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SABBATH EVENING
SERMONS

BY

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NEW-YORK.

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The author offers them to his own people cordially and affectionately. And to others, to whom he may personally be a stranger, he sends greeting of kindness and hope.

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SABBATH

EVENING SERMONS.

I.

THE TWO RESTS.

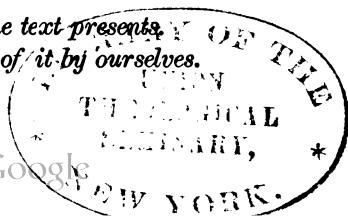
"COME UNTO ME, ALL YE THAT LABOR AND ARE HEAVY-LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST. TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU AND LEARN OF ME; FOR I AM MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART; AND YE SHALL FIND REST UNTO YOUR SOULS."—Matthew 11: 28, 29.

From the twenty-fifth to the twenty-seventh verse of this chapter is found recorded a prayer. Out of it comes this invitation. Our Lord never seemed to enjoy even one exquisite moment of communion with his Father, without an immediate wish for his best friends likewise to share it. Everybody ought to observe the extraordinary literary beauty of this entire passage in our English translation. All the words but one are Anglo-Saxon in derivation, and the sound of them rings like music in the air.

Our present attention, however, is concentrated upon these two particulars :

- I. *The singular doctrine which the text presents.*
- II. *The practical use to be made of it by ourselves.*

1*



I. What strikes us so strangely in reading over these verses is the discovery that Christ says in the beginning, "I will *give* you rest," and at the end says, "Ye shall *find* rest." With the one offer, rest seems to be free; with the other, it is evidently somewhat severely conditioned. Moreover, the figures employed appear paradoxical. To propose to relieve a man who labors by putting on him a yoke, or to help a man who is heavy-laden by imposing upon him a burden, gives chance for a cavil.

The explanation is found in assuming that in Christian experience there are *two* rests, and not just one only. The first of these is a gift, the other is an acquisition. These differ quite elementally. They do not arrive at the same moment. They are not precisely of the same character. They certainly do not come in anything like the same way. The second one is never attained till the first has preceded it. The first may be reached years before the other is made perfect, so that it might happen that the spiritual distance between them shall be sorrowfully wide.

You will not understand all this without a somewhat close analysis of the whole passage, and a comparison of its parts.

1. Begin with that rest which is here shown to be a sovereign gift from the Saviour. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

In this instance our Lord uses a single verb. It is good English to say, though we do not often say it transitively, "Come to me, and I will *rest* you." A form of expression like this appears very welcome, and it is exactly what Jesus did tell his hearers that day. What he meant, of course, will be outlined by the

meaning of the terms connected with it. That is, the first of the rests will be explained to us by the terms "labor" and "heavy-laden" just before: it includes two elements, release and relief.

"Labor," in this verse, means the struggle of a fatigued soul trying to do more than it can. Work is natural to man—*work*, both of mind and body. Happiness results from the success of unimpeded enterprise. But to the term "labor" we attach the sentiment of hindrance, difficulty, poor progress, and measurable discouragement. A camel labors under the heat and heaviness of the desert sand. A ship labors among the waves of a tempestuous sea. An orator labors amid the embarrassment of timidity within and opposition without. Here in these verses the allusion must be to those useless and afflictive toils of the soul seeking self-righteousness, attempting to make peace for itself, and only getting tossed with trouble.

"Heavy-laden" here means overstrained with too much load to be carried. No one can mistake the almost violent force of such a figure, who has ever noticed how the cruelty of people in eastern countries leads them to pile on burdens to such extent that their ill-favored animals can often be seen pitiably staggering under a weight quite unendurable. In this invitation of our Lord the allusion, spiritually, is to those unprofitable legalisms into which the soul is apt to run when seeking for a perfection of its own before God. The expression is used only twice in the New Testament; and in the other case beside this it is applied to the Jews, who felt fretted and were crushed beneath the traditions of the elders. They were tired of them and were hindered by them.

So, then, we understand that when our Saviour says he will "give you rest," he explains the rest he will give by the state he describes. From all that is included in the word "labor" he offers free and immediate release. From all that is included in the term "heavy-laden" he furnishes unconditional and perfect relief. If there be any help in an enumeration, it might run thus: From all frantic efforts after self-righteousness, from all vague monitions of conscience, from all dependence upon moralities fixed and forced by tradition, from all ascetic forms of self-restriction or self-injury, from all legal liabilities for sin committed, from the entire curse of the divine law, come at once to me, and I will give you deliverance; I will *rest* you perfectly.

Hence this first rest is the rest which a penitent sinner feels when all his iniquities are forgiven through the merits of a Redeemer crucified; it is trust as opposed to the unrest of remorse. A substitution is effected between the believing soul and Christ. The effect of righteousness thus obtained is peace and assurance forever.

2. Now we are ready to consider the second rest, which is a conditioned acquisition. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; and ye shall find rest for your souls."

Let us study this likewise, and we shall in the same way discover the real signification of what Jesus says by the examination of the things which define it. It will be seen to include three elements—docility, submission and service.

"Learn of me" means, become my disciple or scholar. It refers not to one single lesson, but to a continued curriculum of a pupil at school to Christ.

Meekness and lowliness were our Saviour's most luminous and conspicuous traits. "Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will he teach sinners in the way: the meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way."

"My yoke" means submission. Our word "subjugation" comes etymologically from two Latin words, *sub* and *jugum*, and signifies going under the yoke. It refers to a war custom among the ancients, of putting two spears together with the points touching in the air, the staves spread beneath, and then forcing a conquered army, disarmed, to pass in a file under it: thus they were subjugated. The pertinency of such a metaphor, as descriptive of the triumph of grace by which the enemy of Christ's cross becomes its adherent, will not be questioned. But we are to add to this all that the yoke, as an ordinary implement of farm labor, would indicate: a faithful, obedient office of duty rendered in the furrow.

"My burden" means service of Christ as our Master. We positively surrender our wills and our lives to a new Lord. We urge forth all our energies in consecration of ourselves to doing good in his name. It is by no means a torpid and joyless inactivity, or an unjust and oppressive work like that we do for Satan. When the Saviour says here, "My yoke is easy," his word means *wholesome* or advantageous; not that the yoke is certainly easy to wear always, but that it is the best sort of thing for us; natural and happy on the whole, because healthy, and alleviated by the love which imposes it. And when he says "My burden is light," the word means unfelt and unoppressive. Augustine beautifully compares it to the plumage of a bird's wings, seeming very heavy, but, after all, the

exact thing by which the creature soars the highest toward heaven.

Hence we see that this second rest which our Lord engages includes deliverance from ignorance and imperfection, from pride in our hearts and passion in our minds, from all turbulence and inward discord of experience, from the service of the devil, which is slavery, and the wages of the devil, which is death. Of course, an absolute perfectness in this attainment comes only after supreme struggle, and remains as the crown of final growth in grace.

Now when we put all these considerations together, we perceive the almost infinite reach of these wonderful words of Jesus. When a man has given himself to Christ in faith—when he has been released from all his irritating and useless self-lacerations—when he has been relieved of all the heavy ceremonies of a self-imposed legalism, and goes about no more seeking to establish a righteousness of his own—when he has taken cheerfully upon his neck the yoke of a wholesome service—when he has uncomplainingly gone under the burden of love, so light indeed that it seems the rather to carry him, and lift the higher the more it presses—when he has forever laid aside the rebelliousness of his own will, by which his heart was frequently in inward discord and turbulence—then it is that he begins to see the brightness of the thought that God loves him, Christ cares for him, the Holy Spirit dwells in him, the new life is begun; then it is he sings, “Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee!”

II. The doctrine of the passage, then, is that there are in each believer's history these two rests, sometimes quite widely apart. Now let us inquire what use can be made practically of it.

1. It will help us correct the mistakes of neophytes. I use this word intelligently in order to explain it. It is a good term of description, and might well take the place of our awkward "young professors." You find it in the epistle to the Romans (6: 5.)—"If we have been *planted* together in the likeness of Christ's death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." And it is also the exact word in Paul's first epistle to Timothy (3: 6.)—there rendered "not a *novice*," but in the Greek a neophyte, that is, a newly-planted believer, or as the margin renders it, "one newly come to the faith."

The mistake made by those who have hardly gone on much beyond the first beginnings of Christian experience, is in being discouraged and harassed by the disclosure of conflict even after conversion. They are surprised to find their hearts even more violently wicked than before. They ask almost plaintively of their religious teachers—Did you not explicitly promise us *rest*, if we would come to Christ? Yet surely, here we are, more hardly tested than ever! Shall we doubt our coming? Shall we discredit a promise so extensive? What does it mean?

It means that you are *between the two rests*. You have the one, and you have not the other. If you will analyze your own experience, you will discover that you are no longer "laboring and heavy-laden;" from that the first "rest" was to deliver you by promise. *That* rest Christ has sovereignly given you. Your disquiet does not now come from any sense of past sin, but from present. You are, in Christian experience, precisely where the Israelites were, in the Exodus. When they had got across the Red Sea, they were certainly out of Egypt, but in the wilderness still. They

had rest from bondage, but not yet—not yet—rest from traveling to Canaan.

This second rest, referred to in the text, is a different thing from the first; different not so much in degree, as in nature. It is a rest from different agitations and disquiets. You have the rest Christ makes a gift; now seek by yoke-service and patient docility to gain that rest Christ offers as an acquisition. It comes further on.

2. It will explain the listlessness of some believers. That piety would really seem to be defective, which has no continuance in self-mastery. No one will ever come to much who supposes *one* rest is enough for him. Rest is not stagnant repose. Satisfaction does not consist in merely gliding out from under the penalty of the law. The soul needs some battle in itself. There is every reason for believing genuine grace in the heart will not only generate conflict, but increase it from day to day. Our ideal will grow higher all the time; and so our variations from the pattern of excellence will become more and more conspicuous. Then, too, our conscience will grow keener all the time; for every faculty of our souls, like every sinew of our bodies, strengthens by use and exercise. Then, likewise, Satan becomes more and more malignant all the time; he stirs us up with taunts, and plies us with temptations, in proportion as he really fears he is going to lose us in the end.

So the most terrible warnings of all the Bible are lodged against those persons who settle down *between the two rests*, accepting that which is a gift, and putting forth no endeavor for that lying further on. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!" Spiritual death follows spiritual torpor. Hence the call ought to be

heard and heeded, when divine grace says: "Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest." Christians must keep moving on. Every arbor on the hill seems welcome, but there lurks within the air of it a benumbing poison; and in the slumber any one may lose his roll. "Ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the Lord your God giveth you!"

3. It will help us check some uncharitable judgments of the weak church-members around us. Few energetic workers for Christ have there been who have not one time or another got thoroughly out of patience with the mistakes and backslidings of those who have seemingly started in the right path. They stumble so. Then they hurry so. Then they lag so. Then they have their ups and downs in rapid succession. Will they never learn to serve God quietly? Is there any need of this tumultuousness and variation of feeling? There is this much of need—the tides ebb and flow for the purifying and perfecting of our faith. "Grace," said the experienced Rutherford, "is a strange plant; it grows best on the weather-side of the hill." These weak Christians are *between* the two rests, like other ones. We have no right to be uncharitable towards them, while God forbears with them. A quick rebuke for volatility may bring utter discouragement; perhaps provoke a reply, which would seem, in our own imperfect life, hardly safe for any one to tempt. There is admonition in a proverb, which comes to us from a missionary field, in the Yoruba language: "Ashes always fly back in the face of those who fling them." All censure should be accompanied with explanation and counsel.

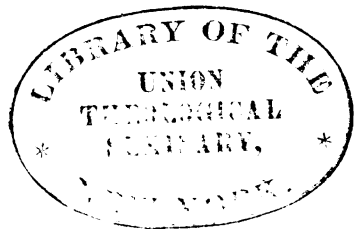
Let us keep saying it over: they are *between the two rests*. There is nothing which hurts and hinders the

church of Christ to-day more than indiscriminate criticism among its members. We need, all of us, to learn of Christ, for he was meek and lowly. An honest view of ourselves, like all the rest, struggling much for only a little progress, will make us far kinder and more useful. "I never seemed fit to say a word to a sinner," said the sainted Payson, "except when I had a broken heart myself, when I was subdued and melted into penitence and felt as though I had just received a pardon to my own soul, and when my mind was full of tenderness and pity." Let us be ingenious at covering defects in our brethren. In one of the battles of Alexander he had been hit with a sword on the right temple, and thereafter showed an unpleasant scar. A painter, a real master in his art, was employed to furnish his portrait. He sketched the Emperor as at the moment leaning his head on his hand, and so covering the deformity. What a lesson for charity! Is it not possible to find one attitude among many of every man, in which we can present him ingeniously, and be artistic in concealing his foibles?

4. It will bring us help in dealing with inquirers. Christ does not bid them "agonize" for the first rest: he says it is a gift. No one can have it *except* as a gift. Quite possibly some of those who hear me are ready to confess that they are laboring and heavy-laden, and there is no use in trying to deny it. It can hardly be otherwise, unless one is as ignorant as a heathen, or as hardened as a stone. The soul of man naturally hungers after deliverance from sin, and communion with God. Augustine, while yet a wicked man, wrote in his Confessions: "O Lord, thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart will evermore be restless till it reposes in thee." Christ does not say in this text: come to

the church or come to the Bible, but come unto *me*, and I will give you rest. The gift is absolutely free; but you must ask him for it. This word rendered in the verse, "Come," is a mere particle of beckoning: it is not a verb. Jesus does not command, he *gestures*. The word is "Hither!"

The work all comes afterwards in the subduing of self. Most of us remember the hymn beginning, "Love divine, all love excelling." But Wesley wrote it quite scripturally, and we have gained such wrong notions that many of the hymn-books have altered one of the lines. For he said, "Let us find *that second rest*." He was singing of what this verse puts second. No one can appreciate accurately the significance of these chapters who prefers to sing it, "Let us find *thy promised rest*." The yoke comes before the doctrine: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." Therein lies our duty. The rest still waits. Yoke-bearing leads to it. Learning of Christ leads to it. Jesus offers his hand to you. Repent of all your sins; put your simple trust in him. Then comes a new endeavor. Submit at once to Christ's will. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." The doing is ahead of even the doctrine. Make one simple resolve, in dependence on divine aid: "Here I give myself to thee! I put on the yoke, I go joyously under the burden!"



II.

THE FADING LEAVES.

"WE ALL DO FADE AS A LEAF."—ISAIAH 64: 6.

The book of Nature is the book of God just as much as the Bible is. There are sermons in the Bible; and Nature is to be understood as preaching at least four discourses a year, with the moving of the seasons; and each of these is a parable with a deep religious lesson in it. This one, introduced to us to-day in the brief text, is evangelical, experimental, and spiritual.

"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf: and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, thou art our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand."

It is not wise to think lightly of the teachings which we receive from the mute world around us, and insist that they are addressed more to the poetic sentiment than to the reasonable understanding. For it is of no consequence that this should be contradicted. It is the conscience of each human being which is to be finally reached in order that his stubborn will should be moved; and it matters nothing through what avenue the moral instruction arrives. Most of us remember that, when Diabolus besieged Mansoul in the Holy War, he tried

Eye-gate as well as Ear-gate in his approaches ; and Immanuel re-captured it in a similar way. Nature comes before our open eyes, Revelation before our open ears ; but both are seeking the heart. Hence, some of our finest conceptions of spiritual truth come from our every-day disclosures of material order and beauty. "Father," said a small Swedish child once, who had been gazing at the stars, "I have been thinking that, if the wrong side of heaven is so very beautiful, what must the right side be !"

But surely we have no need of argument or apology ; for God's word is quite explicit in directing us to a continued study of nature in all its phases :

"But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee ; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee ; or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee ; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this ? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind."

I. Now the special object, brought before us as a study on the present occasion, is a mere autumn leaf, in its capacity of A RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTOR. I knew a preacher who once placed in the pulpit by his side a maple-leaf—indeed a rich glory of color, that he picked up from the path as he entered the church—and he called it his text.

It would seem as if the most fastidious taste might be satisfied with so beautiful a teacher. We recall Henry Martyn's often-quoted remark : "Even a leaf is good company." We wreath chaplets out of leaves, we twine garlands, we build booths. Recollect that spears of grass are leaves, petals are leaves, flowers are only clusters of the finest leaves. Noah's dove brought back one olive leaf to the ark ; it is the leaves of

the tree of life which are for the healing of the nations. A leaf is one of the most exquisite things in the world.

Furthermore: remember that each leaf is a sort of type of the tree it grows upon. If you examine any one of our familiar species in the forests, you will discover that the veinlets on the under side of each leaf are branched into the same general shape which is assumed by the tree which produced it. The maple-leaf is like the maple, the oak-leaf resembles the oak, and the pine-cone bears the image of the pine. The greater form is represented in the less. Each leaf is a little tree—as each man is a little world, what some call a microcosm. Thus men, like leaves, have a great—almost an infinite—variety; but a few commonplace rules would govern them all.

II. But not only as a study is a leaf interesting; it is offered to us here as a SYMBOL. It is meant to suggest to our imagination human life. For just a single feature of its curious career, it is suddenly summoned into service as a preacher to men: it *fades*—and we fade like a leaf.

It may sometimes happen that, in our reading of the Bible, we should fall upon these words in one of the epistles:

“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”

Perhaps, some persons, inclined to criticise, might say that Simon Peter had been heedless here, as he frequently was, and while intending to utter an original truth or use a new figure, had only plagiarized a couple of verses from Isaiah. Certain it is, that the evangelic

prophet had said, hundreds of years before the apostle was born, pretty much the same thing in the same way :

“The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.”

And possibly, if the critic were disposed to be captious, he might accuse even Isaiah of having borrowed his language from King David, who sang his psalm before Isaiah penned his prophecy: for there stand the words :

“As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children: to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.”

But some other Bible-student, still more acute, might insist that Moses had a similar figure of speech, put on record long before the sweet singer of Israel had left off tending his father’s herds: Moses said this :

“Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.”

Thus chasing the thought back, we should reach at last the book which some say is the oldest in the Bible,

and there learn that even the worn and weary Job had said, in the depth of his sorrow: "Man cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down."

But then, this is not a question of literature; we do not need to start a debate as to which of the inspired writers first uttered the sentiment, or clothed it in its familiar figure: "We all do fade as a leaf." It is evident that God has been saying over and over again in the ears of his human creatures the one special lesson which he intended them to hear, and the leaf to teach.

III. So we pass on: now we consider the **ADMONITIONS ADDRESSED TO US** by the fading leaf in the somewhat peculiar office and capacity of a religious teacher.

1. Our first lesson to learn is this: *everything in this world has a life-work to do.*

To some minds no preacher can be found more mutely eloquent than just a faded leaf fallen in the autumn. For in itself it is the sign and the proof of good honest work faithfully done. It seems but a little while since this year began its annual career through the seasons. We marked it particularly when it started out. Young leaves and growing flowers sprang up in the pathway of each month as the pageant passed. Time had reason to believe himself a monarch with such a train. Foliage vied with verdure in the liveliness of the green pavilion they offered to their advancing king. Then came the summer harvests; great shocks and full sheaves displayed their rich glories of grain, and the vines hastened to shake away the cover from before their ripened clusters. And now the pageant draws nigher, and actually gains in glory as it approaches its close. Our own ears listen to the music, the wailing of the wind, and the sighing of the forest firs. The great banners of the realm are out on

the walls at last, and the battlements of the hills are gorgeous with purple, crimson, solferino, and gold.

But we notice the days are still hurrying by. The train is not going to pause here. In the distance we are almost able to see the glittering doors of the winter-palace of ice, into which the monarch will before long lead his band. And once there, he will rest only a moment for the old year to be buried and the young year to be born. Then with high music again the round will be resumed. And the same old pageant will be gone over: the thing seems to have no meaning: there will be the same enthusiasm of welcome, and the same haste to decay: is the world never going to get tired of rolling over?

The mistake lies in a careless thinking that this is simply a parade without any purpose. Whereas the impressive fact is that never was a king making a progress through his kingdom to a more profitable advantage. Not a leaf has faded, not one spear of grass has fallen, in all this past year, without having had its work set, and having done it according to the issued command. Its work was the work God gave it to do: and that is the work which it has accomplished to the utmost demand of the divine approval. Ah, me! I wish each one of us could be sure this autumn that we have finished our tasks as well and as joyfully as have these leaves which the wind drifted off as we came in!

