

DIVINE GUIDANCE.



THE

**Baccalaureate Sermon**

IN

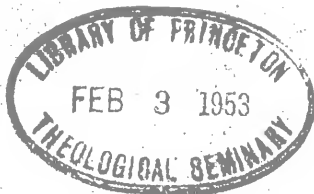
LEBANON VALLEY COLLEGE.

BY REV. E. S. CHAPMAN, A. M.



Delivered June 10, 1875.





BX9878

.9.C46



DIVINE GUIDANCE.

---

THE  
Baccalaureate Sermon  
IN  
LEBANON VALLEY COLLEGE.

Delivered in the College Chapel on the 10th of  
June, A. D. 1875.


✓  
BY REV. E. S. CHAPMAN, A. M.


---

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.

---

LEBANON, PA. :  
C. M. BOWMAN & CO., PRINTERS  
1875.






---

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.

---






## DIVINE GUIDANCE.

---

*Prov. 3 : 6. "In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths."*

---

No subject of contemplation possesses more of thrilling interest than the future of a human life. Though veiled in that darkness which covers all the future, its vast possibilities, its certainties and uncertainties sometimes rise before the imagination in pictures vivid and impressive. There are, with all of us, certain periods in life peculiarly calculated to awaken in the mind anxious inquiry respecting the future. To such a period have you arrived, my young friends, and God only knows how many anxious inquiries respecting your future lives even now are taxing the mind and heart of those you love. Into that dark future, which our knowledge can not enter, the imagination peers with wistful eye, and with fond affection traces for you the paths which buoyant hope suggests. As experience casts its light upon the picture thus drawn in fancy, many of its most attractive features are darkened by doubt, and vague uncertainty flits like a specter o'er the scene. A world of anxious inquiries arise in the mind respecting your future career, which fancy has vainly sought to sketch. What will your future be? Will it be peaceful or tempestuous; will it be darkened with sorrows or radiant with joy; will it bring a realization of those fond hopes which now warm your hearts and nerve your arms, or will disappointment verify those anxious fears which ever and anon arise; will it be a success or a failure; a blessing or a curse; will it be protracted or brief; will it be prematurely closed or will a ripe old age rejoice in the treasures of a life well spent? How will these things be? Who of all the sons of men can tell? Where shall we look for an answer? If we consult the records of the past we learn that while all desire to make of life a success: its pages are burthened with the story of utter failures. Though true success is worthy of the fondest desires and most vigorous efforts, it is not alone by fond desires and vigorous efforts that such a result is reached. Hence *failure* is the



fitting word which closes the record of many an earthly life of high aspiration and persevering industry.

Vast capabilities and rare culture do not furnish a certain guaranty of success, but often display the woefulness of failure. The strongest human forecast, the keenest insight into the future, cannot determine, with any approximation to certainty, the ultimate tendency or result of any effort. The most wisely laid plans of life, the most maturely formed purposes, very seldom reach realization and are often utterly thwarted by some unseen influence or hidden hand of destiny. The day whose morning was bright and serene, often closes in deepest darkness.

“ We feel the mighty current sweep us on,  
Yet know not whither. Man fortells afar  
The courses of the stars ; the very hour  
He knows when they shall darken or grow bright,  
Yet doth the eclipse of sorrow and of death  
Come unforewarned.”

With the future all wrapped in utter obscurity, how can you so solve the problem of life as to determine what that future shall be ?

We pause for an answer, and human knowledge, judgment and desire

“ Speak not a word,  
But, like dumb statues or unbreathing stones,  
Stare each on other.”

