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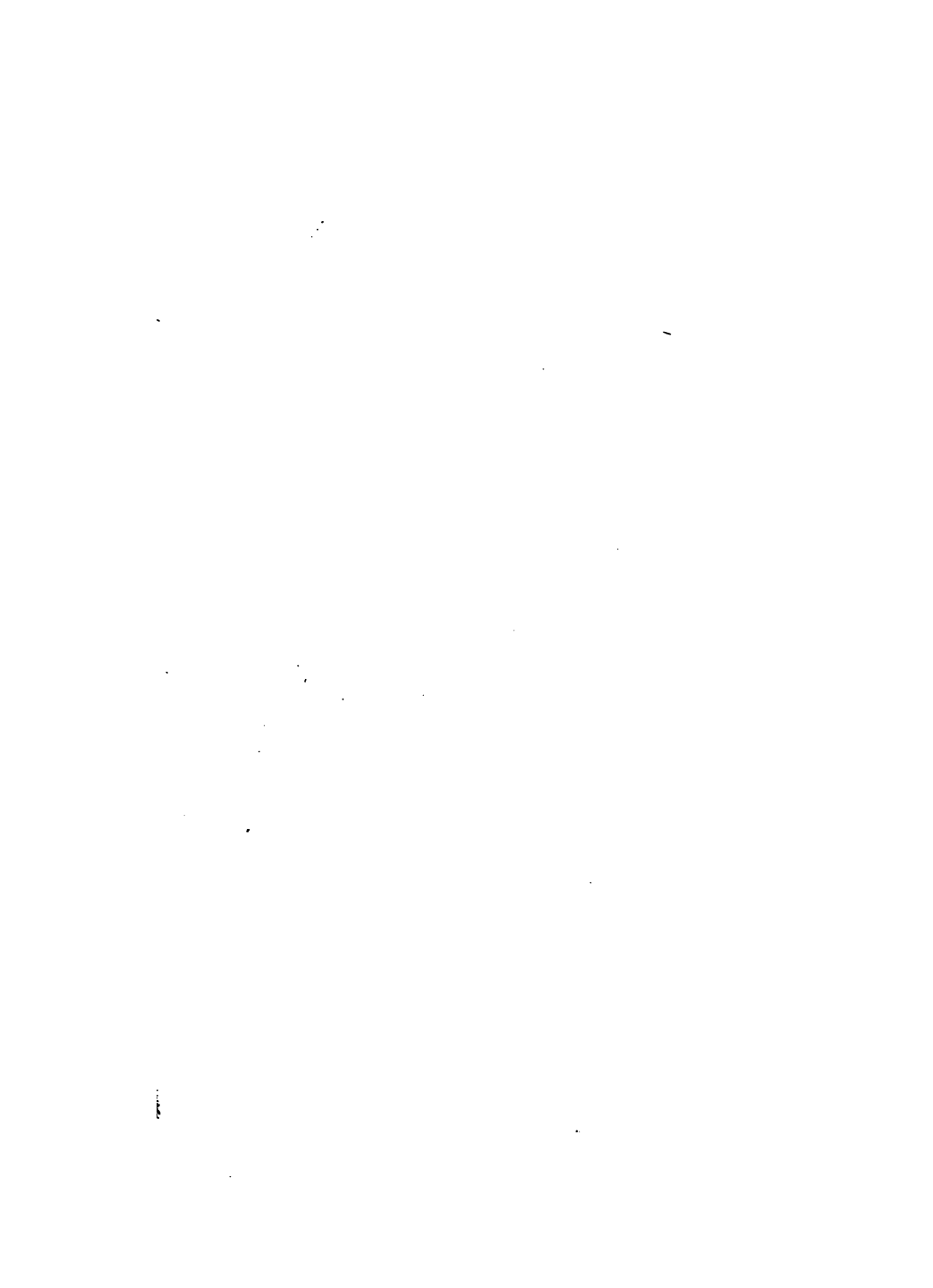
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FAMILIAR TALKS
ON THEMES OF
Christian Experience.



By
HENRY WARD BEECHER

FAMILIAR TALKS.



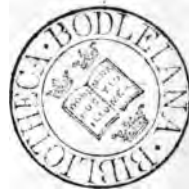
FAMILIAR TALKS

ON THEMES OF

GENERAL CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



LONDON:

T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW;
EDINBURGH; AND NEW YORK.

1870.

141. j. 127.



PREFACE.



