

“I will never, never
let go your hand”

(Heb. xiii. 5: Weymouth's Trans.).

By RUSSELL ELLIOTT.

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THERE are three passages in God's Word which should be a great comfort to His people. Of Israel God said, “I took them by the hand.” This was when He led them out of Egypt (Heb. viii. 8). Later on in their history, God said, “I the Lord . . . will hold thine hand” (Isa. xlii. 6). And, finally, “I will never, never let go your hand.” These three passages embrace past, present and future. So that, we see, at the very beginning God took our hand; He has continued to hold it ever since; He has said He will never, never let it go. Have we the sense of this? In danger; in perplexity; in loneliness; in temptation; when friends forsake us; or when we are setting out on some new and untried path; do we realise that someone is holding our hand; and that someone, is God?

In the authorised version, the words quoted from Heb. xiii. 5, which head this article, read, “I will never leave thee”; but we think all will agree that Dr. Weymouth's rendering is a very happy one. It seems to bring God still closer to us. “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” does not seem to give quite the same sense of nearness as, “I will never, never let go your hand.” Companionship is blessed. The abiding presence of One in Whom we have all things is an inestimable comfort. But there are times when we need to feel the actual pressure of a hand—to know that someone is holding us.

When did God first take your hand? For if He says, “I will never let it go,” there must have been a period when He took our hand in His for the first time. Heb. viii. 9 answers the question. It is a quotation from Jeremiah xxxi., and refers to God's dealings with Israel. It is God Himself Who speaks: “When I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.” Their exodus was His ordering, and He was with them all the time. Have we realised that God did the same with us at the beginning of our spiritual history? With the first steps in the divine life He took our hand. We did not think of it at the time. Israel did

not. Only after all their wanderings and failures in the wilderness, and all their rebellion in the land does God tell them that He took them by the hand at the very beginning.

He took them by the hand! How close that brings Him! Have you realised that God has come as near to you? What a new character the consciousness of it seems to give to everything. Our Christian life means nothing less than God holding our hand. Has yours sometimes seemed to you like an aimless wandering? Has God seemed at a distance? Have you failed repeatedly? Has your progress been slow and almost imperceptible? Do you sometimes almost seem to lose sight of God and good altogether? Try and awaken to this fact, God has taken hold of your hand. "In the day when I took them by the hand"; this is how God describes it. And nothing less is true of you, if you have made any start with God at all.

Think what it means: "I took them by the hand." God has hold of you; you are precious to Him; you are not left to yourself. God did not say to Israel: "I want you to leave Egypt and cross the desert, and I hope to see you in Canaan, and I will be there waiting for you." He went every step of the way with them. "*I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land.*" "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led him about; he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." Such are God's words. And these also: "I BARE YOU ON EAGLES' WINGS AND BROUGHT YOU TO MYSELF." Does not God do as much for His people to-day? Assuredly He does. And when you first came to Him He took you by the hand. You may have faltered many times since; your first impulses may have died down; your steps grown weary; but if ever He had hold of your hand at all He has hold of it now. For God Himself has said, "I will never, never let go your hand." Look up into the face of your Guide in believing trust, and you will realise that this is true; and you may boldly say, "the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid."

There is a reason why God will never let go your hand. He took Israel by the hand because He had made a covenant. "God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Ex. ii. 24). It is on the ground of another and better covenant that God takes His people by the hand to lead them to-day.

This covenant is based upon the blood of Christ. It is ratified and made unalterably sure by the resurrection of Christ. This very same chapter of Hebrews speaks of it. *“ Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.”* God made a covenant with the nation of Israel which they broke ; this other is an **everlasting** covenant ; it rests upon a foundation God Himself has laid ; and the reason He ever took us by the hand, intending never to let it go again, was because of what the Great Shepherd of the sheep had done and suffered. *And God has bound Himself by that.* All He undertakes to be and to do is because of the blood of the everlasting covenant ; and not because of what we are and what we do. If you have trusted the Lord Jesus—the One God has brought again from the dead : if you are, through faith, one of the sheep belonging to the Great Shepherd ; then God has taken you by the hand. *“ My sheep,”* said Christ, *“ hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me ; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.”*

