

THE THIRSTY INVITED.*

ISAIAH lv. 1.

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.”

Who is there among us, that remembers near the home of his infancy or the play-ground of his youth, some cool and crystal spring, that burst forth from its covert of rock, or its margin of grass, and freshened all the scene around? Such an object of natural scenery lives long in the memory. To such a source of innocent delight we resort again and again, without weariness and without satiety. That which attracted us first, charms us still, and the reason is, that it is living, perennial and inexhaustible, yielding supplies to wants which are perpetually returning. As long as men thirst, they will value the clear cold fountain. But if,

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even in this temperate clime, we are often made to comprehend the invaluable excellency of this great and lavish gift to our craving humanity, how much livelier must be the feeling, in those torrid regions, where most of the scriptural scenes are laid! A spring of water is always a desirable object; but how surpassing its fascination amidst tropical heats, or in the scorching wastes of the desert, where the panting caravan looks out for hours to catch the first signs of verdure! Consider this, and you will no longer marvel at the large place which is occupied by wells and fountains, in the beautiful pastoral and nomadic pictures of the Old Testament. The literature of the patriarchs is eminently an out-door and a summer literature, which we best understand when we leave the luxuries and constraint of cities, and dwell abroad, under the fair heavens, and amidst the bright and picturesque surroundings of an oriental life. The imagination and memory of the Bible-reader are familiar with such objects in the ancient landscape; the wells of Abram, Isaac and Jacob; the fountain opened to despairing Hagar; the well of Rebekah, and the not less lovely well of Rachel; the well of Jethro and Moses; the palm-tree wells of Elam; and that fount of which thirsting David cried, "O that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" Bearing these associations in our minds, we can the better catch the meaning of promises which declare that the thirsty land shall become springs of water, and that God will

lead his people to fountains of living water. But why seek remote illustrations of that which finds its prompt response in the bosom of all who ever were athirst? It is to such, in a spiritual sense, that the invitation of the text is addressed, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" And we may, without laboured investigation, consider it as offering the benefits of the gospel to those who are perishing. I ask you on this holy day, to examine with me the fulness, the freeness, and the universality of the offered gift.

I. The fulness of the offered gift. It is water; it is abundance of water. There must be something in this natural object, which is suited to symbolize the provision made in the gospel for the salvation of mankind. Man is so constituted that he must have water, or perish. Give him all things else, but deny him every liquid refreshment, and you destroy his life. Nothing more forcibly shows this, than the familiar fact, that even on the vast ocean, the mariner, surrounded by a world of waters, must nevertheless carry with him the fresh products of the living fountain. The appetite for this supply is so strong, that when long ungratified, it becomes a frenzy. And how bountiful is the supply! In hill and valley the springs of water bubble up, with a sweet caprice and delightful irregularity, or the hand of labour penetrates deeply to the cooling vein, in both cases with a liberality like that which pours a vital atmosphere around our planet. The evaporation from earth and ocean, and the descent of copious showers

maintain in plenitude this great reservoir for the cleansing and cheering of mankind. It is indispensable to the natural life of the race. And so is the gospel to the spiritual life. Men must partake of it, or perish. When duly enlightened, they feel this to be their condition, and thirst for righteousness. Such an invitation as that of the text implies that the supply is large ; or it could not suffice for all. The provision of grace leaves nothing wanting, for the worst conceivable individual case, or for the utmost number of persons to be saved. We must be careful not to undervalue the remedial methods and so to limit the Holy One of Israel. In this case God has acted like himself, with a large and sublime munificence ; more striking even than in the wonderful arrangements of original creation and providence, because these do not contemplate a creature malignant and self-destroyed. If any one thing, even the slightest, had been left undone, which was necessary to the salvation of the sinner, the work would not have had this completeness. But all is furnished.