DESIRE the reader to bear in mind that the subject-matter of this book was delivered in my week-night prayer-meetings. The "Talks" are not only colloquial and familiar, but they carry in them much more of the personality of the speaker than is usual in such remarks. But I have considered the want of personal experience in Christian discourse one reason of the want of interest usually felt in sermons. No one can read the discourses of the apostles, and above all of Paul, without perceiving that they are saturated with personal experience.

Where such elements are not in excess—where they are guided by a modest judgment, and do not degenerate into empty and repetitious egotism—they become the source of great power, and we

cannot well afford to lose them out of the pulpit,— certainly not from the more social and familiar lecture-room.

I have left both the selection and the revision of the matter of this book wholly to the judgment of others. As the separate topics are short, the applications very direct, and the illustrations drawn from familiar scenes, it is hoped that they may be acceptable, in many instances, when a sermon would prove too long and elaborate.

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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FAMILIAR TALKS.

PARTING WORDS.*



THINK we are occupying the dearest place that this church knows. To me, at least, around about the Friday night prayer-meeting cluster more sacred memories than around any other service, and from it proceed more attractions than from all the other services put together. I shall not miss the Sabbath-days half so much as I shall the Friday evenings. There is nothing else that seems to bring me so near to you. When you are all singing one hymn, there is a kind of mystic unity established between you; and none can help feeling that he is a part of every one whose voice is mingling with his own in sacred song. Here, too, our experiences are more personal; we learn to know each other by the spiritual man. Here we are conscious that we have had alleviations, consolations, and joys, at times almost unspeakable—full

* At the last prayer-meeting before Mr. Beecher sailed for Europe, in 1863.

of glory, certainly. And this meeting of the church and brotherhood, cordial, prayerful, songful, social, is very dear and very attractive to me.

When I am gone I shall, of course, think of the church on Sunday. It is impossible for a minister not to think of his pulpit,—just as impossible as for a mother not to think of the babe from which she is separated. I shall think of all the duties that belong to the church ; but it will be of the Friday night meeting, of the gathering of the brethren here, more than of any other service, that I shall think : partly because I am so much refreshed by it—for when I am at home it is my rest-meeting—and partly because I shall feel sure that you will pray for me.

Now, let me say that you must not be disappointed if, while I am abroad, it should please God not to employ me at all in any public ministrations. Verily, I have no purpose formed. I am entirely uncertain as to what I shall do in Europe. Whether I shall shoot through England and go upon the Continent at once, whether I shall abide in England for two or three or more weeks, or whether I shall pursue some other course, I do not know. I have no plan laid. I leave the whole matter to the Lord. I shall follow the Providence that leads me ; and it may be that that Providence will not open any door for me. There are a great many doors open ; but a door must be of a man's size, or it is not meant for him. I have seen a great many men run for openings that were not for them. If it please God to open a door for me, and to give me to understand

that I am to enter, I shall not hesitate to do so. And in that case I have another desire. It is simply this: that I may be permitted to do according to the strength that is given to me, not your work exactly, not my work, not an American's work even, but a Christian man's work. For I hold that Christian manhood is higher than nationality. It is higher than any specialty. It includes everything else. As long as there was no probability of my going to England, I used to say what things I would about "those dogged Englishmen;" but now that I am going there, I have an increasing desire that I may do nothing and say nothing that shall not be in the highest spirit of the Saviour, so that if He were by my side, He might lay His hand on my shoulder, and say, "Well done." I do not wish to speak from my passions. I do not wish to speak from anger, nor irritableness, nor vengefulness, nor any secular and lower feeling. I desire to rise up into the moral sentiments, Christianized, and speak from them, think from them, and act from them. And you must not desire that I shall give the people over there a flailing, whether or not. You must not desire that I shall go over to "show them what an American can do." You must not pray for any such thing. If you do, your prayers will never get up to the throne of God. Your desire should be this: that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be honoured in my ministration, whatever it may be. Your desire should be that, while I speak with fearlessness, with courage, I shall speak also with an unmistakable exemplification of love.

I do not think that anything goes far which has not the wings of love to make it buoyant, so that it can fly. It is increasingly my wish that love may characterize all my words and actions abroad; and for that I believe I shall have your desires and your prayers. The Lord will give me work to do if He chooses, and He will prepare me to do it; but if He has no work for me to do there will be no opening, and I shall go on my way, attending to my own personal and private errands.

