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CHRIST THE ONLY REFUGE

FROM

THE WRATH TO COME.

FROM

HERVEY'S THERON AND ASPASIO.



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CHRIST THE ONLY REFUGE.

Give me leave to relate an uncommon incident, which happened a little while ago in this neighbourhood, and of which I myself was a spectator. The day was the Sabbath; the place appropriated to Divine worship was the scene of this remarkable affair.

A boy came running into the church, breathless and trembling. He told, but in a low voice, those who stood near, that a press-gang was advancing to besiege the door, and arrest the sailors. An alarm was immediately taken. The seamen, with much hurry and no small anxiety, began to shift for themselves. The rest of the congregation, perceiving an unusual stir, were struck with surprise. A whisper of inquiry ran from seat to seat, which increased by degrees into a confused murmur. No one could inform his neighbour; therefore every one was left to solve the appearance from the suggestions of a timorous imagination. Some suspected the town was on fire. Some were apprehensive of an invasion from the Spaniards. Others looked up, and looked round, to see if the walls were not giving way, and the roof falling upon their heads. In a few moments, the consternation became general. The men stood like statues, in silent amazement, and unavailing perplexity. The women shrieked aloud, and fell into fits. Nothing was seen but wild disorder; nothing was heard but tumultuous clamour. The preacher's voice was drowned. Had he spoken in thunder, his message would scarcely have been regarded. To have gone on with his work, amidst such a prodigious ferment, had been like arguing with a whirlwind, or talking to a tempest.

This brought to my mind that great tremendous day, when the heavens will pass away, when the earth will be dissolved, and all its inhabitants receive their final doom. If, at such incidents of very inferior dread, our hearts are ready to fail, what unknown and inconceivable astonishment must seize the guilty conscience, when the hand of the Almighty shall open those unparelled scenes of wonder, desolation, and horror!

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When the trumpet shall sound, the dead arise, the world be in flames, the Judge on the throne, and all mankind at the bar!

“The trumpet shall sound,” 1 Cor. xv. 52, says the prophetic teacher; and how startling, how stupendous the summons! Nothing equal to it, nothing like it, was ever heard through all the regions of the universe, and all the revolutions of time. When conflicting armies have discharged the bellowing artillery of war, or when victorious armies have shouted for joy of the conquest, the seas and shores have rung, the mountains and plains have echoed. But the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God will resound from pole to pole. They will shake the pillars of heaven, and startle the dungeon of hell. They will penetrate the deepest recesses of the tomb. They will pour their amazing thunder into all those abodes of silence. The dead, the very dead shall hear.

When the trumpet has sounded, “The dead shall arise.” In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the graves open; monumental piles are cleft asunder; and the nations under ground start into day. What an immense harvest of men and women, springing up from the caverns of the earth, and the depths of the sea! Stand awhile, my soul, and consider the wonderful spectacle. Adam, formed in Paradise, and the babe borne but yesterday, the earliest ages and latest generations, meet on the same level. Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Barbarians, people of all climes and languages, unite in the promiscuous throng. Here those vast armies, which, like swarms of locusts, covered countries, which, with an irresistible sweep, overran empires; here they all appear, and here they are lost; lost like the small drop of a bucket, when plunged into the unfathomable and boundless ocean. Oh! the multitudes! the multitudes! which these eyes shall survey, when God “shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people!” What shame must flush the guilty cheek! what anguish wound the polluted breast! to have all their filthy practices and infamous tempers exposed before this innumerable crowd of witnesses! Flee, guilty sinners, instantly flee, earnestly flee to the purifying blood of Jesus, that all your sins may be blotted out,

that you may be found unblamable and unreprouable in the presence of the assembled world, and, what is of infinitely more importance, in the sight of the omnipotent God.