2. Put with this now another lesson: *God always gives his workers plenty of time in which to complete their work.*

We make a very queer blunder each autumn, just as a matter of elementary information; it is on a question

in which later science corrects former tradition. We say thoughtfully before our children that leaves fade and fall because the frost touches and kills them. And so we draw many a sentimental homily of moralizing from this sudden alteration of color. We talk of blighted ambitions, and thwarted hopes, and early deaths—and all that; as if we were living under the rule of some Nemesis, or were the creatures and victims of a miserable caprice. The truth is just the reverse, and the moralizing is quite wasted.

Leaves change color and fall when no frost whatever has been in the air. They drop when a tree's fruit is ripe. Cardinal Wolsey's lamentation may be pretty poetry, but it is excessively poor fact.

“ This is the state of man : to-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope : to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honors thick upon him :
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost ;
And,—when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a-ripening,—nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do.”

This is true as to the appearance, perhaps ; but it is true in its philosophy only as tradition. Leaves vanish when their entire work is done, and because it is done ; and not before, even to a day. So of true men : “ A Christian cannot die before his time.” Every good man is “ immortal till his work is done.” That is what the leaves say always. This graceful and beautiful surrender of green for purple, and of olive for yellow, is only the dignified adieu Nature is teaching the foliage to present, when it has finished its summer offering of dutiful service unto God. She “ changeth its countenance,” as death does man's, “ and sendeth it away.”

It is characteristic of the divine government under which we live that there never is any hurry. God takes

his own time for everything, and so everything is beautiful in its time. "He that believeth shall not make haste." So the one grand lesson which the leaf gives us is patience and zeal: do our work well; there is plenty of time; we can do resting in heaven. "Thine eyes shall behold the King in his beauty, they shall see the land which is very far off." And that is the land which the poets sing of; "the land where it is always afternoon."

3. Thus we reach a third lesson: *as soon as one's work is done, he must expect to retire, and so make a place for others.*

Of course, this is the moment again in which sentiment grows morbid and perverse. Somebody says: "Did you ever go and look upon the heap where, next day, they flung the forgotten garlands of an ended parade? Did you see those little circlets of foliage and flowers as they were carried yesterday? Now look at them, draggled and dead! That is the way in which men are cast out: the pageant will be over soon!"

Some of us, a little less morose, and a little more philosophical, are ready to disown so cynical a conclusion. But even we must admit the general statement. Men's hopes are fleeting, their honors are delusive, their possessions are transitory, and much of what we call life is a vain show in which men and women travel on, trying to keep up appearances. Fading leaves fade because they are fading leaves. And mortal men die because they are mortal. Not even positive usefulness can save them. Indeed, it appears at times as if the fittest to live were the soonest to die. Who has not had in his heart a shade of mournful feeling at the thought that it is this very wild and peculiar beauty of the Fall foliage which is the surest evidence that decay is near? It is the very hand of the Autumn which draws

with a pencil of spiritual skill such colors of richest vermilion and carmine on the surface, that loosens the stem from the branch. How apt this is as an emblem of those saintly men and women, chastened, wearied in labor, almost emaciated with self-sacrifice, disciplined by affection, refined by trials, now grown old and grown lovely with the years, until they shine with a kind of spiritual beauty that we know belongs to another world than this! Yet are we instantly certain that this attractive and wonderfully brilliant loveliness of character is a new proof of their speedy departure. They have got about through. What makes us wish the more for their abiding a while longer, is this exquisite beauty of their dismissal; and others will come in their room.

But let us be practical, no matter if we become prosaic. Do we wish the order of things could be different? Would we ourselves, being prosperous, happy, holding positions of honor and usefulness, like just to stay where we are? Does it seem rough to disturb us, when we are so content? Very well: but if the change had begun only two generations earlier, how would we relish it now? Do you wish George Washington were still commander-in-chief of the American army? Would you like it, if Andrew Jackson were to be re-elected for the President's place next time, for the fourteenth term? It is only decent to be fair; is it likely the trees, or the leaves either, if they had their way, would relish the overcrowding of the years of foliage upon the branches? Do any of us soberly wish that our great-grand fathers, and all their succeeding race, were still continued in the old spaces they occupied, and the positions they filled? And are we any better than they?

No, no: every true man has his proper chance, and he will be the wisest who improves it the best. Mean-

time, the race moves along. Leaves fade, but the tree stands: the leaves fall, but the tree grows bigger: God's providence buries the generations of men; and yet God's kingdom keeps surely coming.

4. Finally, we learn as a lesson from the fallen leaves that *the highest beauty in this world is that of a finished work well done.*

Our American autumn is really the grandest and most glorious of all our seasons. There is nothing that answers to its splendor in any other country. People living beyond the ocean cannot understand it. In all the parks and paradises elsewhere in the world, there is nothing that equals our supreme disclosures of leaf-glory. The rare tourists from other continents pronounce it our chief charm in the whole year. Paintings in continental galleries, which, in the poverty of human pigments, even attempt to reproduce these colors, are considered exaggerations by those, who of course never saw the reality, and by the professional critics, living in the light of tradition alone, are pronounced absurd.

Now we begin to grow clear in our apprehension that this wonderful splendor is only the farewell magnificence of a vanishing line of leaves, a funeral pageant of a dying dynasty of workers, which made the forest larger, stronger, and more welcome while they lived and labored in it and upon it, and that in their departure left room for another of the new throngs which Spring summons into existence to fill the ranks Autumn thins. But the misfortune is, that this regal season, arrayed as never was Solomon in all his glory, is the most disrespected and abused. When we cast our eyes upon the gorgeous hilltops, and over the variegated plains, many there are close beside us, who are ready

to drop into a lackadaisical sentimentalism, murmuring plaintively to each other: "The melancholy days have come, the saddest of the year."

This cannot be a Christian thing to do. Autumn days are melancholy to none but those men and women who never did anything in life, and are not doing anything now. No period in all the year is so religiously suggestive of joyous admonition as this, the days of which are showily passing by us this last month of the Fall. For it tells us that "now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." It shows us, in one wide sweep of satisfied vision, that work has been done, and so the world is growing to meet the Lord's will. And it summons us to see that fruits of eager and faithful service are at last under a proud exhibition, and the Creator's covenant is still holding its own. So it forces us to acknowledge, that, if we all do fade as a leaf, it is possible for us all to find, as the leaf does, a work to do before the fading comes; and that, in the end, it will be true of us, as it is of the leaf, the crowning glory of our life will be found in the fading, for then will the worthy work come to view which our lives have finished.

When they told Goethe that Schiller was dead, he was much depressed; he began to walk the room excitedly; and by and by he exclaimed: "Fate is pitiless, and man is little." That is no fitting reflection for a believing child of God. He does not die as the leaves do; he fades, but he does not fall; he rises, and then the new life begins—the new life that knows no ending and no change.

"The purer life draws nigher,—Every year;
 And its morning star climbs higher, Every year;
 And earth's hold on us grows slighter,
 And the heavy burdens lighter,
 And the dawn immortal brighter,
 Every year!"

III.

THE FIRST CONTRIBUTION BOX.

"BUT JEHOIADA THE PRIEST TOOK A CHEST, AND BORED A HOLE IN THE LID OF IT, AND SET IT BESIDE THE ALTAR, ON THE RIGHT SIDE AS ONE COMETH INTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD; AND THE PRIESTS THAT KEPT THE DOOR PUT THEREIN ALL THE MONEY THAT WAS BROUGHT INTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD."—Kings 12 : 9.

We are over in Judah once more, and begin to feel at home in Jerusalem. This chapter takes us away from those confusions up in northern Palestine, which seemed to be getting a little over-crowded with murder and warfare and theft. And we are glad to come under the shadow of Mount Olivet in the old city.

Jehoash is king, so we discover, since we went away. One of the factions made him so as a kind of compromise. He is reported to be amiable and good-tempered, really religious in his tastes and life. Still, he is only a boy, seven years old.

"In the seventh year of Jehu began Jehoash to reign; and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. And Jehoash did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him. Howbeit the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places."

There is a deep spiritual apathy in the city and the land everywhere. The people have still idolatrous practices; around on some of the hills there are altars and groves where decorous men and women would think it not nice to go. The worst of this terrible ungodliness is found in the greediness of the priests. Evidently they are self-seekers of the vile sort. They exhaust all the income of the sanctuary, slender as it

is, in their own emoluments and perquisites. The king is inefficient, as should be expected; what could a little boy do? The temple is all out of repair; there are breaches in many parts of the building. A dull period of sixteen years has been slowly drifting along.

The picture is not encouraging; but let us turn ourselves to the instruction it offers for us in these modern times. The force of the story will come out in a series of observations.

I. SOMETIMES RELIGIOUS DEPRESSION SHOWS ITSELF IN MATERIAL DILAPIDATIONS. Everything is running behindhand in the public spirit of the town, the city, or the congregation.

1. It is a bad sign when *the church-edifice is going into ruinous condition*. Let a stranger pass through one of our villages, and have his attention called to the fact that the gilded vane on the meeting-house spire is quite awry, some shingles are fluttering in the breeze. When he has been delayed over an autumn Sabbath, and shivers in church because the panes are out in the window near him; when he sees the unseemly streaks along the walls where the stove-pipe has leaked; does he need to have an official bulletin from the selectmen to assure him that piety is at a low and melancholy ebb in all that borough? Can it be said that the zeal of the Lord is eating any one up there?

2. It is a worse sign when *the income of any congregation has begun to fail*. In the story here, somebody must have pushed up that little seven-year-old king Jehoash to try to collect some money, for he issued a call almost at once for help to put the temple under repair. But it all came to nothing; the house of the Lord continued to discourage and chill the devotions far more than to awake them, because it was so forlorn

and unclean. When the revenues of a church fall short, there is always a direct explanation of it to be found in the hearts of the people. If the times are easy, then the reason is lodged in the pursuit of wealth beyond legitimate zeal; if the times are hard, then a plain reason is lodged in the want of proper trust in God.

“And Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the hallowed things that is brought into the house of the Lord, in current money, the money of the persons for whom each man is rated, and all the money that it cometh into any man’s heart to bring into the house of the Lord, let the priests take it to them, every man from his acquaintance; and they shall repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found. But it was so, that in the three and twentieth year of king Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house.”

3. It is a worse sign still when *the minister and the employees exhaust the funds in their own uses and luxuries*. That was the trouble during those sad sixteen years of Jehoash’s infancy. Money went in, but the priests swallowed it up. For an inglorious and indolent period they had received the contributed money, and assumed the responsibility of making the repairs. But they never set about it, because they wanted the cash themselves. There are churches in our modern times which ministers treat as mere machines for giving them support. This is one of the surest signs of destruction; the preacher begins himself to love money, and the conspicuousness of show, and the soft luxuries of stained glass and rich vestments and costly music.

4. It is the worst sign of all when *the people’s heart is unmoved*; when everybody knows and nobody cares about the cheerlessness of the facts or the prospects. Once, in the course of his most vigorous prophecy, **Jeremiah** bursts out with what seems almost like a cry.

He is speaking in the name of the Lord, and yet it sounds more like the pitiful sorrow of a grieved parent: "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land!" Instinctively we bend our ears to listen to the reproach; and his words grow heavier and heavier: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means!" Then comes the bitterest grief of all, as he adds: "and my people love to have it so! my people love to have it so!" To be content with backsliding, to be glad of leaders who will not lead—oh, this is the worst that can ever be said of nations, of churches, or of men!

II. Now let us study this story further, for here is another reflection: **SOMETIMES THE SPEEDIEST RELIEF IS FOUND IN THE PEOPLE'S TAKING THE REFORM WHOLLY INTO THEIR OWN HANDS.**

1. In this case, it was the young king and the people who did the work, though the high-priest organized the new movement, under royal direction.

"Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and for the other priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? now, therefore, take no more money from your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house. And the priests consented that they should take no more money from the people, neither repair the breaches of the house. But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Lord: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord."

Let us look into the whole facts and philosophy of this uprising of the community there in Jerusalem. The religious and ordained officers in the congregation of the temple cheerfully arose to say, "Let anybody do this great and needed thing, that can do it better than

we can." They consented to receive none of the money, and they withdrew from ordering the repairs. In that historic hour there came first to light the earliest contribution-box used in the service of God. Was there ever anything imagined so rude or inartistic as an instrument of devotion? Jehoida "took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid;" in that most commonplace form this clumsy contrivance was frankly set out beside the altar where the people could put in money!

2. But before you smile at the prosaic expedient, pause a moment to do simple justice to one of God's instruments of good. From that day, the contribution-box has been an institution for the church under the Old Testament and the New, probably as well known as any other in the range of our experience. It deserves now and then a decent eulogy. Its record is honorable and fair.

The contribution-box *exhibits the wide reach of religious obligation*. This one stood beside the altar. "To whom much is given, of him much will be required." If forgiveness of sin has ever been gracious or valuable to any soul, then gratitude will show how seriously it has been prized; every one whom grace pardons will render service. And money is the representative, now as then, of labor and life. We should put our coins into God's treasury with the same hand with which we take the communion.

The contribution-box *kindles the fires of love and hope in the believer's heart*. For it seems to say, "All are at work now, and all together; what are you doing for your Lord?" Thus every burden is distributed, and the littles aggregate into vast sums. Just notice the artless surprise of these people at the result: "And it was so, when they saw that there was much money in the

chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags and told the money that was found in the house of the Lord." So much was collected on this extraordinary occasion that they had to gather it in bags and tally the amount off by rule.

The contribution-box *keeps good and true men up to the exact end in view.* The narrative now becomes even more suggestive in its particulars. These verses are worth careful reading: "And they gave the money that was weighed out into the hands of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of the Lord; and they paid it out to the carpenters and the builders that wrought upon the house of the Lord, and to the masons and the hewers of stone, and for buying timber and hewn stone to repair the breaches of the house of the Lord, and for all that was laid out for the house to repair it." The givers grew watchful and alert; they would not waste money upon mere priestly show or gaudy furniture; they gave the sums right over to the workmen for the repairs on the house of God; not to music, nor to janitors, nor to trumpets of sounding vanity. Real cash in hand makes believing men and (especially) women immensely practical in the matters of decent repairs of God's house.

The contribution-box *develops and commissions the most capable workers in the Lord's cause.* When men have given hopeful hearts and open hands alike to the service of the Master, it is not necessary to guard them; they will surely deal faithfully. "But there were not made for the house of the Lord cups of silver, snufflers, basons, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money that was brought into the house of the Lord; for they gave that to them that did the work, and repaired therewith the house of the

Lord. Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to give to them that did the work ; for they dealt faithfully." Perhaps you all noticed in the prints a little while ago that a Japanese young man had recently joined one of our Sunday classes. When the box came around he poured all he had in his wallet into it at one sweep. The teacher expressed some surprise, and his laconic reply was : " Why, it is a good cause, is it not? The more I give, the better I shall like it." And from that he moved on, always following up his money with his prayer and his zeal. It gives one an interest for fidelity to have some practical share of spiritual stock in any undertaking proposed.

III. SOMETIMES PIETY IS BROUGHT BACK TO ITS LEVEL UNDER A FRESH IMPULSE OF MATERIAL PROSPERITY. This is a reflection also that we might expect to be suggested by the history here.

1. The *philosophy* underlying such a conclusion is simple. We are all creatures of human build and constitutional weakness in relation to the practical world we live in. When the church is repulsive and the services dull, when the carpets are soiled with long using, and the melodeon squeaks ; when the prayer-circle is languishing, and one of the deacons has to keep saying familiar things over and over, for lack of others to speak ; when business cares are so burdensome that there is an anxious casting about to find officers present at Monthly Concert to carry around the plates ; when the Sunday-school rooms are so packed that children are simply huddled in masses, and teachers can scarcely breathe the atmosphere ; when we are all fretted to the extreme with mechanical impossibilities crowded in and upon the moral resistance ; then,

good friends, it is almost hopeless for even the best of saints to try and keep up his spirits.

2. The *relief* is close at hand. Let all this be suddenly reversed ; let that ancient and honorable instrument of activity, the contribution-box—that supreme symbol of devout enterprise and majestic effort—be brought into use ; let the wholesome effect of clean lime and bright paint be tried on the building over every wall from cellar to roof ; let some new books be found for instant help ; let the whole work of the church be made nice and welcome ; and it will be like the breaking up of the blockaded river all at a leap ; the ice-chunks will be floated away, the open stream will wash off the mud, and the very atmosphere will be full of exhilaration and sweet bright spring sunshine.

3. The *facts*, which might be offered in illustration now, are without limit. I know the village church in which there abode one ghoul of horror, and his name was Debt. The people opened their hearts and purses. Somebody took a chest and bored a hole in the lid of it like a king. They found in it one day sixteen thousand dollars, and down went the ghoul dead. It has no weight to say, "That must have been a rich congregation." It was a poor church made up of working-men. I know a second instance ; a village spire pierced the sky, unusually high, unnecessarily high, and over the top of it was a wet blanket of thirty-six thousand dollars. The people took a chest and bored holes in it ; and the contributions came in on the four sides with little sums all around. And one fair morning the sun rose far above the steeple, and the golden cross shone free in the radiant light. I know a city church,—I guess I do—that was a-dying under the mill-stone of two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. Somebody

took two tin chests, bored a hole in the top of them. One year they had a hundred and eighteen thousand dollars in them. That helped, but was of little use. The other burden kept growing. Then the people brought out the battered tin boxes once more, twenty months after. Neighbors laughed at them; some timid counselors said that it would split the congregation. One Sunday morning there came in eighty-seven thousand six hundred dollars at a rush; and two Sundays after that, one more shake of those blessed boxes, and twenty-four thousand dollars in addition fell through the slit! Nobody knows the supreme glory of a contribution-box put beside the altar. If you had heard the Doxology sung at the end of the service that last day, when the people were free, you would have said that it was like the sound of the silver trumpets when Israel sang jubilee!

My Christian brethren, I have been occupied in this discourse, as I intimated, with the mere exposition of an Old Testament passage of inspired history. But there was never a time in the history of the New Testament church when it might have a livelier application. The various organizations for usefulness over the land—Societies, Congregations, Boards, Institutions—are struggling for simple existence. It is for want of funds that churches are oppressed for evangelical enterprise. Most of the sums bestowed are to be credited to a few men and women out of the many. A large number of modern church members do not make any contribution worthy of the name. I believe that is the reason why the piety is so low. I avow it as my profoundest conviction, that *systematic beneficence is the truest test of religion* now, and the contribution-box is the one hope left for the whole people of God.

IV.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

"YE HAVE COMPASSED THIS MOUNTAIN LONG ENOUGH : TURN YOU NORTHWARD."
—Deuteronomy 2 : 3.

In the final rehearsal which Moses makes of Israel's history just before he goes up into Mount Nebo to die, he quotes one peculiar command which he had been commissioned to bear to the people a while before : "And the Lord spake unto me, saying, Ye have compassed this mountain long enough ; turn you northward." The story with which this order is connected in the annals is found in the book of Numbers.

The whole incident is worth studying, and will furnish us with a suggestive theme for the general review we ought to make near the close of the year.

I. Let us begin with an examination of *the new departure in Israel's wandering*. Only a few particulars will be necessary in order to show us the pertinency to an anniversary service which the ancient narrative will bring.

1. *Past experience* was in the word "compassed." It seems that now for thirty-eight years the tribes had been lingering listlessly in the vicinity of Mount Seir. This was the name given to an extensive range of elevated country near the northern end of the gulf of Akaba. Once before in their travels from Egypt they reached Kadesh-barnea, where they were at this mo-

ment. Then they were all expecting to enter the land of promise immediately. This was the great point of time to which Moses referred, when he reminded them of their previous history :

“The LORD our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount : Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea-side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you ; go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.”

The people grew much excited under this news. Preparation was made to start at once over the Jordan. Spies were sent across to see what sort of a country it was ; the people distrusted their report, broke out into a great unreasoning cry of fear because of the “giants,” railed in a melancholy way against Moses, and murmured against God. The Almighty was angry at their perversity, and ordered them all back on their previous track down towards the Red Sea till that entire generation, with the pronounced exception of Caleb and Joshua, who had remained faithful in the midst of the defection, should be actually dead and buried. So here they were again, “tenting on the old camp-ground,” the same, yet not the same, for only four men—Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua—were above sixty years of age. Those murmuring people had dropped one by one along the path, in fulfilment of the old denunciation :

“Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you ; your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness ; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole num-

ber, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me. Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised."

2. *Future experience* was in the word "northward." For they all knew that in that direction lay Canaan. The time was complete, the retribution was fulfilled, a young generation had arrived upon the stage of action. So another forward movement was ordered this time in the line of progress towards the Jordan and the covenanted land of promise. Evidently a great historical crisis is reached at last. The deadlock of rebellious will is broken. Humanity shows a quickening of life once more. This is what in modern times is called "a new departure;" and this is what renders the incident suggestive as a religious symbol for our present employment.

