

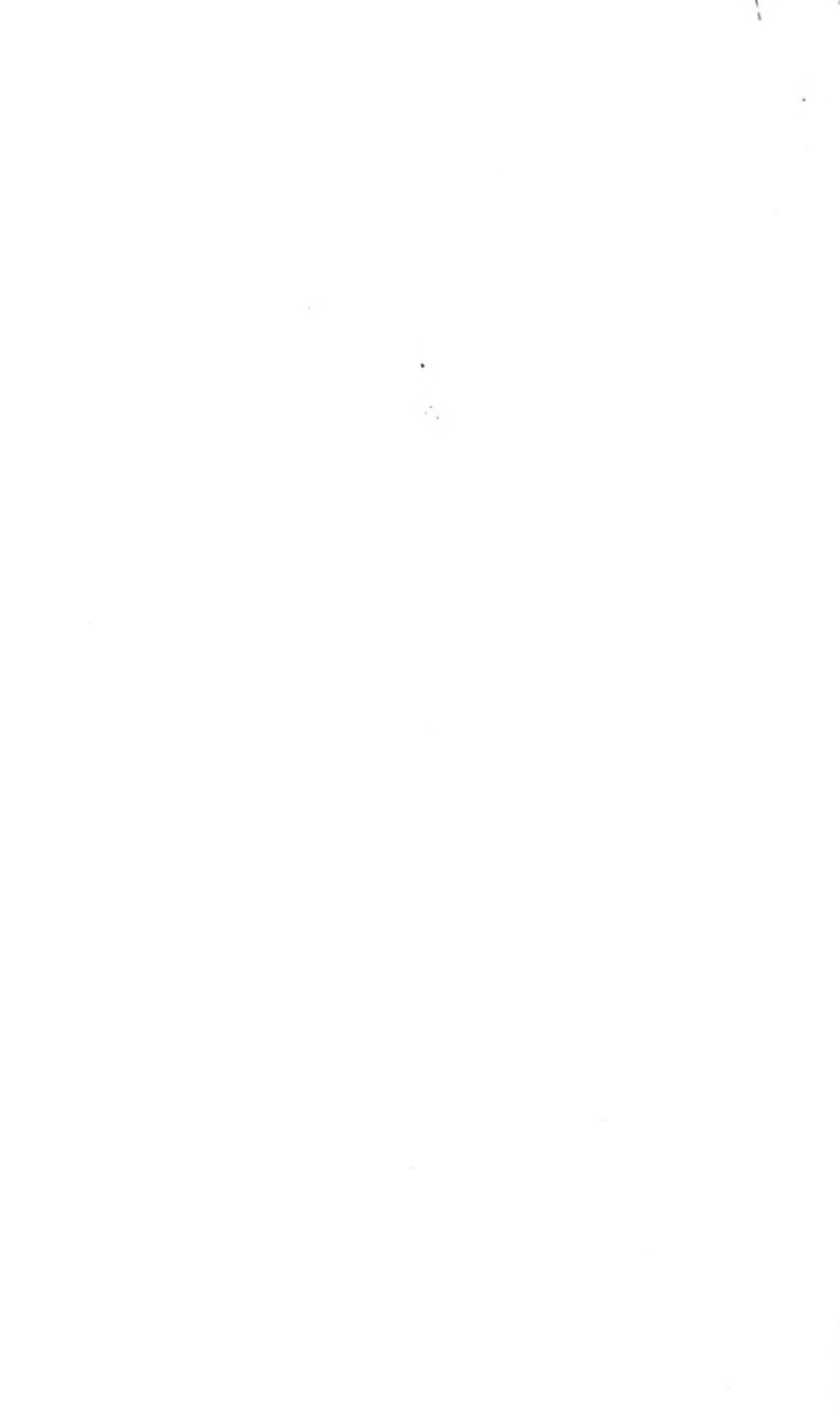


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Now







N O W .

BY
NEWMAN HALL, LL.B.,

AUTHOR OF

"COME TO JESUS," "FOLLOW JESUS," ETC.

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N O W.

Now! A short word; a shorter thing.
Soon uttered; sooner gone.

Now! A grain of sand on a boundless plain. A tiny ripple on a measureless ocean! Over that ocean we are sailing, but the only part of it we possess is that on which our vessel at this moment floats. We look back and watch the ship's wake in the waters. But how short a distance it reaches, and how soon every trace disappears! We see also some landmarks farther off—and then the horizon closes the view. But beyond, that ocean still rolls far, far away. Memory looks back on the few years of our individual life. History shows us a dim outline of mountains. Science tells us that still farther back, out of sight, stretches that vast sea. Reason assures us

that like space, it hath no boundary. But all that we possess of it is represented by this small word—Now! The past, for action, is ours no longer. The future may never become present, and is not ours until it does. The only part of time we can use is the present—this very moment—*Now!*

But multitudes waste what they actually possess, in vain regrets for what they once had, or vain intentions respecting what is not yet theirs. “Alas!” says one, “I have thrown away the choicest opportunities—the best part of my life is lost;—O, if those years might return, how differently would I now act!” Those years cannot return. But you have the present moment! Why add the neglect of the present which you *can* improve, to the heap of lost opportunities which are now far beyond your reach?

A passenger comes bustling into the railway station. He is just too late, for the engine has sounded its whistle and the train is gliding rapidly out of sight. He looks after

it in despair. He had important business to transact. Ruinous may be the consequences of delay. He sits down on his trunk, leaning his head upon his hand, and, absorbed in vain regrets, gazes vacantly forward. But see! another train is at the platform just about to start for the same destination. Other passengers have arrived and are eagerly crowding in. The bell rings. Again the whistle sounds—again the engine bears away its living freight—and, starting up, our friend again bewails an opportunity lost! O sit not down again despondingly! There is yet another chance. Throw not this away too, but at once take your seat in this third train which *now* is preparing to follow the other two!

But should we never look regretfully after the past? Certainly, but for this purpose, that we may be stirred up to improve the present. Let us think of past sins that we may repent *now*. Let us meditate on former failures, that we may watch and pray and fight against similar dangers *now*. But let us not be so foolish as to lose what yet remains,

while poring over what is gone for ever. Rouse thee, self-reproaching, desponding sinner! Thy guilt has been great. You cannot lessen it by merely regretting it. Bring it *now* to Christ, that He may pardon it! You cannot atone for the past, but you may improve the present. Often in by-gone years you might have sought God in an "accepted time," and have rejoiced in a "day of salvation." Great is your guilt and great your folly in having lost such opportunities. Yes! think of this and be ashamed. Think of this and mourn. But so think of it as not to add to that guilt and folly. So think of it as to act at once on the divine word—"Behold, Now is the accepted time; behold, Now is the day of salvation."

There are indolent anticipations, as well as indolent regrets. We waste the only time we possess, if we spend it in resolving what we will do in time to come. If a private soldier were to be continually revolving in his mind what he would do when he became a serjeant, but meanwhile were to perform none of the

private's duties, it is plain that his promotion would never take place. Neglect of the actual present would disqualify him for the imagined future. So if, while busy with framing good resolutions for to-morrow, we disregard the duties of to-day, we not only waste the present, but thereby help to unfit ourselves for that very future when it comes. Look, by all means, towards the future; but, as with the past, let such looking prompt you to improve the present. Look forward to the day of judgment, not to become the victim of a hopeless terror, but diligently to prepare for that judgment *now!* Think of the hour of death, not to settle down into inactive melancholy, but to discharge the duties of life *now!* Let your good intentions for to-morrow prompt you to prepare for executing them, by diligence, *to-day!*

But alas, the very opposite is too often the practice of mankind. They look to the possibilities of the future, in order to avoid the duties of the present. To resolve is much easier than to work. A purpose of amend-

ment encourages evil indulgence. Conscience remonstrating, is gagged by plausible promises. If "yesterday" has slain its thousands, "to-morrow" has slain its ten thousands.

Procrastination has been still more fatal than indolent regret. There is not a more subtle and powerful antagonist to the Gospel. Infidelity, with its bold arguments, cunning hints, or covert sarcasm is comparatively feeble; there is a still small voice within the breast which ever gives the lie to scepticism. Worldliness may display its gilded baubles to captivate the eye, but the inward heart pronounces them insufficient to satisfy its cravings. Sin may mingle the honey of pleasure with its poison, but cannot altogether disguise the bitter, and he who drinks knows there is death in the cup. But "To-morrow," assenting to, confirming, enforcing the claims of duty, yet suggesting delay—ah, of all the agents of the devil there is not a subtler antagonist of truth, a deadlier foe of man, than To-morrow!

Few persons can endure to be grossly inconsistent. They at least wish others to think,

and they try to persuade themselves, that their creed and conduct are in harmony. Their minds cannot enjoy rest while the one grossly contradicts the other. Who is consistent in religion? He who acknowledges that there is a God, and worships Him; that Jesus is the Saviour of sinners, and trusts in Him. Who is consistent in irreligion? He who does not worship God, because he does not acknowledge his existence; who does not trust in the Saviour, because he denies that Jesus is the Christ. Both are consistent. The earnest piety of the former, is in harmony with his creed—the utter irreligion of the latter corresponds with his avowed disbelief. Who is chargeable with the grossest of all inconsistency? He who acknowledges a God, and does not worship Him; who confesses a Saviour, and does not trust in Him. To admit as true what the Bible teaches, and at the same time to determine never to act in accordance with it—to say “There is a judgment day, but I will never prepare for it—a hell, but I will never try to escape from it—a God,

but I will never worship Him—a Saviour, but I will never seek Him,”—this is too gross for any but the most abandoned. The devil does not tempt us to make such a resolve. By so shocking our reason he would defeat his own purpose. But he sends his emissary “To-morrow,” by whose artful persuasions multitudes give such an answer as this to the appeal of Divine Love—

“I acknowledge the truth of religion, and have resolved to yield to its claims. I intend to repent of my sins, and seek pardon through Christ. I will certainly give up my wicked practices, and by God’s help live a better, holier life. Thus I am determined to flee from the wrath to come, and obtain the salvation offered me in the Gospel. All this I am resolved to do—*To-morrow!*”

To-morrow! Eloquent advocate! robed as a king’s counsel, holding the devil’s brief! The sermon’s swift antidote, the preacher’s most formidable respondent, never at a loss for a reply. *To-morrow!* Skillful fencer, warding off so dexterously the best aimed

blows. To-morrow! Prompt physician, dulling the sense of pain by sweet but deadly narcotics—quieting the pangs of conscience, and closing up so comfortably the wounds of the sword of truth. To-morrow! Accomplished musician, soothing the soul to slumber by endless variations on a single string. Delusive phantom, ever beckoning the traveler onward, downward, to the precipice's very brink. Courteous traitor, smiling assassin, Satan's chief recruiting serjeant, paving with good intentions the road to hell!

