

## **The Well and the Wall, or the Fruitful Bough and the Abiding Bow**

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"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." Genesis 49:22, 23, 24

What a striking representation has the blessed Spirit in the book of Genesis (49) brought before us of the death-bed of Jacob! How we seem to see the venerable patriarch, blind indeed and feeble, as being now in the 147th year of his age, yet retaining full possession of all his mental faculties, supported by the power, and favoured with the presence and blessing of God, as his Father and Friend. Let us endeavour to picture to ourselves the scene, not to amuse our minds with vain speculation, or to work upon our natural feelings by pathetically representing to our imagination the dying bed of the aged patriarch; but let us seek to edify and profit our soul by listening to his words as from the mouth of God; for they were words of truth and power, the far-seeing language of an inspired prophet, and therefore not the common leave-taking of a dying father, but a revelation to his sons of the mind and intentions of God towards them for ages and generations. His twelve sons, from Reuben down to Benjamin, surround his bed, for he had sent for them and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days." There they stand in the order of their birth, each awaiting the words that should drop from his lips: words, it might be, of good or words of

evil—a blessing or a denunciation upon themselves and their posterity, even to the remotest times; for their appointed lot in "the last days" was the chief subject of his dying theme.

He begins as was natural with Reuben. "Reuben, thou art my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power." To Reuben, as the first-born, belonged the birthright. This was the "excellency of dignity and the excellency of power," for to it were attached both dignity of rank and superiority of authority. The birthright of the first-born son carried with it mainly four distinctive privileges above the rest of the sons. The first privilege was *headship* of the family, and therefore of all the other tribes; for though each tribe had its separate chief, yet all acknowledged the superiority of the first-born as representing in his person the common father of them all. The second privilege was the *priestship*; for until the institution of the Levitical priesthood, the right of sacrifice belonged to the first-born son. The third privilege was that of *kingship*; for with them, as with us, the right to the throne descended lineally to the eldest son. The fourth privilege was a *double portion* of goods; so that when, at the death of the father, the property was divided, the eldest son as heir took twice as much as any one of his younger brethren. But to Reuben was attached a sad and disgraceful blot. He had committed a crime forty years before which could not be forgotten nor forgiven. He had defiled his father's couch. The birthright therefore was taken from him as justly forfeited, and so we find the sacred historian recording: "Now the sons of Reuben, the first-born of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's." (1 Chron. 1:1,

2.) The birthright, then, with its four distinct privileges was taken from Reuben and for ever forfeited. We shall see presently to whom the forfeited birthright fell, and how its privileges were apportioned.

Having passed sentence upon Reuben, the dying patriarch now addresses Simeon and Levi whom he joins together, putting Simeon first as the next son after the first-born. As Simeon had no real claim to the birthright, no wrong was done to him in its not being given him. But both he and Levi had also forfeited their claim to it, such as it was, by their treachery and cruelty. "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations." This was an allusion to their cruelty in the case of Hamor and Shechem. "In their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." Simeon, as perhaps the greater transgressor, was "divided in Jacob," and therefore the headship could not be his, as wanting unity of habitation; but to Levi, though "scattered in Israel," was afterwards given one part of the birthright—the *priestship*.

The dying prophet and father comes next to Judah, for his three elder brothers being set aside, he stood next in succession. Him he thus addresses: "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise" (his name, Judah, signifies praise): "thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee." He then pronounces that memorable prophecy, in which he intimates that from Judah the promised Messiah shall spring: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." By these words he gives Judah two of the privileges of the forfeited birthright, the *headship*

over the tribes and the *monarchy*. "Thy father's children shall bow down before thee." There is the headship. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah." There is the kingdom—the right of monarchy, which though given at first to the tribe of Benjamin in the person of Saul, was taken away from it and fully vested in the tribe of Judah, in the person and house of David. I shall pass over what was said to the rest of the sons both as foreign to my subject, and presenting much difficulty of interpretation. But having seen to whom three of the distinctive privileges of the birthright were given, viz., to Judah the headship and kingdom, and to Levi the priesthood, you may want to know to whom the fourth fell—the double portion of goods. This portion of the birthright, as we have already read, was given to Joseph by the adoption of both his sons as heads of tribes, as his father said to him on a previous occasion: "And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. (Gen. 48:5.) And again, "Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." (Gen. 48:22.)

But we now come to the subject of our text, which is Joseph, of whom the dying patriarch thus speaks: "Joseph is a faithful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall."

Joseph was an eminent type of two things: first of our gracious Lord, whom he typically represented in several striking particulars. He was hated by his brethren, as our Lord was hated by his brethren after the flesh. He was sold by his brethren into captivity, as our blessed Lord was sold into the hands of the chief priests for a slave's price. He was cast into prison on a false accusation, as our gracious Lord

was condemned to death and cast into prison on a false charge by lying witnesses. He was brought out of prison at the command of the king, as our blessed Lord was raised from the dead by the power of God. He was made ruler over all Egypt and all power was given into his hands, as our gracious Lord now administers all power in heaven and earth by command of the Father. In spite of all their transgressions against him, Joseph loved his brethren, secretly sustained them, and in due time made himself manifest unto them. So the Lord loves his brethren though they have sinned against him, girds them and feeds them when they know it not, and in due time manifests himself to their souls. As Joseph was entrusted with the disposal of all the goods in Egypt and fed his brethren out of the storehouses; so our Lord holds in his sovereign disposal all the gifts and graces of the Spirit, and gives out of his fulness to his brethren every needful supply, as Joseph gave them corn out of the barns of Egypt.

