

# The Thoughts of God

By John MacDuff, 1864

*"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with you." — Psalm 139:17-18*

The thoughts of a great man on earth how valued! With what feelings shall we ponder "the thoughts of God?" We treasure the thoughts of the wise and the good for their own sake, but how is their value enhanced when they are personal, and have a special reference to ourselves? These "Thoughts of God," are thoughts toward us. "I know the thoughts that I think towards you." "Your thoughts which are to us." "How precious also are Your thoughts unto me, O God."

We peruse with additional interest the Diary — the recorded thoughts — of those with whom, while living, we interchanged hallowed friendship, and whose regard and love we had been privileged to enjoy. In opening the Divine "Diary" — unfolding the Divine Thoughts as these are recorded in Sacred Scripture — we have the elevating assurance, "this Great Being loves me — pities me — carries me on His heart." If it be consoling to be much in the thoughts of a revered earthly friend, what must it be to occupy the thoughts of ONE, better than the best, more loving than the most loving human relative?

An earthly father writes his son in a distant land, 'You are never absent from my thoughts.' Such, too, is the comforting declaration of our Father in Heaven. The humblest and loneliest of His children on earth can say, "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon me."

In one sense we are everywhere surrounded with God's thoughts. The world of nature is a majestic volume of these. His sublime thoughts are the everlasting mountains — His lofty thoughts the

distant stars — His dreadful thoughts the lightning and tempest, the earthquake and volcano — His minute thoughts of discriminating care the tiny moss and lichen, the tender grass, the lily of the field, and pearly dewdrop — His loving thoughts, the blue sky, the quiet lake, the sunny glade, the budding blossoms and beautiful flowers — His joyful thoughts, the singing streams and sparkling waves — His unchanging thoughts, the rock in mid-ocean, on which the waves are in vain spending their fury.

But it is not in these mute, undefined, often mysterious symbols, that sinners, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, can discover the true Divine breathings and utterances of the very heart of a reconciled Father. "He has magnified His word above all His name." He "has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." It is in Christ that each thought of God becomes "precious," — a ministering angel of comfort and hope, a deep pool of unfathomable grace and love, reflecting the image and the peace of Heaven. Jesus is the true ladder of Jacob, upon which thoughts upon thoughts of unutterable tenderness flood down from the upper sanctuary. The Father is represented in an impressive figure as "wakening him morning by morning," — "wakening his ear to hear as the learned," — confiding to him one blessed thought after another, that he may speak them as "words in season to him that is weary."

And how precious are these thoughts of God! Well may He say regarding them, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts," — infinite, immutable, everlasting — a glorious chime carrying their echoes from eternity to eternity. We may try to form whatever estimate of them we may, they far transcend our loftiest imaginings. "Now," says the apostle, "unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think."

God loves and treasures even our poor thoughts of Him. "A book of remembrance was written for those

who feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name." Oh, how should we cherish and garner His ineffable thoughts towards us! — take them to solve our doubts, calm our fears, soothe our sorrows, hush our misgivings — it may be to smooth our sick-pillows or our death-pillows. These, like tremulous music in some hallowed, time-honored sanctuary, floating on the entranced ear, have fallen with their heavenly vibrations on many a downcast, mourning, troubled, pensive spirit, and woke it up to hope and confidence, peace and joy. This has been the experience of believers in every age — "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts [Your comforting thoughts] delight my soul."

With the devout Psalmist these 'thoughts' seem to have formed the theme of morning meditation — for he adds, in our motto-verse, "When I awake, I am still with you." "What is man," exclaims a saint of an older age still, "that You should magnify him? and that You should set Your heart upon him? and that You should visit him every morning?"

In this little volume of daily readings, we have been able only to make a brief selection from these "precious thoughts." "Many," truly, "O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done, and Your thoughts which are to us — they cannot be reckoned up in order unto You; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." But may these few sparks of living fire — a handful of burning coals taken from the holy altar — serve to kindle the fuel, or brighten the flame of the morning, or, it may be, evening sacrifice. Nothing surely can serve better to quicken faith and animate love — to mitigate grief and disarm temptation — to temper and moderate life's anxieties and engrossments — to sweeten our earthly joys — to hallow our earthly sorrows — to elevate and dignify our earthly pursuits, than to go forth to the world, climbing its mountains of toil, and descending its valleys of care, preoccupied and solemnized with A THOUGHT OF GOD!

"If we would let God's thoughts, as they are revealed in the Word, come in and fill the chambers of our minds, how different our views and feelings would be regarding both Him and ourselves. What an ado unbelief sometimes stirs up within us, as if all were over! What weeping and dirging as of minstrels waking the dead! Were God's thoughts to be let in, it would be like Jesus coming into the midst of the mourners and saying, 'Why make you this ado and weep?' As the minstrels and other mourners were put out of the house by Jesus, so must our thoughts be put out of our hearts by God's thoughts — then, all being still, the sweet voice of the Redeemer will be heard, 'Tabitha' — 'Arise.'" (Hewitson)

## **INFINITE CONDESCENSION**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"For thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." — Isaiah 57:15*

This verse may with reverence be termed, God's own description of His two dwelling-places. How amazing the contrast and disparity; inhabiting eternity, AND — the human bosom! The great of the earth associate with the great; kings have their abodes in palaces — one of God's palaces is the lowly heart. Inconceivable is the distance of those stars whose light takes millions of years in traveling to our earth; and yet what is this? A mere span, compared to the distance which separates the creature from the Creator. We are "but of yesterday." Our days are as an handbreadth — "as a dream when one awakens!"

Eternity is the lifetime — the biography of the Almighty — ages and eras the pages of the vast volume! If our distance from Him be great as creatures, it is greater still as sinners. Yet this high and lofty One, dwelling in the high and holy place, and whose name is Holy, condescends to be the inmate of the humble, contrite spirit, and to listen to its penitent sighs. Oh, unutterable, unimaginable stoop! The sovereign earthly king visiting the abode of poverty is earth's illustrative picture and symbol of condescension. Yet what, after all, is this, but one perishable mortal visiting another perishable mortal.

But here is Omnipotence dwelling with weakness, Majesty with nothingness, the Infinite with the finite, Deity with dust! How this "precious thought" ennobles, elevates, consecrates the human soul. That home of earth is ever afterwards rendered illustrious where royalty has sojourned. "If any man loves Me," says Jesus, "he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him."

What, O Lord, is man, that You are thus mindful of him — that You visit him? Prepare my heart for Your reception. Rend Your heavens and come down — fill its temple-courts with Your glory. May all its powers — sprinkled, like the sacred vessels of old, with the consecrating blood — be dedicated to Your service. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit — a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." Destroy every pedestal of pride. Make me humble — keep me humble. What have I to be proud of? Nothing. I am dependent continually on Your bounty. My existence — my health — my strength — my reason — are a loan from You the Great Proprietor, who can, in the twinkling of an eye, paralyze strength, dethrone reason, arrest the pulses of joyous life, and write upon all I have, "Ichabod, the glory has departed!"

Much more is this the case in spiritual things — a pensioner from hour to hour on redeeming grace and love — but for Jesus, I would be lost forever! It is

lying low at the foot of His cross that I can learn how the Greatest of all Beings can be the most condescending of all. "I cease to wonder at anything," said a believer, "after the discovery of God's love to me in Christ." "Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?"

## **EVERLASTING LOVE**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you."* — Jeremiah 31:3

Here we have an everlasting thought of God, "in the beginning, before ever the earth was." Believer, travel back in imagination to the ages of the past. Before the trance of eternity was broken by any visible manifestation of power — before one temple was erected in space, before one angel waved his wing, or one note was heard of seraph's song — when God inhabited alone these sublime solitudes — then there was a thought of you, and that thought was — Love!

Think of the sovereignty of that love. He says not, 'You have loved Me with your poor earthly love, therefore have I drawn you.' No, no! It is from nothing in you — no foreseen goodness on your part. Grace is the reason for all He has done — "God who is rich in mercy for His great love with which He loved us." "I will have mercy," is His own declaration — on whom I will have mercy." "Jacob," (that cunning, scheming, crafty youth) "I have loved."

Manasseh, (that miserable man who has defiled his crown, dishonored his throne, and deluged Jerusalem with blood) "I have loved." That dying thief — fresh

from a life of infamy, breathing out his blasphemies on a felon's cross — "I have loved." And why, let each of us ask, am I not a Cain or a Judas? Why am I not a wrecked and stranded vessel, like thousands before me? Here is the reason; "Yes, I have loved you." Before you had one thought of Me, yes, when your thoughts were those of hatred, rebellion, enmity — My thoughts towards you were thoughts of love!

And that Sovereign love, as it is from everlasting, so is it to everlasting — endless in duration — enduring as eternity. The love of the creature is but of yesterday — it may be gone tomorrow — dried like a summer-brook when most needed. But the love of God is fed from the glacier summits — the everlasting hills. We may estimate its intensity, when the Savior could utter regarding it such a prayer as this, "That the love with which You have loved Me, may be in them."

Oh, amid the often misgivings of my own doubting heart, with its frames and feelings vacillating as the shifting sand, let me delight to ponder this precious thought — the long line of unbroken love — every link love — connecting the eternity that is past with the eternity to come — God thinking of me before the birth of time — even then mapping out all my future happiness and heavenly bliss — and standing now, with the hoarded love of that eternity in His heart, seeking therewith to "draw" me!

It is "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus" — the moral gravitation-power of the cross, by which His true people have ever been drawn. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." Draw me, Lord, and I will run after You. Show me Your loving-kindness thus enshrined and manifested in Your dear Son. Constrain me to love You in Him, because You have first loved, and so loved, me. "How priceless is Your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of Your wings."

## A DIVINE CHALLENGE

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"Thus says the LORD; If you can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers." — Jeremiah 33:20-21*

It is remarkable how often God's revealed thoughts have for their theme the immutability of His covenant; as if the contemplation of His own inviolable faithfulness formed the mightiest of all topics of comfort and consolation for His believing people. Here He makes a solemn appeal to the constancy of the natural world, as a pledge and guarantee of His unchanging fidelity in spiritual things. Nothing seems so undeviating as the succession of day and night — the revolution of the seasons. The sun sinking at eventide in the golden west, and rising again like a giant refreshed. "While the earth remains," said the Great Creator over His own world, as it emerged of old from the waters of the Deluge, "seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

In our motto-verse, using human language as a vehicle of Divine thought, He makes the challenge — 'If you can forbid that sun to rise — if you can put drags on his burning chariot wheels, and prevent him from setting — if you can forbid the moon to hang her silver lamp from the vault of night, or pluck the stars from their silent thrones — if you can transpose summer's heat and winter's cold — if you can make seed-time belie its promise to expecting autumn — then, but not until then, shall I break My covenant with My chosen servants.' "Just as the heavens

cannot be measured and the foundation of the earth cannot be explored, so I will not consider casting them away forever for their sins. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

It is delightful thus to look around us on the steadfast and unvarying sequences in the material universe, and to regard them as sacraments of grace — silent witnesses for the inviolability of God's word and promise. Nature, in her majestic constancy, becomes a temple filled with monuments, each bearing the inscription — "God who cannot lie." The God of nature and the God of grace are one — and He who for the last six thousand years has given such proof of unswerving faithfulness in the one economy — (for "they continue this day according to Your ordinances") — will be equally faithful in fulfilling the more permanent provisions of the other. "Look up to the skies above, and gaze down on the earth beneath. For the skies will disappear like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a piece of clothing. The people of the earth will die like flies, but My salvation lasts forever. My righteous rule will never end!"