And why ? Because full well they know how powerless they are to lead to any certain issue. And is it true, that with all your years of ardent toil, equipped with learning and decked with laurels of collegiate honors, you must now meet life's battle in utter ignorance of what the result will be ? *It is true indeed.* And will no kind hand lift the curtain that conceals the future, that your paths of life may be so chosen as to secure for you the ends desired ? No, no. It may not, can not be. And is the picture sad ? Do you shrink from the contemplation of yourselves walking the paths of life thus blind and ignorant ? As I love you and hope for your highest interests, my heart would sink in sadness as I state these truths, but for the unshaken confidence and unfaltering and unquestioning faith with which I point you to your better portion. As a perfect guaranty of every desirable result, I bring to you to-day the solemn admonition and gracious promise of divine revelation. “ In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths.”

In these words, all radiant with the light of divine love, may you find a practical solution of the vexed problem of life. It is the divine claim, and the divine promise which here appear. No tremor of uncertainty, no halting of doubt marks the movements of the voice which is here

heard This is the solemn asseveration of the Lord God Almighty, and weighty words does He speak.

The extent of the divine claim appears as covering all our rightful possibilities. In thought, and plan, and effort, in faith, and prayer, and practice, God and His glory must be supreme. And God as He is, God as He has revealed Himself—watchful, loving, sympathizing—must our faith embrace and our every power and effort acknowledge. No God of icy theories and heartless speculations should we place upon the throne. In His own true character must He be acknowledged, or our assumed acknowledgment becomes positive *denial*.

Such an acknowledgment embraces complete cheerful obedience to His every call. Such is the claim which He presents, and any failure to obey in full involves denial of His claim, and hence of Him.

No measured or partial obedience, therefore, can fill the requirements here made. And not arbitrary or irksome are the duties thus enjoined, for did not the beloved disciple say, "His commands are not grievous?" Did not the sweet singer exclaim, "Oh, how love I Thy law," and did he not also declare of the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, that his delight is in the law of the Lord?

There is here also displayed the extent of the human privileges. Every act may be an acknowledgment of God, every duty a religious duty. No mischievous separation, by wide distinctions, of duties into secular and religious, is here allowed, but in all alike must there be an acknowledgment of God. Such is the compass of the divine claim; such is the extent of human privileges. Not alone in the sanctuary or the closet should we engage in divine service; in all the duties of life, in securing an education, in choosing a profession and in selecting social or bosom companions, should the divine claim be recognized, and the divine guidance invoked.

Thus far our theme has been circumscribed to the sphere of human endeavor. We are now raised to the realm of divine favor. An unseen power is proclaimed and an unseen hand is extended. In the darkness of the future no light is seen, but better than light or knowledge to us is the guaranty of divine direction. The divine mandates cover only the range of human ability, but ultimate results reach far beyond. Hence to meet the immeasurable wants thus arising, the finite is merged into the infinite, and moves in the orbit of its highest interests and grandest achievements with undeviating certainty and success.

In the clear tones of divine authority is proclaimed the sacred duty "In all thy ways acknowledge Him," but in the deep rich tones of infinite love and mercy do we hear the promise—"He shall direct thy paths."

Rich in promises akin to this are all the pages of divine revelation. Psalms xxxvii: 23, 24, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delights in his way. Tho' he fall he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. The law of his God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide."

Proverbs xvi: 9, "A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps."

In those beautiful metaphors with which his writings so abound, the prophet Isaiah presents the divine promise, 58: 11, "The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not." Comprehending all conditions and covering all periods of life is the guaranty recorded by the Psalmist, 48: 14, "He will be our guide even unto death." In view of the ignorance and indiscretion so distinguished in man, the prophet of the Lord is permitted to say, Is. 28: 26, "His God doth instruct him to discretion and teach him"

It is a significant fact that while the directing influence of the infinite mind is here most positively vouchsafed, the means or manner of that direction is not even hinted at. It is obviously here implied that our acts in life and their results, together with the great world of events over which we have no control, shall be so ordered as to result in our greatest good. We are not however to hope for the divine interposition to arrest the results of any willful violation of our relation to the universe. We are provided with faculties by which we may learn our true relation to the universe, and we cannot fully acknowledge God without the exercise of those faculties. But the blindness and ignorance by which we are oppressed, call for more than is found within the compass of human knowledge and power, and it is this which is secured in the divine promise. These glittering gems of sacred truth constitute a basis for our hopes as immutable and imperishable as the throne of Omnipotence.

