

spirit. He will no longer remain amid the misery and degradation of the land of famine. He will make the attempt to avoid the near ruin now before him. He will do something rather than perish. All dejection and despondency vanish as he stands up, and, with a decisive resolve, which calls for instant action, says—"I will arise and go to my father."

His repentance presses on to its consummation in this resolution to *return*, conjoined with the further resolution to *confess his sin*. He says—"I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

It is almost impossible to express the heart-breaking fulness of this single word of confession—"Father, I have sinned." This is the sinner's heart cry in returning to God; his cry to the heart of the all-merciful Father. It springs from the very depths of earnestness, with no abatement of reserve or apology:—like that prayer of the publican in the temple, when he stood afar off, and with thoughts fixed only on himself and God, smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me *the sinful one*." This son makes no excuse, *in words*, for his sin. He does not bring forward anything to extenuate his guilt. He does not plead his youth and inexperience, or strong temptation or the perverting influence of bad companions, or the evil effect of outward circumstances. Neither does he, *in thought*, excuse himself. Without reserve or apology his heart sends forth the cry of confession,—“Father, I have sinned.” And that single word, so uttered, is enough for Him who searches the heart. The contrite heart, breaking under a sense of innumerable past sins and follies, endures not to wait to array them all in order, but must relieve itself with the piercing cry, Father, I have sinned. That word, uttered unconditionally,

contains the essence of all those words of lowly confession which, in all ages, the Holy Spirit puts into the mouth of God's children when leading them back to Him.

Corresponding to the single word of confession, there is but one aggravation of his sin mentioned. He says, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.” The seeming separation here, between heaven and the father, sustains the figure in the parable. But, essentially, this word is the same as the psalmist's cry of believing penitence, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.” For, the special aggravation of sin, the essence of its malignity, consists in this, that it is an offence *against God*, an attempted injury and dishonour done to Him. Sin may have other aggravations. It may involve grievous wrong to many; it may bring misery and want to the sinner himself, and grief and shame to all, connected with him. He may have bitter sorrow at the sight of its wretched consequences, and profound dread at the thought of his own exposure to the judgment of God because of it, and yet, its real malignity as an offence against the blessed God is a consideration, which, if thought of at all, lies very lightly on his conscience. But there is neither true conviction of sin nor yet true repentance, where this consideration does not stand out above and before every other. And thus when, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, any sinner is convinced of sin, his heart's cry of penitence in turning to God shall be like this, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.” Then shall the contrite heart be able to appropriate the words of the psalmist, “Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight.” This is the language of that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation. Alas! for you, reader, if you have not yet learned this by heart; for then, you