

JOSEPH in PRISON.

PART II.



Sold by J. MARSHALL,

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PART II

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JOSEPH IN PRISON.

HOW little do we know whether the things which befall us will turn out for our happiness or misery! If I was to be made a king tomorrow, I am not sure that it would not prove to my hurt; and if on the contrary I was to be sold tomorrow for a slave, it is far from being clear that it might not be for my good, for God has all events under his direction, and he can bring strange things to pass just as he pleases.

Joseph (as we have already told you) was sold by his Brethren as a slave to a company of Midianitish merchants. Now "the Midianites brought Joseph down to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, who was an officer or captain of the guard to king Pharaoh." Joseph fell, as it seems, into good hands, but the Scriptures take care to inform us to what cause his was to be attributed, for there we read that

“ the Lord was with Joseph:” hence it was that
“ he became a prosperous man, and he was taken
into the house of his master the Egyptian. “ And his
master saw that the Lord was with him, and that
the Lord made all that Joseph did to prosper in his
hand.”

What a great thing is it to have God's blessing
with us in every thing we do! Some people are
always talking of their good or bad luck, and ac-
cording to such persons Joseph was merely a lucky
person; he was lucky first, they would say, in get-
ting so good a master, and still more lucky in find-
ing every thing go well to which he set his hand.
In fact however, there is no such thing as luck, as
we have observed before, and as we shall have oc-
casion again and again to observe in telling this
story. Let us learn therefore to thank God and not
to thank our stars, or to thank fortune whenever
we succeed in any thing, for whatever it be, we suc-
ceed only because the Lord is with us in that
thing.

Joseph by degrees found such favor in his mas-
ter's sight that “ he was made overseer of the house,
and all that Potiphar had was put into his hands.”
Such was the confidence placed in him, that at last
Potiphar seems to have done nothing for himself,
but to have left it all to Joseph, for we read that
“ he knew not ought that he had, save the bread
that he did eat,” which is as much as to say, that he
knew indeed what food was set before him at his
own table in order that he might eat it, but as to all
the rest of his affairs, he knew nothing about them.

Now though Potiphar might be wrong in doing so little for himself, yet what an honor was it to Joseph to be thus completely trusted. I have known some common servants indeed in my days, who by being very remarkable for their faithfulness, have risen first to be upper servants, and then even to be stewards to their masters. Like Joseph they have set out with doing first one little thing well, and then another, and so they have gone on till they have had very large sums trusted to them, and have got into places of prodigious confidence, and if it were not for the number of servants who pretend to be very trusty when they are not so, the sort of case I am speaking of would probably happen much oftener than it does.

“And it came to pass,” says the Scripture, “from the time that Potiphar had made Joseph overseer in his house, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake, and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had, both in the house and in the field.”

What an encouragement is this to take good people into our family, for God perhaps may bless us for their sakes. Such a good man as Joseph is a blessing wherever he goes.

But now comes a new scene in the life of Joseph. His prosperity was great, but the greatest prosperity is sometimes suddenly interrupted. Potiphar had a very wicked wife, and “she cast her eyes” very criminally on Joseph. Joseph indeed was “a goodly person and well favoured,” and this very

goodliness or beauty of his proved a misfortune to him. How foolish then are those persons (whether young men or young women) who think that to be handsome and well looking is the greatest of blessings. It may turn out perhaps to be the greatest snare, it may prove the worst calamity that ever yet befall you, as happened in Joseph's case.

