition he is always ready to assert himself, and strive to regain the throne in our hearts, upon which the Holy Spirit has set Christ. Do you ask what is meant by our present mixed condition? It means that although our souls are alive unto God in Christ Jesus, our mortal bodies still link us to Adam's fallen race. We have not bodies yet suited to the life in Christ. Therefore death to Self has to be made good in us day by day; that is, we have to deny Self, to disown his authority and his wishes, and to keep him down in the place of death, where God has put him.

Ah! what a sound of battle rises upon our ears at this stage of our journey. Have you not read

how Abraham had to cast out Ishmael? Ishmael was the son of Abraham's Self-will. He thought to get God's promise of a son by the plannings and the wisdom of Self. But the child of sinful Self-will was born in bondage, and could never become free-born; he could not be joint heir with Isaac, the child of promise, given by the power of God. Abraham grieved for Ishmael; we none of us like disowning the fruit of Self, but Self and Christ cannot dwell together. Have you heard Christians speak of the "Galatian conflict?" This is the struggle that they mean, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. v. 17). The Apostle said, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh"; that means, let the Spirit of God have His own way with you, and He will keep Self down in death. All the workings and the counsels, and the plannings and the fruit of Self have to be disowned. Nothing whatever of Self, even his beauty, or his talent, or his wit, or

his eloquence, will do for God. How could it? Have we not seen Christ the Holy Son of God "made sin" to free us from our link with sinful Adam? The Fire of God had to fall upon it. "Away with it," cries the soul that has seen the Brazen Serpent in the Light of God. "Away with Ishmael, he must be cast out." The glow of heat, the new Power within the heart burns for the God who so loved us, as to give up Christ to bear our doom. The Fire of God and the Power of God are resting there.

Now, sometimes it is years after the soul has seen the condemnation of sin in the flesh before it reaches its next stage in this solemn journey, which is liberty. Shall I tell you why? Because it only too often allows Self to rise up and pretend to help in this desperate contest. It is the great enemy's device to keep believers in Christ occupied with their own state, and he stirs up self-effort to overcome Self, and thus the Spirit is grieved because He is not allowed to carry on the battle in victory. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed

unto the day of redemption" (Eph. iv. 30). Some people will tell you that this struggle is to go on while you are on earth. It is plain they have never learned deliverance by power.

There is not only a moment when the soul is brought to see sin in the flesh, *i.e.*, Self condemned, but another moment when it comes to the very end of its own efforts to walk in the Spirit, a moment when it learns experimentally that "the battle is the Lord's," and that it may "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." Then and then only is Deliverance by power wrought, and you become suddenly conscious, as one has said, that there is "a Power in you superior to all opposition, internal or external" "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John iv. 4). Oh, that moment! that never-to-be-forgotten moment! the soul sees Christ seated on the throne of its being as Lord in reality. It cries "I am free," for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. iii. 17). Nothing short of the conscious enjoyment of this is liberty. It is the

gift of God, "you are called unto liberty." People who do not know it may say what they like, but be assured that nothing short of liberty is God's purpose for the believer. Isaac the child of promise was free-born. The Holy Spirit of promise has set you free *in Christ.*

But if I go on with my simple illustration of the eagle's story, you will remember that the bird, though free, could not mount away to his friends and his home, until he stood upon the rock. It is now your soul's new place, or new origin, which you need, to realize "in Christ Jesus."

This phrase "in Christ" used to be a great puzzle to me. I thought it meant being in the ark like Noah, as if in some way I was *inside* Christ, and how that could be I did not understand at all, but I used to try and explain it to people as being inside a place of shelter from judgment. I am sure I puzzled them very much, for I had not seen God's meaning in the words. Oh, those two little words "in Christ." They mean so much. They mean to your soul, in its escape from the Land of Loneliness, all and more

than the rock meant to the eagle in its escape from captivity. It could not have gone home without the rock, nor can your souls enter into the joys of Relationship without enjoying the truth in those two words "in Christ." It is the fact of your soul's new origin that you need to realize. Let me try and explain it more fully to you.

It was on a lovely summer's afternoon, when the shadows of the trees were making cool shady places here and there in the garden, that a lady who was visiting at my father's house said to me, "Let us go out into the garden and enjoy the air." "By all means," I replied, and we were soon seated under the trees talking together upon various topics; but the conversation soon turned to the subject which was, I think, uppermost in her mind. It was the history of her own sad life. She had been left an orphan when very young, and had never known either a mother's tender care, or a father's sheltering love. Her life had been spent in wandering hither and thither, from situation to situation as a poor lonely, homeless governess. As she went on with

her history she suddenly brightened up, and spoke in glowing terms of the kindness she had received in one of her situations. She had not only been well remunerated for her labours, but she had been cared for, and loved, and her poor heart had gone out in answering love to her kind employers. But at that point of her narrative she stopped abruptly, and then after a moment's pause resumed in a tone in which sorrow and bitterness were painfully blended. "But after all, you may do what you will, you may study them to your utmost, you may slave away your life to please them, but you are only 'the governess' still. You may come in, and you may go out, but you do not belong to them. Your services are needed—and you stay; your services are at an end—and you go. Do what you will, you remain one alone. You are not—you never can be—*one of them*."

