

A BELIEVER'S COLLOQUY WITH HIS SOUL

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, 19th July 1868.

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."
Psalm 42:11

What a proof it is of the truth and inspiration of the word of God, that no sooner is the Lord pleased to quicken our souls into spiritual life, than we find the Bible to become our companion, counsellor, and friend. True, we might possibly before that time, from a sense of duty or out of custom, have read the Scriptures, and that diligently. We might have been taught them from childhood, and committed large portions to memory; or even have been able so far to understand them as to speak fluently upon the truths contained in them, and contend for the doctrines of grace against opponents. But though we might have done all this, and much more than this, for who can say how far nature may go?—yet for the most part, how listlessly and languidly was the word of God read by us; how little was its spiritual meaning understood; how much less were the solemn realities revealed in it believed or acted upon.

We might not have doubted the inspiration of the Bible, and might have regarded it with a degree of reverence as the word of God; but with all that outward respect, there was no real faith in our heart either to fear the threatenings, or to receive the promises. We never obtained through it any well-grounded hope in the mercy of God; we never felt from it any spiritual love to his name, or to any truth connected with the Person and work of Christ. Nor did it ever work in us any

humility of mind, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, or any obedience to God's will, or create any earnest desire to please or solemn fear to offend him. And thus, as regards what the word of God was to us, as to any saving or sanctifying effect upon our hearts or upon our lives, it was a perfect blank to us, and we as great a blank to it.

But O what a change takes place in the soul's feelings towards the word of God when God is pleased to quicken it into divine life! Nor indeed need we wonder why there is such a marked revolution in our feelings toward it; for it is by the power of God's word upon the heart, that this wondrous change is effected. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." (James 1:18) "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Pet. 1:23) "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me." (Ps. 119:50) By that same word we were convinced of our sins; "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb. 4:12) By the power of that word also upon our consciences, we were, in due time, enabled to believe in the Son of God; for it is through his word applied to the heart with a divine power, that faith is raised up to believe in his name; and then it is, as the Lord said to his disciples, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." (John 6:63) And this spirit and life are the spirit and life of faith, and specially of that faith which embraces Him as the Son of God; for when he is pleased to apply his precious word to the heart, and in the power of that word to manifest himself, faith is raised up to receive his testimony, and thus his word is made Spirit and life to the soul. This made

Jeremiah say: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." (Jer. 15:16) In a similar way, when the soul is cast down by reason of the many difficulties of the way, that word becomes its support. "My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word." (Ps. 119:81) When we are in difficulties or perplexities, that word becomes our counselor; as David found it: "Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors." (Ps. 119:24) And again, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Ps. 119:105) And the counsel it gives us is good counsel, for it tells us how to act and what to do: bids us cast our care upon the Lord, for that he will sustain us; bids us be still and know that He is God; warns us not to fight our own battles, or go forth to meet the enemy in our own strength; but to watch, and pray, and wait for the Lord to appear.

If we are persecuted by our enemies as David was by Saul, when he was hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, it is by the power and support of that word we get strength to bear their cruel accusations and to stand firm against their attacks. This made David say, "They had almost consumed me upon earth: but I forsook not thy precepts." (Ps. 119:87) If Satan come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord by the power of his word lifts up a standard against him. If we slip and start aside from the strait and narrow way, the word comes to restore us: "He restoreth my soul." (Ps. 23:3) for it is by believing God's promise of freely forgiving all iniquity, transgression, and sin, that our backslidings are healed and our souls brought back from bondage, carnality, and death. In fact it is by the power of his word upon our heart, that the whole work of grace upon the soul is carried on from first to last. By its promises we are drawn, by its precepts we are guided, by its warnings we are admonished, by its reproofs we are rebuked, by its rod we are chastened, by its support

we are upheld; in its light we walk, by its teachings are made wise, by its revivings are renewed, and by its truth are sanctified. Not that the word of God can of itself do all or any of these things in us and for us; but in the hands of the Spirit, who works in and by it as his effectual instrument, all these gracious operations are carried on in the soul.

Now can we say this, or anything similar to this, of any other book? Other books may instruct or amuse: they may feed the intellect, charm the imagination, and cultivate the mind. But what more can they do? I do not mean by this to despise or set aside every other book but the Bible; for without books society itself, as at present constituted, could not exist; and to burn every book would be to throw us back into the barbarism of the Middle Ages. Let, then, books have their place as regards this life: but what can they do for us as regards the life to come? What can our renowned authors, our choice classics, our learned historians, our great dramatists, or our eloquent poets do for the soul in seasons of affliction and distress? Can they heal a wounded conscience? Can they put away a sense of God's wrath? Can they restore the joys of salvation, when, through guilt and fear, they seem well nigh gone? Can they support a dying man upon his bed of sickness? Can they take away the sting of death and snatch victory from the grave? How powerless all human writings are in these circumstances. Is it not as Mr. Hart well says?

