

The True Workman

- his rebuffs, his resources, his returns.

Matthew 11.

C. H. Mackintosh.

There is a never-failing freshness in every part of the Word of God, but especially in those portions of it which present to us the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus; which tell us what He was, what He did, what He said, how He did it, and how He said it; which present Him to our hearts in His comings and goings, and matchless ways; in His spirit, tone, and manner, yea, in His very look. There is something in all this that commands and charms the heart. It is far more powerful than the mere statement of doctrines, however important, or the establishment of principles, however profound. These have their value and their place, most assuredly; they enlighten the understanding, instruct the mind, form the judgement, govern the conscience, and, in so doing, render us invaluable service.

But the presentation of the Person of Christ draws the heart, rivets the affections, satisfies the soul, commands the whole being. In short, nothing can exceed the occupation of heart with Christ Himself as the Holy Ghost has unfolded Him to us in the Word, and especially in the inimitable narratives of the Gospels. May it be given us to prove this, as we hang together over the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, in which we shall get a view of Christ, the true Workman, in His rebuffs, His resources and His returns — the rebuffs which He met with in His ministry; the resources which He found in God; and the returns which He makes to us.

And first, let us look at *the rebuffs*.

There never yet was one who stood as a workman for God in this world, that had not to encounter rebuffs in some shape or form, and the only perfect Workman is no exception to the general rule. Jesus had His rebuffs and disappointments; for had it been otherwise with Him, He could not sympathise with those who have to meet them at every stage of their career. He, as man, perfectly entered into everything that man is capable of feeling — sin excepted. "He was in all points tempted like as we are, except sin." "He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He perfectly understands, and fully enters into, all that His servants have to pass through in their work.

Now, in this eleventh chapter, the Spirit has grouped together a series of those rebuffs or disappointments which the perfect Workman, the true Servant, the divine Minister had to encounter in the discharge of His ministry. The first of these came from a quarter from which we should not have expected it, namely, from — John the Baptist himself. "Now, when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto Him, Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"

It is very evident that at the moment in which the Baptist sent this message to his Master, his spirit was under a cloud. It was a dark season in his experience. This was nothing uncommon. The very best and truest of Christ's servants have had their spirits overcast at times by the dark shadows of unbelief, despondency, and impatience. Moses, that highly honoured, faithful servant of God, gave forth on one occasion such accents as these, "Wherefore hast Thou afflicted Thy servant, and wherefore have I not found favour in Thy sight, that Thou layest the burden of all this people upon me . . . I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in Thy sight, and let me not see my wretchedness"

(Num. 11: 11-15).

Such was the language of the meekest man upon the face of the earth — language drawn forth, no doubt, by very aggravating circumstances, even by the murmuring voices of six hundred thousand footmen — but still it was the language of Moses; and surely it would ill become us to marvel, for where is the mere mortal who could have endured the intense pressure of such a moment? What merely human embankment could have resisted the violence of such a mighty tide?

Again, we find Elijah the Tishbite, in a moment of heavy pressure, when a dark cloud was passing over his soul, flinging himself down under a juniper tree, and requesting for himself that he might die. "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4). This was the language of Elijah, one of the most highly honoured of the servants of Christ — language evoked, no doubt, by a combination of the most discouraging influences — but still it was the language of Elijah the Tishbite; and let no one blame him until he himself has passed, without a wavering feeling or a faltering word, through like conditions.

In like manner also we find Jeremiah, another of Christ's high-favoured workmen, when under the smitings of Pashur, and the derisive insults of the ungodly around him, giving vent to his feelings in such language as this, "O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed; I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name."

And, again, "Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide, because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?" (Jer. 20: 7-9, 14-18) Such was the language of the weeping prophet — language drawn forth, no doubt, by sharp rebuffs and sore disappointments in his prophetic ministry, but still the language of Jeremiah; and, ere we condemn him, let us see if we could acquit ourselves better under similar pressure.

