

Work in its Right Place;

or, Reflections on the Life and Times of Hezekiah.

2 Chronicles 29 - 32 and Isaiah 36 - 39.

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There are two things to be specially guarded against by the Christian, viz., *inactivity* on the one hand, and ill-timed *Service* on the other. The former is a thing quite incompatible with the Christian character; the very same grace that makes us ashamed of our poor mean services, sends us on our way in earnest desire to be still more largely used for God. It is a truly lamentable thing when we need to be exhorted not to be idle. The Christian should find it as natural to him to act for God as it is for the natural man to perform the functions of natural life; hence, if he be not found *acting*, he has much reason to doubt as to his *living*. There *is* such a thing as "a name to *live*;" but no such thing as a name to *act*; i.e. to act for God.

On the other hand, we must ever bear in mind that God will be no man's debtor, seeing "He *giveth* to all life and breath and all things." (Acts 17: 25.) Man's constant effort is to make God his debtor; but it is a truly fruitless effort; and he who persists therein will find himself at issue with God. Nothing can ever settle the question between God and man, save man's becoming the recipient and the debtor; until this is done man must remain at a distance from God

Now, it is rather with the second point above referred to that I have to do in this paper Service ill-timed or defective, because not being the direct result of communion, contrasted with service flowing out of communion will be my theme — a theme with which the life and times of Hezekiah do specially furnish me

There are three kings of Judah whose reigns have been linked together by the Holy Ghost in three of the Prophets Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah delivered their prophetic burden "in the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" There is, I feel, a marked moral connection between the three reigns — a connection for which we might naturally be led to look from the fact just stated.

The temple of Jerusalem was the grand centre or gathering point for the people of Israel of old; round that sacred edifice the affections of every righteous Jew were entwined; and, as regards the kings of Judah, it will be observed that their actings with reference to the temple may be regarded as a safe criterion by which to judge of their real character personally and officially Those amongst the kings of whom this happy testimony could be borne, "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," were generally such as had their hearts exercised about the temple and worship of the God of Israel; and, on the other hand, those who "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" were such as had abandoned the house of the Lord and addicted themselves to idolatry

Jotham, king of Judah, occupied a position midway between these two classes; he was not an idolater; and yet the house of the Lord did not occupy that place in his thoughts to which it was entitled Of him it may be said that he began his work *outside the Sanctuary* — he went out to the mountains to build ere he had gone into the sanctuary to worship — he stood in the battlefield, ere he had stood at the altar — he addressed himself to the masons and the men of war, ere he had addressed himself to the priests — the ministers of the Sanctuary Hence all was defective True, he did much — "he built castles and towers" — he even went so far as to "build the high gate of the temple of the Lord" — yea, "he prepared his ways before the Lord his God" Yet, notwithstanding all this, there was a "howbeit" —

"the high places here not removed, the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places" (Compare 2 Kings 15: 35, 2 Chr 27: 2) This is a profitable lesson for us. We should watch with great strictness over the state of our hearts, lest haply our very services — our right and reasonable services — should get between our souls and the Person of Christ We should frequently turn aside for the purpose of sifting our motives in what we do — when we preach, publish, correspond, visit, or do anything else, we should calmly sit in judgement on ourselves as to our secret purposes in all these things When the Lord comes it is the "counsels of the heart" — not the works of the hand merely — that "He will make manifest" This is very solemn. Many a showy act of service — many an eloquent sermon — many a well written book — many an ostentatious visit will sink into eternal oblivion; or, if remembered, tend only to smite the conscience and blacken the doom of the deluded soul, who, it may be, had gone to work without having experimentally known that fundamental law of God's house, namely, *man must be a beggar*; in other words, who had never any higher object than *self* in all he said and did.

Concerning Ahaz we need not say much. He was an open opposer of God and His truth. He neglected the temple — shut up the doors — put out the lamps — cut up the vessels, and erected idolatrous altars in every corner of Jerusalem. Moreover, he went to Damascus to meet the king of Assyria, and there he saw an altar of which he sent a pattern to Urijah, the priest, who made one like unto it at Jerusalem; thus he put the true altar out of its place, and in a word, subverted the whole order of worship. "This is that king Ahaz."

In whatever way we view this unhappy man his history *is* full of solemn warning to us; but particularly when we view him as coming after Jotham. Whenever our hearts are not devoted fully and primarily to the service of the sanctuary — when we do not prize and cultivate secret communion with God — when the work *within* does not keep pace with the work *without* — when we read and teach more than we pray — when our work is more before the eye of man than the eye of God, we may rest assured of it, we shall soon break down altogether. The only thing that can maintain us in genuine effective service is communion, and if we fail in this all must go wrong Thus, looking at these two reigns as morally connected, the open apostasy of Ahaz was what we might have looked for after the defective service of Jotham. If we are merely engaged in building upon the mountains, while the temple lies comparatively neglected, we shall soon be found turning our backs altogether on the true worship of God, and giving ourselves up to idolatry. Surely we may ask, what avail "castles and towers," while the doors of the Lord's house are shut up? Or victories over the Ammonites, while the lamp of God shines not in the holy place? They avail just nothing nor will they last long, such as they are, but will soon give place to the more decided actings of an Ahaz who would not occupy an anomalous position.

From the above reflections we may draw the following profitable moral, namely, that communion City God must ever hold a higher place than service for God — *secret* fellowship with God must never be put out of its place by *public* engagement even in godly things. There are many who are ready enough to perform showy acts of service apparently *for* God, who doubtless would find little craving after private communion *with* Him. Let us, then, remember that if God does not receive the full homage of the heart, it matters not what we may achieve with our *hands* in the way of outward service, or with our *intellects* in the way of learning doctrine, our foundation is undoubtedly unsound, and the whole fabric will speedily tumble upon us, and bury us in its ruins; and, moreover, the greater the height, or the more showy the architecture of the superstructure, the greater will be the crash — the more melancholy will be the desolation. I feel that these things are worthy of the serious attention of professing Christians in an age like this of so much outward show, but so very little inward vital power of divine life in the soul — so much preaching and writing — so very little *living* — so much of the

head and hands, but so little of the heart and affections — so much for the eye of man, but so little for the eye of God. Our unceasing cry to God should be for power, power, power, spiritual power — without this all is thorough vanity.

We now turn to Hezekiah, whose history will yield us somewhat more comfort than that of his two predecessors on the throne of Judah. Of him it is written, that "he, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them." This was a happy opening, of his way — an encouraging pledge of what his whole after course was about to be. A course *begun with* God is sure, in the long run, to prove a triumphant one. There may be failure — difficulty — temptation — sorrow — clouds and darkness; yet, in the end, it will be made manifest that he who begins his course in the sanctuary will end in the glory. "They that be planted in *the house* of the Lord shall flourish in *the courts* of our God. (Psalm 92: 12.) Hezekiah, through mercy, seems to have felt this; we find him, at once, beginning at the right point. He did not go out into the mountains to build, but proceeded directly to the work of a thorough reformation. He sent the Levites into the very innermost part of the house of the Lord, to cleanse it, and thus set God in his due and proper place, feeling persuaded that, once that grand point was secured, all the rest would follow in course.