It is the province of faith to accept, with gratitude, the surety thus afforded, without reasons or inquiry, but if into the field thus opened we press our most critical investigations, we shall find the foundations for our confidence not less secure in reason than in revelation. To no one of the many sources of human effort is the divine Spirit limited in its directing influence. The entire range is grasped in the infinite mind and subject to divine control. Upon all the springs of human conduct the Spirit of God may move, and by agencies unseen and influences unknown the path of obedience may be constituted the path of safety and success.





The very act of admonition here presented will of itself become a directing agency to those who in all their ways acknowledge Him. Such an acknowledgment embraces an adjustment of our relations to both the material and spiritual world, of measureless value in its influence upon our destiny. An illustration drawn from the lessons of science may serve to display this truth. There are two forces, the centrifugal and centripetal, in perpetual and uniform operation in the great system of worlds.

Upon the unvarying vigor and action of these two forces depend all the advantages of the system. Either without the other would work utter ruin. By the vigorous and uniform action of both the vast system, moved by the power of its centrifugal force, dashes away through the depths of space with a velocity which seems to portend immediate and utter destruction, yet held by centripetal power, and without the least variation, within its own orbit, and to the accomplishment of its own grand mission.

Not entirely unlike these forces in nature, are those influences which operate in the realm of accountable beings. Instinct with activity are all the children of men. In body, mind and heart there is a perpetual tendency to action. Herein is the force corresponding to the centrifugal force in nature. Prompted by this native activity, man plunges into schemes and efforts of every conceivable character, and is involved in turmoils and contentions not unlike the wild chaos which would be seen in the planetary world if only centrifugal force were in operation. But for man there is provided a remedy for all these ills. As the planets are held in their orbits by the centripetal force of attraction to the sun, and no jarring or collision occurs, so may man be held in his proper orbit by the power of loving obedience to the divine mandates, and may ever revolve around the bright Sun of Righteousness, in perpetual peace and holy joy. His affectionate obedience to the divine will, gives direction to his efforts, and hence, as is declared by the wise man, Proverbs 11 : 5, "The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way."

Herein would be found an unfailing panacea for every earthly ill, if human knowledge of duty was perfect, and all men would obey the divine law. In so far as human knowledge grasps the divine law, and the human heart will yield obedience to its claims, there will be that direction of his paths of which we are speaking. But human knowledge is limited and the world is full of wickedness. Beyond our control are influences in perpetual activity and inimical to our highest interests.

To meet the wants thus arising, the hand of Omnipotence is extended




and its aid kindly proffered. Replete with precious assurances are those gems of sacred truth, in which that aid is tendered. Covering the entire range of causes which war against our interests, these precious promises guaranty to us the direct interposition of God to give to our efforts the right direction, and control or overrule, as may be best, every event or effort inimical to our welfare and success.

In all this there is nothing in conflict with the teachings of science or the deductions of sound reason. True there are within the range of human knowledge, fixed and immutable laws, but the divine interposition in human affairs involves no conflict with those laws or their uniform operations. Through the ordinary operations of natural causes, the divine direction may be bestowed. For instance, human effort, in the main, is in accordance with the promptings of desire or inclination. In the ordinary current of events, incentives arise which awaken the desires leading to endeavor

These events may arise from the operations of fixed law in the material world, or they may lie within the realm of free will, but all these regions are alike under the Infinite eye and subject to His control. In the realm of material things many causes of human choice may arise; heat and cold, storm and calm, light and darkness, may become the determining cause of human effort and may seem to determine with heartless severity the destiny of mortals. A severe storm delayed a train by which, in some way, our entire future life was determined. It may be that while thus delayed an acquaintance was formed which resulted in vast consequences to us, and in a limitless number of ways may momentous interests be involved in what may seem the invariable workings of invariable forces.


