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[No. 81.]

ONLY BELIEVE;

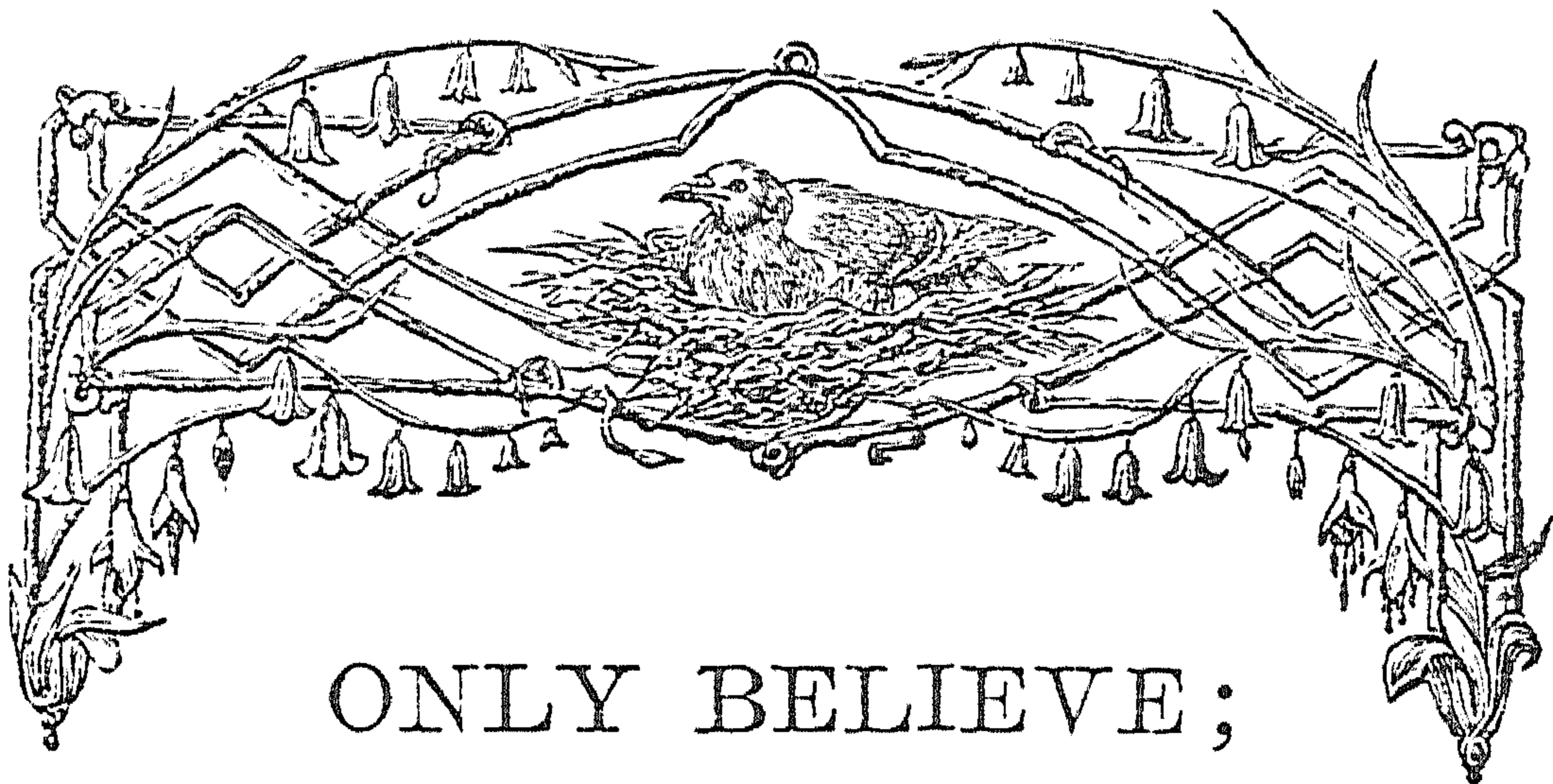
OR,

WORDS OF INSTRUCTION TO THOSE
WHO SEEK JESUS.

