

STORM SIGNALS



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STORM SIGNALS.

STORM SIGNALS:

BEING

A Collection of Sermons

PREACHED

ON SUNDAY AND THURSDAY EVENINGS,

AT THE

METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE,

BY

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle lives so much on his watch-tower, and is so constantly on the look-out for souls in imminent danger, or in absolute distress, that our special set of volumes, selected from his Sunday evening and Thursday evening sermons, must appear incomplete without such a series of flaring beacons and shrill warnings as we have here entitled

“STORM SIGNALS.”

We have therefore issued it as a sequel to “TYPES AND EMBLEMS,” “TRUMPET CALLS TO CHRISTIAN ENERGY,” and “THE PRESENT TRUTH,” each and all of which have found wide acceptance with the Christian public.

That this volume, like those, may be blessed of Him who is the Fountain of all blessings is the sincere prayer of

THE PUBLISHERS.

“The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.”

EZEKIEL iii. 16, 17.

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Spared !

“I was left.”—Ezekiel ix. 8.



HE vision of Ezekiel, which is recorded in the previous chapter, brought to light the abominations of the house of Judah. The vision which follows in this chapter shows the terrible retribution that the Lord God brought upon the guilty nation, beginning at Jerusalem.

He beheld the slaughtermen come forth with their weapons, he marked them begin the destroying work at the gate of the Temple, he saw them proceed through the main streets, and not omit a single lane; they slew utterly all those who were not marked with the mark of the writer's inkhorn on their brow. He stood alone—that Prophet of the Lord—himself spared in the midst of universal carnage; and as the carcasses fell at his feet, and the bodies stained with gore lay all around him, he said, “I was left.” He stood alive amongst the dead, because he was found faithful among the faithless; he survived in the midst of universal destruction, because he had served his God in the midst of universal depravity.

We shall now take the sentence apart altogether from Ezekiel's vision, and appropriate it to ourselves, and I think when we read it over and repeat it, "I was left," it very naturally invites us to take a *retrospect* of the past, very readily also it suggests a *prospect* of the future, and, I think, it permits also a terrible *contrast* in reserve for the impenitent.

I. First of all, then, my brethren, we have here a pathetic reflection, which seems to invite us to take a solemn retrospect—"I was left." You remember, many of you, times of sickness, when cholera was in your streets. You may forget that season of pestilence, but I never can; when the duties of my pastorate called me continually to walk among your terror-stricken households, and to see the dying and the dead. Impressed upon my young heart must ever remain some of those sad scenes I witnessed when I first came to this metropolis, and was rather employed at that time to bury the dead than to bless the living. Some of you have passed through not only one season of cholera but many, and you have been present, too, perhaps, in climates where fever has prostrated its hundreds, and where the plague and other dire diseases have emptied out their quivers, and every arrow has found its mark in the heart of some one of your companions. Yet you have been left. You walked among the graves, but you did not stumble into them. Fierce and fatal maladies lurked in your path, but they were not allowed to devour you. The bullets of death whistled by your ears, and yet you stood alive, for his bullet had no billet for your heart. You can look back, some of you, through fifty, sixty, seventy years. Your bald and

grey heads tell the story that you are no more raw recruits in the warfare of life. You have become veterans, if not invalids, in the army. You are ready to retire, to put off your armour, and give place to others. Look back, brethren, I say, you who have come into the sear and yellow leaf; remember the many seasons in which you have seen death hailing multitudes about you; and think—"I was left." And we, too, who are younger, in whose veins our blood still leaps in vigour, can remember times of peril, when thousands fell about us, yet we can say in God's house with great emphasis, "I was left"—preserved, great God, when many others perished; sustained, standing on the rock of life when the waves of death dashed about me, the spray fell heavy upon me, and my body was saturated with disease and pain, yet am I still alive—permitted still to mingle with the busy tribes of men.

Now, then, what does such a retrospect as this suggest? Ought we not each one of us to ask the question, What was I spared for? Why was I left? Many of you were at that time, and some of you even now are dead in trespasses and sins! You were not spared because of your fruitfulness, for you brought forth nothing but the grapes of Gomorrah. Certainly God did not stay his sword because of anything good in you. A multitude of clamorous evils in your disposition if not in your conduct might well have demanded your summary execution. You were spared. Let me ask you why? Was it that mercy might yet visit you—that grace might yet renew your soul? Have you found it so? Has sovereign grace overcome you, broken down your prejudices, thawed your icy heart, broken your stony

will in pieces? Say, sinner, in looking back upon the times when you have been left, were you spared in order that you might be saved with a great salvation? And if you cannot say "Yes" to that question, let me ask you whether it may not be so yet? Soul, why has God spared you so long, while you are yet his enemy, a stranger to him, and far off from him by wicked works? Or, on the contrary, has he spared you—I tremble at the bare mention of the possibility—has he prolonged your days to develop your propensities, that you may grow riper for damnation—that you may fill up your measure of crying iniquity, and then go down to the pit a sinner seared and dry, like wood that is ready for the fire? Can it be so? Shall these spared moments be spoiled by misdemeanours, or shall they be given up to repentance and to prayer? Will you now, ere the last of your sins shall set in everlasting darkness, will you now look unto him? If so, you will have reason to bless God through all eternity that you were left, because you were left that you might yet seek and might yet find him who is the Saviour of sinners.

Do I speak to many of you who are Christians—and you, too, have been left. When better saints than you were snatched away from earthly ties and creature kindred—when brighter stars than you were enclouded in night, were you permitted still to shine with your poor flickering ray? Why was it, great God? Why am I now left? Let me ask myself that question. In sparing me so long, my Lord, hast thou not something more for me to do? Is there not some purpose as yet unconceived in my soul which thou wilt yet suggest to me, and to carry out which thou wilt yet give me grace and strength,

and spare me again a little while? Am I yet immortal, or shielded at least from every arrow of death, because my work is incomplete? Is the tale of my years prolonged because the full tale of the bricks hath not yet been made up? Then show me what thou wouldst have me do? Since thus I have been left, help me to feel myself a specially-consecrated man, left for a purpose, reserved for some end, else I had been worms'-meat years ago, and my body had crumbled back to its mother earth. Christian, I say, always be asking yourself this question; but especially be asking it when you are preserved in times of more than ordinary sickness and mortality. If I am left, why am I left? Why am I not taken home to heaven? Why do I not enter into my rest? Great Lord and Master, show me what thou wouldst have me do, and give me grace and strength to do it.

Let us change the retrospect for a moment, and look upon the sparing mercy of God in another light. "I was left." Some of you now present, whose history I well know, can say, "I was left;" and say it with peculiar emphasis. You were born of ungodly parents; the earliest words you can recollect were base and blasphemous, too bad to repeat. You can remember how the first-breath your infant lungs received was tainted air—the air of vice, of sin, and iniquity. You grew up, you and your brothers and your sisters, side by side; you filled the home with sin, you went on together in your youthful crimes, and encouraged each other in evil habits. Thus you grew up to manhood, and then you were banded together in ties of obliquity as well as in ties of consanguinity. You added to your number; you

took in fresh associates. As your family circle increased, so did the flagrancy of your conduct. You all conspired to break the Sabbath; you devised the same scheme, and perpetrated the same improprieties. Perhaps you can recollect the time when Sunday invitations used always to be sent, a sneer at godliness was couched in the invitations. You recollect how one and another of your old comrades died; you followed them to their graves and your merriment was checked a little while, but it soon broke out again. Then a sister died, steeped to the mouth in infidelity; after that a brother was taken; he had no hope in his death; all was darkness and despair before him. And so, sinner, thou hast outlived all thy comrades. If thou art inclined to go to hell, thou must go there along a beaten track: a path which, as thou lookest back upon the way thou hast trodden, is stained with blood; for thou canst remember how all that have been before thee have gone to the long home in dismal gloom, without a glimpse or ray of joy. And now thou art left sinner; and, blessed be God, it may be you can say, "Yes, and I am not only left, but I am here in the house of prayer; and if I know my own heart, there is nothing I should hate so much as to live my old life over again. Here I am, and I never believed I should ever be here. I look back with mournfulness indeed upon those who have departed; but though mourning them, I express my gratitude to God that I am not in torments—not in hell—but still here; yea, not only here, but having a hope that I shall one day see the face of Christ, and stand amidst blazing worlds robed in his righteousness and preserved by his love." You have been left, then; and what ought you to say?

Ought you to boast? Oh, no; be doubly humble. Should you take the honour to yourself? No; put the crown upon the head of free, rich, undeserved grace. And what should you do above all other men? Why, you should be doubly pledged to serve Christ. As you have served the devil through thick and thin, until you came to serve him alone, and your company had all departed, so by divine grace may you be pledged to Christ—to follow him, though all the world should despise him, and to hold on to the end, until, if every professor should be an apostate, it might yet be said of you at the last, “He was left; he stood alone in sin while his comrades died; and then he stood alone in Christ when his companions deserted him. Thus of you it should ever be said, ‘He was left.’”

This suggests also one more form of the same retrospect. What a special providence has watched over some of us, and guarded our feeble frames! There are some of you, in particular, who have been left to such an age that as you look back upon your youthful days you revoke far more of kinsfolk in the tomb than remain in the world, more under the earth than above it. In your dreams you are the associates of the dead. Still you are left. Preserved amidst a thousand dangers of infancy, then kept in youth, steered safely over the shoals and quicksands of an immature age, and over the rocks and reefs of manhood, you have been brought past the ordinary period of mortal life, and yet you are still here. Seventy years exposed to perpetual death, and yet preserved till you have come almost, perhaps, to your fourscore years. You have been left, my dear brother, and why are you left? Why is it that brothers and sisters are all gone?

Why is it that your old school-companions have gradually thinned? You cannot recollect one, now alive, who was your companion in youth. How is it that now, you, who have lived in a certain quarter so long, see new names there on all the shop doors, new faces in the street, and everything new to what you once saw in your young days? Why are you spared? are you an unconverted man? are you an unconverted woman? To what end are you spared? Is it that you may at the eleventh hour be saved?—God grant it may be so—or art thou spared till thou shalt have sinned thyself into the lowest depths of hell that thou mayest go there the most aggravated sinner because of oft-repeated warnings as often neglected—art thou spared for this, or is it that thou mayest yet be saved? But art thou a Christian? Then it is not hard for thee to answer the question, Why art thou spared? I do not believe there is an old woman on earth, living in the most obscure cot in England, and sitting this very night in the dark garret, with her candle gone out, without means to buy another—I do not believe that old woman would be kept out of heaven five minutes unless God had something for her to do on earth; and I do not think that you grey-headed man now would be preserved here unless there was somewhat for him to do. Tell it out, tell it out, thou aged man; tell the story of that preserving grace which has kept thee up till now. Tell to thy children and to thy children's children what a God he is whom thou hast trusted. Stand up as a hoary patriarch and tell how he delivered thee in six troubles, and in seven suffered no evil to touch thee, and bear to coming generations thy faithful witness that his word is true, and that his promise cannot fail.

Lean on thy staff, and say ere thou diest in the midst of thy family, "Not one good thing hath failed of all that the Lord God hath promised." Let thy ripe days bring forth a mellow testimony to his love; and as thou hast more and more advanced in years, so be thou more and more advanced in knowledge and in confirmed assurance of the immutability of his counsel, the truthfulness of his oath, the preciousness of his blood, and the sureness of the salvation of all those who put their trust in him. Then shall we know that thou art spared for a high and noble purpose indeed. Thou shalt say it with tears of gratitude, and we will listen with smiles of joy—"I was left."

II. I must rather suggest these retrospects than follow them up, though, did time permit, we might well enlarge abundantly, and therefore I must hurry on to invite you to a *prospect*. "And I was left." You and I shall soon pass out of this world into another. This life is, as it were, but the ferry boat; we are being carried across, and we shall soon come to the true shore, the real *terra firma*, for here there is nothing that is substantial. When we shall come into that next world we have to expect by-and-by a resurrection—a resurrection both of the just and of the unjust; and in that solemn day we are to expect that all that dwell upon the face of the earth shall be gathered together in one place. And he shall come, who came once to suffer, "he shall come to judge the world in righteousness, and the people in equity." He who came as an infant shall come as the Infinite. He who lay wrapped in swaddling bands shall come girt about the paps with a golden girdle, with a rainbow wreath, and robes of

storm. There shall we all stand a vast innumerable company; earth shall be crowned from her valley's deepest base to the mountain's summit, and the sea's waves shall become the solid standing-place of men and women who have slept beneath its torrents. Then shall every eye be fixed on him, and every ear shall be open to him, and every heart shall watch with solemn awe and dread suspense for the transactions of that greatest of all days, that day of days, that sealing up of the ages, that completing of the dispensation. In solemn pomp the Saviour comes, and his angels with him. You hear his voice as he cries, "Gather together the tares in bundles to burn them." Behold the reapers, how they come with wings of fire! see how they grasp their sharp sickles which have long been grinding upon the mill-stone of God's long-suffering, but have become sharpened at the last. Do you see them as they approach? And there they are mowing down a nation with their sickles. The vile idolaters have just now fallen, and yonder a family of blasphemers has been crushed beneath the feet of the reapers. See there a bundle of drunkards being carried away upon the reapers' shoulders to the great blazing fire. See again in another place the whoremonger, the adulterer, the unchaste, and such like, tied up in vast bundles—bundles the withs of which shall never be rent—and see them cast into the fire, and see how they blaze in the unutterable torments of that pit: and shall I be left? Great God, shall I stand there wrapped in his righteousness alone, the righteousness of him who sits my judge erect upon the judgment seat? shall I, when the wicked shall cry, "Rocks hide us, mountains on us fall," shall this eye look up, shall this

face dare to turn itself to the face of him that sits upon the throne? shall I stand calm and unmoved amidst universal terror and dismay? shall I be numbered with the goodly company, who, clothed with the white linen which is the righteousness of the saints, shall await the shock, shall see the wicked hurled to destruction, and feel and know themselves secure? Shall it be so, or shall I be bound up in a bundle to burn, and swept away for ever by the breath of God's nostrils, like the chaff driven before the wind? It must be one or the other; which shall it be? Can I answer that question? can I tell? I can tell it—tell it now—for I have in this very chapter that which teaches me how to judge myself. They who are preserved have the mark on their foreheads, and they have a character as well as a mark, and their character is, that they sigh and cry for all the abominations of the wicked. Then, if I hate sin, and if I sigh because others love it—if I cry because I myself through infirmity fall into it—if the sin of myself and the sin of others is a constant source of grief and vexation of spirit to me, then have I that mark and evidence of those who shall neither sigh nor cry in the world to come, for sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Have I the blood mark on my brow to-day? Say, my soul, hast thou put thy trust in Jesus Christ alone, and as the fruit of that faith, has thy faith learned how to love, not only him that saveth thee, but others too, who as yet are unsaved? And do I sigh and cry within while I bear the blood mark without? Come brother, sister, answer this for thyself, I charge thee; I charge thee do so, by the tottering earth, and by the ruined pillars of

heaven, that shall surely shake, I pray thee by the cherubim and seraphim that shall be before the throne of the great Judge; by the blazing lightnings, that shall then kindle the thick darkness, and make the sun amazed, and turn the moon into blood; by him whose tongue is like a flame—like a sword of fire; by him who shall judge thee, and try thee, and read thy heart, and declare thy ways, and divide unto thee thine eternal portion. I conjure thee, by the certainties of death, by the sureness of judgment, by the glories of heaven, by the solemnities of hell—I beseech, implore, command, intreat thee—ask thyself now, “Shall I be left?” Do I believe in Christ? Have I been born again? Have I a new heart and a right spirit? Or, am I still what I always was—God’s enemy, Christ’s despiser, cursed by the law, cast out from the gospel, without God and without hope, a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel? Oh, I cannot speak to thee as earnestly as I would to God I could. I want to thrust this question into your very loins, and stir up your heart’s deepest thoughts with it. Sinner, what will become of thee when God shall winnow the chaff from the wheat, what will be thy portion? Thou that standest in the aisle yonder, what will be thy portion, thou who art crowded there, what will thy portion be, when he shall come, and nothing shall escape his eye? Say, shalt thou hear him? Say, and shall thy heart-strings crack whilst he utters the thundering sound, “Depart, ye cursed;” or shall it be thy happy lot—thy soul transported all the while with bliss unutterable—to hear him say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the

world." Our text invites a prospect, I pray you take it, and look across the narrow stream of death, and say, "Shall I be left,"

"When thou, my righteous Judge, shalt come,
To fetch thy ransom'd people home,
Shall I among them stand?
Shall such a worthless worm as I,
Who sometimes am afraid to die,
Be found at thy right hand?"

III. But now we come to a terrible *contrast*, which I think is permitted in the text—"I was left." Then there will be some who will not be left in the sense we have been speaking of, and yet who will be left after another and more dreadful manner. They will be left by mercy, forsaken by hope, given up by friends, and become a prey to the implacable fury, to the sudden, infinite, and unmitigated severity and justice of an angry God. But they will not be left or exempted from judgment, for the sword shall find them out, the vials of Jehovah shall reach even to their heart. And that flame, the pile whereof is wood, and much smoke shall suddenly devour them, and that without remedy. Sinner, thou shalt be left. I say, thou shalt be left of all those fond joys that thou huggest now—left of that pride which now steels thy heart: thou wilt be low enough then. Thou wilt be left of that iron constitution which now seems to repel the dart of death. Thou shalt be left of those companions of thine that entice thee on to sin and harden thee in iniquity. Thou shalt be left by those who promise to be thy helpers at the last. They shall need helpers themselves, and the strong man shall fail. Thou shalt be left then of that pleasing

fancy of thine, and of that merry wit which can make sport of Bible truths and mock at divine solemnities. Thou shalt be left then of all thy buoyant hopes, and of all thy imaginary delights. Thou shalt be left of that sweet angel, Hope, who never forsaketh any but those who are condemned to hell. Thou shalt be left of God's Spirit, who sometimes now pleads with thee. Thou shalt be left of Jesus Christ, whose gospel hath been so often preached in thine ear. Thou shalt be left of God the Father; he shall shut his eyes of pity against thee, his bowels of compassion shall no more yearn over thee; nor shall his heart regard thy cries. Thou shalt be left; but oh! again I tell thee, thou shalt not be left as one who hath escaped, for when the earth shall open to swallow up the wicked, it shall open at thy feet and swallow thee up. When the fiery thunderbolt shall pursue the spirit that falls into the pit that is bottomless, it shall pursue thee and reach thee and find thee. When God rendeth the wicked in pieces, and there shall be none to deliver, he shall rend thee in pieces, he shall be unto thee as a consuming fire, thy conscience shall be full of gall, thy heart shall be drunken with bitterness, thy teeth shall be broken even with gravel stones, thy hopes riven with his hot thunderbolts, and all thy joys withered and blasted by his breath. Oh! careless sinner, mad sinner, thou who art dashing thyself now downward to destruction, why wilt thou play the fool at this rate? There are cheaper ways of making sport for thyself than this. Dash thy head against the wall; go scrabble there, and, like David, let thy spittle fall upon thy beard, but let not thy sin fall upon thy conscience, and let not thy

despite of Christ be like a millstone hanged about thy neck, with which thou shalt be cast into the sea for ever. Be wise, I pray thee. Oh, Lord, make the sinner wise; hush his madness for awhile; let him be sober and hear the voice of reason; let him be still and hear the voice of conscience; let him be obedient and hear the voice of Scripture. "Thus saith the Lord, because I will do this, consider thy ways." "Prepare to meet thy God;" "Oh, Israel, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." I do feel I have a message for some one to-night. Though there may be some who think the sermon not appropriate to a congregation where there is so large a proportion of converted men and women, yet what a large proportion of ungodly ones there are here too! I know that you come here, many of you, to hear some funny tale, or to catch at some strange, extravagant speech of one whom you repute to be an eccentric man. Ah, well, he is eccentric, and hopes to be so till he dies; but it is simply eccentric in being in earnest, and wanting to win souls. Oh, poor sinners, there is no odd tale I would not tell if I thought it would be blessed to you. There is no grotesque language which I would not use, however it might be thrown back at me again, if I thought it might but be serviceable to you. I set not my account to be thought a fine speaker; they that use fine language may dwell in the king's palaces. I speak to you as one who knows he is accountable to no man, but only to his God; as one who shall have to render his account at the last great day. And I pray you now go not away to talk of this and that which you have remarked in

my language. Think of this one thing, "Shall I be left? shall I be saved? Shall I be caught up and dwell with Christ in heaven? or shall I be cast down to hell for ever and ever?" Turn over these things. Think seriously of them. Hear that voice which says, "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out." Give heed to the voice which expostulates—"Come now, 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." How else shall your life be spared when the wicked are judged? How else shall you find shelter when the tempest of divine wrath rages? How else shall you stand in the lot of the righteous at the end of the days?





Startling !

“And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?”—2 Kings viii. 12, 13.



SUPPOSE that none of us can doubt that Hazael acted with perfect freedom when he became the murderer of his master. No one, surely, would dare to suggest that any constraint was put upon him. The glittering prospect of wearing the crown of Syria was before his eyes. Nothing stood between him and the kingdom but the life of his master. That master lies sick of a fever. A wet cloth is the usual remedy. He has but to select one that shall be thicker than usual, and take care in spreading it over his face to accommodate it so that the man is suffocated, and lo! he comes to the throne. What wonder is it that Hazael easily puts his master out of the way, and then mounts the vacant seat? None of us will imagine for a moment that he was under constraint, unless it was Satanic. And yet while he acted as a free agent, is it not quite clear that

God foreknew what he would do—that it was absolutely certain he would destroy his master? The prophet speaks not as one who hazarded a conjecture. He foresaw the event with absolute certainty, yet did this man act with perfect freedom when he went and accomplished the prophecy of Elisha. I believe, my brethren, that it is quite as easy to see how God's predestination and man's free agency are perfectly compatible, as it is to see how divine foreknowledge and human free agency are consistent with one another. Doth not the very fact of foreknowledge imply a certainty? Is not that which is foreknown certain? Is not the fact sure to be when God foreknows that it will be? How could it be foreknown conditionally? How could it be foretold conditionally? In this instance there was no stipulation or contingency whatever. It was absolutely foretold that Hazael should be king of Syria. The prophet knew the fact right well, and right clearly he descried the means, or else why should he look into his face and weep? God foreknew the mischief that he would do afterwards, when he came to the throne; and yet that foreknowledge did not in the least degree interfere with his free agency. Nor is this an isolated and exceptional case. The facts most surely believed among us, like the doctrines most clearly revealed to us, point all of them to the same inference. The predestination of God does not destroy the free agency of man, or lighten the responsibility of the sinner. It is true, in the matter of salvation, when God comes to save, his free grace prevails over our free agency, and leads the will in glorious captivity to the obedience of faith. But in sin man is free—free in

the widest sense of the term, never being compelled to do any evil deed, but being left to follow the turbulent passions of his own corrupt heart, and carry out the prevailing tendencies of his own depraved nature. In reference to this matter of predestination and free will, I have often heard men ask, "How do you make them agree?" I think there is another question just as difficult to solve—"How can you make them differ?" The two may be as easily made to concur as to clash. It seems to me a problem which cannot be stated, and a subject that needs no solution. It is but a difficulty which we surmise, and theoretical dilemmas are always hard to deal with and difficult to disentangle. When we look at matters of fact, the mist that clouds our understanding vanishes. We see God predestinating and man premeditating; God knowing fully, yet man acting freely; God ordaining every circumstance, yet man manœuvring to compass his own projects; in short, we see man accurately, but unconsciously, fulfilling all which was written in the wisdom of God; and that without any impetus of the Almighty upon his mind constraining or inciting him so to do. You will observe in this chapter three or four distinct instances in which both the foreknowledge and foreordination of God are distinctly proven, and yet at the same time the free agency of the creature is conspicuously set forth. That point, however, I have merely adverted to by way of introduction. My subject this evening, as more immediately suggested by the words before us, is the common and too often fatal ignorance of men as to the wickedness of their own hearts.

First, let us expose and expound this ignorance, and

then let us draw two practical lessons—one of restraint, what it suggests to us that we should not do—the other of counsel, what it suggests to us that we should do.

Our ignorance of the depravity of our own hearts is a startling fact. Hazael did not believe that he was bad enough to do any of the things here anticipated. "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" He might have been conscious enough that his heart was none so pure but it might consent to do many an evil thing; yet crimes so flagrant as those the prophet had foretold of him, he thought himself quite incapable to commit. He could not believe that such wanton cruelty lurked in his breast, or that such barbarity towards women and children could be perpetrated with his sanction. Not yet, perhaps, was the ambition that aspired to the throne of Syria, or the treachery that issued in the murder of his master, fully ripe. Ah, my brethren, the ignorance of Hazael is ours to a greater or less degree. In our natural state we are oblivious of the depravity of our own hearts. How commonly we hear men deny that their hearts are depraved. They tell us that though man be a little injured by the fall he is still a noble creature. His high and glorious instincts make amends, they would persuade us, for his low and beggarly vices. Such foolish conceits we impute to ignorance. Men account crimes revolting when they hear of their comrades being convicted of committing them, but they do not know the innate plague of their own heart. They have not yet learned that their own heart is base and depraved. Hence they challenge the doctrine when we

state it—because they are unconscious of the fact. We do not expect a man to accept it as an axiom merely upon our testimony. He had need have some experience himself before he will be able to lay hold upon a truth so humbling, so self-abasing, as that of total depravity. The baseness of our hearts has barely dawned on our apprehensions, though we have a faint gleam of suspicion. Conscience is sensitive enough to let us know that all is not quite right. We feel that we are not pure, that we are not completely perfect. We do admit that we make some mistakes, though we set them down to weakness rather than wilfulness; we apologise for our infirmities, and rather excuse than accuse our own hearts. Most of us, however, I trust, have enough light to discern that there was something wilfully wrong with our hearts before the Spirit of Christ began to deal with us. We would frankly and freely confess that we were not all that we desired to be our own selves, that there was some radical evil that defied our capacity to search it out. Ah, but how pale was that gleam; it was mere starlight in the soul—not like the sunlight which has since shone in, and shown us the blackness of our nature. We were ignorant, then, of the fact that our nature was totally corrupt; we did not know that it was essentially tainted with iniquity; we could not have endorsed that saying of the apostle, “The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” We could hardly understand it, when we heard the Christian minister say that the old nature was positively irreclaimable, and must be crucified with its affections and lusts, and that a new nature must be

given us. If we ever heard a preacher speak of the fountains of the great deep of our evil heart being broken up, we thought he exaggerated; at least we said, "Surely this might be true of some notorious criminals or it might be even alleged of some ill-bred people who had seen an ill example from their youth up," but we could not imagine that this was actually the case with ourselves. Ay, but, my brethren, we were, to a great degree, cured of this our ignorance when the Spirit of God brought us under conviction. Oh, what a view of ourselves he then gave to some of us! I think we could say with Bunyan, we thought the most loathsome toad in the world to be a better creature than ourselves. We have been led, when under conviction of sin, to sigh and wish we had been made a viper or some reptile that men would tread upon and crush rather than we should have been such base, such vile, hell-deserving sinners as we felt ourselves to be. No discourse, then, about human dignity, could have pleased us; it would have been rubbing salt into our sore to have told us that man was by birth a pure and a noble creature. In vain might they have attempted to persuade us then that though we were a little awry, a diligent pursuit of some orthodox plan or prescription might easily restore us and lift us up from the position into which we had been cast by Adam and by our sin. No; we felt that divine grace must new-make us, that there must be a supernatural work wrought in such beings as we were, or else surely we never could be fit to stand before the face of God, and see him with joy and greet him with acceptance. Thus, I say, brethren, that much of our ignorance was taken away; but alas!

how much remained! We did not know even then how depraved we were. When Sinai's lightnings were flashing abroad, and all our hearts seemed lit up with its dread fire, that lurid flame was not bright enough to show to us all our baseness. While we stood trembling there, and the law was thundering over our heads, we bowed to the very dust, but we did not cower then as we ought in penitent humiliation. We were rather awed than melted; for we had only just begun to decipher the black letters of that volume of our total depravity. I think we knew more of our moral obliquity afterwards, when Jesus came to us, and, by his sweet love, bade us be of good cheer, for our sins, which were many, were all forgiven us. Oh, how we saw the baseness of sin as we had never seen it before; for we now saw it in the light of his countenance. The love of his eyes flashed a brighter light into our hearts than all the lightnings of Mount Paran. Horeb's burning steep never gave us such illuminations as did Calvary's hallowed summit. Calvary might be the lesser height, it may not have seemed to stand out with such majesty and awe, but it exerted greater power over us. In its tender flush of mellow light, our eyes could see more clearly than in all the fitful flashes that had scared us hitherto. I think we saw, then, to as full an extent as it was possible for us to bear, how vile, how desperately evil was our nature! When we perceived how great must be the sacrifice which, by its virtue, could atone for sin, how vast that price of our Redeemer's blood which only could provide a ransom from the fall, we had lessons once for all taught us, never to be forgotten. And yet, since then, methinks we have learnt more of the evil of our own hearts

than we could at first apprehend. We said, then, "Surely, now I have come into the innermost chamber of iniquity;" but often, since that day, has the Spirit said to us, "Son of man, I will show thee greater abominations than these," and we have been led to see, in the light of God's continual mercies, his perpetual faithfulness, his unfailing love—we have been led to view in that light our continued wanderings, our idolatries of heart, our murmurings, our pride, and our lusts, and we have found ourselves out to be worse than we thought we were. I appeal to you, Christian men and women, if any one had told you that you would have loved your Saviour so little as you have done; if any prophet had told you, in the hour of your conversion, that you would have served him so feebly as you have done, would you have believed it? I appeal to you from the dew of your youth, from that morning blush of your soul's unclouded joy, if an angel from heaven had said to you, "You will doubt your God, you will murmur against his providence, you will kick at the dispensations of his grace"—say, would you not have replied, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this evil thing!" Your experience, I am sure, has taught you that you were not aware, when you put on your harness, how dastard was the soldier who then did gird himself for the battle. But mark this, we none of us know, after all, much of the baseness of our hearts. Some of you may have had more drill than others; you may have made proof of it by sad backsliding, your lusts may have outwardly betrayed their inward vigour; you may have been discarded by the Holy Ghost for a little season that the Lord might show you that you were weak as other men,

that he might prove to you the hollowness of all your self-confidence, and wean you from all trust in your own integrity; but the most sorely exercised among you have not learnt this lesson fully yet. God only knows the vileness of the human heart. There is a depth beneath, a hidden spring, into which we cannot pry. In that lower depth there is a still deeper abyss of positive corruption which we need not wish to fathom. God grant that we may know enough of this, to humble us, and keep us ever low before God. Yet hold, Lord, lest we should yield to despair, and absolutely lie down to die under the black thought of our alienation from righteousness, our naturalisation in sin, and the deplorable tendency of our heart to rebel more and more against thee, the faithful and true God. Show us not our wretchedness. As for the most of us who cannot talk of this experience, let us not think ourselves doctors of divinity; let us sit down at once on the lowest form of the divine school. We have only begun to know ourselves in part; albeit we do know something of the Saviour, blessed be his name! That something is exceedingly precious. Yet how much there is to learn! We have hardly begun to sail on that unfathomable sea. We have not dived yet into its depths. We know not all its heights, and depths, and lengths and breadths. I have been startled often—and if any should say, jeeringly, “The preacher speaketh by experience,” they may—I have often been startled when I have found in my heart the *possibilities* of iniquity of which I thought I never could have been the subject, in reveries by day or in dreams of the night. All at once a blasphemy foul as hell has started

up in the very middle of offering a prayer so earnest that my heart never knew more fervour. I have been staggered at myself. When God has called us into the pulpit—we thought at one time we never could be proud if God honoured us—this has seemed to quicken our step in the black march of our depraved heart. Or when a little cast down and troubled in spirit, we have wished to leave the world altogether, and have been like Jonah, trying to flee to Tarshish that we might not go to this great Nineveh at his bidding. Little did we reckon that there was such cowardice in our soul. We have found out another phase in our own nature. Does any man imagine that his heart is not vile? If he be a professing Christian, I much suspect whether he ought not to renounce his profession; for methinks any enlightened man who sincerely looks to himself, and whose experience leads him somewhat to look within, will surely find, not mere foibles, but foulness that literally staggers him. I question the Christianity of that man who doubts whether there are in his soul the remains of such corruption as drown the ungodly in perdition; or whether though a quickened child of God, he hath another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind. What! hath he no such battle within that the things he would do he often doeth not, while the things that he would not do he often doeth? Hath he no need to be in constant prayer to God to deliver him from the evil in his heart that he may be more than a conqueror over it at last. I do assert once more, and I think the experience of God's children beareth me out, that when we shall be most advanced,

and when we come, at last, to sit down in God's kingdom, we shall find that we have not learnt all that there is to be learnt of the foulness of our nature, and the desperateness of the disease. "The whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Perhaps if we knew more of this terrible evil it might peril our reason. Hardly could it be possible for us to bear the full discovery and live. Among the wise concealments of God, is that which hides from open view the depravity of our heart, and the corruption of our nature.

But now I turn to the practical use of our subject, looking at it in two ways—what it forbids and what it suggests. The depravity of our nature forbids, first of all, a venturing or presuming to play and toy with temptation. When the Christian asks, "May I go into such a place?"—should he parley thus with himself? "True; temptation is very strong there, but I shall not yield. It would be dangerous to another man, but it is safe to me. If I were younger, or less prudent and circumspect, I might be in jeopardy; but I have passed the days of youthful passion. I have learned by experience to be more expert; I think, therefore, that I may venture to plunge, and hope to swim where younger men have been carried away by

the tide, and less stable ones have been drowned." All such talking as this cometh of evil, and gendereth evil. Proud flesh vaunteth its purity, and becomes a prey to every vice. This is the conception of iniquity; only let it be nourished and it will soon bring forth in hideous form every development of sin. He who carries gunpowder about him had better not stand where there are many sparks; he whose limbs being out of joint is in danger of falling every moment, had better not trust himself to walk on the edge of a precipice. Let those who feel themselves to be of a peculiarly sensitive constitution not venture into a place where disease is rife. If I knew my lungs to be weak and liable to congestion, I should shrink from foul air and any vicious atmosphere. If you know that your heart has certain propensities to sin, why go and tempt the devil to take advantage of you? Satan will surprise you often enough; why then should you borrow fuel from his forge for your own destruction? Why will you go forth to meet him instead of trying with all vigilance to elude his insidious attacks? You have enough temptation. It is an ill thing for God's people when they leave their quarters and visit the localities where sin abounds. Were you an angel, were you sure you could never fall, then you might pitch your tent in the pestilential swamp securely, or frequent the haunts of sensual attraction, whose house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death, without apprehension of harm. But you are so prone to evil, so susceptible of contagion, that I warn you not to trifle. Were you strong as adamant your duty would still be to keep out of the way of temptation, to keep as far as possible from

that forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Howbeit, you are not as strong as adamant, you are a creature whose moral power is weak, whose bias to evil is extreme; I implore thee, therefore, as thou wouldst honour thy God, and as thou wouldst stand in his brightness, go not I beseech thee where the temptation to sin is glaring, and flatter thyself that thou wilt come out guileless. There are some of us such poor soldiers that I think, if we had our choice, we should rather be where there was least danger. It is right for some brave men, when duty calls, to go into the thickest of the battle: but every Christian is not meant to be in the front rank. There are some men who have to deal with great sins, who are to seek and pluck sinners as brands from the burning. There are those who, like the physician, must go into the midst of the plague that they may save such as are smitten with it. Some men's calling necessarily demands that they should be in the midst of sin. Yet they have need to keep a special guard over themselves, lest while they seek to pluck others from the fire, they be like Nebuchadnezzar's men, who, in going near the furnace, were burned themselves. Let them take heed then to themselves who seek to take care for others. In some of those charitable missions in which you, my dear brethren in the church, are daily engaged, take care lest you yourselves, exposed to temptation, should so slip and slide, that Satan may have to rejoice, that instead of smiting the lion the lion hath smitten you, and you are lying at his feet. Oh! keep out of temptation's way, or invade it armed with the entire panoply of God. Not many of us are called to expose ourselves to it.

Keep as far off as you can. You had need be watchful.

But, again, knowing how vile we are by nature, knowing indeed that we are bad enough for everything, let us take another caution. Boast not, neither in any wise vaunt yourselves. Presume not to say, "I shall never do this," "I shall never do that." Never venture to say with Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" My experience has furnished me with many instances that the braggart in morality is not the man to be bound for. I would not like to stand surety for his virtue. He professes to hate drunkenness, he was certain he never could be intoxicated, and yet he has indulged the vicious taste when his companions have lured him on, and stained the character that he vainly affected. If not that particular sin, yet there has been some other crime more terrible, perhaps, more fatal to the soul, which has smitten that man down to the dust who has dared to vaunt his integrity. He has said, "My mountain standeth firm; I shall never be moved;" and in that very point where he thought his firmness lay, or in some other which was next-of-kin to it, he has proved his weakness. Lo! the mountain tottered to its base, and was cast into the midst of the sea. There are no men who are in such danger as the men who think they are not in any danger. There are none so likely to sin as those who say they cannot sin. I remember a story told me by a dear brother, who is present with us now. A tradesman who held office in the church asked him for a loan of money. Though rather inconvenient, he was about to comply, and would have done so had not

some such inducement as this been offered—"You know you may safely advance this money to me, for I am incorruptible. I am not young; I am past temptation." Thereupon my friend promptly declined, as he did not like the security. The result justified his shrewdness. At that very time the borrower knew he was on the verge of bankruptcy, and, ere long, was actually a bankrupt, and yet he could pretend to say he was above temptation. Above all, avoid those men who think themselves immaculate, and never fear a fall. If there be a ship on God's sea the captain of which declares that nothing can ever sink her, stand clear, get to the first leaky boat to escape, for she will surely founder. Give a ship the flag of humility, and it is well; but they that spread out the red flag of pride, and boast that they are staunch and trim, and shall never sink, they will either strike upon a rock, or founder in the open sea. Pride is the mother of soul ruin; self-confidence is next door to self-destruction. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Boast not, though thou be never so strong. Boasting becometh not any mortal. Not the stature nor the strength of Goliath could furnish a pretext for his arrogance. Goliath never seemed so little as when he said, "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the air." Leave thy boasting until the battle is done. Do not begin to glory till thou hast trodden all thine enemies beneath thy feet. Wait till thou hast crossed the Jordan, and hast reached the shores of the promised land. Do not begin to say yet, "I am out of gunshot; I am beyond the reach of sin." "Oh," saith one, "I am so grown in grace that

I cannot sin." Brother, I would not have thee think so. Thou hast so grown in grace that thou mayest not slip. "The man after God's own heart" sinned foully. What if thou be after God's own heart, why shouldst thou say, "I cannot sin"? Think thou of Lot—just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversations of the wicked, into what follies he was betrayed. Art thou wise as Solomon? Yet Solomon was an arrant fool. Mayest thou not be in thine old age a fool too? Art thou a believer? So was Peter, and yet Peter denied his Master. Mayest not thou deny thy Master too? Let the fact that many of God's saints have fallen where they seemed to be the strongest—Moses the meek failed in his temper, Abraham faltered in his faith, patient Job waxed irritable, and so forth—let their example teach thee to take heed to thyself, lest thou also be tempted, and thou also be cast down.

And let this fact that we do not know our baseness teach us not to be harsh, or too severe, with those of God's people who have inadvertently fallen into sin. Be severe with their sin; never countenance it; let your actions and your conduct prove that you hate the garment spotted with the flesh, that you abhor the transgression, cannot endure it, and must away with it. Yet ever distinguish between the transgressor and the transgression. Think not that his soul is lost because his feet have slipped. Imagine not that because he has gone astray he cannot be restored. If there must be a church censure passed upon him—yet take care that thou so act that he in penitence of spirit may joyously return. Be thou as John was to Peter. Shut not out thy fallen brother, for the day may come when

they shall shut thee out, and when thou mayest need all the pity and all the help which the spiritual guide can give unto thee. Distinguish, I say again, between the sin that thou dost condemn and the sinner whom thou must still love—the child of God over whom thou must still weep. Ah, sirs! there may be some of you here who speak with bitter contempt and scorn of those who, notwithstanding their frailties, are better men than yourselves. God may have suffered some sin to attain a great predominance over them for a season. Perhaps, if all were known of you, you might be proved to be worse than they;—and oh! were the Lord to take his bit from your mouth, and the bridle of his divine providence from your jaws, you might run to greater excesses of riot still. Who maketh thee to differ? What hast thou that thou hast not received? Say in thy soul, “By the grace of God I am what I am;” but stand not up with the self-righteousness of the Pharisee—say not, “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are.”

Leaving now this point of caution, let us consider, by way of counsel, what positive suggestions may arise. If we be thus depraved, and know not the full extent of our depravity, what then should we do? Surely we should daily mourn before God because of this great sinfulness. Full of sin we are. Let us constantly renew our grief. We have not repented of sin to the full extent, unless we repent of the disposition to sin as well as the actual commission of sin. We should deplore before God, not only what we have done, but that depravity which made us do it. See how David repents. He does not merely mourn for sin, but he

says, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." He makes it a part of his confessions, that iniquity was in his inward parts, and that his soul was tainted from the birth. So be it with you: weep over the nature as well as over the development of the nature. Weep not over the fountain merely, but over the deep spring from which this fountain gushes; not merely over the coin of sin which has been minted into outer acts, but over that base bullion of iniquity which lies uncoined in your heart. Every day exposes this, as well as the sins you have committed, before God. Lay before God, not merely thy crutches, but thy lameness; not merely thy ceremonial defilement, but the deep leprosy that is in thy skin and in thy bone. Yea, mourn over it, and beg him by his grace to cleanse thee, that thou mayest enter into his kingdom. And when thou hast thus done, take heed that thou walk every day very near to God, seeking daily supplies of his grace. Brethren, I charge you, and specially do I charge myself here, let us look up to God, let us hourly depend upon him, feeling that yesterday's grace is of no use whatever for to-day; that the grace which saved us seven years ago is not the grace that can save us now, but we must have fresh supplies. Oh, there be many, I think, who sit down and say, "I did once know Christ." That is not enough, brethren; we must know Christ each day, we must have fresh grace each hour. It is not once to be partaker of the divine nature, but to be daily a partaker of it. Doth the tree bear the fruit by the sap of seven years ago? Is it not the sap of this year which will produce the seed of this year's fruit? And

must it not be so with you? Must you not have daily influxes of the divine influences of the Holy Ghost? Must you not receive from Christ each hour that life without which you must droop and die? Oh, brothers and sisters, let no day pass by without commending yourselves to God; let no hour be spent without resting under his wing. Oh, may our daily habit be to cry unto him, "Hold thou me up and I shall be safe." Oh, my dear hearers, there are some of you who think you are not vile. You have never had your eyes opened to learn your depravity. Let me tell you this, that you are so depraved that except you be born again you cannot see the kingdom of God. You may reform, you may go and seek to make yourselves better. It will not do. Know the old proverb and consider it: "The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Ay, the nature is so base—the nature itself is so depraved and so vile—that there must be a radical change of the whole self. How then canst thou change thy nature? Canst thou renew thine own heart? God forbid that thou shouldst be so vainly infatuated as to imagine it possible! No arm but the eternal arm can make thee what thou shouldst be. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Canst thou make thyself a new creature in Christ? Thou canst not create a fly or a grain of dust, much less create thyself a new heart. But there is one who can. The Holy Spirit is able, Jesus Christ is willing. Dost thou say, "Oh, that he would renew my heart to-night?" Methinks he has begun the work; that desire of thine, if sincere, would prove it. Remember what he bids thee to do is to trust.

If thou hast longing desires for him, cast thyself down at his feet and say, "Jesus, salvation is brought nigh to me; I trust in thee to make known in me this strange, this God-like grace. Work in me the new heart, the divine life, the new nature; save me, save me, Jesus; put my feet in the narrow way, and then guide me all the days of my pilgrimage and bring me to thyself, that where thou art, in heaven, there I may be with thee." Sinner, he will do it, he will hear thy cry and answer thy petition, and thou, in the heights of heaven, shall sing of the mercy which received thee when thou wast not worthy to be received, of the love which loved thee when thou wast wholly unlovely, and of all the grace which changed thy nature and made thee meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. God grant that we may not, any of us, be as Hazael, the perpetrators of crimes of which we never suspected ourselves capable; but rather, feeling that we are men and women of the same kith and kin as the vilest sinners that ever trod this earth, may it be our grateful surprise and our happy lot to be justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. So shall we be numbered with the saints now and throughout eternity. Amen.



Lovely, but Lacking.

“One thing thou lackest.”—Mark x. 21.



HOUGH the gospel of Jesus Christ most certainly addresses itself to the vilest of the vile, it is not exclusively to such that the message of salvation is sent. There are, indeed, no characters so far gone in vice that the gospel does not speak to them. However abandoned they may be, still is this inviting voice sent to the very chief of sinners—“Come to Christ and live.” But the gospel, with equal affection, addresses itself to those who are not upon any common estimation to be numbered with the chief of sinners,—to those, forsooth, whose moral integrity has been unimpeachable, whose outward propriety has been scrupulous, whose lives in all their domestic and social relations have been commendable. There are always some such individuals in our congregation. We are very thankful that there are. We have an invitation for them as frank, as honest, and as earnest, as for wanton sinners, heinous transgressors, and hardened criminals, and our sincere desire is that such may be saved; for we believe that they also will make illustrious

trophies of divine grace, when grace constrains them to decide for Christ.

Amongst us we have a large number of most hopeful people, to whom it may be said—"One thing thou lackest." Let me address *a word of congratulation to you, that you only lack one thing*; then, *a warning because you do lack one thing*; and after that *a few words of instruction to show how this one lack may be supplied*. God grant that his power may rest upon his Word, so that you may lack the one thing no longer.

I. First, then, here is A WORD OF CONGRATULATION.

Let us take this young man's case as descriptive of that of many here present. *He did not lack morality*. He could say, "All these things have I kept from my youth up;" nor did the Saviour tell him that he was uttering a falsehood. He looked upon him and loved him, which he would not have done if he had been a wilful liar. No, he had been neither unchaste, nor dishonest, nor profane. He was, we may presume, all that could be desired in these respects. I congratulate you if such is your case. It will save you from a thousand sorrows to have been kept from those grosser sins. You have not formed habits which will lead you in after years into temptation. You have not entangled yourself with evil associations which it will be difficult to break. You have not learned words, and phrases, and sentiments which will defile your memory in after days, even though you should live to hate them. I thank God that you have this privilege; that it cannot be said of you that you are lacking in morality.

Nor was this young man's lack *that of outward religion*. We are elsewhere told—I think it is by Luke—

that he was a ruler; that is to say, as we read it, a ruler in the synagogue. He was one who had taken office amongst his co-religionists, and had even presided in their religious assemblies. He was a young man, recollect, and it is not often that young men attain to such a position, so that he must have been not only scrupulously excellent in his conduct, but he must have been regarded by all who knew him as remarkably religious at heart; indeed, when he knelt down before the Saviour, and addressed him as "Good Master," he showed that his outward habits were of a religious cast. And so I congratulate some of you that you love the place where Christians meet, that in their sacred songs you take an interest, that their Holy Book is not altogether unread by you, that you would be grieved if you could not go up to the assembly of God's people. I am glad that, as touching these things in your outward regularity, some of you might even put others to shame who are further advanced than you in spiritual things. You do not lack for morality; you do not lack for the outward part of religion.

Nor can I suppose that this young man lacked a *becoming respect for whatsoever was pure and lovely and of good report*. His addressing our Lord by that remarkable title which was not used by Jews even to their Rabbis, showed how he looked upon the Holy Christ with a profound awe. He did not perceive his deity, but what he did perceive of his matchless goodness he deferred to. And it is so with you, my friend. You never utter an opprobrious word against God's people. You would be very grieved to hear them evil spoken of. You love the ministers of Christ. There is no com-

pany that pleases you better than the company of the people of God. You have religion; you have a respect for that power of godliness which as yet you do not possess. You wish you had it. You envy those who have it, and would wish, though meanest of them all, that you might but have a part amongst them. I congratulate you upon this. I thank God concerning you. Looking upon you, I feel as Jesus did, that my heart loves you, and I fain would that you had the needful supply of that thing which you still lack.

This young man did not lack *orthodoxy*. He was no doubter, sceptic, or professed infidel. He said: "What must I do that I may inherit eternal life?" He believed in eternal life. He was not one of those Sadducees who say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit. He venerated the grand old truths to which his forefathers heartily subscribed; he was a firm believer in the orthodox faith. And so it is with you. You have never yet dared to doubt the Word of God, and as far as you have learned its meaning, you hold that meaning in the most solemn respect. You would not for the world be accounted a heretic. You would not wilfully call in question the existence of God, the deity of Christ, the atonement by blood, or any other of the essentials of our most holy faith. As far as your head is concerned you are clear enough about these things. I thank God for this, for it is a grand escape from a pestilent evil. It is hard to get a man's conscience sound who has gone through the great dismal swamps of infidelity. After once listening to the vile suggestions of unsanctified reason, or reading such infamies as come from the pen of a Tom Paine, or the

more refined but not less subtle insinuations of modern cavillers, a man's soul seems as if it never could get clean of the corruption. It is such pitch; it sticks to one's hands, and defiles his heart. Though one take to himself nitre and much soap, yet shall he scarce cleanse himself from the pollution. You have not acquired that taint of your moral constitution. Thank God for it. I bless God that, in his abundant mercy, you do not lack for a knowledge of the faith and a degree of belief in it.

Nor yet, my dear friends, did this young man lack *sincerity*. I have noticed that some expositors speak of him as a hypocrite, but he was as far away from being a hypocrite as the North Pole is from the South. He was transparent in all he said. Even that little bit that looks like boasting—"All these have I kept from my youth up," shows how ingenuous the young fellow was. A man who was not sincere would have minced a little, and kept back an expression so complimentary to himself. He was the mirror of candour. So are some of you. You have not learned the ways of craft. You do not assume to be what you are not. Though you mix with God's people, you have not ventured to present yourself for baptism without faith, nor do you dare come to the communion table because you fear you have not fellowship with Christ. You prove your sincerity in many ways, and upon this again I congratulate you, and thank the God of mercy.

This young ruler, moreover, did not lack *for zeal*. The way in which he came to Christ showed his ardour. He came to him running, and fell down before him saying, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" You, too, have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. If the Holy Spirit shall but teach you

what the one thing is that you are lacking, I believe you will seek after it. I trust you will. At any rate, up to the measure of your light you have been hitherto quick, and zealous, and willing to do what you could.

This young man also *was exceedingly thoughtful*. Half the battle with many men is to make them think, even though they think wrongly. It is almost better for them to think in the most crooked manner than not to think at all. The people most hard to reach, and so least likely to be saved, are those who pursue their business or their pleasures till their hours of labour and leisure are so filled up that they have no time for thought. To them the sweets and the solace of solitude and reflection are all unknown. But here was a thoughtful man. He had studied the law, and had tried to keep it. He was now something more than thoughtful; he was anxious. "What lack I yet?" as if he felt there was something he did not know, and he would fain know what it was. He was not so self-righteous as some had fancied he was. He had a self-righteous head, but he had a seeking heart. His head made him think that he had kept the law, but his heart told him that he had not, for he said, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" This he would never have said if he had believed that he had religion enough to inherit it. His exclamation—"What lack I yet?" would never have escaped his lips, had he not known that he did lack something, though he knew not what. I am thankful,—I am again thankful to God, and I congratulate you, my dear hearers, if you are something in the same position, if you can honestly say, "I have tried to do what I can; I have sought to do as far as my light guides me; I do not believe I am saved, but I wish I were; what is it—what is

that secret something which can fill the aching void within my heart? What is that which can give me the rest which as yet I do not possess?"

Once more, this young man did not lack *for willingness*; at least *he thought he did not*. He believed himself willing to do anything, to give anything, to suffer anything, if he might but be saved. So also do some of you. You would stand up in the congregation to-night and say, "The Lord knows there is nothing within my reach that I would not do, there is nothing under heaven that I would not bear, if I might but inherit eternal life." But perhaps, like this young man, you do not know your own heart, and were Christ to try you with some searching precept, you might, like him, go away sorrowing. But, at any rate, as far as you know, you are willing, and I am glad of this, and thankful that all these points are in you. Though you do lack, yet you do not lack any of these, it is in something else you are lacking.

The fact is, this young man *lacked knowledge*. He did not know the spirituality of the law. He had never been taught that the law of God takes account of the veriest fictions of the brain, our thoughts, and our imaginations. He supposed he had kept the law because he had not committed any act of adultery, or of theft; nor had he spoken the thing that was not true. He did not know that an unchaste glance, or a causeless hatred, or a covetous desire, breaks the law of God, and betrays the sin that lurks in the breast. He was never startled by a dream that betrayed the sin which lurked in his breast. He did not know the corruptness of his own nature, and perhaps some of you do not know it. Oh, that you may be led to know it. May God not only make you know it as a matter of

knowledge, but understand it as a matter of conviction deeply written in the conscience. And he did not know the plan of salvation. The question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" showed that he did not know that salvation is not by doing, but by believing; not by our works, but by a simple trust in Jesus. This was a great deficiency; though he was a model of uprightness in a hundred interesting points which we cannot now stay to discuss, he was wanting in a matter of vital interest to his moral welfare. In that he was just like many of you. With looks of love and pity, with feelings of tender regard, but deep anxiety, we turn to you therefore with this reflection, "One thing thou lackest."

II. And now we shall change the note. THIS TEXT HAS A WORD OF WARNING.

"One thing thou lackest." What was the one thing that this young man lacked? *It was the full surrender of his heart to God in Christ.* He had not done that. Our Saviour gave him, therefore, a command which tested him. He bade him go, sell all that he had, and distribute it to the poor. This is not a command which he gives to all men, but he gave that particular command to that particular young man, according to his particular circumstances, because he saw that he was not the man that could endure to be poor. He saw, too, that he had made his riches his idol. He was a gentleman; he was a man of great possessions. He does not seem to have been a niggard; he could hardly have been a ruler of a synagogue, one would think, if he had been. But still, he had a great liking for position. He was a gentleman, and there are a great many people who would sooner be gentlemen than they

would be saints, and sooner be thought to belong to the upper and respectable circles of society, than they would be thought to be devout and holy. This young man would have liked to have been both, but the Saviour, seeing that his wealth was in his heart, and that he loved it better than he did his God, said to him, "Part with your wealth; for if you are decided for God, and your heart is wholly his, you will prove it by the readiness of your obedience." Here, then, was the thing he lacked—he lacked the full surrender of his heart to God's will, and so he went away sorrowing, for he had great possessions.

This lack of the full surrender of his heart to God's will made him shun the reproach of being a follower of Christ. Hence, though he would call Christ "Good Master," he would not turn and follow him and learn of him. So the Master said, after he had bidden him sell his goods, "Take up thy cross;" that is to say, "Come out and confess me; having done as I bid thee, then come and say, 'I am a disciple of that Man who is despised and rejected; I will follow him to prison and to death, and I will preach his word though I be put to death for it; I will take up my cross.'"

Christ knew that the one thing he lacked was the full-giving up of his heart to God, and therefore he said, "Follow me, for if you really do love the Eternal Father, you will follow his well-beloved Son; if your heart is fully given to God, you will be willing to be obedient to Christ, to take him for your Leader, Master, Saviour, Guide, Friend and Counsellor." Now, in this the young man failed. He could not so give himself up wholly to God; he could not, at that time at any rate, so give himself up as to be completely Christ's servant. Now, no man who

fails in this respect can enter heaven. Christ will save you, but a part of the agreement on your part must be this: "Ye are not your own, but are bought with a price." If you would have Christ's blood to redeem you, you must give up to Christ your self,—your body, your soul, your spirit, your substance, your talents, your time, your all. You must from this day be Christ's servant, come what may. If persecution should arise, you must be willing to part with all that you possess, with your liberty, with your life itself for Christ, or you cannot be his disciple. It may be, he will never call you literally to sell your goods and distribute all, but he does call you to own that your goods are not your own, but his; that you are only a steward, and must be willing therefore to give to the poor and to dedicate to the honour of his kingdom such part as shall be meet and right of all that you have, not as though you were bestowing anything of your own, but only as yielding up to God what belongs to him. He claims that you do now make over, if you would be saved, yourself and everything you have by an indefeasible title-deed to the great Lord of all whose you must be. If you would be saved by the blood of Jesus, you are not from this day to choose your own pleasures, nor your own ways, nor your own thoughts, nor to serve yourselves, nor live for yourselves or for your own aggrandisement. If you would be saved, you must believe what he tells you, do what he bids you, and live only to serve and honour him. I am ashamed to have to say that a great many Christian professors seem to be false to this their agreement, but, as my Lord will take no less from you, I dare ask no less of you. It seems to me all too little.