But Joseph was also a type of a believer. He was an eminent believer himself. The graces of the Spirit shone forth conspicuously in him. He therefore stands forth in the Scripture not only as a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, but as a representative also of an eminent saint of God; and it is in this point of view that I shall, with the Lord's help and blessing, this morning consider him. I hope you clearly understand my meaning, or else you will scarcely be able to follow me in my delineation of his character. I view him then as a *representative character*—in other words, that his spiritual life as drawn by the pen of the Holy Ghost represents the spiritual life of a believer, with its trials and blessings, sorrows and joys, sufferings from man and support from God, together with the exercise of the graces of the Spirit in all vital and practical godliness. Taking our text, then, in this point of view as descriptive of the character of a believer, under the representative form of Joseph, I shall

show,

I.—*First*, Joseph's *fruitfulness* with its *source* and *maintenance*: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall."

II.—*Secondly*, Joseph's *sore grief* with its *cause* and *consequence*: "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him."

III.—*Thirdly*, Joseph's *strength* and its *divine Author*: "But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

I.—The grand distinguishing feature of Joseph, in which as a typical character he represents the child of grace, is portrayed in the words, "Joseph is a *fruitful bough*;" for this leads us at once to our Lord's striking figure of the vine, and the distinction which he there so vividly draws between the fruitless and the fruitful branches. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (John 15:1, 2.) Our gracious Lord there makes a very clear and evident contrast between those branches which are in him by profession, and those which are in him by vital union. Of the former he says, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away;" and of the latter, "Every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth (or cleanseth) it, that it may bring forth more fruit." It is evident, therefore, that the bearing or the not bearing of fruit is the grand distinction between the possessor and the professor. As they surrounded the bed of the dying patriarch, the brethren of Joseph might be represented by the branches that bear no fruit; but Joseph shone eminently and conspicuously amongst

them as a fruitful bough. Indeed, we cannot read the history of Joseph from the first mention made of him by the Holy Ghost, as bringing to his father, with brotherly concern, "the evil report of the sons of Bilhah, and the sons of Zilpah" (Gen. 37:2) down to his dying bed, when "he took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence," (Gen. 50:25) without seeing what an eminent saint of God he was. Nor, indeed, is there any believer whose words and actions are recorded in the Scriptures who shines forth with fewer blemishes or brighter lustre. Viewing Joseph, then, as a fruitful bough, let us see how the Christian whom he represents worthily bears such a designation.

i. To be really fruitful, he must be fruitful in heart, in lip, and in life. And first in heart; for there the grand secret lies. That is the real source of all fruit in lip or in life. We see in Joseph's case how fruitful he was in heart; how in early days, when he was but 17 years of age, the grace of God had visited his soul, and what tenderness of conscience he manifested, for he could not connive at his brother's sin. He could not but know that communicating the sad tidings to his father would bring upon himself their hatred and persecution; but his soul was grieved at their iniquities; and if by his father's warning and advice they could be controlled, it would be for their welfare and his own comfort. As he grew up, the grace of God became more and more manifested in him; for the Lord separated him from his brethren in a very significant manner, and gave a prophetic intimation of his future exaltation by the two dreams which he related to them in the simplicity of his heart. But this very display of the Lord's peculiar favour to him, and the intimation thereby contained that he would be exalted over them, only drew forth their enmity; for that they the elder should bow down to him the younger, mortified their pride and cut their vanity to the very

quick. They could not, indeed, but see that there was something prophetic in these intimations; yet, instead of being awed by the authority of God, they only mocked him as "the dreamer"; conspired "against him to kill him," and though they were induced to spare his life, yet that they might for ever defeat the prophecy which they feared, they sold him as a slave into the hands of the Midianites. But when he was taken into Egypt, the fear of God still made itself more and more manifest in Joseph's heart. Refusing to yield to the solicitations of his vile mistress, he turned her into an enemy; and falling under her base accusations, was thrust into prison an innocent sufferer, where he was at first, no doubt, exposed to all those cruelties and hardships which, we know from history, were ever the lot of those confined in those gloomy abodes. And indeed, we expressly read in the book of Psalms, "He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron." (Psa. 105:17, 18.) It is very expressive in the prayer-book version, "The iron entered into his soul." Still, even there the grace of God shone upon and through him. The Lord gave him favour in the eyes of the keeper of the prison, bestowed wisdom to interpret the dreams of the chief butler and the chief baker, and no doubt often solaced him in his dark cell with the beams of his presence. But what occasion for patience and resignation to the will of God; first to be cast into this gloomy dungeon by a false accusation, and then to be kept for years with little prospect of release. But the time comes when Pharaoh has that dream for which no interpreter can be found among all the magicians and all the wise men of Egypt, until the chief butler calls to mind "the young man, the Hebrew, servant of the captain of the guard," who interpreted to him and his fellow prisoner the dreams so fatal to the one, so prosperous for the other. I need hardly remind you how Joseph is brought forth at a moment's notice and interprets at once