What balm could wretches ever find
In wit, to heal affliction?
Or who can cure a troubled mind
With all the pomp of diction?

Now here is the blessedness of the word of God, that when everything else fails, **that** comes to our aid under all

circumstances, so that we never can sink so low as to get beyond the reach of some promise in the word of truth. We may come, and most probably shall come, to a spot where everything else will fail and give way but the word of God which for ever is settled in heaven. Then the word of grace and truth which reaches down to the lowest case, the word of promise upon which the Lord causes the soul to hope, will still turn towards us a friendly smile, and still encourage us under all circumstances to call upon the name of the Lord, and to hang upon his faithfulness who hath said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." (Mark 13:31) Thus, under circumstances the most trying to flesh and blood, where nature stands aghast and reason fails, there the word of God will come in as a counsellor to drop in friendly advice, as a companion to cheer and support the mind by its tender sympathy, and as a friend to speak to the heart with a loving, affectionate voice. We need not wonder, then, how the word of God has been prized in all ages by the family of God; for it is written with such infinite wisdom, that it meets every case, suits every circumstance, fills up every aching void, and is adapted to every condition of life and every state both of body and soul.

These thoughts spring up in my mind in connection with my text. What that connection is may perhaps be more evident as I unfold it; but is not this a wonderful circumstance, that if your soul is cast down within you and your mind disquieted, and yet you are hoping in God and expecting him to appear, you have a companion in the word of God; and that our text assures you that there was one before you walking in the same path, and in whose heart the Spirit of God wrought feelings and desires similar to yours? Let us, then, see whether, as you compare the things that you pass through with the word of truth, you will not find a reflection of your

experience, and an echo of your voice in the words of the Psalmist now before us.

We see in them a pathetic colloquy which David carries on with his soul; and that from this colloquy he gathers up hope and encouragement for himself. I shall, therefore, simply follow the order in which the words present themselves to our view, and shall

I. **First**, address myself to the consideration of David's **pathetic inquiry** to his soul: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?"

II. **Secondly**, I shall consider the **encouraging admonition**, which he addresses to his soul as thus cast down and disquieted: "Hope thou in God."

III **Thirdly**, the **confident expectation**, which he gathers up in this colloquy, that the dark cloud will pass away and the time come when he shall praise Him who was "the health of his countenance and his God".

I. Observe the tender and familiar way in which David converses with his own soul, as a tender and sympathising bosom companion.

(i) But how few, speaking comparatively, know that they have a soul which they can thus talk to. Indeed, I may say, that it is really a very great discovery when a man discovers, for the first time, that he has a soul in his breast. The great bulk of mankind, may we not indeed say, all who are destitute of divine life, do not really and truly know that they have a soul. This may seem harsh doctrine, but at any rate they act as if they had none. In fact, a man never really and truly discovers that he has a soul till he discovers that there

is a God, nor does he ever discover that there is a God until a ray of divine light shines out of the fullness of God into his heart. I do not mean to say that men actually in so many words deny either the existence of the soul or the existence of God. But we must judge men from their actions; and if they act as if they had no soul to be saved or lost, and as if there were no God who would bring them into judgment, we must conclude that they do not believe either in heart, though they may not boldly and positively deny it in lip.

But a man never knows really and truly that he has a soul till there is life put into it; for a dead soul makes no movement in his breast, and is therefore not known to be there. It is like a stillborn child, which gives no sign or movement of life, and therefore is to its mother as if it were not. We need not wonder the child does not cry if it be dead; we need not marvel it does not move a limb if stillborn. How does the child make its existence known but by the cry and the movements of life? Thus it is in grace: we never know really that we have a soul till it is made alive unto God and cries unto him. Then we begin find for the first time, that we have a soul by the cry of life; and then our soul becomes a matter of the deepest interest to us; for we find that, according to the word of God, it must either be eternally saved or lost; and as we cannot separate enduring happiness or misery from the soul which is the seat of both, it becomes to us the most important thing that we have ever had to deal with. This brings us into an intimacy and a sympathy with it.