It appears that Potiphar's wife, the wicked woman just now mentioned, "spake to Joseph day by day," and tried repeatedly to seduce him; "but Joseph refused, and said unto his master's wife, behold my master observeth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand. There is none greater in this house than I, neither hath he kept back any thing from me, but thee, because thou art his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

Here let us stop, in order to consider one of the most striking parts of the character of Joseph. He is in the strongest manner tempted to sin by a wicked woman: he might also hope for her favor if he consented; he had to dread her wrath if he refused: every thing united to make the temptation strong; he was invited by her, not once only, but again and again; not publicly, so as to endanger a discovery, but quite secretly. By what means then did Joseph resist the temptation? He resisted it, partly by reflecting how ungenerous a thing towards his master it would be to yield, and partly also by saying to himself as he also said to the woman, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

Joseph knew that the eye of God was upon him at all times and in all places, and I have no doubt that he had long acted under the influence of this knowledge. What was it that had made him such a faithful steward of his master's goods? It was his being aware that God could see the smallest dishonesty in him, and that God's eye was upon him even when his master's back was turned. And what was it that made him now resist another kind of temptation? It was the same principle of regard to Almighty God. This principle seems to have been very powerful in him, and also to have been always at hand. Joseph (I warrant you) was not used to pass days and hours together without thinking of God, as some people do. Had this been the case, I question whether he would not have yielded to one or other of his temptations.

And now let me request my Readers to take a hint from Joseph, and to try themselves in the following manner. Say to yourselves, what am I in secret? What am I when no eye but that of God is upon me? When on the one hand some fellow creature invites me to sin, when my own inclinations are on the same side, when a present opportunity offers, when there is also no danger of discovery, so that my reputation may be safe, and when my worldly interest will not be hurt by the indulgence, but will rather be promoted by it; when, in short, against all these temptations which beset me, there is nothing to oppose but the fear of God in the heart, how do I then act? Is the fear of God so strong in me as to gain the victory? Am I able to conquer my temptations, however suited to my age, circumstances,

and condition in life, by saying as Joseph did? "How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Now this is true Religion. We are apt many of us to complain of the difficulties of Religion, and to say that we have not learning enough to understand it, but surely that fear of God which has been spoken of is very easy to be understood. I only wish it was as easy to be truly felt. Some there are who fancy themselves religious because they attend at religious places of worship, because they understand well some religious doctrines, because they remember to have once experienced certain religious feelings, or because they have now a number of religious phrases always in their mouth. Let such persons also try their Religion by the same test. Does it enable you to conquer your sins? When all things seem to unite on the side of sin, does your Religion in any measure enable you to get the victory? Secret self-denial, secret conquest over ourselves, secret preference to God above all the world, secret consciousness of having been enabled, by God's grace, to overcome our temptations, and of having, like Joseph, stood firm to God and duty in times of peculiar and repeated trial, these are some of the proofs of true Religion; these are some of the best evidences of our being in a state of grace. I would value these evidences above any comfortable frames and feelings, and they are more in my opinion than a thousand fancies, or impressions, that our salvation is sure. Reader, if you hope to stand undismayed before God on the Great Day of Judgment, try yourself by this test. We read but little in Scripture of Joseph's religious opinions, (not that these are unimportant) we read nothing about the

particular time and manner of his first becoming religious; we read not a word about the religious form of worship which he preferred, nor about the religious party that he followed, nor the religious name he bore; but we read, that he resisted hard temptations, and that both in his prosperity and in his adversity he was faithful to his God; and we find also, as I shall presently shew you, that although his Brethren had used him very cruelly, yet he behaved very kindly and charitably towards them, and forgave them freely, and rejoiced over them to do them good. May my religion be like his, and may the clearer knowledge which God has given me both of himself and of a Savior, make me the more earnest to do his will, and to walk worthy of that "vocation wherewith I am called."

But to return to the story.—“And it came to pass about this time that Joseph went into the house to do his business and there was none of the men of the house there within. And Potiphar's wife caught him by his garment, and he left his garment in her hand and fled and got him out. And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth, that she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them saying. “See he hath brought in an Hebrew “unto us to mock us” (or to offer an insult to us,) “and I cried with a loud voice, and it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and “cried, that he left his garment with me and fled “and got him out.” And she laid up his garment by her until his Lord came home; and they spake unto him according to the same words, and it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his

wife, that his wrath was kindled. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound and he was there in prison?"