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow!
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusky Death!

O then, instead of indolently gazing after yesterday and delusively looking forward towards to-morrow—give heed to the voice from Heaven which urges you to seek salvation **NOW!**

THE CASE STATED.

The state of the case is this. You, in common with all mankind, have "sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The guilt of each has some special aggravations. So has yours. You have incurred the just displeasure of the Almighty. You are in danger of eternal death. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The wicked shall be turned into hell." Moreover, you are already by sin in a ruined state, unfit for the high duties and pure enjoyments for which you were originally designed. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God. The wrath of God abideth on them. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

But "God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He invites you to put your trust in this Saviour, to repent, to seek forgiveness, to change your mind and amend your conduct,

to love God and keep his commandments. To help you, He promises to give you his holy Spirit, for whose assistance He bids you earnestly pray. He thus urges you to seek salvation. This is his gift, but you must make an effort to obtain it. You can never deserve it, but if you seek you shall find. If you are ever saved, it must be by grace—or undeserved favor—yet it never will be without exertion on your own part also. “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.”

God calls on you to make this effort at once. The Holy Ghost says—“To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart. Seek the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, nor device, in the grave whither thou goest. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” But you prefer to postpone the work. Convinced of the truth and importance of religion, you sincerely intend to repent, but not at present. You wait for a

more convenient season. With affectionate earnestness and prayer that the Divine Spirit may give them power, the following arguments are submitted to your careful consideration, for the purpose of persuading you not to wait a single day, but to "repent and believe the Gospel" NOW!

I.

**THE PRESENT IS THE ONLY PORTION OF TIME YOU
ARE SURE OF POSSESSING ; THEREFORE,
REPENT NOW.**

ALL putting off till to-morrow implies an expectation of possessing to-morrow. In judging of the reasonableness of such delay, we must take into consideration both the nature of the work to be done, and the grounds of expecting a time in which to do it. Much uncertainty as regards opportunity is of little consequence when the business to be transacted is trivial. But a small amount of such uncertainty becomes invested with the gravest importance when momentous interests are at stake.

What then is the degree of certainty you possess, that the future, to which you postpone repentance, will ever become yours? You perhaps reply, that, from your age at present, you can by a table of averages calculate

how many years you have still to live. Life assurances and annuities are thus determined with an accuracy which secures a more certain return than most commercial transactions. But this certainty has relation to an aggregate number of lives, and not to any one in particular. The similarity which prevails in respect to the duration of life in a nation, is connected with the utmost possible diversity in respect to the individuals composing that nation. It is the very uncertainty existing in each person's own case, which prompts him to "insure his life." Uniformity in the operation of natural laws as regards a community, renders such insurance possible; uncertainty as regards the individual, renders such insurance desirable. Your own argument then confutes itself; for the years you say you may expect to live are only the average certainty resulting from the individual uncertainty; an uncertainty so great, so baffling all efforts to remove it, as to call into existence those very calculations on which you falsely ground your personal expectations of to-morrow.

As if to render it impossible for any one to presume on the future, Death comes in various forms, and carries away his victims from all the stages of life. Multitudes, roughly weaned, are snatched from their mother's breast. Many a flower is "no sooner blown than blasted;" many a one is allowed to grow to full maturity, and then is cut down in all its glory, before one sign of decay appears. Some persons linger on the brink of the grave for half a century; while others, buoyant with health, and confident of long life, are suddenly arrested in their morning race. Some, year by year, on beds of pain, long for release; while generations of the strong and active pass by them to the grave of which they never dreamed. Thus is the hour of death to each individual shrouded by a darkness into which no human sagacity can dart a single ray.

This very concealment strikingly displays the wisdom and goodness of God, whose love is seen in what He withholds as well as in what he gives. Disastrous both to the temporal and eternal interests of men would be

the knowledge of the moment of death. Friendship, anticipating exactly the hour of separation, would often spend in tears that interval which through happy unconsciousness of the approach of the destroyer, is now one of unsuspecting enjoyment. Sad whenever it comes, bereavement would be invested with ten-fold sadness by the long shadow it would cast before it. Besides, as the time of death approaches, some, distracted with terror, would be unfitted for the duties of the present life; while others, throwing off all restraints of prudence, would abandon themselves to indolence or dissipation, saying, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Thus the interests of survivors would suffer incalculably, in consequence of those whose death was drawing near becoming unfitted or indisposed for any further efforts to promote the common good.

Still worse would be the tendency of this knowledge as regards religion. Suppose you knew that you would certainly live ten or twenty years. If now, uncertain of even *one day*, you are tempted to defer repentance,

would not that temptation be still greater when you were sure of *many years*? Would you not be likely to put off all preparation for eternity until the very last? If you felt quite secure that death would not break in upon your revelry, or rouse you from your slumber, would you not be disposed to spend the greater part of life in wicked indulgence, or at least in religious indifference and forgetfulness of God? During such a career, would you not be riveting the chains of evil habit, so that as the end drew on, you would be less capable of repentance, and more inclined to postpone it? This, as will be urged hereafter, is the general tendency of all procrastination. But in the case supposed, that tendency would be more fruitful of evil because the temptation to delay would be itself increased. When all your years had gone but one, you would still be certain of possessing so many months, and therefore would feel safe until the last of these had come. Even then, you would be confident of still enjoying so many weeks; then, of so many days; then, of so many

hours. Having put off till the last year, you would be likely, tempted by a similar certainty, to put off till the last hour; and thus to spend the whole of life in the neglect of life's great end, the glory of Him who gave it.

To preserve us from these evils, God in mercy has withheld from us this knowledge, by ordaining that no one should be able, from his age, health, or circumstances, to foretell his last hour. Therefore none can be sure that they will ever see that future to which they postpone the greatest work they have to do. "Now" is ours, but whether "to-morrow" will ever dawn, who can tell? "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought within himself, saying—What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said—This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul—Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him—Thou fool!

this night thy soul shall be required of thee!" Therefore, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth!"

What is the nature of the work which you postpone until a season so uncertain? While we rejoice that some have obtained mercy at the close of life, yet we must not forget that religion ought to be the chief business of every day. Were we sure of living a thousand years, it would be our highest interest and duty to serve God *now*. We shall recur to this view of the subject. But here we will for a moment adopt the view of those who procrastinate, namely—that the work to be done is simply to save the soul from punishment after death, that this can be performed at any time, and therefore on the last day of life as well as on any other. Consider its importance, even on your own representation. Death will usher you into the presence of the Almighty, before whom you must give an account of the deeds done in the body. Unless, during life, you have obtained forgiveness,

you must then hear the sentence of condemnation—"Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Your happiness or woe during countless ages depends on the performance or the neglect of the work which you postpone. Can then anything equal it in importance? If some work of an hour were to influence the whole of your future career in this world, so that the doing or not doing it would determine whether you would have long life, health, riches, honor, or the contrary—would you treat that work with indifference? But how immeasurably more important is repentance, when on it depends whether you are acquitted or condemned at the great assize—whether you are welcomed into heaven, or thrust down into hell—whether through endless ages you dwell where there is "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore;" or in "outer darkness," where there is "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!"

Repentance is a work not only of supreme importance, but of great difficulty. Many

persons seem to imagine just the contrary. They put it off, because whenever the right time comes, they fancy that they can easily and at once do all that is necessary to prepare for eternity. It is a general rule, that in proportion to the value of a thing is the labor of acquisition. Why should it be supposed that religion is an exception, and that the work of all others the most important, should be of all others the most easy? It is far otherwise. You have to repent, that is, to change your mind in reference to sin, duty, and God. You have to mourn for your transgressions, to confess them with a contrite heart, to pray for pardon, to exercise faith in Christ, and by becoming holy in your character, to be fitted for the enjoyment of a holy heaven—"made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Can you regard this as easy? It is something more than ceasing to indulge in certain definite sins. These must of necessity be given up at the end of life. It would be easy to relinquish them for one day beforehand, in order to escape the punishment due for many days

of indulgence. But will it be easy to hate what you have always loved—to love what you have always hated? Will it be easy to seek God after spending life in trying to forget Him—to pray sincerely and earnestly when prayer has been always neglected—to confide in the Saviour whom you always shunned—and to have your whole tastes and sympathies so changed that the society of angels would be congenial, and the presence and service of God the happiest home of the soul? “Without holiness no man can see the Lord.” Without this holiness there is no true repentance. Is then repentance so easy a work that you can safely adjourn commencing it to an uncertain time?

The Bible does not so represent it. Here we read that it is a labor, and we “must give all diligence;” a race, and we must throw away every incumbrance; a warfare, and we must ply every weapon; a wrestling match, and we must strain every nerve; the gaining of a life by cutting off “a right hand,” by plucking out “a right eye,” by nailing to the

cross and putting to death our old nature of selfishness and sin. "*Labor* to enter into that rest. *Work out* your own salvation with fear and trembling. Let us *lay aside every weight*, and *run with patience* the race that is set before us. Take *the whole armor* of God. *Fight* the good fight of faith. We *wrestle* against principalities and powers. *Crucify* the flesh."

We shall shew on a future page, that this work of securing salvation is so arduous, that the whole of life is not too long for it. But here, for the sake of argument, we are granting the plea of the procrastinator, that it is possible to repent on the last day of life. Still we say that the work is one of immense, of inconceivable difficulty, as well as of infinite importance. You perish eternally if that work is not done; and yet you put off doing it until to-morrow, though you have not the slightest assurance that for you to-morrow will ever dawn! You are urged by the God of Salvation to secure the blessing *now*. This '*now*' is actually yours. To-morrow is not, may never be. Yet you deliberately, repeat-

edly, habitually, put off what is now within reach, to a period when it may forever be beyond your grasp.

Do you act thus in the common affairs of life? If your health or your property is in danger, do you put off exertion until an uncertain future? Perhaps you may — but the consequences are only temporal. You are willing to take the risk. But here the case is different. Eternity hangs on time. Your everlasting destiny depends on what you do now. Can you bear the consequences of failure? Are you prepared for such a risk as *this*?

There are circumstances connected with the present life, in which delay would be regarded as a proof of madness. A mine is about to be exploded. Warning is given. The slow match is lighted. At any moment the spark may reach the powder, and then, as with an earthquake's shock, the ground will be rent, and those fair buildings above be shattered into ruinous heaps. Death must overtake any one lingering there. What would be said of

the man, who, urged to escape and knowing the danger, still loitered about, presuming on the next moment, instead of improving the present? A ship, sailing on the broad Atlantic, springs a leak. Every effort is made to remedy the injury. In vain! The water gains upon the pumps. The truth must be told. The passengers, unconscious of danger, are amusing themselves on deck or in the cabin. But now the captain informs them of their peril. The ship is rapidly settling—she may keep afloat a little longer, but she may sink at any moment: they must, therefore, by boats, rafts, or life-buoys, provide as best they can for their personal safety. If you were one of them would you say—“I must finish this game—or complete this piece of work—or read to the end of this book—and then I will see what can be done: the vessel *may* keep afloat some hours longer, and I will adopt measures of self-preservation by and by?” If the very supposition of such a case seems outrageous, what is to be said of those who are actually doing what is far more foolish, by delaying

repentance, and risking their everlasting salvation?