Ah, that sad lonely orphan heart had found there was no way for her into a father's affections, or a family circle on earth—*none*. No efforts of hers could make her one of the stock. "One of the stock"; that is what the

soul needs to understand. No law-keeping, no service, however faithful, could make it one of the stock, could give it a birth-right to the joys of Relationship. But the truth is, it has been freed from its Adam link by the judgment of Fire that fell on Christ "made sin" by God, and that it has been linked with Christ risen from the dead—free of sin, and death, and judgment—by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of promise, which came down like wind and fire at Pentecost. You see you have a new origin, a new start, a start from Christ in glory, so that your glad soul can never come under the power of death and judgment more. "As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John iv. 4). You are "in Christ." It will make it plainer to you, I think, if you add the word "race" after "in Christ," and say "In Christ's race." That poor governess, work as she would, could never be one of the family she served. She could not be of their race; she could have no inheritance with them; she could claim no father's love, no father's care. It was *impossible*. But the loving heart of our God

in eternity sought not to make us servants standing afar off in the Land of Loneliness, but to create in Christ a race of sons, who should draw nigh and worship in a Father's home. Do you see it?

Once sprung from Adam sinful, outside of Eden, gazing with fear at the Flaming Sword that righteously guarded the way to the Tree of Life on earth,—now sprung from Christ, the last Adam,—a life-giving Spirit—the Tree of Life in the paradise of God. "In Christ." "Therefore if any man be *in Christ*, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new" (2 Cor. v. 17). And priceless are the privileges which this marvellous new creation that has put your soul "in Christ" confers upon you. It is indeed a change of place. Clothed in a righteousness that can stand the Fire we walk at liberty, the blessed liberty of the Spirit of God; and we walk as unconsumed by the searching flames as He who is with us, whose form is like unto the Son of God. "For both He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified are

all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. ii. 11).

"But of him are ye *in Christ Jesus*, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. i. 30).

Wisdom! Ah! what wisdom. Christ was the wisdom of God, ere the world was, and by Him God purposed to place us "in Christ" as a race of sons, in eternity's changeless sphere. Righteousness! Ah! Yes, now you can see how in Christ we no longer live like the poor signalman, the same man who had failed, or like the traitor nobleman—a forgiven rebel—but in Christ we have justification of life; we live as men of a new order altogether before God, "clean every whit." We see, as one has said, "the man that was under judgment, is gone in judgment." Sanctification! Yes, for as Christ has sanctified Himself, or set Himself apart as a Man of a new order, the Head of a new race, so as getting our new origin from Him we too are set apart, or sanctified to God. "For both He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one" (Hebrews ii. 11).

Redemption! Yes; even these poor bodies, still mortal, still corrupt, will be redeemed, and because of the Holy Spirit, which dwells in them, they will be changed, when Christ comes forth, into bodies like His own. That will be "the redemption of the purchased possession." "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God, and not only they but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption—or sonship—the redemption of our body" (Rom. viii. 21–24).

Not long ago I climbed a steep hillside, and when at its summit I paused and looked behind me. "What a beautiful view!" I cried as I beheld the heaving waters of the mighty ocean rolling beneath me, as far as I could see. So now your soul in its experience is climbing Jordan's brink, and stands in its experience where it has ever been seen in God's purpose, on the Red sea-shore of victory. "What a beautiful view!" it cries, as it beholds behind it the great sea of Death that once

shut it righteously in its prison in the Land of Loneliness. "In Christ" it looks back on His death and judgment, and beholds its idol Self buried from God's view in Jordan's rolling waters, judged by Fire and left behind like the twelve stones graven with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel who had fallen in the wilderness. And well may it cry as it basks in Zion's shadeless light of grace, and looks back on Calvary's cross of shame, "What a beautiful view! What hath God wrought!"