It is an "everlasting covenant, well ordered in all things, and sure." How can it be otherwise, seeing it is founded on the work and righteousness of Jehovah-Jesus, Immanuel — God with us. Before one provision of that covenant can fail, immutability must first become mutable, and God Himself cease to be God! Standing on this "sure foundation," we can boldly utter the challenge — "Who is he who condemns?" — not God the Father, for "He has justified;" — not Christ, for "He has died;" — not angels in the heights above, not devils in the depths beneath.

Universal nature, in the ceaseless hymn of her own constancy, proclaims and celebrates our covenant security and safety. Her four great evangelists, Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, endorse the utterances of the inspired volume. In the mouth of the two witnesses — "Day and Night," every word is established. Thus, with reference not only to the glory

and wisdom and power of God, but to His purpose and promise of salvation for His people, "Day unto day utters speech; and night unto night shows knowledge." "But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations."

## **THE THOUGHT OF THOUGHTS**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." — John 3:16*

Here is what Cyprian calls "an ocean of thought in a drop of language." Who can sound the depths of this "thought of God?" It will form the theme and the mystery of eternity. Manifold other and glorious are His thoughts regarding His people. But this is the center and focus of all — around which all the others constellate. It is the jewel of which all the others are the setting — the thought of thoughts — the gift of gifts. We may well say, "How precious!"

There is no measuring that love; it defies all human computation. Christ Himself, in speaking of it, can only intimate its indescribability. He puts the plumb line into the hand, but He does not attempt to gauge or fathom — all He can say of the precious thought and the precious love is, "God so loved!" And His redeemed Church in Heaven will forever stoop over the edge of the precipice and exclaim, in the contemplation of the profound abyss, "Your thoughts are very deep."

Think of that love in the past — a love so great as to put into the lips of the Eternal Father the mysterious summons, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd,

and against the Man who is My Fellow — smite the Shepherd!" The same Almighty Being is represented elsewhere as looking around — scanning and surveying the needs of a doomed and dying world: "I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold — therefore My own arm brought salvation unto Me." The alternative, "condemn — or not condemn," was before the Infinite mind. BUT "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it."

Think of that love when it culminated thus in its triumph on the cross. When God's "precious thoughts," had their awful exponent and interpreter in "the precious blood of Christ." Think of that moment when Infinite paternal love laid His Isaac on the altar, and the unsheathed sword descended on the priceless Sacrifice! Think of it, too, as a love evoked by rebels — a love manifested towards the guilty and undeserving. History's noblest deed and record of love is in the self devotion of one generous heathen, Pylades, who forfeited his life to save his friend — but "God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!"

"You have not yet seen," says a great writer and profound thinker, "the greatest gift of all — the HEART of God, the love of His heart — the heart of His love. And will He, in very deed, show us that? Yes, unveil that cross, and see! It was His only mode of showing us His heart. It is Infinite Love laboring to reveal itself — agonizing to utter the fullness of infinite love. Apart from that act, a boundless ocean of love would have remained forever shut up and concealed in the heart of God. But now it has found an ocean-channel. Beyond this He cannot go. Once and forever the proof has been given — God is love."

"My thoughts are completely different from yours," says the Lord. "And My ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts."

## TENDER REMONSTRANCE

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"Why say you, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Have you not known? have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding." — Isaiah 40:27-28*

Here is a thought of desponding man, in contrast with a "thought of God." No, not only so; it is an ungrateful thought of God's own people. It is "Jacob," — "Israel," — who are guilty of these unworthy complainings. They question the rectitude of His dispensations. "Surely," is the language of their doubting hearts, He cannot be cognizant of our situation — our trials — our temptations — our perplexities — otherwise He would long before now have come to our relief — "Surely the Lord does not see my troubles, and God refuses to hear my case."

So thought Gideon in his hour of faithless despondency, when Israel had been ground down for seven years by the oppression of the Midianites — "If the Lord is with us, why then is all this befallen us?" So thought David, in the wilds of Gilead, when, a broken-hearted exile, he repeated through his anguished tears the challenge of his enemies, who continually said unto him, "Where is your God?" So thought Asaph in his moments of guilty unbelief, when he saw the wicked prospering and the righteous suffering. Misjudging and misinterpreting the divine procedure, "his steps had well-near slipped;" he "remembered God and was troubled;" and amid the misery of unbelieving thoughts, exclaimed, "Has God

forgotten to be gracious? has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?"

So thought Martha and Mary in the extremity of their grief, after they had sent prayer and messenger in vain, and were still left unsupported in their agony. They had ever fondly trusted that mighty Heart of divine tenderness. But how could they trust it now, in these mysterious moments of blank despair? If He had indeed 'loved' them and their lost one, why could Jesus, "abide two days still in the same place where He was?" Could there be kindness — could there be anything but forgetfulness in this strange prolonged absence? Surely, was their hasty, unworthy surmise — 'our way is hidden from Him, He has passed over and overlooked our case and our cause!' No, O desponding ones! "My thoughts are not your thoughts." "I am the Lord; I change not." You have fainted and grown weary of Me; but I, the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth — have not fainted, and never can faint or grow weary of you!

Go, Gideon, on your *deliverance mission*, trusting in My sure word; and out of weakness you shall be made strong, become valiant in fight, and turn to flight the armies of your enemy. Go, fainting pilgrim of Gilead, take down your harp from the willows — sing the Lord's song even in that strange land, for He will soon turn for you your mourning into dancing — take off your sackcloth, and gird you with gladness.

Go, mourning psalmist of the olden temple, "call to remembrance your song in the night," "commune with your own heart," and thus rebuke your peevish murmurings, "This is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."

Go, mourning sisters of Bethany, go forth to meet the lingering steps of 'the Brother born for adversity.' Dry these unkind, distrustful tears. There are wise, though yet undeveloped reasons, which both you and the Church will yet learn to appreciate, for these two

long days of unsupported sorrow. Imagine anything but this — "Your God has forsaken you, and your Lord has forgotten you!"

Believer, trust the divine faithfulness in the dark — trust where sight and sense fail to trace. Think especially of the mighty God, yet Brother-man, who has left this last promise legacy — "Surely, I am with you always." He ever lives and ever loves — the true Moses on the mount, whose hands never grow heavy. Oh, amid the fainting and failing of what may be dearest to you in earthly love; be this your sublime solace amid all trials and all changes — "He faints not, neither is weary." "You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in You, whose thoughts are fixed on You!"

## **PATERNAL PITY**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them that fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." — Psalm 103:13-14*

What feelings on earth are to be compared, in depth and intensity, to those that link a parent to his offspring? Has some member of his family been unjustly wronged? Many a man would willingly submit to unmerited injury and ridicule — bear in silence the tongue of calumny and slander — receive in silence the arrows of unkindness, who could not rest thus unmoved under the affront or stigma attempted to be fastened on his child.

Or does the parent see his child in suffering? He could himself bear pain with comparative composure; but when he sees slow, torturing disease ploughing its furrows on the young cheek, and dimming the luster of the young eye, the iron enters into his soul; he would gladly even risk his own life were that of his

loved one endangered. Many a father has stood by an early grave, and said, through anguished tears, "I wish I could have died rather than you!" Behold, in the loving, pitying thoughts and tender pitying deeds of the earthly parent, a picture and symbol, O believer, of God's thoughts and God's love to you. No, more — He identifies Himself with the sufferings and wrongs of His children. Injure them, and you injure Him. He who touches them touches the apple of His eye. He says, as David said to Abiathar, "Abide with me, for he who seeks your life, seeks my life — but with me you shall be in safeguard."

When and where does this pitying love of God begin? "And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him!" God's thoughts of pity were upon us when we had not thought of pity on ourselves. And at this hour, too, is He pitying us — in our weakness, our sorrows, our temptations, our difficulties, our perplexities. Many an earthly father can make only a little allowance for the weakness and feebleness of his offspring. Not so our heavenly Father. "He remembers that we are but dust." When Job was greatly perplexed and downcast by the bitter reflections of his adversaries, this was his comfort — "But He knows the way that I take."

See how these same thoughts of pitying love, like the ivy clasping the battered ruin, cling even round His wayward, backsliding children — "Is not Israel still My son, My darling child? I had to punish him, but I still love him. I long for him and surely will have mercy on him." Oh, blessed assurance, this great Being loves me, pities me — pities me and loves me even in the midst of my truant forgetfulness, ungrateful wandering — and continues to call me His "darling child." I have in Him a love in which fatherhood, brotherhood, sisterhood, are all combined!

Arise, go to your Father! He is waiting and willing to welcome you to His embrace. He asks elsewhere, in a passage which touchingly describes His thoughts (His loving, paternal thoughts) at work — "How shall I put you among the children?" The gospel plan of

salvation has answered that question — solved that Divine problem of parental love. Jesus has opened a way of access to the heavenly household — and made us heirs to all these precious thoughts of a Father's heart. Seated under Calvary's cross, we can exclaim in grateful transport — "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

### **COMFORT FOR THE BEREAVED**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners."— Isaiah 57:18*

We have here the utterance of God's thoughts to the bereft mourner. He who looked down of old on bondaged Israel, and thus unlocked the thoughts of His heart, "I know their sorrows" — He who, in a later age, watched from the mountainside the frail bark tossed in the midst of Tiberias, and hastened to the rescue of faithless disciples — says to each poor afflicted one, 'My thoughts are upon you. I have appointed your trial. I have decreed that early, or that unlooked-for grave. Let faith trust Me in this dark hour, when fainting human nature may fail to comprehend the mystery of My dealings.'

The successive clauses of this verse form a beautiful gradation. God "sees," He "heals," He "leads," He "comforts!"

God SEES. He knows all my case, my character, my circumstances. He alone can judge as to the "needs-be" of trial. He has some wise reason for His discipline.

God HEALS. He comes with the balm of His own heavenly consolation. When the wave of sorrow has answered the end for which it was sent, He says, "Thus far shall you go, and no farther!"

God LEADS. He does not inflict the heavy blow, and then forsake. He does not leave the shorn lamb to the un-tempered winds of trial. "The Lord shall guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought" — guidance and provision, the two pilgrim necessities — and that, too, "in drought," — when the world's provisions fail!