Need we wonder, then, after reading such records as the above, when we find the Baptist, amid the gloom of Herod's dungeon, faltering for a moment? Should we be greatly astonished to discover that he was made of no better material than the workmen of former generations? If Israel's lawgiver, Israel's reformer, and Israel's weeping prophet had, each in his day and generation, tottered beneath the ponderous weight of his burden, are we to be surprised to find "John, the son of Zacharias," giving way to a momentary feeling of impatience and unbelief beneath the dark shadow of his prison walls? Assuredly, not until we ourselves have sat unmoved amid similar influences.

And yet we have ventured to assert, that John's message was a rebuff and a disappointment to the spirit of his Master. Yes, that is just what we assert; and we find the authority for our assertion in the style of Christ's answer. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me."

It is very possible, nay probable, that the Baptist, under a passing shadow of unbelief, had been tempted to wonder if indeed Jesus was the One to whom he had, in the discharge of his ministry, borne

such full and unqualified testimony. He was, doubtless, stumbled for the moment, when he saw himself in the iron grasp of Herod, and heard of the works of Christ. His poor heart might indulge itself in such reasoning as this, "If indeed this be the glorious Messiah for whom we looked, whose kingdom was to be set up in power, then why is it thus with me His servant and witness? Why am I here in the gloom of this prison? Why is not the strong hand of power stretched forth to free me from these bonds and fling open these prison doors?"

If such were the reasonings of the captive Baptist, and we can easily believe it, what a powerful, pointed, pungent answer lay folded up in his Master's reply! He points him to those grand moral evidences of His divine mission, which were amply sufficient to carry conviction to every one that was taught of God. Was it not to be expected that if the God of Israel appeared in the midst of His people, He should address Himself to their actual condition? Was that the moment for the display of mere power? Could the Son of David set up His throne amid disease and misery? Was there not a demand for the exercise of patient, lowly grace and mercy in the midst of the varied and multiplied fruits of sin?

True, mere power could have burst open Herod's prison, and set the captive free; but then what about the lame, the blind, the deaf, the leper, the dead, the poor, the wretched? Could the display of royalty alleviate their condition? Was it not plain that something else was needed? And was it not equally plain that that something was being supplied by the gracious, tender, soothing ministrations of the lowly Jesus of Nazareth?

Yes, and the Baptist ought to have known this. But ah! you and I may well tread softly in the prison chamber of this honoured servant of Christ, not only because grace would have us so to do, but also because of the conviction which assuredly must possess our souls that, had *we* been in his position, the foundations of our personal faith, if not sustained by grace, would have given way far more deplorably.

Still, it is important that we should fully comprehend the failure of John the Baptist, and sedulously gather up the seasonable instruction furnished by his temporary depression. We shall do well to see, with distinctness, what was lacking in his faith, in order that we ourselves may profit by this touchingly interesting narrative. It would have greatly helped the Baptist had he only understood and remembered that this is the day of Christ's *sympathy* and not the day of His *power*. Were it the day of His power, there would be no dungeon, no block, no stake, no trial or sorrow of any sort for the saints of God. There would then be no tumultuous waves of the ocean, no cloud in the sky, no storm to brave, no roughness to endure.

But this is the day of Christ's sympathy; and the question for the tried and tempted, the harassed and oppressed, is this, "Which would you rather have, the *power* of Christ's *hand* in deliverance *from* the trial, or the *sympathy* of Christ's *heart* in the trial?" The carnal mind, the unsubdued heart, the restless spirit, will, no doubt, at once exclaim, "Oh! let Him only put forth His power and deliver me from this insupportable trial, this intolerable burden, this crushing difficulty. I sign for deliverance. I only want deliverance."