But there is more. Death has become the servant. I read once the story of a French Count whom Napoleon the First shut up in prison. He was quite a young man when the sentence was passed upon him, which made him a prisoner in one small room of an ancient fortress, and years passed over him while he led his sorrowful life in solitary confinement. Day by day and night by night, the gaoler, under whose hands he was, visited his cell, and day by day and night by night, shot the bolts again and left him to his misery. But gradually the

man grew to love his captive, and did many kindly acts to relieve the monotony of his prison life. At last the Count became very ill, and the gaoler had to become his nurse. With tender care he nursed him through his sickness, and got leave for him to walk every day in a little yard beneath his prison. "What would you do," said the Count to him one day, "if you were to see me escaping over these walls?" "I should shoot you instantly," replied the man. "I am your gaoler; it would be my duty to shoot you, and I should do it." A few years later, and Napoleon, at the intercession of Josephine, set the prisoner free. The bolts were withdrawn for the last time, the bars were removed, the doors were thrown open, the Count was at liberty. "Now, sir," said the gaoler, "if you will take me with you, I will be your servant until I die." So, now the soul "*in Christ*" beholds a strange new servant at its side. Death, who was once its righteous gaoler, has become its servant. He waits as its servant-friend to hand it in to the actual presence of its Deliverer. Death as the penalty of sin is gone; "or life or death, or

things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 22, 23).

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. xv. 55–57).

CHAPTER X

RELATIONSHIP AND HOME

"I ascend unto my Father and your Father."—JOHN xx. 17.

"And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder: and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." —2 KINGS ii. 11.

DO you know what makes a home? Perhaps not; for every habitation on earth is not a home. I went once to see a very large house in the country; it stood in its own grounds surrounded by beautiful trees. Pleasant lawns of soft green grass lay around it, and smooth gravel paths wound about amidst clumps of evergreen shrubs and flower-beds, bright with many coloured flowers. Inside that house there were large and airy rooms that were carefully furnished with every necessary comfort; and upstairs there were long dormitories filled with rows upon rows of little beds—pretty little beds, all of them scrupulously clean and tidy. Do you ask, Who lived there? Children lived there. I saw children everywhere; nicely dressed, well fed children. Some of them were learning their lessons in the

airy schoolrooms, some of them were running about in the pleasant gardens, and some of them —oh, sad sight!—little baby children, were playing with pretty toys upon the nursery floors.

Do you say, Why was it a sad sight? Because that large house with all its comforts was not a home. It was called, and rightly called, "an orphan asylum." You might search its stately chambers, its many corridors, its pleasant gardens, but you would find no father there, no tender loving mother; there was no common bond of relationship between those children. They ate together, they played together, they studied together, but they were not brothers and sisters knit together by the common bond of a parent's love. When the time came for them to leave the kindly shelter of that large habitation, they would each of them have to go forth alone upon the struggle of life, unsheltered by a father's watchful care, unsoftened by a mother's tender sympathy. That large house, with all its comforts, its food, and its shelter, was not a home.

It was on one cold and snowy day in De-

cember that, after wrapping my warmest cloak about me, I issued forth to visit some of my poorer friends. The one to whom I most wished to go that day was a caretaker in a large empty house, about half a mile from where I lived. I soon reached the gate, and fearful of trusting myself to the broken steps that led up to the front door, I crossed the little tangled overgrown garden and crept down the area steps to the servants' entrance. My knock was soon answered by a thin, worn-looking woman, who at once asked me in, and ushered me through the outer passage with the damp stains on the walls, into the kitchen where she lived. The ceiling was low, the walls were smoke begrimed; round the wainscot the damp stained the plaster, the window was almost entirely below the ground, and the furniture was poor and scanty. As the owner of that not very desirable habitation offered me a chair she apologised for the general appearance of confusion in the room by saying, "I am very busy to-day, the holidays will soon be here, and I am getting everything clean and tidy, for my children are coming home."

"Home!" Was that a home? That poor cellar-like room with its tattered carpet, its half empty cupboard, its tiny fire? Those children were being educated at the workhouse school, that mother was a widow who earned a scanty living and kept things together by labouring hard at her needle. Yet her worn face brightened as she talked of the holidays, and "the home" was being prepared for the returning children.

A few days later and I walked again into that abode; and if I had doubted before its right to that sweet name of "home," I could doubt it no longer; for the children had returned, and when I looked upon their beaming faces as they nestled round their mother, I could not doubt for an instant but that that half-furnished cellar claimed a title which could never belong to the grand house in the country with all its comforts. It was *a true home.* What made the difference? It was the presence of that pale, worn, weary mother that made the difference. She was the centre that drew together in the fond embrace of her love those children's hearts. They

were not orphans, they had a mother, and in her presence was their home. I sat me down at the deal table, beside the scanty fire, but I felt that though I was in the habitation, I was not in the home. No! "home" is a charmed sphere, a sacred circle, belonging to the parent and the child, into which neither friend nor servant can ever enter.

To be in the home you must not only be one of the stock, but you must know One who claims the name of "Father," and you must know the Father's heart.

A gentleman whom I once knew asked this question of a class of girls at a boarding-school: "If I could offer to each one of you what you would most desire to have, what would you each choose?" There was a pause—a pause during which each young heart pondered over what it most desired to possess. Then one named one thing, and one another, till a little orphan girl said sadly, "If *I* might choose, I would choose a *mother*." Deep down in that poor bereaved heart there was a yearning for relationship and for home—a relationship, poor child, which could

never more be for her on earth. So now within the orphan soul, as it enters into life on the shore of victory, with all the radiance of Mount Zion's perpetual Grace around it for evermore—so now within it rises a strange, deep yearning to know and to be with the God it loves. It is yearning to know its Father and its Home.