St. James says—"Go to, now, ye that say To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." How often men resolve what they will do at a time, when, as the event proves, they will be in eternity. They fix work for themselves, little thinking that when the season allotted for it arrives, the words of Solomon will be verified — 'There is no work in the grave whither thou goest.' It is generally of little importance whether what we intend to do is accomplished or not. But suppose a man says—"To-morrow I will repent;" yet, before to-morrow dawns, his "soul is required of him!" He is practically saying—"I will prepare to meet the Judge, after sentence is passed: I will begin to avoid being cast into hell, after its gates have closed on me forever!" Multi-

tudes have thus found themselves in perdition at the very time to which they had postponed their efforts to escape it! May not this be your case also, if you persist in this perilous procrastination?

The Apostle admonishes us to say—"If the Lord will, we will do this or that." Not in words, but perhaps in spirit, you utter the same as regards religion. "If the Lord will, I intend to repent to-morrow. He is merciful. He gives sinners many to-morrows. He has spared me a long time. If He will still bear with me a little longer, I will seek Him." This may have the appearance of piety, but is it not most presumptuous wickedness? The Lord's will is that you repent, not to-morrow, but *now*. You cannot know his will respecting the length of your life, but He has plainly declared it respecting your present duty. Will you disobey his positive command, presuming on his possible forbearance? Will you make his very mercy an excuse for sin, and because his long-suffering gives you hope of to-morrow,

harden yourself in rebellion to-day? If anything could provoke Him to cut you down at once in impenitence, it would be such conduct as yours. Beware lest the parable of the unfaithful steward be verified in you! "If that evil servant shall say in his heart—*My Lord delayeth his coming*; and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of; and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth!" St. Peter tells us that the "day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." And Christ himself says—"Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." When you 'think *not*'—when you fancy you are secure—when you are calculating on many to-morrows, then He may be at hand! To those who put off religion, the present, this very *now*, is such an hour as they think the

Son of man will *not* come. It is therefore just such an hour in which, as He himself tells us, He *may* come!

Perhaps you reply—"But after all, I *may* have a to-morrow—and therefore, though I put off religion *to-day*, I *may* still repent and be saved." Yes. But this '*may*' of yours involves a '*may not*.' The *probability* of your seeking God in time, involves an opposite probability that you *may be too late*. You *may* die before you obtain mercy. You *may*, notwithstanding all your good intentions, be lost forever! Can you delay securing yourself against so fearful a risk, when security is offered to you, and may be obtained *now*?

Learn from your own conduct in other things. If you possess ordinary prudence you insure your house and furniture. Is this because you expect they will be burnt? No. Comparatively few persons actually suffer in this way. You hope such a calamity may never come to you. But it is *possible*. And the evil is so very great when it does come, that the mere chance of it is a sufficient reason

for insuring against the damage which you would suffer. Now consider whether death, to a man who is unprepared for it, is not infinitely worse than the loss of all his property? "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" But death to the impenitent is the loss of the soul. And death is not a chance, but a certainty. You do not expect your house to be burnt down. You *do* expect to die!

Suppose you were certain that your property would be destroyed some time within sixty or seventy years, possibly this very night, but certainly at some time within such a period, would you not insure at once, if you had not done so before? But this is exactly the case with your soul! You *know* that on some day within a limited period, you must die. And if you die uninsured, that is, without repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, you perish eternally! Should not the bare possibility of this taking place before to-morrow, urge you to repent and believe NOW? You may be on the brink of everlasting ruin,

and can you trifle? The fire *may* break out, before the insurance is effected! The mine *may* explode, before you have left it! The ship *may* sink, before you are in the life-boat! You *may* die, while still postponing repentance, and therefore when unprepared! You *may* meet the Judge as your enemy! You *may* be "driven away in your wickedness," you *may* "be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God!" Can you, with so fearful a possibility hanging over you, remain one hour at ease?

When Sodom was about to be destroyed, Lot, warned of the coming catastrophe and urged to make his escape, hesitated and lingered. He was loth to leave his house, his property, his friends. He thought the danger was not imminent. He might wait at least another hour or two. There were no signs of peril. All things continued as they were. The city looked, in the early twilight, as stately and secure as ever. Why such haste to leave it? But the tempest of wrath was about to overwhelm it. So the angels laid hold of his

hand and hurried him away, saying,—‘Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed!’ Even so, reader, this little book would take *thee* by the hand, and urge thee without another moment’s delay, to “flee from the wrath to come.” The *to-morrow* you trust in may never be yours. The only instant of time you are sure of is the present. Therefore, repent NOW!

II.

**THE PRESENT IS THE ONLY PORTION OF TIME IN
WHICH IT IS POSSIBLE TO ACT. THEREFORE,
REPENT NOW.**

RELIGION is urged on your attention. Admitting its truth and importance, you refuse to comply with its claims. But you shelter yourself from the charge of inconsistency by resolving to act at some future time. You imagine that this is really taking a practical step in harmony with your convictions. As every work must have a beginning, you flatter yourself that this is the commencement of your salvation—not merely an introduction to it, but a part of it—perhaps as much as could be expected from you at first. Thus you try to persuade yourself that while resolving for to-morrow you are really doing something towards the duty of to-day.

You are mistaken. To-morrow, as you.

have been reminded, may never be yours. And if so, where is your boasted work? What you only resolve to do, will not have been begun. Your purpose, defeated by death, ends in nothing. What you only intend to do, will be as much left undone as if you never formed such an intention. Of what worth then is that intention?

But let it be granted that you will certainly be spared until that future day to which you postpone repentance. Do you not see that you cannot really act in any future period of life, until it becomes a Now? Every action implies an agent. In order to act we must exist. But we exist only in the present. Therefore we can work only in the present. We have left a past, we are traveling to a future; we can remember the past, we can anticipate the future; but we can act in neither. Intending to do is no more doing, than remembering what is already done. We must wait till the great wheel of time brings the future within reach, and makes 'to-morrow' a 'to-day.' We can work in no moment

of time but that which is a *Now*; and if all we do in this life is resolving to do, we really do nothing.

“But,” say you, “though purposes are not performances, are good intentions altogether worthless? As actions spring from thoughts, may not the intention to act be the most important part of the act itself?” This is true in some cases, but not in the one we are considering. An important distinction must here be made. Whenever the thing we resolve to do at some *future* time, is not a duty or a possibility at the *present* time, the resolution to do it as soon as it becomes obligatory or practicable, may be a real mental commencement of the act itself. It *may* be, but it also *may not* be. For when the difficulties which, at the time we formed our resolution, were only partially foreseen, really exert their counteracting influence, our resolution may give way. Thus it fares with the majority of good intentions. Their value can only be tested when the hour for performance arrives. But when the work can and ought to be done *now*, the opportunity

of testing the intention is presented to us at once. If then I refuse to do now what is both possible and obligatory, of what value is the promise of performance to-morrow? It is contradicted by the very act of postponement. It destroys itself.

We here only refer to the fact which we shall by and by urge as a separate argument, that to repent and turn to God is the duty of every day we live. If then I, to-day, resolve to begin to repent to-morrow, I am at the same time doing and intending. I am actually refusing present obligations while resolving to discharge those which are future. Each day has its own work. To-morrow has more for me to do than I shall accomplish, without my giving it the work of to-day. Each hour must bear its own burden. A day lost cannot be regained from the past, nor can the present be crowded into the future. If I say I will do to-day's duty to-morrow, I deceive myself. I cannot thus shift my work. If it is not done to-day, it is absolutely repudiated to-day.

Here then is a rejection of to-day's duty,

connected with an intention to do to-morrow's. But actions speak louder than intentions. The positive act of rejecting what is present, is a more real thing than the mere purpose to embrace what is future. That purpose then is worthless. It is less than worthless, for present positive disobedience not merely neutralizes but supplants it. It is a case, not of two witnesses equally trustworthy, who contradict each other; but of evidence so overpowering on one side, that the opposite testimony is disregarded. The procrastinator is doing two things which affect his religious condition: he is actually sinning to-day, and resolving to repent to-morrow. These are opposites; but the former is stronger, more emphatic, more real than the latter. We shall recur to this: but here let it suffice to maintain that the mere resolving to attend to religion to-morrow, is doing nothing towards securing salvation to-day.

I therefore deceive myself, if I fancy I am nearer to heaven because I *intend* to set out on the journey at some future time. I cannot

thus escape the charge of inconsistency. I profess to believe that Christ has died to save sinners, and that unless I repent and believe in Him, I must perish. Yet I am neither repenting nor believing. In fact, I resolve that for the present I will persevere in sin, and keep on in the way to hell. And I flatter myself that there is nothing absurd in this conduct, because I *intend* to seek salvation to-morrow! I put off the most important, the most difficult work, to a most perilous uncertainty. I have no security that another hour will be mine, yet I defer to another hour making my escape from a peril impending over me every moment. If I do not live to see the day to which I defer repentance, I perish eternally; if death overtakes me while only postponing, I am cut off without having even begun the work, and the best intentions for the future avail me nothing! Every day, the very last day of life, will have been a day of positive impenitence, and the mere purpose of amendment will not alter the fact of actual, habitual wickedness, persevered in till the end.

If then I should even be spared to see the day to which I presumptuously postpone repentance, I am, as much as in the case just supposed, doing nothing *now*. I have no right to solace myself with the notion that the procrastination of religion is in any degree religion itself. While only resolving to seek salvation to-morrow, I am destitute of salvation to-day. While putting off obedience till to-morrow, I am not practising obedience to-day. O reader, you may please yourself by the notion that you are acting when you are only resolving, but "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." At present you are sowing the solid seed of actual impenitence, mixed with the chaff, light as wind, of good intentions. Rely not on this admixture, lest you verify the threatening which speaks of *sowing the wind, to reap the whirlwind!*

III.

**YOUR GOOD INTENTION MAY NOT LAST TILL
TO-MORROW: THEREFORE, ACT
ON IT NOW!**

THE good intention is a present thing. But the carrying out of the intention is a future thing, and may never become actual. The purpose may be very *sincere*, and yet not be permanent. Or it may remain as a purpose for some future day, and never become a purpose for instant action. Thus it may prove forever worthless. For you must not allow yourself to think that the state of mind which determines to act to-morrow, is the same as that which wills to act at once, or which, when to-morrow comes, will be needed for the doing of what is at present only resolved on.

