

THE SOWER.

A VOICE FROM A PRISON CELL.

There is nothing within me that ever I might
Give as reason why Jesus should wash my soul white.
I had mocked at His mercy so often before,
He might have forsaken my soul evermore.
But still in His wonderful mercy so free,
He had room in His heart for a sinner like me.

I would not attend, though so often He cried,
"Son! look at My hands and the wound in My side;
Oh, think of the love that could bring thy Lord down
To buffeting, hate and a brow-piercing crown.
I bore all that anguish to set thy soul free."
But Christ's love and mercy were nothing to me.

He bore with me long, and He followed me far
O'er the way where allurements and lusts ever are :
He brought me to bay, and He led me to think,
With my feet slipping fast o'er the terrible brink
To destruction and death, put the devil to rout,
Then I came, and He never has since cast me out.

He is ever the same ; and His bible declares,
There's rejoicing above o'er a penitent's prayers ;
That sins, red as scarlet, can be white as the snow,
If o'er them the blood of the Saviour but flow
He is pleading and calling, poor sinner, for thee :
He'll not refuse you, since He saved one like me.

PEACE IN BELIEVING.

III.

DEAR friend: I thank you for your good letter of yesterday, I am happy to see that the Lord continues to occupy you with a subject so important as the salvation of your soul, but at the same time I am distressed to learn that you are still a stranger to that peace which the gospel announces. However, it is of grace that you are kept from a false peace, by means of which Satan seeks, in a thousand ways, to deceive poor souls and drag them down to perdition. But avoid settling down or continuing a single moment in your present state. "Remember Lot's wife." She went out of Sodom with her husband in order to escape the terrible judgment which God was about to bring on this wicked city. But her heart was still there, her attachment for Sodom and all that was in it continued, and so, *looking behind her*, she was changed to a pillar of salt, and thus became a perpetual monument of the terrible consequences which result from a return of a state of awakening to one of indifference. Oh! that God Himself may engrave upon your heart the warning given to Lot and his family; "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." (Gen. xix. 17).

You say, "I believe I shall not die without knowing the Lord." I also seriously hope you may not. You are—as you read this letter—either a child of God, or a child of wrath. There is no middle

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place, be assured of that. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Now you have either the Son of God, or you have not. Where are you, dear friend?—If believing in Him, you have the Son of God, *you have life*. In this case, it is not a question of hoping that you will not die without the Lord; you have the Son, and you have life. But if you have not the Son—if your heart is not attached to Jesus as your only hope, your only refuge, *you have not life*; and if you continue in this state, there is not anywhere a single promise that would warrant you in believing that you will receive it before you die. All the promises have their centre in Christ and a present application. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." "To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

How uncertain is human life! when I left home some weeks ago, a lady of our acquaintance was confined to her room through indisposition although not to her bed. I heard frequently of her during my absence, and on my return, her sister came with joy to tell me that the invalid was much better. This was at four o'clock. At eight o'clock the same evening her sister read to her a chapter from the New Testament. At nine o'clock she was dead. What a solemn and sudden change! We have every reason to believe that for a number of years our deceased friend believed from her heart in Christ, and that now she is happy with Him. But suppose this had not been the case, how could she have been able to go to Christ

when she was thus suddenly stricken by death. Do not rest, my friend, a day or an hour longer without Christ—God presents Him to you with all the value of His precious and expiatory blood. You will be welcomed in coming to Him *now*. “He that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” But it is: “*Him that cometh.*” Go then to Christ, and go at once. Do not put it off a day or an hour.

I enclose you a tract—I beg you to read it seriously and prayerfully. Look up all the passages referred to, meditate on them carefully. In reading it, ask yourself often. “Do I believe that?” “Does my soul find rest in that truth?” May the Lord be with you in the reading, and may it help to enlighten you and conduct you to Christ, so that, happy in Him and in the assurance of the love of God, you may be able to follow Him and to serve Him joyfully all the days of your life.

I am always glad to get your letters, but you must not lean upon any one, nor upon what your friends are able to tell you, or do for you. Look only to the Lord Jesus and to the blood which was shed at Calvary. It is that which cleanses from all sin—all that any man can do is to point you to Jesus and His blood and to pray God to lead you by the means of what has been said to you, to look to Jesus; to confide in Jesus; to cling to Jesus; and to rejoice in Jesus.

May the Lord grant you this grace, and may I soon learn from you that Jesus has become truly precious to you. Yours etc.

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THE CONDITION OF MAN BY NATURE.

I.