God COMFORTS. The mother's love for her child is manifested, not at the moment only when it receives some severe injury, but in the subsequent nights of patient, tender care, and unwearying watchfulness. "As one whom his mother comforts, so," says God, "will I comfort you!"

In the hour of sorrowing bereavement many a precious revelation is made of a before unknown or hidden God. In wrestling like Jacob with the covenant Angel, the soul is often brought to feel for the first time, in that struggle-hour, His touch — the consciousness of a Presence, before dimly recognized, is now felt. Like 'Israel,' we may go 'halting' to our graves. But the place of affliction is called by us to the last "Peniel;" for there "we saw God face to face;" and from that hour we have journeyed on, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

Let us cleave to this thought of sustaining comfort. Other thoughts of other hearts may have perished. Others that used to think of us, and to interchange thoughts with us, may now only greet us with mute smiles from their portraits on the wall. The parent's arms that comforted us may be moldering in the dust. The brook that once sang along its joyous music may be silent and still — we gaze upon a dry and waterless channel. But 'Jehovah lives!' Towards the mourner there is ONE heart ever throbbing with thoughts of unalterable love. Weeping one! you can say, in the midst even of intensest loneliness, and

through anguished tears, "As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord is thinking about me right now. You are my Helper and my Savior. Do not delay, O my God."

## **A GRACIOUS PARDON**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember your sins."*  
— Isaiah 43:25

"I — yes, I alone" — the Great, the Pure, the Holy, the Righteous God! Surely if there be one way more than another, in which God's thoughts are not as man's thoughts, it is this — pardoning the rebel, welcoming the undeserving, forgiving and forgetting. How we remember the sins and the failings of others. How we harbor the recollection of ingratitude or unkindness. We say, "I forgive, but I cannot forget." God does both. Forgiveness is with Him no effort; it is a delight — "The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake."

"I — yes, I alone" — the God who for weeks and months, and, it may be, for years, we have been wearying with our iniquities, whose Book of Remembrance is crowded with the record of our guilt — "I — yes, I alone" — the very Being who has registered that guilt, is ready to take the recording pen and erase the pages thus blotted with transgression!

How can He thus forgive? How can the God who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, cancel the handwriting that is against us in these volumes of transgression, so that they are remembered no more? It is through the atoning work of Jesus. "The Son of

man has power to forgive sins." He shed His precious blood that He might have a right to say, "Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you." What a complete erasure! Crimson sins, scarlet sins; sins against grace, love, warning, and privilege — see them all cast into the depths of the sea, never again to be washed on shore!

"Whatever our guiltiness is," says Rutherford, "yet when it falls into the sea of God's mercy, it is but like a drop of blood fallen into the great ocean." "The ancients said there was nothing so pure as snow. But we know of something purer, a human soul washed in the blood of Christ."

What is the impelling MOTIVE with God in so wondrous a forgiveness as this? It is, it can be, nothing He sees in us. No repentance, however sincere; no good works, however imposing or splendid. It is His own free sovereign grace! "For My own sake!" "Thus says the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel; but for My holy Name's sake." If He had meted out retribution in proportion to our deserts, His thoughts towards us must have been of evil, not of peace — our blood would, long before now, have been mingled with our sacrifices. But He is God, and not man. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed." "O Israel you have destroyed yourself, but in Me is your help found."

Most wondrous chapter in the volume of God's thoughts! — His full, free, unconditional, everlasting forgiveness of the guilty and undeserving. All the most gigantic thoughts of man look poor and shabby after this. God, the just God, yet the Savior — just, in justifying the ungodly.

Lord! I accept the gracious overture of pardon. I joyfully repose on this thought of Your forgiving mercy. "My debt is very great, neither can I pay anything thereof myself. But I trust in the riches and benignity of my Surety. Let Him free me, who became surety for me; who has taken my debt upon Himself."

(John Gerhard) Yes, He has taken my debt! Think of God, not only willing to blot out and bury in oblivion a guilty past — but hear Him giving the assurance that the legion-sins are already cancelled. The debt has been discharged — the wages paid. He makes it an argument for immediate return and acceptance, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins; return unto Me; for I have redeemed you." "What can we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?"

### **ALMIGHTY GUIDANCE**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go: I will guide you with mine eye." —  
Psalm 32:8*

No more precious assurance can I have, than this — that I am under the constant, loving guidance of my heavenly Father — that He appoints the bounds of my habitation, and overrules all events for my good — that my whole life is a plan arranged by Him. Every little apparent contingency, as well as every momentous turn and crisis-hour, forms part of that plan — a 'thought of God.' "God examines every path a man takes." "A man's heart devises his way, but the Lord directs his steps."

"I will instruct you and teach you." How patiently does this almighty Preceptor train, and with what infinite wisdom and tenderness does He adapt His varied teachings to the needs and requirements of His people! It is "line upon line;" — or if need be, cross upon cross — trial upon trial. Or it may be that startling providences are no longer required — the gentle indications of His will are enough — "I will

guide you with My eye." The earthquake — the hurricane — the wind — the fire, may now have fulfilled their mission. "The still, small voice" is now sufficient.

And how does He promise to teach and to guide? Not in the way that we would like to go — the way of our own choosing, but "the way which you shall go." Often we would decide on pursuing the sunny highway. But God says, 'the rough mountain-track is best for you.' Often we would, like Israel, take the near and smooth road to Canaan by the land of the Philistines. But God's pillar-cloud decides otherwise, and takes us by a circuitous route "by the way of the wilderness." Often we would prefer, like the disciples at Tiberias, the safe path by the seashore, so as to avoid the gathering storm, "for the wind is contrary." But God says, "No." He constrains us to get into the ship.

It is not for us to question His plans. He led His people of old — He leads them still — by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. There is a day coming when, in the words of Augustine, "both vessel and cargo safe, and not a hair of our heads hurt, we reach the haven of our desire," we shall own the wisdom of every earthly lesson, the "needs-be" of every wave in the troubled sea.

The gardener has occasionally to subject his plants to apparently rough usage — cutting, lopping, mutilating; reducing them to unsightly shapes before they burst into flower. Summer, however, before long, vindicates the wisdom of his treatment, in its clusters of varied fragrance and beauty. So also, at times, does our heavenly Gardener see fit to use His pruning-knife. But be assured there is not one superfluous or redundant lopping. We shall understand and acknowledge an infinitely wise necessity for all, when the plant has unfolded itself into the full flower, bathed in the tints and diffusing the fragrance of Heaven.

Believer, go up and on your way, rejoicing in the teaching and guidance of unerring Wisdom — "I will guide you with My eye." The sleepless eye of Israel's un-slumbering Shepherd is upon you by day and by night — in sickness and in health — in joy and in sorrow — in life and in death. "Does not He who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not He who guards your life know it?" "But the Lord watches over those who fear Him, those who rely on His unfailing love."

### **HELP FOR THE FEEBLE**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel; I will help you, says the LORD, and your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."* — Isaiah 41:14

"Worm Jacob!" What weakness, insignificance, unworthiness! Yet it is this helpless, groveling "worm," that occupies 'the thoughts of God' — receives His sympathy, and has the assurance of His almighty aid.

Believer, beaten down it may be with a great fight of affliction, or trembling under a sense of your unworthiness and guilt — mourning the coldness of your faith, the lukewarmness of your love, the frequency of your backslidings, the fitfulness of your best purposes, and the feebleness of your best services — your God draws near to you — He remembers that though you are a worm, still you are "worm Jacob," — His own beloved, covenant one; and He tells that the thoughts which He thinks towards you, are "thoughts of peace, and not of evil."

Mark His message of comfort, "Do not be afraid." His promise, "I will help you." The guarantee which He gives for the fulfillment of that promise, it is His own

great name; "says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." "By whom shall Jacob arise?" says the prophet Amos, "for he is small." We have here an answer. He shall rise by the might of His covenant God — the God who has given JESUS as a pledge for the bestowment of all other blessings. "I Myself will help you!" Yes, poor, weak, trembling one, "Jehovah" — "your Redeemer" — "the Holy One of Israel" — in other words, Omnipotence, Love, Righteousness, are embarked on your side, and pledged for your salvation.

He loves to draw near to His people in the extremity of their weakness. "He will not break the bruised reed, He will not quench the smoking flax." Man would do so. Man would often crush the writhing worm under his feet — bid the trembling penitent away; but He whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, says, "Neither do I condemn you." "He shall deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him that has no helper." "All you descendants of Jacob, honor Him! Revere Him, all you descendants of Israel! For He has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; He has not hidden His face from him but has listened to his cry for help." Listen to the testimony of one such lowly suppliant — "I called upon Your name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. You drew near in the day that I called upon You — You said, Fear not."

Seek to be humble. It is to the humble God 'gives grace.' He perfects strength in weakness. "When the high cedars," says Philip Henry, "tumble down, the shrubs are safe." "When I am weak," says the great apostle, "then am I strong." Worm Jacob, the halting cripple of Peniel, was made strong in the moment of his apparent weakness. He received a new name — "as a prince, he had power with God, and prevailed."

Be it mine to go in the strength of the Lord God. "I will help you," is enough for all the emergencies of the present, and all the contingencies of an untried, and, it may be, a dark future. "But happy are those

who have the God of Israel as their helper, whose hope is in the Lord their God."

## **SOVEREIGNTY**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things."—  
Isaiah 45:7*

What a sad world this would be, were it governed by Fate. Were its blended lights and shadows, its joys and sorrows, the result of capricious accident — blind and wayward chance! How blessed to think that each separate occurrence that befalls me is "a thought of God" — the fulfillment of His own immutable purpose.

Is it the outer material world? It is He who "forms the light and creates darkness" — who appoints the sun and moon for their seasons — who gives to the sea its decree — who watches the sparrow in its fall — who tends the lily in the field — and who paints the tiniest flower that blossoms in the meadow.

Is it the moral world? All events are predetermined and prearranged by Him. It is He who makes peace and creates evil. Prosperity and adversity are His appointment. The Lord who of old prepared Jonah's shade-plant, prepared also the worm. He gives and He takes away. He molds every tear. He "puts them into His bottle." He knows them all, counts them all, treasures them all. Not one of them falls unbidden — unnoted.

"The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Over every occurrence in nature and in providence He writes, "I the Lord do all these things." True, His thoughts are often

mysterious, His ways past finding out. We are led at times, amid the bewildering mazes of His providential dealings, to exclaim, "O Lord, how great are Your works, and Your thoughts are very deep!" Be it ours to defer our verdict until their full development. We cannot envision the thoughts and intents of the architect or engineer in the first clearing of the ground for the foundation of some gigantic structure. The uninitiated eye can discover nothing but deep unsightly scars, or piles of unshapely rubbish — a chaos of confusion. But gradually, as week by week passes, we see his thoughts molding themselves into visible and substantial shapes of order and beauty; and when the edifice at last stands before us complete, we discern that all which was mystery and confusion at first, was a necessary part and portion of the undertaking.