So much for myself. The rest will be for you. Many of you will betake yourselves to the country. You will scatter everywhere. I pray that "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," which is the promise fulfilled in this life, and which is also the fruition of the heavenly state, may rest upon you. May your hearts be as underneath the shadow of the wings of the Almighty! Many of you will return, and many will stay. I need not ask you to remember this church as a table spread, where you may go and take a luxurious repast, and more actively in its prayer-meetings, in its Sunday school, in its mission labours, and as it stands vitally connected with the life of the masses around about it,—because that you will do for your own sakes; but let me ask you to be in your places more than ever, and to be more faithful than ever in your work. If there is *any* time when Christians can afford to be careless, it is when the pastor is at home and at work; but when the pastor is gone, you should feel that it is your business, by your presence and your prayers, and your zeal and your labour, to witness

for Christ in this church. I believe that you will. I have scarcely ever asked you to attend meetings when I was at home, for I have gone on the theory that it was my business to make the services so interesting that you would come without being asked. But now I am going away; and for a novelty I exhort you to attend the meetings of the church, when you are in town, with regularity and with zeal. Then the flame will not go out on the altar. You will have daylight all the time. And I do not know why this may not be a summer in which souls shall be awakened and converted. You might bring me, on my return, a thousand more flowers than the sweet-handed children brought and heaped up on my door-steps the other day; * you might bring me treasures of silver and gold,—and these would touch my heart as memorials of your remembrance;—but the best things with which you can greet me when I come back will be sheaves in your bosom, of which the seed has been sown in tears and faith, and which you have reaped as well as sown,— hearts newly born into the life of Jesus, waiting on the threshold of His church to come in.

* The anniversary of the Sunday schools of Brooklyn, on which the Plymouth Church Sunday School marched past Mr. Beecher's house, each child throwing him a bouquet as a farewell gift.

EXPERIENCES ABROAD.*

DURING all my absence, this place has been the point of my thoughts. Things to which we are really most inclined we do not always think most of when we are subject to the mixed influences and the adventitious excitements of ordinary life; but when we go away from our habitual places, and familiar things address us not directly, but only through the pulses of memory, they tend to separate in the mind, and some that have seemed important begin to lose power with us. Many that have seemed of very little account rise with distinctness before the mind, and we find out then what are the things that have exerted, not the most declamatory, but the most real and lasting influence upon us. And, judged in that way, the prayer-meetings of this brotherhood have grown more and more intensely the dearest to me of all the exercises of our church. I do not know that I have thought once in all my absence of my own

* Related by Mr. Beecher at the first prayer-meeting after his return from Europe, in 1833.

preaching, nor of the pleasurable excitement through which it has taken me. That has not been a thing that has asserted itself at all in my memory. I have thought of the congregation; but I have taken notice that the congregation which rose before my mind has been almost invariably as it has looked to me in times of revival. You know, in respect to friends whom we love, that it is always certain peculiar expressions which present themselves, and that those expressions are the ones which we think of in connection with our different friends. Now, the expression of the great congregation, which almost always presents itself to my mind, is that which it wore when the most active religious feeling existed and was developing—in the time of spiritual quickening. It is the church in the labour of love for the conversion of men to the edification of God's body that has most firmly impressed itself upon my mind. And I have always felt—selfishly, I had almost said—that to come back to my church meant to come back here, where I had a part of the comfort of religious service. In the great congregation I have the work, and you are recipients; but in the prayer-meeting I receive my part also. There, I carve and serve; but here I sit at the table, and take my portion with the rest of you. And it was toward the thought of coming back into the prayer-meeting, and to the communion of the brotherhood of the church, that my mind moved more than toward anything else. For I have not changed, except to be stronger in the convictions that before were strongest—believing that the vital thing in

Christian association and life is Christ ; and that the wealth of individual experience and the power of associated Christians are to be measured by the degree in which they are in sympathy with Christ, and enjoying the peculiar blessings which His Spirit vouchsafes to us.

I believe you will bear me witness that I have always been strong in the faith of Christ in this intimate and personal communion ; but I come back, if it were possible, even more intense in my convictions in that direction than I ever was before. Of all the passages that stay by me, and are for ever budding and blossoming and bringing forth fruit, to bud over again and blossom and bring forth more fruit, there is none that is more efflorescent and fruitional than this : "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God."

