

THE AMERICAN NATIONAL PREACHER.

No. 5. VOL. XVIII.]

MAY, 1844.

[WHOLE No. 209.]

SERMON CCCLXII.

BY REV. ANSON ROOD,

PASTOR OF THE CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NORTHERN LIBERTIES,
PHILADELPHIA.

DEATH DREADFUL TO THE UNGODLY.

Gather not my soul with sinners.—Psalms xxvi. 9.

THERE is something in death from which human nature instinctively shrinks with dread and horror. Come in what form it may—come attended with all the alleviating circumstances which sympathy and the assiduities of friendship can impart, it is still armed with terrors which neither reason, fortitude, nor philosophy can dispel. We may speculate upon the nature and the necessity of death, and summon all our energies to meet it with calmness and composure. But when we see the emaciated form, the ghastly countenance, and the dying strife, we feel our courage fail, and shrink from the approaching conflict. It does not reconcile us to our lot that the generations who have preceded us, have been swept away by this invincible foe. The power of death as felt by others, and felt by ourselves, is so entirely different, that we feel the same anguish and dread as though we were its first victims. We cannot familiarize our minds with this event, so as to feel no misgivings or concern when we see it approaching. There is in it something so stern and inexorable, something so repulsive and abhorrent to our nature, that the more we see of its ravages, the more we dread to fall under its power. Nor is this revulsion of feeling confined to rational beings, but it extends to the animal tribes universally. You have heard their moanings and doleful cries when one of their own kind has been struck down in death. They feel, apparently as well as we, that it is the rebuke and curse of God inflicted on account of sin.

But there are circumstances which vastly augment the terrors of death, and render it a scene ten-fold more dismal and frightful than it is naturally or necessarily. It is to these the inspired penman had special reference, when he offered the petition, "Gather not my soul with sinners." In his time, as well as in our own day, death was doing his dreadful work. All classes felt his cold and iron grasp, and withered beneath his stroke. Some, as they passed away, were cheered with the hope of a glorious immortality, while others had fearful forebodings of weeping, lamentation and wo. He was conscious that "no man has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and that there is no dis-

SERMON CCCLXIII.

BY REV. ELISHA YALE, D.D.,

PASTOR OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, KINGSBORO', N. Y.

THE DIVINE METHOD

OF RAISING CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS.

"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."—1 Cor. xvi. 2.

Love gives a cup of cold water to a disciple. Love visits the needy and the afflicted. Love goes forth to seek and save the lost. In a distant country, under the burning sun, amid privations, many and great, love cheers the weary, drooping stranger, while he pities, and instructs, and guides the returning wanderer. So God sent his Son into the world to save sinners. So the Son came, saying, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." To build the tabernacle, the willing-hearted brought enough, and more than enough. Said the man after God's own heart, "Because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, prepared with all my might three thousand talents of gold, and seven thousand talents of silver. Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?"

Love was the grace of God bestowed upon the churches of Macedonia. Then, in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy, and their deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of their liberality. They were willing of themselves beyond their power. They prayed the Apostles with much entreaty to receive the gift. They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then were they ready to do his will in every good work. Love inspires the grateful recollection of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich. We are not our own, but are bought with a price; and, in the exercise of love, we devote to him that loved and bought us, all that we are and have, and all that we can do, to carry into effect his designs of mercy to perishing men, and we ask, each one for himself,

"What can I do for Him that died,
To save my wretched soul?"

Knowing, as we do, the languishing state of the missionary enterprise, in all its departments, we shall rejoice to find *the Divine Method of raising all the funds we need.*

Let us examine this DIVINE METHOD.

1. It is to *contribute frequently and statedly.* Upon the first day of the week. This is frequently, for it is once in seven days. Nor shall we think that God calls too frequently, if he calls once a week, to make some appropriate acknowledgment of his right, by giving a portion of what he gives us, to carry on his peculiar work in the world, and to save the perishing; to save them, not from starvation, but from perdition. Can once a week be too frequently to lay by in store to feed the hungry and clothe the naked? Was it not ordered in the Churches of Galatia, as well as in the Church of Corinth, that the same rule should be observed? And can we hesitate for a moment to adopt it in regard to the evangelizing of the world? Once a week—can this be too often to make a pecuniary contribution to send the word of life, or the messenger of mercy, announcing life to those who are dead in sins? Were our souls where theirs are, should we think once a week too often to be thought of, and prayed for, and labored for, that we might live? Relief must be had. God has ordered it to be given by us, and given on the first day of the week. *Frequently*, so that we may never forget it.