Pharaoh's dream; how conviction of the truth of the interpretation falls upon the monarch's mind; how Joseph is exalted to be head over Egypt, yet maintains the same quiet spirit he had showed in prison; how when his brethren came to him, submissively bowing down themselves before him with their faces to the earth, and thus fulfilling his dream, though they knew it not, instead of retorting their harsh treatment, his tender heart was softened towards them, though for wise reasons at first he made himself strange and spake roughly unto them. I need not remind you what tender inquiries he made of them on their second visit, after his father, and the yearning love he felt towards his brother Benjamin. You will well remember when the time came to make himself known, how he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck with many tears, kissed all his brethren and wept upon them, forgiving all their sins against him, speaking kind words to them, and promising them support in Egypt through the famine, for that the good of all the land was theirs. What an example of being a fruitful bough did Joseph manifest. How fruitful in the fear of God, in faith, in love, in every gracious and tender affection, was he in *heart*. How fruitful in *word*, by the good words which he spake to his brethren, all of which flowed out of love and affection. And how fruitful in *work*, by the good actions which adorned his life and conversation, whether he was a slave in the house of Potiphar, a servant of servants in the prison, or riding in Pharaoh's second chariot as ruler over all the land of Egypt. We, it is true, are not placed in Joseph's circumstances. We have neither his lowly lot nor his lofty exaltation. We have never been thrust into prison, nor are we likely to administer a kingdom. Still we have each our sphere of action, and we may have a measure of Joseph's grace without his iron fetters or his golden chain, without his dungeon or his dignity. The great question is whether we are a fruitful bough, for upon that depends our state and standing for time

and eternity.

ii. But let us now observe the *secret source* of Joseph's fruitfulness; for as he is a representative of a child of grace, the source of his fruitfulness must be the source of ours. Let no one think that Joseph brought forth the fruits which made him so fruitful a bough by any inherent strength, or wisdom, or goodness of his own. There was nothing in him naturally to separate him from his brethren, for he was as we are, by nature a child of wrath even as others. Whatever he was spiritually he was by the grace of God, which was given to him as a sovereign act of God's good pleasure. The Holy Spirit, therefore, leads us at once to the secret source of Joseph's fruitfulness by the words, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough *by a well.*"

In those burning climates, trees cannot grow or produce fruit except planted near streams of water. We find, therefore, in Scripture the figure of a tree planted by the waters often made use of. As an instance, David, describing the blessedness of a man of God in the 1st Psalm, says of him, that "he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season." (Psa. 1:3.) In a similar way, the prophet Jeremiah, describing the blessedness of the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is, says, "For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river." He therefore adds, "And shall not see [that is, drought or decay] when heat cometh; but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful [that is, fearfully anxious] in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." (Jer. 17:8.) This, then, was the secret of Joseph's fruitfulness, that he was planted a well or a fountain, which was ever gushing forth in living streams of water, so as to keep the ground all around it soft and moist.

But what does this "well" spiritually represent? The influences and operations of the blessed Spirit; for all through Scripture, water is made use of as typical of the gifts and graces, operations, and influences of the Holy Ghost. Thus our Lord said, "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly [or heart] shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." (John 7:38, 39.) So also spake the prophet of old, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thy offspring." (Isaiah 44:3.) Thus as water has been, as it were, consecrated by divine authority to be a standing type of the gifts and graces, teaching and influences of the blessed Spirit, we cannot well err in so interpreting the well by which Joseph was planted, and I may here observe that the word "bough" does not mean so much the branch of the tree as the tree itself; for we shall find as we proceed that it is a vine to which Joseph is compared. Joseph's fruitfulness, then, was given and maintained by his nearness to this well, that well of which our Lord said, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14.)

But observe with me that this well was hidden from view, for as the vine was planted by it and its roots were necessarily hidden out of sight, the well also was concealed from human eye. You will, perhaps, remember that among the blessings of Joseph wherewith Moses, the man of God blessed him, there was not only "the dew" that fell from heaven but "the deep that coucheth beneath;" that is, the supplies of water couching or hiding themselves deep beneath the soil, and by their secret springs ever keeping it moist and fruitful. The source, then, of Joseph's fruitfulness was hidden from the eyes of men, and could only be discerned by the fruit that hung upon the bough. His brethren saw it and hated it.

Potiphar, his master, until turned against him, saw it and approved of it, for he found, "that the Lord was with him, and made all that he did to prosper in his hand." The very keeper of the prison, probably naturally some inhuman wretch, could not but see it; and because the Lord was with him Joseph had favour in his sight. Pharaoh and all his servants could not but see it, though they knew not Joseph's God, for they all rejoiced with him when the fame was heard in Pharaoh's house that Joseph's brethren were come. But none of these knew the source of that fruitfulness with which he was adorned as a vine laden with rich and ripe fruit. So also it is now with every child of grace. The secret spring of his fruitfulness is hidden from the eyes of men: they can only see his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven. But the secret springs of grace which are continually flowing into his soul to keep his faith, his hope, his love, in a word, all his religion alive in his bosom are hidden from all human observation. Bear in mind that your religion, if it be the gift and work of God, will and must have a root to it. Job, amidst all his confusion, could still say of himself with all holy confidence, "The root of the matter is found in me." He knew that "the matter," the all-important matter of spiritual and eternal life was deeply rooted in his heart. But whatever root our religion may have, it would all die away root and stock, stem and branch, leaf and fruit, were it not planted by the well. Two things then are wanted to make us fruitful trees; first the root and then the well. And you will ever find that the roots of your religion must dip themselves into the well to draw water out of it. Jeremiah, therefore, as before quoted, describes the godly man "as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river." You know how a tree will spread out its roots in a suitable soil. As the river then flows by, the tree planted by the waters spreads out its roots along the river bank, as if it delighted in the moisture of the stream as it continually bathes its