In all this Hezekiah teaches us a most salutary lesson. In the experience and actings of Christians, everything depends upon the place which God occupies in the heart; in other words, there is a strong moral link between our estimate of God, and our conduct; if our thoughts of God are low, low will be our standard of Christian walk; if high, on the contrary, the result will be accordingly. "Thus when Israel, at the foot of Mount Horeb, "changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass," the Lord's words were, "Thy people have *corrupted themselves*". Mark these words: "corrupted themselves." They could not do otherwise than corrupt themselves when they let down their thoughts of the dignity and majesty of God so low as to imagine, for a moment, that He was like "an ox that eateth grass." Similar is the teaching of Romans 1. There the Apostle, by the Spirit, shows us that the reason of all the abominations of the Gentile nations must be sought for in the fact that, "when they knew God, they glorified Him not *as* God." Thus they too "corrupted themselves."

This is a principle possessing vast practical influence. If we lower God we must necessarily lower ourselves. In this, I conceive, we are carried far above all merely systematic views of truth — it is not at all a question of mere doctrine. No, it leads us into the deep recesses of the soul, there to ponder, as beneath the piercing jealous eye of God, the estimate which we as individuals are daily and hourly forming of Him. We cannot refuse to apply our minds seriously to this important point of truth; our neglect of it will be found to contain much of the secret of our own low walk and lamentable deadness. God is not sufficiently exalted in our thoughts — He has not the supreme place in our affections — we do not sufficiently live in the atmosphere of His divine benevolence and faithfulness — our own state of mind — our experience — our services — our conflicts — our sorrows — our infirmities have, in a great measure, got in between our souls and God, and obscured the soul-stirring light of His countenance. Now, whenever *our own things* so act upon us as to hinder that calm, fixed, and certain rest of the heart and conscience in redeeming love, and the eternal efficacy of the work of atonement, we are sure to lapse into the mere religiousness and legalism of nature, or into thorough worldliness and moral evil.

The above train of thought is, I conceive, suggested by the first act of king Hezekiah. He laid a good foundation — he acted upon the precept afterwards delivered by the Lord Jesus to his disciples, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." He felt that his fortifications and buildings should all give place to the house of God — he could not think of dwelling in a ceiled house while the temple of the Lord lay neglected; and he, — therefore, as

it were, went right in to the inner part of the sanctuary and worked out from that as a grand starting point. And here we are invited to pause for a moment in order to contrast the divine and human order of service. Man says you must begin *without* and work in; Scripture says you must begin *within* and work out. *Man* says you must go out into the mountains and build castles and towers, and then come into the sanctuary, in virtue of what you have done, and set matters right there; Scripture says you must *first* enter into the inner part of the house of the Lord, and work out from that, stage by stage, until you find yourself in a fit condition to build fortifications if required. In a word, man says you must work *for* life; Scripture says you must work *from* it man says do and *live*; God says *live* and *do*. This is a happy contrast for the helpless sinner who feels that God's way alone is it that can meet his case.

But to return. I think we shall find a truly divine order in all the actings of Hezekiah, at least as regards the reformation. He did not merely begin right, but he continued right. It may be said of him, save "in the matter of the ambassadors," that all his works were "begun, continued, and ended in God." He determined to keep the Passover unto the Lord; and, in doing so, to act upon the largeness of God's own principle with reference to *all* Israel. He would not selfishly confine the aspect of this great foundation feast, or the cleansing efficacy of the blood, to the narrow limits of Judah or Jerusalem, but rightly commanded "that the burnt offering and the sin-offering should be made for ALL, ISRAEL." (2 Chr. 29: 24.) True; Israel had grievously apostatised, and become sunk in gross idolatry, but what of that? The blood that could cleanse Judah could cleanse Israel, and both stood equally in need of it. And, may we not say, whenever a soul is taught of God, it will always entertain those large thoughts about *the whole family of God*. There is no such thing as a section of the body of Christ; you must either think of the whole body or nothing. Every truth to be seen in its fullness, must be seen as bearing upon the whole body; whether it be the redemption in which we stand, the ministry by which we are sustained, or the hope by which we are animated, all must be believed in connection with the whole body. "In thy book were *all my members* written" — "He keepeth *all his bones*, not one of them is broken."

Now, it was this largeness of heart, and comprehensiveness of view, with regard to all Israel, that enabled king Hezekiah to send the following touching message throughout all the land of Israel, "Ye children of Israel, turn again to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he will return to the remnant of you that are escaped out of the hand of the king of Assyria." (2 Chr. 30: 6.) There is much moral power and spiritual intelligence exhibited in this message. It is plainly a message issuing from the sanctuary — a message from one who had entered in some measure into the largeness of the Divine mind. It is the purpose of God that Israel and Judah shall yet, in company, tread the earthly courts, and stand in the efficacy of the same sacrifice. Jehoshaphat had entered into a union with Ahab, king of Israel, for military purposes. (2 Chr. 18.) This union was, as we know, quite wrong. True, it was for a good cause namely, to recover Ramoth Gilead out of the hand of the king of Syria. Now this Ramoth was one of the cities of refuge; and to recover it out of the hands of the enemy must have appeared a very desirable object to the mind of Jehoshaphat; an object, moreover, which might be regarded as a good reason for entering into a league with Ahab. Yet, was it all wrong! The basis of their union was wrong it was not a union based upon "the blood of the lamb;" hence, notwithstanding it was for a religious, and, in itself a right object, God could not approve of it; it proved a source of much sorrow of heart to Jehoshaphat.

Not so, however, in the case of the good king Hezekiah. He sought to bring Israel and Judah together, not even to recover a city of refuge — not even for a religious object. No; he sought to gather their scattered tribes around the one altar at Jerusalem "whither the tribes go up." He had set up a centre of unity round which every Israelite could rally because he was an Israelite, but which had no attraction for those whose hearts were uncircumcised.

[It is of importance to see that Christian union requires, as strictly, the *exclusion* of those whose profession and life prove them to be of the world, as it does the admission of those who, however feeble and faltering, are of God. The recognition of this principle would preserve us from the two extremes of latitudinarianism on the one hand, and sectarianism on the other. We are not to receive or acknowledge those whose whole bearing is marked by carnality and worldliness, and woe is unto us if we exclude the very feeblest of the lambs of Jesus. It is not charity to admit to the Lord's table a promiscuous mass of worldliness, profanity, and moral evil; nor is it purity to shut out therefrom one of the least of those little ones who believe in Jesus, and desire to follow Him, even though such an one may not be able to come up to our standard or point at view. The grand motto for us is, "Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." (Rom. 15: 7.)]

But it is most important that we should see what it was that enabled him to send out the invitation. If Hezekiah had been walking in the cold and withering exclusiveness of the flesh, he would have left the children of Israel to their idols and thought only of his own enjoyment, and that of those in immediate connection with him. But no; his heart had been softened and his affections expanded in the presence of God — he had felt the sweetness and atoning efficacy of the blood — he saw its power to meet the need of idolatrous Israel — he knew that the lamb slain on the altar was the divine basis for the union of all, and he would therefore seek, in the attractive power of grace, to draw together — the children of God that were scattered abroad." And is there not deep instruction for us in all this May we not ask why it is that we have so little of this holy attractive power about us? why are we not drawing the children of God together? I believe it is because we are not walking in the practical exhibition of the Lord Jesus, who said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men unto me*." (John 12: 32.) We are not acting out the great principle set forth by Hezekiah, namely "The burnt-offering and the sin-offering must be made for *all Israel*." The table of the Lord is for all who belong to Him, and not for such as hold certain opinions merely. How different would be the state of things were all those who really love the name of Jesus to do as Hezekiah did. Instead of setting up such bonds of union as would admit the uncircumcised while they exclude the Israel of God, we should then have but the one bond — "The blood of the Lamb" — one centre — one table — one object. There would be decided testimony, both by word and deed, against everything, in the least degree, calculated to hinder the unity of the body.