Statedly also. Upon the first day of the week. What day could be more appropriate? The Redeemer's birth-day. As it is said, "This day have I begotten thee." The day of the Church's foundation: for, on the first day of the week, the stone, which the builders rejected, became the head of the corner. What precious associations! A rising Saviour! A Church founded! Now, on the same day, we lay by in store that which may honor the Saviour, add lively stones to the building, send hope to the benighted world. It must be good also to begin the week with this labor of love. Let God have the first fruits of all our time; let the noble object of saving lost men, as co-workers with God, pre-occupy our thoughts and our plans, give tone to our spirit, and direction to all our movements. To commence the week in this manner assimilates earth to heaven, the employments of Christians to the employments of angels. The sanctity and the blessedness of the Sabbath are thus spread over all our time and all the work of our hands. Thus frequently and statedly the *Divine Method* requires to lay by in store.

2. It is to *contribute universally.* "Every one of you." Is it a *duty* to contribute frequently and statedly for evangelizing the world? Whose duty is it? The duty of every Christian. Is it a *privilege*? Whose privilege? Does our Lord demand the service of every one? Does he not, at the same time, allow every one the privilege? Who is it, then, among all his friends, that is to be exempt from the duty?

Who that is to be deprived of the privilege? Not one. Due allegiance is expected of all, and due favor is shown to all. It is ordained that *every* one shall lay by him in store. How suitable and how beautiful is this arrangement! Here the whole Church of Christ, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the male and the female, appear before him on the first day of the week. Nor does any one appear empty. Every one lays by him in store an offering, as an acknowledgment of obligation and thanksgiving. This being done frequently and stately, and on that day of consecration and blessing, it is suited to produce the most happy results. Here all hearts beat in unison, before the face of the Lord. This act is done by every one in his own dwelling, under the eye of the Lord, who seeth not as man seeth, but looketh upon the heart. From a principle of obedience and love every redeemed sinner gives an offering to the Lord. While this method cherishes the best feelings towards God our Saviour, and towards his people and cause, it does, at the same time, lie as the basis of all that is needful by way of contribution.

For a moment think of the power which the mighty Saviour can call into action on this principle. Suppose a church of two hundred and fifty members. Let every one be poor, and every one lay by only the widow's two mites, which make a farthing. One cent a week from two hundred and fifty Christians will amount, in a year, to at least one hundred and twenty-five dollars! Is not the DIVINE METHOD one of great power? How vast the sum from a million of Christians!—from a million of poor Christians! Not less than five hundred thousand dollars!

But this is by no means the divine standard of contribution. It is only the frequency and universality that we have yet considered. And far be it from us to intimate that the rich are to contribute no more than the poor. Such is by no means the DIVINE METHOD.

3. It is to contribute in due proportion. "*As God hath prospered him.*" It is supposed that every Christian is engaged in business. It is needful, while in this world, that every one should have some honest and laudable mode of acquiring property, both to supply personal and domestic wants, and afford a surplus for the needy. Believers were generally poor in Apostolic times, and obtained the means of their support by their daily labor. At the end of the week, their work being done, they could be ready to observe the Divine Providence in regard to them, and to know how they had been prospered in their business. And this was the rule of proportion for their contribution. They might lay by in store a certain per cent., five, ten, twenty, or any other proportion, just as they were able, or as their love prompted them to do, either more or less. If, at any time, they had received more than common, then their proportion would be the same, while the amount would be greater. And so, if they had received less. This would operate equally upon all the members; for the rich would give abundance

from their abundant income, and the poor would give a little; just in the same proportion.