It need not be here made an affair of argument, that the great demand is for a righteousness for those who have none ; that mysterious and potent something, which shall heal the difference between heaven and earth, answer the claim of law, turn away the wrath of Jehovah, cleanse the guilt of sin, give a title to life, and afford a pledge of continuance in a holy state and of everlasting blessedness and perfection beyond the grave. The all-comprehending gift is the gift of God's own Son. " God

hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." The Incarnation, the obedience and the vicarious suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ, are the source of all the streams which here issue in such fulness. But the point where above all others the waters gush forth from the smitten rock is the Cross of our Redeemer. There, when his last cry of pain is over, and out of his side issue water and blood, we have the consummation of a gift to man, which is full beyond expression. Sinners by myriads may come in, and yet there is room. The invitation may be large, for the provision is vast. Not only is the springhead of these mercies great, but it cannot be greater. The consideration of this is very necessary for the steady confidence of our faith; and this is felt most deeply in hours when conviction of sin is peculiarly pungent. The righteousness of Christ is infinite. We are made just by this, and by nothing else. Now that which gives to this righteousness any merit, gives it all merit. The divinity of him who obeys and suffers, exalts the meritorious obedience and suffering to a maximum. Were all the sons and daughters of Adam, who have been, are, and shall be, to gather in one numberless mass, with the Cross for its centre and object of desire, there were enough for all. When Jesus bowed his head and gave up the ghost, he completed a sacrifice which is absolutely ilimitable. Yea, though all worlds were peopled with sinners, here were enough for all; we say not in God's purpose, nor in his covenant growing out of purpose,

nor in the actual application of redemption according to covenant, but in the value of the Atonement. If more were to be saved, it would need no more righteousness, and no more effusion of the sacred vital flood, although the contrary has been alleged as our belief. If this is not fulness of redemption, we must despair of communicating this idea by language. And yet we must proceed to add to this statement in a particular respect. The atonement might be complete, and yet not be effectual. In God's holy purpose, it needs to be applied. Some have represented the covenant of grace as simply placing man in "a salvable state." We go further than this. Man may be in a salvable state, yet never reach a state of salvation. The plan of God proposes to bring men actually into the kingdom. The invitation is to come to a provided fulness of effectual grace ; to faith and its consequences ; to perseverance in holiness and everlasting life. These waters break over the verge of their receptacle, and seem to fall like the inviting spray of a great fountain, holding out promise of infinite capacity beyond all that is seen. Till we can conceive of something greater than God, we need have no fear of trusting the whole weight of our salvation on the method which he has revealed ; for he has made it, so to speak, commensurate with himself ; by laying his very divinity in pledge, and causing the value of the salvation to repose on the eternal glories of his own nature.

II. The freeness of the offered gift awaits our notice.

This is implied by the strong terms of invitation, HO, EVERY ONE, COME YE ! It is still more clearly signified by the words immediately following, where the figure is slightly modified, though the general idea of THIRST remains prominent ; “ yea come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.” It is not to a purchase, but a gift. The gratuitousness of the communication could not be more strongly expressed. It is here held forth and proclaimed with divine earnestness, that he who comes to the salvation of the gospel, receives it without any offer of recompense or any worthiness on his own part. The fountain of life has indeed its price, a price which has been paid. It cost the agonies and death of the Son of God. To secure our salvation it was necessary that a struggle and a humiliation hitherto unknown in the universe should take place. The price has been laid down, for us, but not by us. Eternal justice has been satisfied on our behalf ; but to us the invitation is without money and without price.

The reiteration of this truth may strike some as needless. They are ready to exclaim, “ Who doubts that the gospel is free ? ” In reply we must observe, that while no truth is more affirmed in our creeds, none is more denied in our practice. It is hard to make men believe, that they may come to the Lord Jesus Christ gratuitously, that is without any previous condition. There are few believers who do not remember the moment when this unconditional freeness of the gospel

broke upon their minds as a great revelation. They had been lying long beside the pool of healing, waiting for some one to put them in. They thought there was a long and difficult preparation before they could venture to come to Christ. They interpreted the invitation as made to such and such persons, having particular qualities, and they were not sure that these qualities were in themselves. They could not approach the fountain because they did not feel enough ; they dared not believe, because they did not grieve enough. Or, in some of the endlessly shifting varieties of delusive experience, they were setting a price on pardon, and seeking to make up the amount ; they were working on their own hearts, to make them more fit for Christ ; they were essaying a half-way work, which, without erasing the word " grace " from the record, should leave to self some of the glory of preparation. And the moment when all this was swept away, is memorable in the believer's history. It is the moment which immediately precedes FAITH. Up to this instant, he has been trying earnestly to do something, which shall make him more fit to receive Christ. Now, he sees that the whole deed of righteousness is done already, that its full value is offered to him in the gospel, and that he is authorized to accept it.