And, if it be asked, What are we to set up? the answer is, Set up nothing as a bond of union but the name of Jesus — separate from everything that would exclude those who bear the name of Jesus or admit those who bear it not, or love it. This is the way to carry out, as far as you are concerned, the unity of the body of Christ. The question is not whether Ye are to expect a union of all Christians before the Lord comes. Were we to act upon this and similar questions we should do nothing at all. If we may go and form sects, or if we may give our countenance and support to the formation and continuance thereof, because we need not expect all to be united till the Lord comes, we may as well say that, because we shall not be free from indwelling corruption while in the body, it is useless to try to subdue it. No; our place, as individuals, is to do all in our power towards the unity of the body by discountenancing everything tending to divide it. Hezekiah never thought of inquiring whether the time were come for uniting the two houses; he knew that it was the divine purpose that they should be united, and knowing this, he endeavoured, as far as in him lay, to secure the object. The Spirit will ever lead us to aim at the divine purpose, and to act upon divine principle in carrying it out. If it be the purpose of God that His children should be "gathered together in one," it must ever be opposed to His purpose to have them "scattered abroad." Hence we may feel assured that, when we are endeavouring to secure the unity of the body, we are working for a divine object, our only care should be to act upon a divine principle.

[I believe, as old principles continue to work, and new ones begin to show themselves, Christians will more fully feel the importance of being well instructor in the simple principles of truth respecting the divine basis of Christian union and fellowship. I would refer the Christian reader to the following Scripture, viz. John 11: 52, and John 12: 32, as affording clear and simple guidance on the subject of Christian union. "*He* should gather together *in one* the children of God that were scattered abroad;" and again, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men* unto me." Here Christ is presented as the great centre round which all His members should revolve as planets round their central sun. If, then Christ be the centre, is it not as great a sin to set up any other; centre, even though it should be a point of truth, as it was for Jeroboam to break in upon the unity of God's earthly people by setting up calves at Bethel and Dan, when Jerusalem was their grand centre of unity? I believe it will, at least, be found to be productive of consequences as disastrous as regards testimony in the world. For mark the consequence of Jeroboam's act instead of *one* centre there were *three*, viz., Jerusalem, Bethel, and Dan; and, as a consequence, while the people were moving towards their various centres they were moving away from each other; whereas, had they maintained the one divinely appointed centre, it would have effectually secured the gathering together of the children of Israel, for all should come to Jerusalem from north, east, south, and west, but all should not go to Dan nor to Bethel, seeing they were not of divine but human appointment. Now, Hezekiah felt so assured that Jerusalem was the centre round which all Israel should gather that in inviting them to come thither he could say, "Turn again to *the Lord God of your fathers*." Such language would have been quite unwarrantable if Jerusalem were not the divinely appointed centre.

To us, however, it is not Jerusalem but the name of Jesus which constitutes the centre and bond of unity; and, when anything is added to the name of Jesus as necessary to our union, unity is interfered with and a sect formed. And is not that name sufficient? If believers are introduced by the blood of Jesus into the holiest of all — if they, through grace, are *together* there — if their names are enrolled *together* in the Lamb's book of life — if they are raised up *together* and made to *sit together* in heavenly places now in Spirit and by faith, and by and by to be, in actual fact, caught up *together* into the air, why should they not be *together* here below? We are together in God's view, and moreover, we are going on to that place where we shall be one in the view of all created intelligence, and must we by the way, shut ourselves up in our little enclosures, and frown on each other from thence? Ah! no; let all who see This blessed principle of Christian union *act upon it*, and God will surely be glorified thereby.

I would further add that as the name of Jesus is the only bond of union for Christians, so the Holy Ghost is the only Power of ministry for Christians. Let these two principles be received in the power of them, and we shall see what they lead to.

I would observe here that we must take care that, while seeking to lead the Lord's people into the liberty and unity of the Spirit, we do not lose sight of the hopeless and irrecoverable ruin of the professing church as a *corporate witness* in the earth. The observation of a valued servant of God is seasonable on this head: "If we are seeking a testimony we will go to ruin; but if we seek to walk with God, we shall stand." It has occurred to me that any effort after the gathering of the Lord's people just now partakes of the Character of the midnight cry" of Matt. 25. It has been well observed that when the time of coming of the bridegroom arrives :All the wise virgins shall be found *together*; The parable quite teaches this. Those who had the oil were altogether and ready; but those who had none — the foolish — the mere professors, were scattered about looking for oil *This should excite in the minds of all true believers a desire to be found together.*]

But observe the two-fold effect of this message of Hezekiah: They laughed them to scorn and mocked them; nevertheless, divers humbled themselves." (2 Chr. 30: 10, 11.) This is very instructive.

The invitation was received very differently by different parties; but the reception, though so different in each case, proved the message to have been divine — to have been from the sanctuary. Grace must either humble the heart or call forth reproach and scorn; in either case its genuineness is proved. "To the one we are a savour of death unto death; and to the other of life unto life." Hezekiah, however, could bear the reproach and mockery while he had intelligence about the value of the blood that had been shed; and while he beheld "divers humbling themselves" he would deem himself amply repaid for his trouble in sending out the message.

Now, if we were walking in the energy of divine grace, we should witness the same results; some, no doubt, would mock, but "divers would humble themselves;" as it is, we see neither the one nor the other, at least, in the measure in which they might be seen: on the contrary, *in status quo* seems to be too much the order on all sides; thus proving that all is not right. The saints are not drawn together: nor are the people of the world "cut to the heart" by the sharp edge of holy testimony; a painful lukewarmness — a miserable neutrality is maintained as regards divine things; while the things of this world are grasped at with an eagerness and a penetration that fully demonstrate where our affections lie. Should this lamentable condition of things not be counteracted, everything will go to ruin amongst us. We cannot remain neuter. We must either be gathering with Christ or scattering abroad. If we are not engaged for Christ we are engaged against Him — to do nothing for Christ is to do *something* for Satan.

But, it has been observed, that there was divine order in the actings of Hezekiah. This I think will be seen at every step of his course. He would not allow the fact of Israel's idolatry to hinder the outflow of his love to them, nor his efforts to lead them into the only true place of blessedness. He would seek to lead them around the one common centre — the altar at Jerusalem — he would assemble Israel's tribes around the paschal lamb, quite regardless of bygone failures — he would act upon the word of the Lord, by the prophet Isaiah, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people." In all this he was acting in harmony with some of the very finest principles of truth. It is ever God's way to lead the soul away from evil by presenting something good. It would not have been the divine mode of acting for Hezekiah to wait until he, in company with the house of Judah, had kept the feast, and then go out into the cities of Israel and preach against idolatry. He would have had no power whatever in so doing. One of the evils of idolatry was the interfering with the unity of the people of God, and splitting them into sects and parties; how, then, could Hezekiah bear testimony against schism in Israel if he himself had not begun on the only principle of unity. It would have been just as sectarian to confine the aspect of the feast within the limits of Judah as to set up another altar, or centre of unity. The true method of delivering Christians from sectarianism is to let them taste the sweetness of unity. So thought Hezekiah, and so he acted "And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day singing with loud instruments unto the Lord. And Hezekiah spake comfortably (to the heart) unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord; and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering Peace-offerings, and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness." (2 Chr. 30: 21-23.)

