

A FEW THOUGHTS ON THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PETER.

In this epistle, the apostle, under the Holy Ghost, anticipates the moral corruption which was to overspread Christendom. Language and figures are largely employed to set forth this awful anticipation or prophecy; and surely our observations may well and fully vindicate the Spirit's forebodings. For what we know of such corruptions may lead us to say, that language or figures borrowed from Balaam, or from Sodom, or from the fallen angels, from the dog, or from the sow, are not too awful for the reality.

But *pollution* suggests *judgment*. In a divine sense, in the reckoning of God, in righteousness or holiness, there is a necessary connection between them. Accordingly, this same epistle contemplates judgment as well as moral corruption. This we see in chap. iii., following, as of course it does, chap. ii.

These are the apostle's materials, or principal objects, in these chapters—moral corruption in chap. ii., judgment in chap. iii. Glory, or the dwelling-place of righteousness, is seen only in the distance; and I may, therefore, speak thus: moral pollution occupies the foreground, divine judgments the mean or middle place, and glory shines faintly afar off.

But this being so, the apostle has a practical purpose. It is this, I doubt not—to set the saints

to that cultivation of holiness, that living exercise of their souls in the power of godliness, which will keep them apart from this evil condition which he is foreboding. This is seen in chap. i.

He tells them, at the very beginning, that full provision was made to this end—full provision for this husbandry, to which he is about to set them.

He tells them, that divine power had given and secured to them all that pertained to, or was needful for, not only life, but *godliness*, and that the promises, exceeding great and precious as they were, had a *purifying* virtue in them; that by them the saints would be made partakers of divine nature, as a people who had escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. All this he tells them at the outset, and this at once bespeaks his practical purpose in writing to them, setting forth their provisions in God, and His power and His promises, not for salvation or joy (though that be true, as we know), but for *godliness*. The promises are looked at in their *cleansing* virtue. It is, as I may say, the *washing* of water by the word that Peter here contemplates and speaks of, as Paul does in another place (Eph. v. 26).

And having thus declared our provisions in God and His word for the ends of godliness, He puts us upon the husbandry of godliness. He tells us of *fruitfulness*—fruitfulness which will be known in the cultivation and production of those graces and virtues which give real, intrinsic character to the saints, those habits, and tempers, and

properties of the soul, the inner man, which we know with God are of great price.

And there is a difference, we may observe, between *service* and *fruitfulness*. Service is something more manifested, fruitfulness may be very hidden. The hand, or the foot, or the tongue may serve; and so they should. Tipped with the blood and the oil, they are to be instruments in the hand of the divine Master of the house, and to be as servants there; but it is in the deeper places of the affections, the secrets of the soul, that the husbandry of the saints, in the power of the Spirit and the truth, is to be yielding fruit to God. Herbs, meet for Him by whom the soul is dressed, are to spring and grow there, fragrant, and beautiful, such as bespeak the virtue of that rain that has visited it from heaven (Heb. vi. 7).

But still further—in proof how Peter is keeping practical godliness in view—he not only gives the promises, as we have seen, in connection with that, but other things and objects also. Thus, looking at the distant glory, he sees it under this character, the *dwelling-place of righteousness* (iii. 13). It is not its brightness or its joy he anticipates, but its *purity*. He calls the Mount of Transfiguration the *holy* hill (i. 18). And this being so, the place to which the saints are tending being *holy*—being the dwelling of righteousness, he tells them that if they be, as he exhorts them, cultivating godliness—if their husbandry be spent on virtue, knowledge, temperance,

patience, charity, and the like, then they will have an *abundant* entrance into that kingdom. And this is a very simple and sure thought. If the place we are to enter, when the journey is over, be a clean place, a holy hill, a dwelling of righteousness; and if, while we are on the road, we be cherishing the holy, the clean, the righteous mind, surely our entrance will be the more *easy* and *natural*, and thus abundant. This will be so, because we have been already (in the spirit of our minds, or in character) in the place we are approaching. We know it already, in the great moral sense. We may not have had one ray of its brightness or glory along the road that has led us to it, but we have been exercised in its virtue—we have been in moral consistency with it. We have not had its *scenery* yet, but we have already breathed its *atmosphere*; and that ensures an easy, a natural, or an abundant entrance.

And I may add this, that as we see, in chaps. ii. and iii., corruption ending in judgment, so in chap. i. we see the path of the saints—of those who walk in the practical power of their holy calling—ending in a happy, abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom.