Do you remember that when the Lord Jesus Christ was about to leave this world by death, He told His sorrowing disciples that He would not leave them "orphans" (marg.), and that He was going to prepare a place for them in the "Father's house"? Was He going to take us in as servants? No. As friends? No. In the purpose of God, before the earth was, it had been settled that He should bring us in as sons. "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children—sonship—by Jesus Christ unto Himself" (Eph. i. 5).

It was not only into the habitation we were to be taken, but into the Home. How could that be? There could be no Home without a Father? Philip said almost directly, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." "Have I been so

long time with you," answered the Lord Jesus, "and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John xiv. 8, 9). And how long a time in our soul's history is it generally before we learn that the Saviour whom we love and trust is the expression of the Father's love to us! He said to them, "I will not leave you orphans" (marg.). "I will come to you" (John xiv. 18). And when He rose from the dead He said, "I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John xx. 17). Christ declared the Father's *Name* to them, and when He left them and went to His Father, He received the long-promised gift of the Holy Spirit who came down, as we have seen, in Power and Fire to reveal the Father's *heart* to them and to us.

There comes a moment when the once orphan soul receives the revelation of sonship. It beholds itself as one with Christ in heaven by the Holy Spirit, and finds itself in all the blessed warmth of His relationship to the Father. For

He is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. viii. 29). Then with a sudden cry of reverent wonder and delight, it raises to its God the Spirit's cry of "Abba, Father." For "ye have received the Spirit of sonship, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. viii. 15). It is all a matter of the affections. If the Spirit of adoption, or sonship, is within your heart, it will, it must, glow with the love suited to the relationship that exists. If you do not know it, I cannot describe it to you.

The Holy Spirit alone can bring that cry of "Abba" welling up from your inmost being. And the Father, known by the Spirit, what wait you for? But up the ladder of light that streams from the opened heavens, wrapt in the Spirit's power of whirlwind and Fire, you enter in spirit the Father's home on high in answer to that Voice that said, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." "In Christ," and "of Christ," and "as Christ," and "one with Christ," you are swept into the centre of those Divine affections which surround Him. In the warmth and the light

and song of that radiant Home you find yourself seated amidst an adoring multitude, of whom you are one; a blood-washed company, a race of sons.

And what do we ponder there in wondering awe? There we "joy in God," lost in that love which "passeth knowledge." There we gaze in awe at the stupendous purpose that gave us—each named by name—as the Father's love-gift to the Son ere time was, and we behold ourselves the tribute of the Son's love to the Father, as He ushers us into that high presence-chamber set in eternity as a company of sons—the fruit of the travail of His soul—for the satisfaction of the Father's love. Divine affections thus radiate around us, and we find ourselves the vessel for the display of the glory of His purpose "throughout all ages," while we ever raise the glad song "unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God, and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev. i. 5, 6). Thus as "in Christ" and as "of Christ" we find

our spirit's home, as sons, in the very heart of the Fire-circled "I Am."

Farewell, gloomy Land of Loneliness! Death-girdled shore; where moans the rising tide around the trembling captives, and over which quivers the lightning of judgment to come! Farewell! Nevermore shall the glad souls "in Christ" revisit thy gloomy abode—nevermore shall they moan in darkness and in dread, "What am I? Where am I? Where am I going?"

What are they? Children of God. Where are they? Feeding on the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God. Where are they going? Into the Father's Home as *Sons*.

And now, ere we close to-night, let me ask you one earnest question: Will you be content to live encamped for life with religious Self, under Sinai's burning Mount? Or will you be content to pause on this side Jordan, with the wives and children, the flocks and herds? Or will you let Him have His way with you, whose Fire and whose Light have come in through the avenue of Death to bring you unto Himself? "I

bare you on eagle's wings," says Jehovah to Israel, "and brought you *unto Myself*" (Deut.). "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John xvii. 24). Is the prayer of Christ for us?

"Whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Rom. viii. 30).

"And is it so? I shall be like Thy Son!
Is this the grace which He for me has won?
Father of Glory! Thought beyond all thought—
In glory to His own blest likeness brought.

Oh! Jesus Lord, who loved me like to Thee?
Fruit of Thy work. With Thee, too, there to see
Thy glory, Lord, while endless ages roll;
Myself the prize and travail of Thy soul.

Yet it must be. Thy love had not its rest
Were Thy redeemed not with Thee fully blest:
That love that gives not as the world, but shares
All it possesses with its loved co-heirs.

Nor I alone; Thy loved ones all, complete
In glory, round Thee there with joy shall meet:
All like Thee, for Thy glory like Thee, Lord,
Object supreme of all, by all adored."