Here was the true way to teach Israel the evils of idolatry. They had never spent such happy days around the Calf at Dan. They had never tasted of such joys while under the influence of Jeroboam's system of political religion. No; nothing could touch the heart of a true Israelite like the notes of a divinely appointed priest or Levite — nothing could feast and gladden his soul like the divinely appointed sacrifices. And oh! is it not a happy thing that we may judge as to the rightness of any system or institution by its effect on the soul? Whatever is really of God will make the soul really happy; on

the contrary, whatever is not of God will have opposite effect. Thus, in the above interesting scene, when we observe the "gladness" of the "very great congregation" we are sure that God was there, and moreover, that a most powerful influence would be likely to proceed from such an assembly. The spirit that prevailed was such as could not fail to act in decided hostility to the whole system of idolatry and sectarianism which had spread its withering influence over the cities of Israel. A mighty moral influence was about to go forth from Jerusalem like a flood to bear down the altars and idols of the land of Israel, and which, had it proceeded onwards, would have for ever upset the great seat of idolatry and sectarianism.

The moral lesson taught us in all this is very plain, and very important. The true principle upon which to proceed in any reformation is not so much to pull down what *is false* as to build up what is *true*. Hezekiah felt that could he only assemble Israel around the true altar, and lead them into the sweetness of the true worship of the God of their fathers, the false altars would soon come to the ground; nor was he at all disappointed, for "*when all this was finished*, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places, and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned, every man to his possession, into their cities." (2 Chr. 26: 1.)

Here is service happily flowing out of worship, the only true source from which it can flow to the glory of God. One would naturally think that those altars would have attracted the attention, and drawn forth the indignation of the children of Israel as they journeyed up to Jerusalem; but such was not the case. No; they needed *first* to experience the power and blessedness of the truth in their souls — they needed first to drink, as it were, at the fountain head — they had to come up to the sanctuary at Jerusalem, where stood the true priest offering the true sacrifice, and having received strength and gladness in the Divine presence, and in the midst of His worshipping people, they were able to go forth and act in testimony outside. In fact, we may observe the same line of conduct pursued both by Israel and Hezekiah. The latter began with God in the sanctuary, so did the former. Hezekiah opened the doors of the house of the Lord ere he laid his hand upon an idolatrous altar. The children of Israel found strength at the altar of God to pull down the altars of Satan. But, as in Hezekiah's case, so surely as he opened the doors of the temple of the Lord would he level to the ground the idolatrous altars; so, in Israel's case, it was not more certain that God had strengthened them than that they would use that strength for the putting down of evil. It was not possible that they could destroy idolatry in passing from Dan to Jerusalem. No; they went from Dan to Jerusalem for the purpose of gathering strength, so that in passing back from Jerusalem they might act in testimony for God against evil. In all cases of departure from the place in which God has put us, the true way is not to allow ourselves to become entangled with the failure, but to get back at *once*, by humiliation and confession, into our proper position. By this means we obtain a correct view of the failure and real power over it. The children of Israel, during their fourteen days of "gladness," obtained a view of the deformity of idolatry and sectarianism, together with power to execute judgement upon it. This they never could have obtained at Dan. It is only when we have made our escape from a tottering edifice that we can really perceive how near it is to its final overthrow.

Thus we see that it was just as much in accordance with divine principle that the children of Israel should, ere laying their hands on a single idolatrous altar, repair to Jerusalem, "the city of their solemnities," as it was for Hezekiah to repair to the house of the Lord ere he took a single step in the service of God outside. Both were acting upon a principle truly divine. When Israel had once felt the power of their ancient worship they could form some idea of how far they had departed therefrom, and

also of the way in which to retrace their steps; and when Hezekiah had learnt something of the blessedness of having the true God set up in His proper place, between the Cherubim, he was prepared to see the evils — the abominable evils — of setting up idolatrous altars in the streets of Jerusalem.

Before I turn from this branch of our subject, I would say a word for the consolation of any reader who may feel that he has declined, in any measure, from God. To such an one, then, I would say, if you are really conscious of failure and spiritual decline — if you have sinned in any way and grieved the Spirit — if you have failed in the due regulation of your thoughts and ways so that Satan has gotten an advantage over you to weaken and trouble you — if you are troubled about any failure in service or worship — if, in a word, there be any thing whatsoever acting as a weight upon your heart or a cloud upon your spirit; your path is not to sit brooding over the evil, but, like the children of Israel, *at once*, get up to God's altar — fix your eyes upon the blood — look straight to Jesus, and see in Him the measure of your acceptance "before the throne of God," and be assured of it you will find your spirit restored and strengthened to conflict with the very evil that sinks you into the dust, and sends you mourning all the day. True restoration is not a struggle to get up out of the mazes of evil and corruption in which we may be entangled, but rather entering, in the unquestioning confidence of faith, into the divine testimony as to our perfect acceptance in the Beloved. Thus we at once find ourselves beneath the full blaze of God's redeeming love, and trample the mazes of evil beneath our feet in the holy triumph of faith. "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory."

But to return. It could not be expected that the enemy would long look on quietly at such a happy scene. There was too much glory to God, and too much enjoyment to the people of God, to admit of his being an unmoved spectator in the matter. Wherefore, "After these things, and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself:" (2 Chr. 32: 1.) We cannot expect to pass onward without encountering storms. We have a malignant and powerful foe to cope with; and we shall seldom find on earth a happy scene of sunshine without some cloud to overshadow it. Thus Hezekiah and his happy train of worshippers are broken in upon by Sennacherib and his rude warriors. But, blessed be God, the sanctuary and its holy occupations will never unfit us for active service. On the contrary, we can only serve with effect when we have been in the sanctuary. It is when we have been acting as *priests Within*, that we are prepared to act as Levites or men of war *without*; but we must not reverse this divinely appointed order. Hezekiah was ready for action when the time for action came. True; he vastly preferred the sanctuary with its solemn silence to the din of the battlefield, and the loveable altars of God to the castles and towers of military genius; nevertheless, when there was need, Hezekiah could bring the wisdom acquired in secret to bear upon the overthrow of his enemies in public.

There is, however, a marked difference in the way in which Hezekiah's actions are presented in 2 Chr 32 and in Isaiah 37. In the former, it strikes me, we have the matter presented more as a narrative of facts, while in the latter it is looked at in a moral point of view as bearing upon the future destinies of Israel. In 2 Chr. we are informed about Hezekiah's military operations; in Isaiah these are altogether overlooked. We shall therefore look a little at the closing scenes of Hezekiah's interesting life as put before us by the Spirit in Isaiah.