Yes; and this moral we may draw from this. How should the path savour of the place it leads to! Are we on our way to One who was rejected here? How fit that we should not refuse to be rejected with Him. Are we on our way to join the Conqueror of the world? How fit that

we should cherish that faith that overcometh the world. Are we soon to see Him who loved us so as to die for us? How right that we should cultivate love one to another. And, according to the suggestions of this epistle, are we tending to the dwelling of righteousness? How does it become us to grow in grace, and to be adding to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and the like.

How sweet and appropriate the conclusion of the epistle: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both *now* and for ever. Amen."



THE GLORY OF THAT LIGHT.

Nothing but the apprehension of Christ Himself, Christ in glory, can detach us from this present scene, or blind us to its beauty and fascination. This is strikingly illustrated in the apostle's account of his conversion. On his way to Damascus, armed with worldly authority against the saints of God, and filled with bitter enmity against the name of Jesus, "suddenly," he says, "there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw

indeed the light, and were afraid ; but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord ? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus ; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. *And when I could not see for the glory of that light*, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus." (Acts xxii. 6-11). A complete revolution has been affected. The one who had been animated by the most deadly hatred, both against Christ and His people, is now transformed into a willing slave. "What shall I do, Lord ?" expresses his changed condition, as well as the after attitude of his whole life. Besides this, we learn that he could not see for the glory of the light that had flashed upon him ; and while this is to be understood as a matter of fact physically, it yet symbolises the spiritual effect upon the apostle of the revelation to him of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Trace out his pathway from this moment, and it will be seen that thenceforward he has no eye for anything but Christ ; that the vision of his soul is filled with this one blessed, glorious object. Everything that had hitherto engaged and occupied him, everything to which he had clung, and everything which he had cherished, now lost their attractions,, faded into dimness and nothingness before the surpassing beauty and glory of the One who appeared to him when on his way to Damascus. All his precious things

were seen to be but wretched tinsel by the side of the fine gold—divine righteousness—which he beheld in a glorified Christ. As he himself tells us : “ What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ ” [have Christ as my gain]. (Phil. iii, 7, 8.) The estimate he formed at first, was the abiding estimate of his life. Christ was all to him, and he wanted nothing beside.

The history of the apostle therefore teaches most important lessons. First, as has been said, that nothing but Christ Himself can emancipate us from the power of present things. Many a soul is held in helpless bondage, from ignorance of this truth. They desire to be freed from the influence and power of this scene, and they groan and struggle in their captivity, sighing for a deliverance that never comes. The reason is, that they begin the wrong way. Instead of looking to Christ, and being occupied with Him, they look to themselves, and are occupied with their circumstances. The consequence is, they become more enfeebled and powerless every day ; whereas, if they but accepted the truth of their own utter helplessness, and directed their gaze to Christ, instead of crying, “ O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me ? ” they would soon shout, in the joyous notes of victory, “ I thank God that I am delivered through

Jesus Christ our Lord." It is said of the Thesalonians, for example, that they turned to God from idols. (1 Thess. i. 9.) If they had sought to turn themselves from idols to God, they would have remained idolators until the day of their death. But looking first to God, who was presented to them in the gospel of His grace in Christ, they were drawn by His mighty power out from unde the thralldom of Satan in the worship of false gods. Levi is another example of the same thing. Sitting at the receipt of custom, the Lord Jesus presents Himself to him, with the word, "Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed Him." (Luke v. 27, 28.) The attractions of Christ drew him away from all his associations, from all that might naturally have detained him, and constrained him to be, from that day forward, His devoted disciple. This is the secret of all deliverance for the soul. If the eye but be directed to, and fastened upon Christ, nothing can keep us. There is power in Him to emancipate the most abject and helpless ; but the condition of its reception is to be occupied with Him. Whoever would therefore be lifted above his circumstances, and follow Christ in the joyous sense of liberty, must ever maintain the attitude of beholding the glory that is displayed in His unveiled face (2 Cor. iii 18).

