

THE HOMILETIC MONTHLY.

A MAGAZINE

DEVOTED TO THE PUBLICATION OF SERMONS AND OTHER
MATTER OF HOMILETIC INTEREST.

VOL. VII.—DECEMBER, 1882.—No. 3.

SERMONIC.

THE MIDNIGHT SUN.*

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There shall be no night there.—Rev. 22: 5.

Of all the forms of idolatry none is less *unreasonable* than the worship of the sun. For, if ever man might seem to be excusable in mistaking the creature for the Creator; if ever the eye of man might be dazzled and blinded by the glory of any created thing, so as not clearly to distinguish it from the glory of the Creator, it is when he looks upon the sun in the heavens. And of all the seekers after God amid the gloom of heathenism of which we have heard, none ever came nearer finding Him, to say the least, without the aid of revelation than one of the old Norsemen, a supreme judge of Iceland in the time of the republic; a man of unblemished life and integrity who avowed that he would worship no other God but Him who had created the sun, and who was more mighty than either Thor

or Odin. And, when dying, he desired to be carried out under the open heaven that he might pray the Father of Lights to deliver his soul in the darkness of death. And if indeed "the invisible things of God may be understood by the things that are made;" and if every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened, who dare say that the prayer of this old Norseman was not heard and answered.

The sun, always glorious, is never more so than when it shines at midnight in the Arctic regions. To a believer in the Bible there is certainly no sight on earth that suggests Heaven—that world where there is no night—more vividly than the midnight sun. I have seen the sun rising out of the ocean without a cloud, "as a bridegroom cometh out of his chamber and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race." I have seen the sun in his glory and in his power as he shines in the meridian in the incomparably clear atmosphere of our own land; I have seen him from the Rigi setting behind snow clad Alps, and surrounded by many-tinted, silver-lined and golden-fleeced clouds; but I have never seen a

* It may be proper to say that this discourse was suggested, and in great part written, on the Arctic Ocean by the light of the midnight sun on a voyage to the North Cape during the past season.

[The first several sermons are reported in full; the remainder are given in condensed form. Every care is taken to make these reports correct; yet our readers must not forget that it would be unfair to hold a speaker responsible for what may appear in a condensation, made by another, of his discourse.]

HUMAN IGNORANCE CONTRADICTING DIVINE WISDOM.

BY HOWARD CROSBY, D.D., IN FOURTH
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Not so, Lord.—Acts xi: 8.

THESE were Peter's words, addressed to God. They were his protest against the Lord's will. Peter had before this supposed that he knew better than the Lord what was right. When Jesus told Peter that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again, Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him. So, when Jesus told Peter that He had prayed for Him that his faith might not fail, Peter corrected the Savior's mistake and said, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee both into prison and to death." Accordingly, this "Not so, Lord," was very Petrine. God was going to honor Peter by making him the foundation of the Gentile Church, by giving him the second key of the kingdom of Heaven, wherewith he would open the kingdom to the Gentiles. To prepare him for this duty and privilege, God would remove his Judaic prejudices. He wanted to teach him that the differences between Jew and Gentile were now at an end, that the reason for the distinction (the preservation of the Messianic prophecies) had now ceased, and so a vision is given to Peter at Joppa, in which a vessel like a great sheet is let down before him, full of all kinds of animals, and he is bidden by a heavenly voice to arise, slay and eat. Peter is shocked at the idea of eating unclean animals forbidden by the law, and instantly replies, "Not so, Lord." He not only refuses point-blank to obey the Lord, but he deigns to offer a reason for his refusal, "for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth." His refusal and its buttressing argument were both shivered to atoms by the Lord's reply: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."

Let us, this morning, learn something of practical value to us from this scene in Peter's life.

1. In the first place, poor, weak, ignorant man is found contradicting and correcting the Almighty and All-wise God. If God had a human heart, the thing would not happen twice from the same person. The divine fire would consume the presumptuous soul. But God is not a man, as all His tender mercies show. He patiently endures all man's presumptuous folly. We often hear the remark, "I wonder why he was not struck dead when he uttered such awful blasphemy;" but God does not strike the blasphemer or any other rash and foolish sinner dead. If He struck every one dead on the commission of a presumptuous sin, there would be none alive to-day. God's judgments are in another world—not here. Here are all the inequalities caused by sin and used by discipline. Another class of persons say, "God does not strike the rash sinner dead. Therefore, He does not care—or there is no God." Those who say, "I wonder why God does not strike him dead," are the Christian errorists. Those who say, "Because He does not strike him dead, God doesn't care or doesn't exist," are the worldly errorists. They both alike make the same mistake of thinking that God acts on human principles and passions. Many, arguing from impunity, go on to increase their rebellion against God. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore is the heart of the sons of men fully set in them to do evil." Now, this daring resistance to God, which we Christians justly think so dreadful, is not confined to unbelievers. Our text shows that a Peter can say, "Not so, Lord." There may be politeness in the *form*, but in the *matter* it is rebellion and nothing else. It is a declaration that "I know better than God." We are so accustomed to saying "Not so" to man, with perfect propriety, that we omit to notice the profound sinfulness of saying "Not so" to God. We do not use the words, but we show the spirit which would use the words if the opportunity were given. What is murmuring but saying, "Not so, Lord"? What is com-

plaint of our lot (which God has arranged) but a saying, "Not so"? What is refusal to follow the clear leadings of Providence but saying, "Not so, Lord"? And how much of this sort of thing we do! And then we wonder we are not prospered. As if children in open rebellion could prosper!