I have already observed that Hezekiah vastly preferred the silence of the sanctuary to the din of the battlefield. This is very apparent throughout his entire course; but specially so in Isaiah; he spent the most, if not all, of his time in services connected with the sanctuary. God's place "between the Cherubim" gave him far more concern than his own place on the throne of David; and so far does he carry his attachment to the house of the Lord that when the time comes at which we might expect him to issue forth therefrom into the field of battle, we actually find him making the very sanctuary itself

his field of battle. This is particularly instructive. The proud king of Assyria was at the gates of Jerusalem, with a mighty conquering host, and one would naturally expect to find Hezekiah in the midst of his men of war — buckling on his armour — girding on his sword — mounting his chariot; but no; Hezekiah was different from most kings and captains — he had found out a place of strength which was quite unknown to Sennacherib — he had discovered a field of battle in which he could conquer without striking *a* blow. And mark the armour with which he girds himself: "And it came to pass, when Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and *covered himself with sackcloth*, and went into the house of the Lord." (Isa. 37: 1)

Here was the armour in which the king of Judah was about to cope with the king of Assyria. Strange armour! The armour of the sanctuary. What would Sennacherib have said had he seen this! He had never met such an antagonist before — he had never come in contact with a man who, instead of covering himself with a coat of mail, would cover himself with sackcloth, and instead of rushing forth into the field of battle in his chariot, would fall upon his knees in the temple. This would have appeared a novel mode of warfare in the eyes of the king of Assyria. He had met the kings of Hamath and Arphad, etc.; but if he had, it was upon his own principle, and in his own way; but he had never encountered such an antagonist as Hezekiah. In fact, what gave the latter such uncommon power in this contest was the feeling that *he* was nothing — that "an arm of flesh" was of no avail; in a word, that it was just Jehovah or nothing. This is specially seen in the act of spreading the letter before the Lord. Hezekiah was enabled by faith to retire out of the scene and make it altogether a question between Jehovah and the king of Assyria. It was not Sennacherib and Hezekiah, but Sennacherib and Jehovah. This tells us the meaning of the sackcloth. Hezekiah felt himself to be utterly helpless, and he took the place of helplessness — he tells the Lord that the king of Assyria had reproached *Him* — he calls upon Him to vindicate His own glorious name, feeling assured that in so doing He would deliver His people.

Mark, then, this wondrous scene. Repair to the sanctuary, and there behold one poor weak solitary man, on his knees — pouring out his soul to Him who dwelt between the Cherubim — no military preparations — no reviewing of troops — "the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth pass to and fro from Hezekiah to the prophet Isaiah — all is apparent weakness. On the other hand, see a mighty conqueror leading on a numerous army flushed with victory, all eager for spoil. Surely, one might say, speaking after the manner of men, all is over with Hezekiah and Jerusalem — surely Sennacherib and his proud host will swallow up, in a moment, such a feeble band! And observe further, the ground which Sennacherib takes in all this. He says, "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? I say, sayest thou (but they are but vain words), I have counsel and strength for war: now, on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt: whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it; so is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all that trust in him. But if thou say to me, we trust in the Lord our God; *is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar?*" (Isa. 36: 4-7.)

Here we observe that Sennacherib makes the very reformation which Hezekiah had effected a ground of reproach; thus leaving him, as he vainly thought, no resting place or foundation for his confidence. Again he says, "Am I come up without the Lord against this land to destroy it? *The Lord said unto me Go up against this land and destroy it.* (Verse 10.) This was indeed putting Hezekiah's faith to the test — faith must pass through the furnace — it will not do to *say* that we trust in the Lord, we must *prove* that we do, and that too when everything apparently is against us. How, then, does Hezekiah meet all these lofty words? In the silent dignity of faith. "The king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not." (Verse 21.) Such was the king's bearing in the eyes of the people; yea, rather,

such is ever the bearing of faith — calm — self-possessed dignified in the presence of man; while, at the same time, ready to sink into the very dust of self-abasement in the presence of God. The man of faith can say to his fellow, "Stand still and see the salvation of God;" and, at the same moment, send up to God the cry of conscious weakness (See Ex. 14: 13-15.)

So it was with the king of Judah at this solemn and trying crisis. Hearken to him while, in the retirement of the sanctuary, shut in with God, he pours out the anxieties of his soul in the ear of One who was willing to hear and able to help. "O Lord of hosts, God of Israel that dwellest between the Cherubim, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to *reproach the living God*. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their countries, and have cast their gods into the fire: *for they were no gods*, but the works of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them. Now, therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only." (2 Chr. 37: 15-20.) Hezekiah puts the matter entirely into Jehovah's hands, and retires out of it himself. He does not seek to make little of the difficulty — he admits that "the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their countries" — but why? Because their gods were not like Jehovah — they did not know what it was to put their case into the hands of the living God that made heaven and earth. This was the secret of their overthrow. What triumphant faith! What bold confident pleading! Where, we may ask, while we hearken to it, was the difficulty which such faith would not surmount? The faith that has to do with the One who made heaven and earth will make but little account of an army be it ever so numerous. Faith can behold myriads of angels and mountains covered with chariots of fire for the defence of the ones who can trust Jehovah.

But let us see how Hezekiah's prayer was received and answered from between the Cherubim. The Lord will never refuse to be brought into a difficulty, if only He be allowed to act, and not robbed of His peculiar glory. Hear his answer on this occasion. "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria: this is the word which the Lord hath spoken concerning him, *The Virgin, the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee*. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? And against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? Even against the Holy One of Israel (Verse 21-23.) It has been observed that Hezekiah was enabled, by grace, to retire out of the difficulty altogether. He declared *his inability* to cope with the king of Assyria by the very act of covering himself with sackcloth instead of putting on his armour. His attitude in the house of the Lord, had this utterance — *God or nothing*. Seeing, therefore that the faith of this humble self-abased man had brought the Lord God of Israel and the king of Assyria into direct contact, the same Lord God of Israel most graciously led the man covered with sackcloth into the rich spoils of victory over the foe. Hezekiah had said "He hath sent to reproach the living God; "the Lord replies, "Whom hast thou reproached — the Holy One of Israel." Now, Sennacherib had never calculated upon meeting such an antagonist — he had never thought that his letter would be scanned by the eye of the living God. He expected to meet flesh and blood, sword and spear, as he had ever been accustomed to meet; but lo! a man of faith prays — God hears; and forth goes the angel of the Lord, and, in a moment, mows to the ground "a hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses." (Verse 36.)

Thus we see somewhat of Hezekiah's vast resources. He knew the value of being *alone with God* — he felt more comfort and real power in the secret of God's presence than surrounded by troops of armed warriors — he experienced something of the reality of the words afterwards uttered by the

Apostle, "When I am *weak* then *am I strong*." And, we may say, had Sennacherib's army consisted of millions instead of thousands, the angel of the Lord would have thought just as little of sweeping them all off the face of the earth in a moment, for when Jehovah determines to act in behalf of His people, and in answer to their prayers, He makes no account of anything or any one. "He overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea: *for His mercy endureth for ever*." (Ps. 136: 15.)

Nor is it otherwise now. Let but faith address the mercy seat, and the most astounding results will follow. "If ye shall ask *anything* in my name I will do it." Again, "I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching *anything that* they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my father which is in heaven." (Matt. 18: 19.) Oh! we have but little idea of what our God would do for us did we only honour Him. We are too cramped in our thoughts and formal in our prayers. We are too frequently like the king of Israel who "smote the ground thrice and stayed" when he "should have smote it six times." He does not seem to have known the meaning or value of smiting, and the same may be said of us in reference to prayer. Let us, then, in all our difficulties, honour the Lord by bringing Him into them, and we may be confident He will bring us into the enjoyment of full victory over them, be they great or small; His power can reach the greatest — His love will stoop to the smallest. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall Sweep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4: 6, 7.) How beautifully was this exemplified in Hezekiah! His commandment to the people was, "*Answer him not*." But why? "Because he knew that *Jehovah would answer him*. And so He did, blessed for ever be His most excellent name, and that too in such a way as to prove to Hezekiah that he would be no loser by having devoted himself to the interests of the house of the Lord — He would never allow it to be said that the king of Judah had been working or worshipping in the temple when he ought to have been fortifying his kingdom against the invasion of an enemy. If Hezekiah had concerned himself about retaining Jehovah in His place between the Cherubim, Jehovah would graciously show him that, even in a political point of view, he had made no mistake, for He in one night accomplished what the military preparations of an age might have failed to do: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." God will never be a debtor to any one; only let us throw our whole souls onto His work, and the end will declare how far we have acted upon sound principles. "Prove me now herewith saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the window of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Mal. 3: 10.)

