

**THE QUEEN OF THE
HOLLY BUSH:
CHRISTMAS SKETCHES**

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The Queen of the Holly Bush: Christmas Sketches by A. W. Hallen

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THE
REDEEMING LOVE OF GOD.

CHAPTER I.

THE DESIRE FOR GOD'S LOVE.

UPON a beautiful morning in spring, I leaned across the top bar of a gate leading into a field of growing grass. It was a lovely scene. The wind just stirring the trees, the white mounded clouds drifting slowly across the heaven of blue, the sunshine warm and golden, formed a picture of almost perfect beauty; and as the eye wandered over the glossy waving grass, and the blowing clover, and the glistening buttercups, with what a feeling of quiet delight did the ear drink in the songs of the birds, the lark carolling in the sunshine, the blackbird

Among the various objects of desire of the human breast, none seems more truly befitting, none harmonises so well with man's condition and character, as the desire for the love of God. If we were assured that it were a mere phantasm, a mirage of unreal delights, mocking the pilgrims across the desert of life; if we knew it to be unattainable, as lying wholly beyond the reach and limit of our earthly condition, we must even then count it chief among the glorious dreams that float awhile before the mental vision, and delude the human heart. Should we not demand very strict assurance, that such were the case? The heart, clinging with fond tenacity, could not but look with a pang of the deepest distress upon the final shutting out of so glorious a hope—could not readily consent to the abandonment of a treasure so dearly cherished. To be shut out from God in the loneliness of existence—to know that an impassable gulf was fixed between Him and us—not to know Him except as exercising passionless power—to take our place amid a system of merciless unvarying law, where human sympathy and affection would be crushed and disregarded,—how would such thoughts embitter existence!

itself to this power so infinitely greater. How little we can do—how frail we are to resist, how irresolute in purpose, slow in action, unable adequately to carry out our own designs—is matter of every-day experience, and from this poetry wins some of its most pathetic strains, where the flower and the cloud, the dream and the shadow, are presented as the fittest emblems of the weakness of man. Around us are proofs of the existence of vastly superior power. It is not only—

“The poor Indian with untutored mind
Sees God in clouds, and hears him in the wind.”

Sometimes this power wears the severe aspect of wrath, as when the earthquake shakes the solid ground, the irresistible lightning flashes like an avenging sword from the clouds, or the storm breaks around in pitiless fury. The human heart, moved by an overpowering impulse, seems instinctively to yearn towards the protection of this Great Power of the universe, and shrinks from consciously arraying itself against the might of Omnipotence. This is the language of idolatry. Blind, degraded, fierce and barbarous howsoever man may be found; however uncouth his idol forms, and sanguinary and re-

pulsive his rites of so-called worship ; yet these are but the exponents of the instinctive feelings, the muttered inarticulate language of the human heart, as it cowers and beseeches, and pleads, for protection. In this there is something infinitely pitiful. Even the natural affections would prompt man to hope, that these severe aspects did not exhaust the circle of the Divine attributes ; but that just as He was more powerful, so He might be more pitiful, and that, wiser and juster than man, He would also be kinder and more patient. For while there are circumstances calculated to awaken dread and terror, there are times when peace and prosperity, abundance and success, lead the mind to dwell upon, and hope for, the kindness and love of this over-ruling Power.

Just as in an ancient manuscript, the writing has faded away so that you can scarcely perceive that it had ever existed, a few traces alone remaining, so in the heart there seem to be dim remembrances of a higher relationship to God. In this little darkened chamber, where evil thoughts arise, there seem still to remain the faint outlines and scarcely discerned lineaments of higher affections and nobler purposes. When

we muse in thoughtful and subduing moments upon the subject of duty, when we call to mind the love of father and mother, home and friends, it may well be that the thought would spring up, whether He who implanted these affections in the human breast does not Himself possess them. Might we not conjecture, and fondly hope, that He, whom we have been taught to call "Our Father," may possess all the consideration and tenderness, the wise kindness and never-failing affection which are wrapped up in the word "Father?" The soul yearns for God. It may be unconscious of its need, may strive to still the cravings of an unsatisfied heart with that which is not food; yet, as the flower turns to the light, as the parched field thirsts for the shower, as the exile longs for home, so man longs for God. There is not a single heart, however furrowed by care, frozen by poverty, darkened by sorrow, charred and scorched by the fires of Mammon; there is no one, however worldly or thoughtless, giddy, trifling, utterly forgetful, but if he comes to think upon what is meant by the love of God; if some kind friend were to stop him and say, "Have you ever thought of the love of God? have you no desire to possess

the favour of the Most High? do not dwell upon the surface meaning, but strive to grasp the reality beneath;”—there is no one, if thus addressed, but must acknowledge that it is a subject of very deep interest, and an object of very earnest desire. Were such a thought realised, were the infinite desirability, the infinite importance of such a thing seen, there would go up to heaven a cry of agonising entreaty, the prayer of deceived Esau: “Hast thou but one blessing, O my Father; bless me, even me also, O my Father!”

Think for a moment how inestimable a blessing is the possession of the love of God. What tongue can tell its value! It is this which the Apostle says “passeth knowledge;” it is something beyond us, of which we can know only a part, and that a very small part. You may look up to the star-lit sky; although your eye takes in a large expanse, yet how small a proportion is it of the whole. Beyond our horizon fresh vistas open up of worlds beyond worlds in the immensity of space, around, above, beneath. Our glance is but a very imperfect survey. So in the heaven of God’s love; we see but in part, we only feebly, very feebly comprehend. The