II. So much for the old history of Israel. Let us now, in the second place, look at *the new departure in our church life to-day*.

1. Our new departure is also, as it happens just now, out of the Old Year into the New. The practical histories of another full twelvemonth are written and the book is sealed. The last week in December is what merchants call "inventory time." Thoughtful religious people use it often for taking account of spiritual stock. The prayers have been offered, the lessons have been taught, and a record has been kept of them. The trials of some are over, and the joys of others are exhausted; the duties are finished, the days are gone. But here we are again: as Kadesh looked like Kadesh to Israel, so January promises to look like January when the New

Year begins. So we are at a border line once more, and our word of cheer and inspiration to each other might well be "Rise up, and get you over the brook!" Let the past be left behind; our hopes are all in the future: we have compassed that mountain with its twelve peaks "long enough;" it is time to "turn northward."

The first Sunday in the year is with most Christian people a time of hopefulness and resolution. We review the past and forecast the future. Just now in the great political circles we hear much said about "a new departure" for all the parties. Why not accept this for a motto in all our lines of religious duty?

It is said in one part of the apostle Paul's history that he "thanked God and took courage"—not comfort, but courage. And yet it ought to be remembered that in sober truth there is more comfort in courage than in anything else in human experience. Military men declare that the best defence is always a vigorous attack; and it might be argued from a philosophy quite similar that the best repose is found in a spirited outlook.

One of the most cheerful of all New Year considerations is this: past religious successes pledge coming advancement. Something, certainly, most of us have achieved in the twelvemonth which has closed; now we are to remember that he who has begun a good work will continue it to his supreme glory. We ought, therefore, to make our walk closer than ever with God, all plans of mere ingenuity and human wisdom to the contrary notwithstanding. There is much sense in the remark of William Jay when he says, "If the twelve apostles were living near you, and you had access to them, and if this intercourse drew you away from your closet, they would prove a real injury to your souls."

2. Our new departure is also out of some old worries into new freedom. We have passed our fifteenth anniversary of the present pastorate. Many of the plans we have cherished have already been carried into effect.

It will be well for most of us, also, in instituting a new departure to deepen the foundations of our trust and so take larger ventures of faith.

In the book of records kept for the Metropolitan Tabernacle Church in London there is found the entry for January, 1861, in these words: "This church requires £4,000 in order to pay for the new tabernacle; and we, the undersigned, not knowing where it will come from, fully believe in our heavenly Father that he will send it all to us in the proper time, as witness our hands." Then follows a long list of names of deacons and elders, with those of several devout women and a host of praying men, headed by the large, broad hand of the pastor. Two months after, about twenty pages further on, is this record in the same volume: "I, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who am less than the least of all saints, set to my seal that God is true, for he has supplied us with all this £4,000." And then follows a fresh minute: "We, the undersigned, hereby declare our confidence in almighty God, who has done to us according to our faith, and sent us, even before the time when we needed it, all that was wanted. We are ashamed of ourselves that we ever had a doubt, and we pray that we may always confide in him in all things henceforth and forever." And that record is signed by many faithful men and women, some of whom wrote their names with tears in their eyes as they remembered their fears.

This story is remarkable for two things, and not just for one only: it illustrates the dauntless courage of a serene confidence in the Lord of hosts; but in addition

to that, it illustrates the thoughtfulness of grateful hearts in acknowledging what God had done when he showed he had done it. Christ it was who said, before it was ever sung in a song, "Where are the nine?" Of ten Christians helped last year beyond their deserts and their expectations, can it be possible that one only is going to come back next New Year's day with his thanks?

3. Another thought: we might as well now have done with most of our inquiries after new machineries for usefulness, new tools, new associations, new scope. It is simply the industry of downright work which accomplishes the great successes in the progress of Christ's kingdom. If I were a superintendent of a Sunday-school and had a chance I would address my teachers from the text: "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." A very excellent fable is quoted as having been told in Plato's time. There was once an island in which was reported much fine gold to have been buried by those who would conceal it from robbers; many came and upturned the stones and tore up the soil; they found no precious metal, but they prepared the fallow ground for birds to bring seeds to, and the rains to fall upon; and so the treasure appeared before long in a great grove of olive trees and a clusterful vineyard.

It is work only that is wanted, for God's Spirit stands ready. Each of us has his own sphere of labor when the new departure is begun. It is just as true now as it was when Adam Clarke thought it necessary to say it: "Parents cannot do God's work, and God will not do theirs; but if they use the means, he will never withhold his blessing." How good it would be if the opening year should be ushered in by conversions all around us!

“Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” Time is drifting along, and heaven is closer with every dawn of a day. Just after her last earthly Christmas we are told that Frances Ridley Havergal finished her mottoes and called them “Love and Light for the New Year.” That was the end of working; soon came rest; they told her it must be dying before long; and she said, “Oh, beautiful!” No one wants to die till the Lord wills it; and some of us have a great deal to do yet to be just ready; but it would be our best plan now to think of a way in which we could give somebody somewhere “Love and Light.”

III. Once more: let us take into consideration *the new departure in each believer's history*. So vivid appears this illustration that it might easily be made to serve for a permanent exhortation in the churches. Three grand principles in ordinary religious life are exhibited in the image employed.

1. *All true Christians have mountains to compass*. Whatever the Lord sets for us to accomplish may be put under the figure. Sometimes our duties are mountains, sometimes our trials. “Go back down to Mount Seir,” in effect said the leader to the people, “and do what God requires at your hands.” Sometimes an activity which taxes all the strength we possess is our mountain; sometimes it is a waiting which demands only patience. Sometimes it is a conflict, sometimes it is a care. Some have more mountains than others have. Some have harder ones than others have. Some make mountains out of what would be only mole-hills to those who are braver than they are. But this will be the lesson: God gives all his children mountains to compass.

2. *All true Christians must compass their mountains*.

There can be no rebellious refusal of the task God sets for us. There is no room for any ingenious evasion of his commands. There can never be permitted any sudden leaping over or flying across the difficult ridge of duty. There can be no changing mountains with each other in the hopes of getting easier ones. If it had been intended that this practical expression in the narrative should have positive and permanent reference to the highest forms of spiritual activity, no one word could have been chosen more elastic in reach and forcible in description than this word "compass." When we try to imagine how systematically the ark of God *compassed* Jericho, how intricately with wiles Saul *compassed* David, how helplessly Job was *compassed* with the net of God's providence, and how overwhelmingly the billows of death *compassed* the Psalmist, we see the absorbing, exhaustive, enveloping reach of the term. So this is also our lesson: every true Christian must just compass his mountain as the Lord bids.

3. *God's sovereignty decides when the mountain is compassed long enough.* There is a period set for continuance and for cessation. "Ye have compassed this mountain long enough."

Long enough—for the mountain's sake. Real work has to be done slowly and patiently. Some tasks there are which cannot be at all hurried.

Long enough—for our own sakes. Certain disciplines must be wrought out upon our characters. Dispositions, like finest wines, require what can be done for them only by time and silence. Jehovah was preparing these people for Canaan before he suffered a single one of them to enter.

Long enough—for others' sakes. The principle of division of labor is here invoked. Vicarious suffering is

the rule for the redeemed race that follow Christ, who was cut off, and not for himself. These young Israelites were held back to give the older people decorous space in which to die. "And the space in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the Lord sware unto them."

Long enough—for just the dear Lord's sake. He asks us to labor on and wait till he tells us what it is all for. Most likely God was fitting the Canaanites also for the entrance of his people. It is suggested afterwards that he was leaving them the chance to fill up the cup of their iniquity, while these children of Israel spent their weary time around the bleak sides of Mount Seir. At all events, we are sure for ourselves of this lesson also; God will tell all believing Christians when their mountains have been compassed enough, and he will give the joyous call when they are to turn northward.

IV. So, finally, let us consider *the new departure in our spiritual experience*. Our admonitions grow rapidly now, for the field of application for the figure is wider.

1. To some who now hear this call it will be the language of *rebuke*. "Ye have compassed this mountain long enough." It is of no use to stay here any longer; the chance is lost. It is like Jesus' saying to his disciples in slumber, "Sleep on now." Duty is sometimes neglected until the man is withdrawn from the charge.

2. To some who now hear it, this call will be the language of *comfort*. "Ye have compassed this mountain long enough." Oh, how fine a thing it is to look back upon a hard work carried well and patiently

through into grand success! Leave the old toil now; let the bent form straighten up; let the tired shoulder rest!

3. To some it will be the language of *command*. "Ye have compassed this mountain long enough; turn you northward." Yes; turn northward straight to another mountain, and another; for there is no discharge in that war! Is it your birthday? Then one mountain is well compassed; take a new one. Is it the anniversary of your first communion? One good mountain compassed; now again! And the soul is all alive with fresh exhilaration from the hill-climbing.

4. For to some this call is the language of *encouragement*. "Ye have compassed this mountain long enough; turn you northward." And northward lies the land of covenant promise; every mountain now passed brings us nearer to the end of the chain. It grows a little gladder in the sunshine and clearer in the atmosphere; it seems like attaining the last hill and catching the gales from beyond the river.

" We feel upon our foreheads bare,
The benedictions of the air! "

It would seem, my Christian friends, that a few words might well be said in your presence concerning the past we have been journeying through together, and the future into which we look to-day. It would not be candid to deny that we have had some laborious years behind. But at last there is rest. We have come to a reasonable tranquillity in our work. It will not be so hard moving "northward" as it has been down among the mountains. We have still much to do; indeed, there is no listless ease before us; there never will be more ease than what is necessary for our recuperation

Fifteen years is a long time ; it makes up the full half of a generation. How much of the next fifteen years we shall all spend together, no one can tell. It will be a glad task now, to drop all mechanical embarrassments, and come out from under the pressure of all materialistic hindrances. How fine it seems just to move on hereafter for the conversion of souls, and the clear glory of Christ !

“The glory of young men is their strength : and the beauty of old men is the gray head.” So said the wisest man that ever lived. Our history thus far has been adorned by the deeds, and is now noble by the memories, of the old men who have cherished its interests and upheld its fair name. With all the affection of a grateful and trustful heart I congratulate those aged believers who are still lingering among us to pray and to labor. The context here is suggestive. This church will reach its fiftieth anniversary in 1889. “These forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee ; thou hast lacked nothing.” May the Land of Promise open its wealth of peace to you, when in God’s time you “turn northward!”

V.

HALF-WAY TO CANAAN.

"AND THEY CAME UNTO HARAN, AND DWELT THERE."—Genesis 11: 31.

It was a wise remark of the old Roman satirist, that whatever is presented to the eye invariably impresses itself upon the human remembrance more deeply than anything else which reaches the mind merely through the duller sense of hearing. Homilies about morality, whole sermons concerning worldly license, could never avail to fasten admonitory truth upon the conscience half so well as simple pictures of real life upon canvas, showing the inevitable end of vice.

In this principle, no doubt, is found the reason why so much of the Bible is composed of actual history. The characters of each age move before us constantly until we learn to know them, just as a child knows Greatheart in Pilgrim's Progress, or Prince Immanuel in the Holy War, human beings, real folks. And the lesson of these lives can never be forgotten, while the image remains in memory.

My plain purpose in this discourse is to bring before you a brief series of pictures. They will all be portraits of the same individual, taken at different periods of his career—moral portraits of Terah, the father of Abraham. I am much mistaken, if we shall not find in this personage a type-character. He symbolizes, at

each recurrence of his likeness, a class of men. Unfortunately they are all ungodly men. Yet sometimes you think they are very nearly good men. Indeed, they seem not far from the kingdom of heaven. But it becomes clear in the end that they were much farther away than we supposed.

The first of these portraits represents Terah as he was when a husbandman dwelling in Ur of the Chaldees. He was one of the old style of patriarchs there; wealthy, in all likelihood, and having somewhat of prominence and authority in his day.

There is reason to believe that he was openly an idolater. The tradition of the Jewish Rabbins is that he was a priest of the sun, and with those around him worshiped fire, and the other divinities of the Chaldee heathen. And we know, from a passage in the book of Joshua, that he and all his family were long imbued with the idolatrous spirit.

Just at the time when our story opens, Terah seems to have received a call from the true God. He was bidden to change his residence abruptly, to leave the city of his abode, and go on to Canaan, which was then first announced to him as the land of promise. How this call was given, or what were its particulars, we are not told anywhere in the sacred record. It may have been in a dream, or in an open vision; or some inner conviction of his own mind may have been wrought by the Holy Ghost. However it was brought, there can be no mistaking the impression it made. It taught him as well as aroused him. It cleared entirely at one stroke all his notions concerning the Supreme Deity. He saw how utterly false all his gods were. He became painfully intelligent as to the wickedness of the neighborhood where he had so long been making his

home. He was convinced that Jehovah alone was the Lord God, and that in his service was found the round of human duty. And he admitted, on the instant, that Canaan was the place toward which he must journey without delay, and in which his remaining years must be devoutly spent.

Here, then, Terah is before us as a type. He is furnishing us with a vivid picture of *an unregenerate man awakened to a sense of religious need.*

God's truth has come home to his heart. He rejects his old idols. It is of no use to carp at Scriptural phraseology, and insist that there is no idolatry in our times. That is any man's *god* which he suffers to occupy God's place. There are covetous people who make an idol of mere wealth. The Scripture says, in so many words: "Covetousness is idolatry." There are sensualists who set up pleasures as divine. Some worldly-minded men make a god of business. The ambitious worship fame or popularity. Some so-called scholars deify reason, or bow down to science.

To any one of these classes there comes at some time a call from God. It does not always arrive in the same form, or even arise on the same occasion. To one, the divine voice of command syllables itself in an event of providence, a bereavement, a failure, a success, a joy, or a sorrow—something that startles the entire being, falls across the man's history, and suddenly sets him face to face with the true God. He is forced to see all his idols overthrown. A peremptory command, bearing all the evidence of authority supreme, echoes in his ears. He is restless and aroused.

There is no mistaking this imperative call, for the results of it in his own heart are overwhelming. It may be a mere text of Scripture quoted; it may be the

affectionate pressure of Christian zeal; it may be a sermon from a pulpit, or a leaf of print from the press; it may be a mere inexplicable monition of the Spirit of grace—whatever it is, it is in all respects revolutionary. Surrounded with worldlings, and courted by all the associations of conventional life, he now sees these are only Chaldean idolaters and idolatries alike and together. He himself is a man of unclean lips, and he dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips. The call of divine supremacy says to him, "Get thee out of this country."

He admits he is bound to obey. He is wrong where he is. He is unsafe where he is. He is unhappy where he is. And he does not mean to stay a moment longer there. He is not now a Christian; but he knows he ought to be; and he is going to begin to be.

We turn now to another picture of this patriarch. How long he continued to abide in Ur after he was so abruptly called of God, we do not know. We can hardly conceive of him as being in any awful hurry. There is nothing in the history which intimates he rushed out of the town, putting his fingers in his ears, like Christian fleeing from the City of Destruction, and crying "Eternal life! Eternal life!" Most likely he was among those people who always think that such things as a change in religious career should be done very deliberately.

But one good point there certainly was in his conduct. The history says: "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan." There is reason for thinking those old patriarchs always made more of that great

organism of God, the family, than we do. They said to those within the same circle, far more frequently than any of us, what Moses said to his relative, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." When Terah set out for the land of promise, he was not willing nor satisfied to go alone. He took his family along.

This is precisely our portrait of him. We are willing quite freely to admit concerning this patriarch that at the outset of his career he actually meant to do things thoroughly. He was bidden to start for Canaan; and of course the first step to that was to get out of Chaldea. He was commanded to give up idols, and obey Jehovah. All this he did. He set out in the road; he went in the right road; and he pulled up every stake, and took all he had along.

And in this, Terah offers us the picture of *an unregenerate man setting out upon a religious life.*

Many an awakened sinner is here permitted to see his own likeness. There is much in it worthy of our sincerest admiration. It appears full of hope. He has already burst away not only from his personal idolatries, but also from his corrupting associations. You cannot say he has reached Canaan; but he is out of Chaldea anyway. Talk to such a man of old habits: you might as well endeavor to awaken Terah's old interest in the teraphim he once worshiped. He will answer, "What have I any more to do with idols?"

Let us be kind and charitable. These people think they are doing creditably well. Three steps of distinct progress they actually believe they have taken. They have begun with *reform*; they continue with *reparation*; they have reached *routine*. They have heard the gospel call, revered it and sought to obey it. They are moved in spirit with a great and honorable zeal. The

fountains of their nature are broken up. They will arise like prodigals and go to their Father. It is a daily work for them to check the habits of former sin. They become almost morosely moral. They put themselves on courses of penance for repentance. They pull away the stumbling-blocks they know they have dropped in the path of others. They keep the Sabbath intensely. They resent the world violently when it offers amusement. They choose severe maxims. They adopt extreme views. They force every member of their households along with them. Religion seems to consist in being exemplary and methodically correct. They establish family prayer. They are never absent from church. They tithe of their possessions. And they finally reach a rigid kind of drill-righteousness, which might be religion if it were not in fact mere routine.

The third portrait of Terah is now before us. He went joyously on in his journey, because it seemed so like the exact thing to do. But all this troop of pilgrims found some positive discomforts. Over in the New Testament we learn from an incidental remark of the Apostle, that "they went out not knowing whither they went." The facilities for traveling in those days were not great. Geographical knowledge of the neighboring regions was far from extensive. No one of them had ever been in Canaan. It required a good deal of perseverance, and a strong kind of trust, to keep going on. By and by, duty became commonplace, as it always does, and novelty wore off. And it is possible that Terah had some days in which his interest flagged and his zeal languished.

At last they reached a place called Haran. And this verse of our text says "they dwelt there." Some easy students of Scripture history would most likely sup-

pose they had arrived at the end of their purposed journey. Perhaps a few would carelessly imagine Haran was in Palestine. And a sweet little hymn might be sung with the familiar refrain,—“All safe in the promised land.”

But no: Haran was not Canaan. Haran was not in Canaan. It was just about midway between Ur of the Chaldees and the land of promise. Just here the whole force of the narrative rests. With all his zeal—with all his resolution—with all his endeavor—Terah had got on precisely *half-way* to Canaan. The fact is, he had reached a very fertile country. His flocks found delightful pasturage. The beginning of the land of promise was full of a sort of promise, and the frontiers gave delightful experience. Everything seemed to welcome Terah. He settled down there. He sent back for one of his sons, left behind, to come on. There he gathered all his household. And years and years afterwards, we read that a branch of his family lingered on the spot, and worshiped teraphim idols as ever.

Of course we now understand that here Terah becomes the pictorial representative of *an unregenerate man arresting himself in the promise of a religious career.*

The first stage of this experience is self-complacency. These Terahs all around us are wont to say to themselves, as they quiet down into ease: “Well, we have made a good beginning at all events; we have recorded a creditable start; we are out of Chaldea; let us breathe a moment, and not be righteous overmuch; by and by we can go on to Canaan.”

The next stage of the experience is self-interest. Men discover that even a fresh beginning of moral life gains friends, enlarges enjoyment, promotes thrift, and in-

creases values. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Terah perceived that he had really made a good investment by leaving Chaldea, and entering Haran. He did not imagine he was called upon to neglect fine chances, when they fell in his way, merely because he was pious!

The final stage in this experience of spiritual halting is self-seeking. From being luxuriously satisfied with what God gave him by the way, the progress for Terah was very easy to that new degree of greed, in which God was forgotten, and in which he allowed his mind to become quite absorbed again in worldliness, to the utter exclusion of his early errand. This seems to be the secret of his sending back for his son Nahor. This young man had remained in Chaldea when the others left. The date of his appearance has not been recorded; but the lamentable fact comes to light, that when he arrived he brought the old family idolatries with him, and reinstated, in a portion of the household at least, the discarded and profane worship.

From this time forward, for we know not how many years, the history of this entire group of relatives seems to exhaust itself in recounting how much they gained in mere wealth. They forsook God's service, and rushed into mere self-seeking and greed. Once for all let it be here understood that, whenever any man starts out for a Christian life, and suffers himself to indulge in soft self-flatteries, or praises his shallow success in setting up some few new moralities, or in performing some new duties of severe routine, it may be safely and sorrowfully predicted of him that he is not going really to reach Canaan at all; he will stop at Haran, and dwell there. And on the whole, a more deceitfully beautiful spot for

spiritual inhabitation is not to be found in the universe than that which lies on the map *just half-way to Canaan*.

So as we dismiss these pictures of Terah, it would seem as if even the dullest of us might learn sober and profitable lessons from them.