And now, in reference to my journeyings, I must say to you that in the scope of observation and of pleasure which I have just enjoyed, and which has been wider than any ever open to me before in my life ; in studying the treasures of the European continent ; in the midst of scenery which not only was in its own intrinsic self grand or beautiful, but in association was still more interesting ; even under the stimulus of all the triumphs of the human mind, as represented in the various developments of social, political, and artistic achievement ;—I have never been for one single hour or moment turned aside to the worship of these things. It has pleased God to give me, all the time, uninterruptedly, this feeling : that even these things had no value as they stood

apart from the thought of God ; and they have their greatest beauty and glory, as I look at them, in the light of God's countenance. Thus it was among the mountains, and in the valleys, and in cities, in the midst of superlative architecture, and in galleries of pictures and curiosities. Those things were supreme to me which seemed most full of the beauty that moved in the atmosphere of the divine mind and love.

Allow me to say, still further, that in being separated from my proper work, although I had the strongest desire to avail myself of the sources of information, realizing how ignorant I was, and how much there was that ought to belong to one's knowledge which I could learn if I had the chance, I never felt so much how poor that selfishness was that passes under the name of "self-culture." And when I thought of sitting down to accumulate knowledge from eminent teachers, although it would have been a pleasure, I shrank from the feeling as compared with the love of active usefulness in the kingdom of God. I did not undervalue these things, for I seized what I could in passing, and I could easily see that for some men it might be duty to pause and study, as becoming teachers for others in the direction of æsthetic culture—a really important sphere. Yet all the time I felt : "It is not for me ; this is not my life ; this is not my sphere : it belongs to me to labour in the moral realm ; I am to go back and work directly upon men and for men."

And then, since this is our own family meeting, I want to tell you how good God was to me in Eng-

land. There are two dangers that one may be thrown into when placed in the circumstances that I was in : one is despondency and worldly anger, and the other over self-estimation and undue conceit. I think I was kept from both extremes, and was lifted up, I had almost said, by the visible appearing of my Master. So intense was the impression on my mind at times, and certainly in the three weeks which were the most trying to me, that I seemed almost like a child taken up by a mother, and carried in the midst of riot and tumult in her arms, she whispering all the time words of assurance and love. It pleased God to open His bosom and hold me there, and to give me the most perfect rest and quiet, I think, that I ever experienced in my life, for so long a period, under such critical circumstances. I recognized the situation full well; but before I had known it only in less measure, and in less emergent cases.

You know very well how much, from this distance, I had felt in respect to the wrong that England had done us, and how grieved and indignant I was ; not from any malign feeling, but from the intensity of my conviction that, in this country, we were doing God's work, and that we were being dishonoured by our brethren there through misinformation. And when I went to England the matter was not mended. When I found those who were our friends so blinded and so hesitating ; when I found the Church of God—particularly that portion of it which I most sympathized with—so cold, so prejudiced, so almost revolted from us, the natural man did not like it, and I had to struggle with myself. I had to say every-

thing twice. I almost always struck fire first, and then put it out by the rain of compassion and kindness.

So I went through England the first time with a half-uttered denunciation, which melted off into a right feeling. I had to labour with myself to be a Christian toward Englishmen. And that was the object which I had set up before me all the while. I said: "I have endeavoured all my life to be a Christian man toward those who did wrong, and here I am in this country, and it is my duty to be a Christian in my feelings toward these men. It is very hard, Lord, but I will try to love them, and to act as if I did." On the Continent I carried my burden, and that was it. I used to say in my mind, "Do not talk to me about Englishmen: I cannot bear them;" and I was vexed because, after I said so, I found that I did care for them. It was not a very fearful conflict, but there was just that kind of oscillation in my mind. They seemed to me so recreant to the great truths of God's kingdom, as revealed in this day, that I could not away with it.

Well, it was an object of my prayers that God would lift me into a higher sphere. He did; and I was conscious, when, as time passed, and I having rested from exciting, exhausting home labour, I went back to England, that I was more peaceful, and that I was taken, by the power of God's Spirit, into a sphere where I had compassion on those who are out of the way, and that I saw and felt more that side of the Saviour which was kind to poor men, and to men that were prejudiced and unreasonable.

I often read that passage where Christ is spoken of as enduring "the contradiction of sinners." I found that I could endure also.

