

From "Memory's Tribute."

THE BAPTISM.*

Chap. V.

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not."—From the Epistle to the Hebrews.

THE Christian's path is not irradiated with continual sunshine. There are seasons when he finds himself wrapped in deep and awful darkness. God sees fit, a times, to "set him in dark places; to hedge him about so that he cannot get out, and to remove his soul far off from peace." Unforeseen and unavoidable calamity may overtake him. His prospects may be suddenly blasted. His friends, his children, those who are endeared to him by all the tender ties of consanguinity and love, may be torn from his bosom and lodged in the grave.

But in the midst of his severest trials the Christian has the consoling assurance, that these afflictions are not to be viewed as judgments sent in frowning wrath, but as tokens of love and paternal regard. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." All who belong to the household and family of God must expect, sooner or later, these evidences of divine adoption. Afflictive visitations seem necessary to prove us. If we pass through the fiery trial with undiminished confidence in God, our faith by this very process will have become more exalted, and purified from the dross of sin, and we ourselves rendered more "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

These remarks have been suggested by the continuation of the foregoing narrative, which here follows, as related by Mr. Heyden.

"My friend was now called to tread a rough and thorny path. As I observed to you, he had taken great pains to imbue the young and tender minds of his children with sentiments of piety and love to God. In the course of a few years he was called to part with three of these children. Oh Sir, if you have never had and loved, and buried, children, you can hardly conceive the nature of this affliction." Here Mr. H. cast his eyes towards the burying ground, and for a moment seemed lost in silent contemplation. The tear that fell upon his manly cheek, and the tones in which he spoke told me that he had children resting there.

Drawing the back of his hand across his face, Mr. H. thus proceeded:—"There are a thousand ways in which these little ones entwine themselves around our hearts. To see them so helpless and dependant upon us, looking to us so imploringly in the moment of peril, and running to us for protection; appearing so happy and joyous and light-hearted in our presence—to witness in them, day after day, the unfolding of some new capacity, or the performance of some new action; to watch each new development of thought and of moral feeling; to follow them step by step till reason begins to ripen and mature; and to receive from them, at each step, expressions of filial love in all the feelings and simplicity of their young, warm, and guileless hearts—Oh, these things fasten ten thousand cords around a father's heart! And if that father has endeavoured to lead his children in the way of life; if he has gathered them around him, and told them the story of the Saviour's death and sufferings, and as he spoke of the love and the kindness of the Son of God; if he has observed the tears that glistened in their young eyes; and if he has conducted them on in the way of religious instruction until the divine life began to spring up in their souls, he has found his heart bound to them by new ties. To lose such a child—to see him on the bed of death looking so imploringly to us, and when pointed to that blessed Jesus who, while here on earth, welcomed little children to his arms—to see him endeavouring with his trembling lips and dying breath, to utter the name of that Jesus. Oh, this is indeed trying to the feelings of a father.

"In less than one year Mr. Northend saw three of his children thus called into eternity. But the resignation with which he bore it, and the meek submission with which he bowed to the will of God, seemed to throw a new lustre over his character.

"This was only the commencement of my friend's

afflictions. James Northend, as I have already remarked, when quite young, evinced strong symptoms of a wayward and preverse heart. As he grew up, his natural propensities became more manifest, and excited in the bosom of his friends alarming apprehensions: that his course would be marked with fearful depravity. He became extremely dissipated, fond of low company, and averse to labour.

"This was, indeed, a sore trial to Mr. Northend. James was his first begotten. If he had a favorite, if there was one of his children that shared more tenderly or more largely his affections than another, it was James. No one can tell how many bitter tears he shed, how many fervent prayers he put up for him. But this child of his love, this idol of his heart, with a bosom steeled against all impression from parental tenderness, kept on in his evil courses, waxing worse and worse. What rendered this affliction still more trying, was, that Mr. N. always attributed this perverseness in James, to his own early mismanagement of him.

"As I just remarked, James Northend was extremely averse to labour; but seemed very fond of being on the lake, and of associating with boatmen. He now took his own course, and determined to follow boating on the lake as a business. This brought him into habits of intimacy with the lowest and most depraved part of society. He was thus removed from the means of grace, and from the influence of religious people; and his acquaintances, in general, now gave him up as a lost man.

"It was a few years after James began to follow the lake, that his mother was taken very ill, and from the violence of her disease, her recovery was despaired of. She expressed great anxiety to see him before she died. Boats were leaving here almost every day, and the family took great pains to send tidings of this to James.

"It was a very dark rainy night, when intelligence came to my house that Mrs. Northend would not probably survive till morning. I immediately hastened there, and found but few individuals present except their own family. Mrs. N. was evidently rapidly failing, but still able to converse. I do not know that I ever saw one appear more lovely in death, or look into the eternal world, on the brink of which she then lay, with more calmness or composure.