What a change! instead of having the command of every thing in Potiphar's house, where he was looked up to, and honoured and respected, he is shut up in prison among thieves and other wicked or suspected persons. And why was he thus shut up? For doing wrong? No! but for doing right. It now and then happens in this world, that a man suffers for fulfilling his duty. It is a mistake to suppose that virtue here below is always its own reward. Reader, if you act ever so right, I cannot promise you that in this uncertain world you will be rewarded for it. Your conduct may chance to be misrepresented, or not sufficiently understood. Some enemy may injure you; some false and hollow friend or lover, who is become offended, may turn against you. Some one whose feelings, or whose interest you may have wounded through your unbending virtue and integrity, may set himself up as your enemy, and may come and give false evidence against you, and may charge you possibly with the very sin to which that person himself has tried in vain to seduce you, and from which, of all the sins in the world you are happily the most clear. Let us learn from this part of the story of Joseph to look to God for his favor, and not to care so much as we are apt to do, about our character with our fellow-creatures. It is better to go to prison, like Joseph, for the sake of a good conscience, than to live in sin with Potiphar's wife in the midst of a

palace, even though we should contrive to live in credit also.

We before remarked, that when Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar, and when his affairs seemed at the worst, yet "the Lord was with him and blessed him, and gave him favor in the sight of Potiphar his master." The same God who shewed favor to him in his former distress, shewed him the same favor now; for when he had got into prison we again read that "the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favor in sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison, and whatever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand, because the Lord was with him, and that which he did the Lord made it to prosper."

"And it came to pass, after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt, and Pharaoh was wroth against them, and put them into the prison where Joseph was bound; and the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them; and they dreamed a dream, both of them, each on one night; and Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and behold they were sad; and he asked them, "Wherefore look ye so sadly to-day?" and they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them I pray you."

In ancient times it pleased God occasionally to send dreams, in order to make known future events; but let not any one therefore suppose that by the help of dreams he can dive into futurity now.

In the days of Joseph men were in much darkness and ignorance concerning the true God. Jesus Christ had not appeared, the New Testament had not been written, nor as yet even the old. Signs and wonders were therefore used, in order to prove that the God of Joseph was the true God. But now we no longer need signs and wonders, for the Holy Scriptures plainly declare Him to us, and if any man should now follow his dreams, it is more than probable, that in doing so he would be obliged to disregard Scripture and his own common sense also. It is worthy of remark indeed, that soon after the law of Moses was given, (which fell far short of the Revelation made to us by Jesus Christ,) people were expressly warned to beware, lest by following some dreamer of dreams, they should forsake that God who was now made known to them; for it is written in the 13th chapter of Deuteronomy, "If there arise among you a dreamer of dreams, saying, Let us go after other Gods and serve them, even though the sign or the wonder shall come to pass, yet thou shalt not go after that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God hereby proveth you to know whether you love the Lord your God," and will "serve him and cleave to him."

But to return to the history of Joseph. God it seems having special mercy for him, and having great designs in view, and having first sent two re-

markable dreams to Joseph, now sends two other dreams to the chief butler and baker of king Pharaoh, who were in prison with him, and enables him to interpret them.

“ And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, ‘ In my dream, behold a vine was before me, and in the vine were three branches, and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth, and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes; and Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh’s hand.’ ”

“ And Joseph said unto him, ‘ This is the interpretation of it.’ The three branches are three days; yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head and restore thee unto thy place; and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh’s cup into his hand after the former manner when thou wast butler. But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. For indeed,’ (added Joseph,) ‘ I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into this dungeon.’ ”

Now, “ when the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said unto Joseph, ‘ I also was in my dream, and behold I had three white baskets on my head, and in the uppermost basket there was of all manner of baked meats for Pharaoh, and the birds did eat them out of the basket on my

head," And Joseph answered and said, "This is the interpretation thereof. These three baskets are three days; yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree, and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee."

"And it came to pass on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birth-day, that he made a feast unto all his servants, and he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again, and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand; but he hanged the chief baker as Joseph had interpreted to them, yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph.

END OF PART II.



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HISTORIES.

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