O what a tender part of a man his soul is, when God has put life and feeling into it; what a valuable part, in fact, the only valuable part, for it alone can never perish, it alone is the immortal part of man. Being, then, so tender and so valuable, lying so deeply hidden in the breast, and yet ever present and ever ready to speak and be spoken unto, an

intimate friendship and a tender sympathy springs up between a man and his soul. Intimate is the friendship between brother and brother, between sister and sister, between friend and friend, and more intimate still between man and wife. But what is the intimacy, even of man and wife, the nearest, tenderest, of all relationships, compared with the intimacy that a man has with his own soul? How a man can talk to his soul, reason with it, comfort it, chide it, encourage it, remonstrate with it; and how the soul can talk again with him, listen to his words, re-echo them and answer them; how, sometimes, it will give heed to his counsel, at others, obstinately refuse even lawful comfort; as David speaks, "My soul refused to be comforted." (Ps. 77:2)

We need not, then, wonder that David and his soul talked together, both in our text and elsewhere, nor that he should seek to cheer it up; for if his soul were cast down, he was cast down. The sorrows of his soul were his sorrows, as the joys of his soul were his joys; the pangs his soul felt were his pangs, and its distress was his distress; and felt all the more because it touched such a tender and valuable part as the dear friend that dwelt in his breast. Not that I mean to separate a man from his soul, as though the soul was one thing and his consciousness of having a soul was another. Nor shall I plunge into the depths of metaphysics, or bring forward speculative ideas and imaginative notions. I wish to avoid all such vain ideas and foolish speculations, and merely take the broad ground that God takes here in bringing before us the language of David; for he evidently is set before us in the word of truth as talking with his soul, and asking it why it is cast down.

But, following out the analogy and carrying on the figure, the soul may be considered as answering his question; for if David said, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" we may

well conceive the soul may return him some answer, or else there could be no mutual converse or affectionate and sympathising colloquy between them. Now, if we may be allowed to listen to what the soul says, or if I, as an interpreter, may interpret to you its language, we may conceive it speaking thus: "I will tell thee David, why I am cast down; for I know that in thee I shall have a sympathising friend; I will not, therefore, keep back why I am cast down and why I am disquieted, for it will relieve me and may help to comfort you."

(ii) I shall, therefore, speaking as it were for the soul, endeavour to show various causes why it is often cast down and disquieted, and thus may be able to return some answer to David's anxious enquiry, which I will assume is often your own.

"One thing," says the soul, "which casts me down, is **guilt upon the conscience**"

The very idea of being cast down is that of a person thrown down from a high into a low place. Thus the soul had stood in pride and self-righteousness. It had no knowledge of the majesty or holiness of God, nor of the demands of his righteous law. But the entrance of God's word giving light, and the power of his grace giving life, the holiness of God is seen and the demands of the law are felt. Now the effect of this is to cast down the soul from its vain-confident, hypocritical, presumptuous security; and nothing casts it down so much as a load of guilt which is thus laid upon the conscience. I may be addressing myself, even now, to some individual who at this moment is suffering under distress of conscience, who knows the burden of guilt, and is cast down through the recollection of some sin or sins which he has

committed, and the guilt of which has brought him into much distress and anxiety of mind.

Now, may I not say to such a one, "Why art thou cast down, O soul? Is there no remedy for thee in this cast-down state? Has not the Lord Jesus Christ shed his precious blood to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself? Is there not in him a sufficiency, and with him, as the Scripture speaks, 'plenteous redemption?' Is there not in His blood an efficacy which cleanseth from all sin, and in His righteousness a fulfillment of the law, which perfectly justifies?" "Ah," says the soul, "there is, I know there is. On that point I am well satisfied. I do not doubt the efficacy of Christ's blood and righteousness. But what I want to feel is the application of that precious blood, the pardon-speaking voice of the Lord himself, the inward whisper, the sweet testimony, the gracious assurance, and the word from the Lord's own lips, that shall heal my guilty conscience, and pour oil and wine into my troubled spirit."

But let us hear the soul speaking again; for it has other things which cast it down: "What casts me down is **finding so much sin working** in my carnal mind, and manifesting itself in my fleshly members to bring forth fruit unto death. O that I could be holy, walk tenderly in the fear of God, get the better of besetting sins, never be entangled in, or overcome by, the power of temptation, so that I might live more as becometh a Christian, have more of the life and fear of God in my soul, and find less inward conflict, less opposition, and less evil, with a more abundant measure of the love of God shed abroad in my heart!" "Well, cast-down soul, thou art only cast down as most, if not all, of God's people have been in all ages, and are at the present time. It is the body of sin and death that we have to carry about with us, the depravity of our fallen nature, the lusts and abominations that lurk and

work in our vile imagination, if they go no further, which give us all this trouble. How many are continually sighing and mourning because they have so little of the image of Christ stamped upon them, so little of the holiness of God made conspicuous in them, so little of that blessed sanctification of body, soul, and spirit, that we see in the word and strive after, and yet find so little carried on and carried out in ourselves."