Some of us can well understand this. We are so often like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, restlessly struggling, instead of patiently submitting; rendering the yoke all the more galling and grievous by our senseless and useless efforts to shake it off. But the spiritual mind, the subdued heart, the lowly spirit, will say, and that without a single particle of reserve, Let me only enjoy the sweet sympathy of the heart of Jesus in my trial, and I ask no more. I do not want even the power of His hand to deprive me of one drop of consolation supplied by the tender love and profound sympathy of His heart. I know, assuredly, that He could deliver me. I know that He could, in the twinkling of an eye,

snap these chains, level these prison walls, rebuke that sickness, raise up that beloved object that lies before me in the cold grasp of death, remove this heavy burden, meet this difficulty, supply this need.

But if He does not see fit to do so, if it does not fall in with His unsearchable counsels, and harmonise with His wise and faithful purpose concerning me so to do, I know it is only to lead me into a deeper and richer experience of His most precious sympathy. If He does not see it right to take me off the rough path of trial and difficulty — that path which He himself, in perfection, and all His saints from age to age, in their measure, have trodden — it is His gracious purpose to come and walk with me along that path which, though rough and thorny, leads to those everlasting mansions of light and blessedness above.

We cannot, for a moment, doubt but that the knowledge and recollection of these things would greatly have relieved the heart of John the Baptist in the midst of his prison experiences; and surely they would serve to soothe and sustain our hearts amid the varied exercises through which we are called to pass in this wilderness scene. The moment has not yet arrived for Jesus to take to Himself His great power, and reign. It is the day of His patience with the world, of His sympathy with His people. We must ever remember this. He did not put forth the strong hand of power to avert aught of His own suffering. Nay, when Peter, in mistaken zeal, drew the sword in His defence, He said, "Put up thy sword into its place; for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" (Matt. 26: 52-54)

But while we fully recognise the momentary failure of John the Baptist, and while we clearly discern the points in which his faith proved itself defective, let us remember the pressure of his circumstances, and the great practical difficulty of the lesson which he was called to learn within his prison walls. It is very hard for a workman to find himself laid aside. Indeed, there are few things more difficult for an active mind than to learn that we can be dispensed with. We are so apt to think that the work cannot get on without us. And yet the Lord can soon teach us our mistake. Paul's bonds advanced the cause of Christ. The imprisonment of one great preacher drew out a multitude of minor preachers. Luther's confinement in the Wartburg furthered the cause of the Reformation.

Thus it is always; and we have all to learn the wholesome lesson, that God can do without us; that the work can go on without us. This holds good in every case. It matters not, in the least, what our sphere of action may be. We may not be apostles or reformers, teachers or preachers; but whatever we are, it is well for us to learn that we can very easily be spared from the scene around us. The remembrance of this gives great rest to the heart. It tends amazingly to cure us of all that bustling self-importance which is so truly hateful, and it enables us to say, "The Lord be praised! The work is being done. I am satisfied."

The reader will discern a very marked difference between Christ's message *to* John and his testimony *of* John. In speaking to His servant, He lets him know, in a way not to be mistaken, that He *felt* his question. We can have no difficulty in seeing this. We feel persuaded that the Lord's answer to His servant contained a sharp arrow. True, that arrow was enclosed in a very delicate case; but it was an arrow, and a sharp one too.

"Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me." John would, doubtless, understand this. It was designed to go right home to his very inmost soul. That dear servant had said, in reference to Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease," and he was called to enter practically into this, not merely in his ministry, but in his person. He had to be content to end his career by the sword of the executioner, after having spent his closing days in the gloom of a dungeon. How mysterious! What a

profound lesson to be set down to! How difficult to flesh and blood! What need — what urgent need there was, at such a moment, for John to have whispered into his ear these words, afterwards uttered to Peter, "What I do, thou knowest not *now*; but thou shalt know *hereafter*."