I doubt not there are many amongst us who feel ashamed, and most justly so, at the undue importance attached by us to *our own things*, while the interests of the house of God — the church of the living God — engage so little of our attention. The Lord often teaches us our shortcoming in this particular by letting us see that even with all our engagement about self we fail of our object. "Ye looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, *and ye run every man to his own house*. *Therefore* the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit." (Hag. 1: 9, 10) The Lord deals with his people upon a principle of retributive justice as conveyed in these words, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. (Gal. 6: 7.) This method of dealing does not interfere in the least with the perfect acceptance of the believers person, through grace, nor yet with his standing in grace. *No*; these, blessed be God, are settled points, nor can anything unsettle them; yet does the Apostle, by the Spirit, teach us that "he that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly."

Now, this is a principle of very wide application. It does not matter whether we apply it to one character of sowing or another; if we cannot afford to sow liberally for the Lord, He will not let us have

an abundant harvest If we allow not our hearts and minds to go out after the church — after the lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ, need we wonder if our own souls are left in a barren and unprofitable state? If we occupy our minds — solely about our own things — our circumstances — our difficulties — our sorrows — our conflicts — need we wonder if such things do eventually prove quite sufficient to engross our every thought? If Hezekiah had merely thought of building "castles and towers" — if he had merely applied himself to the fortification of his kingdom and the establishment and preservation of his throne, how could he presume to go into the house of the Lord to look for aid in the time of need? Might he not, under such circumstances, have expected to hear instead of the glorious answer above quoted, such words as these, "Get thee to thy castles and towers, let them deliver thee in the time of thy tribulation." But such was not the case. Hezekiah had taken care of Jehovah's house, and Jehovah would take care of Hezekiah's kingdom, for God is not unrighteous to forget the work and labour of love. And so will it be in every case. Let no one imagine that his soul will prosper if he be not devoting himself to the interests of the house of God. If we would see the proud Assyrian laid low we must be in the secret of the divine presence — we must be more before the Lord, and more for Him. Not, of course, for the purpose of gaining anything, but through pure and positive dedication to Him as the one who has given us everything, and made us through the exercise of sovereign grace all we are, or all we shall ever be.

Such, then, was the good king Hezekiah, so far. We have seen him as a *priest* in the sanctuary — as a *Levite* among his brethren, and as a man of war dealing with the enemy without; and, in everything, we observe the same loveliness and moral attraction about him. He furnishes us with a remarkable example of the blessedness of the man who begins, continues, and ends his works in God. This remarkable man seems to have specially breathed the sweet prayer of one of our own poets,

"Let me my weary mind recline
On that eternal love of thine,
And human thoughts forget:
Child-like attend what thou wilt Say:
Go forth and do it while 'tis day,
Yet never leave my sweet retreat."

He would gain a glorious victory over the foe, but he would do so without leaving his sweet retreat in the sanctuary. He would make the temple his council-chamber and make his military arrangements on his knees. Thus he conquered — thus he gained a noiseless victory. The king of Judah was on his knees while the king of Assyria was being brought back to his own land with a hook in his nose, and a bridle in his lips, like a wild beast; a striking example of what pride ever leads to. Nor did his course end here. Shameful and humiliating as it must have been to such a proud and haughty conqueror to be obliged to return into his own land, overcome by he knew not what — a man covered with sackcloth — yet had he to meet with something far worse. He might naturally have hoped for security at least in the temple of his God. But no; he knew not what it was to cover himself with sackcloth in the presence of Him who dwelt between the Cherubim; hence the treatment he received at the shrine of the object of his adoration. "It came to pass as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his God, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword." (Isa. 37: 38.) Such will be the end of all those who exalt themselves against the Lord and His people.

I have already observed that the prophet Isaiah seems to deal with the striking history of Hezekiah more in a moral way and as connected with the future destinies of the house of Israel.

Looking at it in this way, we may behold in Sennacherib a sample of "the wilful king " who shall exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, and "shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every God, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished." (Compare 2 Thess. 2. Dan. 11: 16-45.) Hezekiah, too, covered with sackcloth, may be viewed as a sample of the righteous remnant in the latter day, crying for deliverance from the hand of the mighty oppressor; when the Lord shall "bring them into the wilderness and speak comfortably unto them," and when "the virgin, the daughter of Zion, shall shake her head at Him who made the earth to tremble, and shook the kingdoms." Then indeed "the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall take root downward and bear fruit upward: for out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of Mount Zion; the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this." (Isa. 37: 31, 32.)

If it be allowable to look at the latter times of Hezekiah in this point of view it enhances the value of his history to us exceedingly: for it not only yields us deep moral principles for every-day conduct, but also an important prophetic sketch of Israel's history in the latter days. May we have grace to love and value the testimonies of our heavenly Father more and more, and the rather as we perceive the miserable uncertainty of all human events and human opinions. "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: *but the Word of Our God shall stand for ever.*" (Isa. 40: 6-8.)

In Isaiah 38 we find King Hezekiah brought down very low — even "to the gates of the grave;" and that, too, not in the circumstances or condition of his kingdom, as before, but in his own person. He is allowed, as it were to feel the withering breath of the king of terrors, as before he had felt the haughty threats of the king of Assyria. He is made to feel that he must seek a refuge in God, not only as regards *his kingdom* but as regards *himself*. This was a trying time for him; but it was a salutary time. We can easily perceive the hand of a *faithful* friend in this solemn scene. Hezekiah had been passing through much that might be easily used by the enemy to puff him up. A long course of devotedness to the service of God — the glorious reformation effected by his instrumentality — the influence exercised upon the priests and Levites, the men of Judah and Israel — and, lastly, the splendid deliverance vouchsafed him by the Lord of hosts over a most formidable foe — all these things were calculated, in an eminent degree, to act upon the pride of his heart; and, as we shall see in the sequels Hezekiah was not without knowing what pride meant. But oh! how we must admire the faithfulness of our God, when, after having glanced at the brilliant scenes of the life of this good man, we hearken to the solemn words; with which this chapter opens. "Thus saith the Lord, Set *thine house* in order: for thou shalt die and not live." It was now to be a *personal question*. "Thine house." He had been much engaged about the Lord's house, and most happily so — he had been deeply exercised about this condition of the kingdom; and rightly so. He would have been unworthy of a seat on the throne of David had it been otherwise. But there was a far deeper matter than all this. The Lord would come more closely to his servant. He would deal with him about his *house* "Set *thine house* in order." This was indeed a searching word. Many a secret spring in the heart, unheeded amid the bustle of active service, would vibrate when thus touched — many a hidden chamber of the soul would be unlocked which, it may be, much intercourse with men would have kept more firmly closed. There is an air of deep solemnity about the sick bed of Hezekiah which is particularly striking; and the rather, as the transition is so sudden. At one moment we view him in the arms of victory and triumph, in the next we behold him at "the gates of the grave" — now we see him in the sanctuary with his head "lifted up above his enemies round about;" in a moment after we behold him laid prostrate, and the angel of death on his way to strike the blow; yet in both we can trace the same God. True, in the former case it is God

in grace and mercy, in the latter, God in wisdom and faithfulness; but still God; and one hardly knows whether to admire most the grace of these words to Sennacherib, "The daughter of Zion hath despised thee," or the faithfulness of the words to Hezekiah, "Set thine house in order." In the one we see God delivering his servant from an *enemy*; in the other we see him delivering him from *himself*.