So is it, at present, regarding "the thoughts of God." Often, in vain, do we try to comprehend the purposes of the Almighty Architect amid the dust and debris of the earthly foundations. Let us wait patiently until we gaze on the finished structure of eternity.

Oh, blessed assurance — 'precious thought' of God — that the loom of life is in the hands of the Great Designer — that it is He who is interweaving the threads of existence, the light and the dark, the acknowledged good and the apparent evil. The chain of what is erroneously called "destiny," is in His keeping. He knows its every connecting link — He has forged these on His own anvil. Man's purposes have failed, and are ever liable to fail — his brightest anticipations may be thwarted; his best-laid schemes may be frustrated.

Life is often a retrospect of crushed hopes — the bright rainbow-hues of morning, passing in its afternoon into damp mist and drizzling rain. "Many are the thoughts in a man's heart," (knowing no fulfillment nor fruition) "but the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." "From eternity to eternity I am God. No one can oppose what I do. No one can reverse My actions."

## **DIVINE JOY**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"The LORD your God in the midst of you is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over you with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over you with singing."—  
Zephaniah 3:17*

Wondrous 'thought of God!' — God resting in His love — His love not for un-sinning angels, but for fallen, redeemed man! The idea is, the joy and satisfaction of one reposing after the completion of some arduous work. God rested at creation — He rejoiced with joy over a new-born world. But this was a feeble type of His complacent rest and rejoicing over the new-born ransomed soul.

There is a beautiful sequence in the verse. It rises to a climax. First, God "saves." Then He "rejoices." Then He "rests" (the contemplative rest of joy). Then, as if this were not enough, He rejoices over His people "with singing." Like an earthly warrior — first, the victory; then, the shout of joy; then the calm survey of the field of conquest; then the hymn of triumph.

He "rests in His love!" With God, love is a disposition. People may, from impulse, perform an act of love. Momentary feeling and emotion, even in the case of a naturally unloving heart, may prompt to some deed of generosity and kindness. But God's nature and His name being love, with Him there can be nothing fitful, arbitrary, capricious. His love is no way-ward, inconstant stream; but a deep, quiet, everflowing, overflowing river.

A word or a look, may alienate and estrange your best earthly friend. But the Friend of friends is immutable. Oh, how intense must that love be for the

guilty and the lost which is thus spoken of by the lips of Divine filial love — "therefore," says Jesus, "does My Father love Me, because I lay down My life for the sheep."

"He will rejoice over you with singing." "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." The returning prodigal is met, not only with the tear and the grasp of parental forgiveness; but high festival is kept within these paternal halls — "It is fit that we should make merry and be glad." The gladdest countenance in that scene of joy is not that of the haggard wanderer, but that of the rejoicing father, exulting over his "lost and found."

"There is joy in Heaven among the angels of God over one sinner that repents" — but it is a joy which, though spreading through the concentric ranks, and reaching to the very circumference of glory, is deepest in the center. It begins at the throne — the keynote of that song is struck by God Himself! So also in the parable of the lost sheep. See how Christ speaks, as if He had all the joy to Himself of that wanderer's return; "He lays it on his shoulders rejoicing," and says, "Rejoice with me!" The joy of His people is part of His own — "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

"God is in the midst of you;" "He is mighty;" "He will save." What more does any poor sinner need than this — a present God, a mighty God, a Savior God? Able to save, willing to save — *even more* — delighting to save. "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him." "Since you are precious and honored in My sight, and because I love you."

**SUFFICIENT GRACE**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."* — 2 Corinthians 12:9

The apostle's 'thoughts' were desponding ones, when his God whispered in his ear this precious thought of comfort. A thorn in the flesh — a messenger from Satan — had been sent to buffet him. We know not specially what this thorn may have been. It is purposely left indeterminate, that each may make an individual application to his own case and circumstances.

But who, in their diversified and chequered experience, has not to tell of some similar trial? — some dead fly in life's otherwise fragrant ointment — some sorrow which casts a softened shadow over perhaps an otherwise sunny path? Infirm health, worldly loss, domestic anxiety, family bereavement, the discharge of arduous and painful duty, the treachery of tried and trusted friends, the sting of wounded pride or disappointed ambition, the fierce struggle with inward corruption and un-mortified sin, the scorpion-dart of a violated and accusing conscience; the world all the time, perhaps little knowing or dreaming of the inward conflict, the life-long trial, the fountain of tears, though "a fountain sealed."

As the apostle earnestly entreated that his thorn might be taken away, so may you, reader, also have prayed fervently and long, that your trial might be averted, your sorrow mitigated, if not removed; and you doubtless imagine that it would be far better, were this messenger of Satan, this spirit of evil exorcized and cast out. But here again, God's thoughts are often not our thoughts. What was the answer to the apostle's earnest petition when "three times he pleaded with the Lord to take it away." It was not granting the removal of the trial — but it was better. It was the promise of grace to bear it. "And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for you." It

was enough; he asked no more. He may have demurred at first to the strange answer — so unlike what he expected, so unlike what he wished. But he was led before long, not only joyfully to acquiesce, but heartily to own and acknowledge the higher and better wisdom of the Divine procedure — "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

This, too, may be God's dealings with you. Often and again, it may be, have you taken your hidden sorrow — the burdening secret of your heart — laid it on the mercy-seat, and with importunate tears implored that it might be taken away. Yet the sorrow still remains! But, nevertheless, remember, the prayer is not unanswered. It has been answered — not perhaps according to your thoughts or desires, but according to the better thoughts and purposes of your heavenly Father.

The thorn is still left to pierce and lacerate; but strength has been given to bear it. The trial, be what it may, has taught you, as it did Paul, the lesson of your own weakness and your dependence on Divine aid. It has been a needful drag on your chariot wheels — a needful clipping of your wings — lest, like the great apostle, "you should be exalted above measure." Who can complain of the heaviest of sorrows if they have thus been the means alike of discovering to us our own weakness, and of endearing to us the all-sufficient grace of a Savior God?

Blessed, comforting assurance — "in all time of our need," that God will deal out the requisite grace. Seated by us like a physician, with His hand on our pulse, He will watch our weakness, and accommodate the supply to our several needs and circumstances. He will not allow the thorn to pierce too far — He will not allow the temptation to go beyond what we are able to endure. "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation." "As your day is so shall your strength be."

Grace "sufficient" will be given — sufficient for every emergency. His arms are ever lower than our troubles. I will go forth bearing my cross, fortified with the assurance, and breathing the prayer, "Your God has commanded your strength. Strengthen O God, that which you have wrought for us." "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with My victorious right hand."

## **COVENANT FAITHFULNESS**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the LORD that has mercy on you." — Isaiah 54:10*

The mountains are the most stable objects in the material world — nature's noblest emblem of immutability. But these have "change" written upon their stupendous brows. Time is furrowing them with wrinkles — wearing down their colossal forms. Atmospheric influences are subjecting them to continual waste and decay. The snowy-crowned Alp is included in the doom, "All these things shall be dissolved." But, more enduring than mountains of primeval granite is God's kindness. Whatever is dearest to us may change — and sooner or later must perish. The gourd we have lovingly nurtured and tended may wither, like Jonah's, just when most needed. The gold we have taken a life-time to amass, may be forfeited by one adverse turn of capricious fortune. The brook which for long years has sung its joyful way at our side, may be dried in its channel. The "staff and beautiful rod" which blossomed in our household may be broken, and strewed in withered

leaves at our feet. The cistern — hewn with such pains — may be fractured by a stroke of the chisel while hewing it, and lie scattered on the ground in fragments of shapeless ruin.

But God's love is immutable and immovable! Mark the succession of golden links — "precious thoughts," in our motto-verse. He speaks of the "covenant," — "the covenant of peace," — of "My peace" — a covenant not to be "removed." These are glorious guarantees. Mountains, rocks, forests, all may decay and will decay; but "the Lord lives" — "His years shall have no end." "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, upon those who fear Him."

Nothing can assail the believer's safety or undermine his security. The oriental shepherds were used to belt their flocks and folds with a belt of fire, to scare away the devouring wolves. 'I,' says God to His Zion, and to each child of Zion, 'I will be that fiery defense. This covenant of My peace will be as a wall of flame — once within My fold you are safe forever. My sheep shall never — can never, perish.' "Our cause," says Luther, "is in the very hands of Him who can say with unimpeachable dignity, 'No one shall pluck them out of My hands.' I would not have it in our hands, and it would not be desirable that it were so. I have had many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have been able to place in God's hands, I still possess." "As soon might Satan," says Charnock, "pull God out of Heaven, undermine the security of Christ, and tear Him from the bosom of the Father, as deprive His people of their spiritual life."

Believer, rejoice in this faithful, covenant-keeping God. Anchor your soul on this Rock of the Divine veracity. The great adversary may try at times to impair your confidence — shake your trust — lead you to question your personal interest in the great salvation. But what are his negatives, to one affirmative of that God who cannot lie? His covenant of peace has something better than your own ever-fluctuating frames and feelings to rest upon. It is

ratified by His own oath and promise. "The counsel of the Lord stands forever; the thoughts of His heart to all generations." "Just as the mountains surround and protect Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds and protects His people, both now and forever."

## **CHASTENING LOVE**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."* —  
Revelation 3:19

*"I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction."* —  
Isaiah 48:10

Do the well known tones of a mother's voice hush the child asleep that has been startled from its couch by unquiet dreams? These two "thoughts of God" — the voice of our heavenly Parent may well lull our tossed spirits to rest, and lead us to pillow our heads with confidence in His holy will.

There are times, indeed, when, despite of better convictions and a truer philosophy, our own thoughts are mingled with guilty doubts — unworthy surmises — regarding the rectitude of the Divine dealings. We are led to say or to think with aged Jacob, "All these things are against me;" — there can be no kindness or faithfulness, surely, in such a sorrow as this! "Yes," is the reply of the Divine Chastener, "that trial, with all its apparent severity, is a thought of My love — a proof, and pledge of My interest in your well-being. In these fierce furnace-fires I have chosen you — in these I will keep you; from these, I will bring you forth a vessel refined and fitted for the Master's use."

"That this affliction is unspeakable love," says one who could write from the depths of experience, "I

have no doubt; because He who has sent it is no new Friend, but a tried and a precious One." "The afflictions with which we are visited," says another, "are so many notes in which God says, 'I have not forgotten you.'" He sits, as refiner of His own furnace, tempering the fury of the flames. The human parent, in chastisement, may act at times capriciously, guided by wayward impulse; "but He disciplines us for our profit, that we may be made partakers of His holiness."

Rather, surely, the acutest discipline, the hardest strokes of the rod, than to be left unchecked and unreclaimed in our career of worldliness, forgetfulness, and sin — God uttering that severest word, "Why should you be stricken any more? you will only revolt more and more." As if He had said, "Why should I any longer 'think' of you, or attempt to reclaim you? My warnings and remonstrances are in vain — I will return to My place — I will give you up." Oh, most fearful of chastisements — when God's loving thoughts, and patient thoughts, and forbearing thoughts are exhausted, and when our stubborn unbelief brings Him to utter the doom of abandonment.