BY WILLIAM ARTHUR, A.M.,

AUTHOR OF "THE TONGUE OF FIRE," THE "SUCCESSFUL
MERCHANT," ETC.

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ONLY BELIEVE ;

OR,

WORDS OF INSTRUCTION TO THOSE WHO SEEK JESUS.

PERHAPS you do not clearly remember the circumstances in which our Lord uttered the simple but memorable words, *Only Believe*.

There was a respectable and, probably, a religious man, for he was ruler of the synagogue. He had an only daughter, about twelve years of age. She was deadly ill; ordinary remedies had failed, and the end was nigh.

Just then the country was full of the fame of a Prophet from Nazareth, who was going

about doing good, and healing every sort of malady. Could he be brought to that bedside the little girl might yet be saved. It is not probable that the ruler of the synagogue would feel disposed to put himself under obligations to the Prophet of Nazareth, for, though renowned among the populace, he was suspected by the authorities. Still, his child was dying.

Jesus was away on the other side of the lake, and might not return till it was too late. But a boat was seen crossing. It was his. The people "were all waiting to receive them." A palsied man was brought to him on a bed. First he said to him, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee;" and when some murmured at this he proved his power by commanding the man to rise up and walk. The multitude "marveled and glorified God." Perhaps some ran to Jairus, and told him of this wonderful proof that one was near who could save his child.

The feelings of the father overcame all objections, if any existed. Down he came to

seek the Prophet amid the wondering crowds. He was seated in a publican's house, eating with publicans and sinners, and just then defending himself for so doing. Into that mixed company rushed the distressed father, and seeing Him on whose will the life of his child appeared to hang, he gave way to his feelings, and begged like the poorest of the poor. "He fell at his feet, and besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death. I pray thee come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed, and she shall live."

The Prophet goes with the father, and the throng follows with eager—it would seem almost with rude—curiosity. But Jairus was walking with a light heart; he was going home not to hang over a corpse, but to embrace a daughter. All at once the Master stands still amid the rush. His calm eye looks round: "Who touched me?" he asks, in a tone that demands a reply. All denied; but Peter said, "Master, the multitude throng thee and *press thee*. and sayest thou, Who

touched me?" Aye, but there had been something besides the heedless pressing of the curious; something far lighter, which, nevertheless, drew the notice of the Saviour. "Somebody hath touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me."

Now, a poor woman, all trembling, falls down at the Lord's feet in presence of the crowd, and confesses to having suffered from a sore disease for twelve years—as long as the girl he was going to heal had been in the world. She thought if she could only touch the hem of his garment she should be restored; she had, therefore, come behind him in the press, touched it, and immediately she felt in her body that she was made whole.

Happy woman! Happy Jairus, to behold so clear a proof that his daughter would yet call him father! Happy that crowd, to witness the benignity of the Master, the joy of the woman, the hope of the parent, as Jesus said, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."

The divine music of these words is just greeting their ears, filling the woman with bliss and Jairus with anticipations, when a sad face appears. “While he yet spake”—spake such comfort—“there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue’s house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master.” His cup of hope was full, but in a moment it is dashed to the grave. Palsy was terrible, the woman’s illness was deep-seated, yet both were only disease; this is death! His daughter is dead! Alas, alas! had he come but yesterday! Dead at such a moment! dead with the Healer at the door! but O, dead!

Did the Prophet, sitting on his own calm heights, above the storm of human passion, look coldly down on the pains that wrung the father’s heart? Did he leave him to feel his sorrow long? No. His resources were those of the Creator; his sympathies those of a brother. “*As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken.*” Ah, mark that, all ye who are following Christ, for some day

you will hear sad news from discouraging lips. "As soon as he had heard the word that was spoken, he said to the ruler of the synagogue, 'BE NOT AFRAID, ONLY BELIEVE!'"