This leads me to my second remark:

2. That all the *forlorn experiences* of Christians come from their saying, "Not so, Lord." The ideal Christian existed but once. It was Christ himself. There are those that are *second*, but none *next to HIM*. And then there are all grades, from the second downward. And as we come to analyze Christian character and find the reason of difference in spiritual enjoyment and spiritual power, resistance to God's will is the vicious principle at bottom. An Abraham going unhesitatingly to offer up his son at the divine command is given us in the Scripture as a marked example of spiritual attainment. If ever man could have said, "Not so, Lord," it was Abraham at that time. He might have said, "Lord, I cannot commit murder. I should be breaking Thine own law written on my conscience. And I cannot sin against my natural affections. That I should slay the son whom I love, and who trusts me, would be for me to play the part of traitor to every noble instinct. Furthermore, what will people say of it? I shall be held up to execration to all generations. 'Savage' and 'unfeeling,' will be the epithets ever used when my name shall be mentioned. Not so, Lord; I cannot do this thing." Surely, if ever man could have refused to obey, it would have been then. But that which made Abraham's name the synonym of faith, and which exalted him to the very highest rank in sainthood, was a humble, unquestioning, immediate obedience on this very occasion. Abraham's life was a grand and serene one, because he sought ever to conform to the will of God. Compare it with Jacob's, who was fond of saying, "Not so, Lord," and see the difference. They were both God's saints; but what a wide

difference in their subjective conditions, in their spiritual peace and prosperity! A young Christian starts out in life. The Lord says to him through His Word: "Come out and be separate from the world—what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What part hath he that believeth with an unbeliever?" And the young Christian replies; "Not so Lord—for, if I can marry into that influential family, it will be of great benefit to me, and when I marry I can persuade my wife to become a Christian, so it will all be well;" and so repeating his "Not so," he marries and is soon led into the entanglements of a thoroughly worldly society, where spiritual prosperity is an impossibility. To another young man the word of the Lord comes: "They that desire to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts such as drown men in destruction and perdition"—and the young man responds, "Not so, Lord—there must be exceptions, and I am one. I want to be rich in order to do more good, and surely that will prevent my desire from being a temptation and a snare to me. I shall be generous to the poor and to all important causes, and I shall set an example to others how to use large wealth." And so *this* young man starts on a career for gold, and before long he is gambling with all eagerness, and whether he grows rich and lays up his millions, or loses all and at last ends his life in poverty, or dies in midlife from brain disorder from his watchings and schemings; in any case his life is a wretched failure on the side of God. He is a spiritual starveling. He said, "Not so" to God, and his whole life was ruined by it.

3. My third point is this: That the soul that says, "Not so, Lord," must necessarily meet with evil. The unfortunate experiences are not accidents, but belong to the divine system of government. The evils are not to be considered punishments, for the Lord does not punish us in this world. Condemnations are *there*, but corrections and chastisements are *here*. Every departure from God's

way has a sting in it that we may be stung into going back into the right way. We may at length (it is true) become so callous that we do not feel the sting. We are then lost. Condemnation has begun. Now, the Christian conscience does a godly service to every Christian wanderer. It is harsh in its *kindness*. But the conscience is framed by Him who framed all things, and the work of conscience is supplemented by events without and around us. Nothing comes by accident; and all that we suffer in our evil ways is part of the divine institution. Are you finding things going awry? Are troubles multiplying? Look, and see if you are not reaping what you sowed. See if you have not at a past point in your career turned away from God's directing, saying, "Not so, Lord," and persistently followed your own plan, although you knew it was wrong. David suffered greatly from his children, and two "Not so's" stand out conspicuously as the cause of it all. He married many wives, which, though against no divine statute, was counter to the natural and rational judgment, and a violation of rational religion, and he indulged his children in their follies, and even a David must feel the reaction of such departures from a straight course. The *lex talionis*, or law of tooth for tooth in the Mosaic code, was but a reflection of the universal law God has ordained for human conduct. What a man soweth that must he also reap. Action and reaction are equal and in opposite directions, in morals as in physics. If we resist God's commands, whether given by express statute, by intuitive knowledge, or by providential hints, we shall certainly meet a reversal, because we are out of the only way where He insures our peace. It is of God's mercy that those reactions occur, just as it is of God's mercy that if I run a nail in my foot I am pained. My sensitive nerves are given me to warn me of danger that I may take precaution against further harm. And so the pain I suffer from saying "Not so" to God is a warning that I may not be found again tak-

ing such a rebellious position. The law is universal. I cannot defy or resist the will of God in nature or in grace with impunity. If I am irregular in diet or in sleep, I shall be oppressed with dyspepsia and headache. If I am irregular in worship and religious meditation, I shall be oppressed with fears and doubts, or fall away into a worldliness freighted with remorse. In either case, I have preferred my way to God's way.