Together with deliverance from the power of this scene, in the way described, there will come another thing : viz., insensibility to its attraction. He was blind to all but the beauty of Christ. The

light of day extinguishes all lesser lights ; and the light of the glory, by the very outshining of its splendours, eclipses and extinguishes the brightest glories of earth. And just as when we have been gazing at the sun, we cannot for a time see clearly the objects of earth, so when we have been beholding the glory of the Lord, our eyes are dimmed for the things of this world. If therefore we are sensible of its fascinations, it is a sure sign that Christ has not been the constant object of our souls ; and, at the same time, it is a warning to us of the danger of allowing anything to come into competition with Himself. When, Peter, in his forgetfulness on the mount of transfiguration, said to the Lord, " Let us make here three tabernacles ; one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias," " a bright cloud overshadowed them ; and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." God will have no competitors with His beloved Son ; and thus " when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only " (Matt. xvii. 4-9). Christ therefore should be our only object, and in gazing at Him we not only have fellowship with the Father, but we also find deliverance from the scene, and the attractions of the scene, through which we are passing.

“ Oh, fix our earnest gaze,
 So wholly, Lord, on Thee,
 That with Thy beauty occupied
 We elsewhere none may see ! ”

MEDITATIONS ON THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

(Continued from page 80.)

CHAPTERS XIII.-XVI.**NAZARITESHIP.**

These chapters form a new division in the book of Judges. From chapter iii. to chapter xii. we have seen a series of deliverances wrought by instruments raised up of God. It was a period of *revivals*. The part with which we are about to be occupied has a special character.

Again did Israel fall: "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of Jehovah; and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years" (Chap. xiii. 1). God does not give us any particulars of this fresh declension, but we discern His estimate of it, by the weight of the rod He laid upon His people; and the Philistines were the chastisement. Nothing more clearly indicates the state of Israel than this fact. Hitherto the subjection had been to outside enemies; or to Jabin, chief of the former possessors of the land; or to the nations which had sprung from Israel after the flesh and who attacked them on their borders. Here we find the enemy established within the confines of Israel and committing ravages. The Philistines ruled over the people and reduced them to a state of servitude. There is hardly any difference, morally, between those times and the present. The unfaithfulness of the church has long since brought about this last

form of evil. That which was once outside the house of God now rules within ; those described in the first chapter of Romans have taken up their abode there, and impart their own characteristics to the people of God (*cf.* Rom. i.; 2 Tim. iii. 1-5). This mixture is what is called Christendom.

Now what is the resource of the Lord's people at such a time? One word answers the question, namely, *Nazariteship*. We should be characterized at the present time by complete separation, and by a true and whole-hearted consecration to God.

Before entering upon the history of Samson, let us look a little at this important subject. Under the law, when all was outwardly in order, *Nazariteship* was of *temporary* duration (Numb. vi.); in a time of ruin it became *perpetual*, as we see in the example before us. Samson was a Nazarite from his mother's womb. This permanent character of Nazariteship reappeared in Samuel, judge and prophet (1 Sam. i., ii.), but ceased with David, type of the royal grace, and Solomon, type of the royal glory of Christ. Then came the ruin of the people under human responsible royalty, as had been the case in the time of the judges under the more direct government of God. After this ruin of the people and of the royalty was complete, Israel was delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, and a remnant of Judah was restored to await the Messiah.

The house was doubtless swept, but the people

were lifeless. John the Baptist was raised up with a permanent Nazariteship (Luke i. 15), when the ruin was fully manifested, though not yet headed up by the rejection of Christ, and when judgment (but a Saviour also) was at the door. Announced by John the Baptist, Jesus appeared, the true Joseph—a Nazarite among His brethren—but without the *signs* of earthly Nazariteship, because He was Himself the reality of this type. This of itself strikingly proclaimed the ruin of the people. At the end of His course the Lord entered upon a second and *heavenly* phase of His Nazariteship. He sanctified Himself in heaven for His disciples, the true Nazarite, separated from sinners and seated at the right hand of God, leaving His own here below to represent His Nazariteship. The world having been by the cross convicted of sin, ruined and judged, the disciples, then the church, became heavenly Nazarites in perpetuity in the midst of the world. We shall see, as we go through the history of Samson, how the church itself has answered to this calling.

There is another important thing to notice. That which under the law was the provision for a few, is, under grace, the portion of all. Priesthood, which belonged to only one family out of the Levites, has become the universal privilege of all the children of God (1 Pet. ii. 5, 9). There was a still less numerous class in Israel, that of the Nazarites, composed of a few isolated men and women (not to speak of the Rechabites—Jer.

xxxv.—in the days of the prophets), which gives the characteristics belonging now to all the saints. We have indicated the reason, it is that separation to God is necessarily the mark of witnesses that have to do with man in his ruined condition, with the world on the eve of judgment. This truth of Nazariteship in its universal and permanent character fills the New Testament and shines out on every page of the Holy Book for those who have eyes to see. It is of immense practical importance.