He has bought us, not with silver and gold, but with his own precious blood. Surely, then, we should be quite willing to say,—

“’Tis done, the great transaction’s done,
I am my Lord’s, and he is mine.”

What you keep to yourselves you shall lose, but what you give to him you save and gain. Your treasure on earth the moth shall eat, and the rust corrupt, but your treasure in his keeping no moth shall ever fret, nor canker ever devour. All is safe which is given up to Christ; that which is kept back from him, whatever it may be, shall prove a curse to you. Say, then, my dear young friend, with all your excellences, do you lack the giving up of your heart, the full giving up of yourself to Christ? Oh, I am grieved that you should lack it; I am indeed grieved that you should lack it! I would like my Lord to have such a bright gem as you to glitter in his crown. I would like the Good Shepherd to have so dear a lamb to carry in his bosom. What, shall so fair a flower shed its fragrance for his enemies? Let the Saviour take it and wear it in his bosom; he is willing; may his grace take it to-night. One cannot bear that you, that you, having so much, should lack but one thing. If you lacked all that was needful it would be grievous, but lacking only one thing, it seems all the more pitiable. Oh, why should not that lack be made up? God grant it at once. To miss heaven! I cannot bear to think that you should, when you really are so sincerely anxious about it. To have such desires, and to be so fervent too, and yet not to give your whole heart to my Lord! Poor things are

desires if they get no farther. Desire will not quench thirst, neither will it stay hunger. Thou must take Christ and live on him, or thou shalt die. To think, dear friends, that some of you should miss heaven through your wealth! Why need it be? And yet often it is so. The rich will not go to hear the gospel as the poor will; and when they hear it, there is often so much care about their extensive business, or, on the other hand, there is so much attraction in that circle of gay and thoughtless friends, that it is hard for them to be saved. Oh, what a pity that the mercies of God should lead you to hell, and that riches here should all but involve you, or altogether involve you, in eternal poverty hereafter! God of his mercy prevent it, that you may yet be saved.

The sad thing to remember is, that you who lack one thing, in lacking that one thing lack all; for though I congratulated you that you had morality, that is poor stuff when it has no foundation in love to God. Your sincerity, methinks I must suspect that it is exhausted, if after having been told the way, which is simply to believe in Christ and give yourselves up to him, you now refuse. Yes, and all the good things which I have strung together with words of congratulation are but as the colours of a bubble that shall pass away, except you have this one thing. The one thing is like the unit set before many ciphers which will make them into a great amount; but without the one figure first, all those ciphers will stand for nothing, many as they are. If by the grace of God in your heart, and the exercise of a living faith in the dying Saviour, you give yourself wholly up to God, then every good thing and lovely

thing, and thing of good repute, shall be embalmed and preserved; but without this they shall be like faded flowers, fit only to be cast behind the wall, or to perish on the dunghill.

III. Thirdly, we shall give you A WORD OF DIRECTION.

If thou wouldest inherit eternal life Christ's direction is—"Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor." Now, what did he mean by that? We shall read it three ways, and very quickly. He meant in the young man's case—"Give up thine idol." His was wealth. He means the same kind of trial for you. Give up your idol. What is it? I pause. You may look; but I am sure that if you are not loving God you are loving something else. Whatever it is that you love better than God is your idol, and you are an idolater. That idol of yours must fall to the ground if Jesus is to be all in all. You cannot serve two masters, and whatever your present master is he must turn out that Christ may come in.

"Sell all that thou hast." Well, that means another thing, as I read it—that is, consecrate your *all to God*. How can you expect, if you withhold and you keep back part of the price from God, that he should accept you, and save you by Jesus Christ. Nay, come, poor guilty sinner, and wash in the purple stream that flows from Jesu's heart, and then say in return—"My Lord, since thou hast thus redeemed me—

'All that I am, and all I have
Shall be for ever thine,
Whate'er my duty bids me give,
My cheerful hands resign;

‘And if I could make some reserve,
 And duty did not call,
 I love my God with zeal so great
 That I must give him all.’”

A third reading of this passage will be—*give up your hindrances*. This young man’s hindrance was his possessions, and it was better that he should relinquish his possessions and be saved, than be hindered by his wealth. What, my dear friend, is your hindrance? Give it up; give it up; give it up! Oh, I know some of you that are hindered by bad company. You are often impressed; but it is all blown away by those merry men whose merriment is tinged with lasciviousness. Give them up. Will you give them up, or give Christ up? Which shall it be? You remember in John Bunyan’s *Life* he says that one Sunday, when he was playing on the village green at a game of cat, he was just about to strike the cat when a voice came to him from heaven, and said, “Wilt thou have thy sins and go to hell, or leave thy sins and go to heaven?” And he stood there in the midst of his companions and paused, and they could not think what ailed the tinker while he was disputing in his mind which it should be, Christ and heaven, or his sins and hell. Now, whatever your hindrance is—be it money, be it worldly ambition, or be it any fond passion of the flesh—whatever it is, give it up. If it be thy right hand, thou hadst better cut it off, and cast it from thee, than keeping it, seal thine endless doom. If it be thy right eye, ’twere better for thee to pluck it out, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. That is the cry of the text; down with your idols; give up your all; cast away your

hindrances, and come to Christ and trust him. That is the first word of instruction.

Another instructive word is this—“*Take up thy cross.*” That means, *profess Christ*. You have a notion, perhaps, some of you, that you will sneak into heaven as secret Christians. Take care that you do not find yourselves at another gate than the gate of pearl, if you try that. Christ came not to save those cowardly souls who will not own him. His own words are, “He that denieth me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” Ashamed of Jesus! Ah! then, remember those words, “The fearful and unbelieving!” The fearful—that is, those who are afraid to own Christ as their Master—“shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” I pray you, then, if you are Christ’s, confess him, own him. Confess that you are his; take up your cross. *Take up the Cross*—that is, *endure his reproach*. You would not like to be called a canting Methodist, or a stolid Presbyterian, or some other ugly name. Ah! but my dear friend, if thou wouldest have Christ’s crown thou must have Christ’s cross; and he that is not willing to be sneered at with Christ, cannot reign with Christ. And what if they do sneer at thee? If that be thy cross, take it up. What higher honour can a man want on this side heaven than to be called a fool for Christ? I wot the day shall come when angels shall envy the men that were permitted to have the privilege of suffering for Christ. You know the old story of Henry the Fifth, when, in view of a battle, it was said he wanted more men, and he replied that he did not wish for more men, for

“The fewer men the greater share of honour;”

and he pictured the day when

“Gentlemen in England, now a-bed,
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here.”

Truly, if you could escape rebuke and persecution, you might well be grieved to think that you went to heaven by so mean a way. Be willing, then, like a brave spirit, to take up the cross and carry it, counting the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. Take up your cross—that is, *trust in the cross*, grasp it as your only hope; let the atonement which Jesus made by his death be the delight of your soul, and ever from this day boast therein.

The last word of direction was, “*Follow me.*” Christ said, “Follow me.” He meant, did he not, confide in me? As a confiding sheep follows its shepherd, so follow me. He meant “*Obey me*; as the servant follows where the master leads, so track my footsteps, and let my example be your rule.” In like manner Jesus says to you also—“Persevere in following me; never cease so doing; follow me right up to my throne, and there rest with me.”

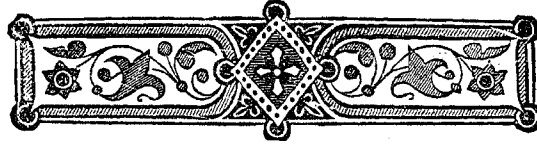
Listen, then, each of you here present, who have only one thing that you lack. Will you now—may his holy Spirit make you—give up the world and all its fair prospects, give up sin and all its fascinations, give up your fleshly self, with all its peculiar inclinations, and close in with God in Christ, and give your whole heart to him? Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! There is a valley of decision to us all, when we are either left to our own wills and decide for evil, or led

by the grace of God to decide for Christ. The cry is heard in this house to-night, "Divide, divide." Those who shall say "aye" within their hearts take their place with Christ; but those who are of the "noes"—those who give the negative to the command of Christ—let them, at least, know what they are doing; and if they will go the downward road, let it be with their eyes open, fully aware where they go. But, oh! say not "No!" Oh! Spirit of God, let them not say "No!" Yield thee, man, yield to the gentle impulse which now bids thee say, "I will take his yoke upon me, for it is easy; I will follow him." Yield to his love who round you now the hands of a man would cast—the cords of his love who was given for you, to his altar binding you fast. Pray this prayer: "Lord, bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar; let me be thine now, and thine hereafter when thou comest in thy glory!"

There is a question that has often been asked, with feelings of curiosity, which I cannot answer. It is this. Did the young man inherit eternal life after all? I think he did; I think he did; because Jesus loved him. I like his character throughout, as the Saviour evidently did, and he did not love because of outward appearances; he looked at the heart. I am not altogether displeased at his going away. It was a deal better than stopping, if he did not feel disposed to follow the good Master, who had eternal life at his disposal. He would do it honestly or not at all. I even look hopefully at his pausing awhile before complying, if such was the issue, for the man that flings all away in a moment may want it back again to-morrow. It was a great deal he had to part

from, and he went away, but he did not go away careless. I should be heartily glad if all my hearers went away sorrowing when they were not converted; I should think it was a hopeful sign. He went away sorrowing, and though the Saviour drew from that the moral that it was hard for a rich man to be saved, yet he said it was possible with God, and why, then, was it not possible with that young man? I do not know. There are some things to be said on either side, and where Scripture is silent we must not give a positive verdict.

But there is another question that I think is vastly more important, and to me far more interesting, but to each one of you it is charged with the most momentous consequence. It is this—will that young man that I have been talking to to-night be saved? And the young woman that I tried to describe just now, will she ultimately inherit eternal life? Oh! may God grant that the answer may be in each case—“Yea, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I trust thee, that I love thee; and whatever thou callest me to give up, or to be or to do for thy name's sake, even all things, I will do it.” Then your decision shall furnish an unerring clue to your destiny. The Lord bless you. Cheer up. He has blessed you, and you shall be blessed. You are saved, and you shall be his in the day of his appearing. Amen.



A Grave Charge.

“Exceeding sinful.”—Romans vii. 13.

INTO the connection of these words the brief limit of our time will not permit us just now to enter. It was something like this. Paul had an argument in hand. He was showing that the law could not make a man holy, and he observes that he had himself found when the law came into his heart it excited in him a desire to act contrary to its precepts. There were some actions which he would not have thought of until he found that they were forbidden, and then straightway he felt a desire to do them at once. To this a grave objection was raised. Did it not by implication make the law aid and abet sin? Not so, replies the apostle; it was not the law that made him sin, for the law is good; but it was the sinfulness of his heart that could thus turn that which was good into an occasion of evil. He further showed that this was the very design of the law as given by Moses to make clear how sinful sin was; the purpose for which it was sent was, not to make men holy, but to make men see how unholy they were. It was not

the cure of the disease, but it was the revealer of the disease that lurked in the constitution of man.

Now, what I want to call your attention to is, that Paul here calls sin "exceeding sinful." Why didn't he say "exceeding black," or "exceeding horrible," or "exceedingly dreadful?" Why, because there is nothing in the world so bad as sin. When he wanted to use the very worst word he could find, to call sin by, he called it by its own name, and reiterated it: "sin," "exceeding sinful." For if you call sin black, there is no moral excellency or deformity in black or white. Black is as good as white, and white is as good as black, and you have expressed nothing. If you call sin "deadly," yet death in itself hath no evil in it compared with sin. For plants to die is not a dreadful thing; rather it may be a part of the organization of nature that successive generations of vegetables should spring up, and in due time should form the root-soil for other generations to follow; so if you call it "deadly" you have said but little. If you want a word you must come home for it. Sin must be named after itself. If you want to describe it you must call it "sinful." Sin is "exceeding sinful."

The text may suggest a broad argument and a special application. Our endeavour shall be to show you that sin is in itself "exceeding sinful;" and that there are some sins of which it may be said with peculiar emphasis that they are "exceeding sinful."

SIN IS IN ITSELF "EXCEEDING SINFUL."

It is rebellion against God, and "exceeding sinful," because it interferes with the just rights and prerogatives of God. That great invisible Spirit whom we

cannot see, whom even our own thoughts cannot encompass, made the heavens and the earth, and all things that are. It was his right that whatsoever he in wisdom and in goodness made should serve his purpose, and give him glory. The stars do this. They jar not in their everlasting orbits. The world of matter does this. He speaks, and it is done. The sun, the moon, the constellations of heaven speak his praise. Yea, and the terrestrial forces, even the billows of the sea and the ravings of the wind, all obey his behests. It is right they should. Shall not the potter make of the clay what he wills? Shall not he who uses the adze fashion what he chooseth for his own pleasure? You and I favoured in our creation—not inanimate clods, not worms, having sensations only, without intellect; we who have been favoured with thought, emotion, affection, with a high spiritual existence—aye, with an immortal existence,—we were especially bound to be obedient to him that made us. Ask your conscience, do you not feel that God has a right of proprietorship in you? Ask yourselves, if you make or preserve anything, and call it your own, because it is your own, do you not expect it to answer your end or do your bidding? Wherefore have you forgotten him that made you? Why have you spent your powers and faculties for anything but his glory? Ah, it is “exceeding sinful” when the crown-rights of him upon whose will we exist are ignored, or impudently contravened! Yet according to the part we take in sin we trample on his edicts, and set at nought his jurisdiction. How exceeding sinful is *this rebellion against such a God!* Muse on his attributes, and consider his majesty,

for is he not infinitely powerful, wise, all-sufficient, glorious, and as it were the sum of all perfection supremely good? He is good to the fullest extent of goodness. He is a God whose character is matchless. Not like Jupiter, to whom the heathens ascribed every vice; nor like Juggernaut, the bloody god of Hindustan. He is a pure and holy God whom we worship; Jehovah, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises. Now it is conceivable that were God some vast being who had a right naturally to our service; yet if his character—(forgive, great God, the supposition!)—were severe without pity, rigorous without clemency, harsh without forbearance, there would be some pretence why daring spirits should lead a rebellion against the oppressor. But our Father, our God, the great Shepherd-King—who shall frame an excuse when we for a single moment revolt against him, or lift a finger against his will? It were heaven to serve him. The angels will tell you this: the highest bliss is to do his bidding. The perfect spirits all proclaim this. Ah! sin is base indeed, a rebellion against monarch's gentlest sway, an insurrection against parent's tenderest right, a revolt against peerless benignity! Oh! shame on thee, Sin! Thou art "exceeding sinful." Indeed thou art!

What an aggravation of the sinfulness of sin is this: *that it rebels against laws, every one of which is just!* The table of the ten commandments contains not one commandment but what is founded upon the essential principle of right. If a law were proclaimed in England which violated the principles of equity, to break that law might be the highest duty; but when the laws of our country are just and right, it is not only an

offence against the natural power of the State, but an offence against the understanding and conscience of rectitude when a man breaks such a statute. God's laws have not only the supreme sanction of Divine authority, but they have also this recommendation, that they are all harmonious, and adapted to the relations of our being. Was it not the State of Massachusetts that at first passed a resolution when they were about to make statutes, that they would be governed by the laws of God until they found time to make better? Will they ever improve upon the model? They may try to mend, but they are more likely to mar, who tamper with the standard of equity which has been revealed from heaven. The law is holy, and just, and good. Rightly understood, it forbids that which is naturally evil and commends that which is essentially good. Oh, sin! thou art sinful indeed that thou should'st dare to revolt against that which in itself is right and just, virtuous and true.

Moreover, brethren—and this may touch some of us to the quick—sin is “exceeding sinful,” *because it is antagonistic to our own interest, a mutiny against our own welfare.* Selfishness is a strong principle in us all. That which is good for our own welfare, and personally advantageous, should be regarded with tenacious attachment, and were we wise would be pursued with strong enthusiasm. Whenever God forbids a thing, we may rest assured it would be dangerous. God's commands are just like those notices, more suggestive of kindly warning than of stern prohibition, which we see upon the park waters in the days of frost, “Dangerous.” God simply tells us that such and such a thing is fraught

with peril, or it leads to destruction. What he permits or commends will, if not immediately, yet in the long run, be in the highest degree conducive to our best interests. God doth but, as it were, consult our well-being and prosperity when he gives us a law. Does not it seem vicious indeed that a man should recklessly dare to slight himself in order to sin against his Maker? God saith to thee, "Do not thrust thine arm in the fire." Nature saith, "Do not do it." If you slight the caution you will soon rue the consequence. And yet when God saith, "Do not commit fornication or adultery, do not lie, do not steal;" when he saith, "Draw near to me in prayer, love me," these commands are in themselves as naturally wise as the injunction not to thrust thine hand into the fire, or the counsel to eat and drink wholesome food when hunger and thirst require. Yet we spurn these commands: like a child that is bidden not to drink of the poison cup and will drink of it: like a boy that is refused the edged tool lest he cut himself, and he will cut himself, not believing in his father's wisdom, but confident of his own judgment. Because the cup looks sweet it must be harmless, because the edged tool glitters it must be a proper plaything. Know it, man, when thou sinnest thou dost cut and tear thyself; who but a madman would do that? If thou neglectest to do the right thou dost neglect to feed thyself with that which nourishes, and to clothe thyself with that which is comely! Who but an idiot would lend himself to such folly? Yet such idiots, and such madmen, hath sin made us; and therefore it is "exceeding sinful."

Sin, if we rightly consider it, *is an upsetting of the*

entire order of the universe. In your family you feel as a father that nothing can go smoothly unless there is a head whose discretion shall regulate all the members. If your child should say, "Father, I am determined as one of this family that whatever your will is I will resist it, and whatever my will is I will abide by it, and always carry it out if I can." What a family that would be! How disorganized! What a household! might we not say, what a hell upon earth! There sails to-morrow a ship from the Thames under command of a captain, wise and good, who understands the seas; but he has scarcely reached the Nore before a sailor tells him he shall not obey, that he does not intend either to reef a sail or to do anything aboard the vessel that he is bidden. "Put the fellow in irons!" Everybody says it is right. Or a passenger coming up from the saloon informs the captain that he does not approve of his authority, and throughout the whole of the voyage he intends to thwart him all he can. If there is a boat within hail put that fellow on shore, and do not be particular if he lands in a muddy place; but get rid of him somehow. Everybody feels it must be. You might as well scuttle the ship, cut holes in her sides, as tolerate for a moment that the rightful central authority should be unshipped, or that every man should determine to do what is right in his own eyes. The happiness of everybody on board that vessel will depend upon order being kept. If one man do this and another do that, you might almost as well be shut up in a cage with tigers as be in such a vessel. Now, look at this world, it is but a floating ship on a larger scale, and say, who ought to be captain here but he that made

it? His mighty hand alone can grasp that awful tiller. Who can steer this gigantic vessel over the waves of Providence—who but he? And who am I, and, my hearer, who are you, that you should say, “I will ignore the Lord High Admiral; I will oppose the Captain; I will rebel against him”? Why, if all do as you do, what is to become of the whole vessel, what of the whole world? Disorder once introduced, confusion, sorrow, dismay, and disaster will be sure to follow.

If you want proof that sin is exceedingly sinful, *see what it has done already in the world.* Lift up your eyes and survey that lovely garden where every beautiful creature both of bird and beast, and every flower of unwithering loveliness, and everything that can delight the senses, are to be discovered in the sunlight. There are two perfect beings, a man and a woman, the parents of our race; enters there sin, the flowers are forthwith withered, a new wildness has seized upon the beasts, the ground brings forth her thorns and thistles, and the man is driven out in the sweat of his face to earn his daily bread. Who withered Eden? Thou didst, accursed sin! thou didst it all! See there,—but can you bear the sight?—clouds of smoke, rolling pillars of dust, the sound of clarion, the yet more dreadful boom of cannon; hark to the shrieks and cries; they fly; they are pursued; the battle is over! Walk over the field. There lies a mangled mass of human bodies, cut and torn, riddled with shot, skulls splintered with rifle balls, dabbled pools of blood. Oh! on such a scene only a fiend could gaze with complacency. Who did all this? Whence come wars and fightings but from your own lusts and from your sins? Oh! sin,

thou art a carnage-maker! Sin, thou dost cry—"Havoc," and straightway they let loose the dogs of war! There had been naught of this hadst thou not come. But the spectacle multiplies on our vision. All over the world you have but to wander and you see little hillocks more or less thickly scattered everywhere. Could you analyse the dust that blows along the street and interrogate every grain, it would probably tell you it was once a part of the body of some man who in generations past died painfully and rotted back to mother earth. Oh! the world is scarred with death. What is this earth to-day, but a sad aceldema—a field of blood, a vast cemetery? Death has worm-eaten the world through and through. All its surface bears relics of the human race. Who slew all these? who wrought this mischief? Who indeed but sin? Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

I scarcely dare ask you to follow me, nor if you could follow would I venture to lead the way, across the stream that parts the land of mortals from the regions of the immortals. Should you, on the venturous wings of imagination dare the flight to a land that is full of confusion and without any order, what horror would seize you! Athwart that valley of the shadow of death, ye might look on the gloomy region of wretched souls, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. How could you dare to peer into that dismal pit that hath no bottom, that place wherein spirits accursed of God are put away for ever and for ever from all light of hope and restoration! But you shudder at the mention even as I shrink back terror-stricken at the thought of that place where God's wrath

burns like a furnace, where the proud that do wickedness are as stubble, where the nations that forget God for ever are consumed. Who lit that fire? Where is he that kindled it? It is sin that did it all. No man is consigned there except for sin. No man that ever breathed was ever cast away except as a punishment most just for sin that was most grievous. Sin is indeed "exceeding sinful."

Not even now have I reached the climax, nor must I venture the description. The worst phase is neither death nor hell. But on Calvary's tree the Lord himself who loved us, and came to earth to bless us, proved the sinfulness of sin when sin nailed him to the tree and pierced his side, and sinners, rejecting him with many a jibe and sneer, exclaimed, "We will not have this man to reign over us." In the agonies of Jesus, in the shame and spitting, in the woes and anguish that he endured, we read the sinfulness of sin, written as in capital letters, that even the blind might see. Oh! sin, murderer of Christ, thou art "exceeding sinful."

My time has failed me, or I had meant to have enlarged upon SOME PARTICULAR SINS THAT ARE EXCEEDING SINFUL ABOVE ANY ORDINARY TRANSGRESSION.

Of this kind are sins against the gospel. I will just give you a catalogue of aggravations on which I cannot amplify, that every one here who is honest with himself may search and see whether he be not verily guilty. To reject faithful messengers sent from God, loving parents, earnest pastors, diligent teachers—to slight the kind message that they bring and the yearning anxiety that they feel for us is "exceeding sinful." To resist

the gracious gospel which talks to us only of mercy, and pardon, and adoption, of redemption from hell and exaltation to heaven—to reject such glad tidings of great joy to our woe-begone race is “exceeding sinful.” To set at naught the dying Saviour, whose only motive in coming to earth must have been love, whose wounds are mouths that preach his love, whose death is the solemn proof of love—to disparage, to neglect, to ignore him, this is “exceeding sinful.” To play false towards him after having made a profession of your attachment to him; to draw near to his table and then run riot with the ungodly; to be baptized in his name and yet to be perfidious, dishonest, unrighteous, this is “exceeding sinful.” To be numbered with his church and yet to be in alliance with the world; to wear the badge of disciples and yet play the part of traitors, this is “exceeding sinful.” To sin against light and knowledge; to sin, knowing better; to sin against conscience; to trample convictions under foot; to do violence to one’s better self; to grieve the Holy Spirit, to make light of his admonitions, warnings, promptings, invitings, this is “exceeding sinful.” To go on sinning after you have smarted; to grow reckless when your way is hedged up; to push onward to hell, as if riding a steeple-chase, over post and bar, gate and stile, hedge and ditch, this is “exceeding sinful.”

Some of you are “exceeding sinful.” Oh, how I have pleaded with you! I have cried to you to come to Jesus. I have warned many of you again and again. If I am called to make answer at the judgment bar, I must say “Amen” to the condemnation of multitudes among you. I shall be obliged to confess that you did

know better—that some of you drink when you know how pernicious it is; that some of you swear when you know how foul it is; that some of you are dishonest when you know how base it is. Some of you sin with such a high hand I scarcely can account for your coming to this Tabernacle again and again and again. You like to hear my voice, and yet you cling to your sins, your sins that will surely damn you. Let me be clear of your blood: I will not mince matters with you, or talk with you, as if you were all saints when I know you are not, and as if you were all going to heaven, when, alas! many of you are still swiftly spreading your wings to fly downward to the pit. Oh! may God arrest you, or otherwise the brightness of the light in the face of which you sin will make your guilt the plainer and the heavier; and the warnings you hear will make your condemnation the more overwhelming.

But why must it come to this? Why will you die? Why are you set on sin? Why love ye mischief? I see often in the gaslight of my study poor gnats come flying in if the window be but ajar, and how they dash against the flame, and down they fall, but have scarcely recovered strength before up they fly again unto their destruction. Are you such? Are you mere insects, without reason, without wit, without knowledge? Oh, you are not, else were you excusable. Come to my Saviour, poor souls! He is still waiting to receive you. A prayer will do it. Breathe the prayer. A broken heart he will not despise. A look at him will do it. A faint glance at Jesus pleading for you will do it. Holy Spirit, make them give that glance. Oh! by thy irresistible power constrain them now to look and live.

Oh! it shall be. God be thanked, it shall be. You shall look to-night, and God shall have the glory; and though you be "exceeding sinful," yet shall you, through the precious blood, be fully forgiven, and exceeding grateful for the great forgiveness which Jesus brings.





Woes to Come!

“One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.”—Revelation ix. 12.



WITH the particular context of this small sentence I have no intention to meddle this evening. I am not an interpreter of unfulfilled prophecy; I leave that for those who have time and talent for such researches. Doubtless these words were spoken of old by the angel that appeared to John the Divine. After he had lifted the curtain of futurity, and shown the terrible things that God would do in the earth, he explained to John: “One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.” To my own apprehension, while reading this in private, it seemed just such an utterance as the angel of God might address to the soul of the ungodly when he leaves the body. “Death is over,” saith the angel. “One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.” Thou hast passed through the Jordan, but thou art to pass through two streams deeper still; thou hast passed through the woes of death, but behold there comes a judgment, and then comes a second death: “One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.”

Very solemnly and earnestly, then, let me make a few observations concerning the woe that is supposed to be passed after the sinner is dead ; after which I will briefly notice the two woes that are to come hereafter.

The woe which is supposed to be passed is the woe of death. Death to the righteous has lost its sting, but to the wicked death has all its terrors. Its horrors are not diminished by anything that Christ hath done ; yea, rather, death gathers more cause of dismay ; for the very Cross itself may fill the obdurate heart with consternation. When the sinner dies impenitent, having rejected the mercy of Christ, death is woe indeed. Let me show you in what respect death is a woe to the ungodly. On the eve of dissolution the wicked man often has fierce temptations. Lying upon his dying bed, he casts his eye back over the panorama of life, and remembers what he has been ; he hears the church bell of every Sabbath ringing again ; he thinks of the many times he has broken the Lord's-day. Laying there he remembers the many sermons he has heard, the many warnings he has had, and how they have all been forgotten. In these hours memory is very strong, —it has great power of vision, as with a lightning flash it brings before the dying man the starting point of his childhood ; the earnest exhortations of a pious father in full many an instance ring their clear notes afresh in his ears ; or he may remember how he was then carried in his arms up to the sanctuary, and how he was admonished not in riper age to forsake its hallowed floor. Anon turning upon his sick bed, he seems to hear the sobbings of a fond mother as she was wont in days of yore to kneel by his bedside imploring God in earnest

prayer, bedewed with tears, that her child might be saved. Memory brings back everything, but to him it is no bosom-spring of joy; far otherwise is it, for

“Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,
Swells at his breast, and turns the past to pain.”

It tells him of all the sins he has committed; it reminds him of things which he had hoped were forgotten; it revokes sins of revelry, concerning which he had said, “Let these be forgotten and blotted out of the book of my remembrance for ever.” He thinks of those moments when he had rebelled against his Maker, or even blasphemed his name; oh, God, what a woe this must be to a dying sinner simply to look back on all his sins! Memory is no liar. Glancing at the black catalogue, it seems to say—Look there, man, look at the mercy you have slighted, at the solemn warnings you have trampled under foot, at the opportunities you have needlessly wasted. As the wretched man lies there writhing in his pain, this is one of the worst woes that he feels. Memory sticks daggers into his conscience, crying all the while, “It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for thee.” Death to the sinner is a woe again in another sense,—it warns him now that he has to leave all his earthly joys *for ever*. Sinner, I see thee lying on thy bed, and thou art panting for thy breath; thy heaving lungs are struggling for air so that thou canst scarcely breathe. Come, take a last look at all thy joys, for thou shalt never know another; kiss thy harlot on the cheek, for all thy sins thou must now forsake for ever: thou wouldst not give them up at the warning of the minister,

and canst not shake them off now with all the convulsions of thy conscience. Come, rich man, lean upon thy *bony* arm, and look out of thy window upon thy broad acres, for thou shalt never see them again. Come, drunkard, drink, drink—for this is thy last draught; take a last farewell of all thy joys, thy festive pleasures, thy garish lusts, thy bewitching vanities, thy deceitful hopes; bid a last farewell, “a long farewell to all thy greatness,” for now thou goest into the land of contempt and misery, agony and death—yea, into a place of unutterable depths of agony. Well may it be said that death is a woe to the sinner. Death, again, is a woe to the ungodly man, if he be really awakened at the last hour—and many such there be—for conscience comes and tells the dying sinner that it is now all over with him for ever; it is too late for him to be saved. One of my predecessors, Mr. Benjamin Keach, has left on record an account of a man that had been a trouble to his church,—for he had backslidden,—and his cries, shrieks, and tears, at the very prospect of death, were enough to make one’s hair turn white and stand upon end. That poor wretched man seems to have had a foretaste of perdition before he entered into its fire; and so it is oftentimes with the wicked: thou hast had thy harvest; thy summer is ended; but thou art not saved; thou hast been warned, but thou shalt not be warned again; the lips that said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” shall say, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;” and all the while conscience says this is just—I knew my duty and I did it not; I knew it was my duty to repent, but I

steeled my heart against God, and I would not forsake my sins; I turned my back upon the cross to dance in a merry circle downwards to the pit. This shall make death woeful indeed, when it shall be hurled into the mind; thou knewest thy duty, but thou didst it not. "Woe unto thee, Capernaum, thou hast been exalted to heaven, but thou shalt be cast down to hell, for if the mighty works that had been done in thee had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." Death is a woe indeed. I never wish to stand by the deathbed of any who die in their sins; this is a dreadful woe indeed, to be wrapped in the black winding-sheet of guilt. I have seen the eyes starting from the sockets; I have seen the throat dried up like a potsherd; I have heard the cries of one man in death whom I visited. The scene comes up before me at the present moment as I saw him rise in his bed and shriek, "O God, I will not die, there is no mercy for me." He begged of us to pray for him, and yet he knew that our prayers were of no avail. "I have had my seasons," said he, "but I can't repent; I shall die in a short time, and I shall soon be in hell." "Water," said he, "give me water." Yet again he cried, "O, God, I cannot die, I will not die," and this was a prelude to his departure, for he shortly afterwards expired in desperate agony. Death is indeed a woe to such a man as that. And you, my hearers, if you die without faith in Christ, your death must be a woe as terrible as ever filled the heart or blanched the cheek with terror. Yet this is only a small part of the sufferings. The man is dead; there lies his corpse; his friends say that it was a happy release for

him from his pains ; the spirit leaves the body, hoping, perhaps, that its pains are over, till coming into the confines of another world, it meets a commissioned angel with brandished sword, who cries, " One woe is passed ; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter." Oh, how those dismal auguries must appal the hapless spirit, unclothed, bewildered ! So does the angel proclaim it, as with a voice of thunder, " One woe is passed ; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter."

Of these two woes that loom in the future, I would now briefly but solemnly speak. The first woe of the man who dies in his sins is the woe of judgment ; that is terrible indeed. What a day shall that be—a day of wrath, a day of fire—when the last great assize shall be held ! When a man is to be tried for his life, there must be a solemnity about every preparation—the seat of the judge, the muster of the jurors, the formalities of the court, and the opening of the books must be full of gloomy interest. Scarce can a prisoner stand in the docks to be tried for his life by his fellow-man without trembling ; at least, it is a wonder if it should be so. But conceive the great assize—the graves are opened ! What horrors shall seize hold upon the wicked at that moment ! Men and women start up from their tombs wrapped in their winding-sheets. The long buried dead stand upon the hillocks that were heaped over their graves ; the sea gives up her mariners, the earth is filled with sinners ; there is scarce a spot without a foot to tread upon it ! What a solemn awe will rest upon every heart at that moment, " When every eye shall look up for his coming, who shall judge the world in righteousness, and his people with equity !"

Sinner, I see thee there. Is this the judgment? I see you standing by the side of the righteous. I hear you imploringly call, "Hide me, cover me, embrace me, let me be seated with you." But I hear the righteous answer, "It is too late; now your state is fixed." And there you stand trembling with unutterable dismay. At last a piercing cry is heard, and, lo, a great white cloud, and on it is seated a throne; he is come—he whose head is white like snow, and his hair like pure wool—he comes, he comes,

"A sudden trembling shakes the ground;"

the earth shakes, the heavens are on fire, and the moon becomes a clot of blood, and there he sits; and now, poor sinner, I hear you cry, as you watch the face of him who sits upon the throne. Yes, 'tis he, the crucified man of Nazareth. What means that shriek? There is the Christ whom I rejected; there is Jesus who was preached so earnestly to me on earth; there is the Saviour whom my mother loved; there is the Son of God in whom my father trusted; there is the King Eternal; he is come.

"He comes, he comes to judge the world!

Aloud the archangel cries;

And thunders roll from pole to pole,

And lightnings cleave the skies."

Oh, what confused howling there will be, or rather what a chorus of anguish, when the wicked shall cry, "Rocks hide us, mountains on us fall! Hide us from the face of him who sitteth upon the throne, for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand!" And now your turn is come! You have stood

there while one after another has received his doom. The book is opened, and oh, what will you say, when he shall begin to read your sins! Says he, on such a day thou didst break my laws. "Sinner," saith he, "I have wooed thee with love divine, and sent my minister to thee, and now I read thy sentence—depart from me. Your minister exhorted you to believe in Christ. Do you not remember that on a Sunday night my Spirit was upon your minister? He prayed you in my stead to be reconciled to God, but ye would have none of it. I called, and you refused; I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh." I think I see your horror—no tongue can tell it forth; thy ribs are creaking; thy brain is reeling; thy heart is melting like wax in the midst of thy bowels, as he uttereth the sentence, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." There is no appeal. You go away, you must sink into the pit which is bottomless for ever and ever. If any of you, my dear friends, suppose that I like to preach on this subject, I assure you that you misunderstand me. I love to speak of the everlasting love of God. I never feel so much at home as when I am speaking of the covenant of grace. Painful, however, as the heavy tidings are, to deliver them to you is a part of my ministry. When they are laid upon my heart I cannot be so unfaithful to my soul as to withhold them. I know that in the last great day I must give an account; and if I warn you not, and ye perish, your blood will be required at my hands. My eyes overflow with tears when considering the manner in which I should address you, and when I stand face

to face with you forewarning each unconverted man of his impending danger, I cannot hide my emotion. Baxter preached—

“As though he ne'er might preach again,
A dying man to dying men.”

My hearers, you read your Bibles, you are not infidels; I am telling you facts which you yourselves believe. I beseech you think of them: you don't despise the Bible, but you neglect it. Oh, do not put these things away. I conjure you by the living God, the righteous Judge; not by the feeble words I speak, but by the Word of God. It is but a little while—a very little while with some of us—and this life must be over, and then shall the realities of eternity begin. Oh, my hearer, bethink thee thou must die, and thou must stand before the Judge. Thou must be in heaven or hell before many more years have run their rounds, and can you be angry with a fellow-creature for warning you—for speaking of these terrible things in love? Oh, I beseech you to flee from the wrath to come! Who can tell the terrors of the day of judgment? Who can describe the two woes to come when this life's fitful fever is o'er? yet certain it is that after the woe of judgment there comes the woe of hell. Oh, what a woe is that in which all the woes of the lost are condensed! Can you bear to see a fellow-creature in pain? The faceache or the toothache draws forth my sympathies. We cannot bear to see a fellow-creature in agony. But how shall I attempt to describe the pains of hell? You cannot feel them here, bless God for it. There is no pain on earth strong enough to be compared with the pains of hell. Napoleon—a man who had perhaps the

hardest of all hearts—one day rode across the battlefield; his horse trod upon a poor wounded man just ready to die, and the poor man rose up, and cried, “Oh,” at which Napoleon shrieked too, and cried, “Oh God, what pains a man may suffer.” Could you and I put our ear to the grating of the world of spirits for a moment or two we should say, “Oh God, what pains a man may suffer!” You cannot compare the pains of this life with the agonies to be endured hereafter. Could all the misery that ever startled the keepers of our hospitals be conceived, it could not convey the least idea of the pains of the spirits that are doomed to dwell in eternal fire and everlasting burning. The woe however, will act its terrible part on the soul. The memory aghast,—hope and fear, thoughts and imaginations, conscience and judgment, all will be racked, every one stretched on a bed of fire, every nerve strained to its utmost, every vein made a road for the hot feet of pain to travel on. Jesus Christ, the most loving of all preachers, preached the most terribly of hell. He calls it a pit without a bottom. He spoke of it as a place “Where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.” Imagine not, therefore, that I can speak too seriously of, or portray too vividly, the doom of the ungodly; but I dread the subject, and I feel it a relief to leave it.

Oh, sinners! in a little while, unless ye repent, ye will know more of hell than the strongest imagination could paint, or the most powerful orator could describe. There is but a little between you and death, and then there shall be but a little between you and that place of torment. Many of you are hanging over the mouth of hell by a solitary plank, and that plank is rotten!

O think, when you come into the place of torment, what will you say then as you lie in the mighty heat? You will cry, "Oh, God, was I foolish enough for a little merriment, or a little worldly gain, or a little praise of wicked men, to be lost for ever? Was I fool enough to bring myself here for ever and ever?" Do, I beseech you, stop and think of it. Picture yourself in it, and what you will think of it when you are cast there. Before the "one woe" comes upon thee stop, so that the "two woes" may never be thine, if peradventure thou mayest be saved from the wrath to come. Could I speak with more tender, thrilling persuasiveness I would. But the text itself rings with shriller notes than any words of comment I can utter; "One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter." Will not an angel's voice persuade you to seek the Lord with all your hearts? What arguments, then, shall I use? The argument of love! Sinner, my heart yearns over thee. What would I give to see you saved? I have sometimes felt as if I could be cut in pieces, if you might be saved by my martyrdom. Oh, souls, you little know how the godly pray over you! There are some of us who cannot sleep by night for thinking of you. We should be praying for mercy for ourselves, but our voice is checked, and we begin to pray for you; and shall our voice be heard in vain? Think again, I beseech you, of One who feels for you more than we do, Jesus, he who wept over Jerusalem. When he beheld the city, wherefore did he weep? Because he knew that they would not be saved. Thank God there are not many in this assembly who are not converted, if you are what you profess to be; and yet there are some, I

think. I hear him lift up his sweet voice and say, "Why will ye die, oh, house of Israel?" Sinner, will you reject your mercies? Will you shut the gates of mercy on yourselves, and unbolt the bars of despair that you may enter into the dungeon of woe, and be fastened there for ever? I think I hear him take that solemn oath again, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn unto me." Then I see him stretch out his arms, and I hear him cry, with the tears running down his blessed cheeks, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." And as you turn away and reject him, I see him coming to you, and crying, "Sinner, come!" and even to-night, though he is not visible to your mortal eyes, you may hear him crying, come—

"From the Mount of Calvary,
Where the Saviour deigned to die,
What melodious sounds I hear,
Bursting on my ravished ear!
Love's redeeming work is done,
Come and welcome, sinner, come."

If that argument of love does not move you, what response will you give to the argument of fear?

"If your ears refuse
The language of his grace,
Your hearts grow hard, like stubborn Jews,
That unbelieving race,
The Lord in vengeance dress'd,
Will lift his hand and swear,
Ye that despise my promised rest
Shall have no portion there."

Reject Christ, and your damnation is doubly sure ;
refuse the gospel, and destruction is your certain and
most righteous doom.

“How they deserve the deepest hell
That slight the joys above!
What chains of vengeance must they feel
Who slight the bands of love. !

Oh, if you reject Christ when he comes to you in love, then you will find that he knows how to smite as well as to woo. His love is great, but spurn him and his jealousy is as cruel as the grave. Should you set your love on the prince of this world, and reject the Prince of Life, he will say: They despised me when I courted them with my kindness; now shall they taste the resentment of incensed love, and feel the pangs of outraged mercy. Oh, what a dreadful thing is the wrath of the Lamb! My hearer, if thou hast one desire towards Christ, do not be cast down; Christ never was behind-hand with thee. Thou art saved if thou art willing to be saved. Do not think hard thoughts of my loving Master; believe that he is able to save thee; believe more than that, believe that he has saved thee. Cast thyself at the foot of the cross; have done with questionings and complainings. Though thou dost feel so vile and wicked, come as a humble suppliant to him who is alone able to save. Smite on thy breast and pray, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” May many, very many of you seek the Lord with broken hearts, and so shall you find him and be found of him, for none shall ever seek him in vain.



The Sinner's Only Alternative.

"Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die."—2 Kings vii. 4.



OUTSIDE of the gates of Samaria you might have seen sundry temporary sheds or huts, hastily built, but suffered to endure till they were thoroughly decayed, in the last extremity of filth, and never visited by any except by those unhappy persons who were doomed to reside in them. In one of these huts are four miserable beings, gaunt, and lean, and thin, with that sharpness of eye and visage which is ever the effect of protracted hunger. These are lepers, loathsome by disease, and emaciated by privation. They cannot sleep, though it is past the dead of night. The sentinel on the walls has just proclaimed midnight. Wakened from their little slumber, they find it impossible to return to it again, for the pangs of hunger prevent. They hold as it were a miniature council of war, and the wiser among them propounds, with the unanimous assent of the rest, an alternative. "Why stay we here to die? If we go into the city, even should we be suffered to remain, yet famine has arisen

to so great a pitch that we must perish there; while if we sit here it is quite certain that we shall pine away; let us fall unto the camp of the Syrians." There is a little hope to cheer them or a fell despair to drive them as they resolve to sally forth from their wretched quarters. The Syrians, may be they thought, are dainty men of war, and they will push us away with their sword-points, and soon end our miseries. Perhaps, in their estimate, death by sword was preferable to death by famine. At any rate, in any case, say they, we can but die. Let us take the desperate alternative. Let us select that which, though it require the greatest boldness, has yet some lingering chance of success. They all listen; they assent; they arise. They perceive a streak of dawn upon the sky; they find their way to the Syrian camp; the men have fled: they enter a tent and feast; having satisfied themselves they grow dainty and they select the most luscious viands from the tables; nay, they have now time for thinking of enriching themselves, and they take, first, this golden and then that silver ornament, and they hide these away. But the thought strikes them, "Here we have bread and corn in abundance. This is a season of common distress. What though the people of Samaria forgot us, and thrust us out of the city, it were an unworthy requital even for the lepers to forget their fellow-men. Let us go back and tell of our discovery, that the poor besieged city may be relieved." They do so. Good tidings give great joy to those who tell as well as those who hear. The famished crowds pour out of Samaria, and, according to the word of the

man of God, they are filled with bread to the full. Thus you have the narrative before you. Let us base upon it a sort of argument which we hope may be found useful to many enquiring souls here present. Some of you have an alternative not dissimilar to that we have described. May they be enabled to follow the instinct of self-preservation, and imitate these poor lepers in their actions; and afterwards may it be your joyful privilege to deliver to others a message as cheering as that which these lepers carried.

I. Some of you have an alternative presented to your consciences. Time was when you were careless about eternal things. That time has passed. You can look back but a few weeks and remember when the Sabbath was to you a day of revelry, when the house of God was utterly neglected, when the Bible was a book which you would not have read if you had not been flogged to it, and when prayer was a duty which you utterly despised. But now your conscience has been somewhat awakened. Though not thoroughly, still partially, roused up, you begin to perceive that the Scripture is true, that we have gone astray like lost sheep, that our iniquities do prevail against us, and that our righteousnesses are filthy rags. You have heard the gospel preached, I do not know where—you may have heard it in the cathedral, or you may have heard it in the theatre; we bless God most heartily if you have heard it anywhere. But having listened to that Word, Satan has interposed, and he has said to you, "Christ will not receive such sinners as you are; the grace of God was not intended for men who have

degraded themselves as you have ; there may be hope for other men, but there is none for you ; the gate of mercy for you is fast closed and sealed, and it has been said of you, 'He that is filthy, let him be filthy still ; he has disobeyed his God, let him receive his penalty.' Well, now, you perceive that you are in just this particular state, that you have a choice of two things before you ; you can sit still, but then you must perish ; you can go to Christ, and your fears tell you that you will perish then. This, however, at any rate, your conscience may say to you, "You can but die, whereas if you go not to Christ you must die." Even should you believe in him you think you might, after all, perish ; but if you do not believe in him then there is no hope. Should you repair now to him in prayer your fears tell you that he may repel you, that he may say, "Get you gone ! You that once cursed me, what right have you to expect my favour ? You who have scorned my grace a hundred times, and defied my law, what do you here on your knees seeking my mercy ? Begone, thou ungrateful wretch, and perish in thy sins." But still there is this presented to your mind, that if you perish there you do but perish, for it is quite certain that you must perish where you are. Well, come, let me try and work out this question for you. Sitting down by your side, as one of the leprous men with his fellow, let us talk this question over. Now, you know, my brother and my friend, that should you die as you are it is absolutely certain that you must perish. Do not listen to what the Evil One now says, "Perhaps it is not true ; ye shall not surely die." You know, every one of you, that the Bible is the Book of God. If there be a man

here who doubts its being God's Word, I will not even except him; I can hardly believe the honesty of his doubts when the truth of Scripture is being so perpetually confirmed by all the discoveries that are made by those who travel in the land which gave it birth. I do not believe him to be honest in this age. Infidelity may have been honest once, but in this age of light I believe it is an imposture. You believe—you must believe—even if you reject the Word of God, you must believe that God is just. If there be a God he must punish men for sin. How can there exist a moral government if sin shall go unpunished, if virtue and vice shall bring the same end to men? Conscience, fallen though it be, and no longer like God's candle in the soul, yet hath some twinkling sparks left which do assure men that God must punish sin. Now, supposing that you do receive the Word of God as being true, you know that the unregenerate can never see the face of God; that the unwashed—those who have never been cleansed from sin—can never stand before the Holy One, for there shall by no means enter into heaven anything that defileth. About your future fate there is no question. There is not the shadow of a doubt that if you live and die in the state in which you now are, the flame must be your everlasting portion. On the other hand, look at the other side of the alternative. There is, at least, some hope; even your poor, trembling heart admits that there is some hope—that if you seek mercy you may obtain it. I know that there is not only hope, but certainty. Jesus casts out none that come to him, and he is willing to receive the vilest of the vile. But I put the

question now as your unbelief puts it; it is not even to you an absolute certainty that Christ will reject you—is it? It is not quite certain that if you pray to him he will refuse to hear your prayer. It is not quite certain that if at this very hour the tear of penitence should stream down your cheeks, God would, nevertheless, refuse to forgive you. At least, it does not admit of positive proof that if you were to trust the blood of Christ you would perish. Mark, now, I am only putting it as you put it. So far from putting it so myself, were I speaking as I feel, I would affirm in God's name again, and again, and again, that if you come to him through Christ he will in nowise cast you out. But put it in your way, and even then does it not seem to be the wisest thing to say,—

“If I perish I will pray,
And perish only there”?

Look at the question for a moment in another light. It is certain that if you perish as you now are, you will perish without pity and without mercy. The law under which you are convicted knows nothing about forgiveness. Condemned already because you are under the law, the law provides no sacrifice for sin. If “they who sinned under Moses' law perished without mercy, of how much sorer punishment”—that is an awful passage—“of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?” If you perish without seeking mercy at the hand of Christ, there must be no mercy for you; but rigorous, unabated, absolute justice must be your portion. But now, do you not feel that even if you could perish after coming

to God through Christ, yet you would not perish without having some ray of pity? Would there not be at least this consolation for you—"I did what God counselled me; I did come to him and ask for mercy; I did plead the precious blood of Christ, and yet he rejected me;" and do you not think that this would be a balm to you? But if you perish now you will have ringing in your ears for ever—"You heard of Christ, but you believed not on him; you lived in the light of the gospel, but you shut your eyes to it; Christ was preached in your streets, and you refused him; you would have none of his warnings, but you put your fingers in your ears and ran on to destruction." Should you perish seeking mercy, you would be able to say, "I did seek; I did knock; I did pray; I did trust; I did try; I did yield my heart to God, and yet I perished." And oh! soul, if such a perishing were possible, though we are sure it is not, yet it were preferable to perishing without excuse, and without the shadow of extenuation. For your own sake, then, I say, choose that alternative, and let me now take hold of your hand and lead you to him who, with arms outstretched, hangs upon his cross, that he may give pardon to the guilty, life to the dead, and salvation to the lost.

Yet further, you ought to remember that all those who have continued in a state of nature have, without exception, perished. Not one, mark, not one, however high in station, however excellent in morality, however profound in learning, however lofty in fame, has ever been able to pass the threshold of heaven except through the atoning blood and meritorious righteousness of

the Lord Jesus Christ. In the black list of the unregenerate there is no exception to their condemnation. But take the other side, and at least we can assure you from our own case that there are exceptions to the rule that any should perish who put their trust in Christ. Even supposing that some perish who put their trust in him, which is not true, yet there are some who do not. Certainly there are some who in this life receive the pardon of their sins, and know it, and who in death are cheered with the prospect of a glorious immortality. Why think, Saul was led to repentance, and yet he says he was the chief of sinners. Others in this day, who had no more right to mercy than you have now, sought and found it, and there are hundreds in this congregation, ay, and thousands too, who, if this were the proper season, could at a signal rise and say, "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and delivered him from all his fears." Well, then, if God has to your knowledge saved some who have come to him through Christ—mark, I say he saves all—then, at any rate, as there is no exception to the other rule, and there are some to this, it were wisest and best for you to adopt the language of that hymn—

"I'll to the gracious King approach,
Whose sceptre mercy gives;
Perhaps he may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives.

"Perhaps he may admit my plea,
Perhaps may hear my prayer;
But if I perish I will pray,
And perish only there.

“I can but perish if I go ;
I am resolved to try :
For if I stay away I know
I must for ever die.

“But, should I die with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
That were to die, delightful thought!
As never sinner died !”

Nay, my friend, not one ever died thus. You would be the first that perished after that manner. Oh! take this alternative, and as the Holy Ghost has quickened you and made you feel your need of a Saviour, I pray that the same blessed Spirit may lead you to plunge into the stream, sink or swim—that, whether you perish or are saved, you may come and say, “Thy wounds, O Jesus, shall be my hiding-place: thy blood shall be my washing; thy righteousness shall be my clothing; thou, and thou alone, shalt be my all in all.”

II. We pass on to notice that the cogitation of these men ended in action. I wish the like were true of all of you. How many resolves have been strangled in this house of prayer! How many good thoughts have been murdered in those pews! Look, see, can you not find their blood upon your own skirts? Many a time that tear which betokens the first rising emotion has been wiped away, and the emotion with it. May it not be so to-night, but oh! may God grant that, like the lepers, we may put into action that which we shall think over, and accomplish that which, by the help of God the Holy Spirit, we shall be enabled to resolve upon.

Undoubtedly the action of the lepers was *bold*.

Cowardice would have sat still. Cowardice would have said, "Well, it is true we shall perish if we sit here, but still we will not go just yet; we are very hungry, but we may bear it another hour," and thus only an extreme pinch would have driven them out. The thought of the sword, and that sensation which the mind can sometimes give to the body when it imagines the keen edge of the cold steel as it shall pierce the flesh, might have kept them sitting still. But no. They said, "We will risk it. It is a desperate case. We will cast all upon this one deed; for better or for worse, for life or for death, we will go at once into the camp." So said and so done. Now, it seems a very bold thing to you, my unknown but trembling hearer, to think of going to Christ by faith. "Why," say you, "I have not the impudence to do it: look at what I have been." Perhaps some of you can speak of immoralities, others of you can speak of the gospel despised, of light abused, and of privileges neglected, a neglect which has rendered your guilt the more heinous, though outwardly it may have sheltered you from reproach; and you say, "No, I cannot; I have not the face to go to Christ; I am too black, too filthy, too naked; I cannot cover my sores; I cannot hide the foul leprosy which is starting from my gaunt face, and gleaming in livid whiteness from my brow. I could not go; I dare not go." Well, do you recollect that hymn of Hart's that we sometimes sing?—

"Venture on him, venture wholly;
Let no other trust intrude;
None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good."

Oh! venture on him! Though it seems impossible, yet God hath said it, and God can do impossibilities. Oh! thou blackest of the black, thou vilest of the vile, trust him to pardon thee, and he can do it. It surpasses thy faith, does it? Man, 'tis God that promiseth: judge him not according to thyself; measure not his ability with thy line; fathom not the depths of his grace with thy short-lined plummet. Believe him, honour him by believing that even such an one as thou art may find pardon, and may find it now. I recollect John Bunyan, in his "Grace Abounding," says there were times when his sins seemed so great, and his horror of them was so terrible, that he felt he must go to Christ; "and," saith he, "though I sometimes used to think of Christ as of one who stood with a pike in his hand to push me back, yet my terrible necessities sometimes came upon me with such force that I would fain have run even upon the very pikes sooner than endure my sin." Sinner, run on the pikes, and thou wilt find that there is no sword or pike in Christ's hands, but when thou thinkest that thou art about to run upon the halberts he will at once receive thee, press thee to his bosom, and say, "I have blotted out thy sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud thine iniquities." Oh! sinner, if thou thinkest my Master to be a hard Master, if thou thinkest it too bold a thing to come to him, thou dost not know him. I once thought him to be such an one as myself. For years I thus slandered him, till my heart was driven to despair and my soul chose strangling rather than life. I said it could not be that Christ could ever forgive such an one as I; I wrote bitter things against him, as well as

against myself, till at last, when I could not help it, when I could stand it no longer, with the rope about my neck as if prepared to receive my doom, I came into his presence, and I dared to look at him, and oh, that one look! My soul at this hour renews its transports at the remembrance of the change that came over my spirit the moment it learned to believe in Jesus! 'Twas gone; the burden of a life was gone; five years of agony were forgotten as a small moment, and my soul could say, "I'm forgiven; I'm forgiven." Then I could shout with joy unspeakable, because the love of God was shed abroad in my heart. Oh, that I could but be the means—God only can do it; we can do nothing of ourselves—oh, that he would but make me the means of bringing one soul to try my Master! I am sure you would find him so good that you would say, "The half has never been told." I have never been able to tell the thousandth part of his love. I have tried to tell of his mercy, but oh, I have made a poor daub where there should have been a fine picture of a Prince, who has every virtue in his face, and love streaming from his eyes of compassion. Soul, lost soul, try him. Troubled soul, risk all to-night. Do a bold thing, and put thy trust in him. Like the woman who stole a cure, so do thou come behind him and touch the hem of his garment. As the dog under the table, without licence, eats the crumbs, so do you. Though you think it is against law and against licence, dare to believe. Dare to trust him. He will be better than thy faith, and thou shalt find that thou dost not trust without a warrant.