What pregnant words! "*Now*" and "*Hereafter!*" How much we all need to remember them! Often it happens with us that "Now" is involved in deep and impenetrable obscurity. Heavy clouds hang upon our path. The dealings of our Father's hand are perfectly inexplicable to us. Our minds are bewildered. There are circumstances in our path for which we cannot account — ingredients in our cup the object of which we cannot understand or appreciate. We are confounded and feel disposed to cry out, "Why am I thus?" We are wholly engrossed with "Now," and our minds are filled with dark and unbelieving reasonings until those precious words fall, in a still small voice upon the ear, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

Then the reasonings are answered, the storm hushed, the dark and depressing "Now" is lighted up with the beams of a brilliant and glorious "Hereafter," and the subdued heart breathes forth, in accents of holy and intelligent acquiescence, "As Thou wilt, Lord." Would that we knew more of this! Assuredly, we need it, whatsoever may be our lot in this world. We may not be called, like the Baptist, to the prison and the block; but each has his "Now" which must be interpreted in the light of "Hereafter." We must look at the "seen and temporal" in the clear and blessed light of the "unseen and eternal."

But let us now turn, for a moment, and hearken to Christ's testimony of John. "And, as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

[In order fully to understand this last clause, we must distinguish John's personal character and walk, and his dispensational and official position. If we look at him, in his person and walk, few, even in the kingdom, could bear comparison with him, in separation and devotedness. But when we look at him, in his dispensational position, *i.e.*, in the place assigned him in the divine economy, the very weakest and least in the kingdom occupies a better and higher place. The same remark holds good with respect to the saints of Old Testament times. If we take Abraham, for example, and compare him with the best of the children of God of this dispensation, the "father of the faithful" might stand higher, as regards personal faith and devotedness the feeblest member of the Church of God occupies, dispensationally, in the divine economy, a place which Abraham never thought of, because it was not revealed. Very many pious and godly people are prevented from seeing the dignities and privileges of the saints of this dispensation, by comparing themselves *personally* with Old Testament believers. But we must remember it is not a question of what we are in ourselves, but of the *place* which God, in the arrangement of His kingdom and household, has thought proper to assign us: and if He has been pleased to give us a higher place than that occupied by His people in Old Testament times, it is not true humility on our part to refuse it; yea, rather let us seek grace to occupy it aright, and to walk worthy of it.]

Such was the glowing testimony borne by Christ of His servant, John the Baptist. "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than he." There is a great principle in this — a

principle which we may see illustrated, again and again, in the record of God's dealings with His people. If the Lord had a message to send *to* His servant, He would send it. He would speak to him, plainly and pointedly. But, the moment He proceeds to speak *of* him, the case is totally different.

Thus it is always, and blessed be God that it is so. We have our ways and God has His thoughts; and while He will deal with us faithfully as to the former, He can only speak of us according to the latter. What relief for the heart is here! What comfort! What moral power! What solid ground for self-judgment! God has given us a standing, and He thinks of us, and speaks of us, according to that. We have our practical ways, and He deals with us and speaks to us in reference to them. He will expose us to ourselves, and make us feel our ways and judge our doings; but the moment He begins to speak of us to others, He brings out the perfection of His own thoughts respecting us, and speaks of us according to the perfect standing which He has given us in His presence, the fruit of His own eternal counsels respecting us, and of His perfect work on our behalf.

Thus it was with Israel, in the plains of Moab. They had their ways, and God had His thoughts; and while He had, often and often, to reprove them for their ways, to speak plainly to them about their perverseness and stiff-neckedness, yet no sooner did the covetous prophet appear upon the scene, to curse Israel, than the Lord placed Himself right between His people and the enemy to turn the curse into a blessing, and pour forth the most sublime and marvellous strains of testimony on their behalf.

"God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless, and He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt: he hath, as it were, the strength of a unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel; according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" (Num. 23: 19-23)

What grace is here! "I have not beheld iniquity, nor seen perverseness." What could the enemy say to this? "What hath God wrought!" It is not, "What hath Israel wrought!" They had wrought folly, many a time; but God had wrought salvation. He had wrought for His own glory, and that glory had shone out in the perfect deliverance of a crooked, perverse, and stiff-necked people. It was no use the enemy's talking of iniquity and perverseness, if Jehovah would not see either the one or the other. It is of very little consequence to us that Satan accuses, when God has acquitted; that Satan counts up our sins, when God has blotted them all out for ever; that Satan condemns, when God has justified.