But so subtle and protean is self-righteousness, that even the free words of the invitation may be distorted into a legal condition. " Every one that thirsteth." The busy demon at the ear, who dreads nothing so much

as that the sinner should believe, here whispers, ' But perhaps you do not thirst, or you do not thirst enough, or you do not thirst aright.' Such queries might indeed be urged forever, and run to an infinite series, if any sort or kind of preparatory condition were required. The question might still be, Do I possess this condition? And it is a question which can never be answered. We have known persons who were engaged during the entire course of their lives, in agitating the inquiry, whether they feel enough; whether they feel their need of Christ; whether they are not too unfeeling; whether they hate sin enough; whether they are sufficiently in earnest. All these are proper questions, *in relation to another matter*; but here they are out of place, and serve only to keep the sick away from the physician. These lingerings and scruples arise from a source, to which I beg your profoundest attention. They arise from founding hope on feelings of our own, instead of founding it on God's veracity. The truth of God's promise is the everlasting rock. Here build and be safe. All else, especially all within us, is a quicksand. The word of the Lord endureth forever. True faith utterly forgets itself, and credits the assurance of God's free pardon. It looks away from its own worthiness and its own unworthiness, and hears God saying " Ho!" " Come ye!" Come without money and without price! And it comes: without turning to the right hand or to the left. The question no longer is, What am I? but what is God? Is he true? Has he

spoken? It sets to its seal, that God is true. It acquiesces in a righteousness already finished. So it saves.

The doctrinal truth which lies at the basis of all these exercises is, that the procuring cause of our acceptance with God, is not any thing done by us, or in us, not any work, preparation, frame or feeling, but only the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The trumpet sounds thus, from over the fresh fountain, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life, FREELY." And the persuaded soul, now taught the great lesson of self-renunciation and self-forgetfulness, and swallowed up in admiration of the stupendous gift, falls into the open arms of dying Love.

When a wretch, just at the point of expiring with thirst, opens his lips to receive the cool reviving draught, does he think of this act of his, though voluntary, as constituting any previous claim? As little does the believer ascribe any meritorious virtue to his sinful believing, which is no more than his acquiescence in the method which God has provided. Thus unbounded is the freeness of the offer which is made of all evangelical blessings, including pardon, peace, and eternal life.

III. The universality of the offer is here: "Ho, every one that thirsteth." Salvation, or in other words, Christ the author of salvation, is offered to all nations of mankind. The topic is so large and inviting, that I must admonish myself to dispatch it in few words. Nothing is more familiar to us, nothing was more strange

to the ancients, than that the favour of God should be made coextensive with the world ; and while it was a stumbling-block to Judaism, it was the theme which, of all others, lifted Paul to the highest rapture, as apostle of the Gentiles. The middle wall of partition was broken down. The vail of the temple was rent. The waters of life, seen in vision by Ezekiel, broke over the Eastern threshold of the temple, and flowed in a mighty stream. Jesus offered himself a sacrifice not for Israel only, but for all nations. "He is the propitiation for our sins," said John, "and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." And coincident with this purpose was the great commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." It was foreseen by Isaiah, the evangelical prophet. In God's wonderful providence, grace had been limited to a chosen nation, but now the system was enlarged, so as to be a universal religion, and henceforth "God commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent." This blessed gospel is now on its triumphant progress through the earth, and the day is fixed in the counsels of heaven, when it shall be "made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." The gracious summons is to all realms and peoples.

The blessings of religion are hereby offered to men of every state, class and character. To be a human creature, and to hear the gospel, is to come within the comprehension of this grace. It proclaims its fulness and freeness to young and old, rich and poor, learned

and simple, high and low. It does not single out certain classes as those who may be saved, but declares that all may be saved, even as all who are athirst may drink. It does not indeed promise that men shall be saved in their sins, for the very salvation delivers from sin, and this water is in each who tastes it a well of water springing up to everlasting life, and manifesting its virtue by holiness of thought, affection, speech and work. But as to the prerequisite for accepting the offer, the Gospel does not demand holiness; this does not yet exist; it is to be produced; it is part of the benefit to be sought. No one should suppose himself excluded from the promise of free pardon and life, because of any thing in his condition or character. Provided he come as a sinner all athirst for pardon, and believes in Him who justifieth the ungodly, he is sure of welcome. And, as no man's proper name is in the grant, the only warrant which *any* has, is the promise which is made to *all*. The general invitation becomes particular, when it is appropriated by faith. In a mutinous army, if the commander or prince publishes an act of forgiveness and amnesty to all who are willing to receive it, the rebel who hears, believes and submits himself, makes the gratuity his own. Thousands hear the terms of the gospel, but do not accept them. But the reason why any one accepts and is saved, is not that the provision was not sufficient for all, or the proffer of life equally made to all, but simply that he, an undeserving wretch, yields to the moving of the gracious

Spirit, takes God at his word, and makes the universal offer his own particular salvation. To the very end of the present dispensation, the preaching of the gospel authorizes all sinners of mankind to come and be freed from sin.