rootlets. So as your faith and hope and love, and indeed every grace of the Spirit in your heart dips its roots into the well and is fed and sustained by the genial moisture ever coming from it, they receive fruitfulness into every pore. Cut off that supply, the root would dry up, the stem would droop, the branches would languish, the leaf would fade, the blossoms would fall, nor would there be any fruit hanging upon the bough. But as long as that source of fruitfulness remains; as long as the well continues full of water and the roots dip down into it and draw spiritual moisture out of it, so long is the bough fruitful. Your religion, if it is to stand the burning drought of temptation; your religion, if it is not to languish and die; your religion, if your leaf is to be green, if sap is to flow into the stem, if fruit is to adorn the branches, can only be thus supported and maintained by continually dipping its roots into the well; for the Holy Spirit is not only the giver, but the maintainer of all life in the soul. Though we cannot ourselves indeed see or understand how the blessed Spirit maintains the life of God in the bosom, yet we know that he does so by two distinct things: 1st, by the languishing and withering of every grace in the heart when he withdraws his gracious influences, for when he goes all our religion seems to go with him; and, 2ndly, by the renewals and revivals which are ever produced by the return of his presence and power. Our Lord, therefore, said, "He that abideth in me and I in him (which we can only do by the Spirit's power and influence), the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing."

iii. But the Holy Spirit has brought before us another marked feature in Joseph, as a representative believer, whereby he was distinguished amongst his brethren as a fruitful bough: "Whose branches *run over the wall.*" I have already intimated that the vine is the fruitful tree to which Joseph is here compared. As then "the well" represents the blessed Spirit

with his secret influences and divine operations upon the soul, so "*the wall*" represents the Lord Jesus Christ. But you will perhaps ask me why? Do you not see that this wall is necessary to support the vine, to lift it, so to speak, from off the earth, for Jesus is the only support of the believing soul? The vine naturally is a trailing plant; it pushes forth no self-supporting stem, which, like the oak or the cedar, can rise of itself into the air. It needs continual support from its earliest growth; from the time that when as a rooted cutting it sends forth a shoot from the infant bud. So it is with the new-born soul: it needs support from its earliest birth, or otherwise it trails in the dust, where it might be trodden down and there lie bruised, crushed, and its very life destroyed by the wild beast of the wood. But there is a wall built on purpose, against which the tender shoot may be trained. Now the moment that this infant shoot finds that there is a wall, a support on which it can lean, to that wall it instinctively clings with all the ardour and tenacity of its young yet vigorous life. But if you watch the shoot thus put forth you will see attached to it what are called tendrils. These stretch themselves out here and there as if seeking some prop on which to lean; and the moment in which they find it, they clasp it close as if they would adhere to it to prevent the leader falling upon the ground. So it is with the child of God. He is in himself as weak as the tender shoot; his tendency is to trail in the dust, not because he loves the ground, for he loves the wall; but he can no more help himself nor raise himself up than the woman who was bowed together with a spirit of infirmity eighteen years could lift herself upright. (Luke 13:11.) But directly that he finds some sensible support by any discovery or manifestation of Christ to his soul as the Son of God, then to that support he clings with all the tenacity with which a drowning man clings to the branch of a tree that hangs over the river. How suitable is the wall to raise him from grovelling in the dust, or being trampled in

the mire by sin and Satan!

But you will observe it is said of Joseph that his branches *run over* the wall. Having found such a suitable support, the branches of the vine spread themselves all over it. And as the well and the wall go together and combine to make Joseph a fruitful vine, so his roots and his branches spread themselves in equal proportion. Gardeners well know that what is called "root action" is the secret of the vine's fruitfulness, for whatever defect there be in the root it manifests itself in the fruit. But when the well feeds the roots, and the wall supports the branches, then fruit adorns the bough. But you will also observe that by the support of this wall the vine becomes more exposed to the beams and rays and fostering heat of the sun. The vine is a native of a sunny clime. It revels and basks in a warm southern sky. It will grow in our climate, but ripens no fruit to perfection. But observe also that the further the wall extends, the further will the vine spread itself; for its very nature is to seek extension. Of all fruit bearing trees it will reach the furthest in extent, and I believe its best fruit is at its furthest end. I have seen a vine in Kent which spread itself over twelve houses, and I have seen another in Surrey which filled completely a very large hothouse, and which I was told would bear every year a ton of the finest possible grapes. What other tree can you find to spread so widely in every direction, or loaded with so prodigious a crop? The vine, therefore, well represents a Christian, not only in his weakness but in his fruitfulness, and the way in which that fruitfulness is communicated and maintained. When a vine is thoroughly healthy the branches run over the wall as if they delighted in the support thus afforded them, and they especially seek what I may call the *sunny* side of the wall; for the wall has two sides, a shady and a sunny, a northern and a southern aspect. The branches then "run over the wall" to get as far as they can out of the shady into the sunny side;