The Apostle does not say, however, how much each man should give, only that it should be proportionate to each one's prosperity. Every one is able to exercise his own judgment. God wishes not that we should feel as tributaries, but as friends and children; that he is Lord of all, the Father of mercies, and the Saviour of the lost; that we should understand the work he is engaged in, and that we are allowed and expected to co-operate in it. And, that our views may be enlarged and our affections engaged, he allows us the unspeakable privilege of considering his kingdom as our kingdom, his work as our work, his glory as our glory, and the happiness and glory of all that is achieved and done, as his joy, in which we are permitted to share. With such a work before us, and such results as our ultimate reward and portion, he calls us to take part in the work, with the assurance that every one shall receive a reward according to his own labor. With our eye fixed on the future joy, he allows us to deny ourselves, to labor, to make sacrifices, and bear his cross, just in proportion to our faith and love; all proceeding spontaneously from our ardent affection for him, and his cause, and the souls of men. In this blessed enterprise, he lays out before us, not only this world, which is the field in which he works and employs us, but heaven and hell, with their eternal realities. Heaven, the dwelling of all that become holy and happy, on the one hand; and hell, with the wicked and the lost, on the other, God reveals to us as the final destination of every soul of man. It is not, then, a mere estimate of our doing a certain amount of labor, or giving a certain amount of contribution, or bearing a certain weight of sorrow and affliction, that is to regulate our action, or our suffering; but it is the worth of the soul, the bliss of heaven, the pains of hell, the example of God, angels and good men, that are to be always before us. Such are the themes of thought, the expanding, ennobling, and invigorating realities, which are to move us. And, with these in view, God allows us to judge and determine how great shall be the amount that we will consecrate to this noble, angelic, godlike enterprise. The purpose and the act are to be our own, in the sight of God, with the glory and joy that are set before us.

Such is the DIVINE METHOD.

4. It is *such as requires order and care*. "Let every one of you lay by him in store." Laborers have store-houses. In them they preserve the fruits of their labor. They have also a place for their money; their iron chest or some other place of safety. This is their treasury. In this they deposit the results of their industry and frugality. For what? For the double purpose of order and safe-keeping. On this place of deposit, how much thought may be expended! It is the store, perhaps, laid up for a day of trouble, or for the helplessness of old age, or as an inheritance for children. In view of this store, one may say to his soul, "Thou hast much goods laid up for many years." Another

may calculate how much he may gain by the provident use of this store; or he may pride himself on the power he can exert with his wealth. Others may look towards their little store with an anxious eye, unable to tell how their wants shall be supplied amid the vicissitudes of an uncertain hereafter.

But where is the man who keeps a treasury for God? I mean a place of deposit, in which he may lay up in store, as God has prospered him, his contribution for the relief of the needy, especially the needy soul. It would be no great stretch of the imagination to suppose that a pious mind would find as much pleasure in thinking of the Lord's treasury as of his own. It is the testimonial of his heavenly Father's bounty. Every thought of it calls forth a new emotion of love, with a strong desire to do good to the needy. In this treasury the money is safe, and it is ready. This was one design of the Apostle in ordering this deposit—"that there be no gatherings when I come." He was making collections in Asia and Europe, among the churches of the Gentiles, to relieve the poor saints at Jerusalem. He was the general agent in this concern. As he was passing from one church to another to promote their spiritual interests, he was willing to take charge of their collections, and be the bearer of them for the relief of the poor. But he did not wish to do what they could do themselves. Nor did he wish to be diverted or detained from his great work while their collections were being made. If they would follow his directions, all would be ready. He would receive their bounty, and rejoice with them in their readiness and liberality. Then God would be pleased with their cheerfulness, and honored by the abundance of their contribution and their joy. So in all cases of charitable liberality, if the DIVINE METHOD were followed, how pleasant, how delightful would be the aspect of the Church! Every member laying by him in store upon the first day of the week, as God had prospered him, what an abundance would there be for every want! How promptly, how cheerfully, how satisfactorily would every want be met! Then would there be no complaint of hard times; for every one's bounty would be ready. Then would there be no complaint of too many calls; for on every Lord's day the store would be replenished. Let there be a call on one Lord's day for the Bible Society; on another, for the Tract Society; on a third, for the Foreign Missionary Society; on a fourth, for the Home Missionary Society; on a fifth, for the Education Society; on a sixth, for the Sabbath School Society; and so on, till all the Societies, which deserve our aid, have called—and then—what? *Let them call again*; for again we shall be ready. Note, however, that the Apostle does not direct these supplies to be laid by in the house of God on the first day of the week; but every one in his own house. Then, at the call of the Lord, there may be brought forth, from every one's store, whatever has been laid by, or as much as may be needful and proper for that object.