Tried one, recognize henceforth, in your sorest afflictions, a Father's rod, hear in them a Father's voice, see in each what will invest them with a halo of subdued glory, a mysterious, it may be, but yet a 'precious thought' of God, and that thought kindness and mercy. That loss of worldly substance — it was a thought of God. That withering disappointment, the blighting of young hope — it was a thought of God. That protracted sickness, that wasting disease — it was a thought of God. The smiting of that clay idol — it was a thought of God.

This is surely enough to wake up the tuneless broken strings of your heart to melody — "Whom the Lord loves He chastens, and He scourges every son whom He receives." He is never so near to you as in a time of trial — never does He so reveal His heart as then. Electricity brings the thoughts of earth near — but

trial is the wire on which "travel to the smitten spirit, and every message is a thought of love." "I will be glad and rejoice in Your love, for You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul."

## **UNBOUNDED PATIENCE**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"How shall I give you up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver you, Israel? how shall I make you as Admah? how shall I set you as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of you: and I will not enter into the city." — Hosea 11:8-9*

What a tender unfolding of the heart of God is here! It is the yearning thought of the fondest of Fathers over a nation of wayward prodigals. How grievous had been their ingratitude. He speaks in the beginning of the chapter of His loving thoughts to Israel "when a child," — His specially gentle upbringing of Ephraim, even "as a nurse cherishes her children;" — "I taught Ephraim also to walk, taking them by their arms. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." Yet what is the requital for all this endearing tenderness? "My people are bent to backsliding from Me."

Surely the next entry in the Divine record will be the sentence of righteous retribution — "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone." No! it is a burst of fond parental love; such as, at times, is dimly pictured on earth, when we see a mother with breaking heart and eyes dim with weeping, locking in her embrace the prodigal boy who has wounded her, embittered her existence, and scorned her tears.

Listen to the tender apostrophe, "How shall I give you up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver you, Israel?" (give you over, that is, to the vengeance of the enemy) He remembers "the cry" of Sodom and Gomorrah of a former age, and "their sin, which was very grievous." The iniquity of Israel and Ephraim can be compared in turpitude only to that of these inhabitants of the plain, on whom "the Lord rained brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." Admah and Zeboim were two adjoining cities in the Valley of Sodom which were involved in this terrible overthrow. "How," says He, "shall I make you as Admah? how shall I set you as Zeboim?" — and then, when He sums up with the declaration, "I will not return to destroy Ephraim," He gives as the reason — "for I am God, and not man!"

Yes, truly, Your thoughts, O God, are not as man's thoughts; Your ways are not as man's ways; had they been so, long before now how many of us would have been "given up," and had executed against us the guilty cumberer's doom — the God we have so often grieved and provoked by our obstinacy and rebellion, swearing in His wrath that "we should never enter into His rest." But, for all this, His anger is turned away from us; His hand of mercy is outstretched still! Well may we say, with the stricken monarch of Israel, "Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hand of man."

Backslider, return! Though you may have tried the patience of your God by years of provocation, yet He still "keeps silence;" He waits to be gracious; He is not willing that any should perish. Let His goodness and patience, His tenderness and long-suffering, lead you to repentance.

Trembling penitent, bowed down under a sense of your base ingratitude, your prolonged alienation, fearful lest a guilty past may have cut you off from the hope of pardoning mercy — return! You are saying, perchance, in the bitter reproach of self-abandonment and despair, "I am given up" — I am

delivered over to the tyranny of my spiritual enemies — the Lord has cast off forever, He can be favorable no more! No! hear His wondrous, precious thoughts — the musings of that Infinite Heart you have wounded, "How shall I give you up? Man would crush his enemy, but I am God, and not man. I will not destroy, I will save." "Behold," He says in another place, "you have spoken and done evil things as you could," (that is could not have been worse) "yet, return unto Me!" "My wayward children," says the Lord, "come back to Me, and I will heal your wayward hearts."

### **A GRACIOUS ALTERNATIVE**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me." — Isaiah 27:5*

God had just spoken of the certain destruction that would overtake obstinate and incorrigible sinners. These He describes under the similitude of "briers and thorns set against Me in battle." "I will go through them," says He, "I will burn them up together." He guards us, by a preliminary statement, against entertaining the supposition that He has any delight in the exercise of such stern retribution — "Fury is not in Me." There is with Him, whose nature and whose name is Love, no vindictive passion, no capricious wrath, no wayward impulses of anger analogous to those in man. His thoughts, in this respect too, are not our thoughts. His hatred at sin is a principle. It is the deliberate recoil of His own infinitely Holy nature from iniquity — that iniquity which His Justice and Righteousness require Him to punish. Let us beware of a harsh and repulsive theology that would assimilate God to the avenging deities of the heathen.

He is "slow to smite." He "delights in mercy."  
"Judgment is His strange work." "He visits iniquity to  
the third and fourth generation of those who hate  
Him. He shows mercy to thousands of those who love  
Him."

At the same time, neither must we forget that He is  
'glorious in holiness.' To that very revelation which He  
made to Moses of His name and memorial as "The  
Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-  
suffering, abundant in goodness and in truth, keeping  
mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and  
transgression and sin," He appends the solemn  
avowal, "and that will by no means clear the  
guilty."

Oh, most solemn, most terrible 'thought' to those who  
are still as "thorns and briers against Him in battle" —  
who are still enemies by nature and wicked works.  
They cannot escape His wrath. They cannot elude His  
righteous retribution. If they continue in sin, they can  
know only in their bitter experience "what a fearful  
thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God." "He  
will burn them up together." He is to all such "a  
consuming fire."

But our motto-verse contains a wondrous alternative  
of mercy. At the very moment when sinners are  
rushing with blind madness against the thick bosses  
of Jehovah's buckler — He whom they have made  
their enemy has a 'thought' in His heart of loving  
reconciliation. Listen to the gracious proposal — "Or,  
let him take hold of My strength, that he may make  
peace with Me."

Who is "the Strength of God?" Let Scripture answer —  
"Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,  
upon the Son of man whom You made strong for  
Yourself." Christ is "the Power of God" — "the  
Arbitrator between us, who has laid His hand upon us  
both." He, also, is "our Peace." "Being justified by  
faith, we have peace with God." Peace, "not as the  
world gives," was His parting, special legacy. It is a  
sure and well-grounded peace, purchased by His

atoning blood, and secured and perpetuated by His continual intercession. Hence the gracious Proposer of reconciliation adds the assurance — "And he SHALL make peace with Me." It is a glorious certainty. Take hold of that arm, and salvation is sure. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." A present peace, a sure peace, a permanent peace, peace now, and peace forever. "None is able to pluck you out of His hand."

"Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord."  
"Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You that lead Joseph like a flock. Stir up Your STRENGTH, and come and save us!" "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."

## **TENDER DEALING**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards." — Hosea 2:14-15*

"Therefore" has a strangely beautiful connection in this verse. God's people had been grievously backsliding. He had been loading them with mercies; they had been guiltily disowning His hand. They had taken the gifts and spurned the Giver. "She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold." No, more, she had shamelessly gone after her lovers — she had deliberately preferred the ways of sin to the ways of God. What will His thoughts be towards this treacherous one? Can they be anything else but those of merited retribution — casting her out, and casting her off forever?

We expect when we hear the concluding word, "therefore," that it is the awful summing up of His controversy — the turning of the Judge to pronounce righteous sentence. We listen, but lo! utterances of love are the exponents of 'the thoughts of God.' "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards."

It is the way He deals with His people still. They often forget Him in the glare and glitter of prosperity. He hushes the din of the world — takes them out into the solitudes of trial — and there — while abased, humbled, chastened — He unburdens in their ear His thoughts of love, forgiveness, and "comfort." Oh, what infinite tenderness characterizes the dealings of this heavenly Chastener! How slow to abandon those who have abandoned Him! Every means and instrumentality is employed rather than leave them to the bitter fruits of their own guilty estrangement.

The kindest human thoughts towards an offender are harshness and severity compared with His. What were the thoughts — the deeds — of the watchmen in the Song of Solomon towards the Bride, as she wandered disconsolate in search of her heavenly Bridegroom — and that, too, in consequence of her own un-watchfulness and sloth? They tore off her veil. They smote her — reviled her — loaded her with reproach. But when she found her lost Lord, though she had kept Him standing amid the cold dews of night — He smites her not — He upbraids her not — no angry syllable escapes His lips. He brings her into the wilderness, and speaks comfortably to her — and the next picture in the inspired allegory, is the restored one coming up from that wilderness "leaning on her Beloved."

Reader! is God dealing with you by affliction? Has He blighted your earthly hopes — "caused your mirth to cease," — "destroyed your vines and fig-trees," and made all around you a desert? Think what it would have been, had He allowed you to go on in your course of guilty estrangement — your truant heart

plunging deeper and deeper in its career of sin! Is it not mercy in Him that He has dimmed that false and deceptive glitter of earth? You would not listen to His voice in prosperity. You took the ten thousand precious gifts of His bestowing — but there was no breathing of gratitude to the Infinite Bestower. You sat, it may be — sullen, peevish, proud, ungrateful, at the very moment when His horn of plenty was being emptied in your lap.

He has brought you into "the wilderness." As Jesus did with His disciples of old when He would nerve them for coming trial, He has taken you to "a high mountain alone," — "a solitary place" — apart from the world. He has there humbled you and proved you. He may have touched you to the quick — touched you in your tenderest point — severed hallowed companionships — leveled in the dust clay idols — but it was all His doing. "Behold, I will allure" — "I will bring into the wilderness" — "I will comfort." He leads us into the wilderness, and He leads us up, and He leads us through.

As He gives us our comforts — our "oil and wine," our "wool and flax," our "vines and our fig-trees" — so when He sees fit does He take them away. Whatever be the voices He may be now addressing to me, be it mine to recognize in them the thoughts and utterances of unalterable love, and to say — "I listen carefully to what God the Lord is saying, for He speaks peace to His people, His faithful ones."

## **A GRACIOUS REMEMBRANCE**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, when you went after me in*

*the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.* —  
Jeremiah 2:2

Backslider! listen to this Divine retrospect — a precious and encouraging 'thought' regarding your past. This may be the present sorrowful feeling and confession of your heart — "I am not what once I was. Once I loved my God. I can remember hallowed seasons of communion and fellowship, of which, alas! the memory is now all that remains. I once was enabled to live, somewhat at least, under the sovereignty of that lofty motive, walking so as to please Him. But I have forsaken and forgotten my first love. I have to mourn over a treacherous, wandering heart. I am conscious of deterioration — spiritual declension. Self-indulged sin — permitted worldliness, in some subtle shape or form, has crept in — blunted the fine edge of conscience, dulled the sensibilities of my spiritual nature, dimmed my soul to its grander destinies, and left me to muse in my better moments, in sadness and tears, over the wreck of former joys."