I F we do not understand the nature of man we cannot adequately comprehend the aim and meaning of God's process in leading us unto Himself ; therefore it is a subject of the highest importance. Many there are who know and acknowledge that only Christ can be their sufficiency before God, who, nevertheless, are by no means convinced of the practical and utter ruin of their nature.

The normal state of man, as first created, was that of innocence—he had done no unrighteousness ; and this consisted in his doing God's will, and not his own ; therefore, he was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ; for if he did, he would substitute his own will for God's. Satan in his enmity to God, assails man and beguiles the woman by representing the great benefits that would flow from the act—that is from disobeying God and following his own will. Satan engendered in the woman the thought, that God would not do for her as well as she could do for herself, and Adam, listening to his wife fell into the snare. What God had refused, the serpent assured them, would greatly serve them ; and what God would not give, to that they could help themselves. Thus God was disbelieved and Satan, listened to ; and *herein* was sin instilled into man's nature, which thence underwent a change, not only in intelligence but in feeling. It was poisoned with an untrue idea of God, and imbued

with self-dependence. It now trusted itself and its own powers more than God's, and implied in its line of action, that God would refuse what would benefit, though abundantly in His power to give! What a delusion! What an estrangement from happy trust in God and full obedience, delighting in the mercies of His hand, to be now so filled with distrust, that not only is His word disbelieved, but He is accused of limiting man's blessing, who must therefore secure for himself what God has denied! What more painful feeling could be entertained toward a once esteemed benefactor, than that He has power to advance me but interdicts it, and that I can help myself to it in defiance of Him! *Satan gained his point*, and instilled the poison into man's nature, which must henceforth rankle with distrust of God and self-dependence, which was only increased and helped on by an enlarged intelligence or power of judging between good and evil, though the standard of such intelligence must be a low one, for it must be with relation to man, and not with relation to God, of whom man had now no right idea.

What then, we may next inquire, was man's course in this fallen condition? Having been made upright he was not without some knowledge of God, though he had sought out and pursued his many inventions; he had conscience, too, which, while it had no power to debar him from his inventions, could always tell him that he was not up to the mark. No man, however hardened, could say that he had entirely answered to his conscience. He might not listen to it, but i

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he consulted it at all, he must allow that he could not do everything, even according to his *own* standard. But the more man's nature, thus poisoned, developed itself, the further it got from God ; and not liking to retain God in his knowledge, God gave him over to a reprobate mind, and the result was, all the immorality of paganism—an immorality which as we see in heathen mythology was sought to be excused by assigning a special divinity to each class of it, which profane doing evinced, that the conscience, degraded as it was, sought some relief from the evil by assuming that it was divinely sanctioned, and therefore all that system elucidates most clearly the religious corruption which fallen nature is in itself capable of ; for we need to study nature as a whole in order to understand its tendencies and fruits.

The system of heathenism, showing what fallen nature following its corruptions, will do, in order to satisfy its conscience and at the same time follow its own will and lust, gives us a great clue to its spirit and will. It illustrates man trying to combine the lust of his corruption with conscience, and to satisfy conscience, while acting according to his own will and lust ; so that in the end it became too monstrous and absurd even for man's reprobate mind. Then a new system sprung up, a reformation which was introduced and promoted by men called philosophers, which system in principle proposed that man should attain to divine favour, not through any intervention of God and divine instrumentality, but by discipline of himself. This doctrine, supported by two opposite schools,

became attractive to any one who felt the degradation into which mere paganism had plunged him ; and the more so as it was addressed to him as having in himself an inherent power to improve and advance himself, which to man, in any degree conscious of his demoralization, was the most pleasing and delusive idea. The spirit and aim of all this philosophy was that man by his own unaided efforts could attain to virtue, and that such attainment would be bliss. This being a mere human reformation, and having to encounter the licentious system of paganism, could not stand its ground, and in the end had to succumb; so that we find at Athens (Acts xvii.) an altar, in addition to all other altars, inscribed "To the unknown God;" thus distinctly intimating that their knowledge had only reached this point even to know their ignorance—to *know that they knew nothing*, and to verify the word of God that "The world by wisdom knew not God." Thus if in the system of paganism we get *one* principle in man's nature, even the endeavour to combine the satisfaction of his natural conscience with his own will and lust, we find in that of philosophy *another*, equally leading and distinct, and no doubt allowed of God to be tested and developed to the utmost by the Greeks and their followers, even that man's effort to repair himself eventually in the acknowledgement that his greatest attainment is only to disclose to him his ignorance of God.