CHAPTER XI

SALTED WITH FIRE

"I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?"—LUKE xii. 49.

"For every one shall be salted with fire."—MARK ix. 49.

DID you think we had finished our journey last evening? So we have, in one sense, but in another we are still upon it. In spirit there already; in body down here on the earth, as pilgrims and strangers. Alas! the song dies upon our lips, the glory fades from our view; the deep realities of that bright Home grow distant to us; while the roar of this world's restless sea waxes louder every moment. Not yet the glory—Home; not yet the Father's presence-chamber; not yet the full inheritance of light and love and song; not yet the unchanging sphere of eternal purpose. But now the soul pent in a mortal body; but now the groans of this wrecked creation; aye, now the weary journey, the tireless watch, the desperate strife, the salting Fire, the daily walk of the saint's responsibility. Do you tremble as you realize

the fact? for though out of the Land of Loneliness for ever, it is in the Spirit only you can enjoy a foretaste of the glad inheritance "reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter i.).

"Kept by the power of God," and "salted with Fire." Little should we enjoy the scene there in spirit, but for this "salting with Fire" on the wilderness journey. It is the Father's provision for our safety through the journey of life; for we have, as it were, come back to walk upon the earth. How strange! a heavenly family, starting from Christ in glory, and now living on earth in a "mixed condition," that is, still linked to Adam by our bodies, and united to a glorified Christ by the Spirit. Living in the midst of death, light-giving in the midst of darkness; Love-emitting in the midst of coldness and of selfishness. Whence the power for all this? "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John iv. 4). "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy

Spirit which is given unto us." The Power and the warmth are of heaven, not of earth. The Fire of God glows in each believer's heart, for this strange family is of heavenly origin and belongs to heaven, and has therefore the nature which befits heaven—love.

Many years ago, when I was quite a little child, a great event happened in our family, and to this day I remember quite distinctly how I first heard about it. I was playing in the garden near my home, when I saw my father walking in the conservatory. I ran into him at once, and he looked down on me very gravely, and said: "You have a little sister." I hardly knew what he meant, but very soon afterwards I was taken into my mother's room to see the new baby. There lay the little helpless thing, which had been born into our family. Its tiny feet and rolled up hands were perfect, but useless as yet for the life it would have to live as a person on this earth; but for all that it had inherited the nature of its parents, and that nature they had inherited from their parents, and so on all the

way back to Adam. The baby child had taken Adam's sinful nature—Self—because it had been born of his stock.

So each member of this strange family among whom we now find ourselves upon the earth has been "born of God." "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (1 John iv. 7). That does not mean that we have as yet spiritual bodies; but it means that we have been "made partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. i. 4). The nature of God is love. "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (1 John iv. 7). "God is love." God's great love has flowed out to us. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (iv. 9).

If this wonderful love is within us by the Holy Spirit, it must flow out to others. It is a living love, a burning love—it cannot be still, it cannot be idle; it is not sentiment, which is natural feeling—a feeling without power; a

pleasing sensation which Self enjoys; it is a Divine principle which, like the Fire that glowed on the altar of old, comes from God and goes up to God. "Every one that loveth Him that begat"—that is, God—"loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (v. 1). This is the family love. One family indwelt by one Spirit, with the same nature love, the same Father, the same Home before us. How happy we ought to be! We each have One Centre—the Father's loving heart; and we are each drawn to that One Centre by the One Spirit. As we approach the Centre we get closer and closer to one another. It must be so.

But do you say: "It does not seem like this at all, for the children of God are scattered far and wide from one another on earth, and do not get on well together." I will tell you how this has come to pass. Self is busily stirring, urged on by Satan, to draw our hearts aside from the one Centre. If each of us followed the Lord this divergence would not be, and this is why we have to be "salted with fire." Self is, so to speak, no longer us, but it is dross. Self

has to be purged away bit by bit from us. Only the Fire of love from heaven that burns upon the altar of our hearts can do this for us. This is "salting by fire." The dross must be purged away, and as it is purged away the love of God grows warmer within us, and we are drawn nearer to the Centre, and so nearer to all God's children.

One morning a letter was put upon my table, and as I looked at it I saw that it had a foreign postmark. From whom can this be? I said to myself, as I opened it. I soon found that it had come from a young girl who was at school in Germany; she had been away from her home for twelve long months. But she was not like a poor orphan who had no parents and no home; she knew her father and her mother, and she had tasted the enjoyments of a very happy home. She had been sent away from them all for a time for her own good: to learn necessary lessons in a far-off land. The letter was a very loving one, but she was feeling lonely so far away from home. She wrote: "We are having dreadful weather now, but I do not mind it, for

it seems much more winterly, and consequently nearer to coming home. I am looking forward very much to seeing home again, and all the dear faces there; sometimes I get such a fit of delight at the thought of going home that I do not know what to do with myself!" Does not an ecstasy sometimes fill your heart as you think that the school time on earth must soon be over, and the glad summons to a Father's arms and a Father's Home must soon sound in your ears? No orphan now you tread the wilderness, but at school to learn your appointed lessons from a Father's hand, subject to a Father's chastening rod, and guarded by a Father's watchful care.