For one thing, this: *It is possible to be awakened into religious impulse, and yet subside ignobly into deeper quiet than before.* The old neighbors of Terah most likely, when they heard that he had settled in Haran, repeated all the sage wisdom there is generally supposed to reside in the saying, "I told you so."

Then again: *It is possible to see clear on to the end of duty, and yet never reach it.* God called, and Terah heard him say Canaan; but he paused when he came only to Haran.

And once more: *It is possible to forsake worldly associations, and yet not become truly religious.* Terah was out of Chaldea; but that was not being in Canaan.

Add another lesson: *It is possible to be greatly reformed in demeanor, and yet remain unregenerate in heart.* Terah began to be exceedingly strict; but he soon grew exceedingly easy.

Yet further: *It is possible to be highly devotional, and yet never at all devout.* Terah put away his teraphim idols for a while; but he let his son restore them.

For another thing, learn this: *It is possible to purpose well, and end in fickleness and failure.* All the edifying excitement of that household to be up and off for Canaan came to nothing.

And finally we see, *It is possible to be actually in the true path, and yet stop disastrously.* Haran was certainly on the road to Canaan; but Haran was not Canaan.

That is to say, it is possible to begin right and end

wrong, by just ending at all. There should be no pause in all our journey of obedience to God. We must simply respect the whole commandment at once.

Let those who are pondering in their hearts these vast issues of a religious life, count beforehand the cost. A little further on in the history we read some words, the quiet simplicity of which is much to edification. A few members of this family—not Terah—afterwards made a new start; of whom it is written—“They went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.”

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son JESUS CHRIST came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the HOLY GHOST, now and ever. *Amen.*

VI.

SURPRISED, AND NOT SAVED.

“AND TERAH DIED IN HARAN.”—Genesis 11: 32.

We should all like to believe that this patriarch Terah—the father of Abraham—was at least a man of amiable intentions. He accepted the call from God that he should leave Ur of the Chaldees, and make his home thereafter in Canaan. This change of residence involved an entire revolution in his religious views and life. For he had hitherto been an idolater, and now he became a servant of the true Jehovah. We could not fail to admire his quick acquiescence in the divine will. He started out obediently, and took his family along. But when he arrived at Haran, he paused. He suddenly settled down for good. He sent for his remaining son. He “dwelt there.” And the significance of that historic statement lies in the fact that Haran is *just half-way to Canaan*.

We conceive more nobly of him if we insist that he must have meant to go on eventually, and fulfill his purpose. But every season seems to have made it more difficult to break away. At any rate, every season practically lessened his desire to start out anew. Precisely how long he abode there after his halt, we have no means of knowing. With all his amiable intentions to resume the journey, he came to be an old man in

the land. Terah lived to be a little more than two hundred years of age. And really he never went on any further at all. The brief record of our text strikes just once, like a single toll of a funeral bell: "Terah died in Haran;" died where he had lived and lingered; died half-way into—but quite out of—the land of promise.

I. When you reflect seriously on a broken career like this, the first thought which strikes your mind is concerning *the waste of so much energy in the beginning, if only so pitiful an end is to be reached.*

The breaking up of this man's old life in Chaldea must have given him some pain. The lengthy journey on towards Canaan must have cost much toil. He lost all his labor when he settled down at this half-way spot. And you are inclined to raise the quiet question, whether, if this was what it was all coming to, Terah would not better have remained in Chaldea, and taken his chances at disobedience.

No one can study the Bible patiently without becoming persuaded that God has very strong likes and dislikes. The most violent language we ever find is that which is employed in stating how thoroughly he rejects a divided or hesitant service. It would not be straining the point to say he positively prefers men of decided rebellion to those of a temporizing acquiescence in his will. One of the inspired writers was commissioned to announce to a church in Asia Minor once, that the Almighty would not bear with their neutral position. Because they were neither hot nor cold, he would "spue them out of his mouth." He would rather have them cold than lukewarm. So another inspired man was authorized to say to the multitudes before him as he preached—"If the Lord be God, then

serve him ; *but if Baal be God, then serve him.*" And the entire spirit of the Scriptures leads to the same counsel. Make clear issues. If you enter upon a religious life, proceed to the end of it. If you begin, continue. If you are not willing to give your whole heart and self to God, then make no false show of it.

Men there are without number, who set out in what they deem a religious career. They reach rigid routine, and claim to be quite exemplary. But they rest there. They settle down in some Haran of spiritual ease. You call to them with the old voice of the prophet : " Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest." But they answer : " We have begun well ; we may go on soon ; surely we have made some progress." You call to them again : " Ye are not as yet come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you." But they resist all appeal. And perhaps there are no words of sadder reproach in the Bible than these : " Ye did run well ; what did hinder you ?" The effort at beginning is lost, because the end is not reached. And I do not know why any of us, who preach God's message to men, should not speak plainly, and say, Why halt ye between two opinions in such clear issues as these ? choose whom you will serve, and rest there.

II. Then the next thought which this story suggests is, that *men generally die as they have lived.*

We are not informed whether Terah met a sudden death or not. Indeed, death always seems sudden. And whatever such a man's vague purposes of some time renewing his early obedience may have been, this abrupt decease put an end to them. It was all over with his plans now. We imagine more kindly and more respectful things of him, if we allow ourselves to

believe he was awfully surprised and deeply saddened, when he learned his last hour had come. We are unwilling to conclude that he had grown altogether callous as well as careless. One good sigh of remorse, or even one bitter cry of mourning, as he remembered his lost opportunities, would evidence still that he had a better mind. But even with this penitent regret, it was too late to retrieve the past. He could not go on to Canaan now. He had had his chance of obedience; he could not reach after it again.

Death is one of those messengers that sooner or later come to every human being. He never rings a bell to make us know he is near. They say a drowning man rises to the surface twice before he sinks beneath the water finally. They say a paralytic has a first and second stroke before the third reaches his heart. But spiritual diseases have no crisis stages to speak of. And at the last spiritual death comes silently. "It is appointed unto men *once* to die; after that, the judgment."

Terah halted at Haran—lived at Haran—died at Haran—and was buried at Haran. Living or dying, he never set foot in the land of promise. Just so every one of these so-called half-way Christians halts—lives—dies—dies as he lives; and then it comes out he never has been a true Christian at all. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die."

Many men vainly imagine, in the secret recesses of their being, that there will be some little space at the last for a final repentance. It is said there is in Britain an old tombstone bearing the epitaph of a man killed by a fall from a horse :—

“ Between the stirrup and the ground,
I mercy sought, and mercy found ! ”

There is no warrant in God's word for any such inscription or any such hope. There is no intimation whatever of any closing hour of respite from pain, of unusual clearness of intelligence, or of rapid concentration and firm fixedness of faith, which is to be vouchsafed to an unconverted man who has procrastinated his preparation. All the experiences of one's history, personal and characteristic, rush up towards these last moments; and no man can be wise who freights them too heavily with alarming risks.

Furthermore, God tells men that character—not impulse—decides destiny. “ Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me to give every man according as *his work* shall be.” No one need hope to be able to institute an entire reversal of his spiritual register in God's books by a mere frantic prayer as he breathes his last. Indeed, you will be impressed with something fearfully solemn in the way in which the Scriptures speak of the absolute unalterableness of a soul's moral state at the instant of decease. “ If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.” “ He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.” “ There is no work nor device in the grave whither thou goest.”

III. Naturally, just here comes a fresh thought which

this story suggests: *it does no good to increase a man's chances for repentance, unless you can also better his heart.*

It is instinctive for all procrastinating men to raise a kind of half-complaining cry in behalf of each other. When any delaying soul is suddenly swept beyond reach of divine grace, there will always be some to assert that it is unfair to catch up a sinner with so abrupt an arrest; give him more time; be a little slack in reining in a wilful disposition; at any rate, he ought to be allowed another opportunity for repentance.

And on the other hand, zealous Christians, jealous for the honor of God, are apt to become impatient because divine pity forbears so many years with the impenitent and injurious. John Calvin lived a life of pain and persecution, trouble, conflict and sorrow. There were days when it seemed to him he could not stand the pressure of hindering, ungodly men, any longer, even though the retribution of high heaven waited. And then he used to cry out in the fierce Latin of the old Psalm: "*O Domine, usquequo!* O Lord, how long, how long!"

Between these two complaints God's forbearance has to take some common ground of fairness. It becomes wise men to study such a case as this of Terah. The most moderate computation of time as it passed on with him, would give a full hundred years between his disobedience (begun, we will say, at his first arrival in Haran) and his death. He could have resumed the broken journey any day. But who is there now that does not understand human nature well enough to know that his lengthened probation was all lost to him? After two or three or ten years of leisurely living in that luxurious half-way land, the expectation of his ever

making any advance was just as fruitless and feeble as it could be. Three-quarters of a century was simply wasted waiting, so far as his future was concerned. He had another chance to obey the divine call—any number of other chances—but he did not obey it.

It may be stated as a general principle, that these so-called half-way Christians of modern time do not perish from want of opportunity to obey the gospel command, but from want of will. Perhaps it would be difficult to find anywhere in history a better illustration than Terah's career offers, of the fact that men lose their souls, not because they receive no more chances, but because they do not improve the chances they have.

And I think it might safely be said, that if the freak of modern interpretation offered to explain a somewhat obscure passage in one of the epistles (1 Pet. 3: 19) ever proves itself worthy of acceptance—and if the doctrine thus proposed should become the faith of the churches—that is, if devout and scholarly men should finally agree that there will still be another opportunity for Christ Jesus as a Saviour to be preached to the suffering "spirits in prison"—and so it should be proclaimed openly that men dead and buried might yet repent and believe, and thus be saved—there would be scores of men and women who would deliberately decide to take their chances of conversion *after this life should have ended.*

IV. Then there is one more suggestion of this story which needs noting: *it seems to be a mysteriously solemn fact that God's Spirit does sometimes strive with those finally lost.*

Terah was once certainly called of God, set to a specific duty which involved obedience and a new life;

started out in the performance of it, ended with halting, lost his interest in his journey, and was surprised with death. We never hear of any renewal of the call while he was in Haran. He seems to have been left to himself after he settled down. He may have been moral in life, irreproachable in character; but he lapsed into disobedience, and everything that might be called religious was at an end. And if you cast your eye along the highways of history, you will find one pillar inscribed: "Terah died in Haran." Not long after this we see one of the kinsmen of this family making an oath. And in order to fix its binding force yet more solemnly, he joins together "the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor." Thus already in Terah's lapsed household the old idols of one son were deemed quite as worthy of worship as the true Jehovah of another. And when the Spirit of peace withdrew, he might be imagined to repeat those sober words inspired long afterwards, but true in many a case—"He is joined to his idols: let him alone!"

All seasons of religious emotion are the beneficent and valuable gift of the Holy Ghost. But sometimes, after repeated solicitation and awakening of a given soul, he retires. Long before Terah's time it was explicitly announced by the Almighty himself—"My Spirit shall not always strive." There is an hour in which he makes a last visit to a human heart. He stands offering help, just as he always does. He is willing, as he always has been. Rebuffed, rejected, he is there now for a final appeal. If the man grieves him this once, he is not going to have another chance. A soul thus judicially forsaken is in the Scriptures called a reprobate.

There is something very sad, we think, in the spec-

tacle of an ancient homestead going to decay. Dismantled and ruined, we pensively imagine the days in which love and light flashed in the halls, and reigned at the fireside. And an old church strikes us as even more melancholy. The roof fallen in, the altar of prayer overgrown, the aisles full of weeds—and yet the unfallen portal bearing the clear inscription, “Unto the Triune God.” But heavier still grows a thoughtful heart as it ponders the spectacle of a life like Terah’s. Once the Spirit of grace spoke within its innermost recess. Once it had its fine glory as the sunshine fell over it. Now it sinks into obscurity; and human charity drops over it the mantle of silence.

We need not pursue this study any further now. There is a lesson of deepest moment to old men and to young men alike.

A serious view of what has been taught us so far suggests much that men advanced in years might well think of. Most moral, correct, right-minded people expect to become Christians some day before they die. It is evident that all this waiting at the half-way land is perilous. One may be on the very height of prosperity, little apprehending a downfall. But we are all creatures of circumstances, and pretty much at their mercy. And circumstances belong to God. An hour’s panic may scatter any one’s possessions. One false investment may ruin his fortune. One recreant friend on the street may betray his reputation. One day’s illness may send disease into his family circle, and lay his life’s pride in the dust. A single chord may snap, and his free limbs shall never bear his weight again. One unseen finger on his brain, and all his learning will be scattered, and even reason’s light quenched on

the altar. An abrupt and startling end may be brought to all one's amiable intentions. And there he will die as he is living—only half-way to heaven, only half-way to God—and that is not at all in heaven, not at all with God.

There is also a word of special significance to young men. Note just here, that in this family of Terah there was one son, who came on with his father out of Chaldea into Haran. He remained there awhile. But when he discovered the rest were going no further, he determined to start on alone. His resolution was taken. He had much to surrender. But he heard the call evermore ringing in his ears. He determined to be satisfied with no divided obedience. He broke away from the circle, pushed his way on, and ere long was at home in Canaan. You know his name—Abraham, the father of the faithful. Blessings, many and glorious, shone over him. And he now stands out eminent in heavenly history as the Friend of God. It is hard to arouse the old ; it is easier for the young to hear and obey. And it is no place for anybody, this Haran,—only half-way to Canaan.

GRANT unto us, ALMIGHTY GOD, thy peace that passeth understanding ; that we, amid the storms and troubles of our life, may rest in thee, knowing that all things are in thee ; not beneath thine eye only, but under thy care, governed by thy will, guarded by thy love ; so that with a quiet heart we may see the storms of life, the cloud and the thick darkness ; ever rejoicing to know that the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. Guide, guard and govern us even to the end, that none of us may fail to lay hold upon the immortal life, through JESUS CHRIST our Lord. *Amen.*

VII.

"THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN."

"LUKE, THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN."—Colossians 4 : 14.

On one occasion, not many seasons since, the Sunday-schools all over the world spent six months in the study of lessons taken out of the Third Gospel alone. The exercise was admitted universally to have been among the most interesting and profitable ever enjoyed. But one fact must have arrested the attention of every teacher: in all the book the name of the author was not once mentioned. Furthermore, we are told by excellent authorities in scholarship that Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles also; and his name does not appear there either.

Indeed, this man is spoken of but three times in the Bible. No incident of his life is related directly; no trait of his character is given; no account of his lineage is to be found; no consecutive narrative of his career is put on record anywhere. About all we know concerning him is derived from hints and allusions of the vaguest sort. Yet an unbroken tradition has held place in the universal church that he was the one who did this useful work of history in two of the most valuable portions of the New Testament.

Now what we suppose is known of him can be partly stated here in the outset; a few more particulars will appear when we afterwards seek practical lessons from his story.

I. It might be better to fasten upon what is generally conceded concerning his person and career than to attempt to sift and pronounce authoritatively upon the more difficult conjectures.

1. He could not have been a Jew; for in one of Paul's epistles some people are mentioned as sending salutations, who are declared specially to be "of the circumcision." And so the others, among whom is Luke, are assumed to be Gentiles. Eusebius tells us that he was born in the city of Antioch, where the disciples were "first called Christians." Most likely he was an early proselyte.

2. He must have been a most zealous believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. All his writings are in full evidence of this. Still, he tells us explicitly that he was not an eye-witness. He only had "perfect understanding of all things from the very first," because those who were "ministers of the word delivered them unto" him. Nothing can be found anywhere in the New Testament to show that he ever so much as saw Jesus or heard his voice. He took on testimony all that the others told him, and pledged his life to their truth.

3. By occupation he was a physician. The Apostle Paul adds a term of endearment, and calls him "the beloved physician." It is generally admitted that he was the companion of this great invalid on his missionary travels. Most commentators think that Paul never really recovered from his blindness at Damascus, but was afflicted with a distemper in his eyes so serious that he called it "a thorn in the flesh." So we are accustomed to suppose that it was somewhat in a professional way that Luke became the "fellow-laborer" to whom the apostle so frequently and so gratefully alludes. Tertullian says: "Luke was not an apostle

but an apostolic man ; not a master but a disciple, as it were less than a master, and so much the later certainly, as he was the companion of the later apostle Paul."

4. The office he performed in compiling the Gospel which now bears his name was little more than that of an amanuensis. He was familiar with the Greek language, and wrote it elegantly and forcibly. The old father Irenæus says: "Luke, the companion of Paul, committed to writing the gospel preached by him." There can be no doubt that the immediate followers of Jesus, who were eye-witnesses of his life and death, told over and over again the simple story as they knew it, until it became in some measure fixed as a narrative. These fragmentary accounts were floating in the Christian community. It was Luke's design to collate them and "set them forth in order." It was possible for a careful mind to make comparisons, and institute inquiries of men then living, so as to reach the truth in some consistent form of statement as nearly accurate as human capability would allow. And then that wonderful gift or endowment which we in these times call inspiration came in. Paul was inspired, and Luke was inspired, each for his own work. Hence, the influence of Paul's logical and cultivated mind is often seen upon Luke's methodical arrangement of facts, as well as upon his rhetorical composition.

5. Of Luke's latter days and death we know nothing certainly. That he was one of the seventy disciples *has no evidence* beyond the fact that he alone mentions *the choice* of them. That he was an artist in painting *has for proof* the same sort of tradition that we find *declaring* he preached for a long time after Paul died, and *in the end* sealed the fidelity of his life by the death of

a martyr. It will do no harm to accept this, but there is no profit in it.

II. The main good which will come to us now at the conclusion of these details of study, so far as Luke is concerned, must be sought in a series of quiet lessons drawn from these scant facts.

1. We see *what a profitable thing it is to keep in good company*. Perhaps it is not worth while to dwell very much upon the name of this "most excellent Theophilus," to whom both the Gospel and the Book of Acts are addressed; for some, being unable to trace the record of any such man in history, have conjectured that this is only a fanciful appellation put here as a graceful introduction. The name *Theophilus* means "a Friend of God;" and we would rather believe that it represents some gentle and generous Christian man, attached to Luke because he found Luke a friend of God's beloved Son.

However this may be, we know Luke was with Paul, and with the cherished band of comrades whom he joins in the greetings he annexes to three of his epistles. Goethe once said: "Tell me with whom thou art found, and I will tell thee who thou art." And it is set down in the biography of Dr. Guthrie that, speaking of some college comrades who were in age and acquirements greatly his superiors, he remarked: "This, next to being able to say with David, 'I am a companion of all them that fear thee,' is the greatest blessing for men as well as youths." The lesson here is plain: to have journeyed and labored with Paul was what made Luke the great man he was.

It is worth while here to notice the exact phraseology of this verse in which the text occurs: "Luke, the be-

loved physician, and Demas, greet you." This is the same man Demas, of whom the apostle says afterwards: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." Luke is associated with him, and he stands credited as a disciple under the new dispensation. But covetousness or love of vanity took the heart all out of him, and everything that is recorded of his career subsequently is that he "departed unto Thessalonica." And then Paul adds with intense pathos: "Only Luke is with me." Standing between Demas and Paul, with the world all before him, Luke chose for Paul while Demas chose for the world. Then Demas disappears, and Luke's memory lives in perennial honor; in that decision Luke's history was made conspicuous for all the centuries since. Fine and profitable companionship was that for this physician; no one had better opportunity to be kind and chivalrously patient to Paul, and there is touching evidence how much the half-blinded apostle loved him. But, on the other hand, it was much for the author of the Third Gospel, that he had for his comrade so eminent a servant of God as this preacher Paul.

For observe how the apostle influenced the evangelist. Paul's aim was especially to impress the grand truth that Christ died just to save souls—all souls, Jews and Gentiles. And Luke dwells upon this more than any other evangelist. He rehearses the parables of the coin, the sheep, and the prodigal son. He records Zaccheus's interesting conversion; he draws the picture of the Great Supper, and tells how the servants were bidden to compel the guests to come in.

2. Then see, next to this, *how easily the Gospel makes use of all varieties of human acquisition.* The profession of Luke discovers itself all through his writings. He

gives full details concerning Jesus' miracles of cure. He treats of diseases with the air of one who knows what he is talking about. Luke alone records the supernatural incidents in the birth of John the Baptist, as well as of Jesus. He alone mentions the sweat "as it were great drops of blood." The trained habits of this man would be sure to awaken his interest in those parts of the narratives which dealt with palsies and blindnesses. He alone tells us of the raising of the widow's son at Nain. He would sift these stories, and bring them down as closely as possible to the exact facts in every case.