and just in proportion as they lie and bask in the warm sun do the roots draw more and more moisture and sap out of the well. So the Lord Jesus Christ gives a solid support to every believing soul which rests upon him for life and salvation, whether on the shady or the sunny side of his face, for though the one may be more comfortable, the other is not less secure. As then this support is sensibly felt, the believing soul cleaves more and more closely to him by the tendrils of faith which take hold of his Person and work; and its ever renewed delight is to support itself in all its weakness upon him as the Son of God, especially when he shines upon it; as the vine delights to spread itself over the wall to catch every beam of the sun to give verdure to the leaf, vigour to the branch, and ripeness to the fruit.

Now we should think that the sight of this vine, this fruitful bough or tree, would draw forth universal admiration. It would do so in nature. A vine loaded with fruit and spreading on every side its rich clusters would naturally be an object of general admiration. But it is not so in grace. As an instance, did the grace which shone so conspicuously in Joseph draw forth the admiration of his brethren? Did they like his "coat of many colours," or when they saw that their father "loved him more than all his brethren?" Were they pleased with his dreams? Did the favour of God thus manifestly bestowed upon him raise up in their hearts any wish to be themselves partakers of the same distinctive grace? We do not find that it did. On the contrary, we read that "they hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him." It is true that "they envied him;" but this very feeling only more moved their spleen, stirred up the enmity of their carnal mind, so that they actually conspired to murder him, though they knew it would bring down the grey hairs of their father in sorrow to the grave; and were only dissuaded from their murderous cruelty by the entreaties of Reuben. Though thus baulked by



the providence of God of their intended crime of blood, they sold him for a slave to the passing Midianites, and thus got him, as they thought for ever, out of the way. As it was then, so it is now. The world cannot love the children of God; it may see, but cannot admire their Christian fruitfulness; may acknowledge that they outshine it, but still it hates what it cannot deny. We need not wonder at all this, for God himself has given us the reason. Enmity has been put between the two seeds; and that enmity will subsist unto the end of all things. We come, therefore, now, by a simple and easy transition, to the second branch of our text, viz.

II.—Joseph's *sore grief*, with its cause and consequence.

"The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him."

Two things are said of the archers, and one of Joseph. Of the archers that they "hated him," and "shot at him;" of Joseph, that he was thereby "sorely grieved." We will look at these points in their connection.

i. First, "the archers *hated* him." The figure, you see, is changed. The Holy Spirit does not tie himself to go on always with a figure, but changes it to another, if more suitable to convey thereby divine truth. The dying patriarch, therefore, drops the figure of the vine, and speaks of Joseph as a man, and as one shot at by archers. He also plainly intimates the reason why the archers shot at Joseph. It was because they hated him. The cause of their hatred was twofold: first, the favour of God manifested to him; and, secondly, from seeing the fruitfulness that sprang from his dipping his roots into the well, and spreading his branches so luxuriantly over the wall. His good works reprov'd their bad ones. His godliness, uprightness, and general consistency silently yet keenly rebuked their ungodliness. So it is, so it ever must be where

the life and power of godliness are manifested; for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus"—(mind, not all that *talk* godly, but all that *live* godly, as in union with Jesus)—"shall suffer persecution."

But who are these archers? In Joseph's case, they were mainly his own brethren, which made him feel it so keenly. When he was sold to be a slave, and torn away from his native land and his father's house; when he was thrust into prison, there to suffer all the pain and ignominy of the prison-house, how he must have reflected, "it is my brethren, my own brethren after the flesh, who have brought me here." We shall see by-and-by what bearing this has upon Christian experience; but I will just for the present remark that the wounds given by his brethren sank very deeply into Joseph's spirit. The wanton eyes of his mistress, the angry eyes of his master, the scowling eyes of his jailer did not wound him like the murderous eyes of his own brethren.

If, then, we are like Joseph, fruitful boughs; if our faith stand not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God; if it be given and maintained by the Spirit's secret operations, and, as a consequence, we make Christ our all in all, we shall surely find archers of different kinds and from various quarters shooting at us.

1. Some of these archers will be from *the world*, for worldly men never can love the children of God; and with opportunity they will manifest their enmity by shooting some of the arrows wherewith Joseph was assailed. The law of the land has much tied men's hands, and broken, we trust, for ever, that bow of violence with which once they shot at the persons of the saints of God, when they shed their blood, shut them up in prisons, or spoiled their goods. But even

now, as David says, "They bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the perfect." (Psa. 64:3, 4.) How often is the tongue of the ungodly "as an arrow shot out!" (Jer. 9:8.) How often are the arrows of calumny and slander at the child of grace, by which men seek to wound his reputation and injure his character; or where they cannot thus succeed, how they will aim at him the arrows of mocking scorn!