I once stood at a window by the seaside watching the scene without. I was weak and ill, and my eyes rested longingly on the golden sands, over which the rippling waves were advancing little by little, under the summer sunshine. My feeble steps could not reach that lovely scene; I had not strength to wander over the yielding sands, to climb from rock to rock, or to gather the rainbow-tinted seaweeds that were strewn

upon that shore. My heart was very sad, for months of ever increasing pain and weakness had left me little or no hope of ever again being able to wander about at liberty in the fresh free air. Presently, as I looked down upon the fair scene, I saw the people on those sands begin to move with one accord towards the steps which led from the shore to the cliffs on which I was. The tide was coming in, and one and all began ploughing their way through the deep, soft sands over which the water was advancing, to a place of safety. They passed, and the tide came sweeping on; when suddenly my eye lighted on the solitary figure of a tall, manly looking man, striding with hasty steps along the farther coast, making for the way up the cliffs. Clasped tightly to his breast, and evidently sleeping in peaceful unconsciousness, lay a little girl. What did she know of the danger of the rising tide, or of the difficulty which her baby feet would have found in ploughing through those yielding sands? Nothing. Step by step the loving father trod along his way. What cared he for

the weariness of the path? He thought only of the little treasure clasped so tightly to his loving heart. His love was set upon her, and to satisfy that deep love of a father's heart, it was his pleasure to bear her to her home in safety. But what did she know about that love as she dreamed her baby dreams lying in the cradle of those strong arms? What did she know of all the cares and anxieties, and hopes and fears of which she was the subject? Or what did she know of the dangers from which his love shielded her, or of the self-sacrifice with which he tended her? My eyes filled. I too had a Father, and why should I not confide in His love and His care? Was He not bearing me on in the arms of His love over the desert sands, where my feet might have been set fast, but for His chastening hand? "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" (Heb. xii. 7).

We are away from home, at school, and if we do not learn our lessons properly, if we let *self-*

will and *self*-love become the motives of our lives, the Spirit of God is grieved; He can no longer tell us of the Father's love, the Father's Home. We may know it all in our heads, as the truth of Scripture, but the warm glow of love dies down, and the conscious enjoyment of Relationship is gone from us. Then God's chastening hand comes in, because the Father's heart yearns over His wayward children, and yearns for their love, and the Fire has to do its purifying work. "For every one shall be salted with fire." It is the Father's provision for the way. "Tongues like as of fire sat upon each of them."

Why do we salt things? We salt things to preserve them, to keep them from corruption. Your Father knows well that corrupt Self is still within you, and what can He do to protect you? He has sent you His Fire, and full of the glow of His warm love to you, Self, sinful Self, can be kept down in the place of death. The Fire from heaven must purge him away as dross is purged from gold and silver. Do you not know that if you love any one very deeply, any

flaw in that person's character or ways is the greatest sorrow you have? Oh! you would do anything, anything if you could only make that dear one all that your fond heart desires him to be. But you cannot. *Divine love can.* Divine love can bear no flaw in the objects of its deep affection. "Be ye holy, for I am holy," says the God of Love. He would see His children here displaying all the loveliness of that One, now the "First-born among many brethren," who ever glorified Him when on the earth: and this is why He would salt us with Fire to keep Self down in death.

We shall not need this action of the Fire by-and-by, when we shall be seen in bodies like Christ's, in "the manifestation of the sons of God"; but while we are in the children's place, in this mixed condition we require indeed to be "salted with fire," that as obedient children we might be found displaying all the loveliness of that One who ever glorified God when on the earth. The Fire has to make us vessels meet for the Master's use.

Long ago, when I was quite a small child, I was travelling with my parents and two brothers in South Wales. My father took us to a town called Merthyr Tydvil. He wanted to show us how iron was smelted. He said it was a wonderful sight, and he should wait until nightfall to show it to us, because it all looked so much more beautiful at night. While the daylight lasted I felt very brave, but as the shadows of night closed over the town and I saw from the windows of the hotel dozens of flaring chimneys, I felt rather nervous. "Are those chimneys on fire?" I asked my father. "No," he said; "they are blast furnaces, and it is there the iron is being smelted."