Experience like his would be exceedingly valuable in the history of Paul. We must remember those were wild times. Of the first three deaths recorded among those who followed Jesus, the earliest was a suicide from remorse, the second was an awful judgment in retribution, the third was a glory of martyrdom. Life was full of exposure, labor, trouble, sickness, and danger through spite of men. It was a fine thing to have so skilled a helper, if an apostle had been stoned and dragged out as if dead. God made the acquirements of Luke of extraordinary service. And our lesson is this: Only let the heart be willing, and Providence will accept our gifts freely. For it is with good wishes as it is with evil appetites in men:

" Desire has trimmed the sails, and circumstance
Brings but the breeze to fill them."

3. We see, once more, *how a life may be thoroughly and grandly useful, which is not very conspicuous after all.* How little we have been able to find out about Luke as a man! Yet, no doubt, he accomplished a great amount of good in his day. Not a speech of his is extant; but deeds of silent men are often wiser than words from

some others. Most suggestively once said the author of Lacon: "Were we eloquent as angels, we should please some men, some women, and some children, much more by listening than by talking." Luke lived and listened, while Paul appears to have done the talking.

A physician's career is remarkable for two things: for the unusual chance it furnishes of being useful, and for the large amount of unrequited and even unappreciated labor it demands. These brave doctors all around us well deserve the epithet of "beloved." We who meet them oftenest know they are among the most courageous, the most devoted, the most patient, the most generous, people in the whole wide world. How kindly they give their nights and their days quickly to those who call them, whether they have any rights or not! No newspapers praise them; the community has no words of admiration or cheer for half they do; they are underpaid, and often not paid at all. Unreasonable neighbors blame them for leaving a case even for an hour, which case they themselves are too frightened to touch.

Yet they go on their quiet way; God never forgets them. The celebrated Boerhaave said: "My poor are my best patients; God pays for them." Some physicians pray with their patients; some actually sing gentle hymns with them at the bedside; some read to them or converse about the things of the kingdom; some bring a hundred messages to the pastors concerning their needs. Oh! scores of invalid people thank heaven daily for their "beloved physicians."

4. We see how God can confirm faith to each man's conviction by proofs that man understands best. We do not know exactly what was the historic experience in Luke's

conversion, as we do in that of Paul. But we can easily infer from his two inspired books, the Gospel and the Acts, that his confidence was unalterable and serene. The very declaration, with which he opens his address to his "most excellent friend Theophilus," gracefully explaining that the reason why he had set himself to write a life of Jesus was found in the fact that he had had "a perfect understanding from the very first" of those things which were "most surely believed," and that he modestly considered that he could set them "in order" so that he might "know the certainty of those things" wherein he had been instructed—this fine little exordium shows that he had been over all the evidences of Christ's divine personality, his character, and his mission. There can be no doubt that Luke brought to bear upon this study the same exactness and patience with which he learned and exercised his profession; he had taken up fact by fact and spent his analytic force upon it as if he had been seeking to make a diagnosis of a disease, weighing one thing over against another as the great lights of his noble vocation are accustomed to do when life hangs upon a consultation. This man had had special opportunities for the study of the new faith now delivered to the saints; and his testimony is exceedingly valuable when he avows his full conviction of its truth. It is not too much to say, that the religious faith of physicians is very attractive, and ought to be very influential; and God often works thus through that profession in turning the hearts of skeptics into belief.

Dr. Marshall once was lecturing on anatomy; Dr. Turner took into his audience a friend who said he was an unbeliever. After the lecture was finished, the man suddenly observed with much emotion: "That person

must be simply a fool, who, after deeply studying his own body, can remain an atheist!” It is related that Galen, the great head of the medical profession, though not claiming to be a religious man, in the midst of a dissection once dropped his scalpel, and, retiring into his own room, wrote a hymn of praise in honor of the Creator. These testimonies, and the like, are full of force, because they draw their inspiration from the study of God’s word and works close at hand.

5. Finally, we may learn *of how little comparative value the close of life is, if only the life has been what it ought to be.* A curious feeling might be gratified, if we knew what was Luke’s last hour; but it is no matter. Matthew Henry said to his friend Illidge just before he died: “You have been used to take notice of the sayings of dying men; this is mine:—That a life spent in the service of God and communion with him is the most pleasant life that any one can live in this world.” With such a life, death is no alarm nor disappointment; nor is the account of it worth looking up. If Luke suffered martyrdom, he has long since forgotten the fire.

“I need not be missed, if another succeed me,
 To reap down those fields which in spring I have sown;
 He who plowed and who sowed is not missed by the reapers,
 He is only remembered by what he has done.

Not myself, but the truth that in life I have spoken—
 Not myself, but the seed that in life I have sown,
 Shall pass on to ages—all about me forgotten—
 Save the truth I have spoken, the things I have done.

So let my living be, so be my dying:
 So let my name lie, unblazoned, unknown;
 Unpraised and unmissed, I shall still be remembered:
 Yes—but remembered by what I have done.”

VIII.

"THE SOUND OF A GOING."

"AND LET IT BE, WHEN THOU HEAREST THE SOUND OF A GOING IN THE TOPS OF THE MULBERRY TREES, THAT THEN THOU SHALT BESTIR THYSELF."—2 Samuel 5: 24.

The minds of all who read the story, of which the text forms a part, will be arrested by the singular fitness of its particulars, as suggesting counsels and cautions appropriate to dwell upon in such times as we are now passing through in the churches.

The narrative culminates with the exciting direction given to David for a sign, by which he might recognize the exact moment for making his military advance and attack: "And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines."

We are in the midst of what might emphatically be called war-times. Among the many points to be developed and enforced under such a figure, a few may here be mentioned in order. By thoughtful Christians it would seem as if something might be made out of them calculated to do much spiritual good.

1. Let us begin with this: *The enemies of the gospel are always ready for an onset.*

"But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines

came up to seek David; and David heard of it, and went down to the hold. The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim.” Notice at once that we do not find that those Philistines had to be summoned to mass themselves together, or take up their position. They are instantly on hand, and are present in force. It is a fact to be borne in mind that the powers of evil are well trained and swift to seize upon undisputed advantage. Wicked men must be doing or undoing. If they rest, they die. If they do not push forward, they lose their last hope.

2. Put with this a second suggestion: *The best defence for Christians is found in an immediate attack.*

In classic phrase, safety consists in “carrying the war into Africa.” Spiritual battles had better be fought on the devil’s territory. In a long campaign, thus we should best protect our own harvests from ravage. A good first thought, on David’s part, was followed by a better second. He “went down to the hold;” but he left his own defences, and took the field in the “valley of Rephaim.” In the beginning, he seems to have planned to retire into a fortified stronghold, and wait. But a wiser counsel came to him, and he decided to give battle out in the plain. He must, sooner or later, destroy that army; and it was better to move on the camps instantly.

3. But let another fact be mentioned here: *There can be no hope of triumph in any strength, but God’s.*

And this strength of God is a thing to be asked for. “And David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the LORD said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand. And David came to Baal-perazim, and David smote

them there, and said, The LORD hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters. Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-perazim. And there they left their images, and David and his men burned them." Twice he thus sought information in prayer; and twice he conquered by simply trusting in the Lord, who answered him with a promise. If each platoon of his army had been headed by the most famous evangelist in all Israel he would probably in every case have prayed just the same. For the rule of all religious advancement and success is found in one recorded utterance of the prophet: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

4. There is another suggestion here in the story: *One real defeat is not enough to end opposition.*

"And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim." The allies used to say of Napoleon, that he did not know when he was ruined. And yet the day came at last when he was ruined. The powers of this world are not only strong but wilful, not only brave but desperate. They are not subdued by just one violent rout. There will always be a campaign rather than a battle. And "there is no discharge in that war."

5. We reach a suggestion now which is valuable if not perverted: *Holy wile is perfectly legitimate in spiritual warfare.*

By holy wile I mean sanctified common sense, or religious ingenuity. It is folly to think we must give up all the profitable ambushes to Satan, and imagine surprises are immoral. In dealing with men, even the divine Lord uses "the cords of a man," as well as "the bands of love." The king in command was instructed

to supplement his forces with stratagem. "And when David inquired of the LORD, he said, Thou shalt not go up: but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees." Observe, sometimes a human soul is so abidingly situated that one would find it awkwardly impossible to approach it directly, even in its own interest. Its prejudices are alarmingly alive and violent. We must reach it in a roundabout way, lulling suspicion as we go. When David, the second time, inquired of the Lord whether he might take the field for an open fight, he said, "Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them." Often a hard man is subdued through his children whom he loves. Edward Irving began the conversion of a spiteful tanner by talking to him about leather, and telling him more than he ever supposed a minister knew; next Sunday the curious man was at his church. Paul says that he became all things to all men, that he might win some. There is in spiritual warfare no need of deceit or falsehood or hypocrisy. But it is permitted to use all our knowledge of human nature in order to defeat an adversary so subtle as Satan, when he is bewildering and entangling one for whom Christ died.

6. Now at last we come to the words of our text; and the lesson is this: *Divine wisdom always gives signs for the attack to begin.*

Here we reach that obscure expression about "the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees." It is queer to find the commentators so puzzled over this insignificant word. What difference does it in any sense make what kind of trees these were? The name is used only this once in the Bible. So nobody knows precisely what it means. In one other place the same cognate term is employed, "Valley of Baca." But that does

not meet the difficulty at all. In Palestine mulberry trees are common enough even now. There may have been a grove of them in the region of Rephaim.

Among the attempts at identification, I confess my imagination has been arrested the most by that which asserts that these trees, in all likelihood, were a sort of poplar—perhaps aspens. The leaves of such are singularly mobile and tremulous. Silver beneath, and dark green above, they play wonderfully under the sweep of a passing wind. They are hung very lightly on their stems. Hence they rustle and quiver, like a thing of life, before a breeze so light as to be imperceptible even on sick travelers' foreheads. These are quite conspicuous objects in the vicinity of the Jordan.

Such trees, if that is what is meant in this verse, present a most exquisite image by which to speak of the Holy Spirit's influence in revival times. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Soldiers have told me, some who fought in the Wilderness, that among all the mysterious and exciting experiences of war in earnest there is nothing more impressive and soul-subduing than the sound and sight, when saplings are beating down, and branches are bending, before the tread of a concealed foe, the outbreaking of whom from cover may be expected at any point and at any moment. Perhaps this "sound of a going," which was David's signal, was intended also to be the Philistines' alarm, and may have had much to do with the panic which ensued. At any rate, many a shrewd device of wicked men has been foiled by the mere sign of the coming of God's Spirit, given to encourage his faithful people.

7. But let us remember: *These evidences of a divine presence are to be most alertly watched for.*

Our sensible tokens from on high are always of a delicate character in themselves, no matter how striking may be their results. God awakes his people often, not with a loud outcry, but as a mother awakes her child with simply looking at it. He wants to fulfil his promise, “I will guide thee with mine eye.” And we must learn from experience what the Bride meant in the Song of Songs, when she said, “I sleep, but my heart waketh.” We must slumber lightly even when taking our permitted rest.

Now this “sound of a going” was explained to David; he was given to understand that it was Jehovah himself in advance of the host; “for then shall the Lord go out before thee.” The language reminds one of the Pentecost history: “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” This, we all know now, was the descent of the Holy Ghost which had been promised.

But those disciples would never have received it if they had not been obediently on the watch in the upper room, where they were told to wait. And David would never have been summoned to victory if he had not quietly hid in ambush, watching—watching—watching—until the tree leaves began to quiver, and the forest to roar. Some say the twenty-ninth of the Psalms is connected with this part of David’s career. If so, there comes a new meaning into those sentences about “the voice of the Lord.” That was the “sound of a going” too. So he sings: “The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty; the voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness.” This rustle

in the tree tops, that began with a sigh, and rose to a tempest, was the whisper of the omnipotent Voice.

8. Our suggestions multiply, but this new one must not be forgotten: *The first sign of God's coming must be met with immediate duty.*

"Then thou shalt bestir thyself." The expression in the Chronicles is a little more specific: "And it shall be, when thou shalt hear a sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees that then thou shalt go out to battle: for God is gone forth before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines." Well says earnest Matthew Henry: "It is comfortable going out when God goes before." The best part of the story under our eye is found in those simple words: "And David did so as the LORD had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer."

Now if anybody asks at this point what are the ordinary signs of the Holy Spirit's presence, easy answer can be given in several particulars.

One is, *people are asking such questions* as this. A spirit of inquiry among Christians is evidence that God has come very near. They are seeking each other, and trying to find out the meaning of certain noises they hear in the air, certain motions they feel in public sentiment. They have all on a sudden grown inquisitive and wistful.

Another is, *increased love for the Word*. Children in the Sunday-school classes, adults in prayer-meetings, indeed men and women everywhere, will be using the ordinary means of grace, as if they now for the first time believed them to be real instruments for good.

Yet again: *Church members will grow sensitive to sin*. Judgment will begin exactly at the house of God. Confessions will be in order. Somebody will break down

in his prayer. Tenderness will prevail. Old grudges will be reconciled. Ancient feuds will disappear.

Another sign is, *alarm among the impenitent*. Just remember the promise in Leviticus, and see how it links in with this intimation here: "And the sound of a *shaken leaf* shall chase them, and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth." Guilt is always suspicious. A dreadful sound is in the transgressor's ears. I once heard a legend concerning the aspen tree; that it was the tree from whose wood the timbers of our Lord's cross were made; and since then it had never ceased to tremble. I raise no question about that; I only say this—when the Lord is near, wicked men are frightened.

9. So we reach the end of the story; and we learn that *in all these conflicts success is sure*.

"And the Lord said unto David, Go up; for I will *doubtless* deliver the Philistines into thine hand." So all we have to do is—keep doing "as the Lord has commanded."

Are these not now signs of the times of refreshing, which are wonderfully suggestive? Did you ever stand on a hill, and watch the waving of the tremulous trees beneath you on the slope? Is there nothing just now in our communities to remind you of that spectacle? Is there around us any "sound of a going"? Who needs in these days to put searching questions like one of the seers of old? Has there ever been a time in which more of the sensible tokens of God's nearness and presence were to be noted and heeded than there are now?

We should pray more vigorously for our own truer, fuller, consecration. Our expectations should be instant and high for good things to come. Let every

child of God put forth his supreme endeavor after individual conversions. Awake Christians who are still slumbering. Remove stumbling-blocks out of the way of the ungodly. Seek close conversation with the impenitent. Dispose of worldly cares so as to have freedom for work, and so as to avoid interference with religious zeal. Watch for each beginning of motion that may be seen trembling among the trees.

“And the fame of David went out into all lands; and the LORD brought the fear of him upon all nations.” The Church is safe. Some petitions of a glorious past are held in reserve as yet, waiting their answer. Some prayers of the martyrs have been heard. The goodly line of the confessors will see the triumph from above, as in their unbroken faith they used to see it from afar. It is cheering to think they are with us in the common anticipation even yet. The Athenians always had a fine tradition, that a throng of their old heroes—the dead veterans of Attica—fought for them just as much at one time as another, even after they had died. So six hundred years after the victory, the plains of Marathon were believed to be haunted with a troop of spectral warriors; and every night it was said there might be heard the shouts of a phantom phalanx, the neighing of steeds, and the ringing strokes of steel on armor.

Are the good of all ages, even in spirit, still with us? Is Christ anywhere near his coming? Is heaven really our home? Very well: “Let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself.”

IX.

THE NEW YEAR'S WORK.

"ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE FIRST MONTH SHALT THOU SET UP THE TABERNACLE OF THE TENT OF THE CONGREGATION." Exodus 40: 2.

The mechanical labor of setting up the tabernacle in the wilderness was only the brief toil of six months, but the significance of the act was lasting as the life of the nation which did it. For the meaning it had was nothing less than the solemn recognition and installation of Jehovah himself as the supreme God over all.

Moreover, there was an added impressiveness in the exact season fixed for the performance of the work. On "the first day of the first month" people were bidden to erect the structure and covenant with God for all that long future in which centred his promises and their hopes. And the record tells us carefully afterwards that "it came to pass in the first month of the second year, upon the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up."

Then at the close of the story we are informed concerning the fine reward which the Israelites received for their fidelity in so costly an undertaking: "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."

Upon these three suggestions, made by just three verses in the fortieth chapter of Exodus, it may be

interesting now to dwell. For while most Christian people would gladly follow the history into every particular with decided enthusiasm, yet some of us would be aided more by a few practical and positive lessons as to our own duty.

I. The duty of tabernacle-building is still pressing upon us all under the New Testament dispensation. Of course there are no frames to be made, no curtains to be woven, no fretwork of gold to be wrought. But in every respect in which the labor of those Hebrew laborers was significant, ours is precisely the same. We see they were bidden to erect that building in order that Jehovah might have an honored place in daily obedience and worship. And we know that Jehovah's presence demands an immediate and permanent abode in all our lives. Put this under a figure, and we may say that every true man has three tabernacles at the least to build without delay.

1. There is a tabernacle to be set up *in his own heart*. Only a reference to a later structure with the same purpose gives us the exact text we want to quote: "Ye are the temple of the living God." The true Shechinah is "Christ formed in us, the hope of glory."

Those who looked upon the martyr Stephen's face, saw it lit, "as it had been the face of an angel." The secret of this marvelous brightness comes out, when we are afterwards told he was "full of the Holy Ghost." It was one of the amazing disclosures of the Scripture that it is possible for even a human being to receive the Third Person of the adorable Godhead as a permanent in-dweller in his soul.

Hence, to set up a tabernacle in one's heart is merely to open widely the doors of our affections to the

incoming of the Holy Spirit. He enters as the "glory of the Lord" entered the enclosure in the desert; and he remains thereafter as the mysterious light abode upon the mercy-seat in the Holy of Holies. We become in this change quite new creatures; for we bend our wills to Christ in affectionate obedience; we draw nigh to the cross where he bore the awful curse of the broken law for us; and, acknowledging our sins, we trust entirely to him for pardon. It does not seem possible to describe this wonderful residence of the Spirit in the human soul further with mere words. It has always been a maxim with Christian people: "He who has not believed will not experience; and he who has not experienced cannot know."

When one has confessed his sins sincerely, has put his trust in the atonement offered to him, has received Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour, and has covenanted to be his for all time and eternity, then there is in the depths of his soul a fresh information, a revelation and disclosure, which he cannot in mere words pass on to others.

In the Village Dialogues, Rowland Hill calls the Christian, of whom he has occasion to fix the name, "Thomas Newman." And this is only Scriptural. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." And great as is the inexplicableness of the change, there is nothing hard to understand at all in the means of attaining it. We become new men by bending our wills to Christ; by drawing nigh to the cross where he bore the curse; by acknowledging our sins, and trusting to him for pardon. That leads us into a religious life, and gives us his name.

2. Next to this, there is a tabernacle to be set up *in*

one's own house. Religion in the family comes right after piety established in the heart. Indeed, there is such a thing as organic service of Christ, superadded to personal service. Every parent is largely the high-priest of his household. He needs, and he ought to invoke, the immediate and the constant presence of God's love under his family roof. In the prophecy of Jeremiah, the families which call not on the name of God are reckoned with the heathen that know him not, and are said to be exposed to his "fury."

Setting up a tabernacle in one's home is establishing a family altar around which parents and children can be gathered for daily devotion and instruction. It is impossible to overrate the power and value of such an institution. Many a father has gone forth to his morning toil, leaving a benediction of help resting behind him on all the beloved circle of which he is the centre and the acknowledged head. And many a child has been won back to duty and integrity by the remembered pressure of his mother's hand on his forehead, as it used to be felt when she prayed for him at her side.

To throne the Almighty God in the midst of our home-affections is to make our houses so many tabernacles with the Shechinah residing in them. And that constitutes any Christian household the fittest image of heaven on earth—seeming just to have glided out of the celestial city unthinkingly, full of its own joyous delight.

Now, there is great spiritual instruction in the remembrance that all along the wilderness journey of this life the Almighty God accepts for himself the vicissitudes of his people, and claims no better lot than his providence allows to them. While these Israelites were in a desert, dwelling in tents, he put himself, as

it were, on an equality with them. So he commanded that his ark should be placed within curtains. While they had no roofed houses, he desired none. He tabernacled beside them.

Hence we may learn an encouraging lesson. In the lowliest cottage, as well as the lordliest palace, our divine Lord consents to dwell with us. He demands nothing more than a cordial recognition in our homes, whatever they may be. He wants only to be welcomed by those who love him, in precisely the sphere of life which belongs to them. So he comes cheerfully to dwell with the poor and the sick, with the lonely and the feeble; and he gives the joy of his companionship familiarly. As we say of our dearest friends, we can say of him: "We need never make a stranger of him, or feel embarrassed; for he likes to come in and take us just as we are." In after times there was a temple, builded at Jerusalem to receive and to manifest the glory of God. But now all he asked was a covering of wool and of skins. And yet that awe-inspiring Presence upon the ark of the testimony, in the bleak desert, was no less majestic and luminous than when it flamed between the cherubim, and abode within the firm walls of one of the noblest edifices under the sun.