Did he say this for the sake of Jairus alone? Nay, surely not! He said it for him, but he also said it for you, and me, and every man, in every time, who, in his presence, and seeking his help, is told to despair because of impossibility. That pale father, in whose eye the image of a glowing daughter, which had for a little while been filling it, is suddenly replaced by that of a cold corpse, as his heart sinks and his color changes, represents not himself alone. There stands human helplessness face to face with impossibility.

Had it been only disease; but death! to human powers the difference between disease and death is impassable—infinite. But at his side stands One to whom that difference is no more than that between a rill which would stop a child, and a river which would stop an army, is to an eagle.

Into the ear of helplessness Impossibility pours the despairing words, "Past help!" but happy he who in his helplessness is found near to Christ; for then the voice of Impossibility is answered by a mightier, saying, "Be not afraid, only believe!"

I take these precious words of our Lord, and now especially apply them to one who is seeking deliverance, help, forgiveness, the peace of God, and eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, but who feels as if he need scarcely hope; as if he never could be a child of God; never could live a holy life on earth, and pass through a happy death to the land of glory; to one who is ready to think that, whatever may be the case with others, salvation is not for him. If you have some such feelings, it is just to you I say, "Be not afraid; only believe!"

There are some—many, alas! and the Bible scarcely contains a word which I should not sooner think of addressing to them than "Be not afraid!" O that I could make them be afraid! Who are they? Persons who are not,

and perhaps never were, troubled with fear about their souls—with fear in consequence of their sins; persons who look back, and think that they have not been without blame, but yet not such great sinners—not worse than others—not guilty enough to be alarmed or distressed; persons who look forward, and do not pretend to feel that heaven is before them, or to say that they have taken pains to prepare for it; but still they count on entering it, they hardly know how—somehow. God is too merciful to cast them out, or they are not wicked enough to be lost, or they are sure to be converted before they die, or they can make up for past defects by good living for the future, or if they must repent and be converted, there is no need yet; it is not desirable just now—when they are older; or, perhaps, they never think upon the subject at all, but when it crosses their minds, dismiss it as not agreeable. If you are one of these, or of any such class, I tell you that if I knew a word that would go through you like a spear—a word that would peal upon your

conscience like a sevenfold thunderclap—a word that would heave all your ground of carelessness from under you, like a gaping earthquake, O ! in love to you—love to the soul that is in you, and that will wail or sing while eternity endures—aye, in true love to you, I would utter that word this instant, praying the God of all power to send it home. And here I stop, and, with heart and hands uplifted, I do call on Him who knows you to fill you with his fear, and to make the sight of your sins so terrible to you, and the ruin that is near you so plain, that you will flee to Christ for refuge, lest you should be lost eternally.

But to thee, my brother—to thee who, like Jairus, art troubled in heart, and seeking help from Christ, and over whose hopes dark feelings pass, as if it was all in vain, all too late—to thee I say, “Be not afraid !”

While a man remains indifferent as to his soul, the great deceiver seeks to persuade him that nothing is so easy as salvation, that he is sure to find mercy some way or other, and to

be right at last; but the moment conscience becomes awake, and the man begins in earnest to ask, What must I do to be saved? the deceiver changes his voice. Now, nothing is so difficult, so impossible, as salvation. Before, it was too soon; now, it is too late. Before, any time would do; now, the time is past forever. Before, God was too merciful to cast out into eternal darkness; now, he is too much incensed ever to forgive. Both these suggestions are false, and equally false. Dealing with you as one who now is subject to the latter class of them, we say, "Be not afraid; only believe!"