Let us see how the question now stands. After reading the two preceding arguments,

you perhaps reply—"I admit that I cannot be quite sure I shall have the opportunity to repent to-morrow, but the chances are so much in my favour that I intend to take this for granted. I admit also that I can really repent only at the present moment; but I can at the present moment honestly resolve to repent at some period now future; and in spite of all you say, I consider that my determination to repent to-morrow renders my salvation as sure as to-morrow itself."

For the sake of argument let us grant that you are sure of to-morrow, and that you are quite sincere in your determination to repent then. You infer from this that your repentance is certain to take place. You here make two assumptions which must not be taken for granted. The first is, that your present intention will last till to-morrow. The second is, that the intention to repent to-morrow is the very same state of mind which is required to produce repentance when to-morrow comes. For the intention, sincere to-day, will be worthless unless it lasts until the time fixed for

action. And unless it is the same mental act as that which immediately precedes and produces repentance, the existence, sincerity and permanence of intention will not render repentance itself a reality.

Are you not conscious of having had many sincere intentions which have never resulted in performance? It is the nature of all our thoughts and emotions, when unaccompanied by corresponding practice, to become less vivid as they become more familiar. Compassion for the needy will diminish in proportion as we witness distress without relieving it. The voice of conscience urging us to our duty, will be heard more faintly every time she speaks and we refuse to obey. But while by repetition unheeded impulses to action become feebler, habits of action become stronger. If with less novelty there is less excitement of feeling, there is greater facility of performance. In the absence of this habit of action, the impulse to action becomes weaker without any corrective. Thus in the lapse of time, the most sincere purposes, where the performance

is delayed, become impotent and worthless. Besides, other subjects engage our attention. The importance of what we had purposed is less vividly before the mind, while the difficulties become more distinct as the time of performance approaches. How often does it thus happen that the best intentions die out by insensible degrees, as a fire which blazed up with paper, wood and turpentine when first kindled, but which afterwards, neither stirred nor fed, gradually becomes extinguished.

But the purpose itself is not sufficient, even should it be permanent. It must change its character in order to become a practical impulse. Futurity is its special feature. It easily reproduces itself, but it does not easily transform itself. It hath a numerous progeny, but the children resemble the parent. They are purposes for some period still to come. The present will to perform an act at the present moment, is a very different state of mind from the present purpose to postpone the doing of it—or even the present resolve to do it hereafter. Proofs are abundant. Here is a man addicted

to indulge too much in sleep. He is awakened early and summoned to his work. He thinks of the claims of duty—he reflects on the evils of his indolent habit—he resolves to rise earlier—but he will not begin till to-morrow. So he composes himself to sleep again, but fully determines that next morning he will rise at the proper hour. But when the next morning comes, does he find that the good purpose he had warmed under the pillow of self-indulgence is the very same power which is needed to throw away that pillow—to conquer that self-indulgence? Will he find it to be strong enough to destroy the very cradle in which it was nursed? Is not a much greater effort needed than that which resulted in yesterday's purpose? If he feels nothing more than he did then, he will once more resolve to rise earlier the next morning, and so on from day to day, with only this difference, that each resolution is weaker than the one before. When the relish and excitement of some sinful indulgence have given place to satiety and disgust, is the intention never to repeat the act the same

thing as a refusal, when temptation assails him with fresh attractiveness? Is the promise to render aid to the needy, connected with present denial of such aid, the very same state of mind as that which, when the time of promised performance comes, unlooses the purse-strings, or impels to personal sacrifice of time and toil?

The intention to do our duty at a future time is then essentially different from the will to do it now. It may not last even as a purpose, until the time allotted. But if it does, its nature must be changed before it becomes the cause of action. Again you are admonished not to deceive yourself with good intentions. Imagine not that to postpone repentance is any security for the practice of repentance. To put off a present duty is a poor ground for expecting to perform it at some other time. God commands you to repent NOW. Your own interest makes it infinitely important that you should repent NOW. If you refuse to repent, do so in plain terms, and let your eyes be open to your peril. But do not deceive

yourself by the notion that resolving to repent to-morrow is any security for such repentance taking place. The very fact of your now promising to repent hereafter, shows that you have some conviction of the claims of religion *now*, that you are in some measure inclined to consider those claims *now*. But you put off compliance till to-morrow. How do you know that you will feel to-morrow as much even as you do to-day? Instead of actually repenting to-morrow, as you promise you will, may you not cease to experience those convictions which you do actually feel now? May you not be in a positively worse state, instead of a better? This, we shall proceed to show, will most probably be the case.

IV.

BECAUSE THE DIFFICULTY INCREASES BY DELAY— REPENT *NOW*.

A Roman Governor, notorious both for his public and private vices, was seated with his wife in the audience room of his palace. He held in bondage a Jewish prisoner about whom there had been much public excitement in the province, and against whom many strange charges had been brought, of a nature unknown to Roman courts. Curious to learn somewhat of his history and opinions, and also hoping that the prisoner might be encouraged to offer a large bribe to secure his acquittal, the magistrate sent for him, to explain the nature of the new religion his zeal for which had aroused against him so much enmity.

Such an opportunity was not to be trifled with. Instead of entering on any speculative

questions, the great preacher addressed himself at once to the conscience of his questioner. Instead of seeking to please the man on whom his fate depended, he sought to convince him of his sins. Instead of using the customary language of court flattery, he faithfully warned him of the guilt and consequences of such a career as that he was pursuing. Instead of seeking his own release, he labored to rescue his judge from a far worse captivity, an infinitely greater peril. Astonished at such disinterestedness, awed by such boldness, his scepticism vanquished by those arguments, his conscience startled into new life by those appeals, dreading the wrath of God, terrified by the prospect of eternity, the prince quailed before the prisoner, so as even outwardly to reveal the inward agitation of his spirit. "As Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled!"

He *trembled*, but did he *turn*? He *feared*, but did he *flee*? He was *convinced*, but was he *converted*? He *intended* to be. He would wait awhile. He would think more on the

subject by and by. At present it would be very inconvenient to alter his course of life. He could not now give his mind to subjects so serious. But a more suitable time would come, and then, when he had more leisure for such thoughts, and the difficulties in the way of amendment would be fewer, *then* he would again seek the advice of his eloquent captive. This then was the answer of the trembling ruler, "Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season I will call for thee."

This is more or less the expectation of all procrastinators. They not only make sure of another opportunity, but of an opportunity more suitable than the present. For if the work must be done at some time or other, it is obviously unwise to put it off, unless by so doing some advantage will be gained. Multitudes imagine this will be the case in reference to religion. They expect that on some future day they will be more deeply impressed with its importance; that they will be wiser, stronger, more earnest, and thus better able to perform the work; or that the difficulty will

diminish, and that with even inferior strength, they will more easily accomplish the task to-morrow than to-day. They say with Felix—
“ *Go thy way for this time*—not for all time, but just for the present. It is not convenient for me to hear thee any longer just now. But some other opportunity will occur when I shall be more in the mood to profit by thy advice. I do not wish to dismiss thee altogether. Far from it. I would have thee within call, waiting to be summoned at any moment. Hold thyself ready then to visit me; for I am resolved some day to give thee more fitting audience, and *when I have a convenient season I will send for thee.*”

If you think repentance will be easier hereafter than to-day, you must be expecting either that your circumstances will be more favorable to a religious life, or that you yourself will be more disposed for it. Let us look at both suppositions. The former is so generally held, and by persons whose condition is so dissimilar, that their own conflicting testimony will be sufficient to disprove it. For

the healthy put off religion till they are sick, and the sick till they recover: the young till they are old, and the old till they are older still: the man of leisure till his amusements are less absorbing, and the man of business till he has more repose. Thus multitudes charge their irreligion on the very circumstances which others wait for as better suited than their own for a religious life.

Consider the two most general cases of delay, the one on the plea of health, the other on that of age. Many while in the midst of the enjoyments of life say, "I will wait until some illness separates me from these temptations. Then, in the quietness and leisure of the sick chamber, I will turn my thoughts to God." But multitudes die too suddenly for the execution of such a purpose. Death often approaches stealthily without any premonitory signs. But suppose the contrary. Do the circumstances of sickness always render it a "convenient season?" Often the pain is so severe as to paralyze the mental powers. The sufferer has no capacity for anything beyond

the endurance of his misery. The mind itself sympathizes with the body. The brain, the instrument of the soul, is often enfeebled by illness. A dull indifference to all things and all persons takes possession of the patient. This is often confounded with resignation. Many are thought to be quite willing to give up the world, and are said to die like lambs, whose supposed peace is merely the apathy of disease. In such a condition the mind is unable to attend even to trivial matters. How much less can it comply with the claims of religion?

See what you do in waiting till you are ill? The most important, the most difficult of all tasks, one which requires the utmost possible exercise of whatever power you possess, you postpone to the time when in all probability your faculties will be at the very lowest point of capacity! Would you act so in other things? If you had work to do requiring the nicest exercise of the eye-sight, would you defer it from mid-day till the gloom of evening? If it demanded the greatest muscular effort,

would you wait till you were fatigued with the long labor of the day? And can you be wise in waiting for sickness, as if you would then be better able to “work out your own salvation?”

Multitudes at this moment are bitterly conscious of the folly of such a course. Many a sick chamber is now, while you read this page, a witness to its truth. Their past sins stare them in the face. They feel, as they never felt before, the folly of having so long neglected repentance. How they wish that they had considered this when they were well! But now they feel that the work is too arduous. Their pain is so great—their weariness so distressing—they cannot read—they cannot listen—they cannot collect their thoughts. But, they say,—if God will restore them once more to health, *then* they will serve Him; but not Now! They wait for health, you wait for sickness. But does not their excuse for delay afford a sufficient reply to yours?

Consider the power of habit, both as affecting the plea just considered, and that to which

we shall presently refer. Whatever we have done once, we do more easily a second time. As we repeat the act, our thoughts and our muscles still more readily perform their task, until that which at first required much labor, is performed with scarcely any conscious exertion. On a very rough road, a new effort is needed to drag the carriage over every fresh impediment. Habit, as a skillful engineer, levels the land and lays down rails. Now, the most heavily laden train, whatever the effort needed to set it in motion, moves easily along the groove with an increasing velocity, though impelled by a diminished force. Thus is human toil in providing for the necessities and comforts of life greatly diminished. In the same way habit influences moral conduct. By every repetition of an act we acquire greater facility both in good and in evil-doing.