But the soul speaks again, and says, "What casts me down is the **temptations** of Satan, the hurling in of his fiery darts, and the stirring up of every vile abomination in the depths of my wicked nature; so that I seem at times to be worse than the devil himself. Where can the fear of God be in my heart, the life of Christ in my conscience, or the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost within, to be so subject to these temptations and to find them so stir up the corruptions of my vile nature?"

But the soul has yet to speak, "O, **how long** have I been praying for a **manifestation** of Christ! How I have seen one after another delivered from bondage, doubt, and fear; and yet here I am, after long years of profession, much in the same spot. O I do not seem to get one step forward in the things of God, or get on as I see others do! O how my soul longs for a word from the Lord, if it were but one word; one smile, if it were but one faint smile; one turning of the Lord's face toward me; one breaking in of the light of his countenance; one manifestation of his mercy and love to my heart; one drop of his blood upon my conscience; one discovery of him so as to know that he is mine!"

But as the soul is still free to speak, and can almost say with Elihu, "I will speak that I may be refreshed," (Job 32:20) we will hear its voice speaking again: "I have great **troubles in**

Providence, heavy trials in my family, am much exercised in my business, for all things seem against me, and this casts me down, for I think God is angry with me, and therefore his hand is gone out against me."

But let us hear its voice once more, and let it speak it may be for you, lest you should think yourself left out; "Do what I will, I **cannot be what I would**. I try to read the word, but seem neither to understand nor to believe it; I bend my knee before the throne, but have little access to the throne of grace; I come to hear, and often go away as I came, without any power, life, or feeling under the word to my heart; I talk to the people of God and hear them speak how the Lord appears for them here and there; but my mouth is silent, for I have nothing to tell them in return."

(iii) But what is the effect of the soul being, in these various ways, cast down? Disquiet. For David says, still addressing his soul, "And why art thou disquieted within me?" "O," the soul says, "there is no rest in my bosom! I cannot get that solid peace which I am looking for, and which Christ has promised he will give to his disciples as his own peace, his abiding legacy. But instead of feeling sweet peace, a holy calm of mind, producing submission to the will of God, reconciling me to the path of affliction, bowing my back to every chastening stroke, making me to rejoice even in tribulation, and conforming me to the suffering image of Christ; instead of this, I find rebellion, restlessness, disquietude, so as rarely to know a moment's solid rest or peace."

Somewhat in this way, then, in answer to the question, "Why art thou disquieted within me?" we may suppose the soul to say, "I have told you the things that cast me down; do they

not afford sufficient reason to explain why I am disquieted within me?"

But let me now apply this more particularly to your case. Does not all this disquietude teach you that there is no solid rest nor peace except in the Lord?, Out of him all is disquiet, confusion, restlessness, and uneasiness. Now it is life within which makes us feel all this; and therefore, if you, or any of you, are thus cast down and your soul is thus disquieted within you, do not think you are traveling a path unknown to the family of God, or that yours is a solitary case. Depend upon it, you have many companions in this road besides the companionship of your own soul. And do you not see, that David traveled in the same path before you, and that God has left upon record the exercises of his soul, that they might encourage others who are similarly dealt with? Why should David have talked the matter over with his soul ages ago; and why should the Holy Ghost have left upon permanent record his conversation with his bosom friend? Why should he have removed the veil, which at the time hung over David's inmost thoughts and feelings, and brought to light his secret communing with his bosom friend, except to cheer, comfort, and encourage those who should afterwards travel by the same path?

II.—But this brings us to the next point, in which I proposed to show how David **admonished** and **encouraged** his cast-down and disquieted soul: "**Hope thou in God**".

It is as if he had said, "Well, soul, thou hast told me thy mournful tale; thou has breathed thy sorrowful complaints in my ear;" I know all that concerneth thee; for there is not a secret pain which I do not see and feel too. If thou art cast down, so am I; and if thou art disquieted, I am disquieted with thee; for we are one in life, death, time, and eternity.

And yet, O soul, it is all for thy benefit. Listen with me to the word of God and see if we cannot gather up thence some strength and support. Let me, then, give thee a word of exhortation, that thou shouldst not be so cast down or disquieted as to renounce thy hope. Satan would gladly, if he could, drive thee to the borders of despair; he would soon rob thee of every grain of hope, and fill thee with his own misery. But O my soul, thou must not listen to the enemy's subtle temptations, nor even to thine own distressing fears; for, by so doing, thou rather sidest with Satan than resistest him.