2. But the world are not the only archers who hate and shoot at the spiritual Joseph. *Professors of religion*, devoid of the power,—are not these archers too, and good marksmen,—fit to win a first-class prize at a rifle match? O how they hate to see the grace of God eminently shine; how the image of Christ in a believer's heart torments and condemns them. His separation from the world and practical condemnation of it, with all its fooleries and lying vanities; his godly fear, which will not allow him to have partnership with evil; his making Christ to be all in all for salvation, and the work of the Holy Spirit upon his heart for sanctification; his earnest desire to glorify God in body and soul; the doctrines for which he contends; the experience of God's favour and mercy which he enjoys; the practical consistency which he manifests; all move the enmity of the professing generation against him for his truth condemns their errors, his knowledge of the power their death in the form, and his obedience to the precept their practical disregard of it. As, then, their enmity is stirred up, they shoot their arrows at him secretly or openly to ease their tormented minds, and please themselves by paining him.

3. Nor are they the only archers who sorely grieve the spiritual Joseph. Even the *children of God* themselves sometimes can carry their bows and arrows; and the wounds which they inflict are so deep and rankling that they are

rarely thoroughly healed. Of all the arrows, except one which I shall presently mention, those are the keenest which are shot by a brother's hand. Is it not cruel, when behind our backs, the bow is held by one of the same faith as ourselves, and it comes to our ears that a friend, at least in profession, or even a minister who preaches the same truths which we ourselves believe, has been shooting arrows in secret against us to damage our reputation, or injure our usefulness? Sometimes these arrows come flying about in the shape of pamphlets. I have had, I believe, more than thirty, though I have never counted them and never cared to read them, written against me by friend or foe. But, through mercy, none have yet succeeded in breaking my bow or beating it out of my hand.

4. But of all arrows, those pierce the deepest which we have *winged ourselves*. There is a pretty tale in an ancient author of an eagle mortally struck by an archer in the breast, and, as she lay upon the plain in dying agony, she recognised the feather upon the arrow as having been taken from her own wing. A modern poet has versified the tale, but I shall only quote three or four of his lines, just to give my figure point and edge:—

"Keen were her pangs, but keener far to feel  
She owned the pinion which impelled the steel.  
While the same plumage which had warmed her nest  
Drank the last life-drop of her bleeding breast."

Have you not been this eagle? Have you never feathered an arrow from your own breast? And as you recognised your own feather upon the shaft, did not sorrow and compunction pierce your inmost soul that you should have given strength, swiftness, and correctness of aim to that arrow which either now is quivering in your breast, or has made in it a wound

which time itself will scarcely heal?

5. *Satan*, too, is a cruel archer, and his arrows are tipped with fire, for indeed they are, as the Scripture calls them, "fiery darts" when shot at the soul by this master bowman. What cruel use he can make of our slips and falls to fill the mind almost with despair. How he can point to the feather! "Hast thou not procured this to thyself?" How subtle his infidel shafts; how terrible his blasphemous injections; how deeply they penetrate: how sorely they wound!

These arrows, then, and others which I cannot now mention, sorely grieve the spiritual Joseph; and this indeed is the intention of the archers. Their arrows, as we shall presently see, do not prove his death or downfall, but they sadly wound his spirit, try his mind, and grieve his inmost soul. Have these archers ever been shooting at you? But perhaps you have not sufficient fruitfulness to draw forth an arrow. You may be too much like the world for it to shoot at you. It may see no difference between you and itself, and therefore may not think you even worth a shot, or not of sufficient value to count you fair game; for who wastes powder on crows or gulls? Or have the professors of religion seen in you sufficient of God's discriminating grace, of separation from the world, of the fruits of godliness or of the image of Christ in internal or external conformity to his likeness to lead them to shoot their arrows at you? But if they do, perhaps you have given them or even the world itself good occasion by your inconsistent conduct, by the slips or falls of which you have been openly guilty, by your heedless words, or your worse than heedless works, to shoot their arrows justly at you? Have you not yourself feathered the arrow now sticking in your conscience? I ask these questions in all solemnity. Conscience, if it be alive in God's fear, will furnish the best answer to them.

But were these arrows, at least in Joseph's case, successful? They sorely grieved the man of God; and thus far the malice of the archers was gratified. Joseph's tears were a sweet morsel to his envious brethren; and they had the pleasure of grieving his spirit, if not the gratification of shedding his blood.

III.—We are thus brought to our *third* point—Joseph's *strength*, and its divine *Author*. There was a secret supply of strength and support given to Joseph which the archers knew not of; and by this unseen help their arrows, though they sorely grieved him, really fell short of working the mischief designed by them. "But his bow *abode in strength*, and the arms of his hand were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

i. Joseph, you see, carried a bow as well as the archers; of a different material and manufacture indeed, but far more potent, as made in heaven, and put into his hand by the mighty God of Jacob.