If you put off repentance, two habits are strengthened; that of actual sin, and that of delay in religion. For we are not one hour in a neutral state. As long as you are putting off the repenting of sin, you are going on in

the commission of it. Every sin renders more easy every subsequent indulgence; and every act of procrastination increases this tendency for the future. You are thus becoming more of an adept, both in committing sin, and in putting off repentance. Every day you run more rapidly the road to destruction, and postpone more readily the effort to turn back. With ever accelerating velocity you rush downward to death; yet while thus rendering necessary greater efforts to check your advance, at every step you throw away some of the little strength which still remains! "Stop! stop! you are approaching the precipice!" "No," you reply, "it is too difficult at present. I will slacken speed when I have gone a little further!" That is, when the peril is nearer, your pace swifter, and your strength less! You are thus most fatally acting, when you fancy you are safely deferring. You are confirming the habit of living in sin. You are also confirming the habit of delaying repentance. The work to be done is being rendered

more difficult, while you are becoming less inclined—that is, less competent to do it.

You are perhaps one of that numerous class who delay repentance till they are older. You say that you cannot be expected to be religious, while your passions are so strong and your temptations so many; but that after a few years you will be better able to obey the stern command of the gospel to “deny yourself” and “mortify the deeds of the body.” It is true that your passions may become less vehement; but it is also true that the habit of indulging them will become more confirmed. The physical impulse may be weaker, but the mental bias will be stronger. The inducement will diminish, but the tendency will increase. The nearer you get to the end of your sinful race, though the prize after which you have been panting will become more evidently worthless, inexorable habit will scourge you to a still swifter pace than before.

Take an illustration from the miser. He has spent a long life hoarding up wealth. The

older he grows the more reluctant he is to part with it, the more anxious he is to increase it. He is now drawing near to the grave. As he can carry none of his money with him, the time rapidly diminishes during which he can make any use of it. And yet, while its value decreases, his grasp of it becomes more firm. The capacity of gratification is less, but the strength of covetousness is greater.

So it is with every sinful habit. There may be no longer the physical power of indulging the outward act, yet the imagination may still cherish it, the mind still assent to it. The moral character of actions is determined by the motive of the agent. Innocence may unconsciously do what looks like gross wickedness; while the most hardened depravity may lurk within the breast of him who is harmless only because he is powerless. Profoundly true is the declaration of the Bible—"As a man *thinketh in his heart*, so is he." A career of sin confirms the thoughts of the heart in sinfulness, and these determine his true character. The body and mind set out together

in the fatal journey; but when the body is worn out and cannot keep up with its more active companion, the mind rushes on alone. A profane man becomes more profane, though he lose the faculty of speech; a murderer more murderous, though deprived of all power to injure. So that when the inducements to sin and the facility of indulgence have alike departed, the tendency to sin, rendered permanent by habit, urges its victim ever downward. He no longer grasps the baubles with which at first the phantom pleasure beguiled him. He no longer sees that phantom itself. It has vanished with a derisive laugh, or turned into the ghastly figure of death. Yet having acquired a certain impetus in the pursuit, he cannot now stop, though there is nothing to pursue but what he would give all he possesses to avoid. No! the power of sin does not cease with its pleasantness. On the contrary, as its charms depart, its strength augments. Beauty fades from the face of the Syren, but her bony grasp holds her victim safe. The more the fetter pinches, the tighter

that fetter binds. The vulture gnaws the vitals, but the iron links of habit, despite the captive's screams, chain him to the rock. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil!"

Do not then postpone repentance in the hope that old age is better able to resist temptation; nor imagine that because your spirits will then be less buoyant, your thoughts will more readily dwell upon religion. The mind, long accustomed to occupy itself with trifles, will not be disposed, at the close of life, when all the powers are enfeebled, to grapple with a subject which demands so much patient attention. The theme which has been habitually banished, will not spontaneously return. You and godliness, so long separated, will be likely to remain so forever. This is verified by facts. How very few who have lived a long life of procrastination, are converted in old age! The wildness of youth may have given place to the sedateness of years, but gravity is not necessarily godliness, and may be quite

as irreligious as gaiety. Amidst that early frivolity, solemn thoughts do sometimes burst upon the soul and startle it into seriousness. But when the sinner has grown old and hardened in procrastination, what can arouse him from that settled, deadly calm which broods over him? The special grace of God alone! But according to human probability, and in accordance with the general methods of the divine dealings—"it is impossible to renew him again unto repentance."

Yield not then to the delusion that your work will be easier by waiting. God may, and sometimes does specially interpose. But we must not presume on this. There are laws relating to mind as regular in their operation as those affecting matter; taking these into consideration we may positively assert that every day's delay of repentance makes the work more difficult. If you do repent hereafter, it will cost you more labour than if you repent at once. But there is a fearful probability that if you refuse to repent now, you will never repent at all.

Perhaps you reply—"Without Divine grace I can never repent. If then that grace is given me to-morrow, I can much more easily repent than without that grace to-day." It is quite true that without Divine grace we shall never repent of sin. But bear in mind that the grace of God operates in connexion with our own efforts. If salvation is spoken of as a divine work, it is also spoken of as a human one. If "God worketh in us to will and to do," we are to "work out our own salvation." Jesus who said "Without me ye can do nothing," said also—"Change your minds and believe the good news. Ask and ye shall receive: seek and ye shall find. Come unto me. Take my yoke upon you. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." There is a work which *you* have to do. To this work, Christ, the giver of all grace, summons you now. And will you presume to postpone obedience on the plea that He has not given you sufficient grace—thus charging your sin on Him?

Is not God, at this moment, gracious and merciful? Does He not at this moment offer grace to you, and urge you to accept it? Does He not at this moment assist you in some measure, by his Holy Spirit? Have you no religious advantages, no knowledge, no convictions of sin, no inward impulses towards a better life? Is not all this to be attributed to Divine grace?

What more are you waiting for? Solemn warnings? These you have already had. Invitations? They are repeated to you even now, as you read this book. Strivings of the Spirit? These also you have felt and resisted. Your present putting off repentance is a putting away of the Holy Ghost, to whom it is owing that you feel repentance needful. If you improve what you have, will not more be given? But where is the promise for those who trifle with the gift of God, and “do despite unto the Spirit of grace?” Instead of expecting more to-morrow, should you not rather expect less? Jesus is now saying—“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If

any man open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." How much longer do you intend to keep Him there? While postponing religion until you receive more grace, are you not practically saying that He must knock louder before you intend to take any pains to admit Him to your heart? But will He always thus wait upon your leisure? Will the king much longer stand and urge the acceptance of his royal pardon on a rebel who trifles with his long-suffering by saying—"If I keep Him waiting longer, He will be more tempting in his offers, more earnest in his appeals, and more powerful in his persuasions?"

O sinner! will you dare thus to tamper with the Almighty? Will you be bargaining with him? Will you refuse his gift to-day, presuming that He will offer more to-morrow? Will you plead the grace you expect, as an excuse for resisting the grace you have got? O beware! He may, instead of increasing, withdraw his gift. The Spirit may be so resisted as to leave you alone. The sacred flame

may be so quenched as to go out. The words spoken of the Jews may be verified in your case—"My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust, and they walked in their own counsels!" Jerusalem had her day of grace, but abused it. Instead of still receiving more, that which she had but which she abused, was taken away, and she was punished for that abuse. Jesus, "full of grace," wept over that guilty and doomed city, saying—"If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes!" The present is your season of grace. Do not waste it in presumptuous expectations of some day of still stronger light. The night may be fast closing in upon you for ever! Work while it is called to-day! The "Holy Ghost saith—*To-day*, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart!" If, by waiting for more grace, you class yourself with those who "tempted Him and proved Him," God may class you with them in the

threatening—"Unto whom I swear in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest."

To sum up our argument—*The difficulty increases by delay; therefore, repent now.* If circumstances seem hostile to-day, other circumstances will hinder you to-morrow. If you wait till there is no difficulty, you will be more foolish than the rustic of the poet, who stood on the river-bank watching till all the water should have flowed away before he would attempt to cross. You have no reason to suppose that circumstances will be more favorable for repentance at any future period than at present. But you are sure that habit strengthens by every repetition of an act. And it is evident that the longer you delay repentance, the longer you continue in sin. So that a two-fold habit is thus confirmed; that of a life of sin, and that of putting off the turning from such a life. Thus the difficulty of the work to be done, and the tendency to postpone the doing of it, increase together. You are becoming more and more inclined to put off the

performance of that which, the longer it is put off, becomes increasingly formidable.

See then your position. The chances of there being a to-morrow at all lessen every day, because it is certain that a day is coming to every one which will be absolutely the last. But the longer you delay repentance, the stronger the habit of delay becomes. So that as the chance of there being any to-morrow becomes less, your tendency to put off till to-morrow becomes greater! Every act of sin gives sin a stronger mastery over you, and yet you put off till to-morrow, as a more convenient season, though by the very act of putting it off you render it less convenient! You hope to be willing to repent to-morrow, although you are unwilling to repent to-day; and you are unwilling to repent to-day, because you hope to be willing to-morrow. You are foolish to-day, yet in this very foolishness you predict that you will be wise to-morrow. Relying on this prediction, you postpone an act which, by that very postponement, becomes less likely of accomplishment.

Like a foolish fly caught in the crafty spider's web, you feel yourself entangled, but will not try to escape. You might, by struggling vigorously, break away. But you say—*Not now! to-morrow!* But while you are waiting, your subtle foe skillfully, quietly, constantly winds his invisible but potent film more and more securely round you. You say that the work of escape is too difficult now, but that you will try *to-morrow!*

You are inhaling chloroform at a time when you have most important business to transact. Under its stupifying influence you feel indisposed for exertion. By a great effort you could, if you started up at once, throw aside the chloroform and begin the work. But you say—"Wait awhile till I have inhaled a little more, and then I will try." O reader, the indifference you feel to religion is the effect of the devil's chloroform. Inhale a little more, and sleep becomes death. Now, while you may, arouse yourself! Breathe the pure air of divine truth and love! Rush from the fatal chair of the sorcerer. Begin at once the great

business of your salvation. *Now* is the accepted time !

A deadly serpent has sprung upon you. He is coiling himself around you. More and more firm becomes his grasp. Now his fangs are fastened in your flesh. He drinks your life-blood. Every moment he becomes fiercer and stronger by what he feeds on. Every moment you become fainter and feebler. Why do you not struggle to throw off the reptile? Why do you not cry aloud for help? You reply—“ This I intend to do by and by. Now it is too difficult, but I expect it will be easier to-morrow, and then I will begin!” O reader, do you not see that if your enemy is strong to-day, he will be stronger to-morrow? that if you are weak to-day, you will be weaker to-morrow? and that he will be stronger and you weaker by that very delay? O then, commence the conflict NOW !

V.