Well, what will Hezekiah do in this hour of his need? He cannot go up to the house of the Lord; but he can go up to the Lord himself, and so he does. "Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord." [It may be a matter of enquiry with some, why Hezekiah should have been so anxious to live? The answer to such an enquiry is, that as a *Jew* he was taught to regard long life as a special blessing from the hand of the God of Israel; but it would be rather inconsistent for a believer under the gospel dispensation to seek for long life. It was an object of desire with a Jew to be allowed to live long in the land; but the Christian's citizenship is, even now, in heaven, and his desire should be that what is now true in spirit and principle, might be so in reality, *i.e.* that he might be really in heaven.] This was his remedy now as at all times. "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him." The Lord merely intended to produce in the soul of his dear servant a proper sense of his real condition of dependence — He would show him that the very same hand that had so recently rescued his kingdom from the jaws of the enemy must rescue himself from the jaws of death. In other words, that until both he and his kingdom could stand in the power of resurrection, there could be no permanency for either. What divine harmony exists between the words, "Set thine house in order" and "Hezekiah turned his face to the wall!" Such was his answer. "Though my house be not so with God: yet He *hath made* with me an everlasting covenant, *ordered in all things and sure*: for this is all *my salvation* and all my desire, though he make it not to grow." (2 Sam 23: 5.) Hezekiah puts himself now, as he had put his kingdom before, into the hands of Jehovah — the only place of true security.

And mark how the Lord links the deliverance of the kingdom with the raising up of the king. "Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver *thee and this city* out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city." Here we learn in the clearest manner that both Judah and Judah's king must pass through *death and resurrection*. It is something quite out of the way of nature; and, because it is so, the very course of nature is reversed; "the *sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down*." What a magnificent display of the power of God in grace moving right athwart the path of nature; There is something remarkable in every scene of Hezekiah's life. His deliverance from the Assyrian was remarkable — his deliverance from death is still more so. He was enabled so to bring God into all his difficulties that his deliverance could not but exhibit much of God's remarkable actings; and, as we know, God will make no account of any thing when it stands in the way of His acting in behalf of His people; He will not only make the SUN stand still, as in Joshua's case, but He will make it go back while He puts forth the divine energies of His grace and power for the deliverance of those who lean upon Him for help. Indeed, we may say, when faith appeals to Omnipotence there is nothing too great.

However, the Lord did not deliver his servant in such a way as to interfere, in the least, with the divine lesson which He desired to teach him. This may be seen by reading carefully "the writing of Hezekiah. king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness." The experience breathed in this writing could never have been attained in the midst of the congregation — nor in the field of battle — nor any where but just where God put him even on the sick bed. None can teach like God.

Now if it be asked, What special lessons did Hezekiah learn in the time of his sickness? the fifteenth verse tells us. "What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me and himself hath done it: *I shall go softly all the years* in the bitterness of my soul." In a word. then, he learnt the need of walking softly.

And surely the visitation was calculated to teach that blessed lesson, however speedily he might forget it. But there was more than this. Hezekiah learnt something about *God* as well as about *himself*. This is valuable for us. It would never do to be merely unlocking secret springs in our *hearts* if we did not, at the same time, unlock secret springs in *God's heart*. If a man only learns that there are hidden sins in his heart, and principles of evil of which he knew nothing before, he is merely plunging his spirit into miserable despondency. This is not learning anything through divine teaching. But if, while he discovers *his sin* he discovers also *God's grace* in putting away his sin, this is divine — this is learning both himself and God.

Now, it is only when a man learns himself and God in connection that he is really humbled. Grace, while it puts away our sin, leads the soul into profound humiliation because of it. Thus it was with Hezekiah; he was taught to "walk softly" by the grace that had for ever settled the question of his sins. "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me and make me to live. Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but thou last in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: *for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.*" Here was a blessed discovery of God! It was not merely, "Thou hast delivered the kingdom out of the hand of the King of Assyria." No; but "thou hast delivered me from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all *my sins* behind thy back." Thus does Hezekiah get away from himself, away from his sins, away from the pit, to take his happy place among "*the living*" who alone can "praise and celebrate" the name of the Lord.

See then to what a happy place the soul of this good man was conducted by all the solemn dealings of God in this chapter. The chapter opened by the words, "Set shine house in order." This, as has been observed, opened up many things to his view which were calculated to humble him; but then he learns more of God's redeeming and restoring love, so that he is able to reply to the searching charge, "Set thine house in order," by the triumphant statement, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." As to his house, he knew that it was "not so with God;" yet he could cast himself upon the divine covenant which he knew was "ordered in all things and sure." "The Lord was ready to save *me*;" therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord."

Thus far it is most instructive to see the temple service restored Judah rescued from the hand of the oppressor, and Judah's king raised from the pit of corruption; and one is disposed to think that now the glory might show itself; but alas! alas! it cannot be so; all this is merely a shadow, blessed though it be, of what is yet to be revealed amongst us, when the true King of Judah shall take his seat on the throne of His father David, and wield the sceptre of a kingdom that shall never be moved.

We now come to consider the closing scene of Hezekiah's life, which but too plainly demonstrates the fact above stated, namely, that the glory cannot yet show itself: Upon this part of our subject, however, we need not dwell at any length; the Spirit Himself has not dwelt long upon it: for he has given us the narrative of it in two verses, and his commentary upon it in one. And, indeed, we always find the divine penman taking much greater delight in setting forth the graces than the failures of those whose history He deals with. This is specially observable in Hezekiah's history; the narrative of his good deeds occupies four long chapters in 2 Chronicles, while, with reference to his failure, we have the following few words: "Howbeit, in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, *God left him to try him, that he might know ALL that was in his heart.*" (2 Chr. 32: 31.) These words are but few; yet they are most comprehensive. For a man to know "*all that was in his heart,*" required no small measure of the knowledge of God's redeeming love. It would demand all that Hezekiah had learnt of God during his

previous history to enable him to look into the deep recesses of his heart and behold "*all*" that was there. Oh! what was there not wrapped up in this little word "ALL;" who could bear it save the one who had learnt to say, "Thou hast cast *all* my sins behind thy back." Surely none else. It is only when we know that the Lord has forgiven *all* our iniquities, and healed *all* our diseases — when we are enabled, by faith, to see the divinely appointed scape-goat bearing away with him into the land of forgetfulness "*all* our iniquities, and *all* our transgressions, and *all* our sins" (Lev. 16: 21), that we can turn round and look into our hearts and see *all* the fearful evil there. To get a sight of the latter, ere we have known and proved the former, is to be overwhelmed by the terrible discovery; but when we have gotten a view of God in the cross, the more we learn of our own vileness — the nearer we approach to the end of that wonderful word "all," the more highly do we estimate the grace of our God, and the cleansing efficacy of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But it is very profitable to mark how that, at each successive stage of Hezekiah's truly interesting history, the Lord is dealing more and more closely with him. "Every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it." (John 15: 2.) The more devoted a man is to the Lord, and the more elevated his walk, the more jealously will the Lord watch over him in order that he may have still larger and more blessed proofs of his devotedness; or, it may be, in order to bring out, and execute judgement upon, some hidden evil that may have hitherto lain dormant in the heart. The latter was His wise and faithful purpose in Hezekiah's case.