Here there may seem to be no sphere for divine interposition. These operations of nature are fixed for all time and can not be interfered with. It is vain to think of divine direction so long as our efforts in life and their results are so intimately connected with these operations of invariable natural law. But it is not wise to overlook the fact that even in the operations of nature the line of causation is to but a limited extent known to us. From the meager glimpses which we have gained, shall we attempt to decide what God can and what he *can not* do, while away back in the unknowable, into the depths of infinity, extend the lines of causation in every movement of nature or free will? How dare we leave God, or his direct and immediate agency, out of the heat or the cold or any physical condition or movement, when such a mere glimpse only is given us of the the causes of any results? But the influence which these material condi-



tions and operations may have in determining our destiny depends largely, if not entirely, upon the relationship which we may sustain to them, and that relationship may arise from considerations of a purely intellectual and spiritual character. A thought springing up in the mind finds expression in a word or act, by which is begun a line of causes, whose importance, ever widening and extending, exhausts computation. But whence arose that thought? Can science discover its source, or reason point out its origin? In its results we discover the blending of the material and immaterial, the intermingling of mental action with physical phenomena, but of origin we know only that it arose as thoughts are continually arising, from the mysterious depths of the human intellect. It is not inconsistent with reason to claim that the divine Spirit approaches especially near to us, and holds intimate communion with us, in this realm of intellectual exercise. We may not be able to determine to our entire satisfaction the precise *modus operandi* by which the divine Spirit touches and influences human thought and inclination, and still leaves intact man's freedom of choice. To our feeble vision there may here appear, if not a paradox, at least a mystery. But what field of thought opens before us, into which we may not plunge far beyond the soundings of our deepest sea lines? Human thought and desire are in themselves unfathomable mysteries, and their subjection to the immediate and perpetual influence of the divine Spirit neither increases nor diminishes the depth of their mystery. Not less impressive and mysterious is the fact of mutual human influence, which, though instinct with power, crosses not the threshold of conscious freedom of choice.

Within this realm of thought may the divine spirit exercise its directing influence. Here may there be suggested or prompted by the spirit of God, those views of duty, those conceptions of truth by which our efforts in life are determined. Thus may we walk in the paths of our own choosing, while the choice we make is prompted by the divine Spirit. To what extent the divine guidance may be given through the influence of the Holy Spirit upon the mind and heart, we may not be able fully to determine, but of this we may be sure, the views of duty and the promptings of the heart when we are living near the Lord will constitute a means of guidance, if not *infallible*, at least of great value.

But beyond all that has thus far occupied our attention, there is a work of still greater importance. Not only must the inclinations of our hearts be such as to prompt to wise endeavor, but the outside world of conflicting causes and agencies, must be made subservient to our interests. The plottings and efforts of wicked men, the intoward concurrence of circum-



stances, the hidden hand of destruction are all arrayed against us. But in all the realm of causation reigns the Infinite Mind. In the midst of all these conflicting forces, God moves in majesty and without molestation. Back of all phenomena he acts upon all the lines of causation. Within the realm of free will he grants volition. If here, in the exercise of the volition, God be our choice, the finite is merged into the infinite, the divine will becomes our will, and thus, lost to self and swallowed up in God, we shall walk the paths of life without the possibility of failure or loss. As well may the forces of nature seek to destroy God or defeat his purposes as to compass the ruin of him who in all his ways acknowledges God. Like one of old, he "walks with God," and hence in the paths of his highest interests.


In the dark days of the war, at a time of great interest and upon an occasion of much importance, I heard a distinguished American statesman, while speaking of the anxious fears of his friends, lest some blunder of his should secure defeat, with much earnestness and emotion say: "Fellow citizens, the man who steadfastly fixes his eye upon the pole star of justice, can't make a blunder!"

How true is this of the man who "walks with God!"