THE WHOLE OF LIFE IS NOT TOO LONG FOR THE WORK OF SALVATION : THEREFORE, BEGIN *NOW*.

Many persons regard religion as simply an expedient for escaping from hell; a work which must be done before death, but for which all days are equally suitable, and any one day sufficient. Even on this supposition we have shown that it is wise to repent *now*; because we are only sure of to-day; because we can only work to-day; because the desire may not survive to-day; because the work is easier to-day. Procrastination, though with the most sincere determination to repent hereafter, exposes us to the risk of dying before that day arrives; leaves the work itself not even commenced; neglects an opportunity when we do in some measure feel its importance, for another when we may be altogether indifferent respecting it, and when the habit, both

of the practice of sin and the delay of repentance, must render repentance far more difficult than it is now. Thus we have endeavored to prove that repentance should be set about *at once*, even on the supposition of its being a single act, the only object of which is to secure deliverance from hell.

That such is a most inadequate view of religion has already been incidentally noticed. But the great importance of the subject demands for it renewed and fuller consideration. In the course of our first argument we urged that even supposing repentance were the work of one day, it is a work of so much difficulty that it is most unwise to put it off to an uncertain period. And in our last argument we showed that the longer it is delayed, the greater is the labour which must be undergone when the day to which it is postponed arrives. But now we go further, and say that religion is so important and so difficult a work, that no one may safely say he can spare a single day from the prosecution of it. Instead of waiting till we have less time to spend upon it, we ought

to feel that the longest life is not too long to devote to it.

Salvation is much more than escape from punishment, it is deliverance from sin. Jesus Christ was sent to bless us "in turning away every one of us from his iniquities." In believing on Him we not only obtain pardon through his blood, but we become holy by the influence of his in-dwelling Spirit. Though pardoned at once, we are not at once made perfect in purity. This is an arduous, a progressive work. Salvation in its full sense implies conformity to Jesus as well as reliance upon Him; or rather such a reliance as necessarily leads to our walking in his steps, and cultivating his spirit. It is a change of heart, a transformation of character, a new life. It is the humbling of pride, the curbing of the passions, the destruction of self-will. It is the subjugation of appetite to reason, of impulse to conscience, of the flesh to the spirit. It is the undoing the work of all former years, the untwisting the coils which the devil had long been winding round us, and the training us to

new habits of thought and action. It is the turning back of the full tide of selfish, worldly, and vain desires, and the steady flow of the soul towards holiness and God. It is not simply the avoiding sin, but the abhorring it; not chiefly through fear of punishment, but from love to the Redeemer. It is the heart which once regarded its own pleasure as the highest good, seeking as its chief end and supreme delight the glory of its Maker. It is the prodigal coming back to his Father, and, with tastes, desires, habits changed, living as a child at home, contented, happy, confiding, submissive, and, by a course of life entirely new, proving the sincerity of his repentance and his gratitude. It is nothing less than becoming a "new creature;" being "born again;" "old things passing away, and all things becoming new."

If this is salvation, can we regard the attainment of it as a work to be easily performed whenever we please, and which we can afford to put off till the close of life? Ought we not rather to feel that not a day, not an hour should

be lost before we set about it? "Virtue," says an old Divine, "is not a mushroom, that springeth up in one night, when we are asleep, or regard it not; but a delicate plant, that groweth slowly and tenderly, needing much pains to cultivate it, much care to guard it, much time to mature it in our untoward soil, in this world's unkindly weather. Happiness is a thing too precious to be purchased at an easy rate. Heaven is too high to be come at without much climbing. The crown of bliss is a prize too noble to be won without a long and tough conflict. Neither is vice a spirit that will be conjured down with a charm. It is not an adversary that can be knocked down at a blow, or despatched with a stab. Whoever shall pretend that at any time, easily, with celerity, by any mysterious knack, a man may be settled in virtue or converted from vice, common experience abundantly will confute him, which showeth that a habit (setting miracles aside) cannot otherwise be produced or destroyed, than by a constant exercise of acts suitable or opposed thereto."

You perhaps reply—"This seems to limit the grace of God, who is surely able to save me at any time, without all this toilsome process on my part. The penitent thief was pardoned at the very close of a wicked life, and went immediately to Paradise. The labourers who entered the vineyard at the eleventh hour received the same wages as those who had toiled all the day. Why then may I not hope that if I begin to repent even at the close of life, I may obtain salvation?"

Nothing can be farther from the purpose of this book than any limiting of the mercy of that God who says—"As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his wickedness and live." Every sinner, who truly turns to Him, will be forgiven. "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out:"—*on no account*, and therefore not on account of the sinner having neglected to come until the last day of his life. This is unquestionable, glorious truth. But salvation has another aspect, equally scriptural, equally important, and it is to this that your

attention is now directed. Doubt not the grace of God; but abuse it not by delaying to make those efforts which grace has itself prescribed. You have a work to do as well as a gift to receive; a work inseparably connected with the gift; a work essential to salvation; a work demanding your best energies every day you live. If God, on his part, "worketh in you to will and to do," you on your part are to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Surely these words imply not only severe, but continual and persevering toil, if you are to "lay hold on eternal life."

The cases you quote are too often wrested from their true function, and made an excuse for presumptuous delay. The thief was pardoned, but he was penitent. If, like him, you repent, you may be sure, like him, of forgiveness. But can you make sure of repentance? God has promised that all who seek shall find; but He never promised that they who now deliberately reject, shall hereafter seek. If, according to the preceding chapter,

the difficulty increases by delay, the longer you wait the less likely you are to seek, and therefore the less likely to find. We have no reason to suppose that the thief had ever heard the gospel before. His case then is totally unlike yours, if, invited to repent now, you put off accepting the mercy which he embraced at once. Besides, can you for a moment imagine that had he been taken down from the cross alive, and survived many years, he would have suspended his religion until death again approached? Plead then no longer this illustrious example of divine love, as an excuse for trifling with that love; nor expect that because at the last hour Christ forgave the thief being penitent, that He will by a miracle of grace save you, if, unlike that thief, you now resolve to postpone repentance. It has been said that one such instance is recorded that none may despair; and only one, that none may presume.

Neither ought the parable of the labourers to give any encouragement to procrastinators. The object of Christ was to shew that the Jews,

though for many generations they had enjoyed the privileges of God's peculiar people, were not to receive greater benefits from the Gospel than the Gentiles, who now, as at the eleventh hour, were called to work in the vineyard. But even granting that the parable may be applied to the case of individuals, it certainly cannot apply to *you*. When the workmen were asked why they stood in the market-place all the day idle, they replied—"Because no man hath hired us." Can *you* say this? Have you not repeatedly been invited to repent, that is to change your mind, and instead of being the slave of the devil, to devote yourself to the service of God? Is not the Lord of the vineyard at this moment waiting to "hire" you? You cannot then plead this parable as an excuse for remaining idle. Yet you are practically saying—"It is only the third hour of the day, or the sixth, or at most the ninth. I will wait a little longer, for if I begin as late as the eleventh hour, I shall receive as much as they who have 'borne the labour and heat of the day!'"

O reader, do not thus “wrest the scriptures unto your own destruction!” Do not imagine that if God summons you to work now, it is not necessary to begin at once. Do not make so sure that if your purpose to give all but the dregs of life to the devil, and only the dregs to Christ, the eleventh hour will find you in the vineyard. But even if it should, can you imagine that your condition would be exactly the same as if you had been spending all your days in the service of God? This does not seem reasonable. This certainly is not scriptural. All who die penitent die pardoned. But salvation is conformity to Christ; and therefore though all who repent enter heaven, it does not follow that they all make equal attainments in salvation. The greater the toil the greater the progress. “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” There are different degrees in glory, as there are different attainments in grace. There is a recompensing with “ten cities,” and a recompensing with “five.” There is such a

thing as men "laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." Christ commands us to "lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven;" implying that we are to do this by continued, repeated, persevering efforts, even as men accumulate treasures upon earth. Though nothing we do can strictly deserve any recompense, yet we are told that he who gives only "a cup of cold water" to one of Christ's little ones, "shall in no wise lose his reward." Can he who lets slip all opportunities during life of thus serving Christ and of laying up treasure in heaven, be no loser by such neglect, because he obtains pardon on his death-bed? Though he may gain heaven, can he expect "an abundant entrance?" This by the Apostle Peter is represented as dependent on the efforts put forth to attain it. "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness

charity; for if ye do these things ye shall never fall: *for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*"

Can we then afford to lose any time, when each day's work so tells upon our eternal destiny? St. Paul exhorts us to be "*always abounding* in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as our labour is not in vain in the Lord." Too much cannot be done. The longest life is not too long for such a service. Christians are not merely to work, but to "abound" in it: not for a short period, but "always." How can you then with so much levity delay even to commence? What will it profit you, if, between now and your anticipated repentance at the close of life, you were to gain the whole world? Would this be any equivalent for the loss of that time from the work of salvation? The Apostle Paul had lived many years before his conversion; he also lived many years after. Can you imagine him saying "I repented too soon—for I might have gone on longer in the enjoyment of ease, affluence and

honour?" Can you imagine that if he had known he had twenty years more to live, he would have been willing to abstract one single year, one single day of it from the great work of making sure of salvation? Hear what he says—"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect—but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus!" If such a man as St. Paul felt that he could not remit his efforts one single day, how much less ought *we* to suppose that we can lose another day before we *commence* the work! If those who have attained to the happy assurance that they belong to God's called and chosen ones, are nevertheless exhorted to "*give diligence to make their calling and election sure;*" can you, who are destitute of this hope, spend in indolent delay a single hour that might be employed in obeying the Divine Call, and thus participating in the privileges of God's elect?