But while these lepers did a bold thing, I pass on to

notice that they did it *unanimously*. It is not said that three of them went, but that the other said, "No, I will not go yet." It does not say that two said, "When we have a more convenient season we will go." It was a mercy for them that they were all hungry, for if they had not been they would not have gone. It was, probably, a great mercy for them that they were all lepers, or else they would not have been decided, and would never have dared to go. What a mercy it is for you, sinner, to know that you are a sinner! What a blessing it is that you have not yet got that mortification of the conscience which is premonitory of eternal death! You do feel; you feel now, as if you were shut out. Oh! I thank God for it; because now that you seem to be shut out of Israel it may be you will begin to go to Israel's Christ, and find mercy and help, and hope in him. Ah! you will not all go to him to-night. Would to God that ye might! Out of this congregation there will come under our notice, perhaps (our faith is in God that it shall be so), some dozen, or some score, who will say, "That night I went to Christ; I dared not go before, but that night I said, 'I'll venture on him; I'll trust him.'" "But what are they among so many?" While we bless God that we have so many seals to our ministry, what a sorrowful reflection it is that such multitudes come into this house who go out unsaved! Oh! there are many of you who can say, "The harvest is past, and the summer is ended, and we are not saved." It is not because there is no gospel preached. "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why, then, is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered? saith the Lord."

No, no; we sow much, but we reap little, compared with what our hearts desire. Where stands there the man or the woman here who intends to sit down and die? Well, if you do choose it, choose it deliberately. I would have you to-night, if God shall help you, make some choice. I know you will not make the right one unless he chooses for you; but if you yourselves make the wrong choice, do it deliberately, and solemnly. Say to-night—man, I wish you would say it if you mean it, for then I hope you would soon reverse it—say, “I mean to take the pleasures of this world; I mean, from this time forward, to live without God and without Christ.” Mark, you may as well add, “I mean to die and be damned,” for that must go with it. Take the whole, if you dare take any part, let your damnation warrant be signed and sealed, “No,” say you, “God forbid, not so, not so.” Why not? had you not better make that league with death, and that covenant with hell, than be as some of you are, indifferent and careless. This is the fault, the folly, the infatuation of our church-goers, and of our chapel-goers. When we once get the outside world in to hear a sermon they listen with attention. If they are impressed, it often happens that the impression is saving. It is far otherwise with you who are used to sermons, who go from place to place to listen to this man and to that, till full often you come to think that preaching is a Sunday diversion intended to amuse you! How often you come to hear us as you would go to see an actor, that you may spend your time, and be able, when the question is asked, “Have you heard Mr. So-and-so?” to say, “Yes, I heard him on such an occasion!” Sirs, do you think

we preach for your entertainment, or to court your criticism upon our talents? Oh! you do not know us if you think thus lightly of our sincerity. Is it such a fine thing to make a display of ourselves before you? Is it so flattering to our vanity that we should have your eyes fixed on us? God knoweth I would sooner break stones on the road than be a minister if it were not for the hope of winning souls. I know of no life that has more trouble in it; I know of no calling in the world that brings more awful despondency of spirit upon any man's mind than my ministry does on me. May God deliver me from the oppressive weight if he does not win souls by the effectual working. I would renounce my charge, for all the profit it brings me in, and all the honour it ever gives me. It were not worth the labour of thinking or the languor of talking if sinners were not saved, and souls reclaimed, and God glorified. Oh! I do pray you, sirs, shake off this indifference. If you mean to engage in Satan's service be prepared to take his pay; if you take his pleasures make up your minds to let him have the reversionary interest in your soul. Look forward to making your bed in hell; be ready to lie down in everlasting torments; or else, I adjure you by the laws of God, before whom I stand, embrace that other alternative, and fly to him who will in no wise cast you out.

Bear with me while I remind you again that the action of the lepers was also *instantaneous*. They said, "We will go," and at once they went. Many say, "I go, sir," but they go not. We can all of us remember times before our conversion to God when we have been impressed under solemn sermons, and some of you

can recollect how you have made haste home, and have gone upstairs, and have shut the door and prayed; but idle conversation dissipated the serious impression. And how many more there are who, while their hearts have been searched under the Word, have said, "Please God to spare me another day, I'll think over those things." But where are you now? There is a grey-headed man over there. Just let him sharpen his memory, and recall the story of the past a little. When he was a little boy his mother had hopes of him, and when he was but a lad he was looked upon by all who knew him as being a Timothy; and now he is an old Demas with his silver hairs, and perhaps with the silver coins which he got by forsaking God and loving this present world, for the root of the matter was not in him. Venerable man, in thy hoary age recall that vow of thy ruddy youth, that vow registered in heaven, that vow which thou hast so deliberately broken. There are men here, too, in the high tide of business, who, when they were more tender of heart and less hardened by the deceitfulness of riches or the chills of misfortune, resolved and re-resolved to change their course, yet are they still the same. If you would put down your resolves in your pocket-books, and keep the old ones, so that you could look back with bitter stings of repentance you might then say, "This vow was made in the strength of the flesh, and therefore it has been broken, but its sin rests upon my soul." These famished lepers went instantly. There is no being saved except it be done at once. We must go to Christ, not with hesitant misgiving or protracted resolving, but with instantaneous submission. As justification by faith is an instantaneous gift, so the

faith that saves is doubtless an instantaneous act. Believe in Christ; trust Christ, and oh! do it now. That done, thou art saved. The lepers went instantly, and they found satisfaction instantly. God grant that you may go instantly too. In one word, a positive plea for present pardon will procure you perfect peace.

Oh how well they were all of them rewarded for what they did. Not one of them perished. They were all saved; not one came back empty-handed; they were all enriched. Nor shall one of you—my life for yours—not one of you seeking mercy through Christ shall be refused it. You shall all be blessed, all adopted, all saved, who are by the Spirit of God led to put your trust in Christ at this welcome moment.

III. These lepers no sooner found what was good for themselves than they straightway went off to tell it to others. And if you have found Christ, after you are sure you have received him, and have rejoiced in him for a little season, and fed upon him, and enriched yourselves by him as your hidden treasure, it behoves you to go and tell to others of his grace, and your joy. This gospel is not to be stifled. "Oh! but I cannot preach," say you. Try, brother! "But I have not the gift of utterance," you say again, "I have tried." Write a letter, brother! speak a word for Christ anyhow.

"Tell it, unto sinners tell,
That you are saved from death and hell."

Why, I cannot make out how some people keep the secret. I cannot easily keep any secret to myself, especially if it be a benefit for anybody to know it, and I

am sure I cannot keep this one. No sooner does that secret get into the soul of a man than it wants to burn its way out. You recollect John Bunyan says he wanted to tell the very crows on the ploughed land about it. And I think it will be the same with you. If you have got the secret in your heart, you will want to tell it to your fellow-workmen. Perhaps you are employed behind the counter, then surely you will want to be telling it in the evening, after the shop is shut, to some that are in the common room with you. If you are a husband, you will never be content till you have told it to your wife and family; and if you are a mother, I am sure you will be eager to make it known to your children. It is a great and holy fire, that will burn and not smoulder. There was a spark once that got into the stubble, and the Angel of Discretion was there, and he said, "Spark, lie still, lie still, lie still; if you begin to consume, the next, and then the next, will get alight, and perhaps the whole threshing-floor will be in a blaze, and then the homestead, and then the village." But preach as he might, the fire would burn, and the Angel of Discretion had well-nigh burned his wings before he had turned to flee. And so there be some in our churches who are very angels of prudence. "Young men," say they, "don't speak too soon; don't attempt to do it till you are duly qualified." My dear sirs, if God has communicated to any man the secret of salvation by grace he cannot help telling it; and if the Lord has touched a man's tongue with a live coal, he will burn as well as the coal. If the new life has been given to him, it must find its way out, and be the means of conveying that life to others. What a mass of *men*

there are constantly attending this tabernacle! I suppose two-thirds of this general congregation consist of men. What a noble staff of men we have, then, who, if converted themselves, might be apostles of Christ to the church and to the world! Sirs, do you know Christ, and have you held your tongues? Take care that before the great tribunal you are not charged with the ruin of your fellow men! You young men of ability, trained in our grammar-schools, and educated in our colleges, it is too often a lamentable fact that if you join the church you feel as if you had only to give it your name, but not your abilities. If a man joins a rifle corps, he attends drill, and throws himself into it, and endeavours to promote the interests of the corps; but if he joins a church, it is as much as you can do to get him to drill once a-year, and he seems to have nothing to do except to "stand at ease." Oh, sirs, when you join the church I hope you give us yourselves. If you do not, I pray you withhold your names. Up! up! in the name of God, up and at the evils of the times! Up, and tell to starving London what the lepers told to starving Samaria—that there is bread to be had. Do you say, "I am a sinner myself"? Your leprous lips will not spoil the message if you have but tasted and handled this truth. Do you say, "I am unworthy"? Ah! but he who took away your unworthiness took away the disability which that unworthiness involved. You are not worthy to be called God's son by nature, but by grace you may be worthy to be his ambassador. My poor friend over there, you often weep because you cannot do more for Christ. Take courage; do all you can. If you cannot speak to

thousands, be content to speak to one; and if you cannot bring hundreds to Christ, be satisfied if now and then you can lead a mourner to him. My dear hearers (and especially you, the members of this church), if you have obtained mercy, I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, by the compassionate heart of your dying Redeemer, by that hope which you have that he will shortly come, be ye instant in season and out of season; preach the truth and teach it, knowing that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. Oh, that at the day of Christ many sheaves may be brought into the eternal garner through your being stirred up to labour by the ministry in this house of prayer.

To thee, unpardoned soul, I have spoken at length, and God knows how truly from my heart. This last word in thine ear ere thou passest those curtains to go down yonder steps—it may be that there is a solemn spot in this house of prayer to-night. I am told that just under the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral there is the mark of a workman's hammer, and it is said that years ago one who was engaged in the roof fell down and there met his death. It is the place where a soul departed, where a man died. I do not know where it is, but it may be that there is a solemn spot here to-night where a soul will be lost for ever. May be the moment has come when the wax upon that soul's death-warrant shall grow cold, when it shall say in its heart, "I will have none of these things," and when God shall say, "Thou shalt have none of them; I will let thee alone; thy conscience shall never be troubled again; thou shalt go through life in peace, thou shalt go to thy death with carelessness; only in hell shalt thou ever

open thine eyes." God grant that it be not so, but I feel as if it would be so with some of you, unless sovereign and irresistible grace should decide otherwise, and then, to-night, there will be a spot in this house of prayer where a soul will be born to God. What man is he that just now gives his heart to Christ? Are there none of you? Must I go back to my Master with no joyful tidings? Is there no heart here that says :—

"I'll go to Jesus, though my sins
Have like a mountain rose ;
I know his courts, I'll enter in
Whatever may oppose ?"

Are there none? Great God, looking down from heaven! Are all hearts hard? Are there none that will come? Perhaps it is so, for we are feeble. Oh, Spirit of God, come down now; now, in this solemn moment, now, break the heart with thy hammer; now cut and wound by thy sword; now heal and bind up with thy holy ointments, now, at this solemn moment. I say no more, but may it be so, and with him I leave it. Amen.





A Jeremiah.

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.”—Lamentations i. 12.



HIS was the lamentation of Jeremiah. As he saw the desolation of the beloved city, as he marked the cruelties inflicted by the invaders upon Jewish youth, and children, and maidens, and as he foresaw the long years of bitterness reserved for the captives in Babylon, he felt as if he were a peer in the realm of misery—indeed peerless. He stands foremost, a very emperor of grief, a king of sighs and tears. “Behold and see,” saith he, “if there were ever sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me.”

But may there not have been griefs as great as those of Jeremiah? Is the language that flows from his lips strictly accurate? Like most of the periods which flow from abundant grief, is there not some exaggeration here? If we take the words out of the mouth of Jeremiah, and put them into the mouth of Jesus; if we suppose them to be spoken by him as, hanging on

the cross, he did bear the wrath of God for us, then is there no hyperbole, no exaggeration. The words may be read as they stand, and stand as we read them, and their fullest weight shall not outweigh the truth.

This evening two things challenge our attention—*an earnest expostulation*—“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?”—and *a solemn question*—“Behold, and see, was there ever sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me.”

I. First, AN EARNEST EXPOSTULATION.

The Son of God has become incarnate. He became man out of love to men; but men loved him not, and though in him was every perfection, they hunted and hounded him to death. The story is told four times over by inspired authority in this Book, but the mass of mankind feel no concern it. I come here to-night, and I say to many of you—Does not the story of Jesus at all interest you? You heard it read just now, did it fall flat and stale upon your ears? Did you say to yourselves, “It is dry work to listen to that; there is nothing there to strike the attention; if I had taken up a newspaper and had read of some recent murder my wits would have been all awakened, but in the hearing of this death of Christ I feel not at all stirred.” Well, then, I ask you, Why is this? Why is it so? If there is anything in all the world that ought to interest a man, it is the death of Christ. Yet do I find men, learned men, spending year after year in sorting out butterflies, beetles, and gnats, or in making out the various orders of shells, or in digging into the earth and seeking to discover what strange creatures once floundered through the boundless mire, or swam in the

vast seas. I find men occupied with things of no sort of practical moment, and which to me do not seem so wonderfully enchanting, yet the story of God himself, who deigned to become a man, and as a man suffered, and bled, and died, is thought to be too small a trifle for intelligent minds to dwell upon it. O reason! where art thou gone? O judgment! whither art thou fled? Men spend their strength on trifles, but on God incarnate they turn their backs.

It is strange that even *the sufferings of Christ* should not attract the attention of men, for generally, if we hear any sad story of the misfortunes of our fellow-creatures, we are interested. The newspaper is accounted more than usually interesting which contains full particulars of shipwrecks, the blowing down of houses, murders, shootings, killings, and I do not know what. Everybody has felt that he could read such a paper as that because it concerned his fellow men—what they had lost and what they had suffered. Every one stops to hear the tale of the ancient mariner; even the wedding-guest is held while he with the earnest eye tells how he suffered on the wide, deep, stagnant sea. And yet this story of a man who came to our earth with no motive but love, and lived here to do nothing but good, and yet was so despised and rejected as to be nailed to a cross, and there made to die in the midst of jeers, and sneers, and pains, and agonies unknown, this does not interest men! I marvel, and yet I marvel not, at the strange indifference of this age to the wonders of Calvary. How is it earth does not stretch out her hands and say, “Come and tell us of the God that loved us, and came down to our low

estate, and suffered for us men and for our salvation"? How is it that the crowds of this great city do not come and besiege our houses and say—"Tell us yet again this strange, mysterious story of the sufferings of the perfect Son of God"? It ought to interest us, if nothing more. Is it nothing to you, however? Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?

And should it not be more than interesting? Should it not *excite our admiration*? You cannot read of a man sacrificing himself for the good of his fellow creatures without feeling at once that you wish you had known that fine fellow, and you feel instinctively that you would do anything in the world to serve him if he still lives, or to help relatives left behind if he has died in a brave attempt. Who does not esteem, though you never knew him, the good man at Bethnal Green, who perished some time ago in the explosion at the firework manufactory? He rushed in to seek to rescue others, and was found at last a handful of ashes; bewailed by a weeping wife! One felt at once, "There is a man there who had a soul beating beneath his ribs!" But is no admiration to be given to the Son of God, who left a throne of glory without bound, and came here below to poverty, to shame, to a life of contempt and toil, and then gave himself up voluntarily to a death which never could have been inflicted upon him if he had not given himself up to die? Jesus Christ had no motive in suffering but the good of men. Nothing selfish ever crossed his soul. Oh, men and brethren, it was pity that ruled his heart, pity and only pity; and while we set up our statues in reverence of men who have loved their fellow men, and speak of such and such a man as

“a great philanthropist,” is it nothing to you that Jesus should die for men? shall this greatest of all philanthropists, this first and chiefest of lovers of the race of men, be altogether forgotten? I would admire him if he had not saved me. If I had no share in his blood I think I should love him. The life of Christ enchants me; the death of Christ binds me to his cross. Even were I never washed in his blood, and were myself cast away into hell, if that were possible, I still feel I must admire him for his love to others. Yea, and I must adore him, too, for his Godlike character, his superhuman love in suffering for the sons of men. But why, why is it that such a Christ, so lovely and so admirable, is forgotten by the most of mankind, and it is nothing to them?

Now, my dear hearers, there are some of you to whom I might put this question very closely. You have heard about Jesus very often. This pulpit is always ringing with his name. And you have admired what Jesus did; I know you have, and if any spoke ill of him, you would be very grieved, and you would be among the first to defend his name; and yet—and yet—is that all? Are you always going to be interested, and to admire, and are you never going further? Is it, after all, to come to this, that it is nothing to you that Jesus should die? Have you no interest in that death, no part, no lot in the salvation which that death brings to the sons of men? I am afraid with some of you it will be so all your days. How many years have I preached to some of you? And if those past years have not brought you to Christ, is there any reason to believe that more years to come will do it? Nay, I

fear that with some of you the harvest is past, and the summer is ended, and you are not saved. There was a time when this voice did seem to cut into your soul, and the truth that was uttered awakened your conscience, but it is all nothing to you now. You could go to sleep under the sound of it, and your soul does sleep under the sense of it. What, will you abandon hope? Have you resolved to be lost, with the light of life beaming before you? Have you determined that you will never look to him who is lifted up to save you from the serpent's bite? Shall Christ, the water of life, never be tasted by your lips? Do you elect to perish of thirst? Shall this bread of life be never eaten? Do you choose rather to starve than to come to him? No, you tell me you hope it will be otherwise one of these days. Ah! but I have no hope of you for any day but to-day, and I wish you too knew that procrastination is of all things fatal. I would sooner that you resolved to be damned than that you only said, "To-morrow, to-morrow," for if to-day you resolved upon your ruin, you might be startled at the resolution, and you might be led to see your folly and awakened to amend your steps, but if you always say "To-morrow, to-morrow," it will be the will-o'-the-wisp that will tempt you into the fatal morass, where souls have been lost by tens of thousands, as yours will be.

Oh! wherefore should I have to be always coming on the same errand into this pulpit to say over and over and over again to you that Jesus died, and that if you trust him you shall live? Why should it need to be repeated thus? Great God of patience, such a story as this ought to be accepted of the heart at once. If

thou bearest with men who reject it, we may well bear with them too; but oh! we pray thee let them not go too far with thy longsuffering, nor venture too much upon thy patience, lest thou lift thy hand and swear in thy wrath that they shall not enter into thy rest, because they had the gospel, but they counted not themselves to be worthy of it.

One thing I would say to you, to all of you to whom it seems as yet to be nothing that Jesus should die, I can assure you that personally to me it is something that he should die. It is more than something; it is everything, and I will tell you why. It is much to me that Jesus died, for I knew I slew him. I sang those verses just now, and I sang them with some bitterness of soul. I was forced to feel:

“’Tis I have thus ungrateful been.”

If it were not that I had sinned, as one of the race, there had been no need for Christ to die, but as it was sin that pierced and nailed him, I had a share in his death. But then I know another thing, that by that death I am delivered from the very guilt that put him to death. I have looked to him, and I am forgiven. Fleming tells us in a book of his that a great culprit had been condemned to be hanged at Ayr. He had been a very great offender, but, while he lay in prison, God granted him repentance, and he was heard to say continually as they took him to the scaffold, “Oh! but he’s a great forgiver! Oh! but he’s a great forgiver!” and I have often felt as if I could stand and cry, yea, even dance and say it, “Oh, but he’s a great forgiver! Oh! but he’s a great forgiver!” My innumerable sins

confessed to him, were blotted out each one, and peace and joy bestowed where all was fear and trembling before. Now, there are hundreds in this house that could say the same. If I were to ask it, and this were the proper time, there are thousands here who could rise and say, "I too can say that it is much to me that Jesus died, for though I slew him, yet by his death I live, and by the blood which I drew from his veins, I have been washed and made white." Well, if it is so much to us, we do sincerely wish, oh, unconverted ones! that Christ were as much to you, for we do think he ought to be; we do desire that he should be; we pray that he may be, and we tremble, even to horror, lest after all he should not be; for if Christ be nothing to you, it will be a hard dying for you, a wretched exit, the bed shall be of iron, and the pillow shall be cold as ice; and it will be hard passing into a disembodied state; it will be heart-rending to come before God; it will be grim and doleful for you at the again-rising, in the day of the resurrection, when the trumpet sounds, and the sepulchres are burst open, and your body linked to your soul again, shall stand before the flaming throne of Christ. It will be appalling for you, more terrible than tongue can tell, throughout eternity! An eternity without Christ! an eternity without Christ! "Nothing to you, nothing to you," you say now, but how will it be when conscience shall remind you in eternity, "You heard of Christ, but you said he was nothing to you; you listened to earnest admonitions, but you said they were nothing to you." How will this stir the fire? How will this fan the flame? How will this prick your conscience and vex your spirit, that Jesus died, and inestimable mercies dropped from the

cross, pardons sealed with blood were distributed freely upon Calvary, and broken hearts were healed, and sins were forgiven, and the dead were raised, and the lost were saved; but it was all nothing to you, nothing to you. Oh! before death comes—and he is on his way to some here present, on his way to meet them soon—before death comes on the pale horse with hell following at his heels, I beseech you, as you love your souls, look to the Crucified, and be not satisfied till you can say, “He is everything to me; I slew him, but he saved me; I looked to him, and I live.”

May God bless this admonition, and my heart shall be glad indeed if he will but do it. Oh, how little can I do for you, unconverted ones, how little can I do for you! When I sometimes get a shake of the hands from some of you, and you say, “Well, I have been hearing you for years, sir, but I am not converted,” I look hopefully upon you, but I cannot help when I get away, reproaching myself in part and saying, “Have I preached to these people as I ought to do?” You cause me to wake up at night to weep for you, and to ask myself again and again, “What more can I say? How shall I put it? With what force and power can I deliver it, if perhaps I may reach their hearts?” Oh, I trust you may yet be brought, and God shall be praised and glorified world without end!

II. Now let us change to a second point—A SOLEMN QUESTION.

The Lord Jesus Christ may be represented here as bidding men see if there be any sorrow like unto his sorrow, which is done unto him. Truly *the sufferings of Jesus were altogether unique; they stand alone.* History

or poetry can find no parallel. There were never any sufferings which could match his, and never was such an illustrious sufferer put to such boundless shame. He was the eye of heaven, the very sun and star of the bright world. It was the seraph's bliss to do him homage. King of kings and Lord of lords was he, and the government was upon his shoulders, and his name was called Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. All the hallelujahs of eternity rolled up at his august feet. But he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not. They spat into his face; they plucked off his hair; they blindfolded him; they smote him with their fists; they gave him a felon's death, and then stood by and mocked his prayers, and made jests about his groans and pangs. Never was one so high brought so low. "Behold, and see if ever there were sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me." Never one so innocent, never one so falsely accused. He had done no evil; he was no rival of Cæsar. He said his kingdom was not of this world. Instead of doing evil he had done boundless good. His meat and drink were to do God's will. His delight was to help the poor, to feed the hungry, to heal the sick. He was all gentleness, all goodness, and generous beyond degree. From both his hands he scattered bounties lavishly amongst the graceless sons of men, and yet they said he was guilty of sedition and blasphemy. He seditious! He a blasphemer! Lying could go no further; suborned witnesses could not be made to agree. The lie was too massive even for those

to compass who were willing to have compassed it. Oh! was ever grief like his! exonerated yet condemned! adjudged to be without fault, yet delivered up to his direst foes! treated as a felon, put to death as a traitor; immolated on a gibbet which bore triple testimony to his innocence by its inscription. The tragic drama never reached a plot so deep. The majestic odes of prophecy never told a fact more clearly. He suffered the just for the unjust, for he did no sin, neither was deceit found in his lips!

In our Saviour's death there were aggravations of an extraordinary kind. Before he actually came to die, that dreadful night in Gethsemane had broken his already emaciated frame. There he sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground. In two or three cases other persons have sweat drops of blood, but they have invariably died. Our Saviour did this, and yet lived. Oh, how was the bitterness of his soul expressed in that awful overflow which fell upon the soil of that garden! Then remember, he was led, deserted by his friends, without any comfort from his God, to be tried by Herod, by Pilate, by Caiaphas; to be scourged, beaten, probably several times, with rods and scourges. God forsook him. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me"—was his cry in the very depth of his agony. With none to pity, no one to administer comfort, forsaken utterly, our Saviour died, with accessories of sorrow that were to be found in no other decease than that which was accomplished at Jerusalem.

Still, the singularity of his death lies in another respect. There was never sorrow like unto the sorrow which was done unto Christ, *because all his sorrow was*

borne for others. Whatever you and I may suffer we deserve it, and directly or indirectly, we may trace it to the fact that we are sinners. But he was spotless, innocent, and pure. In him was no sin, and neither suffering nor death could lawfully have been exacted of him had he not been made the substitute for his people. Behold, and see if there was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow. He bears the sin of many; he is numbered with the transgressors. He stands vicariously to endure tormenting griefs which never could have fallen to his lot had it not been that he was a surety, and stood in his people's stead.

Now, I want your close attention for one minute. Question—What was it that Christ, as substitute, had to endure? Answer—Although it may not have been precisely what we ought to have endured, it must have been something equivalent thereto. And what ought any one sinner to have suffered? Interminable misery in hell. What, then, must have been the pangs which in Christ's case were accepted as an equivalent for the countless agonies of one sinner? Howbeit Christ died, not for one sinner, but for tens of thousands, for multitudes whom no man can number. Think, then, my brethren, what must have been the crushing blows which Jehovah laid on him when those strokes were inflicted to satisfy divine justice for the sins, the crimes, the transgressions of ten thousand times ten thousand of those for whom he suffered. Of course, it were not possible for him to have endured such penance, even for one soul of man, if he had not been God. His Godhead gave him an infinite capacity, and infused a boundless degree of compensation into all the pangs he bore.

You have no more idea of what Christ suffered in his soul than you have, when you take up in a shell a drop of sea-water, power to guess from that the area of the entire boundless, bottomless ocean. What Christ suffered is utterly inconceivable. We are not at liberty to think of him as dying as another dies. His was a vast soul, so great a soul that it seemed to have all souls within it, and it had the capacity for suffering what all souls might bear, and the whole of the vast nature which God had given, that wondrous nature which he himself also essentially possessed, was put forth to make an atonement for human sin. "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me."

It is time to pause a little. Instead of talking any more, let us sit down in meditation at the foot of the cross, and look up. 'Tis the King; 'tis the King, but he is crowned with thorns. It is the Prince of glory, but he is stripped naked to his shame. It is the Ancient of eternal days, but he bows his head to die. He is God allsufficient, yet he cries, "I thirst." He is the angels' darling, but he is despised and rejected of men. He filleth the courts above with honour; his presence gilds heaven with light, yet there upon the cross he is covered with shame and shrouded in darkness. Hushed are the songs, the anthems, and choruses of celestial choirs; and all the music that greets his ears is that of his own sighs, and cries, and groans. Was ever grief like thine? Needless question; needless question; all but shameful question; for were all griefs that ever were felt condensed into one, they were no more worthy to be compared therewith than the glow-worm's tiny lamp with the ever-blazing sun.

What then, beloved, what then? If Christ be thus alone in suffering, what then? Why, *let him stand alone in our love.* High, high, set up Christ high in your heart. Now, brethren and sisters, you have many objects of your affection, but oh, lift up my Lord, your soul's Bridegroom, your spirit's well-beloved! Come now, if you have thought well of him, think better of him. If you have loved him, oh, love him more. Now, ask to have your heart inflamed, as with coals of juniper which have a vehement heat, and let that heart be all his own. Oh! let there be no such love as your love to Christ. Let it pass the love of women. Let it go beyond a mother's love, a brother's affection, a father's tenderness. Love him; you cannot match his love to you; seek at least to let your little stream run side by side of the mighty river.

If Christ be thus alone in suffering, brethren, let us seek to make him, if we can, alone in our service. It is not much we do for Christ compared with what we should. Some have learned to give their time, their labour, and their substance in larger measure than most people care to do. But yet what is our giving, be it ne'er so costly, for such an one as he is? We only give what we can spare; how few of us ever pinch ourselves for him. He smarted for us, and gave up even his very garments for us, but we do not come to that. In the olden times they did, and saints, and martyrs, and Christian missionaries made sacrifice of all, and counted it no sacrifice, out of love to him. I wish we had more Marys who would break the alabaster box of precious ointment upon his dear head. Oh! for a little extravagance of love, a little fanaticism of affection

for him, for he deserves ten thousand times more than the most enthusiastic devotees ever dream of rendering.

If he be thus, brethren, so far beyond all others in his sorrow, let him also be first and foremost *in our praise*. If ye have poetic minds, weave no garlands except for his dear brow. If ye be men of eloquence, speak no glowing periods except to his honour. If ye be men of wit and scholarship, oh seek to lay your classic attainments at the foot of his cross! Come hither with all your talents, and yield them to him who bought you with his blood. Come hither, ye with much and ye with little; come ye with hearts so warm whom he loved so well; give some lively expression to your gratitude.

“ Dear suffering Lamb ! thy bleeding wounds,
With cords of love divine,
Have drawn our willing hearts to thee,
And linked our life with thine.

“ Our longing eyes would fain behold
Thy bright and blessed brow,
Once wrung with bitterest anguish, wear
Its crown of glory now.”

But, oh! are there any of you here who still think nothing of Christ, who pass by unheeding, to whom his sorrows are of no account? Ye will think differently another day: for “every eye shall see him; they also that pierced him, and all nations shall wail because of him.” Did ye but know the meaning of this—“Surely he hath borne *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows,” your interest would be aroused, you would turn straightway, and look at him, and look to him, as a friend, as your

friend, as the best friend a sinner can see or know.
Oh that his sorrows might awaken your sympathies!

“Come, blessed Lord, thy grace impart,
To warm each cold, each stolid heart,
Till all its powers and passions move
In melting grief and ardent love.”





Ho! Ho!

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.”—Isa. lv. 1.



HERE is a thirst which is peculiar to the believer. He can say with David—“As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” Delightful thirst! Would God we had more of it! May we be longing and panting after our God in that sense until we shall be filled with his Spirit, and shall dwell in his presence to go no more out for ever. But I wish now to speak of another kind of thirst to another class of thirsting ones, who thirst they scarcely know for what. They have a sense of unrest, of longing, of yearning, yet they have a very indistinct idea of what it is their souls are pining for. It may be they will find out presently what it is their thirst requires. Better still, if mayhap, by God’s blessing, that thirst shall be quenched by their drinking that living water of which they are bidden freely to take.

I shall not detain you with a long preface, nor, indeed, with a long discourse. I will try to make each

portion of my address brief, practical, and pointed. May the Holy Ghost make it effectual.

Learn from my text that *God has made plenteous soul-provision; and that to every thirsty soul this provision is perfectly free and gratuitous.*

I. In the first place GOD HAS MADE AN ABUNDANT SOUL-PROVISION.

We read here of "water." Water has been pronounced the simplest, purest, fittest drink for all persons of all ages and temperaments. Now, there is a thirst in man's body which makes him require drink. He drinks, and that thirst is removed. There is a similar thirst in man's spiritual nature. He wants something, and he feels uneasy until he gets it. The grace of God, which is proclaimed to us in Christ Jesus, is that which meets the longing of man. That is the spiritual water for man's spiritual thirst. In the text the word is put in the plural, "Come ye to the waters," I suppose to show the abundance thereof, as though there were many rivers of it, so that none might fear that they should require more than was provided.

"Great God, the treasures of thy love
Are everlasting mines;
Deep as our greatest miseries are,
And boundless as our sins."

The mercy of God is not a little brook which can be almost drained up by a passing ox, but it is a vast river—it is many rivers, rivers to swim in. Ho, every one that thirsteth! stand not back because ye think there is not enough, but come ye to the waters.

Or the word may be in the plural to signify variety. The soul wants many things. Viewing eternity, and

God, and judgment, from different points of view, it needs manifold and multitudinous mercies. They are all provided, and the word "waters" indicates that many fresh springs of consolation are ready for those who thirst for all spiritual blessings as soon as the eye sees or the ear hears tell of them. You need not fear if you want the pardon of sin, or the renewal of your nature, or guidance in perplexity or comfort in distress, you need not fear but what you shall find it. "Come ye to the waters." There is an infinite variety in the grace of God. He is called "the God of all grace." All the grace that all the sinners that ever come to him can want, they shall find stored up in the gospel provisions of the covenant of grace. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," for God has provided for soul-needs in plentiful abundance and endless variety.

Now, are you thirsting? It surely is not the mere play of imagination, but the sober apprehension of a fact, that convinces me there are persons here who are thirsting in a spiritual sense. Methinks one of them says, "I thirst, *I thirst to have my sins forgiven, and to be reconciled to God*; I know that I have done wrong; for me to plead that I have been innocent would be to add a lie to all my other iniquities; I am sensible in my inmost heart that I have, both by omission and commission, transgressed the divine law; I deserve punishment, but I would that by some means I might be put into the divine favour; I cannot bear to think that God should be angry with me every day; once I laughed at this, but now I feel its meaning, and it is like an arrow sticking in my loins. Oh,

that I could have my Maker to be my friend! I cannot fight out the battle with him; he could crush me in a moment; I would, therefore, cast down the weapons of my rebellion, and be reconciled to him." Come, then, thou thirsty one, come and have what thou wantest! Come and put thy trust in Jesus, and thy sin is forgiven, and thou art reconciled; for, far off as thou art, thou shalt be brought nigh by the blood of Christ. Dost thou know how? It is thus—God must punish sin: thy sin has incurred his penalty; but he exacted thy debt of thy surety. He punished Jesus for thy sins which thou hast committed if so be thou believest in Jesus as thy substitute. He endured, that thou mightest never endure, the whole of the divine wrath; God now, therefore, can, without marring his justice, reconcile to himself the offending sinner, be agreed with him, receive him into friendship, ay, receive him into sonship, and adopt him as his child. That troubled conscience of yours will soon have peace if you will but trust in the bleeding sacrifice of the Lamb of God for sinners slain. Put your hands upon his dear head, once crowned with thorns for thee, and thou shalt prove that God is thy friend, and know that thy sin is forgiven. Ho, every one that thirsteth for pardon and for reconciliation, come ye to the waters, and have there your desire.

I think I hear another say, "I desire that selfsame blessing, but I want something more; *I want to conquer the sin that dwelleth in me*; I want to be pure and holy; I cannot bear to be in the future what I have been in the past; I feel the chains of habit that bind me; I want to snap them off. I would no

longer be an example of vice; I want to be a pattern of everything that is lovely and of good repute; but I have struggled against sin, and it gets the mastery over me; I do for a time escape, but still I bear my fetters upon me, and am dragged back to my prison. I cannot be what I would; oh, that I could escape from the power of sin!" Ah, thou thirsty one, it is a blessed thing to desire as thou desirest; and let me tell thee that God will give thee the desire of thine heart, for Jesus died that he might deliver his people from the power of Satan. He came on purpose that he might destroy the power of sin in his people, and make them so free that they should not serve sin, but become a people zealous for good works. If thou wilt come to Jesus, and simply believe in him, that is, rely upon him, trust him, his grace will come and refine thee, implanting a new nature, taking away the heart of stone, and giving a heart of flesh, and thou shalt yet put thy foot upon the neck of all thy corruptions; thou shalt cast them out by little and by little, and thou shalt be made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Ho, every one that thirsteth for purity and virtue, and for victory over indwelling sin, let him come to the waters that flowed with the blood from Jesus' side, and let him taste, and his thirst shall be appeased for ever.

In some persons this soul-thirst takes the shape of an *anxious desire for perseverance and security*. "I would like," says one, "oh, how I would like to know myself saved, and so saved that I never can be lost! Would that I could get on the rock and feel the steadfastness of my refuge, that I might be able to sing—

'My name from the palms of his hands
Eternity cannot erase;
Impressed on his heart it remains
In marks of indelible grace.'

I recollect how I longed and panted after this, for no salvation ever seemed to me to be worth the having that would not last me to the end; no sign of grace within seemed worth the having, but a sign that could never be cut off. The dread "peradventure" haunted me lest the enterprise should be after all a failure, and the prospect of final deliverance should be defeated by some superior power of evil. I wanted the indwelling of eternal life, of that life incorruptible which liveth and abideth for ever. Now, such a life as this it is that we read of in the Bible. "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him, it shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." You who want security, who wish to know that you are saved, and to rejoice in it, may well listen to these words: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." If you come to Christ for this blessed satisfaction you shall have it. Give yourselves up to Christ and you shall sing, in the words of our song,—

"I know that safe with him remains
Protected by his power,
What I've committed to his hands,
Till the decisive hour."

Yes, be your thirst for pardon, for reconciliation, for sanctification, for deliverance from sin, or for perseverance and safety, you shall have any and all these in the waters which God has made to flow.

There are persons in the world, however, whose thirst

takes another form. They have a *thirst for knowledge*. They want to know, to know infallibly. Through how many theories some people wade! There are minds so naturally inclined for cavil and controversy, for reasoning and reconsidering, that the more they study the more sceptical they grow. Ever learning, they never come to the knowledge of the truth. "Oh!" they seem to say, "if I could but get hold of something that was true, some fact, some certainty." Well, sir, if thou thirstest for this, let thy soul be given up to a belief in Christ, and thou shalt soon find certainty. I believe that the religion of Jesus Christ is so certain a truth to that man who has believed it, that it is so verified to his inner consciousness, and so interweaves itself with his entire being, that no proposition of Euclid could ever be more demonstrable, or more absolutely conclusive. We have known and believed the revelation that this Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. We have tasted, and felt, and handled of the good word of life. I know, and many here know, that since we have believed in Jesus we have come to live in an entirely new world. We have broken through the veil that parted us from a kingdom of which we knew nothing, and we have been brought into this new kingdom, and live in it, and are as conscious of new sensations, and new emotions, and new sorrows, and new joys as we are conscious of the old sensations which we possessed aforetime. It is true, sirs, certainly true. Have not our martyrs stood at the stake and burnt for this truth? That is a stern truth which a man will dare to burn for. Twisted as their nerves and muscles were upon the rack, and their very hearts searched after

with hot claws of fire by their tormentors, yet have they learned to sing in the midst of anguish, to tell of present enjoyment and to triumph in the absolute truth of the doctrine whereof they were the witnesses. If you want to get your foot upon a bit of rock, to feel your footing, and express your conviction, "Now, this is true whatever else is not," you must believe in Jesus Christ. Then you will be no more shifted about like an unguided vessel, by every wind and every current, but you will be sailing with the heavenly pilot on board, directing you to the haven of everlasting peace.

But there are those whose thirst is *that of the heart*. It is not so much something to believe, as something to love which they want. Well, my dear friend, if you would have something worthy of your affection, a person whom you may love to the fullest possible extent, and never be deceived, adore and never become an idolater, let me say to you, come ye to the waters and drink of the love of Christ, for they that love him may love him more, they cannot love him too much. He never disappoints any confidence that is reposed in him. His dear, sweet love which he poureth into the souls of those that love him is a recompense for any sorrows they may have endured for his sake, a recompense that makes them forget their wrongs and woes in the exceeding weight of glory which it entails.

Oh! did ye but know my Master, ye would find out that to know him is to love him. All things else in this world were insignificant in comparison with him. As a candle is not to be compared to the sun at noonday, so the joys of this world are not worthy to be mentioned in the same century as the joys of

communion with Christ. Get this, and you shall have overflowing joy! you shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness, and drink of the wines on the lees well refined.

But time would fail me if I were to try to mention the different forms of soul-thirst. Whatever they may be, God has provided a supply for them all. Sinner, you cannot want anything which God cannot give you; your soul cannot crave for anything but he can bestow it; you cannot be so soul-sick but he has a medicine that will heal you; you cannot be so naked but he can clothe you, nor so black but he can wash you, nor so devilish but he can sanctify you, nor so near being damned but he can save you. Christ is all in all. If you are just now ready to die, if you have brought yourself down to the gates of the grave by your sin, if you are suffering in body the results of your iniquities, if your own conscience has pronounced on you the dread sentence of doom,—know this, my Master's arm is strong, and long as well as strong; he is able to reach the worst, the vilest, and the most abandoned; and when he once reaches them he will never let go of them till he has taken them out of the miry clay, and out of the horrible pit, and set their feet upon a rock, and established their goings. I wish I had an angel's tongue, or could sound a trumpet that would be heard right round this world. How loudly then would I proclaim the glad tidings that God has in store for needy ones everything they want! No sinner needs to die of famine; for there is no famine in this land of grace: no traveller through this world needs to die of thirst, for the well is deep, and it eternally

springs up; no sinner needs to starve, for the oxen and fatlings are killed, all things are ready, and the gospel message is, "Come ye and eat of my supper." God grant that, knowing how bountifully all these things are provided, we may none of us keep back, turn a deaf ear to the general call, refuse the special invitation, slight the grace, or scorn the gospel.

II. Observe, secondly, that THE GOSPEL PROVISIONS ARE FREE TO ALL THIRSTY SOULS.

Do notice the words of the text—"Ho!" That is like the cry of a salesman at a fair. He calls out to passers by, "Ho! look! listen! turn hither! Here is a bargain; something worth your attention!" So God condescends, as it were, to put it to those who are busy with this world's cares, its business and its barter, its buying and selling. Ho! ho! ho! here is something worth your minding, ye that would be rich at little cost, ye that are in want, ye that are in need, ye that would find something that shall exactly meet your case. Ho!—this is the gospel note; a short, significant appeal, urging you to be wise enough to attend to your own interests. Oh, the condescension of God! that he should as it were become a beggar to his own creature, and stoop from the magnificence of his glory to cry, "Ho!" to foolish and ungrateful men!

Notice the next word, "Ho! *every one*;" not some of you that thirst, but every one—you rich ones, you poor ones, you great men, you little men, you old people, you young folk—"Ho! every one that thirsteth." Now, it does not say, "Every one, except—except—except—except—." No, no. Here is an amnesty published without exception or exemption. Here is an

invitation given to every longing, thirsty one, and not a single name struck out. "Ho! every one that thirsteth."

And then it is added "*come.*" Not "make yourselves ready," not "bring your money," or "prove your title," but "come!" Come just as you are. The coming is believing, trusting. Believe, trust, then, while you are as you are; rely upon Christ; come to the waters; come now. Read the invitation for yourselves; it is written in the present tense. Obey the summons; come, come at once, Come. What though you have no money, you may come and take a drink, for it is freely provided for you. As I walked over a long sandy road one day last week, when the weather was sultry, and the heat, far beyond our common experience in this country, was almost tropical, I saw a little stream of cool water, and being parched with thirst I stooped down and drank. Do you think I asked anybody's leave or inquired whether I might drink or not? I didn't know who it belonged to, and I didn't care. There it was, and I felt if it was there it was enough for me. Nobody was there to call out "Ho!" My inward craving called out "Ho!" I was thirsty, and water was there inviting to my taste. I noticed after I had drank that there were two poor tramps came along, and they went down and drank in like manner. I didn't find anybody marching them off to prison. There was the stream. The stream being there, and the thirsty men being there, the supply was suited to their need, and they promptly partook of it. How strange it is that when God has provided the gospel, and men want it, they should require somebody to call

out to them, "Ho! ho! ho!" and then they will not come after all. Oh! if they were a little more thirsty, if they did but know their need more, if they were convinced more of their sin, then they would scarcely want an invitation, but the mere fact of a supply would be sufficient for them, and they would come and drink, and satisfy the burning thirst within.

Now, although the gospel provision is free to all thirsty souls, there are many who cannot believe this. Some cannot believe it because they stumble at the doctrines. What doctrine affrights thee, dear friend? Is it the doctrine of election? Well now, I believe the doctrine of election. I thank God I do. It is a precious doctrine, and let me tell you, dear friend, that the doctrine of election shuts nobody out, though it shuts a great many in. "But I may not come and trust Christ." How do you know? God says you may, and he tells you you shall; in fact, he says, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed," thus making it a sin not to believe; so you really have such a right to believe that it becomes even your duty. Whatever the doctrine of election may be, or may be meant to be, we will not talk of that just at present, for it is quite certain that it cannot contradict any plain practical direction of Scripture. Here is a plain text, which no one can gainsay, "Whosoever believeth in him is not condemned." If, then, you believe on Jesus Christ, you are not condemned, election or no election. But let me tell you, if you believe in Christ you are one of his elect, and it is because he elected you that you come to believe in him; it is because he chose you that you are led to desire him and made to

accept him. Let not that doctrine ever terrify you, or provoke your distrust, for if you rightly understand the revelation, it is rather a finger beckoning to Christ than a spectre that should intimidate you, or drive you away from him.

Then your spirit of legality will tell you that the gospel is not free to you. Why not? Oh! because you are not fit to receive it. This, I say, is a spirit of legality, and is clearly contrary to the gospel. There is no fitness wanted to receive Christ. You see men go to wash. What is the fitness for washing? Why, to be dirty, and that is no fitness. All the fitness a sinner can have for Christ is simply to need Christ. If you are empty you are fit for Christ, and he will come and heal you. If you are poor you are fit for Christ to make you rich; he that is sick is fit for a physician; he that is needy is fit for pity; he that is guilty is fit for mercy. I beseech you get rid of that pestilent and soul-destroying idea of fitness for Christ. You cannot come to God as you are, but you may come to the Saviour as you are. All black and unwashed you may come and wash in the fountain which he has opened. Let nothing, then, by way of legality, make you think that the gospel provisions are not free to you.

But what if your unbelief should tell you that the provisions of grace are not for you because you have been such a great sinner? Did not Jesus come into the world to save the very greatest of sinners? "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." You may have soared as high as the mountains in your sin, but God's flood, like that of Noah, can go over the tops of all your iniquities. Do not limit the

Holy one of Israel by your unbelief. Believe him, and you shall be forgiven, even though you were worse than you are.

Ah, brethren! whatever the devil may say, and whatever your irritated conscience may say against the freeness of God's mercy, I tell you solemnly it is as free to every thirsty one as the drinking fountain in the street corner; as free as the air that blows over the mountain and into the valleys; free to every lung that breathes. So free is the mercy of God. God stint not his mercy when men need it. Be they but thirsty, let them but long for it, and they shall have it. If there be any difficulty it is on their part, not on God's part. You are not straitened in him; you are straitened in yourselves. Oh! guilty sinners, if ye find not mercy it is not because God is unwilling to give, but because you will not trust him, because you will not think that he can save you. The prodigal never could have believed his father's heart to be so kind as it was, had he not tried and proved it. Come and try my Master's heart. I tell you he will blot out your sins like a cloud, and your transgressions like a thick cloud. Only do rest on him, and you shall find him better than ever you dreamed him to be. As for my words, they cannot set him forth. They fall flat to the ground. May you be brought to try him, and you will be safe to find that he is a mighty Saviour.

The provisions of grace must be free to thirsty ones, *why else were they provided?* Wherefore should there be a Saviour *for* sinners if God will not give salvation *to* sinners? Why those wounds, why that bloody sweat, why that thorn crown, why those expiring

throes, if still God will not receive sinners? The dying Saviour is the best answer to the cavillings of unbelievers. He must be willing to forgive who spared not his own Son. If the gospel were not free to thirsty ones, wherefore is it published? If it were not meant for you, why are we bidden to tell it you, and to continue sounding it in your ears? If it were meant for a few in a corner, why publish it in the streets? Why gather the crowds together, as we are bound to do, and find out those in the highways and hedges, with a mandate to compel them to come in? Why do all this if God intends to bar the door in their faces? The very fact that the gospel is preached to the sinner is God's love-token that he will accept you if you will come to him. Why a mercy-seat? Why are you allowed to pray, why are you bidden to pray, if God will not hear? This were a mockery of which you cannot accuse God, that he should encourage a sinner to pray with no intention of hearing him. Let me ask you again—how is it that others have found God's mercy so free when they have come and trusted Christ? Why that multitude in heaven, all once as guilty as you are, but all having washed their robes in the precious blood? Why those on earth who have found peace? They had naught to recommend them any more than you have. They will all tell you that they came just as they were, in all their rags and beggary, and Jesus did not reject them. No, glory be to his name, he received us freely. Come, then, fellow sinners, come! May the eternal Spirit draw you now. Even now come ye to the waters. Though you have no money and no price, and no goodness, come and rest in

Jesus, and find everlasting life. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." That is my message. There is your welcome. Come; do come. So my errand will speed. So your souls will be blest. So God's name will be glorified. Amen.





A Caution for Sin-sick Souls.

"When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound."—Hosea v. 13.



HERE is a tendency in the heart of man to want something to look at rather than something to trust to. The children of Israel had God for their King, and a glorious King he was. Where else was there found such impartial justice, such tender compassion for the poor, or such perfect righteousness in every statute that was ordained, and every sentence that was enforced? But they said, "Nay, let us have a king whom we can see—a king whose pomp and magnificence shall dazzle our senses, though he take our sons to be his bondslaves, and our daughters to be his confectionaries. Let us have a king, that we may see the gaudy glitter of his crown with our eyes, and hear the sovereign mandate of his throne with our ears." God granted them that request. Their sole allegiance was due to that almighty King whose superlative glory admitted of no natural similitude. The Lord Jehovah was the God of Israel—a God ever ready to forgive their sins, to hear their prayers, and seek their welfare. But the children of Israel said, "Not so; let us make a king to judge us, like all the nations: and let us set

up gods, after the fashion of the Gentiles, that our hands can handle, and that our eyes can behold. Let us have blocks of wood and stone. Let us have the carved images of the heathen." Neither would they rest till they had set up for themselves in every high place gods that were no gods. For this the Lord chastised them. He gave up their lands to famine, and their habitations to the spoiler. He brought enemies from far countries to lay them waste, so that the state became sick, and the whole nation impoverished. Then the people of Ephraim opened their eyes and looked to their condition. But when Judah saw himself to be wounded what course did he pursue? There was God ready to help him when he returned to his allegiance. There was Jehovah ready to heal all his distresses, to give him back all that had been laid waste, and to restore to him everything that the spoiler had taken. But no! the arm of Jehovah was not enough for Judah; Judah must rely upon a force that could look imposing with its array. "Oh!" said the people, "let us send to the king of Assyria, and let him furnish us with tens of thousands of soldiers, and aid us with his mighty men, so we shall be safe. Thus will our state recover itself." But if they had trusted in God, my brethren, how secure they would have been! Mark what God did for them in the days of Hezekiah. Their enemies came upon them in great numbers. Hezekiah prayed before the Lord. And it came to pass that night God sent forth the blast of his nostrils, and they were utterly destroyed. When the men of Judah arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses! As often as they trusted in God they found immediate succour,

and their enemies were put to confusion. But not so was their heart stayed in its confidence. No ; the unseen arm they cannot rely upon. They must have men and men's devices. They must have something they can see. Unless they have the spear, and the sword, and the shield of the Assyrian state they can feel no sense of security. "They went to the Assyrian king, they sent to King Jareb, yet could he not heal them, nor cure them of their wound." How foolish they were to hope he would, for as soon as they sent their ambassadors to the king of Assyria, he flattered himself while he spoke to them, "Oh, you want help, do you ? I will send you some soldiers to help you." Remember their houses had been stripped of all the gold and silver they contained to give a present to the king of Assyria. "I will send my soldiers to help you," said he to them ; and then he whispered to himself, "After they have helped you, they shall help themselves." And so they did. When they had come, and for a little while had fought for the people of Israel, and set them free, then they turned round upon them, and carried them captive, and spoiled them of all they had. This comes of trusting in man. "Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm ; but blessed is he who trusteth in the Lord, and whose God the Lord is."

Looking at this fallacy of a nation as illustrative of a common tendency of mankind, and using my text as the picture of a sinner in a certain peculiar state of mental anxiety, I shall observe, first, *the sinner's partial discovery of his lost estate* ; secondly, *the wrong means which he takes to be cured of his evil* ; after which I will endeavour to direct you, as God shall enable me, to *the*

right means of finding healing and deliverance through the atonement and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have in our text somewhat of a picture of the sinner when he has partially discovered his lost estate. Mark, it is but a partial discovery. Ephraim felt his sickness, but he did not know the radical disease that lurked within. He saw the local ailment, but was ignorant of the organic derangement that played on his vitals. He only perceived the symptoms; he was uneasy, he felt pain; but the discovery did not go deep enough to show him that he was actually dead in trespasses and sins. He saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound. Yes, he saw his wound; it smarted; and therefore his eye was drawn to the spot. But he did not know how deep it was; he did not know that it had pierced to the heart, that it was, in fact, a death-blow; that the whole head was sick, that the whole heart was faint, and that from the crown of the head even to the sole of the foot it was all wounds and bruises, and putrefying festering sores. There was but a partial discovery of his lost estate.

How many men there are who have got just far enough to know there is something the matter with them? They little reckon that they are totally ruined, though they do feel that it is not all quite right with them. They are conscious that they are not perfect—not even up to their own low standard of rectitude; hence they begin to be uneasy, albeit they still seem to think they can make themselves better, and that by degrees of reformation and daily prayer they will become superior to what they are. They have not yet learned the

doctrine of the Fall, the deep depravity of mankind, the total perversion of the human heart; they have only got so far as some modern ministers, who speak of man as being a little marred, but not entirely broken; as having had a fall, and become somewhat damaged, and rather spoiled, as to outward beauty, though not altogether ruined, or incapable of raising himself up and recovering his strength. In fact, the fashionable phrase that has been recently coined is, "the *lapsed* state of men." Depend upon it, when men use *latinized* words to express their meaning they do not mean much. The fall of man is full and entire; and when people frame *certain* phrases of rather *uncertain* significance instead of talking honest English, they show a disposition to dispense with the bare facts. I know there are some sinners brought so far as to find themselves undone, and to feel convinced that unless some change takes place they are not fit for the kingdom of heaven. But they have not as yet seen the fountains of the great deep of their depravity broken up; they have not been taken into the chambers of imagery, and shown the abominations of their own hearts. They still cling with some hope to their own devices. However, I would remark that even this, though it be but a partial discovery of their state by nature, is not without its good effects. When a man gets thus far, the first good sign in him is that he cannot speak against religion. While he is at peace with himself, he calls religious men hypocrites. He can rail at the things of God, and despise and trample them under foot. But the man who is like Ephraim in our text will not be very anxious to find fault with others; his philosopher's tongue has been

plucked out, and he is now a little more gentle in his speech, as he sighs for something in religion that he would like to have. "Oh," says he, "I do not find fault with the good folks who are always praying and singing now. Would to God I could become like they are! Would that I had, as they have, an interest in the blood of Christ!" So far so good. Such men, again, are generally thoughtful. I have known many a man who, before he came into this state, was a very dare-devil, and never thought anything with regard to his soul and eternity; yet, when brought to know his sickness and his wounds, he has become not only thoughtful but serious, until some of his former companions have remarked it, and called him "Old Sober Sides," or some such epithet, and laughed him out of countenance. They tell him he is a saint. The man says, "I wish what you are saying was true." They tell him, "You are beginning to be religious." "Yes," he says, "I wish I were really so." Some man once called me *a saint* as I went along the street, and I turned round and said I wished I could make him prove his words. I would like to be one certainly. Such is the condition of a man when he begins to discover, though it be but partially, his lost estate. He is thoughtful; he cannot laugh as he did; he does not now shut his eyes, and throw the reins upon the neck of his lusts, and let them rush madly on down to the pit; but he tries to curb them, and hold them in with bit and bridle, for he knows that all is not right within him. Such a man, too, has another good trait, another hopeful feature in his case—that he begins to attend to the things that belong to the peace of his soul. You see him now

coming into the house of God—be it chapel or church—to hear the word preached. He never cared for that before. He worked so hard all the week that he was not able to go out on a Sunday; but now he feels he must go. He must be by the side of Bethesda's pool. Even though the angel stir not the water, he feels a kind of satisfaction while he is lying at the edge of the healing pool. He longs to be saved, and therefore he is found in the way, hoping that God may meet with him. Such a man, too, you will find, takes no pleasure in sin. If he is asked by his worldly companions to go into the haunts of vice, where once he went, even should he go, he comes away and says, "It was the dullest evening I ever spent: no enjoyment whatever does it yield me. God has turned the sweet wine of my memory into bitter gall. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. I can find no comfort in sensual pleasures."

