

their voice ascend through the clouds of the desert, from its dismal solitude. Desolate of a happiness which the world does not yield, longing for a spiritual food which the world does not supply, their soul fainting within them, they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivers them out of their distresses. In such cases God by his spirit and his word revives his people, stimulates, encourages, sustains, them. They are lifted up from the ground. They are quickened in prayer. They rise refreshed, they are fed from on high, they have heavenly manna given to them, they drink of a river which comes down from the throne of God. They have infused into them a happiness which relieves the wilderness for a time, dispels its solitude, and makes it bloom with the flowers of paradise. How often is the believer thus helped, sustained, strengthened, when his soul was fainting within him! There is a power in prayer, there is a power in God's word, there is a power in his imparted grace, to accomplish this, to make the heart rejoice, to make the desert blossom. For where God is, where his presence is felt, where his comforts are enjoyed, there is no longer solitude, there is no longer barrenness, the desert is peopled, the wilderness and solitary place is made glad. As soon as Jacob felt God's presence, his solitude was a Bethel. This, however, is only for a time, the solitude and the barrenness return, and the wilderness is again as before.—But the people of God cry still unto the Lord, and he hears them, and anew delivers them out of their distresses. It is thus that they go on, and, upheld and fainting alternately, God all the while leads them, and he leads them by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.

God leads his people:—they are not directed by chance—they do not walk by random. They are in a wilderness it is true—the wilderness is pathless—no footsteps trace it—it extends on all sides, and its directions, like the boundless ocean, must be taken from the stars of heaven. But even in that wilderness they are led—they are guided by a power which sees the wilderness in a glance—to whom it has no windings and no intricacies, and no uncertainty, but is as plain as the open highway, through which he can lead with unerring certainty as though it were but a line. So that though the people of God would err themselves—would not know what direction to take

—could not go a single step, it may be, in the right direction—would wander like the rudderless ship, or the unsteered van—and though they often walk without knowing the way they are going—they are still led by God. The dealings of God with his people are often mysterious, bewildering—have no apparent direction:—they are like the way in the wilderness:—no seen end—no known direction—wide and wandering and perplexing; and the people of God would stop short—they would stand still, did their way depend upon themselves; but they are guided by a higher power—they are led by God:—he traces the wilderness for them—he goes before them—he breaks up the way—he unravels the desert—he threads its mazes—he makes a way in it—that they may go at last to a city of habitation.—Through his leading—through his guidance—the wilderness becomes a plain path—at least one which they may hold on in with safety, and the very path by which they have walked will prove at last the right path. Did not God lead his people of old in the wilderness? Would they have found their way themselves?—not the way at all events—not God's way. It were easy enough to pass through life, and see the end of every event, were we not needing to *keep the way* to the city of habitation:—it were easy to go through the wilderness had we no particular destination—we would cross, and often cross it sooner, had we *no particular destination*—it is having a certain destination to reach which makes the way *difficult and often perplexing*. But God did guide his people of old: “he led them forth”—and he guides, he leads them still. He leads them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.

These words have obviously reference to God's providential dealings with his people in connexion with his purposes of grace. In one sense Christ is the way to the city of habitation—justification is the way—sanctification is the way—it is the way of holiness:—we read—Isaiah xxxv. 8, 9, It is thus a safe way as well as the way of holiness: the *redeemed* shall walk there. But what is intended here is, that the believer once on that way—the way of faith—the way of holiness—in other words, once a believer—God leads him forth by the way of his providence, in the very way that will bring him to a city of habitation. Once redeemed from the hand of the enemy—once delivered