

THE LATE MR. SIMON.

Extract from a Sermon by the Rev. Francis Close.

TEXT—MALACHI II. 5, 6.

As he drew towards his end, his views of his own unworthiness continually deepened. If any person upon his dying pillow might have looked back over a well-spent life with self-complacency, surely it was he! But no single expression escaped him during his long illness that betrayed such a self-righteous feeling. He ever referred to himself as to a poor penitent sinner, resting all his hopes on the merits and righteousness of a Divine Saviour. "I wish to be alone with my God," said he, on one occasion, a short time before he died, "and to lie before him as a poor, wretched, hell-deserving sinner; yes, I say, as a poor, hell-deserving sinner, and to go to my God as the lowest of the low. But I would look to him as my all-forgiving God, and as my all-sufficient God, and as my all-atoning God, and as my covenant-keeping God! There I would lie before him as the vilest of the vile, and the lowest of the low, and the poorest of the poor. I know I am the chief of sinners, and I hope for nothing but the mercy of God in Christ Jesus unto life eternal, and I shall be, if not the greatest monument of God's mercy in heaven, yet the very next to it, for I know no greater. Here I lie adoring the sovereignty of God in choosing such an one—the mercy of God in pardoning such an one—the patience of God in bearing with such an one—and the faithfulness of God in perfecting his work and performing all his promises to such an one." Who that has not a spiritual knowledge of the Word of God, and a true acquaintance with his own heart, would imagine that this was the dying testimony of one who had devotedly and conscientiously served God in his day and generation through a long life? But such was "the fear wherewith he feared God, and was afraid before his name."

This fear, however, had nothing of "torment" in it, it was accompanied with that "perfect love of God which casteth out servile fear." God did, in a most gracious manner, "give him his covenant of life and peace." Deep and lowly as was his reverence for the awful name of God, yet he loved and confided in him as in the tenderest father. Let us again listen to his devout meditations upon his death-bed:—"Infinite wisdom has devised the whole with infinite love—and infinite power enables me to repose in that love—and all is infinitely good and gracious. All is right and well, and just as it should be. I am in a dear Father's hands, and all is secure. Whether I have a little more or a little less of pain and suffering does not matter. But all is secure. When I look to God I see nothing but faithfulness, and immutability, and truth, and I have not a doubt nor a fear! but the sweetest peace—I cannot have more peace! But if I look another way—to the poor creature—oh then, then, there is nothing, nothing, nothing, but what is to be abhorred and mourned over. Yes, I say that, and it is true!"

The language of my text appears to have been most literally applicable to him: God had, in a peculiar manner, "made a covenant of life and peace with his soul;" and upon the wisdom and faithfulness of God, he seems, at all times, to have rested with extraordinary composure. "What is before me I know not," said he, at an earlier period of his illness, whether I shall live or die, but this I know, that all things are ordered and sure—every thing is ordered with unerring wisdom and unbounded love." And on a subsequent occasion he expressed his views of the covenant of grace, in language most scriptural and sublime.

"It is to the principles that I look," said he, "it is on the broad, grand principles of the Gospel that I repose! It is not on any particular promise here or there, any little portion of the word, in which some people seem to take comfort; but I wish to look at the grand whole, at the vast scheme of redemption, as from eternity to eternity. I wish to point out this peculiarity in my case; I am not solicitous so much about this feeling or that, this state or that, as upon keeping before me the grand purposes of Jehovah from eternity to eternity! . . . In taking the grand revelation of himself which God has

given us, then I rest upon him, and not upon myself: I do not depend on feelings and thoughts which are changing and uncertain, but I am kept by Him who changes not! For, after all, what are a man's best prayers and thoughts before Him! It cannot depend upon a few poor, broken, pining words; nor do I depend upon them, but again I say, "I take the glorious and majestic discoveries which God has made to me of himself, and there I rest."

We are not surprised that a mind that could grasp such magnificent views of Divine truth as these, should sustain with exemplary patience all the sufferings of the body to the end. He only once expressed surprise "that he was so long in dying;" and when reminded that it was the will of God, and that he must "await all his appointed time," he simply added, "And that is quite sufficient for me." On the occasion of his relapse, he expressed his entire resignation to the will of God in striking language, "God cannot do any thing contrary to my will!" Intimating that his wishes were absorbed in the will of God. Truly "the end of this man was peace!"

But we must not here omit to notice the turn which our translators have given to the clause in the fifth verse. "This covenant of life and peace" is represented as the result of that lowly "fear wherewith Levi feared God;" and there can be no doubt that this is not only the true sense of the passage, but also that it is agreeable to many other passages of Scripture. Not that the manifestations of God's love are the reward or meritorious effect of holy fear, but this is the order of Divine grace. Deep humiliation of soul is the only safe preparation for well-grounded assurance and lively confidence in God. I remember that on a recent occasion, when many Christian friends and ministers were assembled in Cambridge to commemorate the completion of our Father's labours in his parish for half a century, he reminded us that the day of humiliation under the Mosaic economy, immediately preceded the season of Jubilee. That joy, peace and assurance, which is not based upon deep prostration of soul before God, and accompanied with unfeigned humility, may justly be distrusted. "My covenant was with him of life and peace, and I gave them unto him; for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name." "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the humble."