Have I been depicting the state of one who is here present? I hope I have, and I pray God that what I shall be able to say will, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, be instrumental in leading such an one to the true remedy for his soul.

But when the man is thus partially aroused to know his lost estate, he usually betakes himself to the wrong means for deliverance. "Then went Ephraim unto Assyria, and sent to King Jareb." A sinner when he finds himself lost usually at first thinks, "I will make myself better, I will be diligent in religious observances, I will attend to every ceremony, I will keep my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking guile; I will restrain my steps from evil haunts, my hands from evil deeds," and so he thinks within himself

that all his sins will be forgiven, and that he shall have rest for the sole of his foot. Be it known once for all that all this is a vain and useless effort to work out a radical cure in the soul of man. All that man can do apart from faith in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ is utterly in vain. Let him do his best, and strive to the very uttermost, not one inch has he proceeded on the road to heaven; he hath done mischief instead of doing anything meritorious; he hath pulled down instead of having built up. O, ye that are hoping now, while ye are under conviction, that you will get relief by doings of your own, let me remind you that you are undertaking a long task which will tax your endurance. These men in our text went a very long way to the king of Assyria; it was a wearisome journey they took, while God, who was near at hand, was forgotten. How long do you suppose it would take you to work out your own salvation by your own good works? Why, my friends, ye may bend your knees till your joints grow stiff, and ye may work till there is no flesh upon your bones, and ye may weep till there is no moisture in your body from which to draw a tear, and ye may persevere incessantly in every exercise of body and mind, trying fresh postures and trifling with fresh problems; but still pursuing without progress till you find yourselves not half a league nearer eternal life than when you left the life of sin you used to like.

“Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil the law's demands.
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and thou alone.”

If a criminal should get it into his head that he would climb up to the stars by going up the steps of a treadmill, he would be about as rational as when a poor sinner thinks of getting to heaven by his works. Tread, tread, tread; up, up, up; but never one inch higher. As old Matthew Wilks used to say, you might as well hope to sail to America on a sere leaf as hope to go to heaven by your own doings. This is not the way, man; and run never so fast in it, if it is not the right road, it will not bring you to the right end. If a man take a road to the right, and wants to go to the left, he may run as fast as a race-horse, he will but lose his labour, and find out that he is a fool for his pains. And it is not only a very long task, but it is a very expensive one. If you would have salvation by the works of the law, you must give body and soul up, all you have—hope and joy and comfort included. I used to live near some persons who regularly attended mass early every morning, and I noticed how straight they used to look down the face. I thought they had good reason to be gloomy if they were trying to reach heaven by their own righteousness. It is enough to put any man out of countenance if he has to stand before God and justify himself. We might put our hands upon our loins, and roll in the dust in despair, if we had no hope but in our own deserts. Go and look for cooling streams in the arid desert; cast about for fresh water to drink in the midst of the sea; seek shelter on the mountain top where the hurricane is spending its fury, and then crave for comfort in the law. Go and visit Sinai, ye that seek to be saved by your works. Look at it, shrink, tremble, and despair. Behold, the mountain is

altogether on a smoke while God proclaims the law! If it melted like wax of old, how much more now, after you have broken the commandments and incurred the penalty—now that God cometh not to proclaim the law, but to execute his fierce anger upon the law-breakers! “Well,” says one, “but suppose we do our best, will not that suffice?” My friend, God requireth from man, if he would be saved by his works, perfect obedience; nothing but perfection can be acceptable to a perfect God. One wrong thought, one evil desire—not to say anything of one wrong act—will effectually shut any man out of heaven, if he desireth to go there by his works. That one sin at once puts up an impenetrable barrier across that meritorious way to heaven which is known by the common name of “the law.” If thou canst be perfect, and hast kept the precepts from thy youth up, and shalt do so till thy dying day, then might there be salvation by works. But if there be one flaw, then is that road to heaven effectually stopped up, so that no human foot can ever tread it.

And once more, let me remind thee, O man, when thou tryest to be saved by thy works, thou presumest that thy enemy will prove thy friend. “And who is my enemy?” sayest thou. Why Moses. The law is sworn against thee. It hath become thine enemy, and goest thou to thine enemy to help thee? It is a device of Satan to try and draw poor sinners away from the path of faith into the path of the law. Remember how John Bunyan graphically describes it. Poor Christian, with the burden on his back, is going to the wicket-gate with the light above it, and on a sudden a very good-looking gentleman meets him, and says, “It is a

dangerous journey you are going, you had better turn aside to the right there; there is a town there known as the town of Legality, where lives a very skilful physician who will soon help you off with your burden; and if he is not at home, he has got a very good lad who will do almost as well as his master. Go there, and you will soon get cured." Away went poor Christian; nor had he gone far before he found that he had come to the foot of Mount Sinai, and the mountain hung right over the way, and there stood Christian; and while he was looking up, presently the mountain began to shake, the thunder to roar, and the lightning to flash, and he fell down upon his face and said, "I am undone, I am undone." Then came Evangelist and showed him the right way once more. Just so, sinner, if you trust to the works of the law, you will have to cry out, "I am undone, I am undone." Mr. Morality cannot cure you; he may put on a little poor man's plaister, and make your wound worse, and tie it up and bandage it a little, but he can never relieve your pain or recover your sore. It will go on bleeding, notwithstanding all the balsams he can apply. No hand can heal a sin-sick soul but the hand that wounded it, even the hand of God, through the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is astonishing, after all the gospel-preaching in England, how deeply rooted is this constant fallacy of going to King Jareb for cure. Not very long ago, having engaged to preach at a seaport town, I arrived some hours before night, and, as I was standing on the river-side, I thought I should like to go down the river in a boat. So, hailing a waterman, I went with him, and whilst sitting in the

boat, wishing to talk with him about religious matters, I began by asking him about his family: he told me that the cholera had visited his place, and that he had lost no less than thirteen of his relatives, one after another, by death. So I said, "Have you, my friend, a good hope of heaven if you should die yourself?" "Well, sir," he said, "I think as how I have." "Pray tell me then," said I, "what is your hope; for of a good hope no man need ever be ashamed." "Well, sir, I have been on this here river, I think, for these twenty-five or thirty years, and I don't know that anybody ever saw me drunk." "Oh dear, oh dear," I replied, "is that all you trust to?—is that all?" "Well, sir, when the cholera was about, and my poor neighbours were bad, I went for the doctor for 'em, and was up a good many nights; and I do think as how I am as good as my neighbours." Of course I told him that I was very glad to hear that he had sympathy for the suffering, and that I considered it far better to be charitable than to be churlish, but I did not see how his good conduct could carry him to heaven. "Well, sir," he said, "perhaps it is not, for I cannot be often going to church; but I think, when I get a little older, I shall give up the boat and take to going to church, and then, I think, that will be right—won't it, sir?" "No," I said, "certainly your resolutions will not renew your heart, and should you ever perform them, they will not purge your soul from its sinfulness. Begin to go to church as soon as possible, but you will not be an inch further, if you think that by attending the sanctuary you will be saved." The poor man seemed perfectly astounded, while I went on knocking down his hopes one after another.

Then I put the question, "You have sometimes sinned in your life—have you not?" "Yes," he said, "I have." "On what ground, then, do you think your sins will be forgiven?" "Well, sir," he said, "I have been sorry about them, and I think they are all gone—they do not trouble me now." Trying to rouse his conscience, I said, "Suppose you were to go and get into debt with the grocer where you deal, and you should say to her, 'Now, mistress, you have a score against me, I cannot pay for these goods, I am sorry to say; but I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll never get into your debt any more.' Why, she would say that was not the way she did business. And do you suppose that that is the way in which God does business, or that he is going to strike out your debts because you say you will not run deeper into debt?" "Well, sir," he said, "I should like to know how my sins are to be forgiven. Are you a parson, sir?" In reply, I said, "I preach the gospel, I hope, but I do not go by the name of a parson; I am only a Dissenting minister." I told him how the Lord Jesus Christ had paid the debts of sinners; how those that reposed in him, and rested in his blood and righteousness should find peace and mercy, and the man was delighted, and he said he wished he had heard that years ago. "But, to say the truth, master," he added, "I had not felt quite easy, after all, when I saw those poor creatures taken away to the graveyard. I did think there was something I wanted, but I did not know what it was." I tell you this little personal incident because I see here a great many working people, and I know they delight in a little homely dialogue. It is not what we do or devise, the religious rites we

observe or the romantic aims we aspire to, the self-satisfaction we encourage or the sufferings we endure, that can lead us to the land of light; not all your probity, however plausible, or your rectitude, however rigid you may be, will carry you to heaven. Your good works are good enough in themselves—good enough in your generation—but they will never do for a foundation to rest upon. Do not run away and say something like the foolish man who went to a place where there was a house being built, and seeing the chimney pots standing there, he took them, and laid them in the trench to make the foundation. “What are you doing?” said one of the workmen. “Why, laying the foundation.” “What, with the chimney-pots?” “I did not know that it was wrong,” said he. “Well, take them away; they won’t do for a foundation.” “Oh!” said the other, “you are finding fault with them.” “No; I am not finding fault with them, but with the place where you put them; they are good enough on the top, but they won’t do at the bottom.” So with good works; they will do at the top, but they will not do at the bottom. As a foundation for the soul to rest upon, nothing will suffice but the righteousness of Christ and his finished work. This is our hope of salvation. Our good works are good enough afterwards, when God the Holy Spirit by his grace works faith, and love, and all good things in us.

What, then, you will ask, is the way of salvation? Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary he should know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down from heaven, and was for our sin incarnate in human form, born of the Virgin Mary, lived a life

of sanctity and of suffering; and at last this glorious Son of God—this grief-stricken Son of man—became obedient even unto death. In the garden he wrestled, and shed, as it were, great drops of blood in the prospect of the coming terrors of his death-struggle. To the cross was he nailed, amidst shame, and ignominy, and scoffing. There he endured pain incredible, pangs of body and agony of soul. He hung there, through the thick darkness, three hours: and at last, when the appointed time was come, when he had suffered all, when the full chastisement of our sin had been laid upon him, and the iniquity of us all had received its dreadful retribution at his hands, he cried, “It is finished!” Thus he gave up the ghost, was laid in the tomb, and then arose from the dead on the third day, and ascended to heaven. Now, if thou wouldst be saved, my friend, it is necessary that thou believe in him who was the Son of God and the Son of man, and that thou believe in thy heart these things of him:—First, that he is a divinely ordained Saviour, able to save those that come unto God through him. Thou must believe, likewise, that he is willing to save, and that he will save those that seek salvation, believing and trusting in his power. When thou hast believed this, thou hast gone a good part of the way toward that saving faith, which shall bring thee into a state of grace. It is by acting upon this belief, by casting thyself simply on the merits of his blood, and of his perfect righteousness, as the ground of thine acceptance before God, that thou shalt find peace. No man can be saved if he does not trust his soul in the hands of Christ. We must give up ourselves from our own keeping into

Christ's keeping, saying, "Lord, take me, save me, make me what thou wouldst have me to be; and then, when thy Father shall require my soul at the last day, stand thou my surety, and bring me perfect and spotless into his presence." I must add one thing more—there must be what the old divines call a recumbency, a leaning on him, a dependency on him. But here I must warn you that some people have an idea that if they get faith in Christ it matters not how they live, or what they are. Now, be it understood, once for all, we are saved by faith, and not by works; but we must have you know that faith is not only leaning on Christ, but obeying Christ. Suppose a case. There is a man who says to me, "You have committed such-and-such an offence; you are in such-and-such difficulties; but if you will implicitly trust me, and leave the matter entirely in my hands, I will see that you come through this clearly." Well now, if I get meddling with it that will prove I do not trust in him; but by-and-by he comes to me, and says, "My dear friend, are you trusting me wholly?" "Yes," I say, "I am reposing all my trust in you." Suppose he says, "I want you to look over this document, which you must sign, and then I shall want you, on a certain morning, to be at such-and-such a place." What if I answer, "I shall do no such thing; I will not sign the deed nor meet you by appointment." "Then," says he, "you are not trusting me." "I was leaning on you and trusting," I say. "Well!" says he, "this was not what I meant; unless you do what I tell you your faith is not genuine faith, neither are you trusting in me at all." Now, if you are perfectly trusting Christ your next question

will be, "Lord, I am trusting to be saved by thee, but how wilt thou have me be saved?" "Oh," saith Christ, "I will save thee; but thou must break off those old habits." "Oh," say you, "Lord, assist me with thy grace, and I will renounce them all." "Well," saith Christ, "and if thou wouldst be saved, I will have thee in the next place attend to my ordinances. Come forward and make a profession of thy faith; be baptized; unite thyself to the Church visible; receive the Lord's Supper." But you say, "No, Lord! I will do no such thing." "Well, then," says he, "you are not trusting me, because whatever I tell you to do you ought to do it."

You may have heard the good illustration which Mr. Cecil gives of faith. His little child was standing one day at the top of a dark cellar. She was in the light and he was down below in the cellar. "My dear child, jump down, and I will catch you," said he; and the child, without a moment's thought, sprang into the father's arms. Now that is one kind of faith; that is, when we are enabled so to trust Christ, that we do, so to speak, venture our souls on him, risk all with him; but mark, that it is not the complete picture of the faith of saints. This kind of faith some people profess to have, but their lives do not bear out their profession, and therefore there must be something else to make it clear, and Mr. Cecil gives another illustration through the same little girl. "I said to her one day as she had a necklace of beads, 'My dear child, you know I love you, and you would do anything I told you. Take those beads off and throw them into the fire.' She did so at once." Now the first faith was the faith of daring, venturing

herself ; but the second proved her faith to be true and genuine, when she could obey. And you will see that faith and obedience are, to some extent, one, so that in the Greek language the same word standeth for both faith and obedience. It is impossible for thee to believe if thou dost not obey. Some try, but their faith is worthless. But when we can unite blind trust with blind obedience, we prove that we are really trusting in Christ, and then we are safe.

Oh, my dear hearer, if I have puzzled thee to-night instead of making it plain, I can say I did not intend to do so. I would have thee to understand, if thou art troubled on account of sin, that God requires not aught of thee but what he gives thee. He requires nothing but that thou shouldst depend for all on Christ. It is all he asks for. Do it. Oh, may his Holy Spirit enable you to do it now! But I will tell you a parable which shall illustrate faith. There were two children, according to the fable, walking with their father along a narrow ridge. On either side there was a dark deep precipice. One of the dear children put his hand inside the father's hand, and his father grasped it. The other put his little fingers round his father's hand and took hold of his father's hand. It was not long before in the midst of the thick darkness the children grew weary, and the child who had taken hold of the father's hand perished. But the child who had put his hand into the father's hand and let the father take hold of it was carried safely to the end. Now put thy hand inside the hand of Christ, and when he bids thee to obey take it not away. Give thyself wholly up to him to be his, come life, come death, for better or for worse, to be his

to trust and his to obey, being from this time forth his for ever. Oh, may God the Holy Spirit lead us to do this! It is easy enough when the Holy Ghost enables us, but it is hard enough when our human nature kicks against it. May sovereign grace our hearts subdue, and teach us to depend on Christ, and no more foolishly attempt to work out our salvation by impossible means! I can only pray that God will bless this brief, hurried discourse, and to his name shall be the glory, through Christ Jesus. Amen.





Contrition.

“For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.”—
Psalm xxv. 11.



HIS striking prayer is hemmed in, as it were, between two promises. It looks like a fossil embedded in a mass of stone. What means it there? Why is it put in such a peculiar position? The Psalmist is both praising and preaching. How is it he turns to praying? Beloved, I think it was to teach us that prayer is never out of place. When the Apostle Paul was writing the most doctrinal of his Epistles, he sometimes paused in the midst of them to offer a supplication, as when he said—“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When engaged in any holy duties you may even refrain from praise for a moment to present a prayer. Nor would it be amiss for us sometimes to break the thread of a sermon, that the people might pause and join with the preacher in asking God’s blessing upon the message of mercy, and upon all that hear it. Certainly, my dear friends, you will never find any time inopportune for prayer, if your heart be true and your faith in full force. The Mahometans have their hour for prayer, and when they hear the signal from the minaret of the

mosque, wherever they may be, in the street or in the market-place, they bow their heads to Allah, and repeat their form of prayer. Without their ostentation, you may "pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting." We need not be confined to special seasons when a summons is given, but at all times, and in every place, we may continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving. When your hands are measuring out your goods, when they are pushing the plane, or driving the nail, when you are driving the plough, or threshing the corn, if you are speeding along the iron way, or walking among the corn fields, your heart may have fellowship with him

"Who is within no walls confined,
But habiteth the humble mind,"

who counts all places holy where men are holy, and all spots places for prayer, when the heart is in a prayerful frame. My soul, wait thou upon God in thy daily calling, and think not that thou canst ever approach him at an unseasonable hour, or lift up thy cry to him when he is otherwise engaged, so that he cannot attend to thy petition.

Were it necessary to my present purpose to explain the connection of this prayer with the scope of the psalm it would not be difficult. The promise that the Psalmist had just recited is "to such as keep his covenant." It was the besetting sin of Israel to break the covenant. Do you not see now that the tinge of a condition would shut the door of hope in our face? Therefore, the greatness of the promise often stirs up our deepest anxieties, lest any of us should seem to

come short of it. Depend upon it, brethren, that the prayer for pardon, which is never unfitting at any time, can never be more fitting than when our hearts are lifted up with the loftiest apprehensions of God's covenant. My principal aim, however, to-night, is to bring my hearers, myself, all of us, to feel with David, that our iniquity is great—for this I shall labour. When I have this done, I shall very briefly try to show how the very greatness of our iniquity may become a plea with God: "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." And I shall close with some earnest entreaties to those who have never sought pardon of sin to seek it now.

I. Well then, first, David declared that his iniquity was great. The word used in the original conveys the idea of quantity as well as of quality. Not simply was his sin great in its atrocity, but there was very much of it; any one sin was great, but it was not one but ten thousand times ten thousand in multitude. His sin was as great in the bulk as it was black in its heinousness. Now, I do not know, although David made one very terrible fall, that any humble-minded person here would consider himself to be superior to David. He was a man after God's own heart, and notwithstanding a great blot upon his sun, we would not hesitate to say he is a sun for all that. For David presents a character so admirable, so all but matchless in the harmony of the different graces, that we think he certainly approaches very near to his great Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly, if David felt his iniquity to be great, it would be very foul presumption in any of us to think ours to be little. At any rate, we have to come out and say, "I reckon myself to be a better man than David was," or else we

ought to subscribe heartily with our hand to the truth, that our iniquity must be great too if David's was.

But leaving David out of the question, not comparing ourselves with others, we will draw some few pictures by which the greatness of our iniquity may be seen. Our sin is great when we consider against whom it is committed. In an army, if a soldier shall strike his comrade, it is, of course, a misdemeanour, but if he should have smitten some petty officer it is considered to be a more grievous offence, and if he should have struck the commander-in-chief it would become so heavy a crime that I know not what penalty short of death might be awarded it. Now, in the world of morals, as God sees it, there is much difference in sin when we consider the difference in the person against whom it is committed. You and I think it is the worst sin that hurts us the most. We have heard, I dare say, the story of the lawyer who was waited upon by a farmer, to ask him what would be the penalty for a man whose horse was always getting into his neighbour's field and eating his corn, whether it would be heavy; he had warned him several times, and he always would do it, and it was his fence, and he ought to have mended it. The lawyer said, of course there would be a considerable fine, no doubt, and so on. "Well," said he, "sir, it is your horse that has done this." "O!" said our friend the solicitor, "that is quite a different question; I did not know it was my horse before I gave my opinion." So it is, generally, with regard to anything that is done amiss, if it hurts you, or if it hurts me, we always feel very indignant about it, but if it only offends the Majesty of heaven we make light of it. What fools

we are! If it shall offend such puny, insignificant creatures as we, then there is something in it; but if the Divine Majesty be itself insulted, we pass it by as though it were a mere trifle. There really is a difference in the sin according to the person against whom it is committed. I will put it thus. A man has just now been striking another, striking him with an intent to do him hurt. "That is bad," say you. "Yes, but it was his own father that he struck." "Ay," now you say, "that is far worse for him, to have injured the man whom he ought to have loved and honoured." So since God is our Creator, any attack that is made upon his government, any wilful violation of his law, is aggravated by the fact that we owe to him such unbounded allegiance. "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." Sinners, did ye ever think of it? You have offended against him that made you, in whose hand your breath is, and under whose control are all your ways. When you have used profane words, it has been against the High and Lofty One, against Jehovah, who rides the sky, and launches abroad his thunderbolts, and shakes heaven and earth with his terrible voice; against him, before whom the bright archangels veil their faces and humbly bow themselves, unworthy to lick the dust of his feet; against God thou hast offended! Sinner, thou thinkest it is little, but I tell thee this it is that makes thine iniquity great.

Yet further, sin derives some degree of its sinfulness from the fact that it is an offence against a most just and equitable law. We sometimes read in the newspapers, that persons are severely punished for offences

against the game laws. Well, I suppose, it is a very wicked thing to shoot another person's hares and pheasants and partridges. Were I a preserver of game I daresay I should consider the offence of the tenant farmer to be very aggravated who shot a bird that was feeding on his corn. As I am not, I do not particularly see its flagrant character. No doubt it is wrong, though it looks to me more like a misdemeanour than a felony. When a law is proved to be harsh and severe, there always will be some mitigation in our judgment of the culpability of breaking it. If we consider such and such a law hard and tyrannical, not suited to the times, and out of keeping with the age, then we say when a person breaks it, "Well, he had better not have done it; it is an offence against statute law and he ought not to have committed it;" still we do not think it to be so black as when the offence is against a just, equitable, proper, and righteous law, which harmonizes with strict, unvarying equity. Now, such is the law of God. What can be more fitting than the law of the Ten Commandments? Infidelity itself has turned pale before those Ten Commandments. We have heard of men who have attempted to improve the law of God by a new commandment and have found themselves unable to do it, for they perceived it to be so complete that it embraced all forms of criminality. Those who have abhorred other parts of Scripture have said, as they read the ten precepts, "These are just and righteous." They are, indeed, the fundamental stones of natural morality; they are such as even nature itself would approve to be right and proper for the government of the world. Well then, sirs, if you have

broken these good commandments, if you have run your neck against these holy, just and righteous precepts, your iniquity is great. If we could turn to any law of God and say, "This is harsh, this is tyrannical," there were some excuse for you, but those commandments were made for your good; if you keep them they have their own reward, if you break them they bring their own penalty into your body and into your mind. Wherefore then have you been so foolish as to violate them? Assuredly, in so doing, thine iniquity has become heavy as the millstone, and if it be about thy neck when thou comest to die, it will sink thee in the floods for ever.

But, dear friends, we ought each of us to remember that our sin is all the greater because it has been committed by us, for sometimes an offence is all the worse because of the person who committed it. When the noble Cæsar saw Brutus stab him, he said, "And thou, Brutus!" There was force in his dying words, for Brutus was his dear friend, one who owed him no little. And surely the Lord might say to us, when we sin, "And you too; and you! You whom I have fed day by day; you who are clothed by my charity, and nourished by my bounty! You! living in this fair province of the universe which is called the world, this beautiful fair round green earth! You—partakers of such innumerable favours—you sin against me!" Ah, Christians, you that are heaven's favourites, you that are allowed to enter into his cabinet councils, and to understand the secrets of his covenant, you who are Christ's own spouse, the bride of the Prince of heaven, your sin is blacker because of that light of his countenance in which it has been your privilege to walk.

But to hasten on, as I throw off these hints to be worked out in your own minds rather than to be dwelt upon in our discourse, let me remind you again that our sin is certainly very great, because of the amount of it. Innumerable times we have transgressed. It is not as though we had done wrong once and then washed our hands of it. Who can count his errors? What man shall tell the number of the small dust of his transgressions? As for the drops of dew twinkling in the morning light, as for the drops of the ocean making that vast flood, as for the stars of heaven, and the sand of the sea shore,—the incalculable number of all these sink into insignificance when compared with the infinite host of our transgressions against thee, O God of heaven and earth! This very day have there not been more sins than moments, more transgressions than heart-beats, more offences than pulses! God only knows the sin of man. Only his infinite mind can reckon the iniquity that crops forth from the polluted soil, and wells up from the deep spring of depravity that is hidden in the very core of our corrupt nature. Count your sins if ye can, O ye children of God, and then fall on your knees, bow your heads, cover your faces, and say, “Our iniquity indeed is great!”

Nor is this all; we ought to remember that we have sinned and offended without any provocation. When a poor wretch, pinched with hunger, snatches a loaf from a baker’s shop, and eats it ravenously in the street, what magistrate could forbear to treat him leniently? But when a rascal does a wanton mischief without cause, or commits a wilful robbery without conscience, what defence can he set up? With such utter defiance of

law and order we have no patience. Let the full punishment, we say, fall upon his guilty head. And this is what you and I have done; we have sinned for sinning's sake. When we spent our money in sin it was for that which is not bread, and our labour of iniquity was for that which did not profit us. You and I have not been gainers by all we have done amiss. There may have been times when you had the excuse of getting something by sin, but not always. For instance, what excuse is there for swearing? Lust may plead a pleasure, wine may ease a pain, avarice has an eye to gain, but the cheap swearer, from his open sluice, lets his soul run out in sorry curses, losing all the patience he possesses for the mere sake of venting forth black and ugly words that have no meaning. This is infamous; what if I say it is infernal!—to sin for the mere sake of sinning. We heard of one the other day who said, when reproved for cursing, that he would continue to swear; yea, if he had an angel on each shoulder he would go on cursing still. There seem to be some of this sort who, for the mere sake of dabbling in the mire, will do it; and, in truth, we have all in our time sinned in open defiance of the Almighty, and, therefore, our iniquity is heavy. Sons of men, I put it to you, as one of yourselves, and, therefore, willing to be your advocate—but I must rather take up the cause of him against whom we have offended—what has he ever done to us that we should hate him? He has made us, fed us, clothed us; for which of these good works do we forget him? He has sent his Son to redeem his people; is this a cause why we should despise him? He follows us day after day with

invitations of mercy, stirs up our consciences, hedges up the road to hell as though he would not let us perish; for which of these things do we requite him with evil? What hath the Most High done to provoke you? Let him answer; do ye first lay your accusation, however. Has he ever done you a displeasure? In what respect has he thwarted you? What pleasure that is a real pleasure has he denied you? Is his yoke heavy? Is his burden intolerable? Are his commandments like the whips of Solomon? or his laws like the scorpions of Rehoboam? Hath he made his little finger thicker than the wires of human law? Do ye not know that men in superstition will make laws ten times harder than God's laws ever were, and will keep them too? It cannot, therefore, be that God hath thus offended you. O, wherefore then, sons of men, do we spurn our Father? Why do we despise our God? What can there be so good in sin that we *will* have it, and God's anger with it? What can there be so sweet in hell that we choose it, and despise the glories of heaven? Verily, in this arrant folly, this flagrant malice, this frantic madness, our iniquity is great indeed.

Yet further, what if I should say that we have gone on in sin after we have, some of us, known and felt the evil of it! I speak advisedly when I appeal to almost all of you now present, must not your iniquity be great, because it was not done in ignorance? How many here were trained up in the lap of godliness—your sins, therefore, are ten times heavier than other men's. The lamp of the sanctuary lit us to our cradles. The hush of lullaby had the name of Jesus mingled

with it. Perhaps the first song we learned to sing was concerning the children's best Friend. The first book that we began to read contained his sweet name, and many were the times when we were pressed by godly ones to think of Jesus, and to give our young hearts to him. But we put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, darkness for light, and light for darkness, and knowing the good from the evil we did wilfully choose to do that which is wrong. Ah, for this thing, when we have sinned against light and knowledge, does not our transgression become greater than that of Tyre and Sidon that perished in their sin? And then, I say, when we had learned by experience, as well as by education, that sin was bitter, we went on in it still. There is a young man yonder that went astray once, and smarted for it, and he thought he would never be such a fool again. But it hath happened to him according to the true proverb. The dog is turned to his own vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. Some men seem only to get out of one ditch to roll into another. There are plenty of persons who when they put their fingers in the fire and burn them, run and get them bound up and healed, only to go to the next fire and thrust, not their fingers in this time, but their arms up to the elbow. Take care, one of these days, man, you don't find body and soul consumed in that fire. How foolish some are who have been on the spendthrift line! After they have emptied their pockets and found themselves beggars, they have gone to their friends who used to take a glass with them—such jolly boon companions, such dear friends they were, but they

do not know them now. "O no," they say, and give them the cold shoulder, now that their clothes begin to look a little out at elbows. I have seen these people get employment again, and throw themselves out of it by their ill character. I have seen them get a respectable situation perhaps two or three times, and then go and ruin themselves over again, and expect their friends to set them up once more; set them up on purpose that they may have the pleasure of tumbling down. When men do this so many times, certainly their iniquity becomes heavy.

I have put the case strongly concerning one or two delinquents; they are, however, only representatives of us all, for when we have smarted for an offence, we have committed it again. Burnt children are afraid of the fire, but burnt sinners are not; they will go to the fire again, like the moth which gets to the candle, singes her wings, flies off a little, but she must needs go again, and if you lift her out of the melted grease around the light, she will fly back again the first opportunity, as if she thought it her ambition, and her life's best glory, to be consumed in the fire. Oh! iniquity is great when it is against experience. Men run upon the pikes of damnation. They destroy their own souls by a sort of spiritual suicide.

At times men's offences to their fellow men lose some of their guiltiness by an apology. Why, I know sometimes, when we have been aggrieved by some little offence, and a proper apology has been promptly made, we could have wished we never had taken notice of it, for we did not like to see the good man so sorry about it; we freely forgave him, and felt as if we did not

want him even to feel he had done wrong, because he took it too much to heart: so we passed over the offence because of the repentance. But how great is that man's sin who, having sinned, refuses to repent! And is not this exactly the case of many here present, sinning from your cradles, but repenting never? Repentance is hid from your eyes; ye go on from bad to worse, from dark to deeper stains. The Ethiopian has not changed his skin, nor the leopard his spots. Ye have sought to no physician for your healing. Ye have let the deadly gangrene grow yet more putrid, until the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. Careless sinner! I would to-night I could play the part of Mr. John Bunyan's Captain Boanerges, and run up the red colours before your eye, bearing as the escutcheon the flaming thunderbolts of God's justice. Ye who will not repent must incur the fierce wrath of God. Lo! he hath bent his bow, and made it ready, he hath fitted his arrow to the string, he takes his mark to-night at thee, the arrow shall soon fly and reach thy heart. O that thou hadst grace to repent! O Spirit of God, break the sinner's heart! O take thou hold of thy great hammer, with which thou dost cleave mountains, and dash that heart in pieces, that the sinner may cry out, "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great."

With some men their iniquity becomes all the greater, because they have sinned against promises which they have made, vows which have been registered in heaven, and covenants which they had signed with the Most High. You know who I mean. You were ill with the fever some few years ago, you were given

up, you turned your face to the wall, and you remember how, in the bitterness of your soul, you said, "O! God, if thou wilt spare me, mine shall be another and a better life." You were spared, and your life has been rather worse than better. You remember, too, when the cholera was abroad, and there were many falling on the right hand and on the left, you were terrified and alarmed, and you sought God after a sort, and you told him that if he would but spare your life, that life should be spent in his service. What have you been doing since? It is true you sometimes go to the house of God, but it is in the evening; when you have made your money in the morning, you do not mind giving God the fag end of the Sunday. The first two or three weeks after you got better the shutters were up; there was no rioting, no swearing, no loose conversation: your neighbours said, "What has come over the fellow? he is quite a different man." Yes, you had another heart for the time, but not a new heart, and now you are as reckless as ever. Do you think God has forgotten your promises? Do you think that registered covenant of yours has been blotted out? No, sinner, no; it stands fast against thee to make thy guilt more infamous, and thy transgressions more heavy! Take heed! take heed! take heed! when God shall hold it up against thee at the last tremendous day, thou wilt read thy doom in that broken promise, in that lie which had been uttered against a God of grace and goodness. Such having been the case with some of us, most of us at some time or other having sinned thus against resolutions and promises, our iniquities are heavy. O dear friends! I have a task

too hard for me. When I talk of the glories of the love of Christ I feel at home ; when I speak of the matchless grace of the everlasting covenant, my heart is well at ease ; but O ! to prove man's sin heavy is a task too hard for me. Not that it is hard in itself. The evidence is clear, but to procure a conviction is the difficulty. The jury is not impartial. Your conscience is like an unjust judge. Oh how hard it is to make any man believe himself to be so bad as the Word of God says he is ! None but the Spirit of God can make a man call himself a sinner and mean it. Nothing but the irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit can ever bring a man as low as the Word of God would have him. If thou canst feel in thy soul to-night that thine iniquity is great, that it deserves God's wrath, displeasure, and punishment, I have hope of thee that the first sparks of the Divine light have fallen into thy soul, never to be quenched, but to blaze out in the brightness of salvation for ever. "O Lord, pardon thou mine iniquity, for it is great !"

II. I shall now turn very briefly to the second part, to show how there is a plea in the very greatness of our sins. Is not this a very strange text, think you ? Look at it again ; one needs to read it over twenty times. Is it so written ? Can you believe your own eyes ? "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great !" Imagine a prisoner at the Old Bailey pleading with the judge that he would kindly let him off, because he was a great offender ; we should think that it would be a very legitimate reason why he should not be pardoned. The pith, however, of the whole text lies in those words which we forget to quote—"For thy name's sake."

That alters it. It is an argument now; it was not before. "For thy name's sake, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great." Now let us show that there is a plea here. If salvation were by merit, then supposing all men to have fallen, and none of them to have any merit, yet it would be a rule that the man who was the least offender should have the first turn at being saved. If the choice of God depended in any way upon man's condition, we should naturally expect that the man who had the least sin would be forgiven first; for putting all on an equality in all other respects, the choice, if made at all, with reference to the man, would naturally be the choice of the man who had committed the least iniquity. But, dear friends, please to remember that in the covenant of Christ, and the way of salvation, the choice is made upon reverse principles, not according to man's merit, but according to God's glory. The aim, end, and object of God, in salvation, is to glorify his own character; hence, if his choice may be said to be guided by any principles which we can at all understand, that choice would be guided to select those who would the most magnify his grace and glorify his own name. Well now, if God would do that great work of pardoning sin in such a way as to glorify his own name, the most fitting persons to be saved are the biggest sinners. Let us put it thus. There is a number of persons; they are all sick: here is a physician, he intends to get to himself a name, he is full of benevolence and kindness, but at the same time, one part of his object is to get a name. Now, you will perceive that, in the selection of his patients, he will not pick out a man there who has got a sore finger, for

it will never tell very much to his credit, that he healed a man who had a sore finger; but there will be, perhaps, a few cases among the sick of a very extraordinary sort; some of them will have an affliction, a disease, quite unknown hitherto to the faculty. Medicines have been tried, but the cases have been so stubborn that the best doctors have given them up as hopeless. Now, the physician says, "These are the cases that I will select." Granting that he is able to cure whomsoever he wills, you can see that if the object be his own glory, he had rather take those in which there is the most room for the display of the healing art, than those who have the least sickness, and might be the most readily cured. Yet again; suppose a man would have a character for generosity, and there are a number of debtors assembled, and he is determined to discharge their liabilities. There is a man there who owes a sixpence, another owes a pound. Well now, if he pays their debts, he will never have much credit for liberality there; but another comes in, a thumping debtor, one who is over head and ears in debt. What is the sum there? Fifty thousand pounds; let us say a hundred thousand pounds, let us say half a million. Well, now, here is the opportunity for the liberal man to display his liberality, because here there is room for it. So is it in grace. You proud Pharisees, you come to God and say, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men;" and he replies, "Then there is no room in you for my grace to work." Yon poor publican dares not lift so much as his eyes towards heaven—smites upon his breast. "There is a case for me," saith sovereign mercy,

and the pardon comes. Mark, when I speak of sinners, I do not mean merely those who have been great sinners, or those who have been, in comparison with others, little sinners, but I mean those who feel themselves great sinners. I say, the more we feel our guilt the more fit we are for mercy; the more broken down we are with hopelessness, on account of our own lost estate, the more room there is for the triumphs of Christ. Now, there is many a moral man here to-night, who never offended against the laws of his land, or the laws of outward propriety, and yet he feels himself to be as black as hell. Well then, there is room in him for grace to glorify itself. We have noticed that men of the worst character are often the most self-righteous. There is many a Pharisee whose morals would not pass muster, though he vaunts his piety as a harlot flaunts her broidery; and many a scamp, who would be a disgrace to the meanest society if his character were known, brazens it out as though he never had offended against a single law of God. Again I say, ye chief of sinners, and ye that feel it, ye who groan and mourn on account of sin, be not silenced at the mercy-seat because of the greatness of your guilt, but rather, with the inimitable skill of the Syro-Phenician woman, turn the very desperateness of your case into a reason why he should hear and answer you. Now to-night, upon your knees, wrestle with the angel of mercy, and say, "Pardon me, for my transgression is great; and my hell will be great. But if thou save me thine honour will be great; if thou redeem me, the power of thy blood will be great; if thou give me a new heart, the transforming power of thy Spirit will be great.

God, save me ; be merciful to me a sinner." This is, as Luther says, to cut off the devil's head with his own sword. When the devil says to you, "You are a sinner," say to him, "I am, and Christ died to save sinners." And when he says, "But you are a big sinner," answer him, "Lord, have mercy upon me, for mine iniquity is great." "But," says he, "You are a Jerusalem sinner, a bigger sinner than any other." Say, "Yes, it is true ; but Jesus said, 'beginning at Jerusalem.'"

O ! I have tried, and I am trying, to preach a wide gospel ; I do not like to have a net with such big meshes that the fish get through. I think I may catch you all if the Lord wills. If the vilest are not shut out, then you are not shut out, friends ; and if thou believest in Christ with all thy heart, thou shalt be saved. But O ! what if you should say, "I care not for forgiveness ; I do not want pardon, I will not seek it ; I will not have it ; I love my sins ; I love myself !" O, sinner ! then by that death-bed of thine, where thou shalt see sins in another light ; by that resurrection of thine, where thou shalt see eternity to be no trifle ; by that doom of thine ; by the last dread thunders ; by the awful sentence, "Depart, ye cursed," of the Judge, I beseech you, do me but this one favour. Own that you had an invitation to-night, and that it was affectionately pressed upon you. I have told you, in God's name, that your sin is not a trifle with God—that it is not a matter to be laughed at or to be whistled over. I have told you that the greatness of your sin need not shut you out. What is wanted is that the Spirit of God should teach you these things in your heart. But

do remember, if your ears refuse these truths, and if you reject them, we are a sweet savour unto Christ as well in them that perish as in them that are saved. But woe unto you—woe unto you, who, with the gospel ringing in your ears, go down to the pit! “Verily, verily, I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for you.” May God save you, for Jesus’ sake. Amen!





The Battle of Life.

“Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?”—1 Cor. ix. 7.



HIS question occurs in the course of an argument. The Apostle was proving that the minister who gives all his time to the preaching of the Word is entitled to a maintenance from those people amongst whom he labours. He gives divers illustrations; among them this—that the soldier who devotes himself to the service of his country is not expected to find his own equipment and his own rations, but he is provided for by his country. And so should it be, he teaches us, in the church of God. The minister set apart to labour wholly in spiritual things should have temporal supplies found him. That is a topic, however, on which it would be superfluous for me to enlarge. Your convictions are so sound, and your practice so consistent, that you do not need to be exhorted, much less to be expostulated with on that matter.

But the same question may be asked when we have other morals to point. Is it ever expected that men who go on a warfare should pay their own charges? There

is a warfare in which all of us are engaged. What is life but a great battle, lasting from our earliest days until we sheathe the sword in death? This battle we hope to win, and yet, if we succeed, it will be a distinct and definite response to the challenge before us—"Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?" We may be quite sure that if ever we attempt the warfare of life at our own expense, we shall soon find ourselves failing, and it will end in a miserable defeat.

I. Going at once to the subject, we have here AN INSPIRING METAPHOR. When life is represented as a warfare, some peaceful minds may feel a little alarmed at the picture, yet there are other minds with enough of gallantry in their constitutions to feel their blood pulsing the stronger at the thought that life is to be one continued contest. I do but borrow a reflection from the secular press when I say that it were ill for us if the love of peace, fostered among us as a nation, should degenerate into a fear of danger, a reluctance to bear hardships, or an indifference to the accomplishment of exploits. Craven spirits we may expect always to find, who conjure up gloomy anticipations and forbode horrible disasters. The untrodden path and the unaccustomed climate are dreadful bugbears. But is this the instinct of an Englishman? How else should he contemplate difficulties but as problems to be solved? capital out of which fame or fortune is to be won? And as for the British soldier, is he to be looked upon as a hot-house plant who shrinks from exposure? Far rather would I respect him as a representative individual, the type of his race, always ready for any emergency. In the days of the old Gallic wars, when we

had to fight with Napoleon in Egypt, there were just as many knotty points and critical situations to be grappled with; and, certainly, at head-quarters the War Department was not more efficiently managed than it is now. Yet British soldiers pressed forward then to the conflict, nor did they pant for fortune; what they did seek for was a career, with some opportunity of distinguishing themselves. Moreover, those who stayed at home scanned the despatches with eager interest, and full often lamented that they had not the chance given them of going forth to the fight. Well may the patriot ask—has Anglo-Saxon courage all fled, if at every call to fresh deeds of heroism we listen to the croaking of those whose nature it is to look black and utter dark portents? Our children's children may read how the haughty insolence of Theodore of Abyssinia was humbled, but I hope they will never hear the screeching of the ravens who warned us of the mountain fastnesses in which he was lodged. The Ashantee war is far behind us now, and I suppose those who were once afraid of its perils are now amazed at its prowess. Yes, and that is how I would have Christians feel with regard to spiritual conflicts. Difficulties! Well, they are things to be deciphered. Dangers! They are things to be met and encountered. Impossibilities! They are to be scouted as a nightmare, a delirious dream. The Christian wakes to find impossibility impossible. With a history behind him and a destiny before him he can say—"The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." Things that are impossible with man are possible with God. I like my text all the better because it implies a hostile engagement, and speaks of warfare. For me the battle-field

has no charms. With host encountering host, and carnage left behind, I have no sympathy; but spiritually my soul seems enamoured of the idea; I buckle on my armour at the very thought that life is to be a conflict and a strife in which it behoves me to get the mastery.

Do I not address many young men just commencing life? If you have thought of life at all, I hope *you have thought that it is wise to begin the battle of life early.* We have all so little time to live, and the first years of life are so evidently the best years we shall ever have, that it is a pity to waste them. Oh, how much more some of us might have done if we had begun betimes! Had the very flush of our boyhood been consecrated and the strength of our youth spent in our Master's service, what work we might have accomplished! Now, young men, as a comrade a little farther on the road than you, I take you to the brow of the hill for a moment, and point out to you the pathway we have to pursue, and as I point it out I tell you that you will have to fight along every inch of the road if you are at the end to win the crown which I hope your ambition pants after. Are you ready for the conflict? Then let us talk awhile about it, for as we shall always have to be on the alert, it is well for us to study the map, and to acquaint ourselves with the tactics we must practise.

Be sure, then, my friends, that if you and I are ever to be conquerors at the last, *we shall have to fight with that trinity of enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil.* There is the world. Do you resolve to do the right, and to love the true, depend upon it you will get

no assistance from this world. Of its maxims nine out of ten are false, and the other one selfish; and even that which is selfish has a lie at the bottom of it. As for its customs,—well live where you may, the customs of the world are not such as a citizen of heaven can endorse. Go into what company you please, and you will find that there is much of the prevailing habit that is no friend to grace, and no friend to virtue. In the upper circles, with much pretence, there is little reality; there is a lack of sound honesty. Amongst the lower classes, go where you will, if you firmly resolve to be a Christian, to follow closely the footsteps of your Lord, you will have to breast the current. The most of men are going down the hill. You will be like the solitary traveller when you are threading your way upwards. Do you enlist for Christ to-night? Then know that you enlist against the whole world. You will henceforth be an alien to your mother's children, and a stranger to your own household, unless happily that household should have been converted too. Young man, the young men in the shop will be against you. Alas for the wickedness of the young men of London! Young woman, you will find in the workroom, aye, perhaps you will find even in your father's house, influences at work to impede, if not to thrust you back. Man of business, when you meet others on Change, if perchance the conversation should turn upon religion, you will find it far from profitable, and a good way off from genial. You will be like a speckled bird, with all the birds round about against you. As a marked man your motives will be mistrusted, your character impugned, your piety burlesqued. If you

resolve to win the crown of immortality, you will only do it as by the skin of your teeth. It matters not where you are cast, this is sure to be your lot, unless, as here and there is the case, you may be a timid and shielded one, too weak for conflict, and, therefore, God keeps you in retirement. And yet as for the world, I think we could easily overcome that were it not for a worse enemy. Soldier of Christ, you have to struggle *with yourself*. My own experience is a daily struggle with myself. I wish I could find in me some friendly thing to grace, but hitherto I have searched my nature through and have found everything in rebellion against God. At one time there comes the torpor of sloth, when one ought to be active every moment, having so much to do for God, and for the souls of men, and so little time to do it in. At another time there comes the quickness of passion. When we would be calm and cool, and play the Christian, bearing with patience, there come the unadvised word and the rash expression. Anon, we are troubled with conceit, the devilish whisper—I can call it no less—“How well thou hast done! How well hast thou played thy part!” This pride is the arch-enemy of our souls. Then will come distrust, foul and faithless, suggesting that God does not regard the affairs of men, and will not interpose on our behalf. Fresh forms of evil are generated in our own breasts, and this chameleon heart of ours, which never seems of one colour for a single moment, which is this and that by turns, and nothing long, challenges us on all occasions, and against it we shall have perpetually to struggle. Unless we deny ourselves, and lay violent hands upon the impulses of our nature, we shall never come to the

place where the crowns are distributed to the conquerors. And then another foe comes up, though not the closest, the strongest of the three—the *devil!* If you have ever stood foot to foot with him, as some of us have, you will remember well that black day, for even he who beats Apollyon concludes the battle wounded in his own hand, and in his own foot. Oh that stern enemy! He knows how to attack us in our sore points. He discerns our weaknesses, and he is at no loss for cunning devices. He understands how one moment to fawn upon us, and flatter us, and how the next moment to cast his fiery darts, telling us that we are castaways, and shall never see the face of God with acceptance. He can quote Scripture to his purpose. He can hurl threatenings at the heads of the saints, which were only meant for sinners, and he can tear promises out of the saints' hands, and cast them in the mire, just when they are ready to feed upon them as fair fruits of Paradise. Believe me, it is no small thing to have had to fight with Apollyon, the Prince of Hell. Seest thou then, young soldier, what is before thee? There is a triple host of foes, and thou must overcome them all, or else there shall never be given to thee the white stone, and the crown of everlasting life.

Think not this is an engagement to be quickly terminated. Unlike the laconic despatch of the ancient Roman—"Veni, vidi, vici," I came, saw, and conquered, this is a continuous fight. Wouldst thou fight thy way to heaven, not to-day, nor to-morrow; wilt thou win it with a deadly skirmish or a brilliant dash, like a knight at a tournament, thou canst not come back a conqueror. In sober truth, every man and every woman who enlists

for Christ will have to wrestle till their bones shall sleep in the tomb. There shall be no pause nor cessation for thee from this day until the laurel is upon thy brow. If thou art defeated one day, thou must overcome the next; if a conqueror to-day, thou must fight to-morrow. Like the old knights who slept in their armour, you must be prepared for reprisals—always watchful, always expecting temptation and ready to resist it; never saying, "It is enough," for he who saith "It is finished" until he breathes his last, has not yet truly begun. We must have our swords drawn even to the very last. I have sometimes thought that could we enter heaven by one sharp, quick, terrible encounter, such as the martyrs faced at the stake, we might endure it heroically, but day after day of protracted martyrdom, and year after year of the wear and tear of pilgrimage and soldier-life is the more bitter trial of patience. I do but tell you this in order that you may be convinced that it is not in our power to engage in this warfare at our charge, that if we have to endure in our own strength and with our own resources it is most certain that disaster will befall us and defeat will humble us. To fight, and fight on, is our vocation. *But if thus you fight you may hope to conquer, for others have done so before you.* On the summit of the palace see you not those robed in white, who walk in light, with faces bright, and sparkling o'er with joy? Can you not hear their song? They have overcome, and they tell you—

"To him that overcometh
A crown of life shall be;
He with his Lord and Master
Shall reign eternally."

They have overcome ; then why should not you ? Jesus Christ, who is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, has passed through the sternest part of the battle, and he has overcome—a type and representative of all those who are cross-bearers, and who shall overcome as he has done.

Do I see some young man eager, earnest, all of a glow, ready for the crown ? Let me remind thee *that thou mayest be defeated*. Though it is well for thee to begin life with a resolute determination to fight through the battle, still I would have thee remember that thou mayest be led captive by thy foe. There is a most instructive little book issued by the Religious Tract Society called “*The Mirage of Life*,” which I think all young men should read. It gives historical pictures of the different ways in which men have sought to be great, wherein the result of the greatness attained has proved to be a mirage, mocking the man as the mirage in the desert mocks the traveller when it promises him water and he finds none. That book contains the history of such men as Beckford, a man worth two hundred thousand pounds a year, who spent the former part of his life in building Fonthill Abbey, with an enormous tower, enriching the place with all the treasures that he could gather from every country ; making the grounds so splendid that crowned heads longed to look within, but it is said were refused ; and at the end of his life you find him almost penniless, the house upon which he had spent all his time and money a dilapidated ruin, the tower fallen to the ground, and the name of Beckford forgotten. You have a sketch of William Pitt, the heaven-born minis-

ter, one of the greatest of statesmen, who could make war or peace at his will, and after years of the most brilliant success he dies with a broken heart through grief. The high ambition of men of art, such as Haydon, is introduced to your notice. This great painter, after blazing with wondrous fame in his art, took away his life because he found himself a disappointed and forgotten man. As I read a series of such cases, each one seemed sadder than the other, and it was enough to make a man sit down and weep to think that our mortal race should be doomed to follow such phantoms and to be mocked by such delusions. As I read them all, I could not help feeling how necessary it was to say to young men, especially just as they are beginning life, and to young women too—aye, and the lesson is profitable to all of us—Take care how ye run in the race, lest after running till ye think ye have won the prize ye find that in truth ye have lost it. We must take care how we live, for this is the only lifetime we shall have in which to settle the life that lasts for ever. Make bankruptcy in your secular business, why, you can start again; but once make bankruptcy in soul affairs, and there is no second life in which to start your career afresh. Are you a defeated soldier of life? Ah, then, you can never begin again, or turn the defeat into a victory. If you go down to your grave a captive of sin, the iron bands will be about you for ever. There is no retrieving your position. The priceless boon of freedom is beyond your reach. You may lament, you cannot attain it. See, then, our life is a battle; we must constantly fight, haply we may win, or haply we may be defeated.

II. With a KINDLY HINT I now proceed to mark a second point.

Like a cool breath fanning our cheeks when too hot with ambition, this inquiry greets us—"Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges?" *So then, charges there will be in this life-battle.* It is not to be won without pain and cost. *Let us just glance at some of these charges.* You will soon see how they mount up. If any man shall get up to heaven, what a demand for *courage* he will have to meet! How many enemies he must face! How much ridicule he must endure! How frequently must he be misrepresented and maligned! How often must he be discreet enough to be silent, and anon bold enough to speak and avow his convictions and his purpose!

If a man shall get to heaven, what a charge of *patience* he will be at! How he must bear and forbear! How he must put up with one sharp difficulty and another, making light of fatigue and fasting, restless days and sleepless nights; in fiery temptation unflinching, amidst cold contempt unabashed.

If any man will get to heaven, what an amount of *perseverance* he will require to hold on and to hold out! What hours of prayer, what wrestling with God for a blessing, what striving with himself to overcome sinful propensities! What a charge of *watchfulness* he will be at! How he must guard the avenues of his being! How he must track his actions to the springs of motives, and keep his thoughts pure from guile! There can be little ease and not much slumber for a man who would get the eternal crown. What fresh supplies of zeal he will need; for we shall not drift into heaven

without a conflict or a care! We must cut and hack, and hew with intense energy, for the Saviour says, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by storm." What *strength* he will require, for he has to deal with potent foes! And oh, what a charge of *wisdom* he will be put to the expense of, for he has to stand against the craftiness of evil creatures, and to overcome one who is wiser than the *ancients*, even *Satan*, the arch-tempter. It is possible that the difficulties of an expedition may be intensely aggravated by a lack of knowledge as to the country to be invaded. Under such circumstances it is hard to anticipate the contingencies that may arise. In the battle of life this is the rub. Who knows what lies next before him? How can we forestall the surprises that may await us? "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." If I were aware of the temptations that would befall me a year hence, I think I could guard myself against them; but I do not even know what pinch or what peril may befall me before the hour has passed. You cannot tell the provocations that to-night may occur before you close your eyes in slumber. You may have a trial or a temptation such as never crossed your path before. Hence I beseech you to consider the greatness of the charge of this warfare. You have to pass through an experience which no man before you has proved. All the path of life is new to you, unmapped, untrodden, unanticipated. Yet all you lack of clear statistics is made up for in dire prognostics. No doubt the climate is baneful, and will subject you to fever or ague. Our British soldiers, rank and file, must press forward, though

they are landed on a blazing beach, across which they have to march ; nor will it ever do for them to be dismayed by steep mountains, dismal swamps, or savage tribes. Bent on victory, they brave the incidents of the campaign before they sight the adversaries they attack, while their heads and hearts are full of honour, promotion, stars, stripes, and Victoria crosses. But in our eventful battle of life the checks and bars to progress, the dangers and temptations that we shall all have to meet with in our natural constitution and our secular calling, the unnavigable currents and the impassable barriers that thwart us before we grapple with the main enterprise to enter heaven, are more than I can describe in one sermon. No marvel to me that Mr. Pliable should say, as he turned back, "You may have the brave country yourselves for me." The Slough of Despond, as a first part, put him into a dudgeon, and he said, "I do not like it ; I will have no more of it."

Apart from Divine strength, Pliable was a wise man, wise in his generation, to shrink from the adventure, for it is a hard journey to the skies. They spake the truth who said that there were giants to fight with, dragons to be slain, mountains to be crossed, and black rivers to be forded. It is so, and I pray you count the cost. There is no "royal road" to heaven, except that the King's highway leads there. There is no even road skilfully levelled or scientifically macadamised. The labour is too exhaustive, the obstructions are too numerous, the difficulties are too serious, unless God himself come to our help. I wittingly put these dilemmas before you that I may constrain you to say, "Who can go this warfare at his own charges ?"

III. And now, in the third place, let us look at our text as a GRACIOUS REMINDER. Does any man at any time go a warfare at his own charge? I trow not.

