

they found themselves an enslaved and down-trodden people.

We know that this was part of the purpose of God in their history, and that as such it was revealed beforehand to their forefather Abraham. Gen. 15. 13. But did it come upon the Israelites without any fault of their own? Assuredly not. In the passage before us we are told that "the land was filled with them." Does this mean that instead of keeping to themselves in the land of Goshen they mingled with the Egyptians, and thus attracted the attention of the latter to their wealth and greatness? Anyhow, we have the testimony of Scripture to the fact that during the years of their sojourn in the "strange land" they forsook the Lord, and learned to worship the gods of the people round about them. Josh. 24. 14; Ezek. 20. 7, 8. Thus, descending from their high position as witnesses for Jehovah, they needed the discipline of suffering before they could be restored.

And in the view presented to us of their toil and their misery, we have a faithful picture of the bondage of sin.

The indulgencies and luxuries of Egypt presented great attractions to the Israelites. Exod. 16. 3; Num. 11. 5; 16. 13. Even so do the "pleasures of sin, which are for a season" to the carnal mind. Sin often appears at first as an attractive, pleasant companion, but when it is received, indulged, obeyed, it becomes the master; ruling its slave with a rod of iron, and making his life "bitter with hard bondage."

And the bondage consists in this—not that the worldling is toiling, but that his toil is profitless. "Surely they are disquieted in vain; he heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them." Cardinal Wolsey served his king faithfully, yet he could but exclaim in his old age that he was forsaken! King Solomon, with all his wealth, wisdom, and grandeur, could only come to the conclusion that "all is vanity!" And even young people have tasted the emptiness of pleasure, and felt the aching void which no strivings of their own can fill.

But the bondage of sin is not merely profitless; it is cruel. Even children know something of this. They suffer from their bad tempers, they are often weary of their naughtiness, yet find it hard to get free. But tenfold harder is it when the bands of sin have been allowed to grow with their growth and strengthen with their strength. And yet many young people have the idea that when they are older they shall, as a matter of course, get the mastery over the sin by which they are overcome. This is a delusion which should be carefully pointed out.

The devil does not let his captives go free so easily. He deals "wisely," luring them on little by little until the chain is firmly fastened on them. And this he does like the Egyptian king, for the express purpose of ruining them. He will not spare for their crying, as many a poor miserable slave has experienced, who knows that he is being driven onward to perish. The bondage of sin is indeed "hard" and "bitter."

But, turning back to the Israelites, let us inquire, *from what quarter could help be looked for?*

Although the Egyptians could not hinder the fulfilment of God's promise to Israel, in one respect their policy was successful. The Israelites were utterly crushed and broken in spirit. When Moses, in his early zeal and self-confidence, stood before them as a deliverer, they turned the cold shoulder upon him. We read of the Helots in Lacedæmon rising against their tyrants; of the gladiators under Spartacus daring the whole power of the Roman Empire. But no Israelite dreamed of throwing off the Egyptian yoke. The few who still retained the faith of their fathers, and had some remembrance of the promise made to them, must have known that their only hope was in God.

Their only hope was in God. But if they had any reason to hope in him, that hope was everything. If God undertook their cause, it must certainly be righted. If God arose to save them, their salvation was secured. Had they any sure ground for this hope? Most decidedly they had. As the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God was pledged to care for them. Of his own free goodness and mercy he had made a covenant with Abraham and his seed. And his word could not fail.

And so with those who are under the bondage of sin. There is no help for them but in God. It is true that there is such a thing as reformation. There are many evil habits which a man can shake off, if he only takes them in time. But when he has got rid of this evil habit, he is not, therefore, free. If he has given up the more hateful form of sin, in its more subtle form it still clings to him. It is not only the drunkard, the reveler, the thief, who is held in hard and cruel bondage. That life whose horizon is bounded by this world, and whose future loses itself in dark uncertainties, is sad and bitter as theirs, if its true condition be once felt and realized. And the man cannot right himself. The fast-bound limbs cannot free themselves from their fetters. And though at times the hard bondage forces out a groan, there is, perhaps, no thought of, nor even a desire for, deliverance. Any offer of help is