Many other scriptural proofs might be given that religion is a work for the whole of life; and therefore should be attended to *now*. We are told that God, who renders "to every man according to his deeds," will bestow eternal life on those who "*by patient continuance in well-doing* seek for glory, and honour, and immortality." Christians are exhorted to "walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, *redeeming the time;*"—to "run with patience the race that is set before them;"—to "build themselves up in their most holy faith, and keep themselves in the love of God;"—to "continue in prayer, and watch in the same;"—to "pray without ceasing;"—to "go on unto perfection," and to be "filled with the fruits of righteousness." These exhortations are addressed to those who have already repented, who have found mercy, and who are rejoicing in the hope of glory. Yet even they have no time for trifling. A solemn issue is pending. They are fleeing from hell, but its armies are in hot pursuit. They are reaching forth after heaven, but they have not yet crossed its threshold. The ground is

spread with snares. The arrows of temptation fly thick and fast. Satan is ever plotting their ruin ; now lurking in ambush to fall on them when off their guard ; now, undisguised, casting at them his fiery darts, or in deadly struggle striving once more to regain possession of his prey. But God is "working in them to will and to do." The Holy Spirit "helpeth their infirmities." Jesus, without ceasing, intercedes. Good angels minister to them in the strife. Sundays, bibles, sermons, sacraments, all means of grace are appointed for their succour. As children, they are under constant training. They are chastened by great and divers trials, for the exercise and maturing of their faith and patience. The refiner's furnace has often to be heated for them. They must be "salted with fire" if they are to be acceptable sacrifices. Nothing which God has kindly ordained for their help, can safely be dispensed with. They are convinced they need it all. They feel they have no time to lose. They are like men racing for a prize, who will not turn aside, nor loiter in the course, but who press straight on,

turning neither to the right hand nor to the left. The most eminent Christians, those who are the most safe for eternity, are those who are thus convinced that there is not a single *Now*, in which salvation does not demand their chief exertions. They, who possess in fullest degree that which you have not begun to seek—they are the persons who will most emphatically tell you that if they were sure of living a hundred years, they dare not suspend for one day the work for which you seem to think a single day enough! Be not deceived! religion is for every day: the whole of life is not too long for working out your salvation: therefore, begin *Now*.

VI.

SIN INFLICTS PRESENT EVILS. AVOID THEM BY REPENTING NOW.

Perhaps you think that all the harm sin can do you is in another world; and therefore, that if you wait till the close of life, you will as much escape the evil consequences of ungodliness as if you repented at once. You are mistaken. For consider the uncertainty to which we alluded in the first chapter. You may not see to-morrow! But if you should, still meanwhile you *cannot be sure of it*. You are always liable to be haunted by the terrible apprehension that *you may* be cut off in your sins, that you may at any moment be hurried into eternity, impenitent, unsaved! Is not this a present evil? Yes—so great an evil, that you are conscious of deliberate efforts to counteract it. You irrationally strive to dismiss from

your mind a consideration solemnly true, because it would interfere with your business, embitter your pleasures, scare you in your sleep. Is not the painful effort you make, an evil? Is not the unimproved alarm attending the frequent failure of the effort, an evil? You try to forget you may be on the brink of hell, yet you often start as if you heard the roar of its thunder, and saw the fearful gleam of its fiery lake. Is not this a present positive evil, which might be avoided by repenting *now*?

But if you feel secure against danger, you are at least conscious of deferring a most important and difficult work. You know it must be done, yet you put it off. You have not the present toil, but you have the fretting conviction that it has to be encountered. By delaying any unpleasant necessity, we add the pain of anticipation to that of experience. It is always wise to avoid the former by hastening the latter. Let us do at once what must be done, rather than be daily burdened by the consciousness of neglect, and the dread of

performance. Whenever you think of religion at all, you must feel oppressed by the conviction that there is a work to be done before you die, ever increasing in difficulty, yet not commenced. Would it not be better to avoid the present positive evil of such a state of mind, by repenting *now*?

Moreover, every day you wait, you are adding to the list of sins for which you must give account. That is a fearful passage which speaks of sinners in their "hard and impenitent hearts, treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath!" You are now, by delaying repentance, actually piling up the mountain of condemnation and ruin which threatens to crush you! Every day you defer repentance you add to the heap! If the catastrophe is future, the evil is being prepared now! But you say you hope to avoid the catastrophe by repenting before you die. Consider what was said under the preceding chapter, and ask yourself if you can be quite sure that even if forgiven, you will be no loser by such a course? But at least, you are heap-

ing up a store of unhappy memories. If God forgets your sins, the pardoned sinner himself cannot, at least in this world. Take the testimony of those who have obtained mercy after years spent in wickedness. How their sins often weigh upon their spirits! How gladly, had they to live life over again, would they forego all the pleasures sin ever gave them, if from no other motive, to escape the grief which the thought of those sins now costs them! How they experience the truth of the combined promise and threatening of Scripture—"Then shall ye remember your own evil ways and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your transgressions." "And I will establish my covenant with thee, and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; that thou mayst remember and be confounded and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God."* You are laying up in store such

* Ezekiel xvi. 61, 63 : xx. 43 : xxxvi. 26-31.

memories! You are feeding such a worm! You are knotting such a scourge! You are doing this *now!*

Above all, bear in mind, that now, while delaying repentance, “the wrath of God abideth on you.” Not only will He manifest it towards transgressors at the final judgment—He feels it *now*. He is compassionate—He waits to pardon—but if men reject or deliberately trifle with his mercy, “He is angry with the wicked every day.” It is an awful consideration for any one, that God is angry with him! This is your case while procrastinating! It matters not that you mean to repent hereafter. You are not repenting *now*. Therefore you are *sinning now!* And therefore God is angry with you now! His eye is never taken off you—He sees you through and through—His hand is ever over you—He follows your every step—and you are at enmity! He who made, sustains, and could in a moment destroy you; from whom you cannot escape, from whom you cannot hide,—he is angry with you *now!* All his attributes are arrayed against

you *now*! His justice, wisdom, truth, love, unite in condemning you *now*. His omnipresence pursues you *now*. His omnipotence is ready to punish you *now*. You are degraded *now*—leagued with the devil *now*—an enemy to God *now*—frowned on by Heaven *now*. Even should you be pardoned hereafter, to be in such a condition *now*, for a single hour, is a fearful, unutterable evil! O avoid it by repenting *now*!

VII.

GODLINESS CONFERS PRESENT BENEFITS: SECURE THEM BY REPENTING NOW.

Let it be granted that you will be alive and fulfil your purpose of repentance to-morrow; still the question may be urged—why wait? As there are present evils to be shunned, so there are present advantages to be secured. Religion is not, as many suppose, a life of misery here purchasing a life of happiness hereafter, nor is it a mere passport to pleasures which cannot be tasted till we die! It is not a heavy tax to pay, but a priceless and present gift to receive. It is God's best boon to man. It is intended to make us happy now by raising us out of the degradation into which sin has thrust us. Jesus, God's ambassador of Love, visits us in our fallen, lost condition, and offers to lift us up from the mire, to cleanse us

from our filth, to cure our leprosy, to heal our wounds, to impart to us a new life, to instil into us purer tastes, to stir us with nobler aspirations, to qualify us for higher employments, to make us partakers of a purer and a more abiding joy than sin or the world can ever bestow. We are summoned in the Gospel to a plentiful banquet, a marriage supper. For though connected with toil and self-denial, godliness is not a fast, but a feast;—a feast at which we are invited to partake not only in heaven hereafter, but on earth *now*. Pardon full and free—the favor of God—the honor of serving Him—the privilege of intercourse with Him—joy and peace in believing—the blessed hope of immortality—these are offered *now*, why then defer accepting them?

A prisoner under condemnation waits in his cell the summons of the executioner. His body is weighed down with heavy chains; his mind with the still heavier dread of a violent and shameful death. But a pardon is offered him, with immediate release from captivity and restoration to his home. Does he say—

“Doubtless the offer will hold good to-morrow as well as to-day, so I will remain yet longer in my cell?” Though he were sure of liberty to-morrow, why should he wait if he can enjoy it *now*? And why, O sinner, bound by the chain of thy sins, under the condemnation of the law, exposed to the penalty of death,—why wait one moment in thy dark dungeon, when thou mayest escape to light and liberty at once?

If you were a destitute beggar lying in the street, and some compassionate friend were to bring you warm clothing, wholesome food, and the offer of a comfortable home, would you say—“If I can have them to-morrow I will wait here till then, hungry and cold?” And will you delay feasting at the banquet of divine love, putting on the white raiment of Christ’s righteousness, and dwelling safely in God, as the home of the soul? If a large fortune were presented to you, would you say—“It is very desirable—it will be very useful—I will thankfully take it—but not just now?” Though sure of possessing it in a year’s time, would you deprive yourself of the advantages

of it meanwhile? Would a banished courtier, if invited to return to the palace, and to enjoy again the friendship of his prince, voluntarily lengthen the period of his exile and disgrace? If your earthly Sovereign were to command your immediate attendance in order to confer some high honor on you, would you put it off till to-morrow? And will you, who might this day become possessed of heavenly and incorruptible treasure, remain in poverty? Will you, who are summoned back from the exile into which sin has driven you, delay your return to God? Will you, whom the King of kings is now willing to receive to a private audience, to treat with distinguished favor, to ennoble by special honors—will you, who may at once participate in the privileges and joys of the children of God, wait till to-morrow? Can you be happy too soon? Can you too soon experience the “peace which passeth all understanding;” the “joy which is unspeakable, and full of glory?”

VIII.

DUTY TO GOD DEMANDS REPENTANCE *NOW*.

Thus far the lower motives of self-interest have been chiefly appealed to. We here rise higher. Even if no hell followed a course of sin, and if Godliness promised no heaven, we ought not to put off repentance one single day, because of this highest of all reasons—God commands obedience *now*. In condescending kindness He alarms and allures us; He shows what miseries we incur, what pleasures we lose, by irreligion; but He also teaches us to serve Him because it is *right*.

As Creator, He possesses the claims of Absolute Proprietor. If He endowed us with all our faculties, and preserves us in the possession of them each day, reason itself tells us that we should employ them in obedience to his will. The first and great command of conscience and of Scripture is, to love the Lord our God with

all our heart. He is not only Creator and Ruler, but He is most holy, most wise, most kind; so that we are under all conceivable obligations to acknowledge that "the chief end of man is to glorify God." He has made known to us his will by his beloved Son. The commands of such a Sovereign, communicated by such an Ambassador, ought to be obeyed simply because they are his commands.

But we have disobeyed. Yet are we invited to seek forgiveness, and henceforth to love and serve our Creator and Redeemer. His merciful command to us as sinners is this: "Trust in Him whom I have sent; repent, and believe the gospel." He commands this *now*. It is my duty *at once*. Every day He proclaims his will, but am I to infer that I may choose any day for complying with it? Every day He waits to receive me, but shall I presume to take my own time for making submission? If I, a condemned rebel, am summoned to lay down my arms under the promise of immediate forgiveness, do I not fearfully increase my crime if I say—"I will accept the offer here-

after?" I thus admit I am a rebel, but resolve to go on rebelling! For let no one suppose that a promise to serve God to-morrow is anything but a determination to rebel against Him to-day. If our own salvation is a work for every day, so also obedience is not a debt to be paid once for all, but a constant service which we are bound to render continually. If then I am postponing it, I am meanwhile absolutely repudiating it. I dare to look up to the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe, and say—"It is my duty to serve Thee, and when I feel it easy and convenient I intend to begin to do so, but for the present I choose to go on a little longer in my sin!"