If cast down, remember this, that to be cast down, is not to be cast away. For his own wise purposes; God often suffers his people to be cast down; but he never casts them away. Has he not promised, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee?" (Heb. 13:5) Has he not said, "I have engraven thee on the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me?" (Isai. 49:16) It is expressly declared: "The Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance." (Ps. 94:14) We may doubt and fear, and even say with David in the very Psalm before us, "Why dost thou cast me off?" or even plead with him, "O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever?" The Lord still answers: "I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God." (Lev. 26:44)

Thou mayest be disquieted and have many reasons why sorrow fills thy heart, but thy very disquietude shows signs of life. Whence comes thy craving after God, thy panting after him, as the hart after the water brooks? Are not these the movements of divine life in thy bosom? Thus, thy very restlessness, like a child's disquietude after its mother in her absence, manifests that thou canst find no rest except in the

bosom of the Lord. "Hope thou then in God." Do not give way to this casting down, as though thou wert sunk to rise no more; and be not so disquieted as to give up thy hope: for that is given thee to be thy anchor, sure and steadfast, to ride out this storm. Nothing is got by despondency but rebellion or self-pity; and these the Lord will never approve of or smile upon. Does he not say "The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." (Lam. 3:25, 26) And surely if it be good to hope, it must be bad to despond.

But as, according to our exposition, the soul told David why it was cast down, so we may in the same way assume David as giving the soul reasons why it should hope. We may thus listen to their secret colloquy; and it seems but fair, as we have heard one side of the question, that we should also hear the other. Let us, then, listen as if we heard David now speak: "Well, my soul, I have heard thy melancholy tale. I know it is all true, for I feel every word of it." But now listen to me, as I have listened to thee. And as thou hast poured thy mournful complaints into my ear, see if I can pour some comforting word into thine. As Thou hast told me that thou art so cast down as not to be able to rise, and so disquieted that thou canst get no rest, now let me tell thee how thou mayest, with God's help and blessing, stand upon thy feet and get rest and peace. I will not set thee a hard task to do in thine own strength, nor preach thee a long sermon on creature ability and the duty of faith. It shall all be summed up in four words, "**Hope thou in God.**" "Well," the soul may answer, "that is good advice; for I know by experience a little of the cheering sensations of hope; but must there not be some ground of my hope? for at present my eyes are so dim that I can scarcely see any," But David answers, "Let me, then see for thee, O soul, and, like Jethro in the wilderness

to the children of Israel, be to thee 'as eyes.'" I think I can give thee some good ground for thee to hope; and this shall be the first—

(i) That thou **art alive**. Now, consider **who** made thee alive, O soul, which art thus cast down, and **when** thou wert first thrown down from thy former standing. Wert thou so cast down in days past? Was sin thy burden in times gone by? Was thy mind disquieted for want of the blood of sprinkling, of a revelation of Christ, of a shedding abroad of God's love, of a manifestation of mercy? What, then, has made thee to be disquieted? Thou wert not always so, but found pleasure and happiness, in the world. Must it not be, then, because thou hast life within; and if God gave thee life as his own free gift, if he had compassion upon thee when thou wert dead in sin and far from him by wicked works, will he leave thee now when, he has taught thee to fear his great name, and to worship him in spirit and truth?

He sees it good thou shouldst be cast down. Thou wert getting very proud, O soul. The world had got hold of thy heart. Thou wert seeking great things for thyself. Thou wert secretly roving away from the Lord. The Lord has sent thee these trials and exercises and allowed these temptations to fall upon thee, to bring thee down from thy state of false security. Thou wert too much lifted up in self. The high tree had to come down, that the low tree might be exalted; the green tree to be dried up, that the dry tree might be made to flourish. Therefore, O soul, thou needest not wonder that these dispensations should have come upon thee in providence or in grace to cast thee down. Rather bless his name that thou art cast down; for when there is casting down there will be lifting up. It is a good thing to bear the yoke in one's youth: for if never cast down, thou wilt never be exalted. Write not, therefore, bitter things against thyself,

O soul, because thou I art cast down and disquieted. These are the teachings of God in thy conscience; and therefore, "Hope thou in God."