When the time came, instead of going to my bed as usual, we all started out in the darkness, and drove into the yard of one of the ironworks. I followed my father very closely, for I heard the most terrible noises issuing from some of the sheds, and very soon we were standing in the full glow of the fiery light from several of the furnaces. I cannot tell you all I saw, for I was much too young to understand what it all

meant; but I remember that the clamour was fearful, and that half-naked men were rushing hither and thither in the fiery glow, while the blasts were roaring, the hammers clanging, and the men shouting. I was ready to drop with terror, and when we were led up a little narrow, winding staircase where an awful rushing noise was to be heard, it required all my resolution not to show my fear; especially when the big man who was showing us over the place caught up one of my brothers and set him on his shoulders. I cannot tell you how I wished somebody would pick me up, for the melted iron splashed about like water, and I thought we might all be burnt alive.

After we came from that dreadful little passage where the roaring of the blast was to be heard, we saw something very beautiful. We stood in a long, low building, where the ground, the walls, the roof were all as black as soot, and then suddenly we saw a brilliant gleam of fiery light, and we felt an intense heat. A furnace had been opened, and into the awful raging flames masses of coal and iron-ore were being

tossed. Then there was a shout, and some half-dressed men, almost as black as everything about, came rushing along with what they told us was "a mould." This mould they placed under a tap, which they turned, and immediately a glowing stream of molten iron flowed into the mould. It ran like fiery water, and it was so very pretty that I forgot my fears, even when the drops of liquid fire came splashing about the spot where I was standing.

The iron was coming out of the fiery furnace fit to be moulded and hammered into useful things. But the coal had been destroyed, it was only fuel to the flames; it came out no more, but disappeared in the raging furnace. To the coal which was made of tree-ferns and wooded matter grown out of the earth, the fire was a destroyer; but to the rough black iron dug out of the rock it was a beautifier and a refiner, for it freed it from the dross which polluted it, and the metal came flowing out of the furnace, bright with a new beauty, and soft enough to be moulded to the owner's use. I think if the coal

could have spoken it would have cried out, "How dreadful is this fire!" But the voice of the iron would have said, "How useful is this fire. What should I have been worth without its purifying heat? It has been the making of me." What a difference! And yet the difference was not in the fire, but in the substance exposed to its power.

Do you remember how we spoke of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were cast into the burning fiery furnace? Those were the fires of persecution, and these purging fires have been permitted to try the faith of God's children. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. i. 7). Nothing that is of Christ can perish in the furnace. What then will it consume? The bonds—the ties that bind you, and that hamper you, the dross of Self that dims the lustre of the vessel that should "be meet for the Master's use." Do you think that one atom that is of Christ in you will perish in those

flames? Impossible! I have sometimes heard a mother scolding a naughty, disobedient child; and then turning round in excuse, she will add, "I have spoilt the child." Do you think Love ever spoiled a child? *Never.* Sentiment does it; and if you only think what the word "spoilt" means you will see in a moment that our God could never spoil His children. "Spoilt" means unfit for its proper use. The spoilt child is no comfort to its parents, no comfort to its brothers and sisters, and it is its own worst plague. True Love chastens and corrects, purging away all that mars the beauty of its object.

I told you once of a young man who made Jacob's vow, and who thought he could make a bargain with God? That young man, now growing old instead of getting what he wanted, found life to be a furnace of trial to him. Blast upon blast of fiery trial swept over him; it sometimes seemed as if he must have perished in the fierce ordeal. But has he perished? No. He was of Christ; and brighter and yet brighter grew the precious metal as the fire of adversity purged away the

once unbroken will of the flesh. Does he say, "My life has been a failure"? No! He says, "I would not have been without one of my sorrows." True Love could not give him his wishes, and see him a spoilt child. Divine Love would have him a vessel "meet for the Master's use." If you are full of sorrow just now, if tears are in your eyes and your weary heart is aching with some deep grief, fear not; our Father chastens for our profit, that we might be "partakers of His holiness." "God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" (Heb. xii. 7). It is not by faith that you can enter into the joys of Relationship. Light cannot give them to you. It is by Love alone, by the "glow of heat" from heaven that these deep and sacred joys are known by the soul. Why do we know so little of them? Because our enjoyment depends upon our *state*. Because we grieve the Holy Spirit of God, who alone can keep the warm glow of Divine affections bright within us, and by whom alone we can mount the ladder of light and dwell in Spirit in our Father's Home above.

When the children of Israel went to war and took vessels of gold or silver, iron or brass from their enemies, they had to pass them through the fire before they might use them. Everything that could "abide the fire" had to go through the fire to cleanse it for their use; and do you think that the vessels that the Master has taken from the Enemy will not have to "be salted with fire" to be cleansed and meet for His use? But that was not all, that was not enough. "Nevertheless it shall be purified with the water of separation" (Num. xxxi. 23). Through the purifying blast of Fire and through the sanctifying waves of Death leads the path that conducts your soul to the conscious enjoyment of your Father's love and Home. Believe me, it is no light thing, no pretty story that a child might love; it is a solemn, deep reality, that if you would answer even now to God's purpose of love for you, if you would enjoy even now the knowledge of the Father revealed to you by the Son, and the foretaste of your Home, it must be through *self*-judgment, and through the waters of Death that

you must go. Do you tremble? Stay. "There is no fear in love." Why should you fear? Love that has felt the fiery blast, as you can never feel it, Love that has passed under those deep waves as you can never pass through them, alone—can that Love be other than tender towards you?