And when the fire was once kindled, it never went out. So that when I found it my duty to labour there in our cause—or rather in the cause of God—I was saved from all further trouble. It pleased God to give me an abiding-place in the tabernacle of His love, out of which I looked unmoved, undisturbed, upon everything. And, more than that, it was borne in upon me almost as by a word of angels: "Take no thought what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak." Of course, my life-long studies and observations had laid the foundation for this, so that no miracle would be wrought; but to select the right things to speak, and to speak them in the right spirit, was a most difficult thing. And it pleased my Lord and Saviour to give me a trusting, childlike, and restful feeling that took from me all solicitude; although I felt, as I had never conceived it possible for me to feel, the shadow of two such great nations resting on me, and the responsibility, in some sense, of their future. Not that I had any feeling at all of my own importance, but simply this: "Here, in the providence of God, you stand in an exigency that gives power of life and death." And yet, with all that consciousness of responsibility, I never had an anxious thought or an anxious moment.

When I came to Manchester from Edinburgh, I knew the moment I saw the committee who met me

at the station, by the way they looked, what was on their mind ; for I had received some intimation from the papers that there was a storm brewing ; and when these gentlemen, after driving to the hotel, asked to see me a few moments before retiring (that was Thursday night, and I was to speak on Friday evening), I said : " If you mean this row in the streets, do not give yourselves any concern, I am ready for it." We dispatched that little matter of business in less than five minutes. I prepared the next day a formal programme of my speech ; and I never shall forget my ride with the two or three gentlemen that accompanied me to the hall at the hour appointed for the lecture. It was raining a little, and I remember the shadowy look that everything had as I passed down the streets. I recollect saying to myself, " I am going to I know not what." And I call to mind the prayer that silently went up from my heart all the way. It was simply this : that I might be a witness for that which should please God, without any regard to men, and especially without any regard to myself. It was not what we sometimes experience,—a perception of what is right, and a struggle to get at it. I was in the feeling already, and it was out of the experience that I prayed for more of it. I was willing to be nothing for the sake of Christ, and my reputation was nothing at all to me. I said : " If the enemies of God triumph over me, and put me to shame here to-night, it will be perfectly right. I am willing that it should be so, if it be the will of God."

In such a condition of spirit I went into that great Free Trade Hall, which holds eight thousand people ; and next to that in Liverpool, the audience here was the most difficult to manage of all that I addressed ; and that being my first public speech in England, it was the most critical period. I saw at once that there was a team to be driven there such that it would not do for the coachman to be asleep on the box ! And then I had it borne in upon me that in my lecture I had better not undertake to follow the course I had proposed ; so I laid down my notes, and struck out another plan, and extemporized the whole speech. For I had two things to do all the time. The unfolding of the subject was secondary. I had to control the audience primarily, while opening, as far as consistent with the subject which I had in hand. And during the tumult and the interruptions (which were far greater than anything that you would be led to infer from the reports that appeared), during the tremendous excitement that prevailed, I was so far from being excited or disturbed that the thought of being so struck me as no less absurd than the thought of a man getting irritated in summer while sitting by the side of a persistently babbling brook. It did not seem that that tumult of the people had any relation to me individually. And while it was going on and raging, it seemed almost like the sound of a storm at sea, or of the wind among trees, which I, in connection with all nature, had my share of, but which did not belong to me particularly.

And afterward, when I went to Glasgow, where there is a great deal of ship-building, and where for commercial reasons there is a great deal of Southern sympathy, I had the same feeling. I made my preparation on the day I spoke, and I never came into this room in a more truly "revival" frame of mind than, when the evening came, I went on the platform there. And it was the same in Edinburgh.

When I came to Liverpool—the scene of the hardest of all the labour I performed during my absence; where I waded; where the Red Sea closed on me, and I had to swim through to the other shore, the wheels of my chariot coming off, and the chariot dragging heavily at the bottom—though I was exhausted in body, and all used up, like a ship-master who for two hours and a half in a violent gale has been obliged to bawl out his commands incessantly, yet I never lost the feeling of compassion. I felt as royal as a prince, and looked down on the audience as a prince would look down on the sports of children. And when the men did the most outrageously insulting things, they did not insult me. The taunts, the jeers, the whistlings, the yellings; the cutting in two of my sentences, or, when I began them, ending them in the most comical manner; the spoiling of sentiments, and turning my own words back on me—and this not once, nor twice, but straight through for two hours and a half, in a way that I must pronounce utterly unfair and ungentlemanly—these things never for a moment disturbed me. I felt all the time that I

had a great parcel of children there, and that I was, as it were, a nurse, and was managing them ; and I had the feeling of kindness and compassion and sorrow for them from the beginning to end.

Now, you know enough of me to know that patience is not a natural gift. I have as much temper as anybody, and as much disposition to use it for rebuffing any aggressions upon my personal propriety and honour. I look upon that frame of mind as the fulfilment of my prayer to God that He would accept my labour, and that He would sustain me in it not only, but prepare me for it, all the way through.