Having thus endeavoured, however feebly, to trace the character, life, and death, of my beloved Friend and Father, I would ask, in conclusion, shall we then glory in man? shall we suppose his character faultless, or attribute what was excellent and praiseworthy in him to his own exertions and natural goodness? "God forbid!" Let no man glory in man—let us ascribe all glory to God who wrought in him effectually "both to will and to do according to his good pleasure." Of this important truth we are reminded by that golden sentence in my text, "I gave them unto him." Was there much in him to be admired and imitated? Was his ministry distinguished by uncompromising fidelity? "I gave it unto him," saith the Lord. Did extraordinary success crown his labours? "God alone gave the increase." Did he walk with God in peace and equity? Had he lowly fear, and lively confidence in God? Was he filled with peace and love upon his dying bed? "I gave them unto him?" All, all, was the gift of God, the rich fruits of his grace. Our brother had nothing that he did not receive, and often did he acknowledge, too, that all he had of gifts or grace came from God. And were his disembodied spirit now among us, and were it permitted to address us, the language of the Apostle might be selected as most suitable, "By the grace of God I am what I am;" and "His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Let us then "glorify God in him." It is for our own consolation that we should do so, as well as for the honour of God. For if all that our revered Friend possessed was the gift of God, and all that he did was the effect of the grace of God; then may all and each of us aspire to imitate him, and so to follow him as he followed Christ. Comparing ourselves with him we might be discouraged, or we might conceive it to be a thing impossible that we could thus live and thus die; but if it be a free gift of God, let us ask

of Him who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and he will give us like precious faith, and he will enable us to tread in the steps of them who, through faith and patience, now inherit the promises. Oh that the example of this good man might be the means, under God, of kindling new zeal in our hearts; and whether we be ministers and stewards of God's mysteries, or individual Christians in the private walks of life, may our souls be reanimated and refreshed; may we quicken our step, and gird up our loins, and fix our eye more intently upon the prize of our high calling, that so at length we too may attain, through God's rich grace, the crown which fadeth not away!

But let me forewarn you, brethren, every one of you, that excepting the peculiarities of the sacred office, there is nothing in the character of the deceased, to which we must not all attain if we would be saved. Ask then yourselves, ask your own consciences, has "the law of truth," the Gospel of your salvation, availed to "turn you away from iniquity?" Has the love of Christ subdued in you the power and dominion of sin? Have you ever been imbued with a holy fear of God? Have the terrors of the Lord persuaded you to flee to the refuge of a Saviour? Are you walking with God in holy obedience, in the paths of equity and peace? Do you know any thing of "His covenant of life and peace?" If not, how sad your condition! A stranger yet to God, and far from him; the slave of some evil lust, or the sport of idleness and vanity; dwelling in light, yet abiding in darkness; surrounded with truth, yet lost in error; continually invited to repent and believe and live, but putting off the message of mercy to an indefinite time, a time which may never come!

Oh remember, I pray you, brethren, that death does not always approach with such slow and measured steps as in the case of our departed Friend! You have recently had sad proofs of this; one and another has been suddenly cut down as in an instant, apparently in the midst of life and health and prosperity! May God Almighty's voice be heard in the city! May many remember their ways and turn to Him whom they have forsaken! May you have grace to commence that life of holiness which alone can terminate in such a peaceful death. It is easy to exclaim, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his;" but if you would so die, you must so live; the grace which our brother displayed in his last days, was the same he had exhibited throughout his life; ripened, indeed, and matured, and ready to be gathered into the heavenly garner, but cultivated by the toils of many a day, and watered with many tears, and cherished with many prayers; and though "dying grace is doubtless reserved for a dying hour," you must not imagine that such resignation, humility, peace and love will fill your bosom in that crisis of your existence except you seek them now; wherefore "acquaint thyself with God and be at peace!" "Oh that thou wouldst hearken to the commandments of thy God; then should thy peace be as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea!" Peaceful should be thy path through life—peaceful should be thy death—and in eternity, peace, unbroken peace, should be thy portion for ever.

Concluded.

Church Missionary Society.—The thirty-seventh anniversary of this institution was held at Exeter Hall, London, on Tuesday, May 2nd, the Earl of Chichester, president of the Society, in the chair. The Bishop of Chester, Winchester, Salisbury, Ripon, and Chichester, together with a number of clergymen and laymen, were on the platform. The assemblage was one of the largest which has ever been collected at the society's anniversary.

From the report read by the Rev. Mr. Jowett, secretary of the society, it appears that the receipts from all sources for the preceding year were 71,729l. of which 54,363l. were contributed by auxiliary associations, a fact which shows the wide spread interest felt through the country in the society's objects. There is an increase in the receipts of the year preceding the anniversary, over those of the previous year, of 3,372l. —*Chris. Wit.*