Be not afraid *that the day of grace is past*. If you say that you have lost precious years, alas, it is true, and the guilt of it is on your soul; that you ought to have repented long ago—most surely you ought; that you have provoked the Lord to swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest—it is sorrowfully true; that he has often called, and you refused, often stretched out his hand, and you did not regard—it is still, alas, true; but if you

go on to say, Therefore my day of grace is past and gone ; henceforth I can only look forward to my doom ; here we say, No ; a thousand times, no. Why are you here ? Because God has spared you. Why are you thinking upon your soul ? Because God is still calling you. Why are you mourning your lost condition ? Because grace has not forsaken you, but is working in you. It is not sorrow after the world, but upon a fit subject, that of your sins against your Maker. While you have one desire in your heart to say, " Lord Jesus, if thou wilt have mercy on such as I, here I lay me at thy feet, O save me ! " your day of grace is not, cannot be, past. Put that fear away ; resolutely put it away. Say to the tempter, " No, it is not past ! Grace makes me weary of thy ways, and grace will yet give me rest in Jesus. I am looking to him, and he says, ' Only believe. ' "

Be not afraid that your *sins are too many*. I do not believe you have any idea how many they really are. Ten thousands of them you have forgotten, others at the time you neither

saw nor felt, and there is not one of them that you have ever seen in all its hideous wickedness. Ah, if we could take the record of them as viewed in the light of your own conscience, and then in that of heaven, the one would be no more to the other than the stains on a collier seen in the depths of the coal-pit are to the same in the face of the sun. It would be hard, indeed, to exaggerate the number or greatness of your sins. God grant you may never have to face the sight of them unforgiven!

But, on the other hand, you must not think that they are greater than the mercies of God. Not one of them ought ever have been committed; they are without excuse; they ought to have been forsaken long ago. Yet there is forgiveness for every one of them—full forgiveness, free forgiveness, forgiveness for the chief of sinners, if you were in truth the very chief, as, perhaps, you are. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like

crimson, they shall be as wool." They shall. Only continue looking to Jesus, and they shall. Great, many, hideous as they are, Christ's atonement does suffice; you may be forgiven, you will be forgiven. Be not afraid, only believe!

"But O, I am so vile! Was ever a heart so wicked as mine? Even in trying to come to God, hateful things pass through my mind. When I resolve to do better, I am worse. Sins which I loathe, and despise myself for, I repeat, and repeat again. No, no; for one so foul and sinful there cannot be salvation."

Here, again, I would say, as before, I do not believe that you really know how vile you are. You complain of your heart, and with good reason. Yet your knowledge of it is only like that of an unskilled patient feeling his own pulse. You little know how truly God said of your heart, "*desperately wicked*." Fully, fully do I admit your vileness; "From the sole of your foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores." If so, what is to become of

you? Without a touch from His hand, who maketh all things new, without that heart being taken away and a new heart given, you can never see the kingdom of God. Then must you be lost? No, blessed be the Lord, no. Where are you? At Christ's feet. What are you doing? Saying to him, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Mark! this is not prayer in despair, but prayer in faith. "I shall be clean?" Yes, if he but sprinkle you with that "blood of the covenant," which the sprinkling with hyssop foreshadowed, clean you will be. If he but wash you with the healing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, you shall be whiter than snow. And sprinkle you he will: wash you he will. From all your filthiness and from all your idols will he cleanse you. O, thanks be to God that you are not where the filthy must be filthy still; but at the feet of Him whose blood cleanseth from all sin. "Be not afraid, only believe!"

"But I am sure to fall away again. What
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is the use of my beginning a Christian life? I shall not hold not; 'and the last state will be worse than the first.'"

Suppose it was quite certain that you would fall away; what then? Would you rather lie still in bondage to sin, and let the destroyer bear you downward and downward, an unre-sisting prey, rolling you in the dust, and exulting over your helplessness, than turn upon him, and say, "If I am to perish it will be after a struggle. If I am to be sold under sin, never freed, never blessed, never able to walk in newness of life, it will not be without fleeing, or trying to flee, from thee and thy ways, to Him who saves others. Hearkened to, or unheeded, my voice will cry, 'Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' If I perish, I will perish at the feet of Christ."