4. In the fourth place, let us note that the very opposite spirit to that which we have been contemplating is *the spirit of humble inquiry for God's will*. It becomes us, creatures of a day and full of sin which perverts all perception, to be altogether distrustful of our own knowledge and wisdom. The apostle James describes God as giving wisdom liberally to all who ask Him. We are, therefore, though destitute of wisdom of our own, close by an infinite reservoir of divine wisdom which we can use. We surely need not be discouraged. Now the only method for every child of God to pursue is to go to God for everything, to seek constantly the divine guidance. Such a spirit will become an expert in reading God's will. It will find the most important questions settled for it in a trice. It will be rid of the thousand vexations which otherwise would arise from the debatable ground of practical conduct. But (says some one) how can you tell when it is God's will? Let me answer you. If you stand a quarter of a mile off from your father, you will be sore puzzled to know what he says, or what he means; but if you go within five feet of him, everything will be plain. So, my Christian brother, if you stand off and away from God, your Heavenly Father, in the midst of earthly absorptions, you will undoubtedly be much at a loss to know what is His will; but if you live near to Him, walking with God (as the Scripture expression so significantly gives it), you will have no difficulty of this sort. That is the only answer I can give you. It is only the Christian that wanders away off from

God who is in the dark. The rest have no trouble about understanding God's will. They know it without any plan or method to ascertain it. It is pressed upon their sympathetic souls. Now it is true (and Peter is an example of it), that a Christian may live near to God and understand His will and yet say, "Not so, Lord." A paroxysm of self-confidence may seize him even in the very presence of God. It is a sad commentary on our feeble faith, which, at its best, is so weak. The reaction in such a case is overwhelming. Peter's "not so," when Jesus told him of a coming Calvary, was the direct antecedent of the threefold denial, and the deep scar which it made on his whole life. Such a catastrophe arises from breaking what should be the invariable rule of going to God for everything. This is none other than the life of prayer. "Pray without ceasing" is the divine injunction, and its fulfillment is this life which is habituated to rest upon the Divine support and guidance. The thought of opposing God's will would cause a shudder in such a soul. It has learned to find all its peace and joy in constant waiting upon God; and to substitute for that waiting a self-determination would fill the soul with grief. As in the case of a little child, it feels that independence would be only misery.

Dear brethren, have I not put before you this morning from this Scripture, the secret of your troubles? And have you not here furnished to you the key to all true joy? Is not conformity to God's will the conquest over all disquietude? Surely as David found it, the help of God's countenance was the health of his own. And that glorious help we all shall have at all times if we yield heartily to God's will, and never say, "Not so, Lord."

THE WORDLING'S SHORTSIGHTEDNESS.—The man who makes calculation and provision for this life only is like the sea captain who, starting on a voyage to Europe, lays in provisions sufficient to last him only until he gets safe past the lighthouse, out into the open sea.—*Beecher.*

THE GREAT COMMISSION.

BY RICHARD S. STORRS, D.D., IN THE CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMS [CONGREGATIONAL], BROOKLYN, N. Y.

Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.—Mark xvi: 15.

THESE words are very often read in our hearing. They form the theme of frequent meditation, yet never to a thoughtful mind can they lose their beauty, majesty and strangeness. They are the first words of their kind ever spoken by man. The Hebrew lawgiver did not give forth his code to the world and contemplate its proclamation everywhere, nor did David anticipate that his songs would be put to a wider use than that of the temple or the Jewish nation. No philosopher had ever said, "publish these my teachings to all creation." No; governed rather by aristocratic exclusiveness, the sages of olden time were prone to limit the sphere of knowledge to the initiated, excepting, perhaps, some ingenuous youth that seemed to them to be specially fitted to receive their teachings. But here is One who says, "Preach my Gospel to every creature." How strange! and how much there is implied! It is implied that there is at last a Gospel in the world; not a history merely, not a philosophy, but a Gospel, a way of salvation for dying men; a finished thing, to which nothing is to be added, and from which nothing is to be taken; complete as the most perfect song ever sung, or the most elaborate edifice or exact chemical combination to relieve pain, than which nothing more adequate can be devised; and a preached Gospel, understood by him who speaks it, and comprehended by him who hears it, requiring no large accomplishments on either part, but adapted to plain men as well as for cultured minds.

This commission to preach the Gospel to all the world also implies the continuity of the Church as a preaching, teaching body. Those eleven could not go personally; but the Church of Christ has a function to preach to the end of time, and as long as it heeds