Are you prone to feel, in this desponding contrast between past devotedness and present faithlessness, as if the Lord's countenance and favor must be withdrawn from you forever—that there can be nothing but the bitterness of an ever sadder and more hopeless estrangement? No, no! He remembers that time, "the kindness of your youth" — these early vows, that early pledged love; the vows so poorly kept, the love so strangely diminished. While the pages of your own memory are all blurred by sin, He remembers the earlier entries and inscriptions of devotedness that stood on these yet un-blotted leaves. He remembers the efforts (it may be — the feeble efforts) you made in His service — the secret struggles in the closet, the fervent prayers and recorded vows of the sanctuary, the testimony borne for Him in the world.

How tenderly and lovingly does God deal with His backsliding children! He has no delight in remembering their sin. He loves to exhume rather

from a forgotten past, anything He sees in them worthy of commendation, even, notwithstanding much, it may be, of present frailty, inconsistency, and self-righteousness. He speaks of "My servant Job." He speaks of Lot as "that righteous man." See in the case of Peter what his Lord "remembers," when the erring disciple is confronted on the lake-shore. It is not the faithless hours of his apostolic manhood; but it is "the kindness of his youth." Not Jerusalem, with its recent Palace-hall; but Bethsaida, Capernaum, Caesarea-Philippi, and many other scenes and associations of hallowed, devoted love.

And so with us. He is willing in our case, too, to forget the long-intervening season of coldness, and distance, and alienation, if we tender the promise of renewed obedience. Yes, fearful one, take courage! Cast your eye back on those gracious seasons "when the candle of the Lord did shine, and when by His light you walked through darkness." On that time, which the lapse of years may have partially dimmed or obliterated, the loving thoughts of your God delight to rest. "You may have banished Me," He seems to say, "from your thoughts; but I have not banished you from Mine" — "I remember the kindness of your youth." "Now let Your unfailing love comfort me, just as You promised me, Your servant."

## **CORRECTION IN MEASURE**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"I will correct you in measure."* — Jeremiah 30:11

Here is a gracious and alleviating "thought of God" in a season of trial — "I will correct you," says He. He does not disguise that He will send affliction — that He will subject His own people to chastisement. He knows them too well — He loves them too well — to

allow the unbroken sunshine, the unfurrowed, waveless sea. The rough stone needs polishing — the musical chord must be strained to give forth sweet sounds — notes of harmony; but all is "in measure."

Amid our tossings, night and day, on the deep of trial, how comforting the assurance, "When my spirit was overwhelmed, then You knew my path." He suits the yoke to the neck; He adapts His chastisements to the characters and necessities, the strength and endurance of His people. All are meted out, all are weighed in the balances of undeviating rectitude.

There is no needless wrinkle on any brow — no redundant or superfluous drop in the cup of suffering. He who paints every flower and molds every raindrop in the natural world, fashions every tear in the dimmed eye, and imparts every delicate touch and shading to grief. Fear not, Abraham! even though your Isaac be called to the altar — I will test, but I will not "tempt" your faith — I will stay My rough wind in the day of My east wind. A father may err — he may wear a needless frown — he may punish with undue and unnecessary severity — "But thus says the Lord your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, which leads you by the way that you should go."

Tried one! seek that this be the end of God's present dealing — that "He teaches you to profit." Too often, in seasons of sorrow, our great aim is to receive or impart comfort. That is a limited and selfish view. God has a higher end — a nobler lesson — "He disciplines us for our profit." Trial is a season for expecting great blessings to ourselves, and for greatly glorifying God. It was from the bruised spices of old that the perfumed clouds of incense arose. The fallen, withered rose, emits the sweetest fragrance — the butterfly shuns it, the bee passes it by — the very rays of sunshine can gild it with no beauty; yet it loads the summer air with richer perfume than when it hung in full-blown glory on its parent branch.

Where the lava stream once carried desolation and ruin down the mountain side, vines are now seen hanging their purple clusters; so, where the stream of sorrow once swept distressingly down, are now clusters of heavenly graces — the fruits of righteousness — to the glory and praise of God.

I may not be able at times to see the "measure" in His correction. There may, to the eye of sense, appear nothing but a capricious exercise of sovereign power. No chastening for the present may seem to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless, afterward it will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Oh, let me joyfully endorse every such affliction with an "Even so, Father!" "not my will, but Your will." "Who shall say no, if eternal infinite grace shall say yes? To that yes my spirit springs forth with a hearty Amen, if it be for Your glory, Lord; and if not, with as hearty a no." (Evans) "Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs."

## **PROMISED DELIVERANCE**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he has known my name." — Psalm 91:14*

Here we have the prodigal looking and longing for a father's welcome — the prisoner striving to break his chains and set himself free — the wounded bird struggling in the furrow, and wailing out its plaintive note, "Oh that I might flee away, and be at rest!"

"I will deliver him," is the gracious thought and declaration of an unseen but gracious God. "No, not only will I deliver him — save him from wrath and condemnation — but I will 'set him on high' — I will

bestow exalted honors on him — I will adopt him as My child, and finally glorify him."

Most frequently, indeed, He delivers independently and irrespectively of any antecedent love on our part. "For God's gifts and His call are irrevocable." His grace often triumphs in the case of those who have never cast one look of love towards Him — He "sets on high" those to whom for a whole lifetime His name has been unknown. Nevertheless, to any who may be seeking after Him, if haply they may find Him — to those who feel their chains, and are longing for emancipation — who, by reason of permitted sin or omitted duty, may be in spiritual darkness, exclaiming, in the bitterness of their estrangement, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat!" — it is an encouraging thought to such, that they have His own promise of deliverance.

The Believer, in Solomon's Song, is beautifully likened to a dove in the clefts of the rock. The timid, fluttering, trembling wanderer is welcomed into the crevices of the Rock of Ages. He can fold his weary wing under the shadow of the Almighty; he can find rest and peace in the very Being whom he has offended. Yes, desponding one, He is waiting to be gracious. If you are now casting one fond, ardent, loving look towards your God — if you are cherishing one longing desire for His returning favor — "He will deliver you." This will be your testimony, as it has been of many — "I waited patiently for the Lord to help me, and He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along."

"What have I to do any more with idols?" was the soliloquy and resolve of penitent Ephraim, when, divorcing himself from all sinful attachments, all rival claimants for the throne of his affections, he turned his face towards his God. "I have heard him and observed him," says the great Being who was watching the penitent's tears, counting the throbs of

his anguished spirit. And He adds the assurance of supporting grace and strength — "I am like a green fir tree; from Me is your fruit found."

Do I "know His name?" Acquainting myself with God, am I now at peace? Do I feel that His loving-kindness is better than life? Amid the brokenness of nature's cisterns, am I turning with earnest longing to the infinite and only satisfying fountain-head, like the deer panting for the waterbrooks? All other objects of earthly love and enjoyment are perishable. But "the name of the Lord is a strong tower — the righteous runs into it, and is safe." "Great is the blessing," says one who knew well that Name, "that the anchor of our love is firmly fixed beneath the cross of Christ. The silver cord of life may be snapped in a moment; but this is embedded in the cleft of the Rock forever." "Those who know Your name trust in You, for You, O Lord, have never abandoned anyone who searches for You."

## **THOUGHT UPON THOUGHT**

'How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!' — Psalm 139:17

*"But now thus says the LORD that created you, O Jacob, and he that formed you, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." — Isaiah 43:1-3*

What a library of "precious thoughts!" What an unlocking of the full heart of God do these verses contain! In reading them, we may say indeed with the Psalmist, "Many, O Lord my God, are Your thoughts

which are to us." Each clause is in itself a volume. Well may the Divine speaker begin with the words, "Do not be afraid!" These tender thoughts and tender assertions remind us of the gush of parental affection when a child is in danger or is afraid, and when its most loving earthly friend heaps assurance on assurance to quiet and lull its misgivings.

"I have redeemed you," seems to be the foundation-thought of comfort in this cluster of exceeding great and precious promises. No other blessing could have been ours but for "Redeeming love." And as Christ is the Alpha, so is He the Omega of all consolation. Hence this inspired register of spiritual privileges is terminated by the assurance, "I am your Savior." The pendant chain of "precious thoughts" has these two words for its support, "Redeemer," "Savior;" and each separate link in the intermediate line of blessings is connected with Him who is the "Beginner" and "Finisher" of our faith.

God, indeed, forewarns us in the diversified symbols here employed, that the trials of His people are to be varied in kind, as well as difficult in degree; "waters," "rivers," "fires," "flames." Yet we may well rise above them all, under the sublime consciousness, that the chain from first to last is in the hands of Him who died for us.

We are here further assured, not only that God is the Author of our troubles, but that He Himself is in them all; that His 'thoughts' are upon us as we "pass" through the waters, and "walk" through the fires. He is minutely cognizant of all that befalls us; and is alike able and willing to grant us assistance and support. Others cannot do so. It is in their case like watching the bursting of the distant thunderstorm, or the vessel plunging in the distant sea, without the ability to render assistance. But "You know my thoughts afar off." God is not only our "refuge and strength," but "a present help in trouble." "We went through the flood on foot, there did we rejoice in Him."

More than this — He has set bounds to our trials. The rivers and streams will purify, but not overflow or overwhelm. The fires will refine, but not scorch or burn. He has too deep an interest in those of whom He says, "I have called you by your name, you are Mine," to allow our afflictions to go further than He sees to be absolutely needful. Never are His "thoughts" more fondly centered upon us than in a time of trouble. His loving presence tempers the fury of the fiercest furnace-flames — His everlasting arms are underneath the deepest and darkest waves. "O Lord God Almighty! Where is there anyone as mighty as You, Lord? Faithfulness is Your very character. You are the one who rules the oceans. When their waves rise in fearful storms, You subdue them."

## **EVERLASTING ESPOUSALS**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"And I will betroth you unto me forever; yes, I will betroth you unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies." — Hosea 2:19*

The most endearing as well as the most exalted relationships of earth are employed to illustrate and symbolize God's love to His people. He is represented comforting as a mother, pitying as a father, sympathizing as a friend, healing as a physician, bestowing as a king. Here He is described as entering into everlasting espousals with His Church, and with every redeemed member of it — in the depths of eternity past, pledging His vow to His betrothed Bride — putting the espousal-ring on her finger; summoning Righteousness, Judgment, Loving-kindness, and Mercy, as witnesses of the magnificent ceremony, to sign and ratify the marriage-contract.

How uncertain are earth's apparently surest ties! Brother may be severed from brother, husband from wife, child from parent, friend from friend. But, in our union with God — linked to Him in the bonds of the ever-lasting covenant — the pang of separation can neither be felt nor feared. Age can never plough its furrows on the brow. Sickness can never blanch the cheek. Death can never unlock the fountain of tears. The grave can never close over our "loved and lost." "I will betroth you to Me forever!"