But none can perish there. He will first forgive thee, and then renew thee, and then keep thee. He will say two words to thee: "Go in peace;" this will seal thy conscience with forgiveness for the past; and, secondly, "Sin no more;" this will have a wonderful in-

fluence over thee. It will change thee; thou wilt hate sin, and, more than that, thou wilt have power over it, being no more alone, but “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” Need there will be of watching, need of prayer, of faith, of diligence, of all steadfastness, of ever, ever looking unto Jesus. Cease to look to him, begin to rely on yourself, or to be unwatchful, or to sleep, and you will fall. But he is able to keep you from falling, and in your new state of grace you will often repeat with unutterable comfort this saying: “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, *much more, being reconciled*, we shall be saved by his life.” This is your surety—He lives; then you shall live also, for you are calling upon him. “Be not afraid, only believe!”

Believe for pardon of past sin, for grace in future temptations, for acceptance with God, now, now, now.

When he said to Jairus, “*Only believe*,” what idea did it convey? Simply, Trust to me. And as they went along, and the remem-

brance that it was death they had to deal with came back upon the father, threatening to bring doubt with it, what had he to do? Just to look to him beside whom he was walking, and to say, "I have none but thee. Help and hope are departed; death is here. I am powerless; but thou art wonderful. Thou art surely true, and thou hast told me to believe; I will trust in thee."

You are not walking with him side by side; you cannot look into his countenance, or hear the unearthly power of his words. But he is as close to you as he was to Jairus. His eye is looking on you. His voice is speaking to you. You are longing for a Saviour, and wherever one is doing so he is close by, as surely as sunrise is near when flowers open and birds awake. A Being, a Friend, a Power, he is at hand—very, very near, nearer than this page. Unseen, but real; unseen, but present; unseen, but reading your heart; Jesus is near, very near to thee. When he said, "Only believe," the hopeless father had no alternative but either to feel, "He is not to be

trusted," or to feel, "He will save her after all." Had he looked down to the ground, probably he would have felt the first. If he looked full into the face of Jesus, he would feel, "He cannot lie: it seems impossible, but I must trust him." Do not look down. Reverently, penitently, with much contrition, look to Jesus, but direct to him, and steadily, and long. Then say, "Can I distrust him? Can I do other than trust him? Is he not the Saviour, my Saviour?" Rich in heavenly attributes, he is with thee a living helper; living now, living to all eternity, living and holding the keys of hell and death, which he will shut against thee forever; living in majesty and worship. But he was not always living; he "was dead." Slowly, with deep awe, look! He bears marks of a curse amid all his glory. What curse? Death. For what reason? Sin. Whose sin? He had no sin. No, but for thy sin, ay, for thine, thine! He liveth, and was dead, and is alive for evermore, and is near to thee, and says, "Be not afraid, only believe!" Wilt thou, canst thou, distrust him?

Believe *that he is able to save thee*. Make out as bad a case against yourself as ever you can. Prove that you deserve the anger and punishment of a holy God to any degree. Look at your sins till they swell like mountains. Think upon the law till every commandment seems to cry out against you. Consider the great white throne, and the book, and the sentences, till you feel that you have prepared for yourself a record that it would be woe to face, a judgment that it would be hell to bear. But when you have done all this, you have only proved that without Christ you are lost, lost now, lost forever.

In full knowledge of this fix your helpless soul upon his atonement, upon his intercession. Think how he died for you. Think how he lives and pleads for you. Think that he came just to save, and for nothing else than to save, lost sinners. Settle this in your mind: As sure as I cannot save myself, so surely Christ can save me. Let nothing shake you from this. Answer all doubts and difficulties by saying, He is mighty to save; not equal to easy cases

and incapable of hard ones ; but able to save to the uttermost, to save the chief of sinners—able to save ME.

Perhaps the thought will come, “I could trust Christ, but O, the wrath of the Father! I cannot escape it. I have provoked him ten thousand, thousand times.” Without doubt you have ; and his wrath is just, is awful, and it abideth on you. But it is only wrath ; it is not hatred.