LET THESE DIVINE INSTRUCTIONS BE APPLIED.

1. *Personal responsibility is an essential element of the DIVINE METHOD.*

Our Lord does not intend that the individual shall be lost in the mass. His eye is upon the treasury. He observes every offering. The rich may cast in much. But his eye is upon every one. He orders every one of us, on the first day of the week, to lay by in store as he has prospered us. And he looks as carefully at the gift of the poor as at the gift of the rich. He kindly takes notice of the love, the hard labor, the self-denial of a poor disciple who presents a small oblation. The turtle-dove, the young pigeon, the two mites, the hard-earned shilling, given cheerfully, joyfully, with a heart overflowing with faith and love, attracts the notice of the "High and Lofty One." But if there be among his professed followers, one, or two, or any other number, who present no oblation, how do you think the Omniscient views them? They have no treasury for God. They lay by nothing in store. They have no present for him in their hand, nor in their house. He sees nothing in all they possess designed for him, unless connected with some self-interest. Do you think that Christ is pleased with such? They may think, indeed, that the church to which they belong does much; and they may think that they shall pass along with the church, as being bountiful. But what theology, what logic is this? The Church is bountiful; therefore, every member is bountiful! Do such expect to die with the mass, to be judged with the mass, to be admitted into heaven with the mass? Is it not written that, "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God?" And does not the same authority order that "upon the first day of the week, every one shall lay by him in store as God hath prospered him?" As certainly as every member of the Church is an individual being, just so certainly is every one ordered to lay by in store as God hath prospered him.

2. *The Divine Method is feasible.*—In regard to many plans there is doubt whether they will operate well in practice, because it may be difficult to carry them out. But there is no difficulty in regard to this; for only one person is concerned in carrying it out. He is not dependent on any one but himself. None need inquire whether the whole church, or any considerable number, or even any other one, will do it. It is a personal matter. Nor can any one say he is not able; for it is only to lay by in store as God has prospered you. It is the simplest of all methods, and can be easily carried into effect by every one that desires to do it. Let there be but a willing mind, and you will do as did the contributors to build the tabernacle or the temple; or, as did the Gentile churches to relieve the poor saints at Jerusalem. A willing mind makes a cheerful giver, and God loveth a cheerful giver.

3. *The Divine Method is for the best interest of the Church.*—Let

every member try it at once. It will give new views to many on this most practical subject. It will greatly enlarge the mind. It will put every one on a desire to arrange his affairs with system. It will tend to inspire every one with energy. It will dilate the heart with joy. It will open a new source of enjoyment. And it will give an unwonted impulse to all religious feeling and action, and to the common business of life; for, as you adopt this *Divine Method* you will feel more than ever before that you live for God, for the Church, for the benefit of souls, and for a vast eternity. Your meditations, your prayers, your plans, your whole manner of life will be improved. You will at once become more like Christ in your regard to the great work of evangelizing the world; and, in many important respects, the aspect of the world, of time and eternity, will be changed. You will aim at higher, nobler, more enduring, and more glorious objects, for you will more readily understand the mind of Christ, and more justly estimate the superlative excellence of his kingdom and glory.

4. *The Divine Method carried out will furnish abundant supplies.*—If one cent a week from a million will furnish five hundred thousand dollars, as the contribution of the poor, what an abundant supply will be furnished when the more able and the rich shall lay by in store as God has prospered them! Fifty cents are but the tenth part of five dollars. If every one should adopt Jacob's vow, what an income would annually flow into the Lord's treasury! For every ten dollars one; for every hundred dollars ten: for every thousand a hundred! But we are not to suppose that the more able will be content to give no larger proportion than the poor. Where much is forgiven, the love will be much. Where the Lord bestows bountifully, he expects to reap bountifully. And the pious soul, that receives much from the Lord, delights to consecrate much to him in return. There can, therefore, be no doubt of abundant supplies, if the *Divine Method* be carried out.

