

WORDS FROM THE WORK-TABLE.—No. XVIII.

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O King. But if not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan. iii. 16-18.)

In this chapter we find one of the most vivid of Old Testament pictures. At the mouth of the river Chebar we come upon the plain of Dura, in the midst whereof stands a colossal image of gold. In the background is seen a yawning fiery furnace, casting its lurid glare upon the crowd and deepening the golden hue of the monster image. Those who have descended coalpits, visited glass-factories, or passed through the "black country" at night, can readily conceive the power and appearance of this furnace as the flames leap and dance within. In the foreground Nebuchadnezzar, seated in regal pomp, has summoned the princes, the governors, the captains, and the great ones of the land. He commands them to do homage to the image, threatening all who refuse with death. The great men, at the dictation of their imperious master, bend the knee and bow the head before this senseless image. But in the midst of the crowd are three men whose countenances are fairer than the rest and whose appearance is more comely and attractive. These are the men who refuse to defile themselves by partaking of the king's meat, preferring to subsist on pulse and water. There they stand, arraigned before that mighty monarch and his court. For what? Hear the accusation—"These men, oh king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image thou hast set up." "Is it true? Do ye not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image I have set up? . . . Now, if ye be ready to fall down and worship, well—if not, ye shall be cast into the burning fiery furnace, and *who is that god that shall deliver you out of my hands?*" Unmoved by the grandeur around them—fearing not the fury of the king—unappalled by the fiery death, these Jewish captives reply in the forcible language that heads this paper—"Our God whom we serve, is able to deliver, and he will deliver." They knew that their God could save them, but if His purpose would be better served by their passing through the furnace, they were willing to endure rather than violate His laws. "But if not." What majesty in these three words! They embody a faith fearless of consequences. Firm in their obedience to Divine commands, they leave results with God. Into the furnace they are cast. The infuriated king has caused it to be heated "seven times more than it was wont to be heated." What of that? The omnipotent hand of Him in whom they trust brings them through with hair unsinged, garments unchanged, and with out the smell of fire passing upon them. By

their undeviating love of right they compel that haughty monarch to acknowledge the God they serve and to respect their own standing and character.

The picture is finished. Has it any lessons for us? Some say that this *Old Testament* is effete, that it has served its purpose, and now only contains "heaps of Hebrew old clothes—Jew stars long since gone out." But there is life-power in it, quickening us into activity by the noble example of ancient worthies and by its types and histories, which carry us Christward and strengthen our faith by bearing witness to the facts of the New Testament.

Can the Christian learn anything—can he derive comfort or instruction from this old story? Truly, yes; and much need have we in this day of expediencies to study its teaching.

1. The complete confidence and reliance of those Hebrews in the protecting power of God. In the present time we meet people who have full confidence in Christ as a Saviour—who can unhesitatingly commit their souls to his keeping, knowing that his death brought life and immortality to light—who by their anxiety, their yielding to worldly schemes, and conforming to worldly customs, seem to have little faith in God as a provider and preserver. They can trust Him for their spiritual food, but ignore his power to guide them in temporal matters. Such should ponder this example, till under any exigency they can say—My God can deliver; but if not—well, even then I will trust! Ponder it till they can exclaim—"Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

2. They allowed no unnecessary arguing of of the matter—they knew that God had said—"Thou shalt have none other gods but me"—"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them, for I the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God," and therefore their reply was prompt. They held no parley with the tempter—they knew God could save—not only *could*, but would guard them either *from* or *through* the furnace. "They trusted in the Lord: He was their strength in the time of their trouble." This lesson is supported by the example of our Lord himself. In the temptation in the wilderness he promptly repelled the tempter—the Word of God was his ready weapon: and again in his to Peter there was no delay—no lingering about the matter as though it might be entertained. Nay, there is an abruptness in our Lord's address that is very rarely apparent, as though in haste to cast from him anything that might draw him from his great work. Sin is often encircled with so much seeming beauty, so insinuating, that we need promptness. If we parley the