Now the chief object of the archers was to knock this bow out of his hands, or disable him from making use of it; for they could not but see that his bow had great strength in it, and that his arrows flew fast. Joseph's godly conduct was an arrow in the conscience of his brethren, for it, as condemning their ungodliness, galled and vexed their carnal mind. His dreams and the favour that God manifestly showed him were keen arrows against their pride and self-**consequence**; **[confidence?]** for they could not but see that it was the Lord God of their father who had given him a bow of steel, and that they must either fall down before him, or he before them. Joseph's godliness and refusal to listen to her base solicitations were all arrows in the conscience of his ungodly

mistress, turning her impure desires into deadly hatred. Thus, as representing the child of God, the spiritual Joseph carries a bow as well as the archers; and it is because the arrows which he sends from his lips and from his life do such execution that the archers are so enraged against him. If a minister, for instance, stands up boldly in the name of God, and holding firmly out the bow which the Lord the Spirit has put into his hand, shoots the arrows of truth thick and fast, the words of warning, of reproof, of rebuke, of denunciation of God's wrath against transgressors which fall from his lips, are all so many arrows that fly abroad in the congregation, and wound, it may be, many a heart and fall into many a conscience that he is not aware of. He is thus fulfilling that word, "Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee." (Psa. 45:5.) But if the people do not fall under the keen shafts of truth, and submit themselves to the Lord as conquered subjects, being made willing in the day of his power, these very arrows only stir up the wrath and rebellion of their carnal mind; and this is the secret cause of all that enmity and malice which worldly professors ever manifest against a faithful servant of God, "But his bow abides in strength." God has put a bow into his hand and arrows into his quiver by furnishing him with a spiritual, experimental knowledge of his own truth, and with life, light, and power faithfully to deliver his conscience. If, then, he draw his bow in the strength of God and shoot the arrows which he has put into his quiver, he must leave the event with the Lord, whether it be a savour of life unto life or a savour of death unto death. When Joseph was in the prison house, he still had his bow; he did not leave that behind in the palace of his ungodly mistress. Nor was it taken from him either by his brethren when they stripped him of his coat of many colours, or by the jailer when he put upon him the prison raiment.

But what was Joseph's bow? The *bow of faith* and the *arrow of prayer*. He could believe in the God of his father in the dungeon as well as in the house of his master; he could pray in the lowly cell as well as or better than when engaged in waiting upon his mistress. Oh! how many sighs and prayers would he put up in his prison cell, and how encouraged he would be by every fresh manifestation of God's favour to hold strongly his bow, and to aim rightly his arrows. "His bow therefore *abode* in strength." But where would have been his bow, if he had given way to evil? It is sin and nothing but sin that strikes a believer's bow out of his hand. Have you no bow? have you no arrow? for, as I have said, faith is the bow, and prayer the arrow. Where, then, will your arrows be directed? Will you take up the arrows of malice and slander, of scorn or calumny shot against you by an ungodly world, and put them upon your bow to shoot them back? Their arrows will not fit your string, nor will they suit your bow. That is not the way, then, that God teaches his people to use the bow of faith and the arrow of prayer. The arrows which they shoot are up to the throne of the Most High. The cries, sighs, petitions, prayers, and supplications which the Holy Spirit puts into their quiver and which they lay upon the bow of faith, are all so many arrows directed up to the throne. They have to shoot high, for their arrows are directed heavenward and their object is that every arrow should reach the eternal throne, and should leave a mark, as it were, in heaven's own target. Their bow, then, is not like that of their enemies, the bow of unbelief, malice, and enmity; nor are their arrows tipped with deadly fire, aimed against character or person, ever seeking to damage or destroy; but heavenly is their bow, "the gift of God," for such is faith; and far-reaching are their arrows, for they are shot up to heaven's own gate through which they pierce when their prayers enter the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.



ii. But whence comes it to pass that their bow thus abides in strength? Why do not the cruel wounds which they receive from their inveterate enemies cause their hands to drop and their bow to fall? The aged patriarch gives the reason, "*The arms of his hands were made strong* by the hands of the *mighty God* of Jacob." Much is contained in these words, if I had time to enter into them. We have a striking illustration of their meaning in that remarkable passage in the 2nd book of Kings, where we read of Elisha putting his hands upon the hands of the king of Israel, and bidding him shoot. (2 Kings 12:15-17.) When, then, king Joash shot, it was not really *his* hands which drew the bow, but the hands of the prophet which were put upon his. Thus, in our text, the arms of Joseph's hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob being put upon them.

Observe the expression, "the arms of his hands," that is, the muscles of his arms, for it is the strength of the muscle in the arm which gives strength to the hand. A weak, flabby arm must ever make a weak, feeble hand. The first thing, then, was to put divine strength into Joseph's arms to draw the bow vigorously, and send the arrow far enough to reach heaven's gate. Do you not know that your prayers cannot reach the throne of grace, unless the blessed Spirit himself help your infirmities, and intercede for you and in you with groanings which cannot be uttered? In this way, then, the God of Jacob himself put his hands upon the hands of Joseph and actually drew the bow for him; for though Joseph held the bow, it was the Lord that bent it so firm and so strong. Two things you know are needful for an archer—strength of arm and correctness of eye. You may miss the target from defect of strength, or incorrectness of aim. The God of Jacob, who teaches the hands to war and the fingers to fight, gives both strength to the arm and aim to the eye. How unerring must that arrow fly when the Lord himself draws the string.

Aim high. Set your affections on things above. Lift up your heart to the throne of God: and never cease to draw your bow as long as you have an arrow in your quiver.