There is no more need of this habitable globe. The righteous have fought a good fight, and finished their course. The wicked have been tried, and found incorrigible. Woe be to the earth, and to the works thereof! Its streams are turned into pitch, its dust into brimstone, and the breath of the Almighty, like a torrent of fire, enkindles the whole! See! see! how the conflagration rages—spreads—prevails over all! The forests are in a blaze, and the mountains are wrapped in flame. Cities, kingdoms, continents, sink into the burning deluge. America, Britain, Europe, are no more! Through all the receptacles of water, through all the tracts of land, through the whole extent of air; nothing is discernible but one vast, prodigious, fiery ruin. Where are now the treasures of the covetous? Where the possessions of the mighty? Where the delights of the voluptuous? How wise, how happy are they, whose portion is lodged in heavenly mansions! Their inheritance is incorruptible, such as the last fire cannot reach, nor the dissolution of nature impair.

But see the azure vault cleaves. The expanse of heaven is rolled back like a scroll; and the Judge, the Judge appears! “He cometh,” cries a mighty seraph, the herald of his approach; “He cometh to judge the world in righteousness, and minister true judgment unto the people!” He cometh, not as formerly, in the habit of a servant, but clad with uncreated glory, and magnificently attended with the armies of heaven. Angels and archangels stand before him, and ten thousand times ten thousand of these celestial spirits minister unto him. Behold him, ye followers of the Lamb, and wonder and love! This is he, who bore all your iniquities on the ignominious cross. This is he, who fulfilled all righteousness for the justification of your persons. Behold him, ye “despisers” of his grace, “and wonder and perish.” This is he, whose merciful overtures you have contemned, and on whose precious blood you have trampled.

The great white throne,* beyond description august and

* Rev. xx. 11.

formidable, is erected. The King of heaven, the Lord of glory, takes his seat on the dreadful tribunal. Mercy, on his right hand displays the olive branch of peace, and holds forth the crown of righteousness. Justice, on his left, poises the impartial scale, and unsheathes the sword of vengeance. While wisdom and holiness, brighter than ten thousand suns, beam in his Divine aspect. What are all the preceding events to this new scene of dignity and awe! The peals of thunder sounding in the archangel's trumpet, the blaze of a burning world, the strong convulsions of expiring nature, the unnumbered myriads of the dead starting into instantaneous life, and thronging the astonished skies; all these seem familiar incidents, compared with the appearance of the incarnate Jehovah. Amazement, more than amazement, is all around. Terror and glory unite in their extremes. From the sight of his majestic eye, from the insupportable splendours of his face, the earth itself and the very heavens flee away. How then—oh! how shall the ungodly stand; stand in his angry presence, and draw near to this consuming fire!

Yet, draw near they must, and take their trial, their decisive trial, at his righteous bar. Every action comes under examination. For each idle word they must give account. Not so much as a single thought escapes his scrutiny. How shall the criminals, the impenitent criminals, either conceal their guilt, or elude the sentence. They have to do with a sagacity too keen to be deceived; with a power too strong to be resisted; and (oh! terrible, terrible consideration!) with a severity of most just displeasure, that will never relent, never be entreated more! What ghastly despair appears in their faces! What racking agonies rend their distracted hearts! The bloody axe, and torturing wheel are ease, are down, compared with their prodigious woe. And (O holy God! wonderful in thy doings! fearful in thy judgments!) even this prodigious woe is the gentlest of visitations, compared with that indignation and wrath which are hanging over their guilty heads—which are even now falling on all the sons of rebellion—which will plunge them in aggravated and endless destruction.

“And is there a last day? and must there come,
A sure, a fixed, irrevocable doom?”

Surely, then, the main care of our lives should be to obtain peace and acceptance before the dreadful tribunal of God. And what is sufficient for this purpose but righteousness? What righteousness, or whose? Ours, or Christ's? Ours, in the inherent graces wrought in us, in the holy works wrought by us? Or Christ's in his most perfect obedience and meritorious satisfaction, wrought for us, and applied to us? God is as explicit on this subject, as his word can make him; everywhere exposing the defects of our own righteousness, everywhere displaying the perfect obedience of our Redeemer.

"Behold!" says the everlasting King, "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."* As this text contains so noble a display of our Saviour's consummate ability for this great work, as it is admirably calculated to preserve the mind from distressing fears, and to settle in a steady tranquility, I will touch it cursorily with my pen.