So far as the ordering of the kingdom was concerned, there can be no doubt but that recent circumstances, and specially the defeat of Sennacherib, would have produced a powerful effect upon the nations around. There was abundant testimony to the fact that the kingdom was well-ordered. Again, the joyful hearts of the children of Israel, as they journeyed home to their own land, would prove very decidedly that the temple service was also well-ordered. In other words, Hezekiah had the testimony of the world *without* and his brethren *within* as to the soundness and rightness of his ways. This was all most important. It is happy for us when we are not giving to "the world any occasion to speak reproachfully or our brethren to speak suspiciously of us." We should at least know this happiness. But there is far more than even this. God looks more narrowly into our ways than the world or the church. He will not rest satisfied with a well-ordered *kingdom*, nor even a well-ordered *house*, but setting up a still loftier standard, He looks for a well-ordered *heart*.

This, I conceive, is most instructive and searching. When Hezekiah set out upon his public career the first thing he had to direct his attention to was the disorder of his kingdom; the next was the disorder of his house; and last of all, and most searching of all, was the disorder of his *heart*. Now, in the very fact of his being called to submit to the last named trying test, we learn how very far Hezekiah had outstripped even men of more than ordinary grace. Jotham, for example, was never called to such a trial; and why? Because, at the very threshold of his course he proved defective. There was a "howbeit" with regard to him in the mere matter of the kingdom to say nothing of his house or his heart. Not so with regard to Hezekiah; there was no "howbeit" in his case "save in the matter of the ambassadors," i.e. in other words, God had a question to settle with him as to the state of his heart. And may we not say there was but One who could stand the threefold test above alluded to; even He who could say, "I will walk within my *house* with a *perfect* heart."

But whence, may we ask, came the enemy that vanquished the man whom we have hitherto beheld moving onward in the ways of God with such a steady pace? *From Babylon*. Yes; Babylon that old fountain of moral evil, a stream from which poisoned the camp of Israel in Joshua's day. "At that time Merodach-Baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a *present* to Hezekiah." (Isa. 39.) Here we have another king attacking Hezekiah: not the king of Assyria with a numerous

army; nor the king of terrors with a solemn summons to surrender; but *the king of Babylon with a present*. And, strange as it may seem, the present from Babylon proved too powerful an assailant for the heart of Hezekiah. When the king of Assyria sent letters to him "he went up into the house of the Lord and spread them before the Lord." Thus he conquered. When summoned to prepare for death, "he turned his face to the wall and prayed unto the Lord." Thus he was raised up. But when the ambassadors from the king of Babylon approached him, "he showed them the house of *his precious things*." *THUS HE FELL*. Solemn — most solemn warning! Hezekiah was off his guard. No prayer — no seeking the Lord — no spiritual perception to detect the hook that lay concealed beneath this gilded bait. Had he gone and spread Merodach's letter before the Lord he would have been raised above the influence of the world's polite attraction as he had before been raised above the influence of its angry threats. He would have found the sanctuary as safe a retreat from the guile of the serpent as it had been from the roar of the lion. But then we have the secret cause of the failure in the sacred commentary on the matter. "Howbeit, in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon.... *God left him* to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." When God leaves a man, a straw is sufficient to upset him.

We, however, may learn a very seasonable lesson from Hezekiah's failure. We may learn that the smile of the world will overcome us when, perhaps, its frown would drive us more closely to the cross. It is far more difficult to deal faithfully with a plausible Gibeonite or a polite and elegant Agag than with the rugged sons of Anak — the manifest and naturally unamiable enemies of God. Again, it is exceedingly difficult to act faithfully with the people of the world, and, at the same time, be a recipient of their compliments. It requires no small measure of spiritual power to sit at the table and partake of the hospitality of a man of the world, and, at the same time, deal faithfully with him about his soul: "A gift blindeth the wise, and perverted the words of the righteous." (Ex. 23: 8.) The Christian should therefore be independent of, and separated from, the world. It is better, if we be lacking in spiritual power, to keep away, as much as possible, from worldly people, than to mix with them and dishonour the Lord. Abraham would not take anything from the king of Sodom or the sons of Heth. He would not be a debtor to the uncircumcised. Thus, being separated from them, he could be a *living witness* against them.

Now, we can easily imagine how difficult Hezekiah would have found it to introduce the subject of truth to these — noble strangers; he might not like to intrude upon them with such subjects — the time, place, or circumstances might not have seemed exactly suitable; many such thoughts might arise in his mind to hinder him from dealing faithfully with his guests. Nor would the world without, nor yet, perhaps, his brethren within, have been able to detect any thing wrong in his showing them the house of his treasures. But ah! the secret thought was wrong — pride was lurking in the hidden chambers of his heart — instead of telling them about the One who dwelt between the Cherubim — of the splendid deliverance from the hand of the king of Assyria — of the deep lessons learnt at "the gates of the grave," and the pardoning love of God who had "cast all his sins behind his back" — instead of presenting these things before them, "he showed them the house of *his precious things*, the silver and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of *his armour* (which could not defend him from the king of Assyria), and all that was found in *his treasures*: there was nothing in *his house*, nor in all *his dominion*, that Hezekiah showed them not." Thus it was all about himself, and nothing about God. Strange, unaccountable forgetfulness! Such is man — a man of God — when left to himself.

But now, that the evil has been fully brought out, not only in God's view but in his own, it is worthy of special notice, the Lord, by His prophet, seeks to lead His servant right onward to the end not

only of his kingdom, or of his house, but of himself. "Behold," says He, "the days come that all that is in *thine house*, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be, eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Here, I say, Hezekiah was led to see the end of his kingdom, of his house and himself All was to go to that very Babylon whose ambassadors had ensnared him. Every thing in which his poor heart might boast before the men of this world must go to ruin. He had presented to the view of the world *his* treasures, and these very treasures the world was about to carry away; but the "peace and truth," or, in other words, the treasures which he had in God, "the world could neither give nor take away" — it was "a better and an *enduring substance*" because it was "*in heaven*."

Thus we have reached the end of this instructive history. Hezekiah's actings "first and last" have passed before us — we have been led into the secret of his kingdom, of his house, and of his heart — we have travelled with him through a reign of nine and twenty years, and, at the close, we leave him in blessed company "with peace and truth" — we have seen him in most trying circumstances possessing the same unchecked confidence in God; we have seen him before the world and before his brethren; and, with one exception, his path has been "as the path of the just, shining more and more unto the perfect day."

And oh! dear Christian reader, is it not a consolatory reflection for the soul, that when we have travelled to the end of all human things and learnt the end of all earthly glory; yea, moreover, when we have learnt the deep and humbling lesson of our own hearts and the evil thereof, and discovered "the end of all flesh" and of our own flesh amongst the rest — after all this, I say, is it not consolatory to find that "peace and truth" are to be our never-ending portion? — that our gracious God, having "cast all our sins behind his back" — brought us up "from the pit of corruption" and "set our feet upon a rock," will put into our hands a golden harp, in order that, amid the rest and blessedness of His house, we may sing of "peace and truth" throughout the entire of our "day" which, as we know, shall be an eternal one.

"Lord, I believe thou hast prepared,
Unworthy though I be,
For me a blood-bought free reward,
A golden harp for me.
'Tis strung and tuned for endless years,
And formed by power divine,
To sound in God the Fathers ears
No other name but Thine."