By this it is not meant that he shall not in any case fall, but "if he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand." Nor would we claim that he shall never err in judgment respecting duty for tho' "a man's heart deviseth his ways, yet the Lord directs his steps." Neither can he rest in certainty of having no enemies to his interests, but, "If a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."—(Prov. xvi: 7.)

The paths in which we are led, may not be such as seem to us desirable or of good promise. A shorter, but not a *safer* path to our land of promise may lie through the land of the Philistine, yet by the way of the Red Sea and the Desert we may be led.

A traveler, bearing great treasures, was led by his guide out of the frequented path in the valley and over rough and winding ways upon the mountain side. When at length, weary and indignant, he remonstrated with his guide, and reproached him for his infidelity, with calmness he pointed out to him the camp fires of the enemy in the valley below, whose murderous assaults they had escaped by following the rugged path upon the mountain brow. A mother kneeled with bleeding heart by the cold icy form of her first born. Bitter was her anguish, and unreconciled was her heart. Tho' not in words, yet in heart, she reproached God for his




severe judgments. At length, weary with her weeping, she slept a dreamy sleep. Again her babe was in her arms as beautiful and lovely as before. Rapidly the years rolled on, and, as in panorama, she saw his downward tending course. Step after step she saw him take down the steep descent of vice, until at length, blear-eyed and bloated, he made his last fatal plunge into crime, for which he paid the forfeit of his wretched life. Shrieking with the agony of her heart she awoke from sleep. It was a vision in mercy given to display the mercy of the smiting hand. With tears of joy she clasped the cold form to her breast and through her tears of gratitude looked up to heaven and by faith saw the true picture—her lovely babe, more beautiful than ever, clad in the garments of heaven and safe in the arms of Jesus.

The ways of Providence have always been mysterious, but to those who acknowledge God they have been the ways of joy and peace. We do not always recognize the divine hand of love and mercy, but it is because of our blindness and lack of faith. Mary wept bitter tears in the garden even while Jesus stood and talked with her, but her grief was because "*she knew not that it was Jesus.*" So often do we. But even in the fiercest storm which comes down upon life's sea, even in the darkest, wildest night of sorrow, if we will quiet the tumult of our fears, and listen, in spite of the fiercest dashings of the crested billows, and the loudest howlings of the storm, we may hear the loving voice of Jesus saying, "*It is I, be not afraid.*"

When our plans of life seem all subverted and our hopes forever crushed, if we turn to the chart of life like some bewildered traveler, we may read, (Is. xxiv : 16) "And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, I will lead them in paths that they have not known, I will make darkness light before them and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

Here, my young friends, is the richest heritage of earth—the assurance of divine direction. All the wealth of learning can not be compared to this; all the treasures of the deep are not worthy to be mentioned in connection with it. Every view which we take of ourselves displays the value of such a blessing. To a young person, just entering the busy contests of life, what can compare in value with an *unfailing guide*.

Our utter ignorance of the future proclaims our need of such a guide. Nothing can exceed our blindness as to what is before us. Is. lix : 9, "We wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the walk like the blind, and we grope as if



we had no eyes ; we stumble as in the night, we are in desolate places as dead men."

Even these vigorous words of the prophet fail to express the full extent of our ignorance and blindness.

Not less impressive is our defectiveness of judgment respecting that which is wisest and best. How clearly is this displayed in all the experience of life. That which appears to us wise and prudent often proves to be the height of folly. To these characteristics of our nature may be added the unreliability of our inclinations. What our natural hearts prompt us to do is often that which tends to our ruin.

Thus, ignorant of the future, defective in judgment, and beset by dangerous desires, with what plaintive pleadings do the great interests of our lives call for a guiding hand. Without it, how prone are we to grasp with eager greed the luring pleasures of the hour, and listen to the songs of sirens which compass our destruction. Without it, though blessed with strongest forecast, we know not what we want, and seek not what we need.

