

January 8.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."—Rom. xii. 1.

"THE *mercies of God*,"—it is by them that the Apostle beseeches us. Let us, then, if we would feel the force of his appeal, reflect what God's mercies have been, and now are, to us individually. *Mercies!*—surely all His dealings with us are mercies, for what have we deserved but *miseries* at His hand? "It is of the Lord's *mercies* that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." The word "mercy" speaks to us of our lost condition; it reminds us of the way in which God has provided salvation and life for poor sinners, even through His greatest gift of mercy, the gift of His own dear Son. And having once been made partakers of His grace, all God's ways with us are ways of mercy. Mercy pardons us, and mercy purifies; the Holy Spirit is sent down. "According to His *mercy* He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." And to those who are thus saved and washed, all God's gifts, from the promised gift of a mansion prepared in heaven, down to the present gifts of food and raiment here on earth, are mercies which call on us continually to present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God.

"Let us, with a gladsome mind,
Praise the Lord, for He is kind;
For His mercies shall endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure."

January 9.

"I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."—John xiv. 16, 17.

He who was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," knew the heart of man and the wants of man, when He promised a *Comforter*! The name speaks to the broken heart; it tells of sympathy, and of such a sympathy as can not only feel with, but effectually relieve and powerfully sustain the mourning spirit. This Comforter will *abide* for ever with those whom He comforts; this is Christ's own promise—why are Christians so slow to believe it, so doubtful that He can and will comfort His people even to the end? Is it not because there is so much of *the world* in them? He has told us that the world cannot receive this Spirit of Truth, this blessed Comforter; and in proportion to our freedom from the spirit of the world, will be our power to receive the Spirit of Christ into our heart.

"Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,
Bringing peace and bringing love,
Take me and possess me whole,
Form the Saviour in my soul.
"Be my true and constant guide,
In my fainting heart abide;
All the grace of God reveal,
And each precious promise seal."

January 10.

"He made the stars also."—Gen. i. 16.

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what
is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of
man, that thou visitest him?"—Ps. viii. 3, 4.

There is something truly sublime in the manner in which the sacred historian tells, in these few and simple words, of the creation of all those great and wonderful heavenly bodies that are so inconceivably beyond our earth in magnitude and splendour. Science has opened the eye of man to marvels which were never dreamed of in the days of Moses and of David; but *they* tell us what science could never have told of the Hand Divine that "made the stars also." Unaided by human philosophy, David could yet see mighty wonders in the midnight sky. When he considered the heavens in their glory and beauty, he saw the work of the finger of God; in their perfect regularity he saw that they were ordained by God; and the thought overwhelmed him with amazement when he remembered that such a God was mindful of man! He perceived something of that Infinite to which nothing is little, because nothing is too great. And, while gaining a new view of the great Creator's power, he saw something more than he had ever seen of the love of God to man. What is "the son of man that thou visitest him?"

"Thy gracious eye survey'd us

Ere stars were seen above.

In wisdom hast Thou made us,

And died for us in love!"

January 11.

"Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him."—Job xxiii. 8.

"Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." —Ps. cxii. 4.

The upright are, then, sometimes left in the darkness for a while. It is not always clear sunshine with their souls. Sometimes they cry out like Job in his bitter complaint, for they cannot find their Lord, nor trace His ways; yet Job had faith that it would all come right at last with him; "he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Ver. 10.) Thus he "trusted in the Lord when he could not trace him," and the faith of the patriarch, in those dim and ancient days, may well be an example and encouragement to many a Christian now, living under a clearer light, yet often falling under the shadow of as deep a darkness. He may trust that he shall not be always thus left; and, like Job, he may believe that, when the trial hath done its work, he shall come forth as gold. But let us not, by any carelessness or wilful neglect of our God, wander into this darkness of our own accord; we shall not, in that case, be able to plead this promise to "*the upright*;" nor do we know that, from such a self-imposed trial, we shall come forth as gold.

"But ah! my inward spirit cries,
Still bind me to Thy sway,
Else the next cloud that veils the skies
Drives all these thoughts away."

January 12.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."—Ps. xxiii. 1, 2.

What a lovely picture does this psalm present to us ! what a perfect image does it convey of the peace and security that the believer enjoys in his God! He knows *who* it is that takes care of him ; it is no earthly shepherd, but the Lord; therefore he may well say, "I shall not want," for the power and the love of the infinite God are on his side. We naturally connect this psalm with the words of our Saviour, (John x. 11,) "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Thus the gospel shews us *how* it is that the sheep are so blessed; their pastures are green, and they are led by still waters; their wandering souls are restored; and guilty as they were, they shall dwell in God's house for ever, even because their Shepherd, "the good Shepherd, giveth His life for the sheep." Let us cleave closely to Him; let us seek our pastures *from Him*; let us not be tempted astray by the world with its vanities, nor suppose that our souls can be nourished by any system of opinions or doctrines that *leaves Him out*.

“Shepherd of Thy little flock!
Lead me to the shadowing rock,
Where the richest pasture grows,
Where the living water flows.
By that pure and silent stream,
Shelter'd from the scorching beam,
Shepherd, Saviour, Guardian, Guide!
Keep me ever near Thy side.”

January 13.

"I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."—Deut. xviii. 18.

There could not have been a higher honour to Moses than to be thus told that the promised Messiah was to be a Prophet *like unto him*; but probably he had but a very dim idea of the glorious Saviour of whom he was the type. It is good to meditate on the way in which our Lord fulfilled all the various types by which He was in former days revealed, that we may see how in every part of His work for us "it pleased the Father that in Him all fulness should dwell." Thus He is now our only Prophet; He reveals to us by His Word and Spirit the will of God for our salvation, and to Him alone must we look. In Him is the fulfilment of the prophetic, as well as of the priestly and kingly dispensations; and He speaks to us not only in words written for our learning in the Scriptures, but in all those dealings of His providence which by His Holy Spirit are sanctified to our hearts. May I be found continually looking to Him, and saying, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

"His word of promise is my food,

His Spirit is my guide;

Thus daily is my strength renew'd,

And all my wants supplied."

January 14.

"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling
of God in Christ Jesus."—Phil. iii. 14.

It was not with the Apostle Paul a sudden effort, and then a pause—a fit of enthusiasm, and then a long reaction of indolence. His life, and heart, and soul were given to his Lord; and if there ever was in this world an earnest man it was he. Alas ! how much easier is it to be earnest in trifles than to attain so lofty an earnestness as his! I mourn when I think how diligent in business I have been over a thousand passing vanities, and how slow and lukewarm in the great concern. Oh for something of St Paul's spirit of zeal and ardour! Nay, rather let me pray that the Holy Spirit, given unto all who ask, would Himself animate my dull heart, and stir me up to follow St Paul, as he followed Christ. He drew supplies of grace from a Fountain that can never be exhausted, and is open to me as it was to him. Cease, then, my heart, to rest satisfied with admiring the progress of another, and *press on* for thyself, daily, hourly, till thou canst honestly say with this apostle, "*This one thing I do.*" *One thing!* He did many things for Christ; but it was through the might of single-heartedness. "*This one thing I do—I press toward the mark.*"

 "Still forget the things behind,
 Follow Christ in heart and mind;
Toward the mark unwearied press,
Seize the crown of righteousness."