We should have confidence in our Father's love? Confidence is a sweet word. "My child," said a loving earthly father to his daughter one day, as he handed her a letter with a broken seal—"my child, I am very sorry, but I opened this letter without seeing that it was addressed to you." With a sudden spring that girl threw herself upon his breast. "Open them all, father dear!" she cried. "Do you think I would have any secrets from *my father*." That was confidence, blessed, happy confidence betwixt the father and the child, the child and the father. No secrets from him; perfect trust in his love and his wisdom. And your confidence is what your Father asks. Confidence will have no secrets, no reserves from Him. Confidence will confide to Him every step of the way; will leave itself body

and soul and spirit in His loving, faithful Hands. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John iv. 18).

We are at the end of our journey now, and we see that "our God is a consuming Fire"; but perhaps you can say now in loving, trusting confidence, "and we would not have it otherwise."

But I cannot close this journey from Loneliness to Relationship without noticing that "every man's *work* also shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be tried by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. iii. 13–15).

The other day as I passed down a street near which I live, I paused for a moment before what had once been a house. It was then a ruin, for fire had been at work upon it. The walls, made of brick burnt in the fire, were still standing; the grates, made of iron smelted in the fire, were lying amidst the rubbish, unconsumed; but all

that had been of wood, had been destroyed; the roof, robbed of its support, had fallen; the fire had tested that house, and had consumed all that could not stand its fiery breath.

What of all our so-called good works will stand the Fire by-and-by? Only that which has been purified by the Fire will stand the Fire? Vainly shall we look for all the grand edifices that we thought the wisdom, the influence, the eloquence, and the wealth of the first man Adam, had reared for God; all must disappear when He comes, who is "as a refiner's fire." Nothing but that which is of Christ can stand the test; nothing but that which has had its source from the warmth of Divine love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost—nothing but that will stand the fiery ordeal of the coming day.

Do you realize it, as you teach those children in your class? or as you patiently stitch at those garments for the poor? For whom are you doing it? Do you realize it as you visit from house to house? For whom are you thus going

forth? Does the love of Christ constrain you? "Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. v. 14, 15).

And oh! the Church! *Who* stands amidst its vast pretentious worldly edifice in these last days? *Who* gazes on "the wood, the hay, the stubble" of earthly doctrines and human inventions built into souls by unsent builders? He whose "eyes are as a flame of fire, and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters" (Rev. i. 14, 15). And in the far, far future what glimpse have we still of this ever-existing Fire? "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Rev. xx. 14). The Fire swathes in its flaming embrace all that has opposed or exalted itself against our God.

But let us pause. Our talkings are over; and let us wonder as we see that the Fire that circles the throne of the great "I am"; the Fire that

guarded the way to the Tree of Life in Eden; the Fire that found its sheath in the Christ of God on Calvary's Cross, that Fire has come out through the avenue of Death to be the Guard, the Guide, the Purifier, and the Comfort of the children of God. Aye, the very chariot that shall bear us up as upon "eagle's wings" to our Father's Home in the heavens.

Look up, O Soul! and see upon the sapphire throne enwrapt in a self-enfolding Fire, in the very centre of that gorgeous scene, where shadeless Light and glowing Fire enfold each other; where Holiness and Love are wrapped together; where Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other; see there, "the likeness as the appearance of *a Man* above upon it" (Ezek. i. 26).

"Father, Thy sovereign love has sought
  Captives to sin, gone far from Thee;
The work that Thine own Son hath wrought
  Has brought us back in peace and free.

And now as sons before Thy face,
  With joyful steps the path we tread,
Which leads us on to that blest place
  Prepared for us by Christ our Head.

Thou gav'st us, in eternal love,
  To Him to bring us home to Thee,
Suited to Thine own thought above,
  As sons like Him, with Him to be,

In Thine own house. There love divine
  Fills the bright courts with cloudless joy;
But 'tis the love that made us Thine,
  Fills all that house without alloy.

O boundless grace! what fills with joy,
  Unmingled, all that enter there?
God's nature, love without alloy,
  Our hearts are given e'en now to share.

God's righteousness with glory bright,
  Which with its radiance fills that sphere;
E'en Christ, of God the power and light
  Our title is that light to share.

O Mind Divine, so must it be
  That glory all belongs to God:
O Love Divine, that did decree
  We should be part, through Jesu's blood.

O keep us, Love Divine, near Thee,
  That we our nothingness may know,
And ever to Thy glory be
  Walking in faith while here below."

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