Do not ask, Can God keep hold of your hand ? If everything depended upon us, then we might well ask the question. If he had taken hold of our hand at first because of what He saw in us or expected us to be, He would have let go before now. But He took us by the hand to lead us because of what He had undertaken. This is the meaning of covenant. It is the ground God has for acting. It is that by which He binds Himself. And His reasons and motives are outside of us. They are all found in Christ. He took you by the hand to lead you because of His sacrifice and your faith in Him ; because He loved you ; because He had a purpose concerning you ; He wanted to be near you ; and He knew how much you needed His help. Look at Jacob, prone on the desert ; a fugitive from his brother's vengeance ; discredited ; and with no one apparently to care for him ; it is just then God comes to his aid. What gracious words fall upon his ears : *“ I AM WITH THEE AND WILL KEEP THEE IN ALL PLACES WHITHER THOU GOEST, AND WILL BRING THEE AGAIN INTO THIS LAND ; FOR I WILL NOT LEAVE THEE, UNTIL I HAVE DONE THAT WHICH I HAVE SPOKEN TO THEE OF.”* And the reason of all this grace is not found in Jacob, but in the ladder “ set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven ” and what that ladder typified—One Who alone could unite heaven and earth, and give God a just reason for blessing man—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet all this has a solemn side. If God took Israel by the hand it was "to lead them." He only knows the road; and we must go the way He wishes. If He takes us by the hand it is that we may be under His control. Are we conscious of His leading? Do we feel His guiding touch?

And more solemn still, it was to "lead them out of the land of Egypt." That is the first thing. Till we know that, we cannot know much else of God's leading. God wants us to Himself. He wishes to satisfy us: a thing Egypt's food and Egypt's pleasures never can do. As certain as anything, the first thing God does after we are sheltered from His judgment by the BLOOD, is to lead us out of the place which does not suit Him and where we can never have communion with Him. Have you become conscious of this? Are you obeying His leading, and has He lead you *out*?

II.

God not only took our hand in the past, but He still keeps it. Let us consider for a moment the precious promise enfolded in Isa. xlii. 6: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness **and will hold thine hand,** and will keep thee." Although this refers to Christ, it is equally true of the believer. In the previous chapter almost identical words are used of Israel: "For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand" (ver. 13).

Here is God's promise for to-day: "I will hold," "I will keep." How reassured we are as we face the future. We know not what it may bring. But will any event, however disastrous; any sorrow, however bitter; any disappointment, however overwhelming, be able to take our hand out of His, or wrest His hand from ours?

Think of that hand. How powerful! Even the sea with all its tossing and turbulence cannot pass His commandment, for He holds "the waters in the hollow of His hand." "Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens." "Is My hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?" It is that hand that holds you. It is that hand that can keep. All we have to be concerned about is to "Humble ourselves under the mighty Hand of God that He may exalt us in due time." What is your particular difficulty or apprehension as you face another year, or even another day, it may be? Measure it by yourself and your own feelings, and you may well feel dismayed; but measure it by the Hand that holds you, and how different. May you feel as you face the difficulty

that your hand is in God's. Or, it may not be dread, but hope. "Can God do this for me?" is the question you are asking yourself. Is it the fulfilment of some desire: the granting of some petition? He seems to have given you hope: will He disappoint? or shall hope deferred almost make the heart sick? May the thought come to you that He Who holds your hand, holds "the key of all unknown," and all events are equally His servants and under His control. He Who took you by the hand to lead you out from your past circumstances can bring you in to whatever new conditions He sees good. Remember, with Him nothing is impossible. In any case, during the year may we realise He is holding our hand and keeping us, according to His promise.

III.

Is it not blessed to see that our life down here, with God, and through all the circumstances, is just a holding of our hand?

"Whate'er the hidden future brings
Is sent by Hands divine.
Through all the tangled web of things
There runs a clear design."

And He Who took our hand at the beginning; Who holds it still; has said: "I will never, never let go your hand. I will never, never forsake you." It has often been pointed out the strength these repeated negatives impart. It is the strongest form of asseveration. Where else can we look for such statements? What other book than the Bible can give us such assurances? Best of all, they are not mere words. They are true—true at all times; true for ever. If the storm beats: "I will never, never let go your hand." If much that you cling to is swept away, the promise holds good. In fierce temptation, He is with you. Even in death, He will still hold your hand.

" 'I will never, never let go your hand'—
What a message of strength and cheer!
God Himself our Eternal Guide,
Guarding our footsteps on every side;
What more do we need this year? "

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" 'I will never, never let go your hand'—
Well may I trust His word,
He has never failed and He never will,
My Saviour, Guide and Comforter still,
I *know* that my prayers are heard! "

" 'I will never, never let go your hand'—
O blessed assurance sweet!
With such a promise, and such a Guide,
I am fully equipped for whate'er betide,
As I go His Will to meet."