How beautiful the gradation! How lively the account, and how very important the practical improvement. Come, look at the inscription, which is engraven on this wonderful stone—"Behold!" Intended to rouse and fix our most attentive regard. The God of heaven speaks. He speaks, and every syllable is balm; every sentence is rich with consolation. If ever, therefore, we have ears to hear, let us bend them to this Speaker, and on this occasion.

"A stone." Everything else is sliding sand, is yielding air, is a breaking bubble. Wealth will prove a vain shadow; honor an empty breath; pleasure a delusive dream; our own righteousness a spider's web. If on these we rely, disappointment must ensue, and shame is inevitable. Nothing but Christ, nothing but Christ, can stably support our spiritual interests, and realize our expectation of true happiness. And, blessed be the Divine goodness, he is, for this purpose, not a stone only, but

"A tried stone." Tried, in the days of his humanity, by all the vehemence of temptation, and all the weight of afflictions; yet, like gold from the furnace, rendered more shining

* Isa. xxviii. 16.

and illustrious by the fiery scrutiny. Tried, in the character of a Saviour by millions and millions of depraved, wretched, ruined creatures, who have always found him perfectly able, and as perfectly willing, to expiate the most enormous guilt, to deliver from the most inveterate corruptions, and to save, to the very uttermost, all that come unto God through him.

“A corner stone.” Which not only sustains, but unites the edifice; incorporating both Jews and Gentiles, believers of various languages, and manifold denominations; here, in one harmonious band of brotherly love, hereafter, in one common participation of eternal joy.

“A precious stone.” More precious than rubies; the Pearl of great price, and the Desire of all nations. Precious with regard to the Divine dignity of his Person and the unequalled excellence of his mediatorial offices. In these, and all respects, wiser than Solomon, fairer than the children of men, chiefest among ten thousand; and, to the awakened sinner, or enlightened believer, altogether lovely.

“A sure foundation.” Such as no pressure can shake, equal, more than equal, to every weight, even to sin, the heaviest load in the world. The Rock of ages, such as never has failed, never will fail those humble penitents, who cast their burden upon the Lord their Redeemer; who roll all their guilt and fix their whole hopes, on this immovable basis. Or, as the words may be rendered, “A foundation! a foundation!” There is a fine spirit of vehemency in the sentence thus understood. It speaks the language of exultation, and expresses an important discovery. That which mankind infinitely want; that which multitudes seek, and find not; it is here! it is here! This, this is the foundation for their pardon, their peace, their eternal felicity.

“Whosoever believeth,” though pressed with adversities, or surrounded by danger, shall not make haste. But, free from tumultuous and perplexing thoughts, preserved from rash and precipitate steps, he shall possess his soul in patience. Knowing the sufficiency of those merits, and the fidelity of that grace, on which he has reposed his confidence, he shall quietly, and without perturbation, wait for an expected end. And not only amidst the perilous or disastrous changes of life, but even in the day of everlasting judgment, such persons

shall stand with boldness. They shall look up to the grand Arbitrator, look round on all the solemnities of his appearance, look forward to the unalterable sentence, and neither feel anxiety nor fear damnation.

Reader, these awful scenes must pass before thine eyes, and thou wilt feel an interest in them, infinitely more impressive and affecting than all thy present joys or sorrows. Let thy unworthiness, fear, and guilt, be now ever so great, there is hope concerning thee; for Jesus is "exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins;" but when thou shalt see "thy God in glory, and the world on fire," nothing will then remain for thee, but a "certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation;" or the immediate and happy expectation of being received "into the joy of the Lord." May God deliver thee from the bitter pains of eternal death, and bestow on thee the glorious blessings of everlasting life and salvation!

Jesus, lover of my soul,
 Let me to thy bosom fly,
 While the billows near me roll,
 While the tempest still is high;
 Hide me, O my Saviour; hide,
 Till the storm of life is past
 Safe into the haven guide,
 Oh! receive my soul at last.

Other refuge have I none,
 Hangs my helpless soul on thee,
 Leave, oh! leave me not alone,
 Still support and comfort me.
 All my trust on thee is stay'd,
 All mine help from thee I bring,
 Cover my defenceless head
 With the shadow of thy wing.

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