(ii) Besides this, O soul, let me give thee another ground of hope. Has not the Lord **appeared** for thee **in days past**? Canst thou not remember that signal opening in providence when thou wert so exercised and scarcely knewest how matters would be with thee, but didst pray to the Lord in thy distress and he appeared for thee in a very conspicuous way? Hast thou forgotten all that, O soul? And canst thou not remember when the Lord applied some promise to thee, when sinking and fainting, and ready to despair: gave thee power to look and live; power to believe and find support; so as to receive out of his fullness grace for grace? Then is he not the same God now as he was then? And has he not given thee a sure pledge thereby that he can do as much and more, for thee again now? Should not this encourage thee to hope?

(iii) But let me give thee another ground on which thou mayest hope. Dost thou forget, O soul, that the way to heaven is a very **strait and narrow** path—too narrow for thee to carry thy sins in it with thee? Dost thou not know there is a fire to try every man's religion, of what sort it is? And canst thou expect never to go into the furnace in which God has chosen his Zion? If thou art to walk in the strait and narrow path, must thou meet with no trials and temptations there? If thou art come out of the world and livest godly in Christ Jesus, will not the world persecute and hate thee? Art thou to have a different path from that in which the Lord Jesus himself has walked before thee? Then hope in God. Do not cast away thy confidence, which hath great recompense of reward, but cast thy anchor boldly within the veil, and hope in God.

If thou wilt foolishly ever be looking at thy miserable self and seeking to extract some comfort thence, thou wilt be ever disappointed. Instead then of looking at thyself and at all thy badness, vileness, sin, guilt, and misery look up and hope in God. Has he not given us a thousand encouragements to do so? See his tender pity and compassion for the poor and needy. See what rivers of mercy, grace, and love are in him. See his all-seeing eye, ever watching over thee and knowing the worst of thy case and all thy misgivings. View his all-powerful hand, ever ready to be stretched out on thy behalf. And now, my soul, when thou hast taken this view of God by faith, as manifesting himself in his dear Son, hope thou in him.

But now, leaving for a moment this assumed address of David to his soul, let me speak in my own language to you who can sympathise with what I have just laid before you, from a feeling experience of it. May I not upon this point ask you if you do not feel the benefit of this advice of David? Have you not proved, again and again, that when you are enabled to look out of your sinkings and sorrows, castings down and disquietude, and cast anchor within the veil, you find a secret and sacred support given unto you? What does the sailor do when he comes to a lee shore and the wind is blowing hard and strong upon it, so that in a short time his ship might be upon the rocks? Does he say, "O I never shall get over this storm; I shall certainly be shipwrecked?" What does he do? Why, instead of wringing his hands in despairing misery, he lets the anchor go, and it at once takes hold of the ground and holds the ship up in the storm.

Now if ever you have known anything of hoping in God, you have an anchor on board. God's own gift to you, and meant not for ornament, but for use. Indeed, it is by the possession of this anchor, that the good ship built, owned, and chartered

by God is distinguished from the man-built bark which, concerning faith, makes shipwreck. Now if you are enabled by the power of God's grace to cast your anchor thus within the veil, you will find a secret strength communicated thereby which will enable you to ride out, every storm. I am not speaking in the language of free will, as some might think who cannot distinguish sounds, but of free grace, the language of solid, spiritual experience, and what every child of God knows more or less by the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost. Such know what a blessed relief a good hope through grace gives, when, as an anchor of the soul, it is cast within the veil.

But I shall return to our colloquy between David and his soul; for it now begins to receive the word from his lips. The soul, had told David its complaint, and David, like a wise counselor, had bidden it hope in God. And now the soul cheered and comforted by his encouraging word, begins to answer him: "Well, David, I feel great comfort from your words; for they drop with sweet power into my inmost spirit; and I do believe you are a true prophet, for I have a witness within that they are agreeable to the word of truth, as well as to my own experience."

Now as the soul thus encourages its hope, for there is an encouraging of faith and hope, as well as a damping of them, then comes with it a measure of confidence, so that it says, "Well, after all I believe that I shall praise Him: I begin to feel almost as if I could bless and praise him now. I feel so lifted up; I feel the anchor to be so firm, and my heart seems so strengthened and comforted, that really, David, it is as though I must begin to bless and praise the Lord already. There I was so cast down and disquieted, as if nothing could raise me up; but thy words have come with such sweetness and savour into my breast, that I do believe I shall yet praise

him. And I am sure that none in heaven or earth, as I often tell him, will have such cause as I."