As in the human union which here, as in other passages, is made the type and symbol of the nobler covenant, that Divine espousal is reared on the twofold basis of HONOR and of LOVE. Righteousness and Judgment, the two representatives of God's honor, come first; Loving-kindness and Mercy follow. It is a union founded on everlasting truth, justice, and rectitude. These attesting witnesses sign the contract around the Cross of Calvary. There "mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it." What an endless dowry did that mighty Sacrifice purchase and secure for the Bride of Heaven!

Soon the festal-day shall be here; when the betrothed spouse shall be presented to the heavenly Bridegroom — ushered into the blessed pavilion of His own presence. The marriage-procession is even now on foot. The train is sweeping along to the hall of the King's palace. Righteousness, Judgment, Loving-kindness, Mercy, these are the four torch-bearers lighting the way to the gladsome scene. Have we heard and obeyed the midnight summons, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes; go out to meet Him"? "Let them boast in this alone: that they truly know Me and understand that I am the Lord who is just and righteous, whose love is unending, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

## WONDROUS COMFORT

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"I, even I, am he who comforts you."* — Isaiah 51:12

How soothing the thought for the weary head to lean upon, that in the midst of our bitterest trials, we have the great God of Heaven for our comforter! 'Dry your tears,' He seems to say, 'I am by your side, you poor afflicted one — other comforts may fail you — other comforters may prove utterly powerless to gauge the depths of your sorrow and to heal your aching wounds — but I, as God, infinite in Wisdom, Omniscience, Love, know all the peculiarities of your case — I will be to you better than the best and tenderest of human friends. My delight is to "uphold all who fall, and to raise up all those who are bowed down." I have 'precious thoughts' reserved for the day of calamity — thoughts that are whispered into the ear of the sorrowful. "I, even I" — the same hand that has wounded will bind up; the same hand that is strong to smite will be strong to save. I will give you solaces undreamt of in the day of prosperity; songs in the night, and wells of refreshing in the valley of weeping.'

'Is it sickness that has blanched your cheek, and chained you down for weeks and months — or maybe years — to a couch of pain and languishing? — "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you!" Is it your worldly schemes that have been blighted — moth and rust corrupting the earthly treasure? — I will give you compensating riches, beyond the spoiler's touch and the throw of capricious fortune! Is it bereavement that has traced lines of sadness on your brow, created vacant chairs in your household, left stripped and desolate your heart of hearts? Be still. I will take the place of the mourned. I will come and fill up these aching voids — that yawning chasm with My own loving presence. The rill is gone, but you will have in exchange the Infinite Fountainhead! Is it sin that is making sad your countenance? the bitter

thought of estrangement from Me whose favor alone is life? Wearied with the successive failure of all worldly sources of satisfaction and happiness, are you turning with longing, wistful gaze, like the battered flower to the sunlight, towards Myself, "the living God," wondering if there can be peace and forgiveness for such as you? "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions." I will heal your backsliding, I will love you freely; for My anger is turned away from you.'

"I, even I." Do not doubt His ability or willingness to comfort; God is beautifully spoken of as "the God of all consolation," "the comforter of all who are cast down." Wide as the family of the afflicted are, He has consolations commensurate with every diversity of experience. He has a thought of comfort for every thought of sorrow. "In the multitude of the sorrows I have in my heart," says the Psalmist, "Your comforts delight my soul." His message to the Church of old, after burden on burden of reluctantly-spoken woe, was, "Comfort, comfort My people," — (repeating the word is the usual Hebrew method of intensifying) as if He wished to tell, with what delight He passed from the gloomy prophetic utterances of judgment, to the joyous promises of mercy and love.

"He does not afflict willingly," [or, rendered literally from the Hebrew — 'He does not afflict with the heart'] "nor grieve the children of men." As if affliction in itself were alien to the heart and the 'thoughts of God!'

And let the thought of God the Comforter be all the more precious to me, since that God is Immanuel — our Brother on the throne of Heaven. Himself once the Prince of Sufferers, He is supremely qualified, by the exquisite sensibilities of His human nature, to enter into every pang that rends the heart. "I, even I," the God-Man who shed tears over the bereaved of Bethany — I, who welcomed weeping penitence to My feet — I, who Myself struggled with temptation, grappled with superhuman anguish, lived a life of sorrow, and died a death of shame — I, even I —

that same Jesus — "am He who comforts you."  
"Though You have made me see troubles, many and bitter, You will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth You will again bring me up."

## **COMPLETE FORGIVENESS**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."* — Hebrews 8:12

No thought can be more precious than this — God's thought of *mercy* to the unrighteous and undeserving. The consciousness of past sin lies like a cold avalanche on many a heart. "How can man be just with God?" "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" "What then shall I do when God rises up? and when He confronts me, what shall I answer Him?" These are the solemn questions which, despite of all efforts to silence or evade them, are ever and anon confronting the most indifferent and unconcerned. Blessed be God, He has not left them unanswered. He can bestow pardon on the unrighteous, and bury the remembrance of sin in the depths of oblivion.

"There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." "With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption." By a precious, peerless thought of infinite love, He has "devised ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from Him." He "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." The true anti-typical scapegoat has borne away the burden of imputed sin into a land of forgetfulness — so that on that Great day "when God rises up," "the iniquity of Judah shall be sought for, and shall not be found."

May I be enabled joyfully to accept this glorious method of salvation, by which, in strict accordance with every attribute of the Divine nature, and every requirement of the Divine law, forgiveness may be dispensed to the chief of sinners. Nothing I could do, or that others could do for me, would prove in any way availing to purchase that salvation. Lebanon itself, with all its cedars piled for altar and for fuel, and all its flocks for the sacrifice and burnt offering, would have been an insufficient propitiation.

But this 'precious thought' comes winged with love from the Cross of Calvary — "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses." He is as *able* as He is willing, and as *willing* as He is able, to save "unto the uttermost." Is it crimson and scarlet sins — some deep, dark, foul blots on the tablet of memory — their terrible remembrance haunting like specters from the abyss? — God says, 'I will make even these like the spotless snow and the stainless wool.' What is *that great mountain of transgression* before the true Zerubbabel, the storms of judgment brooding over it? It has become a plain — the work of Jesus has leveled it.

What is that great cloud, the aggregate of bypast sin, charged with condemnation, spreading itself overhead? Lo! it has melted away — "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions; and, as a cloud, your sins." The Sun of righteousness has shone upon it. His rays, like burning arrows, have dispersed the elements of wrath. There is nothing now seen but the bright azure of a radiant heaven; and a voice is heard, amid the glorious sunshine, uttering the words, "Return unto Me, for I have redeemed you!" "Who is a God like You, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy."

## MORE THAN PARENTAL LOVE

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"But Zion said, The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yes, they may forget, yet will I not forget you." — Isaiah 49:14-15*

There are seasons in the experience of many of God's people, when, by reason of outward trials or inward troubles, they feel desolate and desponding. Spiritual comforts are gone. They have little of the hallowed communion they once enjoyed with their heavenly Father — little fervor or filial nearness in prayer — little pleasure in reading the Word or attending the Sanctuary. A chilling blight has passed over their spiritual being. In the bitterness of conscious estrangement from the God of their life, they are led to harbor the secret thought — "The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me."

God points to the tenderest type of earthly love — the mother with her infant hanging on her breast, or seated by its cradle tending it in sickness. That infant's cry may fail to rouse the hireling from slumber; but with wakeful ear she anticipates its every need. For days and nights she seats herself by the couch of the tiny sufferer — smoothing every dimple in its pillow, and kissing away the hot tears from the fevered cheek. Such, says God, is the most touching picture of tender human affection. "Yes," He adds, "they may forget." There may be exceptional cases where a mother may be found untrue to her offspring, and nature prove faithless to her strongest instincts. "Yet I will not forget you!"

Think of this. If His dealings should at times appear inexplicable, if amid baffling dispensations, we may be led at times to say, with Gideon of old, "If the Lord be with us, why is all this befallen us?" — let us hush the unkind misgiving — by the remembrance, that the

affection of the fondest human parent to her offspring is but a feeble shadow compared to that of Him who pities as a father, comforts as a mother, and loves as God alone can do! The earthly parent sees it needful at times, to employ beneficial rebuke and discipline. So does our Father in Heaven at times consider it necessary to let His tenderest affection to His covenant people take the form of chastisement. But His faithfulness on that account dare not be questioned or impeached. *He chastens us because He loves us.* The time will come when all that is now dark and perplexing will be explained and vindicated. "What a day is before us," writes one who has the glowing wish fulfilled, "when we shall be able to adore His faithfulness, without the teaching of it by a crossed will and disappointed prospects!"

Go, burdened one, fearlessly on. He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." That loving eye never slumbers — that wakeful vigilance is never suspended. Do not dishonor God by unbelieving distrust of His word and ways. Look back on the past — trace His footprints of love — the unmistakable tokens of His presence and supporting grace — let these be encouragements for the present and pledges for the future. The dearest earthly friend may forget you — distance may sever — memory may fail — the mind may become a blank — the old familiar greetings may be met only by an unconscious gaze — Death may have already, and at some time will, put his impressive seal on the most sacred interchanges of human affection — "YET I will not forget you!" "Yet I still belong to You; You are holding my right hand."

## **DEATH VANQUISHED**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be your plagues; O grave, I will be your destruction." — Hosea 13:14*

*"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." — Psalm 116:15*

In the first of these "precious thoughts," God is represented in a past eternity as looking down the vista of the future. He sees a captive world doomed to destruction; its perishing millions laden with fetters moving onwards to death and the grave. He hears their cry. It stirs the thoughts and longings of His divine heart. "I will ransom them," He exclaims, "from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death!" Nor was this a mere passing thought, a transient emotion, akin to the human pity which is evoked for the moment by some spectacle of pain or distress. Many generous and benevolent "thoughts" of man have never been embodied in deed. Many noble resolves die away with the hour which gave them birth — "that very day his thoughts perish."

But what God "thought" He *did*. He gave the costliest proof which Omnipotence could give, of the reality and intensity of these thoughts. The ransom-price He paid to "redeem from death" was the blood of His own — His only Son. By the doing and dying of Jesus, Death has now become to the believer a vanquished foe — no, the hour of dissolution is in reality the commencement — the birthday of a nobler life. It is the dropping of the flower to let the fruit expand — the bursting of the prison-bars to lead the soul out to gladsome light and freedom. We can look forward with triumphant hope and joy to that hour, when the eternal 'thought' in all its sublime magnitude shall be fulfilled. Buried myriads starting from their graves — their every chain broken — the king of terrors dethroned and uncrowned. The triumphant song of the risen dead ascending, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Reader, the time of your death is a solemn moment — when about to enter the realities of the eternal spirit-world. But precious is that moment in the sight and in the thoughts of God! You may possibly then be removed from the loving thoughts of others. Cherished voices may be separated by distance when the last enemy overtakes you. But there will be divine thoughts and a divine Presence which cannot be away. When words can no longer be heard — when too weak to listen, too feeble to speak — one joyous and blessed assurance will be yours — "My God thinks of me!"