3. Then, also, there is a tabernacle to be set up *in the world* around us. A public committing of one's life to Christ, so that every one within the reach of his influence shall feel that the Holy Spirit is enthroned in **his heart** permanently—this is what comes next in the **line of Christian duty**. Fortunate is it for us that a **church** has been already established on the earth; but **it is an organization** the furthering of which is very like **tabernacle-building** as it was there in the desert, and **in it we can all have a part.**

To strengthen the stakes of Zion ; to enlarge the borders of God's kingdom among men ; to extend the knowledge of Christ and his cross to all who need it ; to add by our patience and prayers to the membership of Christ's body such as shall eventually be saved—this, in all its magnitude and variety of endeavor, is the same sort of labor as the tribes performed when they built a dwelling-place for God.

No one can fail to see that the work of the Lord is one work, and only one. All the parts of it play into each other, and help each other forward. We begin by an honest recognition of our Maker in our own heart and lives. Then God's Holy Spirit reigning within is quick to force his influence into expression and fruitfulness without. Our home catches it and perpetuates it, till the entire world warms and glows under its luminousness and its power. Each family becomes a "little sanctuary ;" so the church feels our spirituality, and so sinners are converted unto God. The work is all one work ; it is simply setting up the tabernacle by a surrender of our whole hearts to our Maker's service.

II. This being the duty of each child of God, it becomes us to consider, in the second place, the teaching of the story here as to the right time for its performance. The Hebrew year had already been made to begin with the month of Abib,—answering to our April or March,—to commemorate the deliverance of the Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh. To cause that the tabernacle should be reared on such a day was to force the structure itself to be a constant reminder of the debt they owed to Jehovah, all along the future ages.

1. It is evident, then, that *our anniversaries* might be

really the most fitting of all for this great work of enthroning Christ in the heart, or for setting up a family altar, or for publicly entering into membership in the church. This was a New Year's Day when the tabernacle in the wilderness was erected; the first day of the first month. Spiritual surrender to obedience, and orderly assumption of duty, may well choose for its beginning some moment already made memorable as a crisis moment in our lives. The recurrence of one's birthday—the anniversary of one's wedding-day—indeed, anniversaries of any events which have fixed themselves in a personal or family memorial—these may be made valuable. No work is more appropriate for a Christmas morning, or a New Year's eve, or an autumn Thanksgiving, than that of commencing a new departure in our religious life by setting up a fresh tabernacle for worship.

2. But it is just as evident that the setting up of such a religious memorial *might make an anniversary* as that it might accept one. The Israelites were commanded to begin their year of reckoning with the day of the Passover. It would be perilous and unwise to wait for an anniversary for giving our hearts to Christ, or for doing any prescribed duty whatsoever. Better do the duty, and then the date becomes an anniversary of itself. The day of one's first communion is a day long to be remembered; the day on which we earliest came into the full understanding of what it means to say: "Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us."

III. Now let us consider the reward which the Israelites received for their fidelity. On the New Year's day they performed every particular of the work Moses had commanded them, and finished it with **alacrity** and heartfelt joy. They reared up the boards

upon that beautiful spring morning ; they planted them solidly in their silver sockets ; they spread the quadruple curtains above them ; they put the tablet of the testimony into the ark, and over it set the gold-covered mercy-seat, and before all hung the vail. Then lamps were lit on the seven-branched candlestick, and sweet incense was kindled on the altar. The laver also was filled with water, and a burnt offering was laid on the coals. Thus all their commanded labor was assiduously and expeditiously accomplished.

Just at this moment they received a splendid recompense from heaven, an honorable recognition of their faithfulness and devotion. What would be the best payment which could be made for fidelity in the service of the Lord ? The reply is instinctive : Righteousness is always its own reward. So the verse quoted reads : " Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." Suddenly a great cloud advanced toward the tabernacle they had constructed, and wrapped around it its mysterious folds as a pavilion. From the midst of this, in the next instant, there was seen coming forth the brightness of an inner glory. At once the entire space between the golden cherubim on the mercy-seat was flooded with radiant light. This cloud was the same they had seen in the form of a pillar with fire infolded. It had been tranquilly standing for some days at the door of Moses' tent, while the Lord " talked with him face to face, as a man speaketh with his friend." Afterwards, it had returned to the summit of Sinai when the law was given, and there the leader's face had shone with its light. At this sublime moment the same symbol of the Divine Presence came majestically down once more from the rugged slopes and surmounted the sacred en-

closure. Jehovah was entering into his own prepared dwelling; and so transcendent was the brilliance of this "glory of the Lord" that no man could look upon it. Even the dazed and bewildered Moses withdrew from the wonderful vision that filled the whole house.

Herein is found our symbol by which to understand the spiritual blessing promised as the reward of doing duty for God. It is nothing more nor less than the disclosed Presence of God in the tabernacle we have erected. If the tabernacle is in the heart, then it is the light of God in the heart; if in the household, then it is the light of God in the household; if in the world, then it is the light of God in the world around us.

Oh, when I think of it—think how many a heart there is among us as yet warmed by no fire upon the altar of its truest life; when I think how many a home there is from which the love-light of the Saviour's abiding presence is excluded, across whose threshold the pillar-cloud of his protection is never invited to pass; when I think of the radiance of heaven's own gladness, which is all ready to come in at a bidding,—then I cannot help lifting the old note of sorrowing wonder: "O the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble! why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night."

So, too, when I think of this beloved church, in relation to the work it has to do; when I remember its past, and try to picture its future; when I ask concerning its best interests, What do we most, most of all, need? my full heart bursts out with impulsive reply: Oh, this Shechinah light of God's presence beyond everything else!

We need not talk of wealth, and power, and numbers,

and influence ; we want only the lad with his wallet of loaves and fishes ; we want only the shepherd stripling with his five stones from the brook ; we want only the three hundred soldiers with their pitchers and their lamps ! But then, with them, we must have the Divine Spirit, whose presence will make the loaves and fishes feed the five thousand ; that will whirl the few pebbles into the forehead of the giant Sin ; that will send into rout and confusion the Midianites of Satan. " Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." I cannot count the absence of that Spirit a trifling thing. My soul yearns for his presence ; my lips pray for it ; my eyes watch for it, more than they who look for the morning. " Oh, send out thy light and thy truth ; let them lead me ; let them bring me unto thy holy hill and to thy tabernacle !"

My friends, many of you do hope and expect one day to become Christians. Is the time any nearer now, as this beginning of the " first day of the first month" has dawned upon you? *Why not set up the tabernacle to-day?* The power of anniversaries is felt by every intelligent mind. We take all our inventories then for a new start. Here falls a little bar across the line of running time. We are checked for at least one thoughtful moment. The hour is propitious. The argument is pressing.

It was an old Scandinavian fable that on the shoulders of Odin sat two ravens, whose business it was each day to explore the world, collecting incidents and facts, which at night they came home to whisper in his ears. The names of these tireless messengers were Thought and Memory. They may be imagined sitting on every man's shoulder to-day, returned from ranging his life, telling their tale—the one of the past, the other of the

future. There is pleading argument in the whispering of both of them.

Memory bids you look back through the twelve-month closed, and kindly speaks to you about its experiences and record. You can hear her saying now: "By the blessings you have shared; by the tears you have shed; by all the good gifts prosperity has brought you, or discipline has removed; by the trials that have darkened your path, or the triumphs which have lit it,—begin now the new life with the new year; now, while the glad greetings of dear friends are ringing on the winter air, say to your Father: Here am I; take me!"

Thought, then, has her word to utter. She tells you you are getting older, and getting harder. Really, it is not so easy to begin this year, as it would have been to begin last. You may never see another new year; not even another summer. You are keeping back others by your delay. You are losing time awfully for doing any work for God. Indeed, it is becoming questionable whether, after all, you will not find before long that your chance is ended, and your soul is lost!

GRANT, we beseech thee, ALMIGHTY GOD, that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may, through thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living; to the honor and praise of thy name; through JESUS CHRIST our Lord. *Amen.*

X.

THE EYES OF GOD.

"THE EYES OF THE LORD RUN TO AND FRO THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH, TO SHOW HIMSELF STRONG IN THE BEHALF OF THEM WHOSE HEART IS PERFECT TOWARDS HIM."—2 Chron. 16 : 9.

The general subject-matter, of which this text treats, is God's all-seeing presence in the ordinary affairs of men. But the form of expression is unusual and most remarkable, in that it represents the Almighty as himself explaining the *reach* of his own omniscience, as well as the *purpose* he has in the exercise of it. So we have before us to-day a most interesting theme of discourse, and already divided so as to present two excellent and suggestive points of consideration.

I. The REACH of the divine omniscience is thus stated in the inspired language of this verse : "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth."

So it would seem that God claims to see *everything*. And this most marvelous utterance does not even stand alone. There are other declarations to the same end. "Naked and open are all things unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him?" In like manner says the prophet : "Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men." Says the psalmist : "There is not a word in my tongue, but lo,

O Lord, thou knowest it altogether." And thus, with equal explicitness it is declared of him by all the sacred writers who were commissioned to forward his revelation to our race. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." So our text simply utters a plain but most significant fact: "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth."

1. *God sees every creature.*

It is plain that if we give all these passages their literal meaning, there is a most wonderful sweep to such an attribute as this. Far beyond any exhaustive conception of ours, much as we labor to imagine it, must such a vision forever be. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain unto it." Worlds like ours are as innumerable as the stars of a winter sky. Races, as intricate as ours, throng this wide universe. Yet God is the provident keeper of each individual existence in all the mass of multitudinous being. Every boat on the billows, every minnow that swims beside it; every living thing, from the monad in the air to the leviathan in the ocean; every eagle, every gnat, and every angel, shares God's knowledge, and receives his care.

2. *God notices every act.*

No son of Adam, no daughter of Eve, can be so far away, so low, or so humble, as to be out of observation to such eyes as these. If you choose to put an extreme case, what was ever more likely than that a poor insignificant bond-woman, like Hagar, whom her jealous

mistress had driven from the door, and compelled to flee into the wilderness, should escape the notice of Providence? Yet the Angel of the covenant came to her, looked up a spring in the hillside, which she had missed, and saved her life and Ishmael's. And that text we so often quote was spoken by her as a thankful recognition of the help he gave: "Thou, God, seest me."

3. *God knows every motive.*

But this omniscience, which should go no further than the mere external life—no matter how peaceful, no matter how perilous—would be little more than mere mechanical providence. The acquaintance which God has with his human creatures is much more extensive. When the prophet Samuel was sent to the sons of Jesse to choose Israel's king, he very naturally, as a believer in primogeniture, thought that Eliab the first-born must be the one upon whom the anointing oil was to be poured. The perfection of the sinewy beauty of the young man's form won his admiration. But the warning voice came from heaven to the mistaken seer: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him; for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looked on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Let this, then, suffice for both proof and illustration of the fact that God sees all the children of men. He knows us thoroughly; knows all our exigencies; all our experiences; understands all our histories. There is an eye silently following our footsteps, and reading our hearts. Feelings, thoughts, and actions, all alike go on record in his book of remembrance.

I do not suppose there is one among us all who really doubts the truth of this statement. But there are many, very many, who can as a matter of personal experience

make nothing out of it. It is not available truth to them. It seems to them like some vague investment of wealth, upon which they never seem able to realize, even when they feel poorest.

II. Let us come back to the text now to make inquiry after God's PURPOSE in this watchfulness and search. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, *to show himself strong in the behalf of them, whose heart is perfect towards him.*"

1. There ought to be the highest comfort in this verse. How is it possible for any true Christian to miss the significance or resist the force of such a declaration? *God is only seeking chances to help those who love him.* It can hardly be hoped that truth would flash out, in one moment of vast disclosure, from so wonderful a promise; or else I should expect many a tried child of God fairly to cry aloud in gladness under the discovery: "What time I am afraid I will put my trust in thee." It is by such verses that Christian heroes and heroines are educated. "The people *that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits.*"

2. Still, the verse is often perverted into an alarm. There are some persons who go even beyond weakness, and become wicked. They push forward doubt into denial. To them omniscience seems like an organized system of *espionage*, the suspicious watching of a spy. It is uncomfortable for them to think of it. An undefined sense of awkwardness pervades their minds. They refuse to feel at ease in any kind of religious duty. For they insist that the scrutiny is as oppressive as it is offensive.

It is recorded that when Lafayette was in prison at Olmutz, there was a band of soldiers set to guard his cell, one of whom was ordered to stand with his eye at

an orifice in the door. Thus, succeeding each other in the mean office hour after hour, they kept up their watch. He could not write, nor walk, nor change his seat, without a police eye looking upon him. No corner of the apartment could hide him from the scrutiny, no act or motion could elude the search. He wrote to the authorities finally that he could not endure it. It was awaking his imagination; it was wearing out his sensibilities. It would drive him mad with its cold inquisition.

Now if any one thus conceives, or caricatures, divine omniscience as being mere prying suspicion, it is no wonder if he should go so far as to say, with some show of irreverence: "It seems to me God is over-particular." But what a monstrous misrepresentation it would be! Here is an almighty Benefactor, *simply watching for an opportunity to befriend us*, and we turn around upon him to say he is officious, obtrusive, and offensive! Surely it can only be a guilty heart—one grown itself most vilely suspicious—which can so mistake the divine love.

3. Let us see, now, if we cannot make the entire relevancy of this text our own. There are strange and startling poses in individual history, crisis-periods in one's life, to which we come suddenly, and which culminate in sublime decision. A wife is bereft of her husband in a moment, and receives the solemn name of widow. She knows that henceforward she is to walk alone. A conscientious clerk is unexpectedly informed that he has been invited to become a partner in the house he has served. An elder sister is orphaned, and discovers that now will fall upon her the care of children who are motherless. An invalid is told of a hidden disease in his system, which promises only years of torment and sure ultimate death. A thought-

ful student is standing on the threshold of graduation, and must, in a few weeks, enter into real and tumultuous life. A sober-minded maiden has reached the fair morning of her marriage, and gazes curiously down the vista of unknown, untried duty.

All these persons have arrived at an offing for the soul. They cannot avoid looking out upon the eternal sea, though the eye grows wild with apprehension under the limitless prospect. The eager question rises to the lips, and the heart presses it forward for immediate answer, "*What am I going to do?*" To this, any one would say in a moment, there is no human reply. A devout mind is able to look aloft, according to the strength of the faith that sways it. That is the place to look, and that is the way to get help; but few seem to rest satisfied in seeking it. The worst of this experience is the knowledge that other people are all exercised by the same doubt, all passing around the same misgiving, all urging the same question. They say of the widow, "She never had mourning before, how will she bear it?" They say of the young man entering prosperity, "How do you suppose he will turn out?" They say of the motherly sister, "Oh, how will she keep care of those children!" And so of all the rest; it is an honest conviction in the neighbors' minds that these people have got on hand now more than they can meet.

But here we insist that such surmises are utterly mistaken, and such prognostications will certainly fail. For there never was on this old earth a man who simply and honestly asked God to show him his duty, and help him do it, who was turned away with a denial. He is no craven, who, finding he cannot keep up alone, asks almighty help. He is no coward, who finding he cannot put down the untamed devils in his own heart,

asks for heavenly assistance. It is best to keep some simple words ready for a petition. "We know not how to ask for any thing as we ought; but the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered."

Now, I take it to be one of the fine welcome things of this remarkable text we have been dwelling upon, that it tells us that God's *eyes* are to be our source of help. There is no need of calling in the aid of blundering voices, if only we can *look* up and see him watching for a chance to come in with his help the moment we let him. With that look from the eyes of God's love comes wisdom—we know now what to do, though we felt sorely perplexed before. With it comes fortitude—does any one suppose we are going to quail or break while God is gazing upon us? With it comes meekness—we feel docile enough, weary of our old self-will, and ready to come at once to our rest.

So when we see, all over the world, sweet, brave lives under trial, the secret is here. In the words of our text, their "heart is perfect towards God," and he is fulfilling his promise, "I will guide thee with mine eye." They live "looking unto Jesus," and he looks back upon them. It is actually within the reach of human faith to "endure, as seeing him who is invisible." The educated believer learns to understand the events of Providence, the workings of his own mind, the intricacies of other people's experiences, the clear declarations of the Word, as just so many instruments of counsel and encouragement to him. Underneath him are the everlasting arms. And God's omniscience is in no sort or sense an alarm to him. He *wants* to be seen always.

Hence, when the Psalmist says, "I have set the Lord

always before me ; because he is on my right hand, I shall not be moved," he does mean merely that Christ is a model for his imitation. He seems to consider the Saviour as a *living* help. He looks up, and Immanuel—God with us—looks back at him ; he sees aid in every glance. Oh, wonderful conception is this—God looking after his human creatures, keeping watch of them like a real parent ! Two eyes—of unquestionable majesty, of indescribable tenderness—silently following our path, wherever we go ; and this, simply to show that God in person desires to help those who love and trust him !

ALMIGHTY GOD, Father of all mercies, we, thine unworthy servants, do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men. We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life ; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord JESUS CHRIST ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we show forth thy praise, not only with our lips but in our lives ; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days ; through JESUS CHRIST our Lord, to whom, with thee, and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

XI.

IS ANYTHING CERTAIN?

"THAT THOU MIGHTEST KNOW THE CERTAINTY OF THOSE THINGS WHEREIN THOU HAST BEEN INSTRUCTED."—Luke 1: 4.

In these excitable days of ours we note that old religious issues are greatly shifted. Ancient volumes of apologetics are quite incomplete for our text-books now. The forms of error are more subtle than they used to be. The devil is educating, as the centuries roll on. The artifices employed are deeper, the disguises more plausible, the temper more desperate. Science has furnished us in intellectual warfare something now and then which answers to needle-guns and Rodman cannons in military campaigning. Of course slaughter is greater for a while; but the battles are more quickly through with, and sensible people are somewhat slower in beginning a fight. Mere skirmishing is more popular.

Meantime, the entire Word of God still stands unimpeached. Truth has lived upon its own resources, and oftentimes grown opulent by capturing the citadels of error, and purifying them into defences. As if the infidel world had become angry with itself for ever yielding any point, back now after a thousand years it has come to take with new weapons the old stand, where its earliest opposition began—the distinct

statements of the Bible as a revelation from God of his will to men. Here the legions are again out before us, "Tenting, tenting—tenting on the old camp-ground."

Now, it may be true that in all these conflicts some valuable perverts are made outright. If so, we frankly say we do not often happen to meet them afterwards, so as to take down their names. They must be deported into their new quarters as patients are removed to insane-asylums. They are not generally of a class of useful people that are likely to be feverishly missed. And we feel quite calm under pressure of formidable statistics.

But there is one thing we do see, and deplore much, and instinctively would try to remedy it if we could. And that is, a sort of excited irresolution of mind, a misgiving concerning ordinary truth, an irritable uncertainty of feeling, which renders some of our less established Christians uncomfortable and unsettled. "Unfortunate is it," says the German poet, "for the youth of our day, that they are obliged to shake the drops and the insects from the tree of knowledge, before the fruit."

It is useless to blind our eyes to the fact that those who read much nowadays grow worried. They are undermined by insinuations of what they do not understand. Words are mighty big in case their meaning is doubtful. Science overwhelms ordinary intelligence with megatheriums of language as well as of bones, because its hypotheses are not yet clear enough to be stated simply. And these terms seem to thunder down some weak defences. Unanswered questions, to many unsophisticated imaginations, appear answerless arguments. We do not know any spectacle more profoundly pathetic than that presented by one of our average

young men, trying to tell another how distressed he is about protoplasm!

The result is a mere disquieted and morbidly inquisitive state of mind. Old bright views are obscured. A kind of aimless inquiry concerning "the other side" sets in. The life feels in all its fibres of usefulness this restlessness of thought. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." Character becomes enervate also; for the vigor of one's will is left unbraced by any of its usual joyousness of purpose or grandeur of conviction. It has been said, in one of our bright modern books, that the mere surmise, "that the advanced scholarships and the old faiths are at variance," is itself a fruitful cause of popular indifference and unbelief. Some of our younger Christians have a misgiving concerning the articles of established creeds, the moment they learn that it is considered tolerable to doubt and dispute them.