You can trust Christ, but not the Father! It is a dark, bad, unjust thought. Is not Christ God manifest in the flesh? the gift, the embodiment, and the medium of the Father’s love? He came because the Father loved us, and sent him that we might not perish. He died as an atonement. But it is never written that this was to make the Father willing to forgive. It is written that it was in order that, in bestowing the forgiveness wherein his mercy delighted, he might be just. It is a strange and a wonderful thing for an upright judge to lift proved law-breakers out of condemnation to favor and dignities. This could

not be done without atonement; for whether he condemns or sets free, he must "be justified when he speaks, and be clear when he judges." The sacrifice of the Incarnate Son upon the Cross was, and ever remains, the one sufficient, unrepeatd, perfect, glorious, and divine atonement for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Through it God can give a guilty man the lot of a guiltless angel, and yet be just. It was offered, not because he was unwilling to save us, but because he so loved us that even the death of his Son was not too much to give for our salvation. In the voice of Christ's ever-speaking blood hear the whole Godhead uttering immeasurable love, and beseeching us to be reconciled to God. Wrath can change to favor where there is love. This is the case with the Father. He is justly angry with thee; for thy sins are more in number than the hairs of thy head. But he was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, and if thou wilt accept him as thy sacrifice and righteousness, speedily will wrath be turned away, and he will accept

thee, adopt thee, comfort thee, keep thee to the end, and crown thee with eternal life. Again and again repeat it, "He is able to save me."

Believe that *he is willing to save you*. You will be tempted to look on every flaw in your motives, every defect in your penitence, every sign of hardness in your heart, as such an offense to him that Jesus will on account of it refuse to receive you. This is no less than treating him as unwilling to save you. You are what you are, and if he will not receive you as such, of what benefit can he be to you? Review all your spots, all your wrinkles, all your flaws and blotches; and, lifting an eye that may well be heavy with shame, look to Him whom your sins have pierced, and ask, Willing or unwilling?

Here comes in a wonderful word of God: "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, saith the Lord." When we have been often and long offended, our thoughts are bitter, our ways unforgiving; not so those of Him whom we have grieved. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Glory, glory, glory to our forgiving God!

This heaven-high distance of God's thoughts above ours explains many of the difficulties of faith. Were our mind as his, how easily should we trust him! Were not our thoughts and ways so infinitely below his, how readily should we "take him at his word!" But little do they know of human nature who talk of believing a promise of full forgiveness for a long life of offenses, as if it was the same act as believing a credible statement. The one we naturally do; the other is against our nature.

A schoolmaster tells his pupil that the French have gained a great victory at Solferino • he believes it without an effort, for it needs no more than the commonest respect for his ve-

racity. He tells him he will give him his favorite pony. At this he looks into his face, and looks again to see if he really intends it; for to "take him at his word" now requires great confidence in his generosity. He tells him, after a day of disobedience and defiance, that if he will come within doors and submit, not only will all be forgiven and forgotten, but he shall have the richest articles in the house as gifts. Does he believe this at once? Does he not feel a thousand suspicions? Can any thing but a firmly established and long-standing persuasion that the master cannot lie overcome his dread of a snare lying under the offer of reconciliation?

And among men, is any thing so hard as for one who has long and greatly injured another to believe that he has from his heart forgiven him? Even after years have passed he will suspect that the old wounds are kept in mind. Jacob will not face Esau without sending present after present before him. This is just what we want to do, to send a whole train of offerings before us, and come in, following

them, in hope of finding that they have softened an unforgiving mind.

It is our nature thus to judge of God, as if he were one of ourselves. But no, he is utterly unlike you, unlike your neighbors, unlike the most generous of mortals—as unlike as the spangled heavens are to the starless sea. “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” It is against your nature implicitly to trust in any being as ready to forgive so many, so great, so repeated, so heavy offenses as yours; therefore cry, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” He will help it. He will, by a gift of God, by the power of his own Spirit, destroy that unbelief which is in your nature, and which makes him a “liar.” You will be persuaded that he delighteth in mercy, and “is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.”