Young man! I have told you of difficulties and of dangers. I trust your bold spirit, taught by God, has thereby been fired to greater ardour. Now, I have somewhat to say unto thee which has cheered me, and cheered thy sires before me, and made them strong even in their weakness. It is this. You see you cannot go this warfare in your own strength. Is not that clear to you? Then, I pray you, do not try it. Do not for a moment contemplate it. If you do you will rue it. Your fall will be your first warning; the second time it will warn you more bitterly; if you continue in your own strength you will perhaps have a warning too late. But you may rely on God to help you. The text implies it. If by faith you yield yourself to Christ, whoever you may be, with a desire and intent to live henceforth as a follower of Jesus, God will help you, and that right early. Though a warfare is before you, you are not to go at your own charges. Shall I tell you how God will help you? Certainly, *you may reckon upon his watchful Providence.* You little know how easy the Almighty can make a path which otherwise would have been difficult and dangerous. Follow God's leading and you shall never lack for his comfort. I have lived long enough to see many people carve for themselves very eagerly and cut their fingers very severely. I have seen others who albeit they were great losers for a time by doing right, have had to bless God year after year for the abundant recompense they received afterwards. No man shall be a loser in the

long run by loving and serving God. If thou be willing and obedient, trusting thyself with Christ, thou shalt find those awful wheels of Providence revolve for thy welfare. The beasts of the field shall be in league with thee, and the stones of the field shall be at peace with thee. All things shall work together for good to them that love God. Now, I am not pretending that piety will procure wealth, or that if you espouse Christ's cause you shall grow rich. I should not wonder if you did. You are none the less likely to prosper in business for being a Christian. I am not going to predict that you shall be without sickness, much less without temptation, for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he accepteth"; but sure I am of this, that if you put your trust in God and do right, no temporal circumstances shall ever happen to you which shall not be for your eternal good. This is forestalling much more than any transient benefit. In the short space you are to live here you may reckon upon the gigantic wheels of Providence as your helpers. The angels of God shall be swift to defend you. Your eyes shall not see them, but your heart shall wax confident. You shall perceive that by some means you have been rescued from a place of drought and led into a fruitful land.

More than this; as you go this warfare, looking to God to bear your charges, *you shall have the Lord Jesus Christ to help you.* Promise not yourself that you will be able to maintain henceforth a perfect life. Sin will harass you. Old corruptions, even when they are driven out from the throne (for sin shall not reign over you), will yet struggle at the foot thereof. But

Jesus Christ will be your helper. He will be always present to revive you with his precious blood, to sprinkle your hearts from an evil conscience, to wash your bodies with pure water. Have you never admired that picture of Christ with the basin and the towel washing his disciples' feet? This is what he will ever do for you at every eventide when you have defiled yourself through inadvertence or infirmity. Look into the face of the Crucified. Perhaps you have sometimes wished that he were now visible, and in body accessible to you. That sympathizing One who has suffered so much for you! You have said, "Oh! that I might go and tell him my griefs, and get his help!" He is alive. He is here. He is not far from anyone that seeketh him. Whosoever trusteth shall surely find Christ to be his very present help in time of trouble. Believe this, and thou shalt prove it true.

And he that is a soldier of the cross shall have the divine power of *God the Blessed Spirit* to help him. I have sometimes thought, when some strong passion has been raging within my soul—How can I ever overcome it? The will was good, but the flesh was weak. But as soon as the Spirit of God has moved on me the flesh has given way. The Holy Ghost can give the man that is prone to idleness such an intense apprehension of the value of time that he shall be more industrious than the naturally active man. I believe that if any of you who are subject to a bad temper will lay this besetting sin before God in prayer, and ask the Holy Spirit's help, you shall not only be able to curb it, but you will acquire a sweeter and gentler spirit than some of those whose temperament is naturally even, with no propensity to

fitful change or sudden storm. Do not tell me that there is anything in human nature too obdurate for the Lord to overcome, for there is not. Whatever may be your temptation, you need not account it an effectual hindrance to your being a Christian. What though it be beyond your own power to grapple with it! When the Eternal arm comes to the rescue; when the right hand of Jehovah is made bare; when the Holy Spirit puts forth his irresistible power, he can smite through the loins of our kingly sins, and cut the Rahabs and dragons of our iniquities in pieces. Rest thou in the might of Jehovah, the God of Israel. He that brake Egypt in pieces with his plagues can vanquish our sins with his judgments or with his grace, and he can bring the new nature, like the children of Israel, up out of bondage into joyous liberty. Go thou to the blood, and thou shalt conquer sin. Go to the Eternal Spirit, and thy worst corruptions shall be overthrown. "Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges?" As the soldier draws from his paymaster, so let every Christian draw from his God and Saviour. Conduct your warfare trusting in the blessed God.

IV. My last words shall be to those who are beginning the great battle of life. Let me urge upon them these two or three cautions and counsels.

Behold *the wisdom of diffidence*. I heard some time ago of a minister preaching on the dignity of self-reliance: and I thought to myself, Surely that is the dignity of a fool! The dignity of self-reliance! Taken in a certain sense, there is some kind of truth about it; or at least the folly of asking counsel of your neighbour in every strait is sufficiently obvious. But he that relies

on his own wits will soon pander to expediency and grovel in the mire. His actions will admit of no better defence than excuses and apologies. Nay, sirs; "but let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." A better subject, and one that no preacher need be ashamed of if the Master should come ere the sermon be done, is *the dignity of reliance upon God, and the wisdom of diffidence of oneself*. Begin life, young man, by finding out that the capital you thought you had is much less than it looked before you counted it. Begin life, young man, by understanding that all in your nature that glitters is not gold, and that your strength is perfect weakness. Begin by being emptied, and you will soon be filled. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Begin by being poor. If you begin with lowliness you will not need to be humiliated.

"He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low no pride ;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide."

He will win the battle who knows how to begin on the low ground, and to fight uphill by Divine strength. Learn the wisdom, not of self-reliance but of self-diffidence, for he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.

Be thoroughly alive to *the importance of prayer*. If all our charges in the life-war are to be paid us by the Paymaster, let us go to the treasury. Amongst the strangest of human sins is a distaste for prayer. I open my eyes with wonder at myself whenever I find my own self slow to pray! Why, if your children want anything of you they are not slow to speak. They need

not be exhorted to ask for this or that; they speak at once. And here is the soul-enriching exercise of prayer, is it not strange that you and I should be slack in it? Did you ever stand in a market and see the people coming in from the country with their goods? How diligent they are in their business; how eager to take home as much money as they can! How their eyes glitter; how sharp they are! But here is heaven's market; God's wares are given away to them that will ask for them. Yet we seem indifferent, as though we did not care to be enriched; we even leave the mercy-seat of God unvisited! Oh! young people, do understand the value of prayer, and you aged people, do continue in prayer and supplication; for if we are to win this battle of our life it can only be by taking in our charge-bill to the great Paymaster, and asking him to discharge the charges of this war.

Consider, too, *the necessity of holiness*. If in my life's warfare I am entirely dependent upon God, let me not grieve him. Let me seek so to walk with him that I may expect to have him with me. Oh let our consecration be unreserved and complete!

And in all these we must prove *the power of faith*. If we have never begun to trust in Jesus let us begin now. Oh! may the Eternal Spirit breathe faith into our souls. The beginning of true spiritual life is here—trusting what Christ has wrought for us, relying upon his sufferings on our behalf. The continuation of spiritual life is here—trusting still in what Christ has done and is doing. The consummation of spiritual life on earth is still the same—trusting still, trusting ever; always repairing to Christ for the supply of all our

needs; going to him with our blots to have them removed, with our failings to have them forgiven, with our wants and requirements to have them provided for, with our good works and our prayers to have them rendered acceptable, and with ourselves that we may still be preserved in him.

Sharpen your swords, soldiers of the cross, and be ready for the fray, but as ye march to the battle let it be with heads bowed down in adoration before him who alone can cover your heads in the day of battle; and when you lift up those heads in the front of the foe, let this be your song—"The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; the Lord has become my salvation!" And when the fight waxes hot, if your head grow weary, think of "Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself," and still fight on until you win the day, and then as the fight draws to a close, and your sun is going down, and you can count your scars, and are ready to enter into your rest, be this your prayer—"I have gone astray like a lost sheep, but seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments." And be this your last word on earth—"Into thy hand I commit my spirit, for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of my salvation;" so shall this be your eternal song in heaven above—"Unto him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood, to him be glory for ever and ever," Amen.



Attention!

“Hear ye him.”—Matthew xvii. 5.



WHEN our Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured, there came a voice from the bright overshadowing cloud, which said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him.” It was the voice of the Father concerning his Son; a testimony to his person, a notification of his office, an announcement of his authority to teach and to legislate. You can understand how imperative it then was for those who heard it to heed him. But now he is gone up from us. He has entered into the excellent glory; he no more teaches in our streets, yet still, as though present with us, he speaks to us. By the written Word, his sayings are handed down to us infallibly. Oftentimes, when the Holy Spirit rests upon God’s servants, they become as the voice of Christ to us; and when that same blessed Spirit, as the Comforter, brings to our remembrance the things of Christ, seems it not as though Jesus himself spake to our souls? The admonition is not out of date; it has not

lost its telling point or its vital force. Still doth the Father say to us concerning his well-beloved Son, "Hear ye him."

Let us proceed to meditate on this sacred charge. The three little words may give rise to four short questions. Why? What? How? When?

I. Do you ask why? Why should we hear him? It might serve for a sufficient answer, had we no other reply, because God himself commands us. This injunction cometh of the Father, "Hear ye him." Over and over again are we enjoined to listen to the voice of Christ. Every messenger from God ought to have our respectful attention, how much more the greatest of all messengers; that messenger of the covenant, the Messiah, the sent One, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession. Did not Jehovah himself say, "This is my Son." It seemed reasonable that the Son should receive more reverence than any of the servants. If senators and patriots, counsellors and prophets, had been stoned and cast out of the vineyard, deference might yet be paid to the Son. If their perverseness had refused Him homage, their scruples might have sheltered him from indignity. Surely they would not go so far as to cast out the Son himself. There is a wilfulness, a defection of heart, an enormity of sin, in refusing to hear the Christ of God, for which it is difficult to find terms. Appointed, anointed, commissioned of the Father to speak to us, to confer with us, to make known amongst us the mind and will of our great and gracious Sovereign, it becomes treason and blasphemy of the highest order and the deepest dye for us to refuse to heed his presence or hearken to his words.

Why hear him? do ye ask. Does not our Lord Jesus Christ himself deserve to be heard? Peerless among the princes of heaven, is he not very God of very God? Immaculate among the children of men, is he not man of the substance of his mother? Here is a double claim upon our attention. Beaming with divinity, instinct with humanity, he speaks as never man spake; clothing the highest oracles in the most familiar parables. And will ye not hear what this God-man hath to say? Is he not perfect in wisdom, pure in motive, and undeviating in truthfulness? To whom should we listen, if we turn away from him? He has all those high sanctions which should claim our allegiance, and all those sweet traits of character which should attract our regard. If we will not listen to such an one as Jesus of Nazareth, the gentle, and meek, and lowly, yet the truthful, the honest, and the brave, to whom will we ever lend an attentive ear? O, sons of men, there was never mentor or orator so worthy of your regard as Jesus Christ; never philosopher who had such maxims to deliver or such mysteries to unfold as this man—the Son of God—the Incarnate Wisdom.

Why will ye not hear him, when the message he has come to communicate concerns yourselves, your present and future welfare, your most solemn interests? The tidings he brings are, indeed, laden with ten thousand blessings for us, if we will but incline our ear, and hearken to them. He comes to redress our grievances, to retrieve our disasters, to redeem our souls, to secure our prosperity, to effect our salvation: as an ambassador from God he comes, not to treat upon small matters, to settle petty disputes, or to advise upon local or

temporary affairs, but with supreme authority to show how sinful man may be reconciled to his Maker, how the foul stains of transgression may be washed away, and scarlet sins become white as snow. He comes to tell us how we may escape the impending doom of hell, and how we may attain an inheritance in heaven. To fit us for that high estate, and that blessed society, he comes to cleanse us from our corruptions, and to endow us with a nature that is divine, and faculties that are suited to the celestial glory. Such a message as this should enamour our very selfishness, and constrain our ambition to regard it with favour. Hear ye him, O ye sick and wounded, will ye not listen to the physician? O ye bankrupt debtors, will ye not hearken to the jubilee trumpet that proclaims your debts paid, and your forfeited rights restored? O ye outcasts, wandering all forlorn, in climes uncongenial to your health, your peace, your homely joys; will ye not heed the voice of a guide, who comes to conduct you in safety to your fatherland? O ye despairing souls, he sets before you an open door. Ye famished poor, he invites you to a banquet, a banquet richly provisioned with all the dainties of eternal love. With such words upon his lips, such blessed news to bring to such needy creatures, our Lord Jesus Christ may well claim to be heard.

There is a further argument which ought to have thrilling force among full many of you, my hearers. With what zest should those of us hear him who profess to be his disciples. Years ago some of us took his easy yoke upon our shoulders, and we bless his name it has never galled them, neither are we weary of the load. He is our Master and our Lord, and if he be so, surely our

proper place is at his feet. It is an ill thing of us, and untruthful, if we call him Master, and yet will not believe what he teaches; if we say to him "Rabboni," and yet turn aside to hail some fellow-creature—be he a noted saint long since dead, or a party leader who still survives among us, as our captain and commander-in-chief. If Peter be our master, let us call him so; if Calvin be our master, let us call him so; and if Wesley be our master, let us call him so; but if we be disciples of Jesus, then let us follow Jesus, and follow him with other men only so far as we perceive they followed Christ. Hear ye *him*, O ye disciples, if ye be his disciples. Will ye enlist as his soldiers, and shrink from his lead? Will ye engage to be his servants, and yet violate his orders? Will ye who declare that he is your chieftain, and wear his uniform, cede your homage to other masters? Nay, by all that is honest and just, pure and comely, and of good report, the shame would fester in every believer's conscience. Ye call him "Master and Lord," and ye say well, for so he is; but prove yourselves to be truly his disciples by hearing him.

To the rest—I am grieved at heart that I should have to speak of "the rest," but we know there is such a remnant here—to those who are not his disciples, there is an argument, that if it tell not now, will tell hereafter. You must hear him in this day of grace, or else you shall hear him in that day of judgment, and perish for ever. Do you refuse to hear Christ, there are not any tidings of mercy to be heard elsewhere. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh, for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more

shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven." O sinners, hear ye the Saviour's voice! O wanderers, hear your Shepherd's voice! O ye dying, hear your Physician's voice! I will add, O ye dead, hear ye the voice of the great Quickener, for the time is come, that they that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and they that hear him shall live. "Hear ye him?" Thus with general arguments suitable to all, and with special arguments for those who have believed, and for those who have not believed, we leave with you a few of the reasons why.

II. Our second catch-word is "What?" What are we to hear? "Hear ye *Him*." There is much to hear concerning the person of Christ, the actions of Christ, the sufferings of Christ, and the offices of Christ, but the fulness of all revelation is embodied in himself. Greater than the greatest sermon that was ever preached in the world, is the Word made flesh. He is the manifestation of God; the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. Would you know God, you must know Christ, "He that hath seen Me" (it is His own testimony) "hath seen the Father." In the character of Jesus the character of God is reflected with ineffable purity. The invisible God is in him, made visible to men as far as the sense of faith can behold him: infinitely farther than the natural senses can discern. The infinite can never be brought down to the level of our puny intelligence, so as to be comprehended by us; yet in the presence of Christ we are conscious of the infinite. It is palpable to us as a mountain that cannot be scaled, but under whose shadow we can find shelter.

And when we look to Christ, and listen to His voice, we are as those who gaze on the vast ocean, in which, to our poor minds, the infinite is mirrored forth; for, as far as the vision can stretch, there is no bound, no shore beyond, and His words sound on and on like the mighty sea, through time that knows no limit, and through eternity that has no end. He is the wisdom of God and the power of God. Hear him, then, hear him; let his voice break on your ears as the music of the main, in that melodious anthem: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" or in that thrilling utterance, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Hear *Him*, I say, hear *Him*. As the sound of many waters, as the chorus of the waves, hear this:—"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." View Christ as a child who must be about his Father's business, and as a man who must work the works of his Father while it is day; know him as a teacher and a guide; mark his zeal to minister, and his devotedness to suffer. Then let poets sing of "Nature," if they please. Let them call it "the thin veil which half conceals and half reveals the face and lineaments of God," as some of them have done. But let Christians bear me witness, that the simple tale of Christ living among men, with which we delight to make ourselves more and more familiar, unveils the attributes of God in words and deeds of mercy and compassion, of patience and long-suffering, of sweet mindfulness and great marvel in such clearness as days of sunshine and moonlight nights could never teach you, though more than threescore years and ten of these revolving seasons

should pass over your head. But especially read God in the death of Jesus. Behold the divine justice gleaming there, for he wakens his sword that he may sheath it in the heart of the great Shepherd, and that the sheep may escape its keen edge. See there the love of God, who spared not his own Son. See all the divine attributes marvellously blended on the cross in the person of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father. Hear him. And now do ye hear tell of him as he goes beyond the stars and enters the pearl gate to take possession of his well-earned crown : let us hear him there, and understand that he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Hear the voice of his ascension, as it proclaims the justification of those for whom he died and rose again, and the assurance of the eternal perfection of all those for whom his blood was shed ; “for this man hath perfected for ever them that are set apart, by the one sacrifice that he hath offered.” Hear him. His very person, and everything connected with him, speaks with trumpet tongue. Hear what God says to you by him. Oh, I wish that we were more attentive to the Lord Jesus Christ, but I am afraid many of us are very superficial in our considerations of our Saviour. We do not labour “to comprehend with all saints what are the heights and depths.” God speaks to dull ears. Though his accents are far more sweet than music when he speaks by Jesus Christ, yet a very large part of what God has thus said to us, many of you have not hitherto understood.

Let me remind you, dear friends, that the Lord Jesus

has many forms of speaking—many varieties of utterance. Sometimes he instructs. He is a great didactic teacher, and he has spoken by the mouth of his apostles as well as with his own lips. The truths that were uttered in his name, like the miracles that were wrought in his name, have the impress of his sovereign authority. Hence that summary of Christian doctrine which Paul was inspired of the Holy Spirit to open up, was the plain result of the life of Jesus; a key to interpret what he said and did. Do you read in the gospels how he obeyed the Father? in the epistles you read of that obedience as a *righteousness imputed* to all that believe. Do you find in the gospels a minute account of the dying of the Lord Jesus; the epistles will tell you that his death was a *propitiation* for our sins. Do the gospels furnish you with proofs of his rising from the dead; the epistles will assure you that he was raised for our *justification*. Do you learn from the gospels that he ascended up into heaven? the epistles will teach you that he ever liveth to make *intercession* for us. We are bound to take our theology from the entire Scriptures.

Where, and when, and by whomsoever Christ speaks to us, let us hear him. The well of theology undefiled is the Word of God. We err when we pin our profession to creeds of human devising. Creeds are exceedingly useful, and I hope they will never be discarded; in fact they never can be, for every man has a creed, whether he likes to think so or not. He has a consistent or an inconsistent one. But our creed must not be constructed from the dogmas of general councils, or the opinions of learned men, much less must it be the

reflection of "modern thought," which is full of infidelity, but it must embrace the truths which we have received directly from the Word of God. And surely, after reading controversies upon theology, one has often said, like David, "Oh, that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, that is within the gate! Oh, that I could get a drink of the water from the well-head—from Scripture itself!" And ye do well, my brethren, if your only Doctor of Divinity is Christ, and if he is your only body of divinity; for, indeed, was there ever any other body of divinity under heaven save Jesus Christ? Let my doctrine be what Christ taught; let my reason for believing it be that he said so; let me sit at his feet and learn of him, and let him be my authority. I shall want no better argument, if I gather my reason from the fact that he hath declared it.

But the word of the Lord is not always the voice of instruction; it is sometimes spoken in peremptory tones, commanding us. The Lord Jesus Christ has given many absolute injunctions to his people. Some there are amongst us—we grieve to confess it—who are not so fond of his precepts as of his doctrines. They will hear the preaching that sets forth the precious doctrines of grace, and the sweet promises of the covenant, with very great delight, as I hope we all do, but at the mention of the precepts and the practical obligations they are offended, and afraid that there is more of a legal twang than of a gospel tone in the sermon. Perhaps such fears have too often been justified; at the same time, brethren, we should always be ready to suffer the word of exhortation, and be as content to do for

Christ that which he enjoins, as to get from Christ that which he freely bestows. That saying of the mother of Jesus to those who waited at the feast of Cana, is good advice for us all; she said to the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Does Christ command separation from the world—separate yourselves, and come ye out. Does Christ command cross-bearing, and going without the camp—take up your cross cheerfully, and follow him without the camp. Doth Christ command integrity of character and holiness of life—oh, that we might be blameless in the one and exemplary in the other. Doth he command love, a kindly affection for the brethren, and a practical benevolence towards all mankind, let us diligently cherish both. Doth he command us to forgive injuries, to show a peaceable disposition, then let us bear and forbear in advance of all the maxims of society, stimulated by the noble example of our Lord, and obedient to the law of his mouth. Do ye call the blessed Jesus your Lord and Master? "Hear ye him." Heed his precepts as well as hearken to his doctrine. Often, too, by way of direction does our Lord speak to us. How wisely would our lives be ordered did we simply and sincerely follow Christ's guidance! We often make glaring mistakes in trivial matters, because we fancy ourselves able to direct our own steps in plain common paths. Many a man has gone straight through an intricate course, because he has prayed earnestly, and in answer to prayer he has found out the narrow channel between the quicksands and the rocks; yet on other occasions that same man has committed folly in Israel, because he thought it was fair sailing and he did not want to take the divine pilot

on board. Let us in all things, great or small, ask counsel of Christ, and when once we know his will, let us never have a second thought. It is not ours to reason or to question, but it is ours to suffer loss and endure reproach, if need be, when we have his orders. The Christian's, like the soldier's, duty is to obey. Be it to do or to die, it is imperative that he lay his judgment at the feet of his commander. His judgment is never sounder than when he defers to his chief, demurs to nothing, and decides at the spur of precept or prohibition. With his charge for your chart, be ready to hear his direction.

Nor is there any lack in another particular. Full often, blessed be his name, Christ gives us the word of consolation. Unhappy are those disciples who turn a deaf ear to these sweet refreshments. We do know some who are so sickly and depressed in spirit, that "their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw nigh unto the gates of death." "My soul refuseth to be comforted," says the Psalmist, and there are persons in that pitiable condition. But, dear friends, when Jesus deigns to comfort, surely it is wise to obey the injunction, "Hear ye him." Why, if I could not believe the promise of my father, or the promise of my brother, yet must I believe the promise of my Saviour. He cannot deceive; he would not speak flattering words; it were not possible for him to buoy me up with specious consolations, showing me the bright side of the picture, and veiling the darker shadows. Oh no! he has said himself, "If it were not so, I would have told you." He is perfectly ingenuous in what he says; he conceals nothing which it is profitable for us to

know. He is himself transparent truth. When he says to me—to you—“Let not your hearts be troubled! Ye believe in God: believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions;”—shall we not dismiss our fears, renew our hearty confidence in him, believe in the many mansions, and look forward to them? And if he says to us (as he does), “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;” if he declares, “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand,” should we not ground our full assurance on his simple assertion? Are we to question what he affirms, because it seems too good to be true? May it not remind us of that famous speech of the Lord by the mouth of his servant Esaias: “As the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Oh, bow thine ear, thou mournful one, disconsolate as thou art, I marvel not that thou dost refuse earthly sedatives, but I wonder much that thou shouldst deny thyself these heavenly restoratives. The oil and wine that Jesus brings must be healing and healthful. The ointment that he puts upon thee will not aggravate thy sores, but it will cure thy malady. Yield thyself to his generous treatment. The spirit of Christ never comforts unwisely. Rejoice thou that he has given the Spirit, and still speaks by the Spirit unto the mourners in Zion.

I might linger over these kindred reflections. When our Lord speaks by way of warning, and bids thee “Flee from the wrath to come,” hear ye him. When he speaks by way of exhortation, or of invitation, saying, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest," then "hear ye him." If his tone should seem somewhat severe to your souls, and your flesh should revolt against it, yet "Hear ye him." His lips are as lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh; always sweet smelling and healing like the myrrh. Oh, regard him; catch his faintest accents; treasure his words. Take your tablets and write down what he saith; but let your tablets be your heart's best flesh, made soft by the power of the regenerating Spirit. Pray the Holy Ghost to write upon your souls, to carve deeply upon your hearts, all that Jesus Christ may speak to you. This is *what* we would have you hear. "Hear ye *him*."

III. The third word about which some remarks were to cluster was "How." How shall we hear him? We have shown you that he speaks in the word of Scripture; that he speaks through his servants; that he speaks by his Holy Spirit to the hearts of his people. How shall we hear him, then? Undoubtedly it becomes us to listen with devout reverence. Let us revere each particular truth of Scripture, for the sacred authority with which it comes to us. Every rightly constituted mind must feel shocked at the way in which certain parts of God's word are treated by the thoughtless as well as the profane. I believe, brethren, that the habit of trifling with the minutest detail of God's house is very sinful. I know that it has led to much mischief in the church of God. I remember hearing a minister speak of the controversy about baptism with palpable levity. It made me shudder when he said, that for his part he did not care twopence about baptism. Is there not a baptism of the Lord's commandment? Some sort of

baptism there is, at any rate, which Christ has enjoined. God forbid that I should scoff at it. Where is your loyalty to the Son of God, if ye rudely snap your fingers at any ordinance he has appointed? Ye that hear may account it of no consequence, but he that declared it to us well knew its profound importance, for he said, "Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." You have coined a new proverb to supersede the old statutes. "There are no sects in heaven," you inform us. Then, having forged a text, you supply us with a commentary, "These points are really non-essential"; you tell us, "it would promote love and concord utterly to ignore them." Nay, sirs, but the *points* of which you speak so lightly are not mere specks on the horizon, they are more like lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; let them be to you for signs and for seasons. "They are not essential for salvation," says one. Be it so, and yet they may be essential for approbation, I reply. As a servant, "will you wilfully offend because the penalty is that you be reprov'd, not that you be discharged. As a pupil in the school of Christ, will you violate his laws, because you will only be put to the bottom of the class, and no one supposes you will be expelled from school. Has it come to this with thee, professing Christian, that to escape from hell is the only thing you care about. Are you of so mean, so beggarly a spirit, that provided you get saved, it is all you are concerned about?" Dear friends, after we are saved, it is essential to the peace of our conscience that we search the word of God to know the will of

Christ concerning us; and that in every particular, as far as we are able, we endeavour to do his will. You may err through ignorance, not knowing that you are doing wrong. That is a sin, a sin concerning which Christ says you shall be beaten with few stripes. But it is an aggravation of sin when a person does not wish to know his Lord's will; nay, refuses to enquire, and thinks it quite unimportant; for such wilfulness the servant, to use our Lord's own words, "shall be beaten with many stripes." God save us from the censure as well as from the penalty of that transgression. Never treat with levity any text of Scripture; never suppose that because the truth is considered small by the men of your generation, that it is therefore inconsiderable in the eyes of him who ruleth throughout all generations. The sweepings of the lapidary's shop, where diamonds are polished, are precious; how much more should each member of the whole church be jealous of every minute particle of truth. Small errors are the seedlings from which gigantic heresies spring up. The more accord with the mind of Christ there is in the individual disciples of Jesus the more concord there will be in the visible church. Unity is not promoted by endorsing one another's faults, but by conspiring one with another to maintain the Master's statutes.

Let us hear believingly. Some are troubled with doubts and fears, and others foster them as if they were accessories to faith, and proofs of an ingenuous disposition. We have heard from the philosophic side that there is more faith in doubting than in crediting the revealed Word. Really, such cant I do not care to quote. The marvel is that it gets currency for an

hour. The class of doubters we have abroad in the present day may well be always protesting that they are honest, since there is so much reason to suspect the honesty of their doubts. And there are Christian people who think it a commendable humility, and an excellent feature of experience, to entertain doubts, to make a profession of fears, and to cast reflections on "the full assurance of faith," as though it were presumptuous and unbecoming. From the tone of their conversation you might infer that the promise of the gospel is to him that doubts, and hesitates to show his allegiance, rather than to him that believes and is baptized, that he shall be saved. The new birth is a grave subject to their thinking. It fills them with terror, instead of inspiring them with hope. But their morbid views are all wrong, my brethren. What Christ has said is true, infallibly true, it is not to be lightly questioned, but implicitly relied on. Be it ours to accept from his lips whatever of teaching, or consolation, or promise, he may utter. And let us hear him expectantly with the full assurance of hope, knowing that he is faithful who hath promised. Especially in the matter of prayer, let us encourage the utmost confidence that he will hear us. Have you not caught yourself sometimes telling of the remarkable answers you have obtained, as if it caused you the greatest possible surprise that you should ask and receive? Meet and right it is, my dear brother, that you should relate what God has done for you; but is it quite right for you to express astonishment that he has fulfilled his own engagements? Should it be accounted strange by God's own children that their Father keeps his word?

Are his oracles so equivocal that when they are literally fulfilled we hold up our hands in blank amazement? Not so, beloved. Better far the saying of that aged Christian woman, who, when she heard a young disciple relate the answer he had got to the prayer he had offered, and finish up his story with the exclamation, "Wasn't it surprising!" replied, "No, it is just like him." As it is his wont and custom to keep his word, let us always hear him expectantly. And let me charge you, beloved friends, that ye take heed by the power of God's Spirit always to hear Jesus Christ obediently. There is a way of hearing that is worse than not hearing at all. Who are so deaf as those that will not hear—or hearing, will not obey? How often has the Lord called some of you, and yet you have not come to him? Though he has taught you much, you have not learned anything. Though he has exhorted you many times, you have not stirred. Though he has frequently warned you, you have never started at the cry of danger, or woken to the call for vigilance. Oh, that we obeyed, instantly obeyed him, scrupulously obeyed him, universally obeyed him; inquired and ascertained his will, with an eagerness to do his bidding. Fain would I be like a cork upon the waters, that feels every breath of the wind, and every rise of the wave, not like some great steam-vessel, that needs a storm to make it roll. Would to God we were delicately sensitive to the mind of Christ, like the photographer's sensitive plate that catches the image as it passes, and permanently retains the reflection, so that when Jesus Christ's perfect image comes before our soul, it might be there stamped upon us to abide uneffaceably evermore. Oh, my dear brothers and

sisters! ponder this pensively, pray over it privately, ask yourselves personally, are we all thus hearing the Lord Jesus Christ? Come to close quarters; let us put it pointedly: are any of you living in habitual disregard of your Lord's will? If so, you are unhappy; I know you are. You cannot be happy until you come and yield yourself up to him. What is the true posture of a servant but to wait his master's beck and bidding? How can ye expect to know the sweetness of Christ unless ye own him as your Lord, and yield your souls in allegiance to him. Cry to God then for cleansing from the errors of the past; invoke his help to make your obedience complete, now and in days to come. We know we are not saved by *our* obedience; we are saved already by *his* obedience; but for the love we bear his name what was our gain we count our loss, and we desire to render ourselves as living sacrifices unto him, which is but our reasonable service. Thus let us hear him. I beseech you, you who listen to me from Sabbath to Sabbath, never to take aught of your beliefs from my sermons unless you can verify them from his sayings. I would cheerfully blot out from your recollection every dogma that has no authority but my own. I would urge you to give it like chaff to the wind. Let your soul be established upon the truth as it is in Jesus. "Hear ye him." Whatever he saith accept beyond appeal. Let that be your postulatium and your ultimatum, the beginning of your confidence and the end of all your controversy. Should Christ's teaching take you out of our connection, or out of any association where you now are, never mind, follow it; through floods or flames, if Jesus leads, follow his guidance.

Do not be foolish enough to take up with impressions that are merely of the flesh. Do not be for ever changing and shifting with the currents of opinion. Do not have windmills on the brain. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest Holy Scripture. Having done so, if there be not any one else in this world besides yourself who professes to accept the truth that Christ has taught, believe it all the more intensely, cherish it the more tenaciously, and act upon its counsels the more scrupulously. Be concerned that so much dishonour should be done him by so many whose ignorance or misapprehension have blinded their eyes and bereft them of understanding, but be jealous to honour him yourself with a fealty that never swerves, by keeping the testimonies of his mouth, and observing those statutes of his kingdom which others overlook or despise. "The Bible, and the Bible alone," said Chillingworth, in an oft-quoted aphorism, "is the religion of Protestants," but I am afraid it is hardly a fact. It ought to be true, and it would be true, were we all true to Christ. The Bible is the basis of all the professed religion of Christendom. The word of God applied to the soul by the eternal Spirit becomes to us the voice of Christ, and we desire to hear it. God help us to hear it.

IV. One more question remains to be answered. When shall we hear him? The reply must be, Evermore! Hear him when ye begin your Christian career. "Hear, and your soul shall live." "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." It is the hearing of him that quickens the soul. "Incline your ear," saith he, "and come unto me; hear, and your soul

shall live." Nor are we to give up hearing Christ after we have found life in him; we are to continue still learning of him. We shall never grow so wise that we do not need him for a teacher. We shall never be so experienced that we can find our own way, and no longer require him as a guide. We shall have to keep on hearing him when our locks are grey, and our age is reverend; when we are on the banks of Jordan, and our feet almost tread the hallowed soil of the border land; even then, brethren, we must still hear him. And after we have passed across the river his voice will greet us. We shall for ever hear him in the upper skies. The great matter, however—great because it presses so heavily on our present interest and our future destiny—is that we hear him *now*. "*To-day* if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years." May we have grace to hear him now. If we do not hear him now speaking with the voice of mercy, to-morrow we may hear him say, "I never knew you." It would be a terrible hearing that, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity!" The thunder of those dreadful words will be everlasting. May God, of his infinite grace, save us from hearing the dreary sentence of the Judge by enabling us to hear now the cheery welcome of the Saviour.

And do you not think, dear friends, it would be well that believers should have a special time for hearing Christ every day? Might you not mark off a quarter of an hour in the day for hearing what God the Lord

shall speak? In the middle of London, amidst all the din of traffic, the sweetest chimes cannot be heard, they are drowned. But that same music, when other sounds are hushed, will be extremely pleasant. We have the rush and crash of the world in our ears nearly all the day; if we want to hear Christ's voice, we must get alone sometimes, and sit in silence. Our Puritan forefathers, who were mighty men of God, owed much of the strength of their character to the time that they could afford for uninterrupted devotion. They would have an hour, some of them when they rose, others of them more, for reading the Scriptures and prayer. After that, family prayer was a service to which a full measure of time was allotted, it was not got over in a hurry with them. And then at eventide, and many of them during the middle of the day, devoted portions of time to meditation and worship. There was system in their habit of hearing Christ. Now, it is obvious, I think, that we should be neglecting our duty, many of us, were we to take hours in that way (for the time is not our own), yet those who *have* time at their own disposal could not occupy it better. But, at any rate, we must jealously guard a little time each day for trading with heaven. It is the best commerce a man can engage in; it brings in the richest treasure. He will be poor who does not set apart some time in which he can listen to the voice of Christ, by searching the Scriptures, by drawing near to God, by watching and prayer. I would stir you up to diligence in this matter, dear friends. Even the public prayer-meetings should be second to private intercessions. "This ought ye to have done," I would say of the prayer-meeting, "not

to have left the other undone." Both should be regarded, for oftentimes in the morning, if one can get a text of Scripture and put it under the tongue, it will keep the mouth sweet, and the breath sweet, and the heart sweet all the day long. And at night, when one is weary, it gives calmness to our slumbers, and even makes our dreams pleasant, if we can get a kiss from the lips of the spouse in some joyful promise, some precious portion of the Word of God. "Hear ye him," my brethren. "Hear ye him." The Lord unstop your ears to hear, O ye that have never heard him. And ye that have heard him often, may ye hear him yet more frequently and more familiarly, till he shall say unto you, "Come up hither," and you shall enter finally into his joy.





Verilous Procrastination.

“He lingered.”—Genesis xix. 16.

LOT was highly favoured. In the midst of a general destruction angels were sent to take care of him. He had received a warning which many had not heard, and he had felt the terror that warning should excite, while some who had heard the tidings little heeded their imminent moment. Lot stood in the condition of one who knew that he must leave the city, for it was about to be destroyed, who intended to leave it, who was just about to take his departure, but who, nevertheless, hesitated a little, halted awhile, avoided hurry, protracted his stay with some attachment to the place where he had dwelt, and so, in the face of danger, he delayed; being slow to move when fully aware that judgment was swift to overtake;—“he lingered.” I believe Lot to be in this respect the exact counterpart of a great many hearers of the gospel. They understand that the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness of men; they know that the dreadful penalties will be soon enforced; they are well aware of the way of escape; they have

resolved to follow that way; and they intend to do so very soon. Yet for a long time they have halted on the verge of decision, almost persuaded to be Christians. Strong as their resolution to become followers of the Saviour seems at times to be, unhappily they stop short, they linger still in their old condition, halting between two opinions. To such persons I propose to address a few words of exhortation this evening. First of all, to expostulate with you personally upon matters that concern yourselves; then to speak to you about other people in whom you are interested,—for I have the full conviction that the man who lingers puts others in danger as well as himself, just as Lot's lingering was hazardous to his daughters and to his wife; and lastly, to commend the means which I trust God will use, similar to those which he used with Lot, that some angelic hand or some providential force may lay hold upon the lingerer, that he may be brought out from the City of Destruction and made to flee for help to Christ the Lord.

I. I must begin by speaking to the person who is lingering himself. I should like to be looked upon, just now, less as a preacher than as a friend who is talking to the lingering one, the one almost decided—talking to him in the most familiar tones, but at the same time with the most earnest purpose. There are certain thoughts which have been and are still fermenting in my soul. I have heard that a conclave was held in pandemonium. In the lower regions Satan had called together all the devils who showed him allegiance, and he said to them, "I want one of you to go forth as a lying spirit from this place to deceive many. The

gospel is being faithfully preached, and men are being won to Christ, my rival. Spirits of the infernal pit, I desire your help that this gospel may not spread further. I pause while each one of you, my liege servants, shall tell me of the devices you will use to prevent men from fleeing to Christ. His device that shall seem wisest to my subtlety, shall be most fully employed among the sons of men." Then outspoke one and said, "O prince of the infernal pit, I will go forth and tell men that there is no God, no heaven, no hell, no hereafter." But the arch-fiend said, "It is in vain. The gospel has already gone so far with the men of whom I am thinking now, that this would not avail. They know there is a God, they are sure of it. The testimony which has been borne in the world has brought so much light into it, that they cannot close their eyes to the fact, and thy device, though admirable, will not succeed." Then up rose another, and he said, "I shall insinuate doubts as to the authenticity of Scripture; I shall belie the teachings of the doctrines of the Word of God, and so shall I keep them from Christ." But again the leader of that conclave objected that this would scarcely suffice, for the multitude had so heard the gospel, and those whose conversion he was most anxious to prevent were so conversant with its historical facts that they could not seriously question them; neither could they live in systematic doubt who had been schooled in positive belief. There were many devices; but I will tell you the one that most of all struck Satan, which he determined to make the chief use of among the sons of men. It was this: one foul spirit said, "I will not insinuate doubts about the existence of God or the

truth of Scripture. I know they would not avail. But this thing I will do—I will tell men that though these things *are* true and important there is no hurry about them, there is time enough and to spare—that they may wait a little, till there is a more convenient season, and then shall they attend to them.” Now, the subtlety of Satan was pleased with this, and he said, “Servant, go thy way. Thou hast invented the net in which the fowler shall take more birds than in any other. Good speed to thine enterprise. This deadly poison will destroy innumerable souls.” Feeling this to be the case, it shall be my earnest endeavour to tear that net to pieces, and to expose this poison, that none of you may be entangled unawares and perish unwarned.

Coming back, then, to the purpose with which I started, earnestly and personally to speak to the lingerer, I should like to ask you, my beloved friend, if this matter about which you are still hesitating is not of vital importance to you? It concerns your soul, yourself, your true self; it deals with your destiny, your impending, your eternal destiny. You are immortal; you acknowledge a deathless principle within you; and you are conscious that you shall live for ever in happiness or woe. Do you think you ought to put off all preparation for the future that awaits you! If I knew that some one was about to defraud you of your estate, and that unless you were diligent about it you would lose all your property, I think I should say to you, “Bestir yourself.” If I knew that some deadly disease had begun to prey on your constitution, and that if neglected it would soon gain an ascendancy with which ’twere hard to grapple, I think I should say, “Go to

the physician. Do not delay; for bodily health is a boon to be prized." But, dear friend, if your estate is worth preserving, much more your soul; and if the health of this poor clay ought to be looked to, much more the welfare of your soul—the welfare of your soul for ever. Do you not think if anything should be postponed it should be something of less importance? Was not Christ right when he said, "Seek, *first*, the kingdom of God and his righteousness?" Does not your reason agree that he was right in putting that first? I shall not need to argue with you. I speak as to a man who has his wits about him. Is it not so? Suppose you look to getting on in the world first, you may die and be lost before you have got on! Suppose the taking of a degree at the university should be your first concern—that would be a poor recompense. The honours of learning could not mitigate the terrors of judgment. Do you not feel now (if you will let your better nature speak) that the very first thing a man should see to should be this,—to be reconciled to God and have all right with him for eternity? I will then ask you another question—is there anything so very pleasant in a state of enmity to God, that you should wish to remain in it? Why should Lot want to linger in Sodom? He had often been vexed there. The very night before he had his house beset with rioters. Why should he want to linger? Have you found any great comfort in being undecided? Is there anything very fascinating in remaining hesitant and halting between two opinions? Dear friend, if your condition is at all like what mine was before I believed in Jesus, I know you would be glad enough to get out of it. Oh, how

earnest I was sometimes in seeking Christ! Oh, how wretched I was at other times that I could not find him! Then, again, I was stupidly senseless about divine things, and my self-upbraidings would not let me be at peace. It is a most unhappy condition to be in—to have light enough to know that you are in the dark and no more, to have just enough grace to feel that you have not the grace that can save you, to be enough awakened to feel that if you remain as you are, you must perish for ever. I do not see anything in this hesitating condition that should allure you to keep in it any longer than you can help. Beloved friends, have you ever seriously weighed, if not I will ask you to do so, the unutterable horror of the destruction which must come upon you if you are not decidedly a believer in Christ, and, on the other hand, the unspeakable glory and bliss which will belong to you if you are led to trust in Jesus and are saved? I can scarcely recall the details of a little incident in Russian history which might illustrate the emergency: but the fact, as far as my memory serves, was this. The Czar had died suddenly, and in the dead of night one of the counsellors of the empire came to the Princess Elizabeth and said to her, "You must come at once and take possession of the crown." She hesitated, for there were difficulties in the way, and she did not desire the position; but he said, "Now, sit down, Princess, for a minute." Then he drew her two pictures. One was the picture of herself and the Count thrown into prison, racked with tortures, and presently both brought out to die beneath the axe. "That," he said, "you can have if you like." The other picture was of herself with the imperial

crown of all the Russias on her brow, and all the princes bowing before her, and all the nation doing her homage. "That," said he, "is the other side of the question. But, to-night, your Majesty must choose which it shall be." With the two pictures vividly depicted before her mind's eye she did not hesitate long, but cast in her choice for the crown. Now I would fain paint to you such pictures, only I lack the skill. You will either sink for ever down in deeper and yet deeper woe, filled with remorse because you brought it all upon yourself, or else, if you decide for Christ, and trust in him, you shall enter into the bliss of those who for ever and for ever, without admixture of grief, enjoy felicity before the throne of God. To my mind, there ought to be no halting as to the choice. It should be made. I pray God's Holy Spirit to help you to make it to-night. On this winged hour eternity is hung. The choice of this night may be the cooling of the wax which now is soft. Once cooled, it will bear the impress throughout eternity. God grant it may be a resolve for Christ, for his cause, for his cross, for his crown.

I would like still, dear friend, to hold you by the button which I laid hold of just now, and to say to you, What is it that has kept you waiting so long? Did not I meet you some years ago in the street, and you said to me, "Sir, I have been a hearer of yours for many years": and I said, "Oh, yes, and when did you join the church?" and you said, "Ah, I have never done that;" and I said, "Why not?" and you were honest enough to say, "Because I am afraid I should be very much out of place there; for I am not a believer in

Christ." Do you recollect how I squeezed your hand and said, "Ah, I hope it will not be long before you give your heart to the Lord," and you said, "Well, I hope not too"? It is a good long while now; and you have been getting grey since then. I dare say, if I were to shake hands again with you to-night, and put the same question, you would make the same reply; and in ten years' time, if you and I live, we shall be still relatively in the same position—I still pleading and you still saying, "Yes, yes, yes, it is very right." Nay, nay, I answer, it is very wrong; that consenting without complying: not doing what the gospel bids you do, yielding and resisting as it were by turns; repenting and then forgetting. Forgetting! ay, forgetting, and forgetting, till these delays will cast you into irrevocable ruin. What is it you are waiting for, my friend? Is there some sin you cannot give up? What sin is worth being damned for? If there be one, keep on with it. I defy you to defend your negligence. Put it to this test,—if there be any supposable delight that is worth the endurance of eternal wrath, pursue that delight, however sensual it may be, with avidity; but if there be not, do not play the fool or act the madman. Do I hear you plead ignorance? I would make some excuse for you, if I thought the plea were just and true, but suppose for a minute that it is so. Then, dear friend, ought not you to begin to search the Scriptures at once? Should not you be making intensely earnest inquiries that you might know the certainty of these things? For the soul to be without knowledge is not good, but if you are perishing for lack of knowledge there certainly is

no reason why you should. Many of us would only be too delighted, if we might tell you still more fully what is the way of salvation. Well, but do you tell me that it is inconvenient just now? Are you promising yourself a more favourable opportunity? Let me ask you, Do you imagine you will be any better off to-morrow than you are to-day? Do you think in ten years' time you will be more likely to lay hold on Christ than you are at present? I do not think you will. Have you ever seen sponges that have been turned into flints? Well, that is a slow process, it takes a long time. The like process, however, is gradually happening to you; every year you are getting more flinty. The drip, drip, drip of this world's care and sin is petrifying you. You are getting stony. It strikes me the best time to repent in is this moment; and the very best season in which to fly to Jesus is now. Ere yet the clock has ticked again your heart will have grown more callous. It certainly does not soften. When will there be any influence more potent than there is now to help you? The Spirit of God is ready now; do you want more than his power? The blood of Christ is a full atonement for sin; do you want anything more efficacious than that for your salvation? Do you expect Christ to come down again on earth to save you? Do you want any promise fuller than that which the Bible has in it now, or any invitation more gracious than that which the gospel gives to you now? "To-day is the accepted time: to-day is the day of salvation." I pray you, my lingering friend, linger no longer. Oh, how I wish I could put my hand in thine and lead thee to the Saviour! but

I cannot. I will, however, pray him to lead thee this very night. "I will think of it," say you. No, that is the very thing I do not want you to do. I want you to believe in Jesus now, and talk about thinking of it to-morrow. In your seat, if you will rest in Jesus, and trust your soul in his hands, you are saved this very moment. It is an instantaneous work.

"The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives
Salvation in full through his blood."

Oh that thou wouldest exercise that simple faith now, and not talk about thinking of it to-morrow; for to-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow, alas, to-morrow never comes! It is in no calendar except the almanack of fools. Each day to the wise man is to-day as it comes. The fool wastes to-day, and so he squanders all the days of his life. O lingerer, I beseech thee think now of the long time thou hast lingered. It may well suffice thee: it has surely been protracted and persisted in enough. I would say to thee, in the words of one of old, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" and quote the saying of yet another, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve," and may God, the Holy Ghost, guide the choice, and he shall have the praise.

II. Now, I want to speak a little upon another topic. Let me remind the lingerer that while he lingers he endangers the souls of other people. When Lot went to his sons-in-law, and told them that the city was to be destroyed, "he was to them as one that mocked." How would they say to him, "Go to, old dotard! dost thou think we believe thee? The sky is clear and

blue, and the sun has risen: dost thou think we believe thy nonsense about fire and brimstone coming out of heaven? We don't believe thee." When Lot lingered—he was defeating his own purpose, and doing the worst imaginable thing, if he wanted to convince his sons-in-law that he spake the truth; for while he lingered, they would say, "The old fool does not believe it himself, for if he did believe it, he would pack up and haste away: nay, he would take his daughters by the hand and lead them out of the city at once." A little hesitancy in the conduct of a man who professed to believe that a dreadful judgment was imminent would be sufficient to give them umbrage—quite reason enough to make them say, "He does not believe himself what he tells us." Have not some of you spoken seriously to others about the value of their souls, though you are not saved yourselves. Did you try the other day to rebuke a swearer? I am glad you did. You are a member of a Temperance Association, and you do what you can to stay drunkenness. I am glad you do. You will not allow sin to pass unrebuked in your presence. But, hark ye, man, with what face dost thou reprove others whilst thou art not decided thyself? Where is thy consistency? Should they turn round on thee and say, "If there is anything reliable in the grace of God, why are you not reconciled to him? If there is anything desirable in religion, why do you not walk according to its precepts? If Christ be a Saviour, why do you not yield to him and obey his ordinances?" I know not what answer you could give. I cannot imagine any response but a blush that should betoken your shame and confusion of face.

The mischief that Lot did to his daughters-in-law was yet more aggravated, for all the while he was hesitating they were sure to hesitate too. He was keeping them waiting. They were in jeopardy as well as himself. How many comrades, young man, you might have instructed in the faith before now had you been yourself decided! It is a happy circumstance when a young married couple become converted to God before their little ones are able to imitate a bad example. I thank God for a father whom I know and honour; only one of all his children can recollect the time when the evening was spent in playing cards, and that one recollects the night when they were all thrown into the fire and burnt. Only one of his children recollects when the Sabbath-day was wont to be spent in quiet walks and pleasant recreations; but not in public worship or private devotion. He recollects the rearing of the family altar, when prayer was made a household institute. He can well remember the earnest entreaties made that the father's sin might not be visited upon the children. Oh happy circumstance! Had the parents been converted later in life, the ill example might never have been wiped out. The converted father might have found that the children did not emulate the good example of his regenerate state; but preferred to imitate him in the negligence and sinfulness of his natural unrenewed life. When you, who are parents, habitually demur and hesitate, do you not think that other members of your family will hesitate too? I have noticed, on the contrary, that where there is a man or a woman knowing the truth in a measure, but not decided, no sooner does the husband or the wife become savingly

converted than the other follows suit, and avows the same faith. Not unfrequently the children follow in their footsteps, awakened by an example that comes home to them fresh and forceful. It only wanted, somehow, in God's providence, the decision of the head of the household. This has influenced all the family. It becomes, therefore, a very mournful reflection that there should be men and women lingering upon the brink of the grave who are helping others to halt; their example being the means of keeping others in a state of perilous hazard. You must know, many of you, that it is so with yourselves: therefore, I shall leave the truth to weigh upon your conscience, hoping it will stir you up to decision.

Let me venture to make one other observation here. I should not wonder if the death of Lot's wife might not partly be attributed to Lot himself. If you think that this is a severe reflection, I would remind you that she must have seen her husband hesitate. She was a woman far lower down in the scale than he was: when, therefore, she saw him lingering, it was no wonder if that contagious example led her to look back. Perhaps, amongst the regrets of Lot throughout the rest of his life, there would be this one—"I did not hasten myself out of that city as I should: I was in no hurry; I tarried, and lingered, and paused; I had almost to be dragged out by the angels' hands myself; and this, it may be, led her to look back with lingering, and then to be turned into a pillar of salt. Oh, undecided man! I would not like thee to feel that the blood of thy wife was on thy skirts. Oh, undecided father! I should dread to have thee think, in years to come, "The loss

of my children's souls was due to my procrastination." Alas, it may be so—it may be so! Therefore, now, with a brother's earnest affection, let me come to thee and say, "Thou dost intend to believe; thou hast resolved to be a Christian; thou art no Atheist, and no scoffer; thou art not hardened and rebellious; thy heart is soft and tender, and ready for these things—then yield it up now, yield it completely this night, to that dear hand that once was crucified. That hand shall mould thee according to its own will. Thus saith the Spirit of God to thee to-night. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, for "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved": he that believeth not—though he may have resolved to believe, if he dies believing not—must be damned!

III. Our last word was to be on the means by which God is pleased at times to rouse the lingerers. Let us pray for them, that they may by some means be hastened. I do not expect to see angels come walking down these aisles, or threading their way through these pews to-night; but I do trust that a messenger from God will come, notwithstanding that. Sometimes lingerers have been quickened and decided by their own reflections being blessed to them by the Holy Spirit. A very simple observation was once the means of deciding a man. He was a mechanic, and a man of a mathematical turn of mind. He had attended a meeting. The meeting was held in an upper room, and on going below stairs, his attention was attracted by the beam that had supported the people, and he said to himself, "What a weight there must have been upon that!" Just at that very minute, into his mind there flashed, "And what a

weight there is resting upon you!" How that thought should have followed the other, I cannot tell, but as he turned it over, it did seem to him that he had a weight of sin enough to crush him; that he could not bear up under such a weight; and that his soul would come down in ruin like many a building whose beams have not been strong enough; after enduring awhile it has given way at last. I mind not what form the thought may take: I only pray that some such thought may come home and decide you. Occasionally, a good man has been the means of suggesting the thought that shaped the course of a fellow creature. A smith was blowing his bellows one day, when the saintly McCheyne stepped into the smithy for shelter from a shower of rain. As the smith was blowing the coals and they were at a great heat, he simply said to him, "What does that fire make you think of?" He never waited for an answer, but went his way. It made the smith think of the wrath to come, and it made him flee from it too. We cannot tell what may be, in the gracious providence of God, the means of bringing you to decision. He that used an angel's hand with Lot, can use a well-timed observation with you. Therefore, I urge all Christian people that they use every opportunity, and study to season their conversation with grace. Sow beside all waters, for you know not which may prosper, this or that. Sometimes men have been decided by the deaths of their relatives or their friends. "I may be the next" has been suggested to them. When the dear child has been buried, it has made the afflicted father reflect that he shall never meet it in heaven unless he mends his ways. So, too, the bereaved mother in the bitterness of her heart, has sought a Saviour, in

the hope that she might meet her babe again in the better land. Such things are good. They are blessed deaths that bring eternal life to the survivors! These little ones well spend their lives in winging their flight to Paradise, and showing us the way. But surely, dear friend, you don't require a distressing visitation to decide you. I trust your heart will be given to Christ without the dire necessity that you should lose those you love on earth. Occasionally, and very occasionally, persons have been decided by personal sickness. Some, but, oh, how few, have witnessed the good confession in the hour of death. A soldier in the army of the Potomac, of whom I somewhere read, was taken to the rear to die. He was badly wounded; he was also suffering from fever. Some one had told him, just before the fever came on, of a soldier found asleep at his post who was condemned to die. The poor fellow in his delirium imagining that he was that soldier, cried out to the doctor who was attending him, "Sir, I am to be shot to-morrow morning; and as I wish to have all right, I want you to send for the chaplain at once. I want to see him." The doctor, to calm his fears, said, "No, no, you are not to be shot to-morrow morning; it's a mistake." "Oh, but I am," he said; "I know I shall." "But I will be here," said the doctor, "and if anyone comes to touch you, I will have him arrested. I will take care you shall not die." "Is it so, doctor?" said he, in calmer accents, "then you need not send for the chaplain; I shall not want him just yet." So the truth came out that fear, not faith, animated him, though it was but spoken in a feverish dream. How many men, if they thought they

were going to die, would say, "Oh yes, let all be said and done that it is right to say and do;" but persuade them that they are likely to live a little longer, they will wait, and adjourn their faith while they can allay their fear. Not very often is the decision genuine which men arrive at under the stress of that fear which comes of impending dissolution. May God's spirit deepen in some here present their sense of sin. May your crimes sting you. May you feel your guilt. May you hate yourselves because of your transgressions. May you be distressed because of your ingratitude, your disobedience, your unbelief. Then you will long to get rid of this horrible evil, this enmity against God. May you feel to-night what a mischievous thing it is for the creature to be at variance with his Creator, for man to be out of order with his God. What a shameful thing it is for the most favoured of creatures to be inimical to the Sovereign that favours him! What an incredible thing it is, that while the ox knoweth its owner and the ass its master's crib, man, the object of love divine, should not know his Lord, his Friend, his Benefactor! Oh, may you give no rest to your eyes or slumber to your eyelids till you have opened your mouth to profess the name of the Lord, and fled for refuge to take hold of his righteousness and strength. Oh, that you might be too agitated to sleep till you have confessed your sin into the ear of the Great Elder Brother, and sought pardon from your God through Christ your Saviour. There is forgiveness; there is mercy to be had—to be had *now*. Whosoever believeth in Christ Jesus shall be saved. Believing is trusting, relying upon, a simple but sincere dependence. May his grace enable you to

cast yourself upon his mercy and credit his promise in this good hour, so you shall be this night enrolled among the saved, and he shall have all the praise. The Lord grant it, for Jesus Christ's sake.