No sooner were my lectures spoken than they were like chickens, with twenty hawks watching for each chicken. The ablest papers in England, the *London Times*, the *Standard*, the *Telegraph*, the *Liverpool* and *Manchester* papers, and the *Scotch* papers, all came down upon me in the most unhand-some style ; and yet with these it was as it was with the turbulent audiences,—I simply did not care.

And that spirit abode with me to the very last. Why, the fact is, when I was preparing to go away from London, and from Liverpool, we had a good crying-meeting. The breakfast at which I bade farewell to the brethren of these places was one at which we all had a good cry. I felt as though I was leaving old companions ; and I felt a love, not only for those that were there, but for those that were not there, and would not have been there ; and my whole heart left its blessing on England,—on

Great Britain,—good and bad,—the whole of them.

I mention these things because I have taught you that the testimony of the grace of God, in the various experiences of life, is always the most comforting of things. You sent me out, and I went, as a servant of our common Master, but, humanly speaking, as your minister. Everywhere I went it was my pride, as well as my pleasure, to have it understood that I went as your minister; that I was not travelling on my own errands alone, nor by my own support, but was sent abroad by the affection of my church. And your honour, and what seemed to me to be the most becoming to you under God, never was absent from my thought a moment. I think I can say truly that when I became assured that the work was done, and, as I hoped, not unworthily, the pleasure that I derived from it was far more the thought of finding that you were satisfied than the consideration of any outside praise.

I mention these things because I feel that there ought to be some confidential meetings in such a church as this, while the great congregation does not afford us the opportunity of any, and because this passage of experience is one of the most memorable of my life. For while outwardly it has looked like a season of political campaigning, and not a thing unusual in my history, yet inwardly, and to my thought, it has been a remarkable period of my religious life, and a development of simple Christian experience, such as I never before knew. I bring this testimony back to you.

My last testimonies to you, before going away, were of the Christ whom I loved, and in whom you hoped and lived, and will hope and live for ever. And now I come back, and I speak of the same Saviour, only in a different wise, and of that grace given by Him to me, in answer to your prayers, which abounded in me, and was sufficient for me. "As my day, so was my strength."

I have returned into your midst, Christian brethren, desiring, above everything else, not to leave the ministry, not to go into any other sphere of labour. I am not seduced by a wish or ambition for pleasure in new fields. I come back a thousand times more desirous of the Christian ministry than ever before, and with a keener relish and comprehension of what it is to labour with you in the kingdom of God.

COMMUNION SEASONS.



HERE are circumstances which make some of the different communion seasons more significant than others ; not, of course, in their intrinsic interest, since they are always the setting forth of the sufferings, the death, and the triumph thereby, of Christ ; but of the times of doing this, some are more interesting than others.

No one can sit down to the table of the Lord, it seems to me, upon the first Sabbath of the year, and not find, over and above the intrinsic solemnity of that precious ceremony, extrinsic considerations of the mercies and experiences of the past, and of the hopes and anticipations of the coming year. There is special to the opening communion of the year something that makes it peculiarly dear and impressive.

And then there spring up remembrances, sometimes, that make certain seasons of communion more interesting than others. Thus, the month of May will be remembered, at least by many among us, as long as they live, with its accompanying

communion ; because in the May of 1857 occurred that memorable time when so many scores of converts were gathered together, and when, sitting in ranks before the altar, they rose up almost as if half the congregation were rising, and, amidst great joy, were received among God's people.

There will be also other special reasons for different communion seasons being interesting to particular persons. To me there is always something peculiarly affecting in the last communion of the summer. To many of you, perhaps, it may not seem as it does to me. I go away during the month of August. The communion of the Lord's Supper on the first Sabbath of July is the last till the next autumn. And although there is not any more likelihood of separation by death or disaster because we are temporarily apart than there would be if we were together, yet the feeling is different. When we are separated, we cannot but *feel* that there is a difference—that we may not come together again. The chances are the same, but our feelings are not. Many of you will have the opportunity to refresh yourselves in the country. The order of our meetings is somewhat changed. This is the last evening that I shall be with you in the prayer-meeting during the summer. And in these hot days of midsummer there seems to be a kind of suspension in our ordinary methods of public worship. We shall go our several ways. If we come back, it may be with ranks thinned. Some that are here to-night may not be here again when the summer solstice is over.