I hear the accuser roar,
Of ills that I have done;
I know them well, and thousands more,
Jehovah findeth none.

But some may feel disposed to ask, "Is there not danger in the statement of such a principle as this? Might it not lead us into the dark and perilous region of antinomianism?" Be thou well assured of this, thou art never further removed from that justly dreaded region than when thy soul is basking in the bright and blessed beams of God's eternal favour, and exulting in the stability of His unconditional and everlasting salvation. There never was a greater mistake than to imagine that God's free grace and full salvation could ever lead to unholy results. Man's notions of these things may have that effect, but wherever grace is fully known and salvation enjoyed, there you will most assuredly find "The fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

But we know it is an old habit of ignorant and self-exalting legality to attribute an antinomian tendency to the free grace of God. "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" is no modern objection to the precious doctrines of grace; and yet those doctrines remain untouched in all their purity and power, and find their divine centre in the Person of Christ Himself, who, having died on the cross to put away our sins, has become our life and righteousness, our sanctification and redemption, our all in all. He has not only delivered us from the future consequences of sin, but from the present power thereof.

This is what God hath wrought, and this is the groundwork of the great principle on which we have been dwelling, and which we have seen variously illustrated in God's dealings with Israel in the plains of Moab, and in Christ's dealings with the Baptist in the dungeon of Herod. Jehovah was compelling Balaam to exclaim in the ears of Balak, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel," at the very moment when those tents and tabernacles were furnishing ample material for judgement. So also, Jesus was telling out in the ears of the multitude the greatness of John the Baptist, at the very moment when the messengers were on their way back to their master, carrying with them an arrow for his heart.

Now, we want the reader to get a clear view of this principle, and to bear it in constant remembrance. If we mistake not, it will greatly help him, not only in the understanding of God's Word, but also in the interpreting of His ways. God judges His people. He will not and cannot pass over a jot or a tittle in their ways. The splendid testimony of Balaam on Moab's heights, was followed by the sharp javelin of Phineas in Moab's plains. "*Our* God is a consuming fire." This is what *our* God is now. He cannot tolerate evil. He speaks of us, He thinks of us, He acts toward us according to the perfection of His own work; but He will judge our ways. Let an enemy come forth to curse, and what is it? Not a spot, not a stain, all perfect and comely and goodly. How could it be otherwise? How could the eye of God behold those sins which have been for ever obliterated by the blood of the Lamb? Utterly impossible.

What then? Does this make light of sin? Far be the thought. Does it open the door for a loose walk? Nay, it lays the only true foundation of personal holiness. "The Lord will judge His people." He will look after the ways of His children. He will take care of His holiness; and not only so, but He will make His people partakers of that holiness, and chasten them with the rod of faithful discipline for that very purpose. It was just because Israel's tents were goodly in the eyes of Jehovah, that He sent Phineas into those very tents with the javelin of righteous judgement in his hand.

And so, now, it is because His people are precious to Him, and comely in His eyes, that He will not suffer aught in them, or in their ways, contrary to His holiness. "The time is come that judgement must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4: 17). God is not judging the world now. He is judging His people now. He will judge the world by-and-by. But, be it remembered, that it is as a "holy Father" He judges His people; it is as a righteous God He will judge the world. The object of the former is practical holiness; the issue of the latter will be eternal perdition. Solemn thought!

But there is another point in connection with this, which we desire to press upon the attention of the Christian reader — a point of very great practical moment, namely this, we must not measure our standing by our state, but ever judge our state by our standing. Many err in reference to this, and their error leads to most disastrous results. The standing of the believer is settled, perfect, eternal, divine. His state is imperfect and fluctuating. He is partaker of the divine nature which cannot sin; but he bears about with him also his old nature which can do nothing else but sin.