A Soul-Stirring Meditation.

“Without Christ.”—Ephesians ii. 12.



WE shall have two things to consider this evening—the misery of our past estate, and the great deliverance which God has wrought for us.

I. As for the misery of our past estate, be it known unto you that, in common with the rest of mankind, believers were once without Christ. No tongue can tell the depth of wretchedness that is hid in this half a sentence. There is no poverty like it; no indigence or destitution that is comparable to it; for those who die so, there is no outlook, but dark desertion, dire despair, irretrievable ruin: all sorrow, no succour. Without Christ! If this be the description of some of you, we need not affright you with talk about the fires of hell; there is surely peril enough in the privation to startle you, when you are in such a desperate state as to be without Christ. Oh, what terrible evils lie clustering thick within these two words!

The man who is without Christ is without any of those spiritual blessings which only Christ can bestow. Christ is the life of the believer, but the man who is without

Christ is dead in trespasses and sins. There he lies; let us stand and weep over his corpse. It is decent and clean, and well laid out, but life is absent, and life being absent, there is no knowledge, no feeling, no power. What can we do? Shall we take the word of God and preach to this dead sinner? We are bidden to do so, and therefore we will attempt it; but so long as he is without Christ no result will follow, any more than when Elisha's servant laid the staff upon the child—there was no noise, nor sound, nor hearing. As long as that sinner is without Christ we may give him ordinances, if we dare; we may pray for him, we may keep him under the sound of the ministry, but everything will be in vain. Till thou, O quickening Spirit, come to that sinner, he will still be dead in trespasses and sins. Till Jesus is revealed to him there can be no life.

So, too, Christ is the light of the world. *Light* is the gift of Christ. "In him was light, and the light was the light of men." Men sit in darkness until Jesus appears. The gloom is thick and dense; not sun, nor moon, nor star appeareth, and there can be no light to illumine the understanding, the affections, the conscience. Man has no power to get light. He may strike the damp match of reason, but it will not yield him a clear flame. The candle of superstition, with its tiny glare, will but expose the darkness in which he is wrapped. Rise, morning star! Come, Jesus, come! Thou art the sun of righteousness; and healing is beneath thy wings. Without Christ there is no light of true spiritual knowledge, no light of true spiritual enjoyment, no light in which the brightness of truth can be seen, or the warmth of fellowship proved. The soul,

like the men of Napthali, sits in darkness, and seeth no light.

Without Christ *there is no peace*. See that poor soul hunted by the dogs of hell. It flies swift as the wind, but faster far do the hunters pursue. It seeks a covert yonder in the pleasures of the world, but the baying of the hell-hounds affright it in the festive haunts. It seeks to toil up the mountain of good works, but its legs are all too weak to bear it beyond the oppressor's rule. It doubles; it changes its tack; it goes from right to left, but the hell-dogs are too swift of foot, and too strong of wind to lose their prey, and till Jesus Christ shall open his bosom for that poor hunted thing to hide itself within, it shall have no peace.

Without Christ *there is no rest*. The wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, and only Jesus can say to that sea—"Peace, be still."

Without Christ *there is no safety*. The vessel must fly before the gale, for it has no anchor on board; it may dash upon the rocks, for it has no chart, and no pilot. Come what may, it is given up to the mercy of wind and waves. Safety it cannot know without Christ. But let Christ come on board that soul, and it may laugh at all the storms of earth, and e'en the whirlwinds which the Prince of the power of the air may raise need not confound it; but without Christ there is no safety for it.

Without Christ, again, *there is no hope*. Sitting wrecked upon this desert rock, the lone soul looks far away, but marks nothing that can give it joy. If, perchance, it fancies that a sail is in the distance, it is soon undeceived. The poor soul is thirsty, and around it

flows only a sea of brine, soon to change to an ocean of fire. It looks upward, and there is an angry God; downward, and there are yawning gulfs; on the right hand, and there are accusing sounds; on the left hand, and there are tempting fiends. It is all lost! lost! lost! without Christ, utterly lost, and until Christ comes not a single beam of hope can make glad that anxious eye.

Without Christ, beloved, remember that *all the religious acts of men are vanity*. What are they but mere air-bags, having nothing in them whatever that God can accept? There is the semblance of worship,—the altar, the victim, the wood laid in order,—and the votaries bow the knee, or prostrate their bodies, but Christ alone can send the fire of heaven's acceptance. Without Christ the offering, like that of Cain's, shall lie upon the stones, but it shall never rise in fragrant smoke, accepted by the God of heaven. Without Christ your church-goings are a form of slavery, your chapel-meetings a bondage. Without Christ your prayers are but empty wind, your repentances are wasted tears, your alms-givings and your good deeds are but a coating of thin veneer to hide your base iniquities. Your professions are white-washed sepulchres, fair to look upon, but inwardly full of rottenness. Without Christ your religion is dead, corrupt, a stench, a nuisance before God—a thing of abhorrence, for where there is no Christ there is no life in any devotion, nothing in it for God to see that can possibly please him. And this, mark you, is a true description, not of some, but of all who are without Christ. You moral people without Christ, you are lost as much as the immoral. You rich

and respectable people, without Christ you will be as surely damned as the prostitute that walks the streets at midnight. Without Christ, though you should heap up your charitable donations, endow your almshouses and hospitals, yea, though you should give your bodies to be burned, no merit would be imputed to you. All these things would profit you nothing. Without Christ, e'en if you might be raised on the wings of flaming zeal, or pursue your eager course with the enthusiasm of a martyr, you shall yet prove to be but the slave of your own passion, and the victim of your own folly. Unsanctified and unblest, you must, then, be shut out of heaven, and banished from the presence of God. Without Christ you are destitute of every benefit which he, and he alone, can bestow.

Without Christ implies, of course, that you are without the benefit of *all those gracious offices of Christ, which are so necessary to the sons of men*, you have no true *prophet*. You may pin your faith to the sleeve of man, and be deceived. You may be orthodox in your creed, but unless you have Christ in your heart, you have no hope of glory. Without Christ truth itself will prove a terror to you. Like Balaam, your eyes may be open while your life is alienated. Without Christ that very *cross* which does save some will become to you as a *gallows* upon which your soul shall die. Without Christ you have no *priest* to atone or to intercede on your behalf. There is no fountain in which you can wash away your guilt; no passover blood which you can sprinkle on your lintel to turn aside the destroying angel; no smoking altar of incense for you, no smiling God sitting between the cherubim. Without Christ

you are an alien from everything which the priesthood can procure for your welfare. Without Christ you have no shepherd to tend, no King to help you; you cannot call in the day of trouble upon one who is strong to deliver. The angels of God, who are the standing army of King Jesus, are your enemies, and not your allies. Without Christ Providence is working your ill, and not your good. Without Christ you have no *advocate* to plead your cause in heaven; you have no representative to stand up yonder and represent you, and prepare a place for you. Without Christ you are as sheep without a shepherd; without Christ you are a body without a head; without Christ you are miserable orphans without a father, and your widowed soul is without a husband. Without Christ you are without a *Saviour*; how will you do? what will become of you when you find out the value of salvation at the last pinch, the dreary point of despair? and without a *friend* in heaven you must needs be if you are without Christ. To sum up all, you are without anything that can make life blessed, or death happy. Without Christ, though you be rich as Cræsus, and famous as Alexander, and wise as Socrates, yet are you naked and poor and miserable, for you lack him by whom are all things, and for whom are all things, and who is himself all in all.

Surely this might be enough to arouse the conscience of the most heedless? But ah! without any of the blessings which Christ brings, and to miss all the good offices which Christ fills—this is only to linger on the side issues! The imminent peril is to be *without Christ himself*. Do you see there the Saviour in human form—God made flesh dwelling among us? He loves his

people, and came to earth to wipe out an iniquity which had stained them most vilely, and to work out a righteousness which should cover them most gloriously; but without Christ that living Saviour is nothing to you. Do you see him led away as a sheep to the slaughter, fastened to the cruel wood, bleeding, dying? Without Christ you are without the virtue of that great sacrifice; you are without the merit of that atoning blood. Do you see him lying in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, asleep in death? That sleep is a burial of all the sins of his people, but without Christ your sins are not atoned for; your transgressions are yet unburied; they walk the earth; they shall go before you to judgment; they shall clamour for your condemnation; they shall drag you down without hope. Without Christ, remember, you have no share in his resurrection. Bursting the bonds of death, you too shall rise, but not to newness of life, nor yet to glory, for shame and everlasting contempt shall be your portion if you be without Christ. See him as he mounts on high; he rides in his triumphal car through the streets of heaven; he scatters gifts for men, but without Christ there are none of those gifts for you. There are no blessings for those who are without Christ. He sits on that exalted throne, and pleads and reigns for ever, but without Christ you have no part in his intercession, and you shall have no share in his glory. He is coming. Hark, the trumpet rings! My ear prophetic seems to catch the strain! He comes, surrounded by majestic pomp, and all his saints shall reign with him, but without Christ you can have no part nor lot in all that splendour. He goes back to his Father, and surrenders his

kingdom, and his people are for ever safe with him. Without Christ there shall be none to wipe away the tears from your eyes, no one to lead you to the fountain of living waters, no hand to give you a palm branch, no smile to make your immortality blessed. Oh! my dear hearers, I cannot tell you what unutterable abysses of wretchedness and misery are comprised here within the fulness of the meaning of these dreadful words—without Christ.

At this present hour, if you are without Christ, you lack the very essence of good, by reason of which your choicest privileges are an empty boast instead of a substantial boon. Without Christ, *all the ordinances and means of grace are nothing worth.* Even this precious Book, that might be weighed with diamonds—and he that was wise would choose the Book and leave the precious stones—even this sacred volume is of no benefit to you. You may have Bibles in your houses, as I trust you all have, but what is the Bible but a dead letter without Christ? Ah! I would you could all say what a poor woman once said. “I have Christ here,” as she put her hand on the Bible, “and I have Christ here,” as she put her hand on her heart, “and I have Christ there,” as she raised her eyes towards heaven; but if you have not Christ in the heart you will not find Christ in the Book, for he is discovered there in his sweetness and his blessedness and his excellence only by those who know him, and love him in their hearts. Do not get the idea that a certain quantity of Bible-reading, and particular times spent in repeating prayers, and regular attendance at a place of worship, and the systematic contribution of a guinea or so to the support

of public worship, and private charities, will ensure the salvation of your souls. No, you must be born again. And that you cannot be; for it is not possible that you could have been born again if you are still living without Christ. To have Christ is the indispensable condition of entering heaven. If you have him, though compassed about with a thousand infirmities, you shall yet see the brightness of the eternal glory; but if you have not Christ, alas for all your toil and the wearisome slavery of your religion, you can but weave a righteousness of your own, which shall disappoint your hope, and incur the displeasure of God.

And without Christ, dear friends, there comes the solemn reflection that *ere long ye shall perish*. Of that I do not like to talk, but I would like you to think of it. Without Christ you may live, young man—though, mark, you shall miss the richest joys of life. Without Christ you may live, hale strong man in middle age—though mark, without him, you shall miss the greatest support amidst your troubles. Without Christ you may live, old man; and lean upon your staff, content with the earth into which you are so soon to drop, though mark you, you shall lose the sweetest consolation which your weakness could have found. But remember, man, thou art soon to die. It matters not how strong thou art; death is stronger than thou, and he will pull thee down, even as the stag-hound drags down his victim, and then, “how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan,” without Christ? How wilt thou do when the eyes begin to close, without Christ? How wilt thou do, sinner, when the death-rattle is in thy throat, without Christ? When they prop thee up

with pillows, when they stand weeping round thine expiring form, when the pulse grows faint and few, when thou hast to lift the veil, and stand disembodied before the dreadful eyes of an angry God, how wilt thou do without Christ? And when the judgment-trump shall wake thee from thy slumber in the tomb, and body and soul shall stand together at that last and dread assize, in the midst of that tremendous crowd, sinner, how wilt thou do without Christ? When the reapers come forth to gather in the harvest of God, and the sickles are red with blood, and the vintage is cast into the wine-press of his wrath, and it is trodden until the blood runs forth up to the horse's girdles—how wilt thou do then, I conjure thee, without Christ? Oh! sinner, I pray thee let these words sound in thine ears till they ring into thy heart. I would like you to think of them to-morrow, and the next day, and the next. Without Christ! I would like to make thee think of dying, of being judged, of being condemned, without Christ! May God in his mercy enable thee to see thy state, and fly to him who is able to save, even unto the uttermost, all them that come unto God by him. Christ is to be had for the asking. Christ is to be had for the receiving. Stretch out thy withered hand and take him; trust him, and he will be thine evermore, and thou shalt be with him where he is, in an eternity of joy.

II. Having thus reviewed the misery of our past estate, let us endeavour, with the little time we have left, to excite the thankfulness of God's people for what the Lord has done for them.

We are not without Christ now, but, let me ask you, who are believers, where you would have been now

without Christ? As for some of you, you might, indeed you would, have been to-night in the ale-house or gin-palace. You would have been with the boisterous crew that make merriment on the Lord's-day; you know you would, for "such were some of you." You might have been even worse; you might have been in the harlot's house; you might have been violating the laws of man as well as the laws of God, "for even such" were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified. Where might you not have been without Christ? You might have been in hell; you might have been shut out for ever from all mercy, condemned to eternal banishment from the presence of God. I think the Indian's picture is a very fair one of where we should have been without Christ. When asked what Christ had done for him, he picked up a worm, put it on the ground, and made a ring of straw and wood round it, which he set alight. As the wood began to glow the poor worm began to twist and wriggle in agony, whereupon he stooped down, took it gently up with his finger and said—"That is what Jesus did for me; I was surrounded, without power to help myself, by a ring of dreadful fire that must have been my ruin, but his pierced hand lifted me out of the burning." Think of that, Christians, and as your hearts melt, come to his table, and praise him that you are not now without Christ.

Then think *what his blood has done for you*. Take only one thing out of a thousand. It has put away your many, many sins. You were without Christ, and your sins stood like yonder mountain, whose black and rugged cliff threatens the very skies. There fell a drop of Jesu's blood upon it, and it all vanished in a moment.

The sins of all your days had gone in an instant by the application of the precious blood! Oh! bless Jehovah's name that you can say—

“ Now freed from sin, I walk at large,
My Saviour's blood my full discharge;
Content at his dear feet I lay,
A sinner saved, and homage pay.”

Bethink you, too, now that you have Christ, of *the way in which he came* and made you partaker of himself. Oh! how long he stood in the cold, knocking at the door of your heart. You would not have him; you despised him; you resisted him; you kicked against him; you did, as it were, spit in his face, and put him to open shame to be rid of him. Yet he would have you, and so, overcoming all your objections, and overlooking all your unworthiness, at length he rescued you and avouched you to be his own.

Consider, beloved, what might have been your case had he left you to your own free agency. You might have had his blood on your head in aggravation of your guilt. Instead of that you have got his blood applied to your heart, in token of your pardon. You know right well what a difference *that* makes. Oh! that was a dreadful cry in the streets of Jerusalem, “His blood be on us, and on our children,” and Jerusalem's streets flowing with gore witnessed how terrible a thing it is to have Christ's blood visited on his enemies. But, beloved, you have that precious blood for the cleansing of your conscience. It has sealed your acceptance, and you can, therefore, rejoice in the ransom he has paid, and the remission you have received with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

And I would not have you forget the vast *expense which it cost to procure this priceless boon*. Christ could not have been yours had he lived in heaven. He must come down to earth, and even then he could not be fully yours till he had bled and died. Oh! the dreadful portals through which Christ had to pass before he could find his way to you! He finds you now right easily, but before he could come to you he must himself pass through the grave. Think of *that*, and be astonished!

And *why are you not left to be without Christ?* I suppose there are some persons whose minds naturally incline towards the doctrines of free will. I can only say that mine inclines as naturally towards the doctrines of sovereign grace. I cannot understand the reason why I am saved, except upon the ground that God would have it so. I cannot, if I look ever so earnestly, discover any kind of reason in myself why I should be a partaker of divine grace. If I am not tonight without Christ, it is only because Christ Jesus would have his will with me, and that will was that I should be with him where he is, and should share his glory. I can put the crown nowhere but upon the head of him whose mighty grace has saved me from going down into the pit.

Beloved, let us mention one thing more out of the thousand things which we must leave unsaid. *Remember what you have got to-night now that you have got Christ*. No, no, no, do not be telling me what you have *not* got. You have not got a certain income, you say; you have not got a competence; you have not got wealth; you have not got friends; you have not got a comfortable

house. No, but you have got your Saviour; you have got Christ; and what does that mean? "He that spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him, also, freely give us all things?" The man who has got Christ has got everything. There are all things in one in Christ Jesus, and if you once get him you are rich to all the intents of bliss. What, have Christ Jesus, and be discontented? Have Christ and murmur? Beloved, let me chide you gently, and pray you to lay aside that evil habit. If you have Christ then you have God the Father to be your protector, and God the Spirit to be your comforter. You have present things working together for your good, and future things to unravel your happier portion; you have angels to be your servitors both on earth and in heaven. You have all the wheels of Providence revolving for your benefit; you have the stones of the field in league with you; you have your daily trials sanctified for your benefit; and you have your earthly joys hallowed with a blessing; your gains and your losses are alike profitable to you; your additions and your diminutions shall alike swell the tide of your soul's satisfaction; you have more than any other creatures can boast as their portion; you have more than all the world beside could yield to regale your pure taste, and ravish your happy spirits. And now, will you not be glad? I would have you come to this feasting-table this evening saying within yourselves, "Since I am not without Christ, but Jesus Christ is mine, I do rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice."

And oh, dear Christian friends, if you have lost your

evidences, go to Christ to find them all. Do not go striking your matches to light your candles, but go direct to the sun and get your light from his full orb. You who are doubting, desponding, and cast down, do not get forraging up the mouldy bread of yesterday, but go and get the manna which falls fresh to-day at the foot of the cross. Now, you have been wandering and backsliding, do not stay away from Jesus because of your unworthiness, but let your very sins impel you to come the faster to your Saviour's feet. Come, ye sinners; come, ye saints; come, ye who dare not say that ye are his people; come, you whose faith is but as a grain of mustard seed; come, you who have not any faith at all; come now to Jesus, who says, "Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely."

May God grant that some who feel that they are without Christ because they have no enjoyment, nor any sense of communion with him, may now take hold of his name, his covenant, his promises with a lively faith, nay more, may they find him to the rapture of their souls, and he shall have all the praise.





The Wandering Bird.

"As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place."—PROV. xxvii. 8.

SOLOMON spoke from observation. He had seen certain persons of a vagrant kind; and he perceived that they seldom or never prospered. Moreover, he spoke from inspiration as well as from observation, hence the sagacity of the philosopher is in this case supported by the authority of the preacher. We may, therefore, take this proverb, first, as the dictate of human wisdom gathered by long experience; and then next as the testimony of divine wisdom, commended to us by infallible revelation. The principle it inculcates is alike applicable to the common affairs of life and to the higher pursuits which belong to our spiritual interests.

I. In the common affairs of life we believe Solomon to be correct in his statement that "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place." The unrest of that man's mind and the instability of his conduct, who is constantly making a change of his position and purpose, augurs no success for any of his adventures. Unless he maketh the change very wisely, and hath abundant reason for it, he will make a change for the worse, as the bird doth that

leaveth her nest. Some people are eager to leave their country and fly from their native shores. This is not always an ill thing for men to do; for thereby nations have been formed and deserts have been peopled. When a man finds it impossible to provide bread for an increasing family in this country, one of the wisest courses he can adopt is to cross the sea and seek profitable employment in another land. But there are some spirits of such a roving caste that they seem never to be satisfied at home. They feel persuaded that if they were under other skies they would succeed; whereas, as a matter of general fact, a man who cannot prosper in England will not prosper anywhere, and many of those who have gone abroad would be but too glad to get home again. Without taking counsel from God, and weighing the matter long, it is perilous for a man to leave the Christian privileges of this country. Let alone other considerations, it is no light thing to turn aside from the land where sanctuaries are so numerous, and where the gospel is so clearly proclaimed, to go abroad, where there may be some pecuniary advantages, but where there must be much spiritual loss. Well may the man take anxious thought before he goes, or else, mayhap, when he finds himself in Australia, he will long to be in New Zealand, and when he does not prosper there he will pant for the United States, and not getting on there he will, perhaps, be wanting to come back to Old England, and so he will spend the best of his days in vacillating as to where he shall spend them.

The like is also true with respect to a change of occupation. Some persons are one thing to-day, but

you do not know what they will be to-morrow. Evidently they were not cut out for this, and therefore they think they must have been ordained for that, and, as they have not thrived in one line of business, they feel certain that they must have made a little mistake, and that if they could get into another line they would prosper. Well, when a man is in error about his calling, if it really be not his calling, let him leave it ; but let him first be sure that it is not his calling, for otherwise he will sin against the express words of inspiration. The apostle Paul says, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called,"—that is to say, the occupation or profession in life you were engaged in when you were converted need not be rashly abandoned. Therein you may enjoy communion with God. But if you go running before the cloud, and with presumptuous self-will get out of the path that Providence has assigned you, you will be sure to smart for it. It is ours to follow, never to lead. When we clearly see our way, let us walk therein ; but unless we have that way clearly manifested to us, let us abide still in our nest.

This also applies to those who want to be always changing their situation and their acquaintance—masters never satisfied with their servants, and servants always discontented with their employers. We know many who say, "There are so many temptations in the place where I am ; I will try another." Well, I am not at all sure, dear friends, that you are right. As for the temptations that trouble me, I would rather endure them than encounter any fresh ones. I may know something about my weakness in the present trial, but I cannot tell how I might stagger under another. I

should recommend you to be rather chary of changing your trials. To exchange one trial for another is all the relief you will get in this world. All is vanity under the sun. The whole creation groaneth together. Amidst sorrow and sighing thus universal our lot is cast. From the sick man's bitter experience we cannot escape—

“ We toss from side to side in pain,
But 'tis a poor relief we gain,
To shift the place but not the pain.”

You may change your position o'er and o'er again, but you will always be exposed to temptation. Until you get beyond yonder azure sky you will never be out of gunshot of the devil. Evil spirits molest every rank in life. The poor man is sore beset with grievous hardships, and the rich man is encompassed with seductive snares. He who toils with his hand may have some cause to complain, but he who toils with his brain will become the victim of a sorer complaint. Should you fly to the utmost verge of the green earth, temptation would still pursue you. Everywhere, while you are in the body, you must keep guard, for temptations and trials are the common portion of all that on this earth do dwell. Be not in a hurry, therefore, to fly from one scene of temptation to another. If God ordains that your lot should be altered, be it so. It is yours to accept his allotment either with resignation or with gratitude. But be not hasty or heedless in running from one place to another, lest in yielding to the impulse of a moment you forfeit the comfort of a lifetime.

It may be that these remarks are peculiarly applicable to some people here present. I cannot tell. When

talking about such homely things, our words have sometimes proved to be like an oracle for the guidance of those that have come up to God's house to enquire in his temple. At any rate, dear friends, when the mind is unhinged, or the feelings chafed, it is not easy to exercise a wise discretion. Wait upon God for guidance as to any change in life you may determine, and if the two things be equal—to remain where you are, or to remove elsewhere—choose to abide still, for the chances are, speaking according to man's judgment, in its favour. Reason seems to say that, as it is unwise for the bird to wander from her nest, so it is not desirable for you to wander from your place.

Still keeping to the common use of these words, let us now turn them to another account. This is most certainly true in changing one's religious service in the cause of God. We have a niche, perhaps, in which God has placed us, and we have had some little honour in filling it; but by-and-by another sphere of labour opens up before us, and, like children, easily charmed with novelty, we think we could be more useful in doing something else, and leaving our old work. Let us be very careful in this matter, for "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place." I admired one thing greatly in our deceased friend, Mr. Worcester, who for so long a time kept the gate outside. When I once asked him whether he could not be serviceable to the church as an elder, he said that if he were elected to it he should decline the office, because, he said, "I can do my work as a gate-keeper, but I do not know what I could do as an elder." So he resolved to stick to the work in which

he was acknowledged to do good service. I would have each Christian man do the same.

Some brethren, we know, have such an itching to get into the pulpit that they are impatient of any other office than the preacher's. But there are many in the pulpit nowadays who had better have kept out of it. They were excellent people at prayer-meetings; they were very serviceable indeed to give a little address now and then at a cottage-meeting; they would have been useful deacons, exemplary visitors of the sick, and perhaps good city missionaries. But they thought within themselves that the pulpit ought to be blessed by their distinguished abilities, and so they crept up the pulpit stairs, as little to their own comfort as to the church's edification; and now, had they but the wisdom and the humility to come down again, never more to mount them, it would be well. If you be really called to the ministry, then, in God's name, do not stand back from it; and if a new sphere of labour opens to you, accept it, resting on your God, who can make his strength perfect in your weakness; but be not for ever panting after the highest seats in the synagogue: do not always want the uppermost place at the feast, lest, when the King cometh in, thou shouldst have, with shame, to take a lower room. Wait till the King says—"Friend, come up higher;" never go up higher till you have the King's friendly admonition that the higher place is yours by a call other than your own choice, remembering that "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place,"—from his place, from his proper place in the Church of God, his proper position in the ranks of the Lord's hosts.

Again, I will use it as a proverb very often applicable to ministers. There may be some here to whom this may come as a powerful rebuke. It is a crying evil just now, especially in our own denomination, that ministers are changing their places. The good old ministers used to occupy one charge for fifty years, and the people used to love them, and to hold fast to them. They did not think of moving; they never spoke of resigning, any more than fathers speak of resigning their fatherhood because their boys and girls are sometimes disobedient. They weathered the storm. They knew that all parts of the sea are rough, so they did not want to get out of one bay into another as soon as a little storm came on. I do not know but that some preachers are better moving; and probably they would be better if they were moved off altogether. I think when a man seldom or ever remains in service at one place for more than about two years he has need to question whether he was called into the ministry at all. Our heavenly Husbandman does not generally plant trees in his vineyard that need shifting every two years. God's trees are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which he hath planted. They can stand on the bare mountain's brow, and see the ages of mortals swept away into the tomb. And so a God-sent minister may stand many years in one place, and see man-made ministers swept away, like generations of lichens and mosses, because they have no divine life in them. I love to see a Christian minister, I must say, standing fast in his place. We are not to get into a great pet because there was a little disagreement at a church-meeting, or turn round offended because some deacon

will not be quite as pliable as we could wish, or because the neighbourhood does not seem to increase, or because there are not quite so many conversions as we want. No, sirs, if God shall move us, let us move; but if he doth not move us, let not the devil do it. Do you know what happens when the bird wanders from her nest? Why, there are her own eggs in the nest, and there is no bird which can sit so well on the eggs as the bird that laid them. And so, a Christian minister should recollect that there are some young converts who are his own spiritual children. They are of his own bringing in, through divine grace, and, ordinarily speaking, there is no man who can by any means nurture the young converts like the man who was the means of their conversion. It is well for infants to be brought up by their own mother; and it is a good thing for young converts to be fed under their own spiritual parents. I should not like to trust mine to anybody else for any great length of time. There is always a fear when the parent bird is away that the eggs will grow cold and addled, so that when she comes back she will find that she has lost all her trouble. And so when the minister leaves his people and goes away to some other place, there are many of those who did seem to run well who will turn back. This is a sad result—a tale of wasted labour. Besides, the bird knows that, however uncomfortable its nest may be, there is no other nest in the world so comfortable as the one which it has made itself. And the Christian minister must know that there is no other church so comfortable for him as the church which he was the means of forming. “I dwell among mine own people,” saith the Shunammite. That is

my happiness and my joy to dwell among my own people, and if any man should say to me, "Is there anything in life that thou desirest? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the hosts?" I would answer, No, there is nothing I desire under heaven but to dwell among my own people; if I may but seek their good, and see the Church of God prosper here, it shall be all that I ask of my God this side heaven. Brethren, let those of us who are in the ministry, as far as possible, cling to our churches, and to our fields of labour, remembering that, "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place."

This is equally true (and I am still keeping to the common sense of the passage) of our hearers. Oh! there are some hearers who are sad, sad vagrants. We can have no objection to our hearers going to listen to other ministers, if ever they can be edified thereby, for the bird that sits best on the nest must come off sometimes, especially if there is any food to be had elsewhere. Hear anybody that can profit you. I am sure nothing can gratify me more than to know that you grow in grace, and that your souls are fed on the pure word of truth. If a Church of England minister preaches the gospel in your neighbourhood better than the Baptist minister does, do not go and hear the Baptist; and if you find either Baptist or Independent treating you to free-will instead of free-grace, do not listen to them, but seek out the Presbyterian and hear him, if you find him more sound in the faith; for, after all, your souls must be fed. That is a matter of necessity. Where you can have all

the points of the truth, prefer it, prefer it infinitely; but if you cannot have them all, give your chief care to those which possess the greatest importance. Seek first, in this case, those things which make most for your soul's prosperity. But what I do not like is this—certain people will join a church, and then after about six months will remove their membership to another church, and then another, and so they flit about. They ought to have no moss on them, and I suppose they have none, for they have been always rolling stones. And then, if the minister should die, how many there are who go off directly, for now that the church is in a little difficulty they will all get out of it. Brave sailors these! They want to get out the boat when the ship is in a little bit of a gale, and they leave the Church of God just when their help is most wanted. Oh! they will come and join the church when the church prospers; yes, any quantity of them; but I wonder, if the pastor went away, whether we should find them all remaining faithful? Too many London churches are a sort of flying camp, congregations composed of people always flying from one place to another—a set of gipsy-christians who have no settled abode and no local habitation. They are about as respectable as the gipsies with whom I have compared them. Oh! let not this be ever said of any of you who love your Lord, and who consequently love his Church, but when you are united with his people say,—

“Here would I make my settled rest,
While others go and come;
No more a stranger, or a guest,
But like a child at home.”

If you are wilful in your wandering, you will constantly make worse and worse your condition. By a permanent adhesion to the Church, and a diligent casting in of your whole efforts into the cause of God you shall, through the Holy Spirit, get peace to your own soul and bring prosperity to your companions in Christian fellowship.

II. But now I shall take my text in another way, and try to use the general principle in another sense. There are some men who wander from their place in spiritual things.

Where is the "place" for a *sinner*? The place for a sinner is always at the foot of the cross, looking unto Jesus. Alas, then, the tendency in us all is to be looking for evidences, signs, marks, experiences, graces, and coincidences of one kind or another. Having begun in the Spirit, we are so foolish and so bewitched that we try to get perfect in the flesh. We know that at the first our only comfort came from simply depending upon the finished work of Jesus, and yet we are so demented that we try to get comfort from that poor flesh of ours, which has already been our encumbrance, and will be our plague till it dies. The moment a Christian wanders away from his place,—that is, from the simplicity of his faith in Jesus,—that moment he departs from his safe shelter in the solid rock. What Christ did, what Christ is, what Christ has promised we cling to as the home of our faith. The sinner that seeks solace elsewhere, that moment he is like a bird that wanders from her nest. The bird away from her nest has no comfort; the instincts of nature make her feel during her incubation that the nest is her proper

place. And when the Christian gets away from the cross, the new-born instincts within him make him feel that he is out of his proper position. The cross is the true rest of a Christian. We are like Noah's dove, there is no rest for the sole of our feet except in the ark; we may search the world around, and fly over the great waste of waters, but there never shall be found rest for us anywhere but at the cross. I confess I sometimes get into that sorry state of feeling, rather as a Christian professor, or a minister, than as a sinner saved by grace; but I find that I have to come back again to that same place, and to sing the old ditty over again,—

“Nothing in my hand I bring :
Simply to Thy cross I cling ;
Naked, come to Thee for dress ;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace.”

There is no living comfortably, there is no living with the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit in the heart, if we once wander from the simplicity of our confidence in Christ.

Further: there are many *believers* who also wander out of their place. What, now, is a believer's place? A believer's place is in the bosom of his Lord, or at the right hand of his Master, or sitting at his feet with Mary. Now, some of us have had times in which we did come very near to the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah! some of you never woke in the morning without thinking of him, and all day long a sense of his presence was in your heart. How you grudged the world the hours you had to give to business; and when you locked up your heart at night, you always gave Jesus Christ the

key. How sweet his ordinances were to you then, because you could see Christ through them, as through windows of agates and gates of carbuncles! How delightful were prayer-meetings and Bible-classes then, because you saw Jesus there, and talked with him! But what about your present state? Perhaps, my dear friend, you have wandered from your place; you are not living near to Christ, as you used to do. Hence ordinances have but very little comfort in them; they are dull and tedious; and services which were once as marrow and fatness to you have now become as dry bones. Your closet, too, is much neglected; your Bible is not studied as it was. You have lost your first love; and, I appeal to you, have you not also lost your first comfort? Are you not like a bird that has wandered from her nest? Believe me, there is no solid joy, no seraphic rapture, no hallowed peace this side heaven, except by living close under the shadow of the cross, and nestling in the wounds of Jesus. Oh, that we should be so foolish! The bird doth not forget her nest, but we do forget our Lord. We have need to say with the Psalmist—"Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee!" We have need to cry to-night—

"Return, oh holy Dove! return,
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
And drove Thee from my breast."

We have wandered from our place, you see; for our place is at Jesu's feet with Mary, or on Jesu's bosom with John, or at Jesu's lips with the spouse in the Canticles, saying—"Let him kiss me with the kisses of

his mouth ;” but, roaming hither and thither, we are like a bird that has wandered from her nest.

And does not this wandering imply a lack of watchfulness? Do I not observe the Christian who was so jealous of himself once that he did not haste to put one foot before the other for fear he should take a step awry; he would not even talk without saying—“O Lord, open Thou my lips!” But now he thinks that he is sure to stand, and he forgets to guard himself with jealousy. He thinks, perhaps, that his experience has made him so wise that he will not fall into his former errors, and so he getteth a carnal confidence, and forgetteth to stand upon his watch-tower day and night, and watch against his foes. Do you know what sometimes happens to the bird if it leaves its nest? Why, while the bird is away the cuckoo comes and drops its egg in, and so the poor bird when it comes back has to hatch its enemy. And oftentimes when we are not watchful, and permit the enemy to take an advantage over us, Satan comes in, and drops some foul temptation into our nest, which our hearts help to hatch, and which will give us trouble all our lives. As sure as ever we wander in the matter of watchfulness it will be for our hurt. We may sleep, but Satan does not. Never was he detected napping yet. There is slothfulness among believers, but there is no slothfulness on the part of their adversary. He ever watcheth, going “about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Though you should leave off watchfulness, he never will. Oh, Christian! do not leave your nest; for you do not know what may come of it, what good things may be destroyed, or

what bad things may be deposited, while your heart is away.

Some Christians, too, wander in a yet more melancholy manner as to its outward effect, for we see them wander from holiness. Unhappy church that hath in it many such inconsistent professors. But, alas! they are too common in the world. They "did for a time run well; what, then, did hinder them that they should not obey the truth?" The root of the matter was scarcely in them, for they brought forth fruit only for a season, and by-and-by they withered away. Ah, well! if there be a Christian here—a real Christian—who has backslidden and gone into the world, he never will be happy in his sin. A reprobate, after making a profession, may perhaps go back and be comfortable, but a Christian never can. Tell me that you are happy in your sin, and I tell you at once that you are dead in sin, for he who puts on guilt must cast off shame. You are in your own element; like a fish in the water you will find it suits your constitution. As a bird could not be happy down in the depths of the sea, it must drown, unless it soon be delivered, so the saint of God is wretched in the depths of iniquity; he must speedily perish unless he is brought out. If he falleth into sin through infirmity, or be dragged into it through the force of sudden temptation, he yearneth to be delivered, and groaneth and crieth unto God, till once more the bones that were broken are made to rejoice. If you wander from holiness, you wander from your place. I have known some people who, in order to avoid trouble, have committed a trespass. A Christian man, for instance, has kept his shop open on a

Sunday to prevent bankruptcy, and a mass of troubles rolled in upon him ten times heavier than those he had sought to avert. We have heard of some who have done violence to their conscience just once. In sheer despondency they shut their eyes, and swallowed the bitter pill. It did not take five minutes to do it. Their friends said it was wise. Ill-advisers told them it was necessary. They thus attempted to extricate themselves from some trying position. But the consequence was that to their dying-day the worm of conscience still did gnaw their soul. They have made the rod wherewith God hath scourged them. Mind what you are at, then, lest in wandering from holiness you prove yourself like a bird that wandereth from her nest. Oh, how blessed it will be if you and I shall be kept by mighty grace, simply relying upon Christ, constantly communing with his person, watchful against the inroads of temptation, and persevering in holiness even to the end! Without this there can be no comfort to us.

III. And now, what persuasions shall I use to make every one of you who is a true Christian cling close to his nest?

Consider, dear friends, the joy which you and I have had when we have been clinging close to Christ. Where else can such sweetness be found as we have found in the love of Jesus? Will a man leave the cool, flowing waters from Lebanon to go and drink of the muddy river of another place? Shall a man turn away from the bubbling fountain to seek out for himself a broken cistern? Oh, let it not be! We who have fed on angels' food cannot be content with the husks

that swine eat. Let us say with Rutherford—
“Ever since I have eaten the wheaten bread of heaven my mouth has been out of taste for the brown bread of earth, which is full of grit and gravel-stones. I can no longer find sweetness in this world’s joys, for I have tasted of joys celestial that are beyond all that earth can give.” Let the joy we have had in Christ constrain us still to cling to him.

Think again of the sorrow we have felt whenever we have wandered. You and I have had backsliding times; let us confess it mournfully. But what wretched times they have always been! What have we ever gained by going away from our Lord but broken bones and sorrow of heart? As we have been burned, let us dread the fire; and as we have had to smart for our wanderings when the watchmen have plucked off our veil and smitten us, let us henceforth cling close to our Beloved. What reason has he ever given us to be discontented and go away? Has he been unfaithful to us? “Have I been a wilderness unto you?” he asks. In what respect has he aggrieved us? Has he ever smitten us in his wrath, or treated us harshly for our follies? Never has a friend behaved better to his friend than Christ has behaved to us; and as we can never find a better Saviour, let us cling to him all our days. Or can you think that the outlook is dreary? When we think of the joy that is yet to come, we have a yet stronger motive to cling to the Saviour. We may have to walk with him to-day when the snow blows in our face; but, oh! what will it be to walk with him in the sunshine? It may be hard work to keep pace with him; faint may be our heart, and flesh and

blood are frail, walking, as we now do, with him through the mire and dirt, but what will it be to walk in silver slippers upon the golden pavement of the celestial city? It is not so easy to stand with him in the pillory when the multitudes are hooting him; but, oh! how joyous it will be to be with him when the angels are rending the heavens with acclamations, and all the saints are casting their crowns at his feet! To be with him in his trouble is not very palatable to our natural feelings, I know; but what will it be to be with him in his triumph? To be partners in his cross—from that we may shrink; but to sit with him upon his throne—for that we must eagerly long. Well, as we cannot be crown-bearers without being cross-bearers, let us espouse his cross as we would enjoy his crown. Yet be it known that his cross droppeth with myrrh, and that they who carry it will find it so sweetly perfumed that they shall love the very cross itself because Christ has touched it. From this nest let us never wander, because of the “rest” which “remaineth for the people of God.”

Wander from this nest—methinks we cannot if the love of Christ inflames us and our love to Christ sustains us. What, wander from him who died for us, that we might never die; who lives for us, that we might ever live? What base ingratitude is ours that we do not cling closer to him! Can we give him up? Christians, he gave you the light that cheered your darkness, and can you turn away from the brightness of his face? With pitying eye he saw you when you were lying in your blood, an outcast all forlorn, and he said unto you, “Live,” and can you ever forsake him? He passed by thee, he looked upon thee, he spread his skirt

over thee, he covered thy nakedness, he swore unto thee, he entered into a covenant with thee—and canst thou now prove treacherous? He redeemed thee, he opened his veins that he might pour forth the purple drops of his precious blood as the price for your inestimable ransom, and can you turn away from him? “Despised and rejected of men” as he was, will you hide your face from him? And while he is still pleading for you, will you cease to plead for him? Now that his chariots are making haste to bring him in the glory of his second advent, will you turn away from him when his kingdom is so near? Shall the wife leave a husband who cherishes her with utmost tenderness? Shall the child neglect its parents, under whose roof his every want is supplied? Shall the limbs of one’s body abhor the head? Such strange vagaries were not half so unnatural as for a Christian to turn vagrant and forsake his Saviour. Ah me! unnatural and brutish as it must seem, you and I would do this, and more also, did not grace prevent. The love which has made us one with Christ must keep us one with him, or else we shall never hold on our way. Be it then your constant prayer, “Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” Let this be your heart’s cry, “Abide with us;” for except he abide with us, and make our hearts his nest, we shall never abide with him, but shall be as a bird that wandereth from her nest.

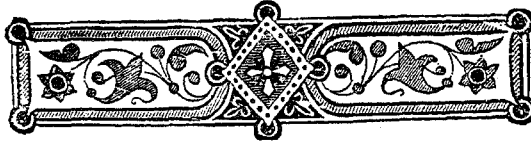
Mayhap I speak to some poor bird which has wandered from its nest. You are a stranger, and you have strayed in hither. You recollect a nest in some happy family circle where prayer was wont to be made. You remember the nest in which you were wont to nestle—

a little village church where you worshipped God with kindred dear. But you have wandered from your nest. You have lost your friends; you have gone into the world; you are a sinner. Conscious you are that you scarcely dare to face the home of your childhood. You have come away from your old haunts, for you are ashamed to continue in them. You have wandered from your nest. And do you mean to wander on? Is yours to be for ever the flight of a bird that hath no roost? "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests;" will you never have a place to lay your head? Are you condemned, like the unclean spirit, to wander through dry places, seeking rest and finding none? Are you a pilgrim who shall never have a city that hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God? Are you like the phantom ship of which the mariners talk, which flits across the sea for aye, but never reaches a port? Nay, friend, you are not so to account yourself, though the devil hath told you that there is no hope; though he hath driven you to desperation, and persuaded you that you are given up of God and man. It is not so; it is not so. The Eternal Father, bending from high heaven, looks down upon you, and by these lips talks to you. Little as you were thinking that you would be found out, he saith to you, "Return, return, return." 'Tis he who makes you say, "I will arise and go unto my Father." He meets you, prodigal; he falls about your neck; he gives you the kiss of reconciliation. He cries to-day to the messengers of mercy, "Take off his rags, and bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and let us eat, drink, and be merry, for he that was dead is

alive, and he that was lost is found." The bird has come back, and has found her nest; and as the mother-bird is happy when that little fledgeling which she thought had fallen on the ground, or had been swallowed by the hawk, comes back, and she covers it with her feathers, and bids it nestle under her warm bosom, so is the Eternal Father happy; and as she rejoices, so, nay infinitely more, does the Eternal Father rejoice when the wanderer comes back to him, and finds comfort in his love.

Believe thou in the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust thou in the Father's grace as manifest in the Saviour's wounds, and so thou shalt find an eternal nest from which thou shalt never wander till thou shalt build thy happy nest in heaven. Amen.





The Strait Gate.

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say, unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”—Luke xiii. 24.

HE precepts of our Lord Jesus Christ are dictated by the soundest wisdom. He has given us divine prescriptions for the health of our souls, and his commandments, though clothed with sovereign authority, are spoken in such infinite kindness that we may regard them as the advice of a true and faithful friend. This is not a legal but a gospel exhortation—“Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” He himself is the only gate or the door by which we can find admission, and the way to enter in through Jesus Christ is not by working, but by believing. Then, as to the strife we are urged to carry on, it is an earnest endeavour to steer clear of all the rocks, and shoals, and quicksands of popular fallacies and deceitful traditions, and to sail in the deep waters, with his covenant for our chart, and his word for our compass, in simple obedience to his statutes, trusting to him as our pilot, whose voice we always hear, though his face we cannot see. The storm signal may well rouse your fears; the

cry of peril had need excite your caution. The mere mention sounds like a menace. "Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Listen to that warning, lest ye be amongst the "many" that founder—mayhap you shall be among the few that escape. Harken to what Jesus tells you shall come to pass with the multitude, that it may never come to pass with you as individuals.

Mark now—A GATE WHICH IT IS MOST DESIRABLE TO ENTER.

Surely "many" would not seek to enter if they were not convinced of the desirableness of passing through it. The very fact that so many, although they fail, will at least seek to enter, proves that there is a desire, a reason, and a motive why men should aim to enter.

This gate—that is, Christ—it is most desirable for us to pass through, *because it is the gate of the city of refuge*. Cities of refuge were appointed for men-slayers, that when they were pursued by the avenger of blood, they might pass the gate and be secure within the sanctuary or city. The gospel of Jesus Christ is intended as a refuge for those who have broken the law of God, whom vengeance is pursuing, who will certainly be overtaken, to their eternal destruction, unless they fly to Christ and find shelter in him. Outside of Christ the sword of fire pursues us swift and sharp. From God's wrath there is but one escape, and that is by a simple faith in Christ. Believe in him, and the sword is sheathed, and the mercy and the love of God will become your everlasting portion; but refuse to believe in Jesus, and your innumerable sins, written in his book, shall be laid at your door in that day when the pillars

of heaven shall reel, and the stars shall fall like withered fig-leaves from the tree. Oh! who would not wish to escape from the wrath to come? Mr. Whitefield, when preaching, would often hold up his hands and cry, "Oh! the wrath to come! the wrath to come! the wrath to come!" There is more weight and meaning in those words than tongue can tell or heart conceive. The wrath to come! the wrath to come! When past that gate, like Noah after he had passed into the ark, you are safe from the overwhelming deluge, you are sheltered from the devouring conflagration which shall consume the earth, you are rescued from the death and the doom that await the countless multitudes of the impenitent. Who would not wish to enter where there is salvation, the only place where salvation can be found?

It is desirable to enter this gate, *because it is the gate of a home.* What sweet music there is in that word "home!" Jesus is the home of his people's hearts. We are at rest when we get to Christ. We have all we want when we have Jesus. Happiness is the portion of the Christian in this present life while he lives upon his Saviour. I have seen outside the night refuges crowds of persons waiting an hour beforehand, till the doors were opened. Poor souls! Shivering in the cold, but solaced by the expectation of being warmed and comforted in a little time for a little while, when they should be admitted. What think ye, O homeless men and women! were there the prospect of a permanent home for you, a home from which you never could be banished, a home into which you could be introduced as dear children—would it not be worth your while to wait long at the door, and to knock again and again

right vehemently, could ye but be certain ultimately to gain admission? Jesus is a home for the homeless, a rest for the weary, a comfort for the comfortless. Is your heart broken? Jesus can comfort you; have you been banished from your family, or one by one have the dear ones been taken to their last resting-place? Do you feel solitary, friendless, cheerless, accounting "the black flowing river" to be preferred before this troubled stream of life, and that pitiless society of men and women, eager all for gain and gaiety, recking nothing of your griefs or your groans? Oh! come to Jesus; trust in him, and he will light up a star in the black midnight sky; he will kindle a fire in your hearts that shall make them glow with joy and gladness even now. It were worth while to be a Christian, irrespective of the hereafter. Such present comfort as a belief in Jesus imparts is an inestimable compensation. This is the gate of refuge, and it is the gate of a home.

Moreover, it *leads to a blessed feast*. We read to you just now of the supper that was spread. Jesus does not merely feed our bodies, but he does what is better, he feeds our minds. A hungry stomach is terrible, but a hungry heart is far more dreadful, for while a loaf of bread will fill the one, who can tell what will stay the other? Oh! when the heart gets craving, and pining, and yearning after something it cannot get, it is like the sea that cannot rest; it is like the grave that never can be filled; it is like the horse-leech, whose daughters cry, "Give, give, give." Happy the man who believes in Jesus, for he becomes at once content, complacent, and at ease. Not only does he find rest in Christ, but good cheer and great delight, halcyon

peace, and hallowed satisfaction are the portion of his lot. I tell you what I do know—and I would not lie wilfully for a whim of language; nay, nor yet for the love of life—I tell you that there is a holy mirth to be found in the faith of those who meditate on Christ which cannot be matched, oh sensualists, by the sunshine of your brightest days, or by all your sounds of revelry at night! Speak ye of their buoyant spirits who make merry in the dance, or of the festive glee of those that are filled with wine? Theirs is but the crackling of a handful of thorns under a pot—how soon 'tis gone!—a cloud of sparks, and then a cloud of smoke. But the joy of the man who apprehends the love of Christ which embraces him, the blood of Christ which cleanses him, the arm of Christ which upholds him, the hand of Christ which leads him, the crown of Christ, which is to be his portion—the joy of such a man is constant, deep, overflowing, beyond the power of expression. The meanest Christian in all the world, bedridden, living on parish allowance, full of pains and ready to die, when his heart is stayed upon Christ, would not change places with the youngest, brightest, richest, noblest spirit to be found outside the church of God. Nay, kings and emperors, boast no more of your beggarly crowns, their glitter will soon fade; your purple robes will soon be moth-eaten, your silver shall soon be cankered, of your palaces not a stone shall be left upon its fellow. Bitter shall be the dregs of your wine-cups, and all your music shall end in discord. I tell you that the poorest of all the company of the faithful in Christ Jesus excel you, nor would they change their blest estate for all that earth calls good or great. So

abundantly worth while is it to come to Christ for the happiness, as well as the repose, which we find in him.

Well likewise, dear friends, may men desire to pass through the strait gate, knowing it is the gate which leads to Paradise. There was one gate of Paradise through which our father—Adam—and our mother—Eve—went weeping as they left the garden all behind them, to wander into the desert world. Can you picture them to yourselves, with the cherubim behind them and the flaming sword bidding them begone, for Paradise was no place for rebels? Men have wandered up and down the world since then to find the gate of Paradise, that they might enter yet again. They have scaled the peaks of Sinai, but they have not found it there. They have traversed the tracks of the wilderness, weary and footsore, jaded and faint, but they have found no gate to Paradise anywhere in all their expeditions. The scholar has searched for it in the ancient books; the astronomer has hunted for it among the stars; sages, as they were called, have sought to find it by studying their arts, and fools have tried to find it among their viols and their bowls. But there is only one gate. See, there it is. It is in the form of a cross, and he that will find the gate of heaven finds the cross and the Man that did hang thereon. Happy he who can come up to it and pass through it, reposing all his confidence in the atonement once made by the Man of sorrows suffering on Calvary's tree. On earth he is saved, and in the article of death he shall pass through that gate of pearl unchallenged, walk the streets of gold unabashed, and bow before the excellent glory without a fear. He is free of heaven. The cross is the mark

of a citizen of the skies. Having truly believed in Jesus, everlasting felicity is his beyond all doubt. Who then would not pass through the strait gate?

And who would not wish to pass through it when he considers the *lot of those outside the gate?* How we tremble at the thought of that outer darkness, where shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! There are many inquiries nowadays about eternal punishment. Oh, men and brethren, do not rashly or carelessly challenge the bitter experience of such condemnation! Speculate as you will about the doctrine, but I pray you do not trifle with the reality. To be lost for ever, let that mean what it may, will be more than you can bear, though your ribs were iron and your bones were brass. Tempt not the avenging angel. Beware that ye forget not God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. By the living God, I pray you fear and tremble lest you be found out of Christ in the day of his appearing. Rest not, be not patient, much less merry, till you are saved. To be in danger of hell-fire is a peril that no heart can adequately realise, no language fitly paint. Oh, I beseech you, halt not, give yourself no rest, till you have got beyond that danger! Flee for your lives, for the fiery shower will soon descend! Escape! God in his mercy quicken your pace that you may escape full soon, lest the hour of mercy cease and the Day of Judgment come! Surely, these are reasons enough for wanting to pass in at the strait gate.

Observe still further what our Lord tells us. **THERE IS A CROWD OF PEOPLE WHO WILL SEEK TO ENTER AND WILL NOT BE ABLE.**

Who are these? If you look closely at the *crowd that this day seeks to pass*, methinks you will see a considerable difference between seeking and striving. You are not merely advised to seek; you are urgently bidden to strive. Striving is a more vehement exercise than seeking. Are you amongst those who coolly seek admission because, forsooth, they suppose it is the proper thing? Many there be who come up to the gate of mercy and seek to enter, not striving, not particularly anxious, certainly far enough from being agitated. And when they look at the gate they object to the lintel because it is too low, nor will they deign to stoop. There is no believing in Jesus with a proud heart. He that trusts Christ must feel himself to be guilty, and acknowledge it. No man can savingly believe till he has been thoroughly convinced of sin. But many say: "I will never stoop to that. Unless I have something to do in the work, and share some of the merit, I cannot enter." No, sirs, some of you are quite unable to believe in Christ because you believe in yourselves. As long as a man thinks himself a fine fellow, how can he think well of Jesus? You eclipse the sun, you hold up your own little hands before the great orb of light, how can you expect to see? You are too good to go to heaven, or, at least, too good in your own apprehension. Oh, man! I pray God prick that bubble, that blown-up bladder, and let out the gas, that you may discern what you really are; for you are nothing after all but a poor worm, contemptible, notwithstanding your conceit; desperately poor in spite of your pretension, an arrogant worm, that dares to lift up its head when it has nothing but its own abject worthlessness to glory in. Oh, bow thyself in

lowly self-abhorrence, else thou mayest seek to enter, but shalt not be able!

Some are unable to enter *because the pride of life will not let them*. They come to this gate in their carriage and pair, and expect to drive in, but they cannot get admission. There is no different way of salvation for a peer of the realm than for a pauper in the workhouse. The greatest prince that ever lived must trust Jesus just as the meanest peasant does. I recollect a minister once telling me that he attended the bedside of a very proud woman, of considerable wealth, and she said to him: "Do you think, sir, that, when I am in heaven, such a person as Betty—my maid—will be in the same place as I am? I never could endure her company here. She is a good servant in her way, but I am sure I could not put up with her in heaven." "No, madam," said he, "I do not suppose you will ever be where Betty will be." He knew Betty to be one of the humblest and most consistent of Christian women anywhere; and he might have told her proud mistress that in the sight of God meekness is preferable to majesty. The Lord Jesus, in the day of his coming, will wipe out all such distinctions as may very properly exist on earth, though they cannot be recognised beyond the skies. Oh, rich man, glory not in thy riches! All thy wealth, if thou couldest take it with thee, would not buy a single paving-stone in the streets of heaven. This poor stuff—do not trust in it. Oh, lay it aside as a crown of glorying, and pass humbly through the gate with Lazarus!

Some are unable to enter *because they carry contraband goods with them*. When you land in France, there stands the *gendarme* who wants to see what you are

carrying in that basket. If you attempt to push by you will soon find yourself in custody. He must know what is there; contraband goods cannot be taken in. So at the gate of mercy—which is Christ—no man can be saved if he desire to keep his sins. He must give up every false way. “Oh,” saith the drunkard, “I’d like to get to heaven, but I must smuggle in this bottle somehow.” “I would like to be a Christian,” says another, “I do not mind taking Dr. Watts’s Hymns with me, but I should like sometimes to sing a Bacchanalian song, or a lightsome serenade.” “Well,” cries another, “I enjoy myself on Sunday with God’s people, but you must not deny me the amusements of the world during the week; I cannot give them up.” Well, then, you cannot enter, for Jesus Christ never saves us in our sins; he saves us from our sins. “Doctor,” says the fool, “make me well, but I’d like to keep my fever.” “No,” saith the doctor, “how can you be well while you keep the fever?” How can a man be saved from his sins while he clings to his sins? What is salvation but to be delivered from sin? Sin-lovers may seek to be saved, but they shall not be able. While they hug their sins they cannot have Christ. Some of you are in this grievous predicament. You have been attending this house of prayer a good long time. I do not know what hinders you, but this I do know, there is a worm somewhere eating out the heart of that fair-looking apple. Some private sin that you pamper is destroying your souls. Oh that you had grace to give it up, and to come in by the strait gate trusting in Jesus Christ!