Under the law, a Nazarite, whether man or woman, was separated to the service of God, during a fixed period of time. This separation consisted in three things (Numb. vi. 1-9), which touched figuratively the most necessary and most important elements of human life. *Sociability* belongs to the nature and the very existence of man. Now the Nazarite had to abstain from wine and strong drink. It is said of wine (Judges ix. 13), that it “cheereth *God and Man.*” This joy of sociable men they could have shared together with God, but sin had entered by man, and God could no longer rejoice with him. He who devoted himself to the service of God could no longer find his joy in the society of his fellows, for God has nothing in common with the joy of sinners. The servant of the Lord may not seek friends in the world, sit down at their banquets, nor share their pleasures, for God is not there; and the more distinctly the ruin is seen, the more

is this fact brought home to us. Christians fail much as to this. They have "worldly friends" and cultivate their society, not for the purpose of putting the Gospel before them, but for self-gratification. Alas! how little do we resemble Paul, when he said: "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh" (2 Cor. v. 16). From this point of view, as from every other, the Lord was a perfect Nazarite, a stranger to all the joys of sociable man. He even said to His disciples, at that meeting which He had ardently desired, when, with death before Him, He might have tasted with them for a moment earthly joy: "Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark xiv. 25). The day is coming when the wine which cheereth God and man will be drunk new in a scene purified from sin, in which the true servant will be able to take part without restriction. The word of God insists upon the importance of this separation: "He shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried; . . . he shall eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk" (Numb. vi. 3, 4). Do we take heed to this, my brethren? Do we deny ourselves what may minister, even remotely, to the joy of the heart of the natural man? How are we carrying out our Nazariteship? But perhaps you will say, how is it possible to do so in

such an absolute way? This we find in *being heavenly in character*. Ours is a heavenly Nazarite-ship. Separation under Judaism was a material one; under Christianity it becomes spiritual and heavenly. The Lord to whom we belong, is separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. He has two means of separating us with Himself and like Himself. The first, the word of God, puts us in connection with the Father in heaven; the second, His own person—Himself—a Christ set apart for us in heaven, in order to indicate and establish the fact that our relationships, our ties and our affections are henceforth heavenly, in the midst of a judged world which has rejected Christ.

A second thing characterized the Nazarite: "All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head; until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto Jehovah, he shall be holy, and let the locks of the hair of his head grow" (Numb. vi. 5). Besides sociability, there is a second characteristic which touches man to the very core. He is a selfish being, with an independent will, and for whom there is nothing of more importance than self, his dignity, and all that attaches thereto. Now long hair separated the Nazarite, in figure, from all that, being at the same time the token of *dependence* and *dishonour* (1 Cor. xi.). The long hair of the Nazarite proclaimed openly, that he had abandoned his dignity and personal rights as a man, in order to

devote himself to the service of God. That which was glory for the woman was shame for him. He relinquished his personality under this veil. He who was born to this dignity neglected it, he who was appointed to rule submitted himself to the Lord as a wife to her husband. Without this dependence there can be neither service for God nor power for it. That which was a sign of weakness for the Nazarite, became the source of his strength. Moreover, his devotedness to the Lord found expression in forgetfulness of self leading him to neglect himself in order that he might fulfil his service more perfectly.

Yet a third thing characterized him: "All the days that he separateth himself unto Jehovah he shall come at no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother or for his sister, when they die; because the consecration of his God is upon his head" (Numb. vi. 6, 7). The third characteristic belongs to man since the fall, and is inherent in his being, that is sin, proved by its consequence—death. This was what it was the duty of the Nazarite to avoid at all cost. The strongest ties, those of the family, must not be taken into consideration, when setting himself apart for the service of God was in question. How little do we understand this! There are many Christians who say: "Suffer me first to go and bury my father." Others say: "I cannot, my relations would not allow it." Such are not Nazarites. But

