

THOUGHTS FOR THE CLOSING YEAR.

A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

A happy New Year! Oh such may it be!
Joyously, surely, and fully for Thee!
Fear not and faint not, but be of good cheer,
And trustfully enter the happy New Year!

Happy, so happy! Thy Father shall guide,
Protect thee, preserve thee, and always provide!
Onward and upward along the right way
Lovingly leading thee day by day.

Happy, so happy! Thy Saviour shall be
Ever more precious and present with thee!
Happy, so happy! His Spirit thy Guest,
Filling with glory the place of His rest.

GOING HOME.

"Ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you."—Deut. xii. 9.

And is it so, that at the close of this lone and weary pilgrimage there is rest above? And after this earthly fleeting existence there is an inheritance reserved? May I unhesitatingly believe this assurance and hopefully clasps it to my heart? Then with what a firm tread, and with what a buoyant spirit may I press my foot upon the mysterious threshold of the year now opening upon me—even as the morning sun peers above the horizon, and as the early flower expands to the warm influence of its genial beams. Whether, like that sun, this new born year shall it its course be wreathed with storm-clouds—or whether, like that opening floweret, its earthly loves and joys and hopes shall pale and droop and die, I cannot tell nor wish to know. Enough that God is my Father, my Sun and Shield; that He will give grace and glory, and will withhold no good and needed thing. Enough that Christ is my Portion, my Advocate, my Friend, and that whatever else may pass away, His sympathy will not cease, His sufficiency will not fail, nor His love die. Enough that the everlasting covenant is mine, and that that covenant, made with me, is ordered in all things and sure. Enough that heaven is my rest, that towards it I am journeying, and that I am one year nearer its blessed and endless enjoyment.

Thus may each Christian pilgrim commune with his own heart while standing beneath the shadowy portal of another cycle of time. Ere yet we meet its new and sacred claims—its duties, its responsibilities, and its trials,—it may be our wisdom to remember, that we are "not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the Lord our God giveth us." Our path, pointing homewards, lies across a long and dreary desert. We have, as yet, many a milestone to pass—many a stage to travel—many a foe to confront—many a battle to win. We cannot exult as those who put off the armor and wave the palm. And yet we are going home. Going home! what a soothing reflection! what an ecstatic prospect! The heart throbs quicker—the eye beams brighter—the spirit grows elastic—the whole soul uplifts its soaring pinion, eager for its flight, at the very thought of heaven. "I go to prepare a place for you," was one of the last and sweetest assurances that breathed from the lips of the departing Saviour; and though uttered eighteen hundred years ago, those words come stealing upon the memory like the echoes of by-gone music, thrilling the heart with holy and indescribable transport. Yes! He has passed within the veil as our forerunner; He has prepared heaven for us, and by His gentle, wise, and loving discipline, He is preparing us for heaven.

Amidst the perpetually changing scenes of earth, it is refreshing to think of heaven as our certain hope. "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." This is no quicksand basis for faith—nor mirage of hope. Heaven is a promised "rest"—exquisitely expressive image!—and that promise is the word of Him who cannot lie. Nothing can surpass, nothing can compare with this! Human confidences—the strong and beautiful—have bent and broken beneath us. Hopes—bright and winning—we too fondly fed, have, like evening clouds of summer, faded away, draping the landscape they had painted with a thousand variegated hues in the sombre pall of night. But heaven is true! God has promised it—Christ has secured it—the Holy Ghost is its earnest—and the joys we now feel are its pledges and "first fruits." Christian, consider this new epoch of time, unfold a new page of your yet unwritten history with the full, unwavering conviction that God is faithful—that in all the negotiations, transactions and events of the unknown future—in all the diversified and fluctuating phases of experience through which you may pass, it will be your mercy to do with Him of whom it is said, "It is impossible for God to lie." O take this precious truth into your heart, and it will shed a warm sunlight

over all the landscape of your shadowy existence. "He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself," Receive the promise, and confide in the veracity of the Promiser, and He will make good to its utmost the word upon which He has caused you to hope. Standing yet within the solemn vestibule of this new and portentous year, could our fluttering hearts find repose in a more appropriate or sweeter truth than the Divine faithfulness of Him "with whom there is no variableness, neither the shadow of a turning?"