But just now* there are other thoughts that come in, over and above these customary ones. A great many of our brethren are separated from us, in the public service. There seems to be that pause and stillness in our national affairs which precedes the burst of the thunder-clap. Those that have gone from our midst are brought, in the providence of God, where they may be permitted to lay down their lives for their country, and for principles as dear to them as themselves; and I cannot but think that our next communion may be one in which we shall feel ourselves privileged and constrained to call the names of the martyrs—the names of those of the church and of the congregation that have been ours, and have gone up rejoicing from us toward heaven, and into it.


Under such circumstances, with these premonitions, with such possibilities in the future, in the enjoyment of this prayer-meeting preceding the Lord's Supper, and the anticipation of that exercise itself, full, I will not say of solemnity (for I am not accustomed to feel that it is "solemn" according to the ordinary acceptation of the word), but full of deep and affecting interest—under such circumstances, it seems to me that we should, more than ever, do as children do in the anticipation of trouble or danger, when they flock around about the parent as the central authority of the family. To whom shall we go but unto Him that has in His hands the keys of life and of death, who wears the crown of empire, who holds the sceptre of dominion and

* July 1861.

authority? To whom can we as individuals and families, and a church, resort, but to the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Head of the church, before whom none are forgotten; who cannot see the weakest and the most unfriended hardly bestead, and not have compassion and thoughtful care?

Brethren, it is good to be made to realize our need of Christ; it is good to be cut off from earthly dependencies; it is good to be shut up to God, so that we cannot but feel that He is indeed our life, that without Him we can do nothing, and that with Him we can do all things.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

 HIS is the last prayer-meeting of the year,* of our regular series. I think we may well make it, therefore, a meeting of remembrance, and of gratitude, and thanksgiving. I desire to bear witness in my own behalf to the faithfulness and great goodness of God to me in my personal history, and in my social and official relations. I think that in many respects I have never passed through a year, if I may so express myself, of such *inwardness*, of so many unuttered thoughts, and of so many striving and yearning feelings, in my life, as the year just closing has been. At times it has seemed to me almost as if I were set free from the body, and as if, like a bird (or many birds, for thoughts go in flocks), I were flying up through the great untravelled void of thought. It is incident to the life that I am obliged to live—of investigation into the roots of things; of looking at the nature of truth, and at its relations; of examining every diversity of experi-

* 1862.

ence, and every sort of mind; of scrutinizing objections, and running along the line of philosophical deductions—it is incident to such a life more or less to be sceptical; that is, to raise questions of facts that have been received, to have doubts which suggest further investigation, to unsettle things that they may be settled again firmer than before. It does not lie in the ordinary course of duty to do this. It is peculiar to professional duty. And it cannot be done without more or less effect upon a person's own mind. My natural temperament is what might be called bold; and I never yet have seen the time when I shrank a moment from carrying any principle out to its apparently legitimate results. I never saw a train of investigation that I was afraid to follow, wherever it might lead. As far as my own mind is concerned, I have acted frankly and openly in my investigations; and as much this year, perhaps, as during any former year of my life, have I been enabled to do this. And I desire to bear witness to the Divine goodness, in that I have been carried through the year thus far with a growing sense of God, and with a decreasing sense of man. Man has never before seemed to me so little. The human powers have never before seemed to me so feeble. I have never before so felt that men were, in their proudest estate, no more than leaves; and that their life, and the life of the branches themselves, depended altogether upon the parent stem. I never realized so much that man's life stands absolutely in God's presence and power, as I have done in the past year.

I have, further than that, been made to feel, in common, I suppose, with almost the whole church, how dependent we are upon God in providence, as well as in grace. I have never before been so shut up to God, and made to feel that there was no strength, no hope, no help, no succour, except in Him. And yet, under anxieties, under evil auspices, under heavy burdens, under severe trials, I have never found the day when I could not go to God and lay down my troubles. I have not preached to you a doctrine that I have not practised. I do not mean that I have come up to my ideal of duty: I mean that if I have preached a doctrine of forgiving enemies, I have practised that doctrine to the extent of my ability; that if I have preached faith in Christ, I have had faith in Christ; that if I have preached the sweetness and blessedness of prayer, it is because I have found out that it is sweet and blessed; and that if I have preached that there is such a thing as carrying burdens to God, it is because I know how true it is.