Nor is this bow confined to private Christians. The servants of God, as I have said, carry a bow: and blessed is that bowman the hands of whose arms are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. When, then, we hold our bow in sight of all, and shoot our arrows of truth among our congregation, aiming at men's consciences, it is not we that draw the string, if any pierce through the joints of the harness. We have no strength of our own to draw the bow, nor wisdom of our own to direct the arrow. But the mighty God of Jacob puts his hands upon our hands, himself drawing the bow and himself directing the shaft. If, then, we are ever favoured to draw the bow with a vigorous arm, and shoot the arrow home so as to reach any man's conscience, and leave a wound there which none but the Lord himself can heal, it is neither our own strength nor our own skill which gives the word of truth a saving entrance into the heart. You, too, though not called upon, as a servant of God, to bear the ministerial bow, have still your own private bow which you are bidden to make daily use of. And do you not find that there is at times a secret power put forth in your soul whereby you are enabled to use it aright? Do you not find that the Lord the Spirit sometimes teaches you how to pray and what to pray for? When then he intercedes in your bosom with earnest cries and supplications, it is he and not you who draws the bow of faith and aims the arrow of prayer. Do you not find yourself at times strengthened with strength in your soul to pray and cry and seek the Lord's face with a fervour and an earnestness, a boldness and a liberty surprising to yourself; and at such times, does not faith seem raised up in your heart with a sweet assurance that your prayers enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth? Why is this but because the mighty God of Jacob at these seasons

strengthens the arms of your hands to draw the bow, as he strengthened the arms of Jacob himself to wrestle with the angel the whole night by the brook Jabbok? Do you not also sometimes feel, in a special manner, that faith is raised up in your soul to believe in the Person and work of the Son of God; to lay hold of him for yourself as all your salvation and all your desire, and thus realise the sweet influence and power of his blood and love? In such favoured moments it is not so much you that believe as the Spirit of God believing in you. How strong, O how strong is faith and hope, when the hands of the mighty God of Jacob are making strong the arms of our faith, and enabling us to believe to the salvation of our soul! And do you not also find, that the more the archers shoot at you and grieve you, the better you can use your bow and the more it abides in strength? O, how the Lord overrules and defeats, as he did so wonderfully in Joseph's case, all the malice of the archers! How he makes all things work together for good to those that love him; and what a confirmation it is to our faith, that when the world, or ungodly professors, or even the children of God themselves, or the great enemy of our souls shoots at us with his infernal artillery,—we find sometimes, to our soul's surprise, that our bow abides in strength; that there is a secret power communicated which we cannot describe yet sensibly feel, so that the bow of faith and prayer is not beaten out of our hand. It is an indescribable mercy when the Lord so strengthens faith as to enable its to find access to himself; power to believe in and receive the Lord Jesus Christ into our very heart; power to submit to his dealings, however trying or mysterious in providence and in grace, and power to do in his strength what we never could do in our own.

Now as your bow thus abides in strength, and the arms of your hands are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob, you will never take up the arrows shot against you

and shoot them back against your enemies: for nothing is so likely to cause the bow to drop from your hands; nothing so likely to cause the God of Jacob to take his hands off yours, as for you thus to imitate the ungodly. I do not wish to speak of myself, but this is the way in which I trust I have been led to act—not to be provoked by all that has been said or written against me, to retort upon them their bitter, angry words. It is not from want of power, for I could give them as good as they bring; but I hope grace has taught me that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20); and that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." (2 Cor. 10:4.) Bear in mind, then, that your bow is not of earthly but heavenly make, put into your hands by the God of Jacob, and that your arrows are not manufactured as theirs are of carnal, but of spiritual and divine material, and have been lodged in your quiver by the God of heaven. Keep, then, firmly to your own spiritual weapons; and though the archers may sorely grieve you with their keen shots, never lay aside the bow of faith that God has given you, to take up the bow of anger and revenge, which is the carnal weapon of your enemies. Never lay aside the arrows of spiritual prayer and supplication to take up the malicious darts of the wicked, lest you provoke the Lord to withdraw his kind support; and then where will be your strength to draw the bow, or where your skill to reach with its shafts the throne of grace?

Let me, in conclusion, just briefly run over some of these thoughts again which I have put before you that they may leave a more abiding impression upon your mind and memory. The leading theme of my subject was, that Joseph, as a fruitful bough, typically represents a true believer. The cause of his fruitfulness I showed you in the well and the wall. I then directed your attention to the enmity drawn forth against him on account of his fruitfulness, and to the grief

and pain it caused to his spirit. I then showed how Joseph was not defeated by all the malice of his enemies; that his bow abode in strength, and the reason was because the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. I endeavoured to impress upon your minds the blessedness of a personal experience of these vital truths. And now let me conclude by expressing my earnest desire that we may feel a sweet persuasion in our own breast that we are in some measure walking in Joseph's footsteps; that Joseph's God is our God, and Joseph's shepherd our shepherd; for the aged patriarch added, "From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel." And O may the very God of Jacob help us as he helped Joseph, and may we find our bow still to abide in strength, with a blessed conviction in our conscience that it was put into our hands by the Lord himself, and by his grace will ensure us a glorious victory over all our external, internal, and infernal foes.