More particularly, the salvation is free to the chief of sinners. This is necessary to its universality. If there were one degree of turpitude which was excepted from the general pardon, what sinful heart is there, which would not sometimes be tempted to think that degree its own? But there is none such. The infinite merit of Christ, which is the sole basis of the offer, proves that there is none such. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. He is able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him. There is no dye of guilt, which these waters do not cleanse. Considered in itself, there is no amount of iniquity which transcends the virtue of Christ's atoning sacrifice, or is beyond the reach of God's gracious invitation. The very murderous treachery of Judas might have been pardoned, nay would have been pardoned, on his faith and repentance. If there is a sin in our day which is unpardonable, it is such, not because the blood of Christ lacks efficacy, or because the promise of the gospel excludes it, but because such sin, by its very nature, rejects and despises the sacred blood and the gracious promise. Every one that thirsteth, though all crimes were accumulated and centred on his head, may approach and be made whole. There are moments of

conviction, in which you might attempt to convince the sufferer of any thing rather than that such sins as his can be forgiven. He admits that others may be saved ; but not himself. The Spirit of God, in foresight of such cases, converted Saul of Tarsus, and has left on record that golden passage, for all ages, which ends thus, "I am chief." It is a doctrine most important to be preached, and to be often reiterated, in the spirit of the text, lest any rebel, however atrocious, should fail to admit the glorious universality of the offer. Some of the most signal trophies of grace, in which sovereign power and love have shone in the brightest colours, have been men whose crimes seemed to outrage heaven ; but each of whom has learnt to cry with David, "Pardon mine iniquity, because it is great !"

The offer of life ought therefore to be considered by each individual hearer as addressed personally to himself. It is a counsel which applies to all divine communications made in the house of God ; but pre-eminently to this, which offers eternal good to all without exception who will receive it to their bosoms. The day and hour have come, in which, after such long delays, you may find in Jesus a merciful Saviour. The providence which has brought you hither, and the influence which has opened your ear to hearken, make the message as truly your own, as if the voice of God in distinct articulation uttered your individual name from heaven. Christ, with all his benefits, is yours, if, for-

saking all things else, you accept him as offered in this gospel. O be persuaded to bow the stubborn neck, and bring the long reluctant lips to these celestial waters !

And let me add a word to Christian believers, whether newly converted or far advanced in pilgrimage. To you also is the invitation given. This is not a well in the desert, of which you may only once taste and must then leave forever, but a river of life, at which you may perpetually slake your thirst. The Israelites all drank of that Spiritual Rock which followed them ; and that Rock was Christ. The current from the smitten rock pursued the journeyings of the camp. The unchanging Redeemer in his fulness is always beside you and within your reach. As ye have received the Lord Jesus, so walk ye in him. Come buy wine and milk, without money and without price. You may be already justified indeed ; but are there not a thousand wants within you which crave supply ? Has not your path been through a wearisome land, and are you not sensible of an inward thirst, which nothing but spiritual refreshment can assuage ? You need daily purifying ; you need daily increase of knowledge ; you need strength for the remaining journey, and healing for the fevered wounds of your conflict. Behold the boundless provision, and hearken to the liberal summons. Approach anew to Him who is the source of all your life, and who cries anew, " If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

Blessed be God—the source to which we are invited is a familiar fountain. In regard at least to our knowledge of it, it was the household-spring of our childhood; and it has been our cool resort from the arid journeys of our mature years. And though we have, days without number, forsaken the fountain of living water, and hewed us out cisterns, which can hold no water, yet are we not deeply convinced, beloved, that there is none so full, none so heavenly, none so free! Many a time have we gone to it, all parched with the ardours of our wearisome path, and found the Diffuser of gracious refreshment ready to take us back and satisfy us with his love. Again the sound of falling waters is in our ears. From the clefts of the saving Rock, the holy stream breaks forth in profusion. “The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”