Now tell me whether you have not been in this spot sometimes? You have gone upon your knees so cast down, so tried and distressed in your mind, almost as if there was not a grain of hope in your soul; but you have poured out your complaints before the Lord, and shown him all your troubles: and to your surprise and astonishment did there not come, almost suddenly, a sweet movement of life and grace upon your soul? In looking back to the days gone by, a blessed promise which was once given you came over the secret depths of your heart and raised up such a sweet hope, that it seemed as if you must burst out in blessing and praising the Lord. How these things, in their various changes, these ups and downs, ins and outs, sinkings and risings, chilling fears and encouraging hopes, ever keep the life of God warm and tender, living and stirring, in a man's breast. By these alternations of sun and shade, these vicissitudes of summer and winter, for the Lord has made both, (Ps. 74:17) these storms and calms, these nights and days, the plant of divine life grows and thrives in the soul.

What would a river be unless it were ever flowing? What would the sea itself be unless it were continually agitated by the restless tide and ever-moving waves? A mass of corruption, giving forth, instead of healthy exhalations which, distilled in clouds, water the earth, noxious steams, breathing disease and death. So what would the soul become if there were no movement of divine life, no castings down or liftings up, no mourning or rejoicing, no hopes or fears? What would it be? A stagnant pool, in which there would be nothing but a mass of weeds and rank vegetation; like a village pond mantled over with duck-weed. But these castings down, this disquietude, these movements of God

upon the spirit, these various exercises, trials, and temptations, keep the soul sweet, preserve it from becoming stagnant and stinking, and maintain the life of God in its vigour and purity.

There is reason, therefore even to praise God for being cast down, for being disquieted. How it opens up parts of God's word which you never read before with any feeling. How it gives you sympathy and communion with the tried, exercised children of God. How it weans and separates you from dead professors. How it brings you in heart and affection out of the world that lieth in wickedness. And how it engages your thoughts, time after time, upon the solemn matters of eternity, instead of being a prey to every idle thought and imagination, and tossed up and down upon a sea of vanity and folly. But, above all, when there is a sweet response from the Lord, and the power of divine things is inwardly felt, in enabling us to hope in God, and looking forward to praise his blessed name, then we see the benefit of being cast down and so repeatedly and continually disquieted.

III.—But I shall pass on to David's **confident expectation**: "For I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

These sudden turns as we may call them, from the lowest despondency to the highest confidence, from the depths of disquietude to the fullest assurance, are very frequent in the Psalms. And perhaps the very history of David's life, with such sudden and marked alternations of adversity and prosperity in providence, may help to account for a similar experience in grace. But be it so or not, the fact is plain, that a distinguishing feature in David's experience was the sudden changes which came over his soul.

But you will observe, that in his confidence, he is rather looking forward to the future than enjoying it at the present. And is not this the very nature of hope? "Hope that is seen," says the Apostle, "is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Rom. 8:24) Though not yet fully blessed or delivered, he therefore looked forward in faith and hope to the time when he should be so, and be enabled to praise God. He could not do it then; but he firmly believed the time was coming when he both could and would.

But observe, also, the expression, "Who is the health of my countenance." By this we may understand the restoration of his soul to the enjoyment of God's manifested favour and presence, which always communicates such happiness and peace as proclaims itself by the very countenance itself. Disease is always marked in a man's countenance. No man can have organic, or even ordinary disease, without his face showing it to the experienced eye, and even often discovering the very nature of the complaint itself. "How well you look!" "How ill you look!" These common expressions show how health and sickness manifest themselves in a man's countenance, even to ordinary observation.

When God is pleased then, to drop his word with power into a man's heart, and restore his soul so as to enable him to bless and praise his holy name, God becomes the health of his countenance. The former sickliness of his soul manifested itself in his very face. He could not smile, and sometimes could hardly lift up his head. Feeling himself such a guilty wretch, it seemed to him as if everybody could read his sins in his countenance. Full of doubt and fear, he was often scarcely able to look up before God and man; and his heavy eye, and drooping eyelid, betrayed the feelings of his soul. We see how even natural joy bespeaks itself in the face. How it gives freshness and animation to the cheek and lustre to

the eye; but how much more is this true of spiritual joy for as that gives inward health of soul, it manifests itself in a man's natural countenance, and his happiness overflows as it were into his eyes, and features, and face.

But we may take the words as applicable to a man's **spiritual** countenance; for your soul, like your body, has its diseases that cast a sickly hue over its face. Sometimes your soul is very sick, languid, and feeble, unable to take any exercise, almost loathing food, and much deprived of rest. Now this will soon begin to tell upon your soul's countenance. Spiritual eyes can read it in your appearance, spiritual ears hear it in your prayers and lamentations, spiritual hearts can feel it and sympathise with you, as knowing themselves what it is to be similarly afflicted. And you yourselves, as knowing so intimately what is the matter with your own soul, need no one to tell you that it is in a sickly state; that you are not as you were in time past, full of life and vigour in the things of God, but have got into a languishing, unhealthy condition. Now, this casts you down and makes you disquieted.