"I remarked to her, that I hoped that she felt resigned to the will of God, and ready to obey his summons. 'O yes,' she replied, 'God has been very merciful to me; his Holy Spirit has brought most of my rebellious thoughts into submission to his will. And I can truly say, that I find unspeakable peace and comfort in resigning myself and all my concerns into his hands. When I look back on my past life, and see how devious has been my path, and how deviating my steps, the creature of a thousand changed and changing purposes; at one time firmly resolved to devote all my powers and faculties to the service of God, and perhaps before an hour had passed, all my good resolutions swept away and myself brought into subjection to the law of sin which is in my members—Oh, when I think of these things, I should sink into utter despair did I not remember that I was to be saved by free and unmerited grace. Yes, Jesus,

"Thou must save, and thou alone;
In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling."

"Oh, infinite is that love, how indescribable that goodness which has promised to lift me from the depths of sin, and exalt me to a seat at God's right hand. When I look forward to the things which are not seen; the things which God hath prepared for them that love him, I long to depart and be with Christ. But then the thought of those I am leaving; yes, there is one bitter, bitter thought—my James—my prodigal son—O, that I could see him, and leave him my dying entreaty to turn from the ways of death."

"The rain was pattering fast upon the roof, and the night exceedingly dark; all within the house was quiet and composed. During these remarks of Mrs. N., James arrived and had entered the room with a noiseless tread; the curtains that hung around her bed, had prevented her noticing his presence, as she made these last remarks. He went forward just as he had left the boat, clad in his sailor dress, dripping

with rain, and kneeled at her bedside; with one hand he covered his own face, and with the other clasped the dying hand of his mother.

"O my James, my James,' she exclaimed, 'I am going to die—and must we be parted forever? Have I borne and nursed you—have I carried you in my arms, and cherished you in my bosom so many days and nights, that you might become a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction. Oh, my son, this is the last appeal that I shall ever make to you. Do turn to God. If you have no pity on your own soul, do have pity upon the tears and agony of your dying mother. O my God, I ask for this child but one thing—the salvation of his soul.'

"Never did I witness so truly an affecting scene as this. The mother soon died. The son, for a little while more steady, soon returned to his former courses. Mr. Northend bore up under this affliction astonishingly. But the severest trial of all was now at hand.

"A few years had elapsed since the death of Mrs. Northend. James continued to follow the lake, and had become the master, and in part, the owner of a small schooner. The navigation of this lake is somewhat dangerous on account of sudden squalls. It was about the time that the arrival of James Northend was expected, that there blew up one of the severest gales I ever witnessed. And in a short time there came news that a schooner was wrecked, and in a sinking condition, within sight of the shore. In a few minutes the shore was lined with spectators, and it was soon decided that it was James Northend's boat. A number of persons could be distinctly seen clinging to the yet floating wreck. The first thing that arrested my attention when I came to the shore, was Mr. Northend, walking backward and forward in the deepest agony. In his haste he had left his house without his hat, and his long white hair was floating in the wind, which gave to him a wild and distracted appearance. An attempt had just been made to send out a small boat to the relief of the perishing crew; but there was not a boat to be had that could have lived five minutes in that gale.

"Mr. Northend was imploring them to make another effort, 'O save my child,' he said, 'I will give all that I possess if any one will make the effort.'

"To have made the attempt would have been certain destruction. Of this Mr. Northend soon became sensible, and desisted from his impotunity. The storm accelerated the approach of night, and in fifteen minutes after I reached the shore, darkness settled down upon the sinking wreck, and blotted it, together with its perishing crew, forever from our sight. Mr. N. still stood gazing in the direction of the wreck, trying to pierce with his dim eye through the darkness, to catch another glimpse of his profligate, but still beloved child. I went up to him, and taking him by the arm, begged him to return to his house, and remember where his trust should be placed.

"Oh yes,' said he, turning away from the wild commotion of agitated waters that was roaring around us, 'Oh yes, my heart is indeed overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Had James been penitent—could I have had any evidence that his peace was made with God? The thought of his going to an endless perdition—how agonizing. O God help me to bow in humble submission to this dispensation, and say, thy will be done.'

"As was to be expected, when the morning came, no part of the wreck was visible.

"From this time Henry Northend became much abstracted from the world. 'His conversation was in Heaven.' The subject of religion seemed the only one that could interest him. This interested him deeply and powerfully. However weary or worn out with fatigue, the mention of the blessed Saviour's name would at all times arouse him up to immediate warmth and animation. He has lived the life, and died the death of the righteous. Peace be to his memory."

When this interesting narrative was finished, we went to Mr. Heyden's house.

After I had retired to my bed room, I could not but think, Here is one instance in which God has blessed, in a signal and visible way, the sacrament of infant baptism to the salvation of souls, and to the magnifying of his own glory. How strongly should this urge all parents to the discharge of this most plainly inculcated duty.