Now his standing is in the new and not in the old. God sees him only in the new. He is not in the

flesh, but in the Spirit. He is not under law, but under grace. He is in Christ. God sees him as such. This is his perfect and unalterable standing; his sins gone; his person accepted; all complete. His practical state can never touch his standing. It can very seriously affect his communion, his worship, his testimony, his usefulness, his spiritual enjoyment, his mental repose, the glory of Christ as involved in his practical career. These are grave consequences in the estimation of every sensitive conscience and well-regulated mind; but the standing of the true believer remains — ever remains *intact* and unalterable. The feeblest member of the family of God has this place of security, and is perfect in Christ. To deny this is to remove the true basis of self-judgement and practical holiness.

Hence, if the Christian sets about measuring his standing by his state, he must be miserable, and his mental misery must be commensurate with his honesty and intelligence. There may be cases in which ignorance, self-complacency, or want of sincerity, will lead to a sort of false peace; but where there is any measure of light, intelligence, and uprightness, there must be mental anguish if the standing is measured by the state.

On the other hand, let it never be forgotten — indeed the earnest Christian never could desire to forget — that the state must be judged by the standing. If this wholesome truth be lost sight of, we shall very speedily make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. We have to keep the eye of faith steadily fixed on a risen Christ, and never be satisfied with anything short of perfect conformity to Him, in spirit, soul, and body.

A very few words will suffice to present the remainder of those rebuffs with which our blessed Lord had to deal, as recorded in our chapter. Having disposed of the question of the Baptist and his ministry, He turns to the men of that generation, and says, "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children."

The piping and the mourning were alike neglected by an unbelieving age. "John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not." The Lord Jesus came in perfect grace, and they would not have Him. The stern and distant minister of righteousness, with the axe of judgement in his hand, and the lowly, gentle Minister of divine grace, with words of tenderness and acts of goodness, were alike rejected by the men of that generation. But wisdom's children will ever justify her, in all her doings and in all her sayings. The Lord be praised for this rich mercy! What a privilege to be of the favoured number of wisdom's children! To have an eye to see, an ear to hear, and a heart to understand and appreciate the ways and works and words of divine Wisdom! "Oh, to grace how great a debtor!"

"Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgement than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgement than for thee."

With what deep and awful solemnity does the word "Woe!" fall upon the ear, as coming from the lips of the Son of God. It is the woe consequent upon rejected grace. It is no longer merely a question

of law broken, ordinances dishonoured and abused, divine institutions shamefully corrupted, prophets and wise men rejected and stoned.

All this there was, alas! But there was more. The Son Himself had come, in richest grace. He had spoken in their ears such words as none other had ever spoken. He had wrought His mighty miracles in their midst. He had healed their sick, cleansed their lepers, raised their dead, fed their hungry, opened the eyes of their blind. What had He not done? What had He not said? He longed to gather them beneath His sheltering wing; but they would not nestle there. They preferred the wings of the archenemy to the wings of Jehovah. He had opened His bosom to receive them; but they would not trust Him. All day long had He stretched forth His hands to them; but they would not have Him; and now, at length, after long forbearing, He pours forth His solemn woes upon them, and tells them of the appalling destiny awaiting them.

But, beloved reader, does it not occur to you that the "woe" of the eleventh of Matthew may have a wider range than even Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum? Should it not fall with still deeper emphasis, and more soul-subduing power, upon the ear of Christendom? For our part, we cannot doubt it for a moment. We cannot attempt to enter upon the circumstances which conspire to aggravate the guilt of the professing Church — the wide diffusion of scriptural knowledge and evangelical light — the numberless and nameless forms in which spiritual privileges lie scattered upon the pathway of this generation.

And what is the return? What the true practical condition of even those who occupy the very highest platform of Christian profession? Alas! who shall venture a reply? We look in one direction, and see the dark shadows of superstition enwrapping the minds of men. We turn the eye to another point, and there we see infidelity raising its bold and audacious front, and daring to lay its impious hand upon the sacred canon of inspiration. Combined with these, we see the poor heart eagerly grasping at everything that can possibly minister to ease and self-indulgence.