But by and by, when a healing word comes, it removes this sickness out of your soul; it brings, as the Lord promises, "health and cure;" and the soul once more begins to walk with life and vigour in the ways of God. Being thus renewed and revived, it reads and understands the word of God with more life and feeling; hears it with more savour, unction, and power; knows more of sweet access to the throne of grace, and enjoys the things of God more experimentally and believingly. It is in this way, that God is the health of our countenance; for it is his grace and his blessing that gives health to the sickly soul. He therefore said of himself, "I am the Lord that healeth thee." (Ex. 15:26) And David well knew this, when he said: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who

healeth all thy diseases." (Ps. 103:2, 3) A healthy soul is a greater blessing than a healthy body. Perhaps, the greatest of all temporal troubles, is an unhealthy body; and the worst of all spiritual troubles, is an unhealthy soul. And conversely, the greatest of temporal mercies is a healthy body, and the greatest of spiritual mercies is a healthy soul.

And then come those few and simple words which crown all, "And my God." What, when you have been so cast down, when so disquieted, when so ready to abandon all hope—what, will you ever be able to say, "My God?" Yes, for he is your God when cast down and disquieted; your God when you could scarcely feel any persuasion of interest in his love; your God in all the changing scenes through which you have passed; and your God so as never to leave or forsake you for his name's sake. How this sums up every thing, "My God;" for if he is your God, all he has and all he is yours.

Now, what mercies these are to embrace, and what blessings these are to enjoy. May I not well say: "O what is all that earth calls good and great, compared with being able to believe that God is your God; your God in life, your God in death; your God in time, and your God in eternity! O this is a religion that will do to live and die by; for if you only have God for the health of your countenance, and the Holy Ghost seals that home with power upon your heart, have you not every reason to praise God, even now, for every dispensation of his providence and grace, and every ground of confident expectation that you will for ever bless him when time itself shall be no more?"

Dialogue between a Believer and his Soul.—Psalm 42:11

Believer:

COME, my soul, and let us try,

For a little season,
Every burden to lay by;
Come, and let us reason.
What is this that casts thee down?
Who are those that grieve thee?
Speak, and let the worst be known;
Speaking may relieve thee.

Soul:

O, I sink beneath the load
Of my nature's evil!
Full of enmity to God;
Captived by the devil;
Restless as the troubled seas;
Feeble, faint, and fearful;
Plagued with every sore disease;
How can I be cheerful?

Believer:

Think on what thy Saviour bore
In the gloomy garden.
Sweating blood at every pore,
To procure thy pardon!
See him stretched upon the wood,
Bleeding, grieving, crying,
Suffering all the wrath of God,
Groaning, gasping, dying!

Soul:

This by faith I sometimes view,
And those views relieve me;
But my sins return anew;
These are they that grieve me.
O, I'm leprous, stinking, foul,
Quite throughout infected;

Have not I, if any soul,
Cause to be dejected?

Believer:

Think how loud thy dying Lord
Cried out, "It is finished!"
Treasure up that sacred word,
Whole and undiminished;
Doubt not he will carry on,
To its full perfection,
That good work he has begun;
Why, then, this dejection?

Soul:

Faith when void of works is dead;
This the Scriptures witness;
And what works have I to plead,
Who am all unfitness?
All my powers are depraved,
Blind, perverse, and filthy;
If from death I'm fully saved,
Why am I not healthy?

Believer:

Pore not on thyself too long,
Lest it sink thee lower;
Look to Jesus, kind as strong
Mercy joined with power;
Every work that thou must do,
Will thy gracious Saviour
For thee work, and in thee too,
Of his special favour.

Soul:

Jesus' precious blood, once spilt,

I depend on solely,
To release and clear my guilt;
But I would be holy.

Believer:

He that bought thee on the cross
Fully purge away thy dross;
Make thee a new creature.

Soul:

That he can I nothing doubt,
Be it but his pleasure.

Believer:

Though it be not done throughout,
May it not in measure?

Soul:

When that measure, far from great,
Still shall seem decreasing?

Believer:

Faint not then, but pray and wait,
Never, never ceasing.

Soul:

What when prayer meets no regard?

Believer:

Still repeat it often.

Soul:

But I feel myself so hard.

Believer:

Jesus will thee soften.

Soul:

But my enemies make head.

Believer:

Let them closer drive thee.

Soul:

But I'm cold, I'm dark, I'm dead.

Believer:

Jesus will revive thee.

Joseph Hart (**Hymn 780—Gadsby's selection**)