

I should like to keep you a moment or two longer on that thought, because I really feel an interest in it. I feel anxious that you should love God, and that you should be happy in loving him. You do not know how sweet the hearthstone will be when God comes and sits down, a sacred, though unseen presence there, when you feel that he knows your ways, has fixed the bounds of your habitation, and portioned out your inheritance for you. We can see how this is in many pathways of providence. I think we can see how God has set one thing against another in some measure in our own life, so that the cloud brings its own revenue of light along with it. The law of compensation may be said to balance the whole of our probationary state. The great men who have lived in times gone by, and have done God's work in the world—how we see a cloud going before them, and a cloud hovering over them; and perhaps they only saw the cloud. Look at Abraham, pushed out not knowing whither he went, with a horror of great darkness round about him. It was not cheering or encouraging; the cloud hemmed him in. But over all there was the presence—"Fear not; I am thy shield." Oh! that raises the meanest life to the grandeur of an epic poem—"Fear not; I am thy shield." And God says it as much to John Smith, and William Thompson, and Mary Jameson, and Charles Perkins, to any of these insignificant and unhistorical, undramatic, unepic beings, as to Abraham in the days of old. There is a shield hovering over thee, my brother, and it is on the arm of God; there is a shield hovering over thee, my sister, and it is in the hand of God. The arrows may fly; they cannot touch thee until that shield, in God's providence, shall allow the stroke. Swords of spiritual foes may glance about thee; Satan may "desire to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat"; but if God has said to thee, "Fear not, I am thy shield," thou art safe, until in the last ecstasy of entirely redeemed existence you fall prostrate on the other side of the shore, when the waves are all behind, all behind, where you find yourself in that realm of light where the shield shall be needed no more, but where the sun shall shine for ever through an eternal existence.

It is beautiful to see how special things link into general cases. I have often thought there is in our life something like that pilgrimage to Emmaus, when the two disciples were walking along, and musing in their hearts upon all the desolation that had fallen upon their path. Ah! they were saying, "It is all over now; it is all over now." Suddenly there comes in their way a mysterious stranger, dignified in mien, loving in his eye, tender in his speech; and he beguiles them into conversation. What was the occasion of their sorrow? Why were they so sad? They put it all into one short sentence—"He is dead, and we trusted that it had been he who had redeemed Israel." "It is all gone; the cloud has swept down upon it; his death has buried all our hopes; and here, unable to meet the rest of the brethren, we walk upon our sad and solitary way. Prophecy, miracle, ancient scroll, past figure and type, Shekinah, all are buried in gloom. He is dead. Unto us all is dead; all is gone: we trusted that it had been he who should redeem Israel." They did not know that he who had redeemed and would redeem Israel was walking by their side. They did not know that when the cloud hung over the cross a silver lining fringed the cloud, so bright that never had angel seen the like of it. He who was suspended on the cross saw the fringe of that cloud too; he saw of the travail of his soul, and was satisfied. Ought we not constantly to take that idea with us as an illustration of how the greatest darkness may only be a curtain, behind which there is the greatest and most merciful light?

Again, in the interpretation of the truth the cloud has often a silver lining. I have already intimated to you how the words of this book have great darkness in them. It is much easier to ask questions on the difficulties of Scripture than it is to answer them. I have no doubt there are plenty of captious people here. In a congregation like this, there will be sure to be a number of persons with critical tongues and itching ears; and let me tell you, my dear people, you may ask questions enough in five minutes to puzzle an archangel. You cannot have the truth explained to you until you yourselves have entered into the state for which that truth was written. The marvel of this great book, with all its cloudy utterances, and "dark sayings upon a harp," its strange similitudes and allegorical grandeur and splendours—the marvel of it is, that it paints and describes states that, but for this book, would never have been depicted, so that all the world's tossed and irritated hearts might come there and find an answer corresponding to their own condition, and draw in

consolation. Yes, if you want to know a truth, you must get into the state into which, and from which, the truth speaks. You remember the case of the man who could not make out that strong saying of our Lord, about the mountain being removed and cast into the sea. He did not know what to do with the mountain; he was perfectly sensible that he could not cast it into the sea, and he was greatly perplexed about it. He believed the truth, but that mountain was always in his way. During this dilemma, he received a considerable injury from a neighbour, and (as most people do in such cases) waxed very wroth about it, and got very irritated. Still, there was the old mountain—he could not forget that. He did feel disposed to forgive his neighbour; on the contrary, he wanted to be well revenged, as most of us do when our brother has offended us. While thinking of his revenge, and also of that mountain, which was his real spiritual difficulty, he somehow or the other came to the reading of the passage—he turned to the very Scripture, and read, "It is impossible but that offences will come, but woe unto him through whom they come. If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him; and if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." The apostles, fairly staggered with that, said, "We can never do it; Lord, increase our faith." And the Lord said, "If ye had faith, ye should say to this mountain, Be thou removed, and cast into the midst of the sea." "Ah!" said the man, "I have got it now: that is the mountain that was to be removed. O Lord," said he, "remove this mountain of hate from my heart, and help me to love my brother." He found out what it was; he was brought face to face with that spiritual state; he could go to God, and God rolled the mountain away. He loved his brother, and he lost his mountain. I only mention this as one illustration that we need to be brought face to face with the particular state before we can see the bright light in the dark cloud. But the bright light comes; the darkness clears up. True, over all this glory there is a defence, a covering, as it is said, "Over all the glory there shall be a covering for a defence." How is it there is so much similitude, so much allegory, so much figure? Why, it is frequently that it may conceal—quite as frequently as that it may reveal—in order that the veil may hang before the picture until you are brought into that state in which you touch the spring, when up flies the curtain, and you see a charming and lovely countenance looking out from behind the curtain which you could not comprehend before. Set a man who does not know anything at all about truth to preach me a sermon on the words, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water spouts; all thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." Set a man who never prayed in his life, who never lost a friend, who never was in any circumstances of deep sorrow and affliction, to preach on the words "Thou hast covered thy face with a cloud that my prayer should not pass through." But let some terrible providence take a man by the shoulders, and press him down, almost against his will, upon the ground, upon his knees; when a great cloud is over his head, when he cannot bring his child back to life, when his wife will not hear him as she lies in her shell, when he cannot build his house again that was burned last night, when he cannot call his brother to life again who left him three years ago, and died in Australia; set him upon his knees then, with a thick black cloud over him, and he is compelled to say, "Thou hast covered thy face with a cloud that my prayer should not pass through"; he will understand the meaning of that lamentation, and its relation to his own state. But, brethren, he shall find that that cloud, dark as it is, and though it hangs over him for weeks, or months, nay, for years, at last begins to brighten on the edge; first it brightens on the edge, then it becomes lighter and lighter, until at length he lifts up his eye and sees that that which is gloom has become glory, that that which was sadness has turned into gladness before his face.

First, let me say, fellow-pilgrims, fellow-soldiers, we must be cheerful under the night. Why even in the dark night, there are one or two stars; and even if there are not one or two stars, if it is all cloudland up there, and only the thick heavy masses rolling and marching; then say we with Peter, "Master, it is good to be here." We will pitch our tabernacle under the night, and the night will be filled with music. Oh! great is the consolation that comes at night. Be cheerful beneath the cloud. And if the cloud should come in the day time still be cheerful. The Israelites had the cloud in the day. I recollect once kneeling with familiar friendliness and love around the family altar of