In a word, it may be safely affirmed that during the entire history of the world, there has not been exhibited a darker spectacle than that which professing Christianity presents at this very hour. Take Chorazin and its companion cities; take Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain; take Tyre and Sidon; put all these together into one scale, with all their guilt, and Christendom will outweigh them all. For if, in those cities, you find wickedness and infidelity, you do not find them, as in Christendom, tacked on to the name of Christ, or covered with the specious robes of Christian profession. No; this latter is the aggravated sin of Christendom, and hence the terrible "woe unto thee" is to be measured by the greatness of the privileges and consequent responsibility.

And if these lines should be scanned by one who up to this moment has rejected the testimony of the gospel, we would affectionately remind him that he should feel the solemnity of the words, "Woe unto thee." We fear that very few, comparatively, realise the awful responsibility of continually hearing and rejecting the gospel message. If it was a solemn thing for Capernaum to reject the light which shone upon it, how much more solemn it is for any one now to reject the still brighter light that shines upon him in the gospel of the grace of God! Redemption is now accomplished, Christ is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, the Holy Ghost has come down, the canon of inspiration is complete, everything has been done that love could do.

If, therefore, in the face of all this accumulated light and privilege, a man is found still in unbelief, still living in his sins, surely he has much reason to fear lest this word be pronounced upon him at the last, "Woe unto thee, gospel-rejector." "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none

of My reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me" (Prov. 1: 24-28). May these words be used by the Holy Ghost to awaken some careless reader, and lead him to the feet of Jesus!

Let us now turn, for a moment, to *the resources* which the true, the perfect, the divine Workman found in God. That blessed One had, most surely, His rebuffs in this wretched world; but He had His never-failing resources in God; and, hence, when everything seemed against Him, when He might say, "I have laboured in vain, and spent My strength for nought and in vain"; when unbelief, hardness of heart, and rejection met His view on every side, "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight. All things are delivered unto Me of My Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him."

Here, then, were the resources — the rich and varied resources of the true Workman, who could thank God in everything, and at all times. He was unmoved in the midst of all. If the testimony was rejected, if the message fell upon deaf ears and uncircumcised hearts, if the precious seed which was scattered by His loving hand fell upon the beaten highway and was borne off by the fowls of the air, He could bow His head and say, "I thank Thee, O Father. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight." There was no failure on His part. He ever walked and worked in the perfect line of the divine counsels.

Not so with us. If our testimony is rejected, if our work is unproductive, we may have to inquire as to the cause. We may have to judge ourselves in the matter. Perhaps we have not been faithful. The lack of result may be wholly attributable to ourselves. It might have been different had we been more single-eyed and devoted. We might have gathered golden sheaves in yonder corner of the field, had it not been for our own carnality and worldliness. We were self-indulgent when we ought to have been self-denying; we were governed by mixed motives. In short, there may be a thousand reasons, in ourselves and in our ways, why our labour has proved unproductive.

But with the only perfect Workman, this was not the case, and hence He could calmly retire from the rebuffs without into the resources within. It was all bright with Him there. "I thank *Thee*." He stayed His heart upon the eternal counsels of God. All things were delivered unto Him; and, as He says, elsewhere, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me." It was all settled, and all right. The divine counsel shall stand, and the divine good pleasure shall be accomplished. What a sweet relief for the heart amid rebuffs and disappointments!

God will perfect that which concerneth His servants; and even where there are mistakes and failures, as alas! there are in abundance with all of us, the Lord's rich grace abounds over all, and actually takes occasion from our very mistakes to shine out all the more brightly — though, assuredly, the mistakes must produce their own painful and humiliating results. It is the remembrance of this which alone can give calm repose in the midst of the most discouraging circumstances. If we take the eye off God, our souls must soon be overwhelmed. It is our privilege to be able, in our little measure, to thank God in view of everything, and take refuge in His eternal counsels, which must be made good despite all the unbelief of man, and all the malice of Satan.