A mother, I knew her well and loved her truly, sought and secured with joyful heart her son's escape from the military draft of our late war. With real joy she declared it to be just what she wanted and most needed. He could now be with her and engage with confidence in his labors. He too was glad, and with light heart entered the forests to fell the trees for the lumber of merchandise, but when the first huge walnut, severed at its base came crashing down, it entrapped him beneath its trunk and buried him out of sight. The mother now regretted her course and wished him in the army. She secured what she sought, but it proved a snare and source of sorrow. This is a representative case, coming under my own observation, and displaying our ignorance of what is wisest and best. Well may the wise man say, (Prov. xx: 24.) "Man's goings are of the Lord, how can a man then understand his own way?"

The value to us of this guiding hand appears from the further consideration that while under the divine direction, we have the pledge of the divine protection. The path in which we are led will be the path of *safety*. The advantage of that protection appears when we consider the dangers with which we are environed at every step of life. Evils of every species beset us on every hand, and press upon us with a degree of vigor, which we are utterly powerless to resist. They assail our bodies and prey upon our minds, they clamor for our blood, and watch with sleepless eye to secure the ruin of our souls. Men and beasts, the elements of na-

ture and evil spirits, are marshaled in this hostile army. Envy, hatred and fiendish malevolence fire their zeal and direct their blows.

Insinuation, slander and seduction are some of their methods of attack. As the Hebrews crossed the Jordan while its waters rose high "upon a heap" by their side, pressing against the restraining hand and eager to engulf them in ruin, so do we walk the paths of life with foes to our welfare pressing with ceaseless energy against the restraining hand of God which guards us round about.

But that hand of protection covers only the path of duty. Beyond that narrow way, thus forever made secure, no guaranty of protection extends.

It requires not the smiting hand of divine wrath to prove to us that "the way of the transgressor is hard," for when in the path of disobedience the enemies to our interests may have unrestrained liberties with us, and no promise of heaven may be pleaded in our defence. Oh it is a fearful picture, but a true one. A helpless child, unsheltered from the fiercest hail storm, does not so call for pity as the servant of sin, unprotected by God.

But the picture for this wide contrast is not yet complete. To display the dangers of disobedience more fully, let us remember that all those divine influences which afford protection to the obedient, are arranged against those who are in the paths of transgression. The gravity of this truth calls for its careful consideration. Let us present it under a similitude.

The church of God is like a city well fortified. Upon the heights which surround are planted the batteries of God's protection. His justice, His truth, His holiness, and all the attributes of His nature, are engaged to protect his people from every harmful influence. With ceaseless activity these batteries pour forth their resistless tide of providences and judgments, smiting with confusion and dooming to destruction every invading foe. Thus guarded upon every point, the security of God's people is complete. In the inspiring consciousness of their safety they may appropriate the words of Israel's sweet singer :

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord he is my refuge and fortress ; my God, in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence.

He shall cover thee with his feathers and under his wings shalt thou trust ; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the

pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon day."

All the vast range of metaphor which is embraced in this 91st Psalm, to declare the security of God's obedient children, may we adopt as applied to ourselves, while we are within this fortification whose ever active agencies accord us their protection. but the moment we step without its boundary, the moment we pass the boundary of duty, we place ourselves within the range of those fierce judgments of God, which were designed for our protection, and we are smitten down by the blow given by mercy for our safety and defence.

It is not a picture but a reality, and if we fall and fail it will not be because the means for our defence are imperfect, either in plan or operation; but because in the exercise of our own volition we passed beyond the bounds of our privileges and fell under the weight of the blow which was struck in our defence.

But the field of thought widens and extends as we advance. At every step new features of the divine guaranty appear. All nature is placed in vassalage to the Infinite mind that man's direction and safety may be complete. The agencies employed may seem remote from the result to be reached, but will at length appear as fitting parts of a most harmonious whole.