Thus we have seen what man's nature is as left to itself, in the developement of its own mind and will,

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but there is another phase and circumstance in which we must consider it, even that as placed in the light of revelation from God. And what does *that* reveal? We have only to read the old Testament in order to ascertain how man in his own nature responds to the revealed will of God.

Early enough Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord; the beginning of his kingdom was Babel. He would enjoy himself independently of God, just as the tower of Babel was conceived and erected in sheer independence of God.

Then, what a commentary on man's nature in the most favoured circumstances in Israel's history: exhibiting to us the antagonism and enmity of its will toward God in so many varied and painful forms, that any one who knows anything of his own heart must be convicted and humbled by the resemblance to it, which he reads in that history of weakness and sin. To Israel were committed the oracles of God, and yet they caused His name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles, and wandered into even greater excesses than the nations, and, as we learn by the parable of the vineyard, they increased in bitterness and opposition to God as times grew on—and were only the more aggravated in antagonism by the presence of the Son of God among them. In the gospel narrative man's nature is distinctly and painfully exposed, and finally condemned too, as irretrievably incompetent in every respect, proved as such by its reception, converse with, and treatment

of "God manifest in the flesh." It was found to be either so wicked and abandoned as to contemplate and contrive His death; or so weak, that in the most desired moment it cannot maintain the semblance of allegiance to Him—but so grossly the contrary, that it can deny Him. It is impossible for any one to read the history of man's reception of the Lord from heaven—He who, as born of a woman, was one of the human family on earth—and not be struck with the utter depravity of man as regarded God, though He had all the light of God's revelation to assist him. The secrets of many hearts were revealed by the manner and measure of the rejection which each levelled against the only one who ever appeared on earth in human perfection—the one Man who came up to the perfect standard of God's mind and will. The Scribes and Pharisees, the chief priests, and all the teachers while boasting of being the repositories of God's mind, were the loudest and fiercest in demanding the death of the Son of God! Where was the goodness of nature or the gain from revelation *there*? They instigated the multitude to cry out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" If nature had a single particle of true power, ought it not to have had some apprehension of the sacredness of the person of the Son of God on earth and the divinity of His mission, especially when educated and assisted by the revelation of God? Was it not tried then, and found—oh how sadly!—wanting? What greater or better opportunity could it ever have again of expressing its ability to understand the ways and manner of God,

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But if the teachers and guides under the law of God could be so led away by their natural mind, as not only to refuse and reject the Son of God, but to hate Him so much, that nothing but His death would satisfy them: if, I repeat, the natural mind were proved so utterly insensible to the divine mind, and at issue with it, notwithstanding all the opportunities offered to it, how could any one again assume, much less maintain, that there was power, or principle, or perceptiveness in it to desire or attain to what was divinely perfect? As the Lord said, "Now they have no cloak for their sin." He had "done among them the works which none other man did." The perfection of humanity often lauded, and by the Pharisees grossly imitated, was displayed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet the chosen people of God, educated in His law; disowned, rejected, and consigned Him to an ignominious death. He that cannot appreciate a superior, proves himself an inferior. To what a depth of degradation then, did man's nature sink in the crucifixion of Christ!

But this was not all. Not only do we find its irretrievable wickedness, as evinced in the Jews' treatment of Christ, but in His very disciples, in those who loved Him in the secret depths of their hearts, we find that the nature of man is so feeble and inconstant, that it cannot support and vindicate impressions and feelings of which it has been assured. Nay, in its pitiable weakness, it does violence to the

approved sentiments of the soul. They all forsook Him in the hour of His distress, not from want of love or faith, but from the simple infirmity of a nature which could not support the good emotions working in it and approved of.

The beloved disciple slept when asked to watch; and Peter, who had hardihood enough to smite off the high priests servant's ear; when unsupported, cursed and swore that he did not know his own loved Lord and Master.

Thus the gospel narrative details to us how man's nature has been subjected to the last trial, when, if it had a particle of goodness or power, it must have appeared; but instead of this, it exposed itself at every point, both in wickedness and weakness.

I have thus endeavoured briefly to set forth the history of man's nature, and how it has been proved, step by step, to be utterly profitless, and its enormity so sealed, that God's fiat—now pronounced by the Holy Ghost, who is at once the witness of man's sin and of God's righteousness—is "The natural mind is at enmity against God."

Is it a fact that by-and-by, in eternity, you must cast your eye back over your history, and, as the long dark night of eternity rolls on, you must remember you refused to let God save you?

I ask you do you accept or decline God's invitation? Either you must accept it on the ground of being a lost, ruined sinner, or you must refuse and be lost for ever and ever?

"A GREAT WAY OFF."