The Lord has sealed his willingness with these words: “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” That is settled. “In

no wise." Not because you are unworthy or ill prepared, or because you are not penitent enough, not coming from a high motive, but from fear of being lost. "In no wise." Not on account of any of the thousand reasons you can see why he should cast you out. "In no wise." If only you come, he will not ask you why. You come: it is enough. It is what he has sought. He has called, he has invited, he has warned, and at last you come. He does not ask why; he does not examine if you are worthy. You come because you have no one else to go to; because you are perishing; because you have tried all other helps and failed; because—you don't know why; something draws you. Yes, something: it is God himself. Come, then, come, and be assured he is willing. "Only believe!"

Believe that *he is ready to save you*. You think much of the needful preparations. All *his* are made. His message to you is, "All things are now ready." He has nothing more to do. The atonement is made, the mercy-seat is erected, the redemption price is

paid. "It is finished:" look to Him who said this, and only believe.

"But I am not prepared;" He is. "But I have not been looking for pardon so soon;" the prodigal was not expecting that "when he was yet a great way off" his father would run to meet and hasten to forgive him. "But I am not in such a good state of mind as to hope for God's favor at once;" the prodigal was ill fit to appear in his father's presence; and to think that in his rags and misery he should be taken into those blessed arms!

He is able, willing, **READY**; settle these three things in your heart; go over them again and again, putting down doubts, and looking steadily at the Lamb of God.

Believe that *he will save you*. This you must do. The woman came, saying, "If I may but touch the hem of his garment *I shall be made whole*." It was this faith that saved her. Not believing that she was made whole before she was, which would be believing what was not true; nor believing that she was made whole after she was, which would not be faith

making her whole, but healing giving her faith. No, no. It is very simple. Her faith was this: "If I touch I shall be made whole." This she had before she felt any change in herself; it was naked trust in Christ, sheer confidence in his virtue and power and love. It led her to touch, it brought the healing; for it is this firm trust in his saving mercy which the Saviour is pleased to honor.

Mark! though the word was "shall be healed," it was not faith for an indefinite period in the future, but for a definite moment in the present. "If I but touch I shall be healed." She touched expecting then, expecting there, and healed she was. And so will you. If you come persuaded that, "If I ask I shall receive," your faith will not be deceived. Let it not be faith for an answer to some prayer to be offered hereafter, but for this one, now. Then the feeling will come over your heart, "He will be my Saviour some time, I hope; but to-day! no, no, not to-day!" Why not to-day? Why not now?

"Now" is the citadel of unbelief. All the
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adversary's ends are gained if you will distrust the Redeemer now; for every succeeding breath brings its Now with it, and if the feeling that he cannot save Now be only kept up you are held away from him. No wonder that the adversary would fence round Now with every difficulty, and throw you back and back upon another time. No wonder he would make Now always seem as an island rock standing up in the ocean of mercy, which, no matter how the tide swells, is never overflowed. But there is no such island. You may as well seek a mountain so high that the sun cannot shine above it, as a moment so difficult that Christ cannot save in it. His mercy transcends all impediments, and reigns in unruffled uniformity over yesterday, to-day, and forever. Now is his set time, his accepted day. Look once more, steadily, and say, "Lord, save now;" and add, "Thou wilt save now," and "be not afraid, only believe!"

"But I do not feel forgiveness; if I only *felt*, then I could believe." Did the woman feel healing before she believed? First she

be'ieved, then touched, and then she immediately "felt in her body" that she was made whole. So you, while still under your load, must believe; and, believing, must say, "Lord Jesus, save me now;" and, continuing to say it believingly, you will soon "feel in your soul" that you are made a child of God. Till you so feel it, let no *man* speak peace to you. Some, when they get the words of faith out of your lips, will try to hasten you, saying, "You believe, then you are saved; dismiss your fears." Tell them not to attempt to heal you by logic. Wait, wait, wait at the feet of Christ till your wounds are touched by his hand, till your burden is undone by One invisible, till you find rest in the Lord alone, till he puts a new song in your mouth, even that of salvation; and though it tarry, still wait for it, and though your faith tremble, and all but fail, hold, O hold on, ever so feebly. It will not be long. Thus believing, you will soon find mercy. "In whom after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." They were.