Suppose a check or a stoppage were to happen in the physical universe for one single day. Suppose the heavenly bodies ceased to move in their appointed orbits—the sun to shine, the earth to yield to its attraction, the atmosphere to engirdle the globe, the ocean to keep its bounds. Suppose all the powers of nature should thus cease, even for an hour, to obey the Great Ruler! How fearful would be the

spectacle ; how terrible its results ! But such an event is impossible. Yet no amount of confusion and disaster in the physical universe could be half so lamentable as the disorder and misery introduced by sin into the world of mind. Irrational things obey the Creator unconsciously, by a necessary law ; but He has endowed you with the higher faculty of yielding Him a *voluntary* homage. Will you abuse this freedom by choosing to do what the material universe is unable to do ? Will you for one single day stand forth amidst the countless obedient subjects of his dominion, and say to them—“ I differ from you in this, that I am endowed, like God himself, with reason and a will ; and I choose to differ from you in this, also, that whereas you every moment obey your Creator, I intend to put off obedience till to-morrow !”

But ask how such deferring of duty is regarded between man and man. Would a private soldier dare to say to his commanding officer, I will attend to orders to-morrow ? What would be the worth of a servant who,

when required to do a certain work at once, should say, "I will attend to it when it suits my convenience?" If you were a master or employer, what would you think of those who were under every obligation to render you cheerful and prompt obedience, telling you that they should take their own time to attend to your wishes? What would be your feelings if your own child, tenderly nurtured and beloved, were to say—"Father, I don't intend to honor and obey you till to-morrow?" Would not this be an act of unnatural and daring disobedience to-day? But thus you are treating Him who, as your Master and Father, has every claim on your service and love *now*. He himself says—"A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master. If then I be a Father, where is my honor, and if I be a Master, where is my fear, saith the Lord of Hosts!" He is *always* our Master, He is *always* our Father, and as his claims are never suspended, so our obedience is always due: every morning that dawns upon us, every evening that darkens around us, every hour that strikes,

every pulse that beats, reïterates his appeal. The time we have still to live, in no degree affects his claims *now*. Were we sure of a thousand to-morrows, and were we equally sure there would be no day of retribution, duty to our Maker demands repentance **NOW!**

IX.

GRATITUDE SHOULD PROMPT YOU TO REPENTANCE *NOW.*

Are you insensible to the claims of *right*? then listen to those of *love*! If the majesty of God does not awe you, let his mercy melt you. He, the Creator and Ruler, condescends to entreat *you* to be reconciled! He delighteth in mercy, and wishes to bestow on you that mercy *now*! The Father from whom you have wandered now stands with open door, and earnestly invites you home! “Return, ye back-sliding children!” Can you hesitate? The Son of God is *now* waiting to bestow on you the salvation He purchased with his blood. He appeals to you, saying—“Come unto me!” He takes you by the hand to lead you to the throne of grace, where he himself will plead your cause. Shall such a friend be

despised and rejected for one single hour? However sure you may be of repenting to-morrow, will you *now* insult him by delay? The Holy Spirit is now striving within you for your salvation. He is counselling, warning, encouraging, entreating you *now*. Will you any longer resist and grieve Him? If you have any generous feelings, a small token of kindness, even from an inferior, draws forth a prompt response: still more from one greatly your superior, and from whom you have merited contrary treatment. Yet you close your ear against the loving voice of God! "He waiteth to be gracious!" — *waiteth* to show kindness! Shall the Lord of Heaven stand waiting to show kindness to a rebel, and shall that rebel delay to accept it?

Reader! before you lay down this book, suffer it to plead with you a little longer. Despise not its warnings! Censure the author if you will—blame the book, its language, its method—toss it aside, never open it again—but, in the name of a God of love, and as you

value your eternal salvation, trifle not with its message! Your soul is in danger! While putting off repentance, you are traveling towards hell. Death watches his opportunity to slam the doors upon you! Unless you repent, you perish! You know this, but comfort yourself with the intention to repent to-morrow! To-morrow? The irrevocable sentence may be pronounced to-morrow! You may be “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing your teeth,” to-morrow! It is not a rare event for sinners to be damned, who were always intending to be saved. For every soul in hell who determined to persevere in wickedness, there are a thousand who did just what you are doing—they promised to repent *to-morrow!* You are not warned against a danger to which few persons only are exposed. The rapid tide from which this book tries to snatch you is sweeping multitudes all around you to perdition.

Say not—“a *little* sleep, a *little* slumber!” Are you sure of a little hour in which slumber will be safe? You may be sure, from past

experience, that the little slumber you demand will lead to a little more. Thus the whole of life may be wasted in the bed of the sluggard, and the trumpet call to judgment may be the first sound that scares you from your dreams! O listen to the voice of warning *now!* "Awake, thou that sleepest," awake *now!* "Seek the Lord while He may be found," seek him *now!* "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," believe *now!* Confess to Him your sins, ask pardon through his blood, rely on his atonement, implore the help of his Spirit, devote yourself entirely to his service! Do it *now!* "Strive to enter into the strait gate" *now!* Offer the prayer—"God be merciful to me, a sinner," *now!* Too much time has been wasted already. Lose no more! This may be your only opportunity! Seize it *now!*

It is the devil who suggests it would be better to wait. "He was a liar from the beginning!" Better to wait? Does death wait? Does the judgment wait? Will he himself wait as soon as he gets the signal to seize you

as his prey forever? While you are waiting does the wheel of your life stand still, and the thread of your probation cease to be untwined? Have you an unlimited store of days to trifle with? Can you tell that when you next thrust your hand into that chest of opportunities, you will not find it empty? May not the one you are now trifling with be the very last? Why do you act as if sure of twenty years? Are you sure of twenty hours—of twenty minutes—of a single second beyond this very now?

What is it you are putting off to this uncertainty? The work on which depends the question of ages of bliss or woe! If your house were in flames, would you wait till to-morrow before you tried to put out the fire? If your leg were broken, would you delay having it set? If you had been poisoned, would you put off taking an antidote? And will you postpone the saving of that soul, which is infinitely more precious than all the world contains? Neglect every other business—trifle with your property, your health, your life—

this would be wisdom compared with delaying for one day the salvation of the soul !

But you comfort yourself with the thought that though you defer repentance till to-morrow, you are encouraging good intentions to-day ! Of what value will they be if you die before they are fulfilled ? If the law apprehends you in the act of theft, will the plea avail that if you had escaped you intended to lead an honest life ? If you linger in the city of Destruction, will the purpose to flee screen you from the tempest of fire when it bursts ? A good intention to be religious to-morrow is only a bad resolve to remain wicked to-day. But it shows you have some sense of the importance of repentance. This even may be gone to-morrow ! improve it *now* ! If you have difficulties to-day, you will have other and greater to-morrow. The devil, who persuades you to wait, knows that "you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Therefore the Holy Ghost says "*To-day*, harden not your heart." Therefore we are to "exhort one another *daily*, while it is called *to-day* !" The longer you

wait, the harder will be the toil. You pamper two deadly foes, the habit of practising wickedness, and the habit of deferring repentance. You are daily becoming more of an adept in both these methods of suicide. Are you not then mad to think you will ever have a more convenient season than now? What? Find the path more readily when you have wandered from it more widely? Tear up a tree more easily when it is rooted more deeply? Draw a nail more quickly when it is clenched more firmly? Stem a torrent more safely when it rolls more rapidly? The poisoned robe clings to you every day more tightly—off with it now! lest if you wait your very skin must be torn away with it!

But suppose you were sure of repenting tomorrow, and that delay would not increase the difficulty: still you should repent *now*. Religion is a work for *every* day! There is so much to be done, that those who are most diligent feel that there is not a moment to be lost. Besides, religion preserves from present evils, and bestows present blessings. Can you be

delivered too soon from the dreadful sense of insecurity? Is it not a terrible thing to have the Ruler of the Universe your enemy for even one day? Or do you think the list of your sins is not long enough, nor the Judge angry enough, nor hell hot enough, but that you must for another day labor to increase the store of guilt and wrath and punishment? Yet, if you desire it, you may obtain his favor at once! You may be made holy and happy at once! Why wait? Can the poor be enriched, the sick be healed, the sorrowful be gladdened, the outcast restored, too soon? Even if you should be saved hereafter, will you be no loser by having so long been busy heaping up rubbish which might have proved fuel for your own destruction, when you could have been gathering incorruptible treasure?

But there is a still higher motive! Your Creator demands obedience *now!* Did He make you to be your own master? While you say you will serve Him to-morrow, do you not rebel against Him to-day? Though sure of a thousand to-morrows, ought you not

to obey *now*? Should you not with David “make haste and delay not to keep his commandments?” If not awed by his authority, will you not be won by his love? Will you trifle while the King of kings draws near to entreat a hell-deserving rebel to receive a free pardon, purchased by the blood of his own Son? He offers to receive you into his family, to number you among his children, to take you to dwell with Him in blessedness forever! Treat not with indifference such love, lest the threatening should be fulfilled—“Because I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices!”

O reject no longer the love of God! Provoke no longer his wrath! *Now, NOW* is the

day of salvation! Even this book, small and insignificant as it is, has made your case more critical. Before the devil snatches up the seed it has sown in your heart—before any slight impression produced by it has faded away—lest such impression, by being effaced, should make you less impressible—give heed to its warning *now*.

Now! for time is short, and death is near, and judgment threatens! Now! for in eternity it will be too late, and your very next step may land you there! The only season of which you can be sure is *now*! The only season in which you can work is *now*! The purpose may not last till to-morrow—fulfil it *now*! Fresh difficulties will flood the channel to-morrow—wade it *now*! The chain of evil habit will bind you more tightly to-morrow—snap it *now*! Religion is a work for every day—begin it *now*! Sin exposes to present miseries—escape them *now*! Holiness confers present joys—seize them *now*! Your Creator commands—obey him *now*! A God of love entreats—be reconciled *now*! The Father

from his throne invites—return *now!* The Saviour from his cross beseeches—trust Him *now!* The Holy Spirit in your heart persuades—yield *now!* “Behold *now* is the accepted time, behold *now* is the day of salvation!”

Alas! what poor weak words, what cold persuasions are these, compared with the importance of the theme, and the value of the interests at stake! A soul in danger of hell—and repentance delayed when delay may be destruction—and yet no greater earnestness of warning! O reader! thou art entreated to forgive, not the force, but the feebleness of this message! Do not judge of its importance by its style. Truly had the author been able to write more earnestly, he would have spared no pains to do so. He feels that no words our language can supply would be too strong to urge thee to repentance *now!* But help must be sought from Him who alone can effectually persuade. Spirit of God! do Thou speak to the reader's heart! Let not this imperfect appeal, intended to benefit him, be-

come a curse to him! Let it not rise up at the last day to condemn him! But do Thou condescend by even so unworthy a messenger, to persuade him to repent and believe the Gospel, NOW!

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