"GRANNY, hearing of your great age, I have come to see you."

"Granny" grunted. She was evidently in no genial mood. Notorious in the village for her great age, and her hard, almost ferocious heart, the newcomer, a stranger in the place, had ventured in the hope of reaching her soul for the sake of Him "Who cutteth out rivers in the rocks," and whose "Eye seeth every precious thing."

"Granny" sat on her stool in the chimney corner smoking her short black pipe. She offered no chair to her visitor, and as the mud hut was not inviting with such a reception, after a few more remarks, saying she would call again and just catching the surly, "You can if you like," her friend departed.

"Granny," I have such good news for you!"

There was her visitor again. Granny looked surprised. It was not often "good news" came to her. She offered her visitor a stool this time, and sat on, puffing at the ugly, black pipe. Her friend sat down and without comment read the 15th of Luke's gospel. She read on, and bye-and-bye looking up she saw the large tears falling down the dark, not over clean, time-wrinkled cheeks. Still she read on. "But when he was a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." "*Hang it,*" and Granny's great, hard

fist came down upon her knee with a heavy thud, "I never heerd the likes o' that afore." Reader, have you? We read and hear of wise parents, and just parents, and loving, almost foolish ones. But have you ever heard of *such* love, *such* wisdom?

"While he was a great way off."

That watching father knew at once, in spite of the rags and the "hang-dog" step, that it was him. Aye! God knows you dear one, whether starting off with the gay, quick step of independence to the "far country," or returning, weary and wretched, having "spent all." Do you think the elder brother would have known him? I don't.

"And had compassion and ran."

He did not sit still to see if he was really penitent or not—to prove him. No. "He ran." Be sure no sin-burdened soul crying out for salvation, has ever run as swiftly to Him as He runs Himself. If you are going towards Him, even slowly, lingeringly, with the "Buts" and "Ifs" of doubt and fear within your heart, you will soon meet Him for He is ever "*Seeking to save.*"

"And fell on his neck."

He did not give him time to say his say. Love shuts his mouth. God knows our worst. He sees the heart with eyes that miss nothing, sees the soul black with the sin that cost the blood of His precious Son, and He knows what that sin will bring; "The wages of sin is death."

If the Father had waited for him to speak, he

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would only have shown how little he knew of the Father's heart.

“And kissed him.”

With those arms about his neck, and those kisses on his cheek do you think any “buts” and “ifs” remained? When the soul has no plea, but “I have sinned,” then God's love can flow out. No matter the rags and the plight, it was the *returning heart* the Father wanted. No matter what, or who you are, dear reader, it is *yourself* God wants, just as you are.

“Granny” was saved and changed. She saw Christ in His beauty, revealing the love of God, and had the joy of sitting at His feet; and then went in to be with Him whom she had kept out of her life so long.

Dear reader have you been acting against God all your life and have never found peace? Are you tormented with a guilty conscience, and still rejecting and refusing salvation? I would earnestly beseech you to consider the danger you are in, and I would ask you to look before you, and see where you are going and what you are doing. You are wandering in a world of which it is written “vanity and vexation of spirit, all is vanity,” and if persisted in, you will ere long sink into the sleep of death, to wake in eternal misery, the horror of a night that shall have no dawn.

Will you, oh, unsaved one, take salvation? Now is the accepted time.

ETERNALLY SAVED.

GRANT me but this, that God has revealed Himself as a Saviour, and I argue, with unclouded confidence and holy boldness, that I am, and must be, perfectly saved. It does not rest upon aught in me, but simply and entirely upon God's revelation of Himself. I know He is perfect in everything; and, therefore perfect as my Saviour. Hence I am perfectly saved, inasmuch as the glory of God is involved in my salvation. "There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour, there is none beside Me."—What then? "LOOK UNTO ME, and be ye saved, ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH; for I am God, and there is none else." Isa. xlv. 21, 22. One believing LOOK from a lost sinner to a just God and a Saviour, secures eternal salvation. "LOOK!" How simple! It is not "Work!"—"Do"—"Pray!"—"Feel"—no; it is simply "Look." And what then? Salvation—everlasting life. It must be so, because God is a Saviour: and the precious little mono-syllable "look," fully implies all this, inasmuch as it expresses the fact that the salvation which I want is found in the One to whom I look. It is all there, ready for me, and one look secures it—secures it for ever—secures it for ME. It is not a thing of to-day or to-morrow; it is an eternal reality. The bulwarks of salvation behind which the believer retreats have been erected by God Himself—the Saviour-God, on the sure foundation of Christ's atoning work; and no power of earth or hell can ever shake them.