Not a few are unable to enter in because they want to postpone the matter until to-morrow. To-day, at

any rate, you are engaged with other plans and projects. "A little longer let me revel in some of the sensual enjoyments of life, and afterwards I will come in." Procrastinators are among the most hopeless of people. He that hath "to-morrow" quivering on his lips is never likely to have grace reigning in his heart.

Others, and these are in the worst plight of all, *think that they are in*, and that they have entered. They mistake the outside of the gate for the inside. A strange mistake to fall into, but many do thus delude themselves. They rub their backs against the posts, and then they tell us they are "as near heaven as anybody else." They have never passed the threshold; they have never found shelter in Christ, albeit they may have felt wonderfully excited at a revival meeting, and sung as loudly and lustily as any of the congregation,

"I do believe, I will believe."

There is a considerable show of reformation about them. Although they have not got a new garment, they have mended up the old one. They are not new creatures, but still they are better behaved creatures than they were before. And they are "all right." Be not deceived, my dear friends; do beware of mistaking a work of nature for the operation of God's grace. Do not be taken in by the devil's counterfeits. They are well made—they look like genuine; when they are bran new they shine and glitter like fine gold, but they will not stand the test; every one of them will have a nail driven through them one day; they will never pass current with God. If you have a religion, let it be real and true, not feigned and hypocritical. Of all

cheats the man who cheats himself is certainly the least wise, and, as I think, he is the least honest. Do not play the knave with thine own soul. Suspect thyself too much rather than too little. Better journey to heaven in terror of hell than dream of the happy land while drifting in the other direction. Ah, that deceit should steal such gentle shapes! Be on your guard, every one of you. Let not any man deceive himself.

Thus it is that a crowd—I had almost said a countless crowd—of people nowadays seek to enter in, but for manifold reasons they are not able to do so. And yet there is a more appalling aspect to the same fact. “Many, I say unto you, *will* seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” Panic-stricken, the dying man sends for the minister whom he never went to hear when his health was good and hours hung heavy on his hands. The charm of Sundays lay in their dissipation; an excursion up the river, or a cheap trip to Brighton and back; anything—everything sooner than hear the gospel. He never read his Bible; he never prayed. Now the doctor shakes his head, and the nurse suggests that they “fetch a clergyman.” Poor soul! she means right; but what, think you, can he do? What can we ministers do for you? What can any man do for his fellow-creature? “None of us can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.” He begins to seek, when, alas! he cannot think, poor fellow, for he is *in articulo mortis*, with the throes of his last struggle. His head swims, pains grow at his vitals, a glassy film is o’er his eyes, rambling words fall from his lips. Could he think, he has got something else to think about than the dread future that awaits

him. Look at his weeping wife. See those dear children, brought in to get a last kiss from their father. Were his mind more vigorous it were not likely to be taken up with spiritual thoughts, there is too much in the solemn farewell to occupy the moments left in preparation for the future. "Pray for me, sir," he says, with fainting, failing breath. Yes, he is seeking to enter in. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred I fear the answer is: he shall not be able. Little hope have I for death-bed repentances. Never trust to them, I beseech you. Such a vestibule as a death-bed you may never have. To die in the street may be your lot. Should you have a death-bed you will have something else to think about besides religion. Oh, how often have I heard Christian men say, when they have been dying, "Ah, sir, if I had a God to seek now, what a misery it would be! What a blessing it is that with all the cares that now come upon me I have a sure and certain hope in Christ, for I found him years ago!" Oh, dear hearers, do not be among those who postpone and procrastinate, till, in a dying hour, after a fashion you seek to enter and find you shall not be able.

Some years ago I was awakened about three o'clock in the morning by a sharp ring of the door-bell. I was urged without delay to visit a house not very far from London Bridge. I went; and up two pair of stairs I was shown into a room the occupants of which were a nurse and a dying man. There was nobody else. "Oh, sir," said she, "Mr. So-and-so, about half-an-hour ago, begged me to send for you." "What does he want?" I asked. "He is dying," sir, she replied. I said, "I see that. What sort of a man was he?" "He

came home last night, sir, from Brighton. He had been out all day. I looked for a Bible, sir, but there is not one in the house; I hope you have got one with you." "Oh," I said, "a Bible would be of no use to him now. If he could understand me I could tell him the way of salvation in the very words of Holy Scripture." I spoke to him, but he gave me no answer. I spoke again; still there was no reply. All sense had fled. I stood a few minutes gazing at his face, till I perceived he was dead. His soul had departed. That man in his lifetime had been wont to jeer at me. In strong language he had often denounced me as a hypocrite. Yet he was no sooner smitten with the darts of death than he sought my presence and my counsel, feeling no doubt in his heart that I was a servant of God, though he did not care to own it with his lips. There I stood, unable to help him. Promptly as I had responded to his call, what could I do, but look at his corpse, and go home again. He had, when too late, sighed for the ministry of reconciliation, sought to enter in, but he was not able. There was no space left him then for repentance; he had wasted the opportunity. Therefore I pray and beseech you, my dear hearers, by the near approach of death—it may be much nearer than you think—give earnest heed to these things. I look round on this building, and note the pews and sittings from which hearers, whose faces were once familiar to us, have gone—some to glory, some I know not where. God knoweth. Oh, let not the next removal, if it be yours, vacate the seat of a scoffer or of a neglecter, or of one who, having been touched in his conscience, silenced the secret monitor and would

not turn. As the Lord liveth you must turn or burn ; you must either repent or be ruined for ever. May God give you wisdom to choose the better part.

It appears from Scripture that even after death there will be some who will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. I do not attempt to explain what I cannot understand, but I find the Master represents those on the left hand asking a question,—“When saw we thee hungry, and fed thee not?” as if they had some glimmering hope that the sentence upon them might be reversed. And I read in another place of those who will come and knock at the door, and say, “Lord, Lord, open to us.” But the Master of the house, having already risen up and shut to the door, will answer, “Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.” Is there, then, such a thing as prayer in hell? When the soul has passed out of the body without hope, will it seek for hope hereafter? Perhaps so. Did not the rich man pray to Abraham to send Lazarus? It is but natural to expect that as they doubted God’s promises on earth, they may doubt God’s threatenings in hell, and may hope, peradventure, that there will be a way of escape. They will seek, they will seek, but they shall not be able, not able to enter heaven. They said they were not able on earth ; they shall find they are not able in hell. *Non possumus* is the sinner’s cry. “We are not able to leave our sins ; we are not able to believe ; we are not able to be serious ; we are not able to be prayerful ;” and then, how it will be thrown back into their teeth ! not able to enter heaven ; not able to escape from torment ; not able to live ; not able to die ; not able because the gate of heaven admits no

sinner who has not been washed in the Redeemer's blood. Back with you, sir! You would not come to the fountain, you would not wash. Back with you. You are not able, not able because heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people, and you never thought of preparation. Away with you, sir! How can you enter when you are not prepared? Heaven is a place for which a fitness is needed. Men cannot enjoy that which would be contrary to their natures. Away with you, sirs! You could not enjoy heaven if you were admitted, for you are not changed in heart. Away with you! What! do you linger? do you cry? do you pray? do you weep? do you entreat? Away with you! Nay, the angels shall sweep you away, for is it not written—You yourselves shall be thrust out—unceremoniously-driven and scourged away from the gate of glory because you would not come to the gate of grace? These are terrible things to utter. I well might shrink from speaking thus, were it not that fidelity to your souls makes such demands that I must ring the warning. If ye die without faith in Christ, behold, there is a *gulf fixed* between you and heaven. I do not know what that means, but I know what idea it gives to me and should give to you. Between heaven and hell there is no traffic. None ever passed from hell to heaven.

“There are no acts of pardon passed
In the cold grave to which we haste;
But darkness, death, and long despair
Reign in eternal silence there.”


They would fain pass the gulf—were it fire they would be glad to pass it; were it full of torments, many and manifold as a Spanish Inquisition could invent, they

would be glad to bear them; could they but hope to cross the gulf. But no, the voice is heard—an angel's voice: "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; he that is unjust, let him be unjust still." The wax has cooled; you cannot alter the impression. The die is cast; you cannot remould it. The tree has fallen; there it lies. I wish I could speak now in words that should burn their way right into your inmost hearts. Alas! I cannot! I must, however, just repeat the text again, and leave it with you. Many shall seek in that dread day to enter, but shall not be able. Oh, enter then, enter ye! Enter now, while yet the gate stands open wide, and mercy bids you come! Make haste to enter while yet the avenging angel lingers, and the angel of mercy stands with outstretched arms and cries: "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." May God, the ever-blessed Spirit, without whom no warning can be effectual, and no invitation can be attractive, sweetly constrain you to trust Christ to-night. Here is the gospel in a few words. Jesus suffered the wrath and torment we justly merited. He doubtless bore the penalty of your transgressions, if so be you penitently believe in his sacrifice. When you trust in him for pardon, 'tis proof your sins were laid on him for judgment. You are, therefore, a forgiven man, a pardoned woman; you are saved—saved for ever. If you have a simple, child-like trust, you may go home, singing for joy of heart, knowing that you have already entered the strait gate, and before you lay grace on earth and glory in heaven. May God bless you richly, and may you adore him gratefully, for his dear name's sake. Amen.



Cries of Distress.

"I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes. I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies." Psalm cxix. 145, 146.

HE fear of punishment leads many people to think about their sins, and a dread of hell in the future fills the retrospect of their past life with gloom and remorse. This is natural. It may happen to any one, as it has happened to tens of thousands, that the peril has haunted them till at length the penalty has overtaken them. Although they have been constantly terrified with a sense of the Divine wrath, they have never penitently looked to the Divine mercy. Thus they have continued to despond, and they have gone on to despair, and that utter desperation has curdled into a bitter remorse, which has been the forecast of their eternal torment. But it appears to me that there is a work of grace in the heart where there is a fear of sin rather than a fear of hell,—where the desire of the soul is not so much to escape from the punishment as to escape from the guilt which is the cause of the punishment. What thief, what murderer, when he has been

arrested, convicted, sentenced, and brought to the gallows, does not wish he had not committed the crime that seals his doom? Yet there is a wide difference between the dread of suffering for the wrong you have done and a dread of doing wrong. Judge yourselves, if you are under religious impressions of any sort, whether you have merely a fear of punishment, for that is an instinct of nature, or whether you have a fear and an abhorrence of sin, for that is a work of Divine grace.

Now, our text exhibits to us the frame of mind of one whose chief prayer was that he might keep God's statutes, and his chief anxiety lest he should fail to observe them. Oh, that you might be brought to this state of heart, those of you who are not saved, and may those of you who are saved have this state of heart perpetually in exercise! A tender heart, a scrupulous conscience, a tenacity of offending God in thought, in word, or in deed, should hold us in check every day and every hour. Let us continually cry unto God to save us from violating his precepts, and constrain us to keep his testimonies. I address myself very indiscriminately to all who hear my voice, desiring that the text may prove a test whereby every one should examine himself. Do we, or do we not, desire to get rid of every evil way? Are we anxious to be sincere and without offence, holy in our character, and obedient to God's statutes in our lives? The man who really does desire this will be sure to pray for it. "I cried," says the Psalmist; and then again he says, "I cried." Moreover, he combines his prayer with strong resolution. "I cried unto thee; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes." Still further, he seasons his prayer with a deep sense of his own weak-

ness, for he put it thus: "I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy statutes."

I. Well, then, every man who desires purity of heart and character will betake himself to prayer. While struggling after purity he will soon discover that he is unable to reach it of himself. Have you never thought that you had destroyed an evil tendency in your disposition, and then found in an unguarded moment that you fell into the temptation, from the coils of which you had supposed yourself to have fully escaped? You have resolved in the morning, may be at the hour of prayer, that throughout the day your temper should be calm and quiet. Yet very likely before breakfast was over you were more ruffled than usual. Where you fancied you had set a double guard, there it was that you were taken by surprise. You thought yourself weak in one point, but it did not happen to be that on which you were beset. Where you said to yourself, "I am safe," there you were betrayed. You must have found this out, if you are striving against sin. When it has occurred many times, you will have a habitual mistrust of yourself. Does it happen but once, you will be driven by a sense of your own incompetence to call in the sacred might of God, that with the arms of the Eternal you may defeat the infernal adversary, prevail over your evil passions, and conquer your besetting sin. "I cried unto thee," says David; not as though it were a trifling skirmish, but as one who felt that he was perilously besieged. "I cried unto thee with my whole heart, for I must vanquish this sin, or be vanquished by it. I could not conquer it by myself, so I cried to thee, O my God, and I said, Oh, display thy power, and by the irresistible

might of thy Holy Spirit crush this dragon within my nature; beat it down, that it may rise up no more."

The importunity of this prayer shows the Psalmist's estimate of the value he set on the blessing he craved. Read verses 145, 146, and 147, and you will perceive how he repeats himself—"I cried;" "I cried unto thee;" "I prevented the dawn of the morning, and cried." Three times does he reiterate it. He was not to be put off. He felt he must get the mastery of sin. There it stands. Sin will destroy us if we do not destroy it. It will be our ruin if we do not fight against it, and get the mastery over it. Hence, in sheer desperation, the good man cries again, and again, and again: "O God, deliver me, that I may keep thy testimonies." Pray often, beloved, for sin will tempt often. Cry mightily, for Satan will tempt mightily. Innumerable snares will he place in your path; let your countless entreaties outnumber his devices.

The expression by which he memorialises his prayer shows us the intensity of it. "I cried;" "I cried;" "I cried." I do not know a better form of prayer than crying. It implies that the whole nature is full of anguish. Crying is the consequence of pain. His entire soul was stirred up. A cry is the expression of desire. It is a natural unpremeditated utterance. There is no affectation about it. A man that knows no Latin or Greek can cry. He that cannot speak with eloquence may yet give eloquent vent to his feelings in tears and entreaties. There are some with whom prayer is a ceremony. They call the servants together; they march in, and they march out to the routine of family worship. They read out of a book some form of

words, or else they compose a little piece themselves, and say it; and that is their idea of prayer! Not so. Prayer is crying, laying hold on God, and spreading our wants before him with an earnest entreaty that he would not reject us, but would give us what we ask of him. It is a wrestling with the covenant angel; it is a sacred resolve, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." If you want to conquer sin, know that it cannot be overcome by cold prayers, muttered in a heartless manner; it will not yield to empty ceremonies. It is unmoved by your litanies and your collects, your postures and your vestments. Sin only flies before the blood of Christ and the power of the Eternal Spirit. These come to our rescue when, with cries and tears, we importune the Lord to help us. "I cried;" "I cried;" "I cried." Thrice does he repeat the words. His whole heart cried to God that he might be delivered from sin.

Wherever there is a real and true prayer about this matter, it must be a prayer of faith. God can, in answer to prayer, help me to conquer sin. Beloved, you pray in vain unless you steadfastly believe that there is no sin which you cannot overcome. I meet with men who say, "I can never give up drink." My dear friend, God can make you. I meet with a man who has a violent temper; and he thinks he never can curb or subdue it. Surely you do not think of taking it to heaven with you. They have no passionate people in that happy clime. You will have to get that anger put away, and God can accomplish it. Do you say—"It would be like turning a lion into a lamb"? That is just what his grace is able to do. He can bring you from

darkness to light. He can work such a transformation in you that you would not know yourself if you could see yourself after you have passed under the divine hand. Resolve in your soul that sin must be conquered, believe that it is possible, and cry to God with a full conviction that he is able to save you from it. Yet methinks there are some who would not like to have their prayers answered. They ask for a humble heart. Well, I question whether they would like it, if it was sent them,—whether they would not want to send it back. They pray that they may have a pure conscience; but how, then, could they carry on that business of theirs? They ask that they may be upright in God's statutes, and they know very well that they prefer following their own crooked devices. There are thousands of prayers that are insults to heaven; but where the Spirit of God really is at work, the man who wants to be pure prays sincerely, and cries mightily to God for purity; nor will he be content to tolerate anything, either in his disposition or in his daily life, which would be inconsistent with the perfect holiness of God. Oh, that God might implant in all of us this desire, and then set us a-praying that we might secure the blessing we crave!

II. Now, secondly, the man who desires to walk in God's way, not merely prays, but he resolves. "I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord. I will keep thy statutes." He puts his whole heart into it. His prayer is no deceit. Then he throws that same heart into a strong resolution that he will find out what God's statutes are; and when he has found them out, he will keep them, cost whatever it may. Need I say that

nobody becomes holy against his will? No man keeps God's statutes without he exercises a resolve to do so. The very essence of obedience to God lies in the heart, so the heart must be set upon obedience. It must be a sincere, willing, cheerful obedience, or else it is not a genuine submission to the Almighty. Do I address any one who is living in sin, and yet saying, "I wish I could get rid of it"? I have often heard such a wish expressed by persons who must themselves have known that they were uttering an untruth. A man says, "I wish I could be set free from sin to-night," and to-morrow he will mix with gay associates and loose companions, and go to places of amusement where he is as sure he will be led into sin as he is sure that his coat would burn if he put it into the fire. He goes into the middle of the mischief; he takes the tinder of his heart where he knows there are sparks, and he says, "There will come no harm of it." He puts a candle near the gunpowder, and he hopes he will not be blown away. That is what he *says*, and this is what he *does*. Do you perceive the inconsistency? If you do not want to be besmeared, do not go amongst the pitch and the tar. If you do not want to be defiled avoid all ungodly fellowships. The man who means to conquer sin, and resolves to conquer it, will keep himself out of mischief's way, that he may be clean before the living God. Such a man will give up everything that tempts him. If there is any weak point of which he is conscious, he will just mortify himself rather than offend his conscience. He cuts off his right arm, and plucks out his right eye, according to the gospel precept, which means, I suppose, whatever he is fond of, if it becomes a temptation to sin, he will forth-

with have done with it once for all. It does not matter what it is,—whether it be drunkenness or gluttony, levity or lust, ambition or avarice—whatever is his besetting sin—he just says, “No; this may be allowable to some men to go just so far, but I cannot go as far without going farther; therefore I will have nothing to do with it.” He is ready to deny himself anything and everything. He completely reforms his habits, lest he should be decoyed into sin. “I will keep thy testimonies.” Oh, what a blessed thing it is when a man really resolves to be upright! when he says, “I will keep out of the way of temptation, and I will deny myself aught that charms, entices, or allures me, lest by any means I grieve the Holy Spirit of God.” And he will be sure, if his resolution be of the true metal, to follow that course which strengthens it. He knows that to hear the gospel keeps his conscience in exercise; therefore he will not waste the morning hours of the Lord’s-day in slothful sleep; but he will welcome the assembly of the saints and rejoice in the preaching of the word. He knows that reading good books will often be helpful to make his thoughts active, and his imagination pure; therefore he prefers sound study to light literature. He knows that association with Christian people will stimulate his piety, so he consorts with those whose conversation is edifying. He knows that to lift up his heart in prayer to God, not occasionally, but regularly at set intervals, has often proved an aid to faith and an incentive to courage, and he accordingly endeavours to maintain such secret engagements as strictly as circumstances will allow. If there be anything of good repute to enable him to get rid of sin, he is enamoured of it. When he prays to God

to keep him pure, he takes care to choose all such means as God may put in his way to resist evil and to follow after holiness. Such a man will achieve his purpose. You may laugh at him for being too precise. His heart will not be wounded by your ridicule. He will lose the Sunday trade if thereby he lose half his living rather than break God's command. It may be that his association with some worldly persons contributed much to his prosperity, though it involved him in serious temptations: he falters not, for he would sooner run the risk of losing all the world than stake his reputation or jeopardise his soul, for he is bent upon getting rid of sin. Sin is the plague he hates. He would sooner be poor as Lazarus, and even covered with sores, and licked by dogs, than have the sins of the rich man upon him. He wants to be clean delivered from every foul thing and every false way. One thing has he asked of the Lord, and that one thing has he set his heart upon—that he may possess himself in righteousness, that he may be without offence, that he may maintain his integrity. To obtain this, through the power of the Holy Spirit, being cleansed by the blood of Jesus, he will cheerfully suffer any imaginable privation. I hail such a man, and I honour him. He has the courage, and the composure, the manliness and the meekness, of which martyrs were made in days of yore, though he has not actually given his body to be burned. To that noble army, in my belief, he belongs, though only one of the file.

Do observe how David sought after a thorough allegiance and a perfect conformity to the will of God. He says, "I cried with my whole heart; I will keep thy

statutes;” not some of the statutes that were agreeable to him, but all of the statutes that had the Divine sanction. I do not intend to be uncharitable when I suspect that some Christians do not wish to know too much, or to inquire too minutely into the Lord’s demands upon their resources. I have noticed a great many people lately who have looked upon perfection as a prize within their reach, and even as an attainment to which they have already come. This conceit is getting rather common. They profess to be perfectly sanctified. But what can I think of some of them who, to the best of my belief, are possessed of fortunes to the extent of two or three hundred thousand pounds? Were they perfectly sanctified, could they look on the outlying world, living in vice and ignorance, out of which a chosen people are being saved by the gospel, without supporting those agents and agencies that have the Divine blessing manifestly resting upon them to the utmost of their ability? They look to me as if they were a long way off from that degree of consecration illustrated for all the ages by the poor widow who gave “all her living” to the Lord’s treasury. I do not believe in a perfect sanctification which allows a man to lay up so much treasure on earth, while so many works for the Lord Jesus need his help. Systematic hoarding of wealth, to my mind, does not indicate a *perfect* character. I am not judging ordinary Christian men, but only those who talk of full consecration, and I can never accredit their sterling sincerity till I see their gold, and their silver, dedicated to a larger, ay, even to a perfect degree. I like to see the hall-mark on every link of the chain. Do not let them boast, but give. As to those who are

satisfied that they are perfect in spirit, soul, and body, we wait for their last testament, to see what their wills look like when they die. A man who is perfect before the Lord lays out his substance for God's cause, depend on that. He does not merely attend conferences, and talk of unfulfilled prophecies and plausible unravellings of spirituality of mind, and sanctification by faith, and listen to the like glittering subjects descanted upon in glowing periods; but he lives for Jesus in some practical work, and gives himself up, and his substance too, for the honour of the Redeemer's name and the diffusion of the glorious gospel. I have no leading member of any of these guilds in my mind's eye at the present moment, but I am deeply concerned for certain of their disciples. Far less do I find fault with them for their searching the Scriptures; but I do challenge them to reconcile their large wealth with their still larger professions of perfect consecration.

The true seeker for holiness is one who, while he resolves on obedience to God, will dare to be singular, if no man will accompany him in it. "I cried with my whole heart: I will keep thy statutes." He meant to do it, though he should be without a companion. He was prepared to stand alone. I always admire that speech of Athanasius, when he, seeing others had turned aside to Arianism, said, "I, Athanasius, against the world." He is a true man who can be a true man by himself. Give me no semi-detached cottage, but a house that stands compact on its own foundation, and give me such a man as can let the wind blow all round him, and yet stand upright. He will hold his own whether men will bear or forbear. Let his fellow-creatures

applaud or hiss him, he will remain true to his own convictions. If they bear him on their shoulders in triumph, it is the truth he has espoused they honour, or if they trample him under their feet in contempt, it is for righteousness' sake he suffers. But, like Luther, he will defy devil, death, and hell, to withstand his purpose to keep God's statutes. Now, the word of God animates a man's soul, and the work of God is the enterprise of his life when this is the strong desire of his spirit. He prays to God, and invokes his aid; yet at the same time he records his vow with a mind that is not given to vacillate. He has put his foot down where he meant to stand. He has knit his brow and closed his teeth, and set all his features to the aspect of defiance, for he means to hold out till he does achieve the victory. He is not going to compromise himself, or to tolerate any wrong thing. He will foil temptation, master evil propensities, and slay the sin that offends, and aggrieves, and harasses him. In the armour of God he arrays himself, and through the grace of God he will prevail.

III. The man who is thus seeking purity, while he prays and resolves, if he be really wise and taught of the Spirit, will have a deep sense of his own weakness and depravity; therefore he supplicates the Lord in the language of the one hundred and forty-sixth verse: "I cried unto thee; hear me; I shall keep thy testimonies." His tender misgivings are an incentive to his restless importunities. As though he should say, "Oh, Lord, I am praying and resolving; but my prayers want thine answers, and my resolutions need thy might to fulfil them. My prayers—what are they? My resolves—

what can they do? I am a frail leaf, and I bend before the wind of temptation. My righteousness is like the sere leaf of autumn: it is soon carried away; yea, it is like a filthy rag that ought to be set aside and hidden from view. My God, I want sifting, I want sifting. Oh, save me, and then I shall keep thy testimonies." There is no holiness in any man by nature, and never will be. Some ingenious author has said that man is not dead like a stone, but dead like an egg. There was some disposition to life in him that wanted brooding over to develop. Well, I should not like to be the hen that had to sit on that egg till it was hatched! That a long eternity of disappointed hopes would spread out before me, I am quite certain. It is a stone egg, this humanity of ours. There is no real spiritual life whatever in it. Who shall bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one. And they may sit on that unclean egg as long as they like, but a vile unclean chick will be the only result of it. Before ever we can keep God's testimonies we must be saved. We must be saved first from the guilt of the past. By substitution, by redemption, by the application of the precious blood of Jesus, by that expiatory sacrifice in which our blessed Lord bore for us the vengeance of God that was due to our sin, must our salvation be procured. Sinner, you will never go out of the Egypt of your bondage to sin till the blood of the Paschal Lamb has been sprinkled on the lintel and the two side-posts. You may strive against sin as you will, but you will never overcome it except through the blood of the Lamb. Inquire of those in heaven who have conquered sin, and do now wear the snow-white garments.

"I asked them whence their victory came?
They, with united breath,
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to his death."

Never till you see a bleeding Saviour will you be able to put your sins to death. They may be crucified on the Cross. They will die nowhere else than there. "Save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies."

We need to be saved, however, not only from the guilt of sin, but saved from our sinful selves. We whose nature is evil cannot do much with so bad a nature to baffle all our efforts to cleanse our way. This nature must be removed and a new nature implanted, or else, whilst the old nature is extant the old evil will assert itself. There are different ways of treating diseases. A man has a bad malady upon him, and it breaks out in his flesh. He goes to a quack, who gives him an ointment, which he applies outwardly to heal the sore till the morbid appearances vanish, and he congratulates himself on the cure, and commends the charlatan for his skill. "What a capital doctor he is, and how well my money was expended," he says; "he has taken away all that eruption." By-and-by the man is lying so grievously sick and ill that he does not know what to do. "Oh" thinks he to himself, "have I made a mistake?" And when the true physician comes he says, "What have been your symptoms?" He tells the tale of an eruption on his skin, and the remedies he resorted to. "Ah," says the physician, "the disease is driven inwards; you have taken the wrong course; your present symptoms are fatal; you will die. It was well that it should come

out on your flesh, seeing it lurked in your constitution. When you have a disease, you had need lay the axe at the root, and not at the branches. It is not the disfigurement of the skin that is so alarming as the blood-poisoning that caused it." Forthwith he begins to deal with the real evil.

So, my dear friends, you are only tinkering with the symptoms, the mere eruption on the skin, while you aim at outward reformation. You must be born again: that is the only cure for the leprosy of sin. I am glad to hear of people insisting on the importance of reforming every kind of vicious custom and evil habit; but they do not go to the root of the Upas-tree unless they resort to the gospel, which lays the axe right at the root of all manner of sin and blasphemy with its imperative demand that ye repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. This is the vital and vitalising process that will turn out to be a radical blessing. Lord, save me, save me; change my heart; renew my spirit; make the fountain clear; set the mainspring right! Oh, Holy Ghost, regenerate me, and, if thou do this, then, not till then, shall I keep thy testimonies.

The like is true in respect to every Christian, beloved. We require God to keep on sifting us. Unless his spiritual work shall be carried on every day in us, we shall be unable to keep his testimonies. We are to be resolved against sin: I have told you that. We are to pray against it: I have enlarged upon that. Still we must fall back upon the naked fact that a real conquest of sin is the work of God himself. "I cried unto thee; hear me: I shall keep thy testimonies."

Brethren, beloved in Christ, live near to God; live at

the foot of the Cross. Go every day to Jesus. Never get away from the spot on which you stood when you first believed. There and then you looked, as sinners, to find everything in him and nothing in yourselves. Do not expect to overcome sin by any other means but by faith in the atoning blood. Do not seek anything like perfection apart from Jesus Christ, who "is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Oh, I would charge upon the members of this church to labour after holy walking. It cuts me to the quick when I hear it said of any one of the members of this church, "Well, they may be professors of religion, but they are not honest in their dealings, or they are not choice in their language, or they do not govern their tempers. They may be saints at the prayer-meeting, but they are devils at home. They may look very amiable at the communion-table, but they are very cross at their own tables." Do not let it be so; give no cause for such an evil report, I pray you. I do invite all that attend my ministry, who are truly converted, to cast in their lot with us and join the church, for so you ought to do; but, oh, do not bring dishonour—I will not say upon *us*; that is of small consequence—but do not bring dishonour upon the gospel that we preach, and the Christ whom we love. The world will not say, "There, that is a false professor." They ought to say it, and if they were honest that is how they would put it; but, in general, they will say, "That is your religion!" and the Cross of Christ will be evilly spoken of; and many a poor believer, who has trouble enough as it is, finds it more difficult to give an answer to the scoffer through having the inconsistencies

of others thrown in his teeth. Better die than deny the Saviour! Better that we lie sick at home, covered with boils and blains, than that we go about the world grieving the Holy Spirit, and putting an evil word into the mouth of the ungodly. Follow after holiness, I charge you. You are not saved by works. We give no uncertain sound about that doctrine. We have told you, and we constantly do tell you, that you are only to be saved by the blood of Jesus; but, remember, Jesus came to save us *from* our sins. If we hug our sins, we cannot have Christ for our Saviour. Christ and you must part, unless you and your sins part. Jesus Christ will take any sinner to heaven, but he will not take any sin to heaven. He will spare the sinner, but he will not spare his sin. If you want to spare your own sins, depend upon it you will lose your souls. Watch, I pray you, against what are called "little" sins. Remember, when thieves want to get into the house, if they cannot find a ready entrance they will often put a child through a little window, and then he opens the front or the back door. So a little sin will often open the door to a big sin. Watch, I pray you—watch against secret sins. We have heard of some who barred the door at night, and fastened the windows, but there was a thief under the bed. Mind that it is not so with you—some hidden evil—some secret lust. Watch, pray, resolve, but still come back to this, "Lord, help me; Lord, save me; Lord, keep me." The old ploughman whom I sometimes used to talk with before he went to heaven, said to me, "Depend upon it, if you and I get one inch above the ground, we shall get that inch too high." There is much truth in his plain remark. If we get any high

notions of what we are, we shall soon sink below what we should be. Lie low; aspire high; be nothing; take Christ to be your all in all; renounce self-confidence, and have faith in God. In this way you shall conquer sin. Your prayer shall be accepted, your resolution shall be carried out, the purpose of your heart shall be verified. "I will keep thy statutes." Amen, and amen.





A Firebrand.

“Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”—Zechariah iii. 2.



T may be well to explain these words, for, simple as they are, a few words of exposition may be useful to open up the metaphor, and enforce the thrilling truth that underlies it.

There is mention of *a fire*. A cry of “FIRE!” has something fearful in it. When a fire begins to get the upper hand with us, it is terrible in its destructiveness. The fire here meant is more awful than any flame, that makes havoc of matter, and its devastations ten thousand times more appalling. It is the fire of sin. It blazed in the heart of an angel, and he became a devil. Its sparks fell into the bosom of mother Eve, and into the heart of father Adam, and paradise was burned up, and the world became a wilderness. Sin is a fire which destroys the comfort of mankind here, and all the joy of mankind hereafter. It is a flame which yields no comfortable warmth. The sinner may dance in the light of it for a moment, but in sorrow will he have to lie down in it for ever. Woe unto those who have to make their bed in this fire, to

dwell with these consuming flames for a term that knows no ending.

There is further mention of *a brand*. Nothing can be more suitable to burn in the fire than a brand. It is not a branch just taken from the tree, fresh and full of sap; it is a brand—dry, sere timber, fit for the burning; it is not a mass of stone or iron, but a combustible brand. And what does this indicate but man's natural heart, which is so congenial to the fire of sin? Our heart is like the tinder, and Satan has but to strike the spark, and how readily does the spark find a nest within our bosom! As the firebrand fits the fire, so does the sinner fit in with sin. When sin and the sinner come in contact, it is "Hail fellow, well met!" They are boon companions. The sinner's heart is the nest well prepared, and sins are the foul birds which come to nestle there. Not to go a step without a particular application, it will be well for us all to understand that *we* are ourselves like the brands; there is a fitness between us and sin; if we burn in the fire of sin it is no wonder; with our fallen nature, it is no greater marvel that we should be instigated by sin than that the firebrand should kindle in the flame.

Beyond the distinct allusion to a fire and a brand, we read of *a brand in the fire*. Nor is it merely a brand hitherto lying upon the heap, to be by-and-by put upon the flames; it is "a brand plucked out of the fire." It has been in the fire. Does not this portray our condition—not only congenial for the fire of sin, but actually burning and blazing in it? We began very early. Disobedience to parents, angry tempers, petty falsehoods, many sorts of childish obstinacies and wrong-

doings—all these were like the first catchings on fire of the brand. We have blazed away the reverse of merrily since then; some have become charred with sin, till their very bodies contain the marks of that tremendous fire, while in every case the soul receives a charring and blackening from the flame. Not one of us has been able, even with Godly training and Christian parentage, to escape from burning to some extent in this fire. Alas! alas! for those who are even now in it! What with the lusts of the flesh, or pride, or unbelief, or some other form of departing from the living God, how many are still like the firebrand, blazing and flashing in the flame!

There is a fair side to the picture. It is not altogether gloomy. While we have a fire, and a brand, and a brand in the fire, we also have, blessed be God! *a brand plucked out of the fire*. Sinners these, who though they have still within them the propensity to sin, are no longer in the fire of sin. They have been taken away from it. They sin through infirmity, but wilful sin they do not commit. Their nature has been changed. They have received the renewing grace of God. The fire that once burned within them has been quenched. They recollect, to their grief and sorrow, the mischief that sin did to them, but it is not doing them the same mischief now. They are delivered from the body of sin and death. They are, in short, rescued from that fire which once threatened their everlasting destruction. They are brands still, but they are brands no longer in the fire; they are out of the fire now.

Still, the force of the passage seems to lie in the words—“*plucked out of.*” You may sit down on the

settle by the hearth in one of those good old country fire-places where they still burn the logs, and perhaps a brand drops out upon the hearth, where it flames a little while and then goes out. This is not a picture that we can appropriate, for there never was an instance known of a man by himself dropping out of the fire of sin. Alas! we love it too well. "The burnt child dreads the fire," says the proverb; but we are like the silly moth that flies at the candle and singes its wings, but useth those wings to mount up again into the flame, and if it falls all full of pain and torment, with burnt legs, and with almost all its wing gone, it struggles, it pants, it labours to get into the fire again. Such is man. He loves the fire which is his destruction. In youth we put our finger into the flame. We feel it is burnt; yet again we put our hand into it. Then in after years we persist deliberately till that sin has consumed us from head to foot, and we lie down in our grave with our bones filled with disease—foul fruit of the sins of our youth; our very corpses in their mortality bearing witness to the corruption of our morals.

Albeit the Christian is relieved of that peril, he does not escape by his own free will. He is plucked out of it. To be plucked out there needs a hand quick to rescue. You know that pierced hand, and how it burnt itself when it was thrust into the hot coals to pluck us out like brands from the burning. It was no use waiting till we dropped out, for we should never have done so. There was no hope of that. With all the appliances of grace and of judgment, the two together could not bring us out. But effectual vocation did it, when the Spirit of the living God took the firebrand by the hand, and

without asking it whether it would or not, by the sweet and irresistible compulsions of divine grace plucked the brand out of the fire. Now, every believer in the Lord Jesus is to-night a trophy of the strength as well as of the mercy of God. It took as much omnipotence to snatch him from the fire as it needs to make a world, and every believer may feel that he is to-night a brand plucked from the fire.

We come now to take the matter up as a whole, God helping us. May he bless the words we speak to some here who are still in the fire!

This question, as it appears to me, will bear three renderings; first, it may *be looked upon as an exclamation of wonder*. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Secondly, as an inquiry or hope—"Is not *this* a brand"—this one particularly—"plucked out of the fire?" And in the third place, *it is certainly a defiance for us, assured of our safety, to throw into the face of Satan, the accuser*. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

I. THE TEXT BEARS THE SENSE OF WONDERMENT—
"Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

It was said of Joshua, the high priest. There was such astonishment at his preservation, that, with hands uplifted, the question was asked, "Is not this man just like a firebrand snatched from among the glowing coals?" Nor is this marvel confined to Joshua. I believe this is *a matter of wonder in the case of every saved sinner*. Was there ever a man saved by grace who was not a wonder? Is not every Christian conscious that there is some peculiarity about his own salvation which makes it marvellous? If you cannot all chime in with "Yes,"

I must at least lead the chorus, in which an overwhelming multitude will join, confessing that it was so with myself. I could not believe that it was possible that my sins could be forgiven. I do not know why, but I seemed to be the odd person in the world. When the catalogue was made out, it seemed to me that for some reason I must be left out. If God had saved me, and not the world, I should have wondered indeed, but if he had saved all the world and not me, that would have seemed to be according to the common course; and a course of right, too. And now, being saved by grace, I cannot help saying, "Yes, I am a brand plucked out of the fire!" And does not each believer say the same? Why, look at the believer. He is fallen, lost, and yet, though lost in his first parent, he is saved in Christ. The believer's own nature is depraved like that of other men, and yet, contrary to nature, he is made a new creature. As though Niagara were suddenly made to leap upwards instead of down, our nature, so mighty for sin, has been suddenly turned into the opposite direction, and we have been constrained to seek after grace and holiness.

Out of the state of our natural depravity we have been plucked, so that every man who is delivered from its sway may well say—"Am not I a brand plucked out of the fire?" Each Christian knowing his own heart, and having a special acquaintance with his own peculiar besetting sin, feels as if the conquest of his own will by the grace of God were a more illustrious trophy of that grace than the conquest of a thousand others. I can well understand that none of us will yield the palm in heaven to any other as to our indebtedness to the mercy

of God. You may sing, and sing loudly, each one of you, and each one say—"I owe more to God's grace than any other;" but there is not one of us who will concede the point. We shall each strike up our own peculiar note, and louder yet, and louder yet, and louder still our notes of gratitude will rise to the seventh heaven "unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood, to whom be glory for ever and ever." Each Christian, then, for some reason, will feel that he is peculiarly a brand plucked out of the fire. I envy not the feeling of any believer who should dispute this. May you and I be more thoroughly baptised into the spirit of humility, that with deeper gratitude we may feel how peculiarly we are indebted to the grace of God.

Though this is the case universally, there are instances so uncommon that they excite surprise in the minds of all who hear. In the cases of extraordinary conversion, one of the first is the *salvation of the extremely aged*. Imagine a person here who has lived to be seventy or eighty years old, and all this time his heart has never heard the sigh of repentance, and never felt the joy of pardon. You have lived only to cumber the ground all these years, and you are still an enemy to God; while on the borders of the grave you have no hope of heaven. Oh, soul, your case is very sad! It were enough to make angels weep, if weep they could, to think that such a one as you, after so many years of long-suffering, should not be melted thereby. Now, suppose the Lord should appear to you to-night, and say to you—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and, therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." I took

thee into the house of God to-night on purpose that the word might come with power to thy soul, and I have this to say to thee—Come now, and let us reason together: though thy sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as wool, though they be red like crimson they shall be whiter than snow.” What sayest thou, thou hoary Jacob, but without Jacob’s faith, leaning upon thy staff—would it not be a wonder if now thou shouldst begin to love—begin to believe? Oh, may God give thee grace to do so, and then I am sure thou wilt say to thy kinsfolk and acquaintance—“Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” There have been instances of persons converted at the most advanced age. There was one who went to hear, I believe, Mr. Toplady preach the very day when he was aged a hundred. He had been a constant neglecter of the house of God, but when he arrived at the age of a hundred, attracted by the fame of Mr. Toplady, who was an exceedingly popular, as he certainly was a highly evangelical preacher, and happened to be preaching in the town where the man lived, he said he would go on that day to hear him, that he might recollect his birthday. He went, and that day God in his grace met with him. I remember, too, the instance of a man who was converted by a sermon which he heard Mr. Flavel preach, and which was blessed to him eighty-three years after he had heard it, when he was at the age of ninety-eight. The word came with power to his soul after all that interval of time. Just as he was on the borders of the tomb, he was made to enter into eternal life. May the God of infinite mercy give such a blessing to aged ones here, and they will be brands plucked out of the fire.

Remarkable, too—I might almost say exceptional—is the conversion of *people who have been accustomed to hear the gospel from their youth up, who, though not, perhaps, absolutely aged, have nevertheless been for years receiving gospel privileges without any result.* They have been lying at Bethesda's pool, with its many porches, now for forty or fifty years. Oh! there are some such here. You have not heard me all that time. Some other ministry has, in times past, fallen upon your ear, and perhaps our own voice is now familiar to you through your having heard it these ten or twelve years. You listened to it at first with attention. You were riveted for a little while. Then it grew to be an ordinary thing, and though still you give the preacher a fair hearing, there is very little of that drinking in of the word which there once seemed to be. Some of you, perhaps, will almost even go to sleep now. I wish sometimes that you were elsewhere; perhaps another voice would make your ears to tingle; you know my voice full well. It is quite possible for a minister to preach too long to any one set of people, if they get so accustomed to the tones of his voice that they are never aroused. The "click, click" of the mill gets to be so customary to the miller that he goes to sleep. Over in Bankside, I am told, when a man is first put inside a boiler while the rivets are being fastened, he cannot stop long, the noise is so dreadful, but after a time the boiler-maker gets so used to the horrible din that he can almost go to sleep inside. Well, now, so it really is under any ministry when the people get gospel-hardened. The same sun which melts wax hardens clay. The influences which tend to make some people better make

other people a great deal worse. Some of you have thus trifled with your own conscience. Should you be saved to-night you would be brands plucked out of the fire; and may we not hope that you shall be? Will not some of us pray for it? Will not all of us breathe the prayer, "Lord, thy minister has been firing his arrows, drawing his bow at a venture, but what can he do? He does not know where the joints in the harness are. O Lord! draw the bow thyself." Where God's arrows go they are sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies. He finds their hearts out. He takes such good aim that he is sure to reach the heart. May he take such an aim to-night! May some fall down slain under him who have hitherto resisted the gospel! If such should be the case, we shall say of you—"Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

Further still, and apparently the wonder increases. *There have been cases of gross sinners in which this marvel has been still more exciting.* It is a merciful thing that God forgives drunkenness. Some of those who have wallowed in it have been saved. We sometimes talk of a man being "as drunk as a beast," but who ever heard of a beast being drunk? Why, it is more beastly than anything a beast ever does. I do not believe that the devil himself is ever guilty of anything like that. I never heard even him charged with being drunk. It is a sin which has no sort of excuse; those who fall into it generally fall into other deadly vices. It is the devil's back-door to hell, and everything that is hellish; for he that once gives away his brains to drink is ready to be caught by Satan for anything. Oh! but while the drunkard cannot have eternal life abiding in him

while he is such, is it not a joy to think of the many drunkards who have been washed and saved? This night there are sitting here those who have done with their cups, who have left behind them their strong drink, and who have renounced the haunts of their debauchery. They are washed and cleansed, and when they think of the contrast between where they used to be on Sunday night, and where they now are, they give echo to the question, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Very frequently where this sin comes, blasphemy is added to it; and how many we have who, though now saved by grace, were once fearful swearers, and could defy the God that made them to destroy them, or to inflict the most horrible judgments upon them, which it were a shame even to mention! Oh! but the mighty grace that takes the swearer, and says to him—"You shall curse no longer, for I have blessed you; I do not intend that you should imprecate curses on yourself; you shall now begin to plead with me for saving mercy!" Many, many, many such, whose tongues might well have rotted in their mouths through blasphemy, have been cleansed by Jesu's blood; and the tongue can sing that once could curse, and the lips can pray that once could utter oaths. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Oh! you are here, Jack, are you? You can swear. Sometimes when you are at sea you roll out an oath or two, and when you are on shore you know what you are! Oh! but may my Master meet you, and may he once for all transform you, and put his Holy Spirit to dwell in you, instead of the seven devils that are there now; and then you will say, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

Can we pass over *the case of some who have given themselves up to sin, to work it with greediness?* Alas! how men turn aside with scorn from the harlot in the street, and they think of her as though she must be consigned to the seventh hell, albeit that they themselves, perhaps, are viler still! But how shall we give a preference to one sinner rather than to another, when it must take two to commit this iniquity? But, alas! we know that in London our streets abound with those whose very names seem to make the cheek of modesty to mantle with a blush. Well, should there be such a one strayed in here—sister—for thou art a sister still—the Lord Jesus receiveth sinners, and though thou hast sinned very foully, “there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared;” and his voice is to-night, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Whoever you may be that have fallen into these polluting sins which do mischief, and which bring down God’s anger upon men, yet still the heart of God melts with pity to the chief of sinners, and he cries, “How can I give thee up?” and lets the lifted thunder drop. Oh! when such are saved—and there are scores, and scores, and scores, to our knowledge, now rejoicing in Christ, who have found peace in this house, though once the chief of sinners—when such are saved, we say of them, “Is not this a brand plucked out of the burning?”

Or, what if you have even worn the felon’s dress? What if you have ever plunged into such sin that the very thought of it makes your ears to tingle? What if the darkness of the night could tell of such hideous crime that the brightness of day seems all too good for

such an offender as you have been; still, the mountains and floods of mercy can break forth and rise above the loftiest Alps and Andes of iniquity. The deluge of the Saviour's pardoning mercy shall mount to twenty cubits upwards, the tops of the mountains of sin are covered, and you, the chief of sinners, shall have it said of you,—“Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”

We have gone a good length in the way of wonderment, yet one wonder, I think, is greater than all these. I have almost ceased to wonder when the swearer is converted, when the harlot is saved; not because it is a mighty act of grace, but because it is common enough to be often repeated. God's mercy extends very freely to these; but there is a wonder which I do not often see. I do see it, though not often. I wish I could. It is *when a self-righteous religious man gets saved*. “What,” say you, “do you mean by that?”

Why, I mean those good people who go to church and chapel regularly, have family prayers, and say their own prayers, and think themselves upright. They will not confess that they have sinned, except in the mere complimentary way in which they are accustomed to say that they are “miserable sinners,” though they do not look very miserable. Peradventure, I address some such now, who felt while I was preaching to the sinner as if their dainty holiness was quite shocked. They are double-distilled in their refinement, they are unutterably holy and free from hypocrisy, their heart all the while loathing the plan of salvation, and rejecting the grace of God, because they believe that they are as good as they need be. To talk to them of crying,

“God be merciful to me a sinner,” is to insult them. Have they not been baptized? Have they not been confirmed? Have they not gone through all the means? It must be right with them, they are so good. Besides, who could think of finding fault with them? Now, if ever such people as these are saved from this terrible disease of self-righteousness, we should have to say indeed, “Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” And nowadays it is getting so common that it ought to be a subject of prayer with God’s people that God would deliver this land from the spreading miasma, the Romanism, *alias* Puseyism, which has covered it everywhere. If a man wants to make sure of everlasting wrath, let him fall into the deep ditch of Puseyism, for the abhorred of the Lord do fall therein. You may get out the common sinner, but those who wrap themselves about with vestments and fine garments of ceremony, who shall reach these? The hocus-pocus of the priesthood, the gewgaws, the ceremonies, the trumpery mummary which they designate worship—these things form the refuge of lies behind which they hide themselves, and the true gospel of the blessed God is scarcely heard. What with their chantings and intonings, how can the still small voice of the gospel be heard? Through the dim smoke of incense, and the glare of gorgeous vestments, how shall Christ have a hearing? The Man of Nazareth is he alone who can save sinners. May he, in his mighty power to save, rend away these rags of Rome from before his cross, and let the naked beauty and simplicity of the gospel shine out again. Once more may we have to say, in the words of Cowper—

“Legible only by the light they give,
Stand the soul-quickenings words—‘BELIEVE AND LIVE.’”

If a priest should get saved, if one of these pretenders to apostolical succession should be brought down to humble himself before Almighty mercy, then will we say of such, “Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”

II. With more brevity than the preacher likes, though with perhaps as much amplitude as will be pleasant to yourselves, we shall now take the text BY WAY OF INQUIRY OR HOPE.

Our time is so far gone that I can only hint at what I meant to say.

When a sinner’s eye is suffused with tears, and a sigh breaks forth, “Alas! woe is me!” you may then say, “Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” for the tear of sorrow for sin is a blessed omen of mercy’s dawning. May mercy reach her noontide soon! And when alone the knee is bent, and the soft prayer goes up, “Jesus, Master, pity me; save me, or I die,” the angels recognize the voice of prayer. They say, “Behold, he prays!” and then they feel that this is a brand plucked out of the fire. The sigh of penitence and the prayer of the seeking are evidences of grace.

And when the poor soul at last, driven by necessity, throws itself flat at the foot of the cross, and rests its hope wholly and alone on Jesus, then we may say of it, “Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”

And when, in the midst of many a conflict and soul-struggle, the heart still flings away its idols, and hopes to love Christ, and vows in his strength to be devoted to his service, we may say again with pleasure, “Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”

I would invite you to think over the signs of grace, and if you see them in yourselves, may you ask the question, and be able to answer it with joy, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

III. AND WHAT A QUESTION OF DEFIANCE THIS IS.

Do you not catch the idea of the text? There stood Joshua, there stood the angel of the Lord, and here stood the adversary. The adversary began to accuse Joshua, but the angel of the Lord said to him, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? What hast thou to do with him? If God has plucked him out of the fire, thou canst never put him in again. Seeing God has plucked him out of the fire, go thou thy way, and mind thine own business! Thou hast nothing to do with this saved soul, this elect vessel, this one whom God has chosen, in whom the Spirit's power has shown itself. He has plucked him out of the fire; go thy way, Satan! and leave this soul alone."

It is a defiance, full of majesty and grandeur. It reflects a gorgeous lustre on the past. "God saved that soul," says the angel to Satan. Why did he do it? Why, because he chose him, because he ordained him to eternal life, because everlasting love had set itself upon him. What hast thou to do with him? If God has chosen him, dost thou think to undo the divine decree? Canst thou reverse the counsels of the Most High, or dash in pieces the settled purposes of the infinite mind? Go thy way! God hath snatched him from the fire, determined to save him. Go thou, and think not to disappoint or to frustrate that design!

Nor less did the angel seem to dart a look forward. If God has plucked him from the fire, why did he do it? To let him go back again? Will God play fast and loose? Does he pluck brands out of the fire to thrust them into the flame again? Absurd! Preposterous! Why has he plucked it out of the fire? Why, to keep it from ever being burned. That brand taken out of the fire shall be exhibited in heaven as a proof of what grace can do; and therefore the angel says to the devil, "Get thee gone! What hast thou to do with this? God means to save this man, and canst thou destroy him? God has done that which is the earnest and the token of his perfect safety; dost thou think that thou canst disappoint God's resolution and resolve?"

Now, beloved in Christ, do realize in yourselves this precious thought, each one of you. If the Lord has changed thee, if, indeed, thou be a brand plucked out of the fire, why shouldst thou fear the temptation which now assails thee? Dread not all the temptations that may attack thee. Weak as thou art, the God that has done so much for thee cannot leave thee now. He will not leave his purpose half accomplished. He will not be disappointed. He will to the end carry on his work till he brings you up to heaven. Why, I think some of you who were very great offenders ought often to take comfort from your conversion. You can say—"What a change there is in me! How far beyond anything I could have wrought myself! It must have been God's work.

'And can he have taught me to trust in his name,
And thus far have brought me to put me to shame?'"

It is a good thing sometimes to go back to the time when first we knew the Lord, and to say—"One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." I am not what once I was; and though I am not what I wish to be, at the same time I am not what naturally I should have been. Well, then, if God has done this, did he bring me out of Egypt to let me die in the wilderness? Did he begin to build without intending to finish? Did he proclaim war, and did he not intend to get the victory?" That be far from thee, Lord! Thou wilt complete the work thou hast begun, and the brand from the burning plucked shall be found in safety in the day of Christ's appearing.

The whole end to which we drive is this—May God enable us all to see that our salvation is in him. Jonah had to go into the whale's belly to learn that grand axiom of theology. The most of us have been sorely beaten before we find it out. "Salvation is of the Lord." If thou knowest this, look to the Lord for it. Repose thyself on him now, and thou shalt be his for aye: thy place of defence the munition of rocks.





To the Rescue.

“And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken, and have done it.”—Ezekiel xvii. 24.



ETHINKS I see a great forest which reaches for many a league. The trees are of divers growths, and of various ages. Some of them are very lofty. Here a towering cedar, and yonder the storks have made their nests among the tall fir trees. Stout oaks there are that laugh at storms, and elms that will not be twisted with the tempest. See how they rival each other! And there are lowlier trees; some bearing fruit though scarcely seen, others, like the vine, creeping upon the ground—so obscure they can hardly be observed. It is a strange forest in which trees of every clime are to be found; some green, verdant, laden with blossoms and with fruit; others dead, dry, withered, with scarce here and there a leaf. It is the evening, the cool of the day. The Lord God that visited the fair garden of Eden is come to walk in this forest. Along those deep glades, amidst that thick shade, the Almighty appears. He comes. How see I him? Bears he in his hand an awful axe, and doth he pass his finger along its edge to see that it be keen? Strong is the arm that

wields it. Howl, cedars, if once he lift that axe against you. What means that Woodman to do? Wait, and let us hear him speak. Oh, ye trees of the field, be silent before the Lord. Clap not your hands until we have heard him speak. "The trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree"—beware, ye towering cedars!—"that I have exalted the low tree"—take courage, ye lowly vines!—"have dried up the green tree"—wail, ye verdant elms!—"and have made the dry tree to flourish;"—hope, ye withered boughs!—"I the Lord have spoken, and have done it." Let the trees be silent before the Lord, for he cometh to judge them, and he judgeth them with much jealousy. That forest I have before my eyes; men like trees appear to me in the vision. While I gaze on this dense mass of people listening to my voice, let me interpret the Mighty Woodman's words to you. There are four notes of which we shall speak one after the other. May God sanctify the emblems to our profit, touching our ears, and teaching our hearts, that we may rightly understand what the Lord saith to the trees of the forest.