it was not only family ties which the Nazarite should set aside *when it was a question of service*, and which he should disclaim after the example of the perfect Nazarite: "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." "Who is my mother and who are my brethren?" (John ii. 4; Matt. xii. 48). The Nazarite should keep himself from all sin, from all defilement. The law made no provision for wilful sin, whilst it is to such that grace more particularly addresses itself. One wilful sin alone, the renouncing of Christianity, is beyond the resources of grace (Heb. x. 26). The law had its resources except for wilful sin. First: In the *daily life* of the Israelite, for sin through ignorance, and for trespass (Lev. iv., v.). Second: In his *walk*, for sin through lack of vigilance or through inadvertence (Numb. xix). Third: In his *service*, for sin arising from negligence, and for sin unforeseen and which it would appear impossible for a man to avoid. "And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his consecration" (Numb. vi. 9). This was an involuntary case and impossible to have foreseen, yet it was sin, and the more so because it was a question of a particularly important and honoured service. How this speaks to our consciences! Our Nazariteship involves the most absolute separation from the defilements of this world. Nowhere in this chapter does God suppose that the Nazarite would deliberately drink wine,

cut his hair, or touch a dead body. It is the same for us—God does not suppose that we *must* sin, and He acts towards us on this principle.

The three marks of Nazariteship, of which we have spoken, were only the external characteristics of this calling, however important they may have been as such, an importance easily forgotten. They were the result of a *vow*, of consecration to the service of Jehovah, of inward separation of heart to Him. "When either man or woman shall *separate* themselves to *vow* a *vow* of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto Jehovah" (Numb. vi. 2). I press this point, as of the utmost importance. A *vow* was a *decision* to serve God unreservedly in a certain manner, thus devoting oneself to the service of Jehovah. This devotedness to Christ is the foundation of Christian Nazariteship. If it is not there we expose ourselves to a serious fall. One may be a Nazarite in an outward sort of way, may possess even, as Samson, the great power that accompanies Nazariteship, and not be separated in heart. Doubtless, this side which was wholly external under the law is no longer so in Christianity; for one may be now a member of a temperance society without being a Nazarite. For the Christian, a *testimony* borne before the world answers to these outward signs; a testimony which separates us from its defilements as well as from its joys, and causes us to walk openly in a path of dependence, taking the word of God for guidance. Now, we

may make a profession of these things, may walk outwardly in the path of Nazariteship, and, all the while, have divided and unsanctified hearts. Such a course would end, as with Samson, in a defeat ; and if it did not come to that, we should at any rate lose the blessing which flows from whole-hearted consecration in the Lord's service. In Lev. vii. the feast of the peace offering lasted two days for him who had made a vow, and only one day when it was thanksgiving for blessings received. The effect of renouncing all that the world could offer is seen in the worship of Abraham in Gen. xii. and xiii. He built there three altars : that at Sichern, the altar of *obedience*, to Jehovah who had appeared unto him ; that at Bethel, the altar of the *pilgrim*, to the name of Jehovah ; that at Hebron, the altar of *renunciation*, unto Jehovah Himself, and it was there that the patriarch realized the divine blessings in all their extent.

But to return to the Nazarite. It is interesting to note what he had to do, when he had " defiled the head of his consecration " (Numb. vi. 9-11). One of these acts corresponded to the loss of his external Nazariteship, the other to the violation of his vow, his inward consecration. He had to shave his head. This was the public acknowledgment that he had failed, and also the avowal that the power of his Nazariteship had left him. The repentant Nazarite was not like Samson who " wist not that Jehovah was departed from him."

He acknowledged it, proclaiming, so to speak, that he was no longer qualified for service. Then he had to offer "two turtle doves or two young pigeons," the sacrifice of one who "was not able to bring a lamb." This was an acknowledgement of his incapacity, of his worthlessness as a servant, and at the same time of the value of the blood offered for his purification. We should note these things carefully and not assume an appearance of spiritual power when we have lost communion with the Lord, but confess with humiliation our sin before God, when we have failed in the responsibility of our service.

Let us persevere in this service without growing weary, and not allow anything to interfere with it. The time came for the Nazarite when the days of his separation were fulfilled, then he offered *all the sacrifices*. This day will dawn for us also, when the Lord will come and His sacrifice will have borne its full results, sin abolished, death destroyed, and Satan bruised for ever under our feet. Then we shall shave the head of our Nazariteship (Numb. vi. 18); then the power of the Holy Spirit will no longer be employed in strengthening us for separation from all evil in our service; then we shall "take the hair of the head of our separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings," for our whole energy will be taken up with the joy of uninterrupted communion, and the scene of the new world will be, like ourselves, perfectly conformed to the mind and heart of God.

(*To be continued, D. V.*)