Haman may plot destruction, and Mordica may be placed in jeopardy, but the sleepless night of Abasuerus is made to serve the divine purpose, and "The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead." (Prov. xi: 8.)

The angel of destruction may pass to and fro through the land, charged with the elements of death, and in every Egyptian house there may be heard the wail of anguish, but no shadow or sorrow crosses the threshold where the blood-sprinkled door-posts proclaim obedience.

When the fire-fiend dashed through the pine forests of Wisconsin, and fell like a thunderbolt upon the peaceful village of Peshtigo, a terrified mother thrust her little girl into an empty cistern, replaced its stone cover and fled for safety. When the work of destruction was complete and not a house or fence remained, she found with difficulty her way back to where her home had been, and with strong fear and trembling hope, approached the cistern and *found her darling safe!* While the flames dashed madly forward, leaving only charred and blackened ruins in their path, the mother at a distance looked on and wept, but her darling in the cistern was secure from harm.





But there are fiercer fires than that which smote Peshtigo with instant and utter ruin, and there is greater security than that which was afforded by this friendly cistern. This rich legacy of unailing guidance and complete security I proclaim to you to-day. And all this, in doing only that which it is your bounden duty to do. The promise is precious and sure and the precept is plain. In the same hand we hold both the precept and the promise; if we relinquish our hold upon the precept the promise falls to the ground. Can interest and duty be more clearly pointed out?

But plain and precious as all this appears, it does not escape the assaults of criticism, nor the sneers of blind unbelief. The voice of inspiration, whose teachings we have been presenting, does not avail to silence the tongue of skepticism. Reason and science are invoked to unsettle confidence in the scriptural declarations of the divine purpose to hear and answer prayer, and lead and protect His trusting children, as the shepherd leads and shields his flock. To the "invariable movements of invariable forces" are attributed all the phenomena of nature, and to the "uniform workings of natural law" are assigned the results which are believed to be brought about in answer to prayer.

But why should men seek thus to exclude from the affairs of the earth the agency of its Author? Are the interests of society more secure when built upon the shifting sands of scientific theories, than when it may be said, "underneath are the Everlasting Arms?" Can we walk the devious pathway of life with greater surety of success, guided only by the ever varying compass of human knowledge and desire, than when our "steps are ordered of the Lord?"

But, not to enter the inviting field of metaphysical discussion which here opens before us, let us test these theories in their application to the wants and woes of human life. Let us carry with us the frigid theory of lifeless, loveless law, and that of the overshadowing, felt presence of a kind and loving Father, Who hears the faintest sigh of sorrow, and relieves the humblest, weakest child that cries to Him for help. With these two theories—the scientist's and the Christian's—let us journey among our sorrowing fellows. If a doubting one is here we bid him come and test these theories by the touchstone of their application to, and relief of, human wants and woes.

But listen! Ere we move, what sound is that, so soft and plaintive, now borne upon the evening breeze? It is the voice of a child, a sweet, innocent little girl, in the dim twilight, kneeling and praying. She is the only child of a foreign missionary. Father and mother are both in the



far off heathen land, exposed to a thousand dangers. If they are sad, she can not, as of yore, so fill their ears with her sweet prattle as to dispel their sorrow; if they are sick, she can not bathe the throbbing brow or sing the heart to rest. This she can not do, but she can pray, and when with the evening shadows there come fearful visions of fever and agony and death, she seeks her quiet chamber, and with weeping eyes and aching heart she pours out into the ear of her heavenly Father, her earnest prayer for the protection of "*Papa and mamma in India.*" She believes in prayer, and when her yearnings have thus found expression, confident of having been heard, confident of the power of prayer to prevail with God, she dries her tears and sings a sweet song of praise and thanksgiving.

Now, my brother, go to her, if you can, with your chilling words of natural law and "invariable forces." Tell her, if you can, that there is no loving Father who heeds her cries, and who will take care of "*Papa and mamma in India.*" Tear down that lovely citadel of confidence and faith in which she rests so sweetly, and build about her your castle of solid ice. Palsied would be the tongue which would seek to destroy that simple child-like faith.