I. *"Thus saith the Lord, the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree."*

Look over history, and you will see that everything gigantic in stature and colossal in dimensions; whatsoever has been great to human apprehension, grasping at earthly fame, has become an object for God's penetrating arrows, and a subject for his withering blight. A grand idea of universal monarchy flashed upon the mind of man. He would build a tower, the top whereof should reach to heaven. What did the Lord do with this fine scheme? "I will come down," said he, "to Babel, and see if it be altogether as they have said." Then he touched their tongues, and confounded their language, and scattered the imaginations of their

hearts: so he laughed them to scorn, and left them to be a laughing-stock to all generations. Then came the great power of Egypt. Pharaoh said, "Am I not lord of Thebes, with its hundred gates, and with its myriads of brazen chariots? Have I not a mighty host of cavalry? Who is equal to me? I speak and the nations tremble." When the king hardened his heart, how did Jehovah—the King of kings—get himself honour from Pharaoh and his hosts? "Thou didst blow with thy wind; the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he cast into the sea!" In after years Babylon set herself up as a queen. "I shall be a lady for ever," said the gay metropolis of the earth, the mighty city of Euphrates. "I sit alone; I shall see no sorrow." Behold, she decketh herself out with scarlet, she arrayeth herself with silk; all the nations of the earth are quiet when she ariseth, nor is the sound of a whisper heard when the voice of her command goeth forth. But where art thou, daughter of Assyria, where art thou now? O daughter of Chaldea, where is the crown which once circled thy brow and adorned thy head? Go, mark a heap of rubbish, and of desolate stones; hear the hooting of the owls and the howling of the dragons, as each one calleth to his fellow in the midst of a desolation which cannot be repaired! How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning! Thus God breaketh in pieces with his right hand everything arrogant and supercilious, that dares to assert greatness apart from his endowment, or to presume on authority other than he delegates. I might prolong the strain. I might tell you of Rome, and all the boastings of that imperial mistress, point to her faded charms, and tell of her decay and her decadence. I might lead you back to

Sennacherib and all his hosts overthrown, or recite the story of Nebuchadnezzar, driven out from the abodes of men, and feeding among the beasts. I might show you lesser kings, kings of Israel, brought exceeding low, until they who had sat on the throne as princes pined in the dungeon among slaves. To multiply instances would be only to confirm the general current of history, and illustrate the fact that the Lord, even the Lord of hosts, always cuts down the high tree, humiliates the creature that exalts itself, and suffers no flesh to glory in his presence. That is the law of his government. The question arises, How does it concern us? Doubtless it opens a sad prospect to those who are lifted up with pride, or inflated with self-opinion. Are there any among you who boast in heraldry a long succession of illustrious names which has ennobled your pedigree? Some people seem to think that the world is hardly good enough for them to tread upon; as if they were made of china, while other men are moulded but of common clay; they look down upon the public as an ignoble herd, and speak of the masses as the "many-headed" and the "great unwashed." Such a man will play the parasite to his own dear self, passionately cherish his own conceits, and petulantly hold that whatever belongs to him is better than any one else can procure for love or money, be it his house, or his horse, the water from his well, or the wine from his cellar. At his wit let all inferiors laugh; to his creed let all who would receive his patronizing nod do obeisance. In stately isolation he will acknowledge no rival. Knowest thou, man, that in one respect thou hast a veritable pre-eminence?—thou mayest fairly challenge all thy fellows for one whose disposition the Lord hates more than he abhors thine. Among the seven abominations your order ranks highest. No liar or murderer can claim a pre-eminence over you in vice

so long as the Proverbs stand. Ere long the heel of the Almighty shall be lifted higher than thy haughty head. He will cast thee down be thy look never so proud; for the Lord hath purposed it to stain the pride of all glory, to bring into contempt all the excellency of the earth. There is, again, an arrogance of mind, of judgment, of opinion, just as ignorant—if not quite so grotesque—as his who dreams that his birth is of higher caste and his blood of richer hue than other men. Humanity in the bulk is the idol of some people; and yonder I see the man who quotes himself as an illustrious specimen. He does not believe in the total depravity of human nature. Judging by himself, the statement that the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint, is a myth; or if it were ever true of a recreant Jew, it never was a fair indictment against such an orthodox-Christian as he is. No, no; he has kept the law; he feels that in all things he is blameless; he has not erred, neither will he humble himself before the word that God speaks to us. In the opinion of such, the gospel that we preach is very good for harlots, thieves, and drunkards, but it is of no use to the righteous, for they have put down their own names among those who need no repentance. Admirable in their conduct, their temper amiable, and their disposition generous, a salvation by free-grace would be wasted on them. The Lord will abase thee, be thou man or woman, whosoever thou mayest be; he will shame thee; the axe is ready to be laid at thy root even now. Thy goodness is not God's goodness, and thy righteousness is not Christ's righteousness; therefore shall the moth consume it, and it shall be eaten away. Or it is my friend yonder, a working man, who says, "Well, I work as hard as anybody; I bring up my children as well as I can; I have nothing from the parish; and if I see a poor mate out of work I always subscribe my mite, though I have

not much to give away; can it be right to tell me that I am not in a fair way of going to heaven?" Ah! the Lord will deprive you of such boasting, for he will bring down all these high trees. You that have any righteousness of your own, whether you be rich or poor, the same word will apply to you all. What mattereth it whether you are born of princes, or the offspring of beggars, pride will nestle in any heart, and presumption will take advantage of any circumstances? Perhaps I may address some person who says, "Well, I am a member of the orthodox and true church; I have been baptized, and I been confirmed after the most proper manner; I receive the Lord's Supper on all fit and proper occasions. The clergyman from whom I take the sacrament has received apostolical *ordination*. The altar where I worship is illuminated with fine candles. How tasteful the architecture! How decorous the congregation! How enchanting the music! There are none of your rough wild notes that give vent to the feelings. Our organ is the perfection of mechanism, and it is played with the utmost skill. Our professional singers perform their parts with dramatic taste. Our litanies are wailed out in plaintive tones. We do the thing in the right style; and as I am a member of a national branch of a catholic church, I hold myself to be an heir of eternal life." From thy towering imaginations, O man, thou shalt speedily totter. God will cast thee down, as surely as thou livest. No boasting even of our orthodoxy, or of our attention to religious formalities, shall ever be allowed to abide his judgment. The Lord hath set his face against all boastings, and all confidences, other than a trust in the cross, and a holy reliance on the finished work and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Or shall it fare better with another class? There is our friend who says, "Well, well, I do not believe

in forms and ceremonies; but, mark you, I always judge and weigh everything." He estimates himself as an independent thinker; he is bound by no precedents, fettered by no creeds, and considers that he is amenable to no judgment but his own. He owns no lord but his own conscience, no duty but such as he prescribes himself, and as for wisdom, he looks with indifference on all things whatsoever that his private judgment has not endorsed. Moreover, he doubts the inspiration of the Bible, and has his misgivings as to the authenticity of some parts of it. He indulges a little suspicion as to the deity of Christ, and as to the doctrines of grace; he professes much intelligence, but he exhibits gross negligence. Strong in his self-assertion, he makes light of the Word of God, and the will of God, while he holds prophets and apostles in little esteem. Ah, well, brother! God is against you, he will make a fool of you one of these days, if you are so wise as to exalt yourself above his revelation. The world shall see your folly. I tell thee, captious questioner, that the Lord will bring thee down. "Tut, tut, tut, I do not believe in any of these things," exclaims the successful merchant; "I say the best thing is to push ahead on one's own account; I mean to save money, to get rich, to rise in the world, as others have done who have made capital of their own wits, and taken care of their own interest." This is the religion of many people; their creed being that God will help those who help themselves: in their account the highest wisdom is to attend to this world, and for the world to come the best policy to ignore it. To the statutes of the Lord they give no heed. Evidently you see no need to depend on God. With a stout pair of arms and a good clear brain, you are confident you can make your own way in the world. Will you prosper, sir? I tell you no; for God is against you.

The Lord will bring you down. Whether it be strength of limbs and lungs, force of brain and intellect, cunning works or scheming plans you rely upon, he will lay you level with the dust ere long. You shall know that he who exalteth himself against his Maker maketh a sorry adventure. Disaster and everlasting confusion are your inevitable fate.

II. Furthermore the Lord says, "*I will exalt the low tree.*" Here is a word of comfort to some who specially need it. You remember Joseph in the dungeon, Israel in Egypt, Hannah in the family of Elkanah, David when Samuel would have passed him by, Hezekiah when Sennacherib rebuked him. Are not all these instances of God exalting the low tree? We have no time to expatiate on them, though they are well worthy of attentive study. But rather now let us ask, where are the low trees here among ourselves? Who are they? The low trees are those poor in spirit who think others better than they are themselves, who, instead of carving their names high, are willing to have them written low, because they feel they have nothing whereof to glory, nought wherein to boast. The low trees are the penitents, those who take their stand afar off with the publican, and say, "God, be merciful to me a sinner;" you that feel your own weakness to do anything aright; you who are conscious of your own worthlessness, and afraid that God will never hear your prayers; you that are bowed down low with a sense of guilt, and hardly dare to look up to the place where his honour dwelleth; you are the low trees, you are such as God exalteth. You, too, who tremble at his word; when you see the threatening, fear lest it should be executed upon you; when you hear the promise, hardly think it possible that it can belong to you—you are the low trees—God shall exalt you. You that feel your ignorance, and are willing to be

instructed ; you that are modest as children, and ready to sit at the feet of Jesus ; you that have been broken in pieces till you feel that a crumb of mercy would be more than you deserve, and are willing to take any dole he is pleased to give—you are the low trees. And you that are despised, who walk in darkness and see no light ; slandered for Christ's sake ; reproached with crimes you never committed ; you of whom the world is not worthy, though the world accounts you to be unworthy of its esteem—you are the low trees, and God shall exalt you. God grant us grace to humble ourselves under his mighty hand. The Lord exalteth the low trees. Is there a soul among you that is ready to despair—a low tree, so low that it can only compare itself to a bramble-bush. Well, God dwelt in a bush. You may think that if he should have mercy upon all other men, yet he must make an exception of you, so aggravated are your offences, so depraved your disposition, and so alien to anything good your natural temperament. Oh ! bless the Lord ! He exalteth the low tree. If this voice can reach now any humble, fearful, broken-hearted soul, even though that soul should say it is too good to be true, yet, in God's name, let me assure you it is God's message to you. Rejoice, yea, sing unto your God, for he will lift up the poor from the dunghill, while he casteth down the mighty from the seats of their pomp and their places of power.

III. The Lord has also declared that "*He will dry up the green tree.*" Whether that green tree be high or low it does not matter ; if it be green in itself, he will cut it down. Mark you, a man may be as high as heaven ; if it is God that makes him high, he will stand ; but if he be high in creature-strength, and creature-merits, and creature-glory, he shall be brought down ; and a man may be low without merit, if he is merely mean and meagre, paltry and pitiable, not

worth a straw. That is not the spirit of lowliness that God blesses. In like manner a man may be green because he is planted by the rivers of God's living waters, that is healthy enough; but those that are like the green bay tree of the Psalmist, trees growing in their own soil, never transplanted by grace, green in the verdure of worldly prosperity, and taking all their delight in earthly things—those are the trees God will dry up. Many I know of this kind! They profess to be God's people, and they say, "Well, I never have any anxiety about my eternal state; I do not see why I should ever have any doubts or fears. I have no prickings of conscience." This green tree boasts "that its leaves never fade, that its evidences are always bright." "They have no changes, therefore they fear not God." "They have not been emptied from vessel to vessel." They have no cares, they walk confidently, they talk arrogantly, they smile disdainfully at some of God's people who groan over their infirmities and bemoan their sins. Perhaps they go the length of protesting that they have no vices, and do no wrong; or they will say, "Why, as for me, I have overcome my bad habits and made amends for my youthful follies and indiscretions; and if I have any faults they are only such as are natural to men, and they do not cause me any trouble." He will even turn round and rail on this wise, "I cannot think how some of God's people can do as they do." No: he is such a blessed, heavenly-minded hypocrite, that after he has condoned his own crimes he condemns other people's customs; hence he holds up the severity of his judgment as a proof of the integrity of his character. He makes broad fringes to his own garment, and he cannot think how good men can wear such narrow fringes to theirs; he has a wide phylactery, and he cannot imagine how a godly man can wear a smaller one; he prays an hour-

and-a-half at the corner of the street, he cannot think that any man is godly who prays for ten minutes in his closet; he sounds a trumpet and gives away three-half-pence to the poor; he cannot understand people when they give away ten pounds or a hundred pounds in the cause of religion; he thinks they must have mercenary motives. He might stand up and say, "Look at me if you want to see what a man should be, how a Christian should live, and what his manner, and conduct, and conversation should be." Behold the man who counts himself the paragon of perfection. Have you never met with such green trees? I have. These people feed without fear, and mock without motive. They laugh at the idea of Paul's apprehension, when he said, "I keep under my body, lest, after having preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." They think such fears inconsistent with the doctrine of final perseverance, though in this they are mistaken. A man may know that a true believer will persevere and yet be very much afraid that he shall not himself hold out, because he may suspect himself whether he is a true believer at all. This green tree is never troubled about the future; it is all right with him; he has launched upon a smooth, deceitful sea, and he believes it will be calm until he gets to the other side: as for human weakness, he knows nothing at all about that. He hears God's children crying, "Who shall deliver us from the body of this death?" and he looks shocked.

The professor, too, who boasts his deep experience, is like this green tree. Young Christians he frowns at—he does not like young people. No, he would not have many young people in the church, because they might adulterate it, and bring down its spiritual tone. As to doctrine, he is profoundly learned; "he can a hair divide, betwixt the west and north-west side," and he censures at once the man who does not understand all the points.

He understands more than the Bible reveals; he has improved upon the Scriptures; and those who cannot get up to his standard he despises. As for the poor, and meek, and sickly among the people of God, he, one of the strong ones, pushes them on either side, and will give them no rest. Never a man yet had anything to boast of as his own, but God was sure to dry him up. Let your life be green as emerald, it shall be brown as March dust before long. You seek sap and nourishment from yourselves. The spider's web—how soon it is blown away! Well it may, because it cometh out of the spider's own bowels. Everything that comes out of self, and lives on self, and hangs on self, and fattens on self, no matter how green it may be, verily, verily, it shall be dried up.

IV. Lastly, the Lord makes "*the dry tree to flourish.*" There are some dry trees to be pitied in their present condition, yet to be congratulated on their prospects. I would not say a word to encourage doubting, but I would say a great many words to encourage doubters. How many of God's people may be fitly compared to a dry tree! They have little joy; they have not got to full assurance. They are afraid to say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." Every night before they go to bed they feel such a consciousness of sin that they can hardly sleep. They feel themselves so weak that where others go and think nothing of it, they dare not trust themselves. They are afraid to risk temptation; sometimes they are so conscious of their own weakness, that they do not exert themselves as they ought, and hence their low spirits, their melancholy, and their mourning. They think they are of no use to the church; they are half inclined to suspect it was a mistake for them to be baptized, and that they were to blame for uniting themselves with the people of God. "Oh," say they, "If I be a lamb, I am the sickliest of

the whole flock." Were I an heir of promise, should I feel the assaults of sin as I do? or should I be so much the prey of indwelling corruption, and become so dry and withered? Do they retire to the closet to pray, hardly a word can they utter. They come to the assembly of believers, and though they do sing with their lips, the heart cannot sing as it would. There are times, too, when walking home they say, "I go where others go, but I get no comfort; if I were really the Lord's, should I be thus; if I did trust Christ, should I ever be so languid?" Brethren, if it is of your own bringing about that you are thus dry, I do not offer you any comfort; but if the Holy Spirit has led you to see your weakness, your nothingness, your deadness, then I am glad you have been brought to this pass, for God will cause the dry tree to flourish. When we are weak, then are we strong. The death warrant is gone out from God against everything that is of the creature. All that is of nature's spinning must be unravelled; not your bad nature only, but your good nature: not your vices only, but your virtues; not your sins alone, but your graces; all these must be contemned and despised so far as you venture to put them in the place of Christ. You must cry "Away with them; away with them," as if they were so much dung and dross. Christ's blood only for our hope, the Spirit's work only for our life. Here let us stand, and we shall be safe. The dry tree by divine grace shall flourish; the green tree, deserted by the dew of heaven, shall dry up. The low tree, fostered by the husbandman, shall mount even to the stars; the high tree, cut down by the axe of judgment, shall lay outstretched along the plains of ruin for ever.

I think I see the last great day. There is a greater forest than this; this is but one corner of it. I see that forest stretched over sea and land, over mountain

and valley. It is a forest of men. There stand the Pharisees, the self-righteous, the tyrants, the autocrats of haughty mien, the men of profound intellect with lofty brows; the men that questioned God's government, the infidels who said "Atheos," and denied his being. I see the high trees, that towered to such an elevation, and attracted so much admiration; and there, too, are the low trees contented to be low, for Christ of Nazareth was lowly. He, whose disciples they are, came riding on an ass even in the day of his highest earthly triumph. And now I hear the trumpet ring exceeding loud and long. Through the glades of that vast human forest the sound comes ringing broad and clear: "Smite! smite! smite! and let all the high trees fall!" O God, what a crash!

He smote great kings and slew famous kings; for his mercy endureth for ever. He smites. What! another crash? the orthodox who rested in their orthodoxy, and the self-righteous men and women fall there; yonder the philosophic atheist, and here the scoffing sceptic; there the haughty persecutor, and there again the pompous priest and pretentious ceremonialist. Gather them; in Tophet ordained of old, pile them together, cedar upon oak, and elm upon fir, gather them together; pile them on, pile them up; let the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, come upon the mighty pile. It is the funeral pyre of the giants. There lies the dead body of sin, and here comes the living spouse of sin, to be immolated upon that same pile. Her name is Pride. She comes; they clasp. The great transgression and the evil imagination, together they lie down, and the flames arise. Now the cedars full of resin give forth their flame, the sparks go up to heaven, and the flames even unto the throne of God, whilst I hear the voices of multitudes singing, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! for thou hast judged the great

whore, even Pride, and thou hast given her up to be burned with fire!" But what of you, what of you, that will be faggots to that great burning? What of you, proud sons of men, that will be fuel to that flame? Turn ye, turn ye! Fly ye to Christ, and then you shall stand in the judgment, and join in the anthem, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." Oh, that we all may be found among the humble—not the haughty—in our present life, and that we may be gathered among the blessed, not destroyed among those whom the Lord abhorreth, in our future destiny!





The Lions' Den.

"O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"—Daniel vi. 20.

THE empire of Babylonia and Chaldea passed into the hands of a new dynasty, and king Belshazzar was slain in a night-assault upon his capital. On that very night he had clothed Daniel in scarlet, and made him a prince of the realm. This was providential; for had Daniel been in obscurity, he would have been little likely to attract the notice of Darius: but observing him in the palace, clothed in scarlet, Darius would naturally ask who he was, and enquire into his antecedents. The fame of his wisdom would be quickly told, and the fact of his having twice interpreted the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar in former times, and of his having just then, with startling precision, foretold the downfall of Belshazzar, and the capture of the city by the Medes and Persians, would be eagerly related. Hence it was not at all surprising that Darius took great notice of Daniel, weighed his character, observed his conduct, and after a while exalted him to be prime minister of his realm. You see Daniel

thus raised to the highest point of distinction and dignity and dominion; and forthwith his prosperity and his honours excite the envy of the courtiers. Full of sullen spite, brimming over with jealousy, they gnashed their teeth at him. Presidents and princes conspired together to cast him down with calumnious accusations. We are wont to say that any stick will do to beat a dog with; and so they looked about for any charge with which they might assail him. I have no doubt they watched him constantly, waited eagerly for his halting, all the while basely flattering the man they wanted to trip up. Can they discover a flaw in his accounts? Can they question the impartiality of his judgment? Can they detect a lack of loyalty in the administration of his government? Can they find fault with his private life? Nay; but is there nothing against him? Is Daniel such a four-square man that he is more than a match for them? I can well believe that they hunted him here and there till their haughty faces grew haggard in the vain effort to find a cause of complaint; and that they set spies to skulk about his house and mark his movements; and, in fact, they stooped to the meanest stratagems, little heeding how much they compromised themselves, if they might but compass his downfall. But his integrity was proof against their devices. The more closely they observed him, the more clearly they discerned that he was always diligent, discreet, and devout. So conscientious and so uniformly consistent was Daniel both in his character and his conduct, that every effort to entangle him in the meshes of their conspiracy proved to be vain.

At length the devil, who does not often run short of devices, puts them up to a fresh plot. O Satan, thou art full of all subtlety! "Let us contrive a new law," say they, "that shall bring his piety and his patriotism into conflict. He is a Hebrew by birth, and in one only God he believes with all his heart. Our divinities he despises; towards our temples he shows a silent scorn; he sets no value on the magnificent statues that we venerate; three times in the day he has been accustomed to offer prayer to an invisible Protector whom he calls 'the living God, Jehovah'; surely these peculiarities will supply us with a pretext, and we will pledge ourselves to entrap him." So they hie off to their homes and, full of hope, they reflect on their new scheme. Soon they meet again, lay their evil heads together, and devise as cunning a snare as they could possibly invent; and yet, clever as they were, they perished in the trap they had prepared. They managed to involve the king himself in their iniquitous device, and to entangle him in such a dilemma that he must either sacrifice his favourite courtier, or compromise his own truthfulness, and violate the sacred traditions of the empire. A royal statute was framed, and a decree published, forbidding any petition to be asked of God or man for thirty days. How preposterous!

But when was there ever a despot who was not sooner or later deserted of his wits? The passion for power, when indulged without restraint, will lead a man to the utmost foolishness, and urge him to a madness of vanity. In such a false position did the monarch stand who was easily persuaded to utter the

infamous edict that his subjects should not ask any favour of either God or man, save of his supreme self, for the space of a whole month. In this strait how does Daniel acquit himself? Will he abscond? Will he count it prudent to desert his post, and get out of the way? Nay, but Daniel had a soul above such policy. And yet you might imagine that if he must pray, he would go down into the cellar, or offer his supplications to God in some retired place where he need not challenge notice. His petitions will be heard in heaven without respect to the place from which they are presented. Or it might have been expedient to suspend the vocal utterance of prayer, and breathe out his supplications with a silent tongue. Daniel, however, was a servant of the living God, and therefore he scorned thus to temporize and play the coward. Well does one of the old writers call him *Cœur de Lion*. He had the heart of a lion. Into that cage of lions he went, a lion-like man—not cruel, like the beasts of the forest, but more courageous than they all. His conscience toward God was clean, and the course he pursued before his fellow-creatures was clear. His sense of truth would not suffer him to be a trimmer. He does not change his habit, but goes upstairs, though he might have known that it was like climbing the gallows; he drops upon his knees, puts his hands together, with the window open, in the presence of all his adversaries, and there he prays three times a day towards Jerusalem, as he had done aforetime. Brave old man! Remember, this was not the sudden impulse of one who felt the flush of youth; but it was the calm decision of one who was venerable with age, having

already fulfilled threescore years and ten of life's pilgrimage, and performed deeds of public service that might have well entitled him to do garrison duty for the rest of his days. So much the more do we value the example of Daniel, because with grave decision he taught the captives of Judah, both old and young, to prove their fidelity to the Lord God of hosts. He prays openly, not ostentatiously: in the spirit of a Protestant rather than in the fashion of a Pharisee: he sought no honour, but he shunned no danger. To encounter shame, or to endure reproach, if needful, for the cause of righteousness, had long been his fixed habit, and now that it threatens to bring on him swift death, he swerves not. Hear those quick feet as they patter along the streets of Shushan. How all the counsellors and captains are coming together! What is doing? There is mischief brewing full often when nobles and statesmen meet in council with closed doors; especially was it so in the olden times. They are going to seek an interview with the king. What calls them thither? Noble patriots! They are anxious to inform his majesty that they have caught Daniel committing the horrible crime of prayer. Was not this a new offence? Oh, no! dear friends, the first man that ever died fell a victim to his religion; and so, I suppose, for many and many a century this was one of the foulest offences a man could commit against society. Those who serve the living and the true God are sure to challenge the sneers of the time-servers in any age. There be many now who hate nothing so much as a religious man. All the epithets in the catalogue of scandal are too good for the man who offers homage to God in everything that

betides him. An infidel! well, he may be reputed honest, intelligent, and worthy of respect; but a genuine Christian is denounced as a hypocrite at once. Away with such a fellow; his conscience is as offensive as his creed! Toleration for everything and everybody who conforms to the fashion of the day; but no toleration for anyone who believes that the laws of heaven should regulate his life on earth.

So they told the king that the laws of his empire must be kept inviolate; good, loyal souls as they were, they would not have a statute broken for the world! There is an end to your monarchy if your royal proclamations are not to be respected! They are so jealous for the common weal, and so earnest for the king's honour, that they must, at all hazards, even if it be at the risk of seeing their dear friend Daniel put into the lions' den, maintain the dignity of the king, and assert the majesty of his imperial edict. The king perceives that he is caught, calls some of his counsellors together, thinks the matter over, and, finding no alternative, gives Daniel up to the conspirators. Alas! I see the godly man flung in among the lions; but what do I hear? Do I hear his bones cracking? Can I hear a shriek of the prophet? Is there a noise of the howling of those savage beasts of prey? Oh, no! There is an awful hush while the king puts his seal upon the stone, and all the lords come and attach their signets likewise. Shall we step down and peer into the den, to see what is going on? No sooner had Daniel arrived at his destination than an angel of God encamped in that dungeon. Stretching his broad wings, he seems to have fixed his station in full front of those

grim old Neros. The safety of Daniel was secured. The mouths of the lions were shut. They lay down like lambs. Perhaps Daniel found a comfortable pillow for his night's rest upon the shaggy body of one of those monsters that would have devoured him had not the heavenly visitant hushed them into silence by his presence; or perhaps the appearance of the angel was as a flame of fire, and wrought an illusion before the lions' eyes, so that Daniel seemed to them to be surrounded with flame, or robed with fire. At any rate, that night the prophecy of the latter days was fulfilled to the letter, that the lamb shall lie down with the lion. God in his providence and grace preserves his servant all that night. We can easily imagine that, like Paul and Silas, when he did not sleep, he made the lions' den vocal with his songs, and the lions growled the bass while God's angel stood there listening to such music as he had never heard before, till the morning dawned, and then he sped his way up to heaven as the king came to fetch Daniel out of his prison-house. So Daniel was delivered, and his foes were confounded. There is the story; now, what lessons are we to learn from it?

Well now, first I want to set before you Daniel's early and entire consecration to the service of God. The king said, "Thy God, whom thou servest continually." This is no empty compliment. His scrupulous uprightness had become so habitual that it was like an instinct of his nature. Daniel began to serve God in his youth. The fear of the Lord was implanted in his heart from the very daybreak of his existence. There are no saints to be compared with those who were set

apart from the nursery, whose childish minds were imbued with heavenly truths as soon as their infant lips began to lisp them: just as there are no sinners so inured to wickedness as those who are bred and trained in haunts of vice, tutored from their cradle to utter profane words, and prone to act, as they think bravely, in defiance of every precept of the Decalogue, till they become proficient in every kind of profligacy. They who give their morning to God, shall find that in beginning early they can keep pace with their work all the day. Happy Daniel, thus continually to serve his God from his youth up! Yet it was not the good fortune of his birth that gilded his name with glory. Far from that; it was his sad hap to be carried away captive from his native land while but a stripling. Alienated from the home of his ancestors, he was taken to the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, and there, with three other youths, he was entered as a bursar in a heathen school, to be instructed in the strange literature of a strange nation, and so to become one of the king's learned men—a magician. His fealty to the faith of his forefathers was at once put to the proof. Certain food that was repugnant to his conscience was served up to table every day. Probably it had been offered in sacrifice to a false god. Daniel feels he would be polluted by partaking of it. He, therefore, with his companions, refuses either to eat the king's meat or to drink the king's wine. As a total abstainer, he drank nothing but water; and as a vegetarian, he ate nothing but simple pulse. With no desire to please his palate, it was his delight to serve his God continually. Another man might have thought it mattered little what he ate

and drank: for Daniel the jots and tittles of divine revelation had a meaning. He could not, ay, he dared not, go contrary to the law of his God, even with regard to meats and driuks. Though far from the land that Jehovah cared for, he longed to live in the light of God's countenance. Strict obedience to God has a swift reward. His face soon became fairer than the faces of those who fed on the royal diet. But know this, brethren, it needs courage to serve God continually.

At length the time arrives when Daniel is to be brought from private tuition into public notice. Nebuchadnezzar has been distressed by a dream, which his astrologers cannot apprehend, and his soothsayers try in vain to search out. To Daniel alone, who served his God continually, the secret is revealed. Of that vision I do not now attempt to speak. But with what nobility of heart does Daniel stand before the king! He does not tremble before the earthly potentate; nor does he conceal the name of the God in heaven who inspires him with wisdom. He recalls the forgotten dream, and forthwith he is exalted; made a great man in the realm; and set in the king's gate. He becomes, so to speak, the king's privy-chaplain. Still he goes on to serve his God continually. Obscurity could not hinder him, publicity cannot mislead him. Again the king dreams; again Daniel boldly explains, though that explanation is to the effect that the haughty monarch shall be driven as a lunatic from the abodes of men.

“Fearless, himself a dying man,
Of dying men's esteem,”

he serves his God continually.

For a while Daniel retires into the shade. You hear nothing of him till Belshazzar ascends the throne, but he is still serving his God; I doubt not sometimes ministering to his poorer brethren, and visiting the sick, but constantly in his chamber, by prayer and by study of the Scriptures, seeking and finding communion with the Most High. On a sudden Belshazzar summons him to his presence. There is a mysterious writing on the wall, which can be read by no eye, and interpreted by no lip but his. He is not disconcerted, but ready at the call of royalty. To court he comes. Oh, with what simple dignity, with what sublime composure, with what heroic courage, does the man of God, bending now beneath the weight of years, tell the proud monarch, who might cut him in pieces if he willed, of his immediate doom: "Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting"! If you want to find a counterpart of John Knox in the Bible, I do not know, leaving out Elijah, where you will find a rival to Daniel. How confidently he speaks: "This is the writing"! And again: "This is the interpretation." His word commends itself to the conscience. No man dare gainsay it. He is promoted to the highest honour in the realm. And now what will he do? There has been a change of monarchs, but there is no change in Daniel. No time-server, he stands to his principles at all times. "Servant of the living God" is his title. He had taken for his motto, when he began life, "I serve"; and he retains the motto to his life's close. The glory of his God was his one object throughout all his days. He never swerved. He is now lifted to a higher post of dignity than he had ever been raised to before. He is

prime-minister of the greatest monarch of the age; yet he refuses the idolatry of the heathen, and maintains his allegiance to him who ruleth in the heavens. They can find no flaw in him, though the eyes of envy watch him from early morn to dewy eve. Oh, my brethren, it is a hard thing to serve God in high places! Many a man did seem to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour when humbly earning his livelihood by the toil of his hands, and eating his bread in the sweat of his face; but afterwards, when advanced to ease and opulence, he turned his back upon his friends, and forsook his Lord. Be very jealous of yourselves if you are rising in the world. Riches are deceitful. It is not easy to walk on a high rope. What lamentable accidents have befallen those who have thus risked their lives! Let us be the more circumspect when we are called to walk in high places. Popularity and fame, riches and honour, are among the sharpest trials of integrity that mortal man can pass through. Daniel could endure them all without his head growing giddy, for he served his God continually.

Now note the effect of what Daniel did. It is comparatively easy to follow the Lord in bright days; but the sun of prosperity suddenly darkens and the man of God is encompassed with perils. If he continues in his holy course, he will forfeit the king's favour and lose his life in the most dreadful manner. What will Daniel's determination be? Oh, the true grit is in him! He is a blade of the true Jerusalem manufacture, and is not to be broken. He will do just as he did before. He opens his window, and in the same posture, down on his knees, he prays, as he

did aforetime. Glory be unto the God of Daniel, who made and who kept such a man with his head clear in the crisis, with his heart pure in the midst of persecution, and his feet steadfast to the end. Ah! dear friends, some of us little know what these pinches mean. There are a few of you that do. You have endured torture without accepting deliverance. I have felt a holy pride in some of you when I have seen how you have borne trial. Witness the man who has a shop, which brings him in more profit on a Sunday than it does all the rest of the days of the week, and he says, "Come, it must be one thing or another; I cannot go to the Tabernacle and keep my shop open too; which shall it be?" His faith proves stronger than his fear. The shutters are closed on the first day of the week. His business goes; he loses everything; and yet he does not regret it, he parts with ill-gotten gain without a grudge, and goes back to hard manual labour again with a moral satisfaction and a manifest ease of conscience that he never knew before. Dear souls, your Pastor is proud of you. I feel that I can thank God and take courage, since the gospel of Christ educates and brings up such men—such simple, honest servants of the living God; and when I have seen young men serving in a shop who, when asked to do something positively dishonest, have at first mildly answered that they could not, and when told that they must either comply or retire, they have boldly said, "Then I will leave," I have felt how highly honoured I am of God to have such men in our ranks. My eminent predecessor, Dr. Gill, was told by a certain member of his congregation, who ought to have known better, that if he

published his book, "The Cause of God and Truth," he would lose some of his best friends, and that his income would fall off; and the Doctor said, "I can afford to be poor, but I cannot afford to injure my conscience." The devil and the deceit of your own heart will readily suggest that you must look after your family. And some good Christian people mistake prudence for piety. I dare say, had Daniel gone to consult Mr. Prudent-Thrifty, and asked his advice, he would have said, "Well, you see, it is a very important thing for us to have you at the head of affairs; I do not think you ought to throw away such an opportunity as you have of doing good. It is not absolutely necessary for you to pray for thirty days! Were it not better for you to trim a little, and yield a point or two? You do distinguished service to our cause, and by keeping your position you will be putting your foes to a non-plus. By compromise you will obtain concessions. Worldly wisdom is worth your study." This is the way that fools are beguiled, and in this way many Christians, alas! drift from their moorings. To plead the present distress is, for the most part, a mere pretence. "Let us do evil that good may come," never was in the code of Old Testament or New Testament truth. I remember a notable instance some years ago of this fallacious reasoning. A reflection was cast on the career of a distinguished clergyman, who resigned his connection with the Established Church, and, after much consideration, allied himself with the Baptists. "Did he gain credit," it was asked, "or increase his congregation by the change?" What of that? The answer is easy. Let conscience assert its supremacy; for circumstances do

not weigh a feather in the scale. Long departed from among us, we may still speak of him as the Hon. and Rev. Baptist Noel; and he was right and righteous in his decision, as one who feared the Lord in the face of any loss. If by stopping where he thought he ought not to stop, or by conforming to what he believed to be a corrupt corporation, he could have saved multitudes of souls, the good done to others would not have extenuated the guilt incurred by himself. You and I have nothing at all to do with consequences. Be it ours to hearken to the voice of the Lord, and obey his high behests. When God prompts our conscience to a course of action, the slightest demur will recoil with a sense of guilt intolerable. *Fiat justitia, ruat cælum* is an old adage. Though the heavens should fall by our doing right, we are not to sin in order to keep them up. At the call of duty never parley with danger. Should everything seem to go amiss with us after we have done the right thing, there is no cause for regret. Remember that our conduct is the maker of our character.

“ Though dark be the way,
 Since he is my guide,
 'Tis mine to obey,
 'Tis his to provide.”

Though cisterns be broken,
 And creatures all fail,
 The word he has spoken
 Shall surely prevail.”

Ye men of faith, hoist your colours! Leave to your God the providing: stick ye to the obeying. Learn your duty, and do it bravely. Through floods and

through flames, if Jesus leads, follow on, never dubious that your welfare is assured. That all-absorbing zeal which is deaf to remonstrance, and urges ever its onward march, crying, "Hinder me not," makes light of the cross a man has to carry in prospect of the crown of glory awaiting him at the end of his brief life's campaign.

Here, dear friends, I would remark that the only service to God which is real, genuine, remunerative, is this continual service that sticks at nothing. Any hungry dog will follow you in the streets if you do but entice him with a piece of meat, or a bit of biscuit. How closely he keeps to your heels! but after a while the bait is gone, and the dog retreats. That is like many a professor. There is some little pleasure in religion, or some advantage, and so he follows Christ; but after a while there is an attraction elsewhere, and the brute, impelled by greed rather than gratitude, pursues it. Of such a cur I would never make a pet. Thus do false professors forsake Christ, whom they never did really follow. But I have seen a man sometimes on horseback, splashing the mud about; and I have seen his dog keeping close at the horse's heels—up hill and down dale—whether the road were smooth or rough, what matters it to the faithful hound? His master was before him, so on he went. That is the only kind of dog I would care to own; and I believe this is the only sort of follower that our Lord Jesus Christ is willing to acknowledge. Oh, those time-servers, who look one way and pull the other, like the wherry-men upon the stream! As for Lord Fair-Speech, Lord Time-Server, Mr. Smooth-Man, Mr. Anything, Mr. Facing-both-Ways,

Mr. Two-Tongues, and all the members of their club, Mr. By-Ends included, the entire company of them will be swept away when the Judge comes with the besom of destruction. I know you feel the force of this. How you loathe a friend who will not stick to you in dark times! Do you remember that companion of yours who used to call in of an evening and sit and chat with you? What a dear fellow he seemed! You always thought he was a sincere friend; you liked him much, and you confided in his judgment as you often took counsel together. And all went well till one day, when the dark clouds began to gather over your head. It made a serious change in your circumstances. What was it? A severe loss in business, or perhaps a bankruptcy. Now you cannot keep such a well-spread table, or wear so good a hat as you used to do; there is not so much nap on your Sunday coat; you look rather less thriving than in days of yore. Pray tell me what has become of your friend? Ah! never mind, let him stop where he is, for you have not suffered much loss by getting rid of him. He was never worth knowing before, but you have found out his worthlessness now; and I advise you to have nothing more to do with him. Do you not despise the character of such a man? Do you not feel in your heart, "Well, I can forgive him, but I will have nothing more to do with such a selfish fellow"? This is but a picture of yourselves if you try to follow Jesus Christ only when you are in the society of his people, and as easily lend yourselves to sing a frivolous or lewd song when you are with the ungodly. What is that man's profession worth who lets his tongue run loose with flippant

speech and vain conversation when he gets into the company of such friends as are known to be sons of Belial? Oh, to have a few Daniels who will serve the Lord continually! The only way to build up a character which will be proof against the temptations of the age and of your own immediate surroundings is to commit your cause to God, as Daniel did. Be much in prayer. Prayer keeps the Christian steadfast. You may make a loud profession, but it will not last without prayer. Amidst work and worry, heavy responsibilities and incessant anxiety, you had need often renew the confession of sin and weakness on your bended knees. Then, again, you must have a lively faith in the living and true God, as the prophet had; for this only can sustain you in such a warfare. Is your faith genuine, of the right metal? Spurious faith soon loses its edge. The Christian is in hard straits if he finds that, when most he needs courage and comfort, all his strength and joy have departed. Prove your faith in the petty skirmishes of the passing hour, if you would have it endure the perilous conflicts of an evil day. Have you got a religion that did not begin with rigorous self-denial? Get rid of it. If you have a religion that suits your constitutional fondness for ceremonies, your æsthetic taste for culture, your habitual passion for music, or the like, beware of it, eschew it. The root of all real religion is simple faith in the Lord Jesus. Away with every counterfeit. That faith which lives on Jesus only, rests on Jesus solely, builds on Jesus wholly, and shows itself in earnest prayer, will give you a consistency and decision of character that will make you like Daniel all your days.

There I leave this first point. The next turns up in due course.

Who was this God that Daniel served? Daniel's God—is he worthy of our worship? Poor Daniel, facing the forfeit of his life—thrown into a lions' den for his fidelity to the faith of his fathers. Is the game worth the candle? I ask the question in all earnestness, because I feel positively sure that multitudes of men have a religion that in their own judgment is hardly worth debating about, far less dying for. To my apprehension, it must have been a sorry spectacle to watch a Papist going to the stake or the scaffold—as many have gone—for the maintenance of a fiction or a falsehood. And I should be surprised to see an Agnostic lay down his life for the defence of nothing; though of this I can remember no instance. I suppose that in the natural order of things Nonconformity must sometimes take a negative form. Still, the heroes of chivalry and the martyrs of the church were never recruited from any society of cosmopolitans, who own no country as their own, nor from any clique of freethinkers who acknowledge no doctrine or dogma as the peculiar heritage of Christians. But what shall we say of the living and true God, whom Daniel delighted to honour? Is he worth living for, worth serving, worth dying for? Doubtless, the prophet's devotion grew stronger with the proof he made of the Lord's goodness and greatness. With childlike faith he clung at first to simple precepts that he would not transgress. The revelations he afterwards received seem like rewards for his unfaltering integrity. In his direst emergencies God manifestly delivered him.

He had no other longing for life than communion with the Lord of all the earth. From the Christian point of view, he was "a man greatly beloved"; to the outside heathen aspect, he was "a servant of the living God." But let us repeat the question, that we may have the pleasure of answering it for ourselves. Is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ worthy of our love and our life? Words are wanting to tell the gratitude and joy that we cherish towards God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead in sins. By faith I understand that the blessed Son of God redeemed my soul with his own heart's blood; and by sweet experience I know that he raised me up from the pit of dark despair, and set my feet on the rock. He died for me. Ah, this is the root of every satisfaction I have! He put all my transgressions away. He cleansed me with his precious blood; he covered me with his perfect righteousness; he wrapped me up in his own virtues. He has promised to keep me, while I abide in this world, from its temptations and snares; and when I depart from this world, he has already prepared for me a mansion in the heaven of unfading bliss, and a crown of everlasting joy that shall never, never fade away. To me, then, the days or years of my mortal sojourn on this earth are of little moment. Nor is the manner of my decease of much consequence. Should foemen sentence me to martyrdom, or physicians declare that I must soon depart this life, it is all alike:

"A few more rolling suns at most
Shall land me on fair Canaan's coast."

What more can I wish than that while my brief term on

earth shall last I should be the servant of him who became the servant of servants for me? You, dear friends, must be the best judges of your own religion, whether or not it be worth suffering for. If it is not full of immortality, I would not advise you to risk your reputation on retaining it. If it is only a fair profession, you may well blush for it as a foul delusion. The fleeting fashion of the time has its market value; but sterling truth is a commodity that never fluctuates. Have you found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth? Your religion is genuine if Christ himself be the all in all of it. Is he your own dear Saviour? Then you have pardon and peace, happiness in this present time, and heaven in prospect. Happier lot no heart can wish for.

The apostle Paul tells us of three full assurances—the full assurance of understanding, the full assurance of faith, and the full assurance of hope. Add them together, and then, by your leave, I would ask you to tell me what views of immortality break on your vision as you realize this triple assurance. With me it comes to this: if need be, let me live like a pauper and die like a felon. Our God is able to deliver us from every ill we dread, and he will deliver us; and if not, if not—what then? We are counted worthy to suffer for his sake. Forthwith we are canonized. Into a goodly fellowship we enter. With the noble army of martyrs we are numbered. Seeing we have such a God and Father, such a blessed Mediator who has ascended in our nature into heaven, and such a Spirit of consolation in the chamber of our own hearts, with an eternal reward in reversion—to serve the Lord, and

to serve him continually, must obviously be our supreme interest.

Then there comes a great question. Daniel's deliverance may excite in our minds the enquiry—Is our God able to deliver us from the lions?

My dear friends, you that are suffering just now for the cross of Christ, you that know what it is to be losers for Jesus, to stand out and to endure pains and penalties as Daniel did—you are well aware that the lions are fierce and furious creatures. They are not stuffed animals, having the name without the nature of those beasts of prey. So the sufferings of a Christian are severe in deed and truth; not merely sentimental. Those lions had not their teeth knocked out; they were not transformed into lambs; they could have devoured Daniel if they had been permitted to do so. It were mere folly to talk of your troubles as trifles. They might have been enough to drive you back into the world, and reduce you to sheer despair. Full often your steps have well nigh slipped. The lions have jaw-teeth, and they would devour you, only divine grace has found a means of delivering you out of their mouths. As I have stood sometimes by the sea-shore, and watched the mighty waves that rolled in, I observed how the breakwaters diminished their force. Then a thought has crossed my mind: Is it not thus that sympathy offers us an effectual solace when the tide of sorrow rises high? All along the strand of life God has provided these breakwaters, as kindly helps to shield us from those encroachments of the proud waters that threatened to drown our dwellings. Such comfort lightens calamity. I ask the man who has given

up a profitable appointment because he would not play foul with his convictions, whether, on shorter commons, he has not found the sweeter luxury of contentment? I ask him whether he has not enjoyed, on a harder pillow, more refreshing sleep? I appeal to you, one and all, if a sense of rectitude has not invariably a soothing effect and a gentle stimulus? I know, brethren, that those of you who have passed through such trials will bear me witness that there is a soft, sustaining influence vouchsafed to you while you are cast, as it were, into the lions' den. I will ask you who have grown old, whether God did not bring you forth in safety? Some of you are suffering the ordeal now; but I will ask others who have got farther on, whether they have not been rescued after much peril without any harm? In most cases that have come under my notice, when any one has ventured loss for Christ, he has presently reaped some substantial advantage, and his loss has, in the issue, proved to be his gain. Many a man in this manner has proved God's providence. For an honest scruple he has been put out of a position that supplied him with a scant livelihood. Contentment, with a bare pittance, was his only outlook. Loosed from his moorings, he feared lest he should be lost. Yet he afterwards traced back his enlarged prosperity to this very date. God, who is rich in mercy, has soon found for that man a far better position than he could have held had it not been for his forfeiting the other. And even if thy deliverance be not thus speedy and sudden, if, like David, thou shouldst say, "My soul is among lions: I lie among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth

are spears, and their tongue a sharp sword"; yet shalt thou sing like David: "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." But oh, should we dwell among lions till we die, what joy shall it be to leave the lions and be linked with saints and holy angels in the beatific hereafter! And be it so, that the higher reward is bestowed on the higher service, and that brighter crowns encircle their brows who have suffered most bitterly and most bravely; what fellowship shall they enjoy with Christ in his glory! Why, you and I have but few and slender opportunities in this soft and silken age of showing our love to our Lord by the surrender of liberty and life for his sake. There are no stocks or racks, no stakes or gibbets, for martyrs now. These are smooth and slippery times. Yet we can work with a will, if we be so inclined, with the self-denial and self-sacrifice of missionaries. Yes, for the love of Jesus we can dare to die under a cloud with no hope of being canonized. Faith and patience are martial virtues, which it may be quite within our province to illustrate in humble rather than heroic fashion. You may wonder why we keep on in this strain. I am aiming at instances much more common than some of you may imagine. There are many worshippers gathered within these walls, whose constant attendance at what is sneeringly called a Conventicle exposes them to no reproach, and in some instances would rather win them a measure of esteem. Others to my knowledge there are who can never enjoy the privileges of the Lord's people without encountering grievous provocations and bitter malice. In a congregation of this magnitude the confidential words

spoken to the Pastor by the solitary ones would startle full often those who sit in their family pews. The confession of Christ causes division in a household. Husband and wife are for his sake in hostility. Mother and daughter cannot manage to agree. Taunt and jibe are ill to bear with equanimity. Mayhap it touches men in their trade. Goes it not hard with the bread-winner when faithfulness takes away his bread and cheese? My sympathy, however sincere, is of small account; would to God I could inspire you with more fortitude! Let me challenge you to quit yourselves like men. Let me exhort you to play the Daniel. Say now, Is thy God, the living God, able to deliver thee out of the den of lions? I hope you will be able cheerfully to respond, "I believe he can, I believe he will; and if not, though I abide in the den till I die, I will rest quietly there with the angel of his presence as my guard; for I know he will bring me, when I have suffered a while, to glory everlasting."

"Is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Let me put this question in one or two lights, and thus draw our reflections to a close. Leaning over like that Persian king, I look down into a greater den of lions than he ever descried. It is dark. The stench is foul, and 'midst the dim shadows I discern struggling forms and figures; tormentors whose faces are hidden, stretching women upon racks, and torturing men with switch and knout, and yonder a spot where, on hundreds of stakes, martyrs have burned quick to the death. In the far distance a wild horse, and a human victim tied to his heels to be dragged to death. Strange and horrible spectacle that

out yonder!—a long procession of men who were scourged, who were stoned, who were beheaded, who were sawn asunder; saintly men were they, of whom the world was not worthy. Leaning over the mouth of this great lions' den, I ask the persecuted saints of all ages, Has your God been able to deliver you? And with a cheerful shout, loud as the voice of Jubilee, they cry, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

To change the picture: I look down upon another lions' den. It still is dark, but not so dreary. Night reigns in sacred shade and solitude. The stars are hid; but tapers burn in chambers dimly lit with rayless gloom. There sons and daughters of sorrow are tossed and tumbled on beds of sickness. Thus they have lain for months, perhaps for years, all hope of health extinguished, all prospect of pleasure passed; their limbs paralyzed, their sight failing, their hearing dull; calamities of every kind have befallen them. God has permitted the great lions of affliction to come howling round, and to tear away all their comforts and their joys, till they are left without any of that cheerful fellowship with nature which seasons mortal life with sweetest relish. Some of you are robust in health. Your head never throbs; your heart never aches; you are hardly conscious that you have any nerves. Small account ye take of the secret, silent, saintly heroism of sufferers, whose pilgrimage on earth is blighted with pain. Oft have I been their companion in tribulation. I appeal to these tried and afflicted children of God. Tell me, ye Daniels, has your God been able to deliver you out of the mouths of the lions? And I hear each

one say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" and all in chorus join, saying, "Not one good thing hath failed of all that the Lord God hath promised; our shoes have been iron and brass, and as our days so has our strength been." Thus we find ever—

"Religion's force divine is but displayed
In deep desertion of all human aid;
To succour in extremes is her delight,
And cheer the heart when terror strikes the sight.
We, disbelieving our own senses, gaze,
And wonder what a mortal's heart can raise
To triumph in misfortune, smile at grief,
And comfort those who came to give relief.
We gaze, and as we gaze, wealth, fame decay,
And all the world's vain glories die away."

Shall I strain my parable too far if I turn my eye upon another lions' den? It lies in a deep valley. The night hangs heavy. The beasts of prey are diseases that skill and shrewdness, time and talent, have striven in vain to tame. Like lions, strangely dissimilar in outward fashion, but strongly resembling one another in instinct, they pounce on their victims and seal their doom. We call this place the valley of the shadow of death. Methinks I am gazing now on the forms of shivering men and women as they are dragged down by the lions. One after another my familiar friends descend into the grave, which is the great devourer. I ask them in the hour of their departure, "Is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Calm is their countenance, and clear their voice, as each one chants his solo, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be unto God which

giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" So, at length, this lions' den loses all its terror.

Then I look into another den; it is almost empty. There is a lion in it—a grim old lion, but I do not see so much as a bone to tell the tale of its victims. No trace of its ravages is left behind. On this soil there once were countless thousands of the slain; it is empty now. Of a sudden I look upwards, and lo! myriads of immortal souls, and they all tell me, "Our God delivered us from the grave and rifled the tomb of its prey. By a glorious resurrection he has brought all his ransomed people forth to meet their Lord at the great day of his appearing. There shall they stand before the throne of God, for he hath broken the teeth of the lion, and rescued all his children from the power of the adversary." Thus, the God whom we serve is able, in the day of judgment, and at the hour of resurrection, to deliver all his children out of the lions' den.

But, dear friends, there are some here who have never suffered anything for Christ's sake: in fact, they have made up their minds that they never will. We are not such fools, say they. Ah, ye little wot what fools ye are who count it a pleasure to sin, and a gain to rebel against the God of heaven and earth. There is a surprise in store for you. Into the lions' den you will be cast. And alas! alas! you have no God to call upon, no God to deliver you. Beware, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces!

The tale is not fully told until the den of lions is portrayed under a fresh aspect. Read, I pray you, the twenty-fourth verse of this chapter for yourselves: "And the king commanded, and they brought those

men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den." Hearken to this, ye time-servers, and tremble. The lions had the mastery; that is awful. Over whom had they the mastery? Over whole families: "the men, their children, and their wives"; that is more awful still. When did this happen? Ah! here is a fresh feature of the agony. It was "or ever" (that means *before*) "they came at the bottom of the den." And why such terrible slaughter, from which none escaped? Do not tell me it was because the lions were ferocious; for they always are. But let me tell you, it was because they had no God to deliver them; no angel of God commissioned to shut the lions' mouths, that they should not hurt. I recount a fact, a veritable fact of history. Does the sceptic meet you with a sneer, and tell you this is merely a fable? Then I would hold up the fable before his eyes, and show him that it contains ten thousand facts in one. The lions—what are they? Animal passions, sensual appetites, wanton lusts! Ay, yes; and they prey on their victims in pitiless fury. I am looking down just now into the den with ghastly terror. Whole households are there—fathers, mothers, sons and daughters. The withered frame, the ruined mind, the hopeless sigh, these all convince me that their bones are broken or ever they reach the bottom of the den. The lions have the mastery of them. Oh, dear friends, how perilous the outlook of those who have no principle! For such, the chivalry of faith has no charm.

Absorbed in the luxury of self-indulgence, the nobler powers and faculties of the human soul are not, and cannot, be brought into play. The love of God has never roused them to a holy enthusiasm. The law of God has never regulated their lives. Those thrilling tales of sacred history, handed down from sire to son, generation after generation, have failed to fire their blood. In vain for them seers of yore bequeathed treasuries of psalms and songs which have awakened, as it were, fresh inspirations from age to age, supplying us with glees of gladness, and solacing us with plaintive symphonies for all the chequered scenes and sensations of mortal life. Let me see: I wonder if I am talking straight to you and touching your conscience. Which are the marked passages in your Bible that tell of precepts that restrained you in the day of temptation, of promises that cheered you when black clouds lowered over-head, or of visions of God that encouraged you when your soul was faint? Be sure of this. The harp of Judah, and the timbrels of her minstrels, will wake no echoes in your hearts, while the sackbuts and dulcimers of this doomed Babylon in which you dwell enchant your ears with some lively ditty, or, mayhap, with some lascivious ballad. Shame on those of you who heed not, though ye have so often heard with your ears, and your fathers have told you, what work God did in their days in the times of old! Sorrow awaits you—such sorrow as baffles my force of language to describe—who are fascinated by fleeting vanities, and reck nothing of those eternal verities which patriarchs and prophets inherited, and bequeathed as an entail to their posterity.

The oracles of God! How true they seem to me! how trifling they appear to some of you! We like to troop our colours. There is some fight in us, as there was in our forefathers. "*Dare to be a Daniel*," means, to our apprehension—resolve to eat pulse and drink water from the mountain spring in your young days, rather than defile yourself with the king's meat or his wine. Then, by degrees, in your riper years, you will get courage enough to go down into the lions' den, rather than defy conscience. Such a character as Daniel's had much need of time to mature it. Like a well-grown oak tree, its roots spread far beneath the soil, while its branches tower up towards the skies. It is not as the gourd, which comes up in a night and perishes in a night. To some of you, I doubt not, martyrdom would seem a species of madness; though in very truth it is the noblest type of manhood, and Daniel could face its terrors without fear. The fact is, thoroughness of mind and steadfastness of purpose distinguished him all his days. His heroism never surprises us, as if it were the accident of an hour; we rather look upon it as the consistency of a life. Daniel's faith was the main feature of his entire career. We must give Darius credit for no little shrewd discernment in this matter. Whatever esteem he had for his prime-minister, he lavished no compliments on him. To Daniel's God he offered the tribute of his esteem. What a lively sense of the living God, to whom Daniel's life was one devoted service, did that heathen monarch entertain! It is "thy God, Daniel,"—"thy God whom thou servest continually." And he repeats the same words on different occasions: full proof of the impression that

had been produced on his mind. Then the decree which he sent out through all provinces of his dominion, "that men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel," reads to us like a prophecy of the age to come. How the subjects of Darius treated his decree I cannot tell you. Let that pass. With yourselves I am concerned just now. The proclamation of the living God, of the loving Redeemer, is sounded in your ears, and set before your eyes, with clearer light, with stronger evidence, with sweeter persuasiveness than those residents in remote provinces ever knew. With what result? Will not the terrors of the Lord alarm you? Will not his longsuffering amaze you? Will not his lovingkindness allure you? Will not the grace of God which bringeth salvation attract you? What more can I say in full view of that Lions' den into which every child of woman born is cast, with or without a deliverer?

Religion is the true philosophy!
 Faith is the last great link 'twixt God and man;
 There is more wisdom in a whispered prayer
 Than in the ancient lore of all the schools:
 The soul upon its knees holds God by the hand;
 Worship is wisdom, as it is in heaven;
 "I do believe! Help thou my unbelief,"
 Is the last great utterance of the soul.

To that great utterance of simple faith the Lord enable you now to give sincere expression. So shall you be partakers of this great salvation, and to God shall be all the glory. Amen.