The Home to which we aspire, and for which we pant, is not only a promised, it is also a *perfect* and *permanent* Home. The mixed character of those seasons we now call repose, and the shifting places and changing dwellings we here call home, should perpetually remind us that we are not, *as yet*, come to the perfect rest and the permanent home of heaven. Most true indeed, God is the believer's present home, and Jesus his present rest. Beneath the shadow of the cross, by the side of the merciful seat, within the pavilion of a Father's love there is true mental repose, a real heart's ease, a peace that passeth all understanding, found even here, where all things else are fleeting as a cloud, and unsubstantial as a dream. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But it is to heaven we look for the soul's perfect and changeless happiness. With what imagery shall I portray it? How shall I describe it? Think on all the ills of your present condition—not one exists in heaven! Bereaved one! *death* enters not, slays not, sunders not there. Sick one!—*disease* pales not, enfeebles not, wastes not there. Afflicted one!—*sorrow* chafes not, saddens not, shades not there. Oppressed one!—*cruelty* injures not, wounds not, crushes not there. Forsaken one!—*inconstancy* disappoints not, chills not, mocks not there. Penitent one!—*sin* exists not, burdens not, embitters not there. Weeping one!—*tears* spring not, scald not, dim not there. "The former things are passed away." There rests not upon that smooth brow, there lingers not upon those serene features a furrow, or line, or shade of former sadness, languor, or suffering—not a trace of wishes unfulfilled, of fond hopes blighted. The desert is passed, the ocean is crossed, the home is reached, and the soul finds itself in heaven, where all is the perfection of purity and the plenitude of bliss. Ages move on in endless succession, and still all is bright, new, and eternal. O, who would not live to win and enjoy a heaven so fair, so holy, and so changeless as this? He who has Christ in his heart enshrines there the inextinguishable, deathless hope of glory.

It is a richly instructive and deeply sanctifying thought—the *future* of the heavenly rest. When told that we are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the Lord our God giveth us, we are gently reminded that we have each one a niche in life to occupy, a—here to fill, a mission to perform. The idea of personal responsibility, of individual influence, and of untiring action instantly starts up before the mind. "Not yet in heaven—then for what am I here? Surely it is for an object in harmony with my intellectual and spiritual being, and worthy of Him who still detains me on earth. It must be that I have something to do, or something to endure for Christ—an active or a passive part to fill. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do or suffer for Thee?" O there is a fathomless depth of divine wisdom in the arrangement that keeps us so long out of heaven. The world needs us, and we need the world. It needs us to illumine and sanctify it: we need it as the field of our conflict, and as the school of our graces. We want the world, not as a hermit's cell, but as a vast theatre where before angels and men our Christianity is developed in the achievements of prayer, in the triumphs of faith, in the labors of love, and in the endurance of suffering.

Not yet at home—then we would remember that it is "through much tribulation we are to enter the kingdom." As a new period of time slowly rises from the depths of the unknown and mysterious future, its form, half-shadowy, half-brightness, seeming to say,

"Cold is my greeting: but when we part
Thou shalt find I have crept around thy heart.
Ah! vainly then would'st thou bid me stay,
And sigh to recall me when I am away."

Shrink we from its stern and solemn duties, its bosomed sorrows, its deep and impenetrable decrees? Why shrink we? Infinite resources unveil their treasures upon its threshold. Christ's atoning merits confront our vast demerit. Christ's boundless grace confronts our deep necessities. Christ's presence confronts our sad and gloomy loneliness. Jesus thus filled with grace so overflowing, with love so tender, with sympathy so exquisite, with power so illimitable, with resources so boundless, with a nature so changeless, stands before us and says to each trembling heart, "Fear not." We commence a new march under His convoy. We prepare for a new conflict with His armor. We renew our pilgrimage with fresh supplies of "angels' food."