Now we need not call this state of mind guilty, and fall upon it with severity. The man has not gone, he is not going, into unbelief; he is merely demoralized under the pressure of a suspicion. His enthusiasm has vanished, his energy, his emphasis, indeed, all that goes to make up real manhood at its work or under its worthy momentum, because he has lost confidence.

The remedy for this painful state of feeling is found in a simple reestablishment of trust. "Is there anything settled?" is the troubled inquiry; and the cheerful answer is, "Yes, for as yet there is nothing disturbed."

It seems to us that perhaps the time has arrived when our spiritual leaders at large might profitably address the people upon at least the internal Evidences of Christianity. The most intelligent of their hearers love now and then to rehearse the familiar items of proof.

Surely everybody likes to listen to words of confirmation and encouragement. There are matters quite within the limit of gospel instruction free from controversy, and full of comfort, which might be exhibited. Some things are undisputed. These will carry other things with them, the moment they are stated. If Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, then a new theory of Evolution will never hurt anybody. Luke wrote a whole gospel to set his friend Theophilus at ease: "That thou mightest know the *certainty* of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed."

Just now popular sentiment is sensitive. A great wave of religious feeling swept through the city only a few years ago. Vast numbers of converts were received into the churches from an unsuspecting and unwary class in society. Many of them have not been trained in the principles of steady Christian life. Many a one among them is trying to do his duty, who is not quite ready to discuss Darwinism or the nebular hypothesis. A strong dogmatism of assertion might carry him over into pitiable confusion. Is it true that we are passing into a new investigation of the foundations of the Faith once delivered to the saints?

If our ears are not mistaken, the air is slightly tremulous with expectation. The secular press is making haste to announce a fresh sensation. It appears likely that the Church is going to be challenged before long to another strong debate. What will in the end come out of it does not yet disclose itself. We may be on the borders of great discovery; we may be now just at the frontiers of the Illuminated Land; but we more think that the Lord's people are getting forced nearer and nearer to the skirmish-lines of a great unnecessary, intricate, and fussy discussion.

Now there are some truly devout minds which are disturbed by the present form of attack adopted by the enemies of the Cross. Not seriously ; not alarmingly ; but enough to cause them to indulge a slight measure of misgiving. They have not gone so far as even to imagine the skeptics have the argument, much less keep it. But they soberly wonder whether it is not high time for scholarly believers to be getting up a little "stir" on their own account. In their judgment, men of science, so-called, seem to be having it quite too much their own way. Such feeling seems to be gaining ground.

A decent respect for the opinions of mankind requires that this impression should be noticed. It must be proper now for all, who have anything to do with public sentiment, to try to meet innocent misgiving with a measure of tranquil reassurance. Why cannot we be satisfied to let the debate proceed? A great mass of men have nothing else to do. Samuel Johnson tells us of a man he met in the Hebrides, who had "an intrepidity of talk," whether he understood the subject or not.

When a Christian becomes moody, and his mind is sorely inquisitive, he discloses a morbid craving for that which is fixed. He reasons with a logic, as false as it is swift, that since a few of the former convictions of his soul have been disturbed there is nothing left which can stand. Now, if a helping hand be extended to him it will do no good to leave him where he is, among the shifting sands of his present difficulties ; he must be led far up the shore, away from even his dangerous associations, and placed upon the firm ground of old and established truth. Then, after a little quiet soothing, he can be told that really there

has been no sort of earthquake, not even the subsidence of the sea. Some things are certain; they can be positively relied upon.

1. For example: God is a certainty. One being rules this universe, supreme, benevolent and wise. The shortest argument to that is, that no human soul can even so much as conceive the opposite. Blank atheism is simply impossible.

Now, just this carries with it untold conclusions. A governor implies a government. A government suggests intricate relations among the subjects, and so admits of mystery. But when we look up we see a Face looking kindly back upon us—there comes down a Hand which touches ours—if we listen we shall hear a Voice. And this is entirely distinct from all considerations of Colenso's counting of the Israelites right, or Herbert Spencer's "Conservation of Forces." The soul is not fatherless, at all events.

2. Revelation is a certainty. If the Bible had come to us as a stranger comes into our dwelling in a snowy night, out of a chill darkness all around, it would evidence its heavenly birth by its conversation and breeding. There is wise suggestion in the remark of Henry Rogers: "The Bible is not such a book as man would have made, if he could, or could have made, if he would." Here is a book which all alone, with the resident Spirit in it, takes a Hottentot's soul and revolutionizes it into a perfectly new and wonderful being. It will do just that over and over again with anybody. It has done it in all ages and in all climes times without number.

And it will go on doing the same thing, no matter whether Archbishop Usher's chronology can stand the pressure from geologic rocks or not; no matter if the

site of Sodom shall be found to have been at the other end of the Dead Sea.

What a history is that of this Book's preservation! What a marvelous good it has already accomplished! It has comforted the weary and refreshed the faint. That one volume is the miracle of a million libraries. There is nothing like it on the earth, and the moment we read it we hear it saying, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

3. Sin is a certainty. It is an inexplicable thing under a moral government; how it got here—how it stays here—how it grows—how it intensifies—how it lives itself, and kills everything it touches. It furnishes the fairest and most stupendous example of a "survival" of the *unfittest* which the mind can conceive. Sin makes the point of contact just now between man and his Creator. Sin is the only key which has wards enough to unlock the mysteries of this world of ours. The moment a man is guilty, that moment he knows he has a hold upon God's pity.

For sin Christ died. For sin man suffers. For sin heaven opens doors of mercy. For sin there is a pardon; for the sinner forgiven there is a crown. And all this is perfectly independent of the consideration whether our undeveloped forefathers were orang-outangs or gorillas.

4. The grand old moralities are a certainty. It is better to be true and manly than false, sensual and base. God is on the side of virtue, and he is not on the side of vice.

Eternal right is right, and wrong is wrong, wherever one finds it. To do good, and to keep pure, and to grow gentle is the highest life of man. And that has nothing to do with Joshua's treatment of the Canaanites, which

can be settled afterwards. It has nothing to do with the inquiry about germs of live matter or jellies of organic existence that must fight to survive. "False reasonings," says the thoughtful author of *Lacon*, "are often best confuted by giving them full swing of their own absurdities."

That is to say, these vexed questions which are unsettling many minds at the present are all on the outside of any heart of ours. The certainties of God, of hope, of love, of truth, are far out of reach, far away from injury, far above and beyond violence. Nothing is going to be shaken harmfully in this wild confusion if one will only think so. The foundation of the Lord standeth sure still. We are such creatures of sympathy that nervous people rush on in a panic, and lose heart when they happen to see a frightened outleader losing head. And, really, nothing in science or in skepticism has been reached yet to excite any alarm.

Some years ago, according to a story often told, an insane man, in one of our New England towns, once rose from his seat in the midst of a large assembly, and, seizing with a great deal of energy one of the columns which sustained the gallery of the church, declared aloud that he was going to pull it down. Had another "Samson Agonistes" suddenly appeared and declared himself just ready to bow between the pillars of another of Dagon's temples, there could hardly have been a greater consternation. If the people had but stopped to consider, their good sense, as well as their confidence in the architect of the great edifice, would have assured them of the man's utter impotence to execute his threat. But amid the outcries and faintings and general confusion they yielded to the most foolish fears. Nor did they recover their self-possession and quietly resume

their seats, until another man, significantly pointing to the large and strong column which had been threatened, calmly said: "Let him try! let him try!" This proposition restored order and confidence at once; the house did not fall, and the services went on.

After all this foolish panic of argument, nothing seems to have been torn down. God is still on his throne; Christ died for sinners; heaven is open for the pardoned and the pure. And so, really, it is possible, if our trust be held securely but a little while longer, that any one of us can know the certainty of those things wherein he has been instructed.

XII.

A PILLAR OF SALT.

"BUT HIS WIFE LOOKED BACK FROM BEHIND HIM, AND SHE BECAME A PILLAR OF SALT."—Genesis 17: 26.

Within the limits of the Holy Land there is one silent lake, which always claims the traveler's notice, subdues his mind to solemnity, and sends him sober from its beach. It is a diminutive inland sea, thick, dark, and deceitful. Its waters sting the nerves of each swimmer as he tries to breast them. Its salt spray and vapors blight every green thing on the shores. No fish lives in its depths, no fowl lingers on its surface. A deep gloom lies over it like a pall, and utter desolation appears there to have its dreary abode. Birds fly high above it; winds hurry on across it; but neither the dipping wings of the one, nor the freshening current from the other, ever curls a ripple or begins a wave. The whole Jordan river, plunging in year after year, without one outlet to diminish its mass, never fills it to the full, nor dilutes the intensity of its bitterness. Sullen and solemn, mysterious, poisonous and lonely, it bears to this day the fitting name of the Dead Sea.

More than three thousand years ago, upon the spot where that sheet of water now lies, were at least two cities of note in those eastern civilizations, Sodom and Gomorrah. Spread in the midst of a valley unusually

fertile and beautiful, they grew in wealth, and became notorious for luxury. But their sinfulness was awful. Two other such towns never cursed this fallen world, before or since.

Patient heaven looked down with forbearance for a while. At last God resolved to destroy such sinks of infamy and pollution at one stroke. Singularly enough, we read that there was one good believing man who lived in Sodom still. He was ashamed of it; he enjoyed not so much as one happy hour there; he "vexed his righteous soul" with the misdeeds; but kept his place and took his chances. God told Abram, when he prayed for the doomed inhabitants, that if there had been five people living among them who were righteous or decent, he would spare the rest for their sake; and Abram could in no way find out that there was even so much as one more beside Lot.

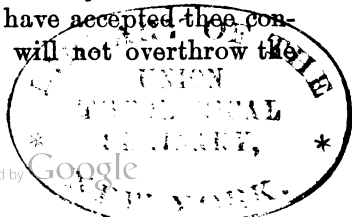
We all recollect that when Abram offered the choice of lands for settlement, Lot chose those which bordered on the lower Jordan, and so pitched his tent towards Sodom. Twenty years now had he sojourned there; he did not like the place; he "vexed his righteous soul" among such vile people; but he still remained on the ground. At this point our story commences of God's terrible retributions:

"And the two angels came to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot saw them, and rose up to meet them. And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons and thy daughters, and whomsoever thou hast in the city; bring them out of the place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it. And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened

Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. But he lingered: and the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters: the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the Plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

In the early part of the narrative, it is easy to discern one after another of Lot's worst characteristics as a man. Of course, he was startled; he went around at once to the families with which he was connected, and told them the warning. They laughed at him. Possibly he was discouraged, and for a moment harbored an unbelieving doubt of the tidings the angels brought. Perhaps he became in some measure cool and listless; at any rate, the angels approached him again, and were now most pressing in their appeals. The last night of respite had arrived; the clouds of fiery doom were gathering overhead. They caught him by the hand and hurried him out into the road. Then Lot began to temporize. He exclaimed piteously to the heavenly messenger who was urging him:

"Oh, not so, my lord: behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast showed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest evil overtake me, and I die: behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. And he said unto him: See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow the



city of which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot came unto Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven: and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt."

From this it appears that Lot was hurrying on somewhat in advance of his family. At all events, his wife, catching her opportunity from behind him, turned a long, passionate, eager look back over the scenes of her former life. She saw the fires roaring for miles beneath her feet: from the elevated off-look she marked wonderingly how the frightened masses of people heaved to and fro when the terrible storm of flame burst upon the doomed plain. The wild horror was complete; the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. All this that woman saw in one frantic glance.

Then, quicker than a falling thunderbolt, the judgment of an offended God was launched upon her disobedience. She became a pillar of salt on the instant, and stood rooted to the spot forever.

Two questions will be suggested by the account given us here. How was this unfortunate and guilty woman changed into a pillar of salt? And is there any sign of that awful monument remaining?

I suppose it is useless to ask or to try to know how this destruction was wrought. It is left to conjecture. Whether by some sudden avalanche of salt she was overwhelmed—saturated and smothered with incrusta-

tions of saline crystals—and thus transfixed against a cliff of rock : or whether, by one of those striking interpositions of the divine hand of which we read in the Old Testament so much, she was in person petrified into a bituminous column like salt stone—preserving her own form, and staring like a statue of Death on the shore of the Dead Sea : we do not know. The tradition of the Jews lends confirmation to the general history, by speaking of a strange monument which stood in that vicinity for many generations succeeding this era ; a structure of weird shape and superstitious suggestion, to which the fathers always pointed when they rehearsed the story of the lost Cities of the Plain. But scholars openly reject all such helps. Every trace of the ruin is gone now, at all events. A sudden depression of the valley seems to have afterwards suffered the waves of the bitter lake to roll over the entire region. Sodom and Gomorrah are known no more on the map of an inquiring world. The Dead Sea covers two cities of the dead.

Imagination alone can reproduce that scene, and give us such lessons as we desire to heed. I have somewhere read of a prodigal to whom was given a seal-ring to wear upon his finger. The device upon it was a death's head and bones ; and he was bidden to look upon this for one hour a day to remind him of his coming retribution. Something such a counsel is this which we all accept to-day as our New-Year's motto. We bind the word of the Lord, "Remember Lot's wife," upon our hearts in the full understanding that there is more than one symbol of spiritual death affixed to the circlet, in order to keep us soberly reminded of the transgressor's end. The story of Lot's wife is rarely remembered for anything but a curious wonder what

became of her. The Christian should ponder its lessons with a thoughtful mind.

I. Let us learn here, first, what is so often taught us, and yet so sadly missed by many readers of God's word, *how close it is possible for one to be to real salvation, and still be lost.*

This woman had all of what are called the means of grace. A heathen by birth, she yet was a Hebrew by marriage. We must admit that Lot was a tame sort of believer, and held his religion properly in hand, so as to keep peace in Sodom. And he may not have contributed much to his wife's advancement in devotion. But he shall not be denied the credit of the New Testament account of him, that he was a "righteous" man; that is to say, an Old Testament Christian at heart. And then, too, his family had been associated for a remarkable time with that of Abraham, the very father of the faithful. This woman must have witnessed the true godliness of this patriarch as he pitched his tent, and always erected an altar beside it. The prayers she heard, the story of divine mercy that he told her, the fine vision of a coming Messiah he waited and longed for, when he saw the day of Christ afar off and was glad—all this she had the advantage of; but her heart was in the wicked city still.

But by and by she was aroused. God sent an angel specially to take her by the hand and pull her away from her entanglement as if by force. She was at last out of Sodom, beyond the reach of fiery peril; she had started for safety. What good did that do? An eager look backward was all she needed for ruin. Do you recollect in Pilgrim's Progress that one of the company came suddenly upon a pillar of salt, which they told him was Lot's wife? Can you remember that pilgrim's

name? Think a moment, for there is a most notable suggestion in it: it was just "Hopeful." He was the one that evidently needed the lesson most. Oh, we have seen so many of these *hopeful* cases—these young men and women, who have lived under an ever-shining light of the means of grace—who have been brought again and again under conviction of sin—who have actually started out of the world, and begun moving towards God—who have perversely turned in their track at this supreme moment, and been lost; ye did run well, what did hinder you? How near one may come to being saved, and yet in the end be stayed by just one glance backwards! "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

II. In connection with this let us learn a second lesson beside the monument of Lot's wife; see that *religious convictions in every case are supremely honorable in the sight of right reason.*

Is there any sort of question in your minds as to the wisdom of this woman in starting away from a city which was to be on fire within an hour? Suppose some one had taunted her with being sober overmuch, and with growing serious. How many are the instances at once springing to your minds, as you recall the Scripture history!

Here was Orpah, the widowed sister of the widowed Ruth, stopping out in the road to Bethlehem in the company of Naomi. At the instant, she was delivered from all the enticements and hindrances of Moab; she was in the true way which led to Israel's God. Still

she went no further ; at last fell back with her kindred among ignorant heathen, and was heard of no more. You recollect Terah, Abraham's father ; he began rightly ; left Chaldea, and went out from under its power ; but he paused at Haran only half-way to the land of promise ; he died there ; and it was as if he never had started. We have reason to believe these people became tired and ashamed of undue anxiety in seeking to obey God ; they gave up their convictions.

We do not need to invoke old histories. Look around you, in the familiar circles of your own acquaintance to-day ; how many you can recognize, who have been standing, as you imagined, on the borders of the kingdom of Christ ; but they were turned back by a gibe or a sneer. Are they nearer or farther off now ? Are their heavenly hopes brighter or darker ? Are your expectations more confident or less concerning their final conversion ? Oh, when the great day comes—that funeral day when the souls of the living and the dead are to be buried in the grave of the second death—how many a sepulchre will bear on its portal the mournful epitaph—almost saved !

III. Then there is a third lesson taught us here in the story of Lot's wife : *what a prodigious power just one sin has in keeping a soul out of reach of all the provisions of divine grace.*

I judge that you understand by this time that the sin of this woman was not so little a sin after all ; for it included in it the guilt of several transgressions at one stroke. Indeed, no sin can be considered simple and primary : every one may be resolved into a group, each of which is heinous enough to receive judgment. It is passing strange that men should talk about a little sin, when they remember the mere eating of the forbidden

fruit which brought into this world its first guilt and its final ruin. God has always put before our eyes the punishment of small transgressions. Moses simply smote a rock instead of speaking to it; but that was enough to keep him out of Canaan. Uzzah only laid his profane finger on the Ark, and fell dead beside it. And when we suppose that Lot's wife was changed into a pillar of salt for looking back, we must surely bear in mind that her look was full of unbelief, curiosity, disobedience, and covetousness; and these were reckoned in the judgment.

For, you see, the principle is this: God punishes the wicked heart, not just simply the wicked act that comes out of it. Never forget that this woman's feet gave the lie to her spirit within as she dragged herself along spitefully behind her husband. It is an easy thing to understand that it is not the plague-spot which ends a man's life, but the plague of which the spot is the sign. A red pustule could not kill anybody; but it shows that the person has a fatal disease which will certainly kill him unless God interposes.

I do not assert that one sin will surely sink a soul into irrevocable doom; but I insist that you shall remember that even one sin shows a bad heart, and proves that the heart needs to be changed. Just because of its apparent insignificance, there is more imminent danger; for it is more likely to elude our vigilance: it is "the foxes, the little foxes, which destroy the vines."

IV. But this is not all: the sin in particular which the woman committed is worth a lesson by itself. And so I choose to say, in the fourth place, that *we learn here the meaning of the expression which Paul uses when he says "Covetousness is idolatry."*

Her sin was covetousness—we admit it was wrong;

we concede its heinousness ; but just how does it happen to be called idolatry ? To this we offer answer by asking another question : What is idolatry ? The worship of any God but Jehovah. And that is exactly what in its nature covetousness is. It is the putting of wealth in the throne of God. Lot's wife deliberately chose between doing what a seraph said was God's will, and what she hankered to do for her individual pleasure. She thought it was such a pity to burn up this great town full of riches. God was not her portion, and she could not make up her mind to call him so while Sodom was so close by.

It is the same old story, wherever you find it ; only some insignificant conditions added or left off. In the New Testament annals we find Agrippa saying to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," but the greed of office kept him back. We remember Felix, moved to trembling under the power of the gospel, deliberately asking God to wait on his convenience. Just so we seem to see the young ruler, eagerly running to Jesus, humbly kneeling at his feet—how amiable he was, how lovely, how moral, how happy-hearted in his zeal of surrender, and yet he went away. He was a sorrowful man when he departed, but the sorrow could not save him. The truth is, God allows nothing—nothing whatever—to interfere with his own rights. Take a single illustration from his words :

"And it came to pass, that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests ; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said

unto him, Let the dead bury their dead : but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee ; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

V. And finally, we learn from this story of Lot's wife *the awful doom of an apostate—sudden, swift, and remediless.*

Of course, you understand that we do not say that every apostate from the true faith and service of God will be changed into a pillar of salt. Our imagination is arrested with the picture that rises before it of this human being standing there on the shore of the sea. Whether salt or stone, it matters not. Indeed, there can be something more and worse than either. The rites of burial were denied her. Her form and comeliness were gone. Men heard of this, talked of it, wondered about it, argued it over, and ended with an instinctive shudder. Amid all the wreck and ruin of those extinct cities, there was no case that attracted so much attention, for it was unusual and strange. That is what Scripture says: there is destruction to the wicked, and "a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity." Thousands of years, possibly, that pillar remained in the landscape for passers-by to gaze at. There stood the terrified woman, just as she died, face towards the lost city whose burning fires once lit her cold features; her eyes staring blank over Sodom, where her heart still remained. She could not disappear.