But we must draw this paper to a close, and shall do little more than quote the precious words which set forth *the returns* which our blessed Lord and Saviour makes to us. "Come unto Me, all ye

that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

These words are familiar to our readers, and we but introduce them here as completing the lovely picture presented in our chapter. We feel assured the spiritual reader will greatly enjoy the presentation of the divine Workman in His rebuffs, His resources, and His returns. It is a marvellous lesson indeed. The Lord Jesus retires from a scene of disappointments, and finds all His springs in God; He then comes forth into the midst of the very scene that had repulsed Him, and makes His gracious returns. It is all in perfect grace — grace unfailing — mercy inexhaustible — patience unwearied.

True, He had sent an answer to the Baptist; He had faithfully portrayed the men of that generation; He had denounced a solemn woe upon the impenitent cities; but He can come forth in all the divine freshness and fullness of the grace that was in Him, and say, to every heavy laden soul, "*Come unto Me.*"

All this is divine. It draws out our hearts in worship and thanksgiving. If *faithfulness* is constrained, in the view of aggravated impenitence, to say, "*Woe* unto thee," *grace* can address every burdened heart in the touching accents, "*Come unto Me.*" Both are perfect. The Lord Jesus felt the rebuffs. He would not have been very man if He had not felt them. Yes, He felt the rebuffs. He could say, "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." Mark, "*I looked.*" His loving human heart fondly "*looked*" for pity, but found it not. He looked for comforters, but looked in vain. There was no pity for Jesus — no comforters for Him. He was left alone.

Loneliness and desolation, thirst, ignominy and death — such was the portion of the Son of God and Son of man. "Reproach," says He, "hath broken My heart." It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the Lord Jesus did not feel in every respect, as man should feel, the varied exercises through which He passed. He felt everything that man is capable of feeling except sin, and this latter He bore and expiated on the cross, blessed be His name!

This is not only a great cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, but a truth of infinite sweetness to the heart of every true believer. Jesus, as man, felt what it was to be neglected, to be disappointed, to be wounded and insulted. Blessed Jesus! thus it was with Thee, down here, because Thou wast very man, perfect in all that became a man, in the midst of this heartless world. Thy loving heart sought sympathy, but found it not. Loneliness was Thy portion while craving sweet companionship. This world had no pity, no comfort for Thee.

And yet, mark the grace which breathes in those words, "*Come unto Me.*" How unlike us! If we, who so often deserve them, because of our ways, meet with rebuffs and disappointments, what returns do we make? Alas! for the answer. Chagrin and sourness, fault-finding and bitter complaints. And why is this? It may be said we are not perfect: certainly not in ourselves; but we may rest assured, that if we were more in the constant habit of retiring from the rebuffs of the world or of the professing Church, into our resources in God, we should be much better able to come forth and make gracious returns in the midst of the scene which had repulsed us. But it too often happens that instead of being driven in upon God, we are driven in upon *self*; and the consequence is that, instead of returning grace, we return bitterness. It is impossible that we can make a right return if we fail to realise our right resource.

Oh, that we may really learn of Jesus, and take His yoke upon us! May we drink into His meek and lowly spirit! What words — "Meek and lowly!" How unlike nature! How unlike the world! How unlike us! How much pride haughtiness, and self-sufficiency in us! What self-confidence, self-seeking, and self-exaltation! May the Lord give us to see ourselves as He sees us, so that we may be in the dust

in His presence, and ever walk humbly before Him.

May it be given us to prove, in this day of headiness and high-mindedness, the moral security of a lowly mind and humble spirit — gladly bearing His yoke — the yoke of entire subjection to our Lord's will in all things. This is the secret of true peace and power. We can only taste of true rest of heart when the will is kept in subjection. It is when we can meet every dispensation of our Father's hand with an "Even so," that rest is our portion. If our will is active, rest must be out of the question. It is one thing to *receive* rest of conscience on coming to Jesus, at the first, and quite another thing to *find* rest of heart through taking His yoke and learning of Him. May it be given us to know very much more of the latter, in this day of restless activity.