

XII.

Of Things not Seen.

DECEMBER 30, 1855.

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true; and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly: Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”—REVELATION xxii.

THE chapter that we have just read would alone be sufficient to strengthen and rejoice our hearts if we could receive it with perfect simplicity of faith. If a man under the pressure of want were assured that tomorrow he would possess a fortune; if a man under the pressure of suffering were assured that to-morrow he would begin a life of ease; would they not find strength to wait a few hours, and would not hope shorten the time that intervened till the happy moment arrived? And if we, my friends, had that firm and simple faith, and a clear view of that eternal felicity described in such lovely and touching terms in the last chapter of the Revelations, should not we also say, Come, Lord Jesus? And should we not say it with perfect peace? What more do we require than what God has given us? Nothing, but what God can give us; simple faith in the things which are not seen. We live in time; but our great concern should be to live in eternity. We are constantly drawn towards what is visible; our great concern should be to be in communion with what is invisible. I say, that

alone is important; but it is a great thing, and requires an immense change. For that which constitutes sin is not only the ordinary forms of disobedience to the Divine law which prevail so commonly in the world; that which constitutes sin in a more subtle way, as its very root, is unbelief, and the seductive attraction of things visible. God being invisible, and the centre and soul of that which is invisible, the difficulty we find in fixing our thoughts upon what is not seen, arises from our being by nature at a distance from God. What characterises the Word of God is, that its life and action are centred in the things not seen; and this fact alone, for a man who reflects, is sufficient to prove its inspiration. It is not given to man, who by his fallen nature became a slave to things that are seen, to rise above them; that is to say, to shake off self sufficiently to rise up to the unseen, and speak from the midst of the invisible world as the Word of God does; as not only Jesus Christ the Son of man does, who is in heaven and speaks from heaven, but as do all those agents who are commissioned to transmit to us the Word of God, which being full of Jesus Christ speaks from heaven even though upon the earth, by that miracle of the grace of God that we call inspiration, and which constitutes the authority of His Word. O blessed Word of God! pure, holy, elevated above us and above the world, thou speakest to us of another world and from another world! How shall we be put in communication with things not seen? We all feel upon this point our need and our infirmity; but do we feel what would be our strength, our happiness, our peace, our joy, if we could, like the Word of God, like Jesus Christ, live and move in the atmosphere of things unseen; if we could, by the power of faith, be transported by anticipation into the presence of God and of the things of God, and see things as God sees them, measure them by His measure, appreciate them by His appreciation, and judge them as He judges them? We have just been told in His name, that “if we would judge ourselves we should not be judged.”

We learn from what we have just heard that the first means of entering into relation with things not seen, is to live with the Holy Scriptures, which are the Word of God, the testimony of God. By living with the Scriptures, I do not mean only reading them every day and accepting their testimony; I mean feeding upon them—seeking in them the bread of life come down from heaven—seeking in them the Lord Jesus Christ himself, that living bread which gives life to the world, whose body was broken for you, for me, for all of us, and receiving it by faith, especially in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which places Him as the object of our faith in such a lively way before us. We must feed upon the Word of God, my dear friends, we must live day and night with it. It must be for us what it was (to quote only one example) for the author of the 119th Psalm - of that psalm composed of 176 verses, in only two or three of which the Word of God is not mentioned by one of those innumerable names which the Psalmist gives it. Ah! let us live with the Word of God! Constantly surrounded by the atmosphere of the Scriptures! for it is the atmosphere of heaven and of God himself.

To be in communication with things not seen, we must pray without ceasing. But how pray? O my God, pray as if seeing Thee, speaking to Thee, listening

to Thee, answering Thee; as feeling Thy presence and delighting in Thy Word. And who can teach us to pray if it is not Thou, O God of prayer? O God! forgive the manner in which Thy Church prays, which alone in the world can pray; forgive the way in which we pray ourselves; forgive our languor, our hesitation, our unbelief, even in the least unfaithful, least unbelieving days of our Christian life—of our Christian ministry. O God! forgive the sins of our holy offerings! Ah! if we could at this moment overpass by prayer the distance that separates us from Thee; if we could pray as Jesus Christ prayed; as prayed a Moses—a Samuel—a David—a St. Paul—a St. John; if we could pray in a way that might be called prayer—that might be called prayer according to the expression of St. James speaking of Elias: “He prayed in praying!” Alas! how often we pray without praying. We have no idea of the unbelief of the deadness that often finds place in our prayers, because we do not live with invisible things; and we have no idea of the blessings of the graces of which we thus deprive ourselves. O my friends, let us constantly repeat this prayer, “Lord, teach us to pray!” When we know how to pray we shall know everything, and what is still better, we shall have everything. We shall not only know Jesus Christ, but what is still better, we shall possess Him; indeed, we can know Him only by possessing Him. It is in possessing Him that we can know Him, and in knowing Him that we can love Him, and that we can with Him triumph by faith over the things that are seen, and bruise Satan under our feet. May the God of Peace himself bruise Satan under our feet!

My dear friends, the things not seen—the things of the last chapter of the Revelations!—soon we shall all appear before God. This is true, not only of those who are expecting from day to day to be called away; who are more especially warned by the Lord to hold themselves in readiness, and who rejoice—oh! who long impatiently for the moment when Jesus shall say to them, Come; but it is equally true for all, since not one of us is sure of living till tonight. It is now, it is while you have the free use of all your faculties, that you must enter into communion with the things not seen, by the Word of God and by prayer. I speak of old things; but, alas! very new through our languor and unbelief! . . . Let us seek the things that are not seen. Seek God himself by Jesus Christ, who has opened the invisible world to us through the veil, that is to say, His body broken for us, and whose love and sorrows are the measure of the joy He has prepared for us! “Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”