As an earthly father's tenderest thoughts are on his dying child, so is it with our heavenly Father. The life of His people, indeed, is lovingly watched over and cherished by Him; but specially "precious in the sight of the Lord" is their death. An earthly father's most joyous thoughts are in the prospect of welcoming his long absent child once more to his dwelling — precious and joyous also in the sight of the Lord, as each member of His ransomed family stands on the heavenly threshold, ready to enter the Eternal Home — the adopted child — the cherished heir, ready to take possession of the Everlasting Inheritance!

Or, is it the death of some member of the household of faith who is near and dear to you? precious also is *their* death in the sight of the Lord. Their pillow is smoothed by Divine hands — "So He gives His beloved sleep." They may now be precious only in your *memory*, but they are precious in God's "sight." Yes! "the beloved of the Lord shall dwell safely." "Your unfailing love is better to me than life itself; how I praise You!"

## **CONTRASTED DEALINGS**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD." — Isaiah 55:7-8*

The precious thought of this verse is "the exceeding riches of God's grace" — the contrast between His judgments and His kindnesses. The forsaking is "for a small moment," the gathering is "with great mercies." The hidden face is "but for a moment," and "in a little wrath" — the "mercy" is accompanied "with everlasting kindness." Judgment is His *strange* work. Strong to smite, He is stronger still to save.

What an encouragement to every backslider to return! — that he will be met, not with coldness, rebuke, reserve, or distance — but with a forgiving welcome. That gospel picture of the father receiving the lost prodigal may be regarded as the representation of the Lord's thoughts embodied in acts. He gives the kiss, the robe, the ring, the feast. There is not a frown on that Father's brow — all the erring past is buried in everlasting oblivion.

"This is not the manner of *men*, O Lord God!" *Man's love*, how easily cooled — easily diverted — like the ray of light, refracted and broken, or dimmed and obscured by the passing cloud. But "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." He knows no alteration — He is without shadow of turning. It is in spiritual as in natural things. As we ourselves cast our own shadows — intercepting the beams of the sun; so, it is not *God*, but *our own sin* which projects the shadow in the pathway of the spiritual life. Moreover, the forsaking on His part, is only *apparent*. The sun shines brightly as ever behind these temporary intervening clouds. The stone or impeding rock obstructs the flow of the great river "for a moment." But it is only "for a moment;" and it rolls on deep and still as before, in its full volume of "everlasting kindness."

Be it mine, if the flow be arrested, to search out and remove the obstruction — if God's face be hidden, to discover the intervening clouds — if the spiritual life be languishing, to trace out the secret of the sorrowful declension — whether it be neglected privilege, or omitted duty, or secret sin, or tampered with temptation, or engrossing worldliness. "I will say unto God my Rock, why have You forgotten me; why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

Oh how little it takes to soil the windows of the soul, and to dim and blur the spiritual landscape! How small the worm needed to wither and blight the gourd of our spiritual joys! How little it takes to rust the key of prayer, clip the wings of faith, chill the warmth of love, and shut us out from the loving ear of God. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." As it is "the Lord the Redeemer," who speaks in our motto-verse, to Him I must look for grace and strength — for restoration and revival. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." "Will you not revive us O Lord?" "Then we will never forsake You again. Revive us so we can call on Your name once more."

## **GUIDANCE IN THE DARK**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." — Isaiah 42:16*

There are times when God's dealings with His people are *perplexing* — His thoughts very deep — His ways past finding out — when the present is full of anxiety,

the future full of difficulty. Their condition is that of blind men groping at noontime — the whole of life a mazy labyrinth, of which they have lost the guiding thread. Their path seems shut up. Pharaoh is behind, and the raging Red Sea in front — their feeling is — "We are entangled; the wilderness has shut us in."

Or they may be confounded in solving some question of duty. The employment and destiny of a lifetime may depend on a moment's choice. They may feel the responsibility of deciding between rival and competing claims; trembling and fearful lest some selfish, carnal, unworthy motive may mingle in the decision, and yet experiencing a painful inability to decide what is best.

Perplexed or desponding one! amid these your anxious, wavering, undecided thoughts, be this your comfort — God's thoughts are upon you. He is the leader of the blind. "Speak," says He, "to the children of Israel, that they go forward." At the crisis-hour of difficulty or trial He will appear to all His seeking, trusting people, and vouchsafe guidance or deliverance — not, perhaps, what they expect, but what He knows to be best for them. At the fourth watch of the night Jesus came to His disciples — walking upon the sea. "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation."

Rely on the God of the pillar-cloud. He will bring you, as He did His Israel, "through the flood on foot." "Be still," is His tender rebuke to the distrustful soul, "and know that I am God." How it would disarm life of many of its anxieties, and take the sting from many perplexities, if we were careful to listen to His voice (the expression and utterance of His 'precious thoughts') — "This is the way; walk in it." "A wondrous way — a tender way — but, with all its humiliations, the RIGHT way." (Evans)

Yes, believe it — "All the paths of the Lord [and this present dark and perplexing path of yours, whatever it be, is one of them] are mercy and truth to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." Confide in no fallible guidance. Be this your lofty resolve — "In the Lord I put my trust; how can you say to my soul, flee as a bird to your mountain?" Regard every new turn in existence as a wise, provident "thought" of your heavenly Father. Make it your earnest prayer in the words of Nehemiah — "Think upon me, my God, for good."

Thus, putting your case in His hands, and leaving it there, "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday." Yours may be a mingled, chequered past — yet, too, how bright with blessings — how full of remembrances of God's loving thoughts — His gracious interventions — His signal deliverances! Make these an argument and reason for implicit trust in the future — "You have been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." "Those who are wise will take all this to heart; they will see in our history the faithful love of the Lord."

## **DIVINE TREASURES**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"And they shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him."*  
— Malachi 3:17

The preceding context tells us of "a book of remembrance" that was "written before Him, for those who feared the Lord, and who thought upon His name." That book of remembrance was a record of the believer's "thoughts" towards God. We have

here the wondrous counterpart — God's thoughts towards the believer. Two beautiful pictures of earth and Heaven! On *earth*, His children are gathered together, speaking "often one to another" — of the great and glorious Being they delight to serve. In *Heaven*, He who sees in secret, "hearkens"—and thus records His own gracious thoughts respecting them in the book of life — "They shall be Mine in that day when I make up My *jewels*" (or "My *precious treasure*").

With what eager thoughts — ardent aspirations — do men look forward to the attainment of some cherished hope or prize or treasure, for which, as the case may be, they have wisely or unwisely toiled. The *money-seeker* for the day when he shall collect and store his coveted heaps. The *historian* for the day when his hoarded facts — his lettered wisdom — shall be compiled into a volume. The *architect* for the hour when the last plank of scaffolding shall be removed from the building on which he expects his renown to rest. The *sculptor* for the last touch being put on the life like marble, that he may set it among his finished works.

The great God, here as elsewhere, is represented as anticipating with joy and satisfaction the day of "the consummation of all things" — the day on which the top stone of His temple shall be brought forth with shouting — when the now compiling volume of remembrance shall be finished — when the now filling treasure-box shall be complete; and He shall display His jewels before an admiring and adoring world. And what does He say is to form, amid these lustrous jewels, His most prized treasure — that on which His eye seems most lovingly and fondly to rest? "They," says He (My believing people, the trembling band that feared Me and spoke of Me on earth), "they" on that day "shall be Mine!"

Oh most precious, most wondrous thought of God!  
Can it be that He can think of treasuring me — a poor, unworthy, contemptible piece of clay, in His treasure-box now, and at last of setting me a jewel in

His crown? Yes! What has He given for that jewel? Estimate its worth by the purchase-price — "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ."

And, as if this one exquisite figure were not enough, He adds, "And I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him." Jewels are precious; but what are they compared to a loved and dutiful son? If jewels were in a burning house, a man would rush to save them. But if the alternative lay between saving them and a precious child, would he for a moment hesitate? I will spare My believing people, says God, as a man would rush, heedless of the flames, to rescue his darling son. When the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, not a hair of their heads shall perish. I will save them with a great salvation. They are Mine now — Mine, justified in Christ, Mine, adopted into My family; Mine they shall be — acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment; yes, Mine forever and ever! "All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be My children."

## **MOURNING ENDED**

"How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God!" — Psalm 139:17

*"Your sun shall no more go down; neither shall your moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended." — Isaiah 60:20*

We have traced, in previous meditations, God's thoughts towards us from a *past* eternity — loving us with an everlasting love. We have pondered some of His *present* thoughts of tenderness, kindness, and sympathy, towards His suffering and sorrowing, His

tried and tempted people. But as His thoughts have been *from* everlasting, so are they *to* everlasting. "He who loved His people *out of darkness*," says a now glorified saint, "loves them *into everlasting light*."

It is again the mourner who is the specially benefited heir to the preciousness of this 'thought of God' regarding a world of glory. Some prized earthly sun has set. Some fond earthly star that has long lighted up the earthly pathway, has been swept from the firmament. "Hush your sorrow!" says He — "dry your tears." These setting suns, and waning moons, and quenched stars, shall reappear as fixed orbs in an unchanging sphere — where the 'loved and lost' shall be loved never to be lost again. Yes, and better still, there will be a nobler light — a peerless Sun — to supersede the need of all earthly luminaries, and lead you to be independent of all — "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God lights it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

Other luminaries *may* still be there, with their cherished radiance. But the city and the citizens will have no need of them; they will not require the tiny candle, or glimmering starlight, when they have the full blaze of noon. They will not need the feeble rill, when they have the boundless, infinite ocean.

God's works and ways, His character and perfections, His wisdom and faithfulness, His ever-present fellowship and love, will form perpetual theme and material for contemplation. The ever-new song of the ransomed will be the old strain of earth — "How precious also are Your thoughts unto me, O God!"

"And the days of your mourning shall be ended."  
Mourning one, think of this! Weeping days here *on earth*; joyful days *yonder*. The muffled harp here; the golden harp yonder. The ocean swept with storm and tempest here; the crystal sea unruffled with one wave yonder. The dew-drops and tear-drops of earthly sorrow, as they sparkle in the radiance of the risen Sun of Eternity, will be so many little mirrors

reflecting the glory of God — lustrous witnesses of His faithfulness and love.

Life may now be to you a dreary winter landscape — its once sunny hollows and green nooks — the crevices of spring and summer — embedded with snow. But a glorious resurrection-time is at hand, when the gladsome announcement shall be made: "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds has come." Oh! blessed prospect. In God's light, we shall see light. The unexplained thoughts of the present all made luminous in the glory of that unsetting sun — not one floating cloud discernible on the boundless horizon. "Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now." "The Lord Almighty has sworn this oath: 'It will all happen as I have planned. It will come about according to My purposes.'"