5. *The Divine Method affords a test of Christian love.*—In some parts of the world a man becomes a Christian at the risk of his life. So it was generally during the first three hundred years after the Christian era. And thus were verified the words of Christ to his disciples: Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. He added, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life for my sake, shall find it." But what is the test of Love to Christ, at this time, and in this land? It is not the name of Christ. So many are called Christians, that the name is far from being a term of reproach. It requires no self-denial, no sacrifice, no cross, to assume the Christian name, at this time, and in this country. What then is a test of Christian love? Is it orthodox doctrine? Is it moral duty or religious form? Is it penance or abstinence? Is it frequent or long continued exercises of prayer, preaching, or effort to persuade sinners to become such sort of Christians as everywhere abounds? None of these, nor all of them together; for all these may be where there is nothing of the

peculiarities of that love which would die for Christ. *But here is a test of Christian love.* When one hears the command of Christ, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," and says, "Lord, here am I, send me," and goes forth. When another perceives that he is not qualified to go, but is willing to do as much at home, and deny himself as much, and suffer as much to encourage and sustain him that goes. This is Christian love; and this is precisely what is needed in this country at this time. For the sake of illustration, suppose that you were to devote yourself and your all to the missionary cause, just as the most devoted missionary of whom you ever heard, and labor at home instead of going abroad. You live in as good a house, and wear as good apparel, and spread as good a table, and regulate all your expenses, and improve all your time, and train your family just as you think it becomes your brother, the missionary, to do; at the same time you deny yourself as much, and do all in your power as much to promote the cause, as you expect him to do. In all these things you keep the Lord Jesus Christ in view, and seek to please him, and imitate his example, and bear his cross, and seek his kingdom. You also, as a true yoke-fellow, work shoulder to shoulder with them who toil abroad; pray as they pray, and feel as they feel, and hope as they hope. Tell me now, is not this Christian love? Tell me again, does not the *Divine Method* lead to this very course? Is it not then a test of Christian love? Is not this the very thing that is needed at this time and in this country? It is not a bloody test, to be sure; but is it not as surely a test? Admit, indeed, if it be demanded, that all this might be without love to Christ. We contend, too, that a man might "give his body to be burned" without charity; but this alters not the nature of the test. It still stands good for this purpose; and by this must Christian love, at this day, and in this land, be tried.

6. Finally. *Shall the Divine Method be adopted and pursued?*—For one, I answer in the affirmative. I will not preach to others what I will not do myself. I have weighed this matter; and I beg you to allow me to say, without being thought ostentatious, that I have practised this method, substantially, for about thirty years. I do not say that I have *literally* laid by on the first day of the week, as God has prospered me; but that I have done the same as to the general amount. I do not say that I have loved Christ, or his cause, or the souls of men, or denied myself and suffered so much as I might have done. But I do say that I have, during these years, devoted a certain proportion, a tenth at least, of all that God has given me, to his treasury. Nor would I have said this publicly, were it not that consistency seemed to require it, for I wish to bear testimony that the *Divine Method* is good. It impresses upon the Christian a *sense of personal responsibility*; it is *feasible*; it is *good to the one who follows it*; it *enables one to do his part in contributing to evangelize the world*; it is *a test of Christian love*. And now, I must urge every one to adopt and pursue this method. The single fact that it is of God, is sufficient to recommend it to every one

that loves God. Then the fact that it is called for at the present time to sustain and carry forward the missionary enterprise, should recommend it to every one who loves Christ and the souls of men. It proposes that something be done; that it be done now; that every Christian should do it, and continue to do it. It is no oppressive method; but one of equality. It is no partial method; but one to be adopted by every Christian. It is no fitful method; but one to be pursued steadily, as based on Christian principle. It is no unsuitable method; but one adapted to the exigency of the times, and adequate to all the demands of charity. It is no novel invention; but it has stood the test of ages. Nor is it just now discovered; for it is written in the ancient records. The author of "The Great Commission" urges it as appropriate to the present wants of the world, as well as of divine authority. We expect of our missionaries as much at least as this *Divine Method* requires. And why should not every one of us do as they do, and bring all our love, and self-denial, and practical energy to bear upon this heavenly enterprise? "Who then is willing, this day, to consecrate his services to the Lord," and to a perishing world? "His God be with him, and make him a blessing to thousands of millions." Amen.