But go with me to the fireside, where parents and children are wont to gather. Deep solemnity rests upon every face, and sad and solemn words fall from every one. For the first time the family circle is to be broken. Ah! what solemn recollections throng upon the mind, as we speak of the first breaking up of the family circle. Thus it is here. Henry is going to a distant land to seek his fortune. They are all praying christians, and before the final adieu is heard they agree to kneel together once more at the family altar and offer earnest prayer for God's protection and guidance of the dearly loved wanderer. This is their only comfort now and a blessed comfort it is. But speak to them, my brother, as they are about to fall before God and invoke His favor. Stop them, and, with tearless eye and icy breath, speak to them of "immutable forces and inevitable results." Tell them, if you can, that God will not heed their prayers, nor give to Henry any protection or guidance, because of their petitions. But you do not speak. Cold theory, cold comfort! Go out upon the billowy deep, when "He raiseth the stormy wind which lifteth up the waves thereof, when they mount up to the heavens and go down again to the depths and are at their wits end. Then they cry unto the Lord and He bringeth them out of their trouble." Tell them now of the folly of prayer, and amid the roar and tumult of the storm whisper in their ears



about invariable results and inflexible law. Go where the mother weeps by the cot of her first born. Hear her cries as she witnesses the contortions and spasms of congestion, or hears the senseless gibberish of delirium. As with tearful eyes and sympathizing heart I stoop and whisper in her ear the sweet word Jesus, as I speak of the "Friend that's ever near," and bid her "cast all her care upon him, for he careth for her," do you, my brother, speak whatever words of comfort you can gather from the heartless workings of natural law. Bid her look to that, and *trust*. But, once more, go with me to the open grave where fond affection lingers and weeps. Hear the sad sound of the clods of the valley as they fall upon the coffin lid. Look down into the dark depths, and then with the telescope of science look out into the dark labyrinth beyond. Sweep up and down the limitless shore, and tell me, oh tell me truly, what visions are disclosed, what beauties are revealed, what splendors are unfolded. Is not all darkness and despair? Does one ray of light or hope gleam upon that trackless void? Comes there from that echoless shore one note of joy, one song of gladness? With this telescope of science, search with patient industry the profoundest depths of this dark abyss, and without the view of one cheering ray of comfort, the mind returns to the loved form beneath the coffin lid

Now let Faith born of Hope arise, and by the aid of revelation gaze out into eternity. Oh! entrancing beauty and loveliness. The splendors of immortality unfold before the enraptured eye, and God, and Christ, and heaven appear in radiance and glory.

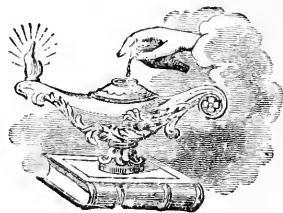
The burdened soul now rises up to God. The darkness and dampness of the grave is forgotten, sorrow for the dead is softened into resignation, and peace, sweet peace, fills the soul, which now communes with God. Such is philosophy, such religion, such is scientific skepticism, such is christian love and faith.

Thus tested by their application to the wants and woes of human life, these two theories appear in their true characters. Thus tested, the icy theory of skepticism appears in a character against which the conscious wants and felt sorrows of mankind cry out in condemnation.

These are not the staid words of metaphysical speculation which are usually, and with entire propriety, employed upon such occasions. They are the unfailling declarations of divine truth, and the warm words of tenderness and love. These hundreds of miles have been passed to deliver to you this message. It is my first and doubtless my last appeal to you. As I began, so would I close, with an earnest, anxious look into



the future. Oh, what will your future be? Is the great problem solved? No light shines into the darkness before us, but from its depth a voice is heard to say: (Jer ix: 23, 24.) "Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgement and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."





BX9878.9 .C46  
Divine guidance : the baccalaureate

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00047 3431