When Ananias died, young men carried him out of sight. When Achan perished, the stones that slew

him covered his body. The Roman soldiers dug a grave in the bed of a river for Alaric, the dead Vandal. They adorned him in the richest spoils of Rome. Then his corpse was laid where the waters would forever flow over the place. Even that was not enough; they slew the prisoners whom they had detailed for the burial, lest they should disclose the now-forgotten spot. No such tender mercy was given to this wretched wife of Lot.

This, then, is exactly what we mean. Every apostate becomes his own monument. He cannot go away from himself. He is a pillar over his own eternal grave. I think the most awful sight that can be imagined is that of a lost man, who once stood among Christians as a child of God. For he himself will not be able to flee out of sight of himself: he will be the monument of his own retribution.

O LORD, let our prayers come before thee in the name of him who is the Angel of the everlasting covenant, who alone is worthy to receive all the glory of our redemption; and for whose sake we entreat thee to bless us and keep us this day, and all the days and nights of our life on earth; and when the golden bowl shall be broken, and the spirit shall return to thee, may it be to each of us the commencement of a life of glory that shall never know an end. *Amen.*

XIII.

REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE.

"REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE."—Luke 17 : 32.

There must have been some extraordinary reason for our Lord's springing down upon his disciples this piece of Old Testament history so suddenly. He was giving them information in reference to the coming days of trial, and warning them against being unprepared to meet them. He uses the well-remembered instance of this woman's melancholy end to give point to what he was saying, and thus fasten his instruction in their memories.

One example, drawn from real life, has more power than a hundred theoretical or didactical statements, to the minds of common men. And, doubtless, this is a sufficient explanation of the fact that so very large a proportion of the Bible is historic and biographic—the mere plain record of passing generations of men and women, acting as lights or beacons.

It was thus that the principles of the true faith were usually thrown into a dramatic form. And we learn God now, not so much from fresh revelations about him, as from these revelations of him. We see him present, acting, moving among men, and are taught to understand his character from his ways. So in like manner, the natural depravity of the human heart is shown

to us by exhibiting such a heart where we can look upon it; and the spiritual refinement of a renewed mind by the analysis of a life of some faithful follower of God. Thus it comes to pass that the most effectual means of influencing men are found in the annals of history. Living examples are furnished for the twofold purpose of warning the sinful to forsake their sin, and admonishing the righteous not to forsake their righteousness. This seems to have been Christ's purpose here.

But ordinarily, it must be admitted, an Old Testament character was chosen which offered some sort of allurement to one's imagination. Hero-worship is quite instinctive in the human heart. Almost everybody mentioned in historic records, inspired or profane, has found some one willing to give him a sainthood. The Church annals are really full of names of those who professed or possessed something considered memorable to a waiting world. Buildings are named, in honor of Christophers, and Agathas, and Johns and Jameses, and Perpetuas, of every clime, in fine confusion of sex and condition.

Now our Lord says here—"Remember Lot's wife." And there is one difficulty in the outset: for we do not recollect so much as her name, nor can we think of anything which this unfortunate creature ever did or said that commends her to our consideration. The unremarkableness of Lot adds to the shadowy obscurity of his wife. We know whom Abram married; and indeed Sarah was a notable woman in her own right. But just where Lot looked up this nameless companion of his does not appear. Her lineage is unrecorded; her biography is so short that another verse in the Bible cannot be found to increase the particulars out-

side of those which tell how she mysteriously died. In a day, very peculiar as to minute matters, wherein history could find plenty of time to say that Rebekah and several other women were fair to look upon, this woman seems to have inspired no one to draw pictures of her figure or her hair. No good deeds made Sodom sorry to lose her activity, when the people saw a whole family going out of town. It does seem passing strange that our Lord, when he had before his recollection David and Samuel, Noah and Miriam and Hannah, must tell his disciples to remember a woman with no more to offer to our imagination than this wife of Lot.

There is one incident which might arrest us for a moment and suggest a possible reason for this sharp choice of Lot's wife rather than anybody else's wife; she was delivered from destruction by the interposition of divine power. But Noah's wife would have presented a fairer illustration, and one of much more significance as a disclosure of God's faithfulness to his chosen. Still, the tale of Sodom's destruction, and the account of Lot's family fleeing to Zoar for safety, would be worth study.

We recollect that some few incidents of the Old Testament are supplemented by further particulars in the New. And our imagination is awaked to conjecture that possibly there might have been something transpiring that eventful day which can now be supplied. If Jude's epistle had not been given us afterwards, we should never have known that the archangel Michael contended with the devil for the body of Moses. And if Paul had not stated it to Timothy, we should never have become acquainted with the fact that the magicians, who troubled Moses so in the miracle-contest before Pharaoh, were named Jannes and Jambres. Our curiosity, therefore, would be aroused to find some

fresh disclosure in the New Testament which would show why Christ tells his disciples so soberly to "remember Lot's wife."

But there is no aid here. You may study the Bible in vain; you will find nothing that offers any more information. This woman's biography is all before us, contained in a single paragraph of one chapter in Genesis. In that is related the story of Sodom's destruction; and the only particular which appears striking enough to attract this allusion our Lord makes, is that concerning her *looking back* when ordered to remove from the doomed city, and her being changed suddenly to a pillar of salt. The end of her life, just the end, awful and shocking—picturesque with a weird kind of horror—this surely is the point at which his admonition was intended to centre. And so I am inclined to propose that we study the narrative especially, in order to catch our Lord's meaning, when he taught his disciples, and fixed this nameless woman in eternal history with these three admonitory words.

Now we have been over this story once, and have seen already how the threat of destruction was followed by the flashes of God's wrath. The warning was given; nobody heeded it; and the bolt fell. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

Our attention has been specially attracted by the spectacle of a woman fleeing out of that burning city, arrested by sudden destruction on the hillside, and instantly transformed into what the Scriptural narrative calls "a pillar of salt." Upon this our Saviour fastens a warning for his disciples: "Remember Lot's wife." It is evident that her guilt consisted in her looking

back ; and it concerns us more at this time to notice her *sin* ; for this—merely this, which that woman did in the excited moment of her flight—was what our blessed Lord meant for his disciples to remember. The entire line of his conversation exhibits his purpose. He knew there was trouble coming ; he feared a possible defection ; he desired to keep them from looking back ; for in all religious life, safety consists only in keeping steadily on. “Remember Lot’s wife,” is only another way of saying, Remember a sin that is perilous, and a doom that is quick—*never look back !*

Does it not seem but a little sin that brought for her such sudden and awful retribution? She looked back—only one gesture of her head, only one glance of her eye—then swift wrath fell down upon her, leaving her standing accursed in her tracks.

What was there in that simple and natural act which constituted it such a sin, and merited such retribution? This word *looked* is a very strong term ; it means gazed deliberately ; it implies one of those goings forth of the heart in a glance which render it the speech of the soul. The Septuagint translation reads : “She looked wistfully.” There was steady regard in it, and desire, and eager sympathy, all in league against the will of her husband’s God.

And before you say this was a slight act, you must recall how much a man or woman can put into a look. A glance can talk better sometimes than a word can. The eye can cheat, and lie, and swear, and covet, quite as deftly as the tongue. The eye can love and envy, can threaten and hate, can long for and spite, more than articulate speech can even describe. You must remember that it was one look only which resulted in David’s crime—that crime which years of sorrow kept his

slower tongue mourning in the fifty-first Psalm. It was only a look at Simon Peter standing in the area by which Jesus brought him to his senses after the denial. It was but a look which Michal threw out of the window upon her husband, dancing for supremeness of joy before the returned ark of God, that discovered her contempt, and sent her childless through a humiliated life. A look on their averted countenances told Joseph that his brethren awaited only a safe chance to murder him. Just a look at the fruit forbidden tangled Eve in the temptation, and led our whole race into death.

Oh, I think it is when we recall how many times we have been menaced by an eye; how often we have been wounded, and frightened, and defied; how many times stung and deceived; just by a single look—when we instance the moments in which we ourselves were conscious that our eyes were talking too much and too wildly, even while our lips were silent—when we distinctly registered the solemn acts in which we sinned by greedily wishing in rebellious gazing and longing and recoiling and refusing, all with our eyes—oh, it is then, I am sure, we begin to understand the expression which the apostle uses as he presents “the lust of the eyes” among the mortal sins of our human souls! And then we perceive the prudence of the wisest man who ever lived, as he counsels with such pathos: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee.”

But this is not all; I do not care to leave the look of this nameless woman to drop into the category of ordinary guilt. It is worth an analysis, that its whole temper and reach may be seen.

It was a look of *disobedience*: the angel told her explicitly that she should not look behind her. This command she deliberately broke. It is of no use to call it a little transgression. The law of God was defied; she was guilty in one point, and the gospel principle is perfectly clear that this renders a transgressor guilty of all. It is most likely that she had no part nor lot with an enterprise so unseemly as this rushing away after a dreamy husband. Her feet went because she was forced to start; but her eyes seemed to be her own, and she lagged behind where she could look back.

Moreover, this was a look of *unbelief*: she could hardly credit the statement of the angels that all this beautiful city was to be burned with bituminous fire; that men, women, and children were to be shriveled by a hail-storm of flame. God notices not the outside alone, as men do; he sees the heart; and he saw that the very innermost soul of that woman was hard and bad. She was, doubtless, saying over to herself: "Where is the promise of his coming? All things continue as they were." Not unlikely this woman's looking back would have become a going back in an hour more, if such transgression had been overlooked or left unpunished on the spot.

It was also a look of *curiosity*: the angel had said remarkable things were going to happen there in the valley; if he was, in any respect, to be trusted, there would be something worth looking at when the path led around the verge of the hill. She wanted for herself to see how the doom would come, if it did come. Perhaps a commotion behind her attracted attention; possibly some rush of irresistible flame roared in the air. She turned to see it; and the look was like the looks of the men of Bethshemish, when they lifted the

cover of the ark ; and her doom was like theirs also, when a stroke of divine wrath strowed their corpses on the ground.

And then, again, this was a look of *covetousness* : she sighed over lost lands and possessions. Her home had been there ; evidently Lot married his wife in Sodom or one of the cities of the plain close by. She knew how fertile the fields were. The associations of her life were behind, and she was painfully reluctant to depart. Her lingering look told by its very fondness where her heart abode. Herein was the essence of her sin ; for the connection, in which Jesus spoke of her in our text, shows plainly that his admonition referred to this as her specific manifestation of guilt : so he says : “ Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot ; they did eat ; they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded : but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all : even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the house-top, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away ; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’s wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life, shall lose it ; and whosoever shall lose his life, shall preserve it.”

And now I am going to arrest the discussion of the theme, since we have reached the very heart of our Lord’s address. Every man, who professes the name of Christ, is called formally and peremptorily to choose between the world and God. Lot’s wife must make her decision now : “ So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

This seems to be well understood. The trouble is not at the beginning of a Christian career, but all along

the way even to the end. You see we are in a more responsible position than Lot's wife was, and yet our risk is exactly the same. You can readily recall what had been done for this woman. A way of escape had been provided. Information concerning the peril she was in as long as she remained in the doomed city had been given. Plenty of time for flight had been afforded. Angels had even caught hold of her hand, and urged her forward. But in despite of all she failed.

Think how much has been done for us, who claim to have started out from the world which is to be burned with fire. We know every path of escape. We are aroused for the effort. But one wrong look backward may be our instant ruin. One sin of the heart, just one greedy, covetous, rebellious glance of the eye, may root us to the spot, and leave us for the ages to scoff at. So I say, as the soberest warning I can utter, "Remember Lot's wife."

Good friends: why have I kept your minds on this theme for a whole Sabbath? Let me show you. Once on a time a workman was precipitated from the dome of St. Peter's cathedral in Rome, and dashed to pieces upon the pavement, five hundred feet below; they are wont now to administer the death-rites of the church to those who go up on the same service; then they lead them around to the spot where the careless comrade fell, to warn them anew of the solemn work they are doing, and the fearful fate that awaits them if they trifle on the way. So have I taken you over beside the Dead Sea; not to alarm or harrow your feeling; but that I might show you an apostate's monument—herself her own monument—and repeat our Lord's words: "Remember Lot's wife!" and add just this: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall!"

XIV.

EARS, TONGUES AND TEMPERS.

"WHEREFORE, MY BELOVED BRETHREN, LET EVERY MAN BE SWIFT TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO WRATH."—James 1: 19.

Inspiration is a most trustworthy helper, whenever it is grappling with the difficulties which bring our greatest worry. As long, perhaps, as the world stands, Christians will be compelled to endure some pains and some reproaches of the gospel. The offences of the cross have not ceased. It is not the privilege of any true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ here among men to escape misconstruction and criticism of their action or perversion of their motives. What shall be done with these as they come, is the question. It will be worth our while to examine this whole chapter with great care; perhaps that will show.

1. First of all, we are informed that the Father of lights has set us forth to be conspicuously his representatives. "Be not deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect boon is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." We are his earnest of good harvests under the gospel. We are to stand on exhibition as "first fruits" of what redemption is doing.

Most of us accept this. We announce ourselves "living epistles, known and read of all men." However strict the analyzing process may be, however severe the tests applied, the ordinary decisions upon the sincerity of Christian character made by outsiders, so-called, only accept the conditions of judgment we ourselves in such cases have authorized. If we are not doers of the word, but only hearers, that is our fault, not theirs. Men will make awful mistakes, and unquestionably they do, again and again; but in the act of issuing an estimate of our genuineness they must not be condemned as impertinent. We assert that we are better than they are, purer, kinder, honester. We plead an aristocracy of spiritual birth above and beyond theirs. We keep exclaiming, with the apostle John: "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness."

2. Now next to this stands another lesson: candor obliges us to listen to what the world has to say of our Christian life. We have invited the free and continuous expression of opinions. So this verse says we are to be "swift to hear." "Ye know this, my beloved brethren. But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

Such an exhortation certainly *appears singular*. On first impression it hardly seems wise. Worldly prudence has got into the habit of casting its counsels in another mould. We are often told to pay no attention to what people keep clamoring in a market-place. Let the stream exhaust the water which does all the empty babbling over the rocks, and then possibly it will be content to dry itself up and be still. But this inspired admonition joins issue directly with the suggestions of

mere policy and pride. A certain amount of alertness and painstaking is indicated by that unusual word "swift." We must listen attentively to what is said about us; we must look for criticisms.

Such an exhortation certainly *requires patience*. The people around us claim that they cannot be charged with harshness, if they assert that we are supercilious and hypocritical. They ask: "What do ye more than others?" They think they point out many serious blemishes; they detect scores of disagreeable failings, and some faults; they contend that we do not lay apart all "filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness." Now we are not to shrink back, and like a cowed schoolboy cry "Unfair," because some one has accepted our challenges to wrestle. Men of the impertinent world naturally judge of us from what they see on the outside; that is what we have told them to do; and we must just put up with what we have given them the right to commence. "Wherefore putting away all filthiness, and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

Such an exhortation, moreover, *may have exceedingly gracious results*. Often there is great advantage in being told the exact truth; we are in danger of deceiving our own selves. It is an old adage, that "listeners hear no good." Possibly that is so; but it is not certain that it is a profitable thing always to hear only good of one's self. No man or woman can be unselfish or noble or true, who lives in an atmosphere of unbroken adulation. Flattering praise is a tropical air, which enervates moral character, and takes the force out of it. Self-conceit is the chief peril of even the best men and the honestest. A real stubborn criticism brings us to our senses.

Somewhere in my reading, I have met an interesting series of illustrations of this process of self-examination under fire, taken from the history of the philosopher Plato. Some men reported to him that an old former friend was telling tales of his foolishness. He answered: "I feel confident no one would do that if he had not had some reason." Then they insinuated that his character was aspersed also by some: "That is enough to make me know," said the sage, "that I must live a decorous life, lest a few shall believe them." Then one of those whom he taught came into the class indignant and furious, saying the boys on the street were laughing at his singing: "Oh, that reminds me," answered Plato, "I must resume my lessons, and so begin to sing better." Of course, we all understand that this Plato was a tremendous philosopher; and most of us know how much tough philosophy is needed whenever one has to meet a world so spiteful as this is.

It is just here that the suggestion comes, that, since we shall have to endure the gossiping and the malignity any way, we might try to make out of it all we can. When a man tells me that there is soot on my face, it does seem impudent for him to jeer at the spot; but the sensible thing for me to do is to wipe off the dirtiness before I start to go into cleaner company than his. So the apostle says here: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves. For if any one is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth, but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing."

Such an exhortation as this *aids in rendering us genuine*. When revilers use their tongues on us, and so pronounce us hypocrites, we shall do well to inquire what is lacking in our characters the most. I do not say these conclusions are correct; I do not state that the motives of those who make them are innocent; I do not avow any sympathy with the sharp spirit of worldly detraction. It is simply fair, I say, that we remember it is ourselves who have bidden them judge of our sincerity by our conduct. Remember, also, that we make no hesitancy in judging the characters of these very people by what we see in their lives. Remember that the only universal principle of the gospel, that from which absolutely no one anywhere can claim exemption on any ground, is that heart and behavior go together: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Conversation is an index of one's real life: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Remember, likewise, that our Divine Lord sternly insisted upon being represented perpetually through the ages by his friends; he asserted that he in some marvelous sense would be always with them so that those who bore his name worthily should be the safe exemplars of the religion he came to establish on earth. And remember, also, that our gospel can be hid only to the lost; it is essentially practical, rather than theoretical or philosophical; its truths are best inculcated by an embodiment of them rather than in a dogma or in a creed; they are to be *lived* out into establishment and proof.

With these thoughts in mind, let us put the question quite fairly and without prejudice: Can any one find just fault if an unfrightened world issues its estimates of individual character? Has it not been invited to do

so? And is it not simply a decent courtesy we owe, when we set ourselves to listen, that we be swift to hear?

3. In close connection with this we must put our third lesson in the text. The apostle's injunction is that we be "slow to speak." He goes so far as to assume that our whole piety is now at stake in this. "If any man thinketh himself to be religious while he bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

In some things there does not seem to have been much improvement made since the time of the apostles. If a clergyman in any modern parish were asked to state candidly what was the severest task he ever found himself set to do, he would have in the sad sincerity of his soul, as he looked upon his home field, to answer that it had been the adjustment of these three things in his congregation,—ears, tongues, and tempers. And this appears to have been precisely what the apostle James was working upon in the counsels of this chapter we are studying to-day, and which he addressed to Christians everywhere: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."

Arithmetic does not go for much in morals; but it ought to be noticed here that the implication is that men have two ears, and only one tongue, and only one temper; for we find in the verse two "slows," and one "swift," for our service: the two ears are commanded to be swift, and the one tongue and the one temper to be slow. From this we infer that listening has ap-

parently the advantage in some remarkable respects. "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame: it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."

4. Thus we come easily to our fourth lesson found in this one verse: we must retain perfect control of our temper under the sharpest reproach. We are to be "slow to speak, slow to wrath." Otherwise we shall not work the righteousness of God.

In considering this question of Christian temper under reproaches, a few suggestions may be needed in order to show precisely what the text does not mean, as well as what it does. It cannot intend to teach anything like tameness or pusillanimity. "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

But now, on the other hand, what does the text really mean as to temper and wrath under the pressure of criticism or evil speaking? It is likely that the whole instruction can be best reached by a series of quiet observations which can be made to cover the ground of duty.

Hasty vindications are apt to be defective. Quick angry rejoinders will only kindle fresh spite, and bring stronger accusations; we can afford to wait. Gehazi lied terribly to Naaman about Elisha, when he ran after

the rich leper, saying his master expected a present ; it must have mortified the prophet sadly to imagine what would be thought of him. But he did not vouchsafe any explanation ; the events of the succeeding weeks did everything that was necessary to clear him with the captain.

Tranquility of deportment is the safest reply to wrong judgment. It is death to any ordinary detractor, who has only falsehood or exaggeration to employ, that we receive his attack without appearing to deserve it ; that we continually show ourselves beyond his reach without his knowing that we watch him ; and, above all, that we now and then send him some slight favor in order to prove we are so little frightened or embarrassed by his meanness that, really, he is left to think peacefully we had been somewhat conscience-stricken to discover we had not been thoughtful enough to ask his opinion before.

Criticism should lead to the closest self-examination in our hours of prayer and reflection. It takes a great deal of tough philosophy to endure fault-finding. But it is certainly better, if we must bear the cutting of the chisel, like a marble block, to secure some polish, like a statue. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged : and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

The standard of registering character is, after all, not human, but divine. That religion is pure which is undefiled "before God and the Father." When one has looked in the glass of his neighbor's opinion, and seen his own face as it is, or has looked in the mirror of God's word, he is not to go away, and straightway forget what manner of man he has been disclosed to be ; but the only judgment he need to be actually afraid of

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