For various reasons, this has been a year in which I have been more burdened than in any other year of my life. I never before saw half so much trouble, in many respects, as I have seen at some periods during the past year. And I bear witness to the faithfulness of Christ. I declare, in the presence of His people, that His title to me is, "He that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." I have had things that I looked upon as the worst evils turn out to be the greatest blessings. Out of some things that seemed like the

piercing of iron into my soul, God has wrought salvation. And I am distinctly conscious now that when my way was hidden from me, it was not hidden from God; and that He was carrying me mercifully, though strangely, on to the fulfilment of His purposes of love.

During the past year I have endeavoured to preach so as to make up for the want of pastoral labour in the church. I have tried to keep you enlightened respecting your duties. I have not been unmindful of the separations of families, or of the losses of friends that many have sustained. I have been aware of the disturbances of business. The despondencies of those in bereavements and afflictions have not escaped my notice. And I have tried to preach so as to keep the courage and the heart of the church up by humble faith in God through Jesus Christ. I have had, in some degree, success in that work. I have loved to do it.

Now and then, a man preaching right straight through the year, in season and out of season, must fall upon dry hours when he cannot do what he wants to, and when he feels that it is a fruitless and profitless task in which he is engaged. For the moment, it is a torment to spoil a good subject by a bad sermon—and I know what that is. But take the year together I have felt, not that I was doing remarkably well, but that when I shook the tree of life some fruit dropped. This has been a year of trouble, of agitation, of tremendous outward commotion. When it began, I wondered if it would be possible to keep a flame burning on the altar in the

sanctuary when there was such a wind outside. And I desire, with the utmost gratitude, and with an unfeigned sense of God's goodness, to make mention, to-night, that the Word of God in the sanctuary has been to me fresh, strength-giving, and comforting. And the Lord during the past year has set His seal to His truth. Not a few have been converted; a good many have been reclaimed from backsliding; and a large number have been comforted that had no consolation but in Christ's Church.

And so, brethren, I will say, in brief, that if I look into my own heart, I have much to thank God for in reviewing the past year; and I sensibly feel that if I look into my relations of friendship, there is a great deal that comes to me perfumed with the love of Christ. And if I look upon the work of this church—by pastor and people, in the sanctuary, in the Sabbath school, and in the evening meetings during the week—I feel as though God had, in a great and wonderful manner, blessed us, and given us occasion to offer Him devout thanks.

MORAL HUSBANDRY.



THE providence of God moves in moral things somewhat according to the analogy of the seasons in natural things. Vegetation does not stand still altogether in winter ; and yet that is not the peculiar growing season : the spring for sowing the seed ; the summer for ripening the harvest ; the autumn for reaping it. It seems as though the autumn were the most precious part of the year, because then the farmer gathers in his products. But, after all, sowing and reaping are only parts of one thing, and the spring and the autumn are own brothers.

So it is in respect to the work of God. There are some periods which seem to be seed-sowing—that is, seed-hiding—periods. You labour and organize with no apparent and immediate result. What you do grows through various stages before it springs up and is ready for the harvest. We are apt to suppose that special harvest seasons, more than other parts of the history of the Church and of God's moral cause in the world, are peculiarly

periods of God's visitation ; but God visits the Church when he is sowing the seed, when he is ripening the harvest, and when the reaping time comes. These are all blessed, connected parts of the one great system of divine government in moral things.

Although winter is not the time for sowing seed, every gardener who has a glass-house will tell you that there are some seeds to be put in in the winter time. Although spring is the general time for putting in seed, every farmer will tell you that he sows some kinds of seed in June and July, and other kinds in September and October.

It is just so in moral husbandry. And what is meant by being "instant in season and out of season" is working at the appointed times and by the usual methods, and then working intermediately whenever you get a chance, and, if need be, by methods differing from those ordinarily adopted.

Of the seeds that I sowed last spring on the side-hill, where there was a strong wind, some did not go into the little furrows that I had made, but were blown to other places, where they sprang up ; and I have noticed that some of the stockiest, strongest, and best plants are those that were chance-sown.

Some of the best things that men ever do are things that they do, as it were, accidentally. The best things that a man says, you know, are not the things that he sets out to say, but those that he says without thinking. The tersest sentences and figures, the most condensed apothegms, which men

speak, are struck out in a moment. A whole lifetime is sometimes crowded into a single sentence.

Now, that which is true of the garden and ordinary matters is true in respect to religious work. If a man is living in the spirit of a Christian life—if he feels the power of the eternal world—if in his own soul are tides which God's heart lifts and lets out again—if he is living after the example of his Master,—there will be showers and floods of thought and feeling and action in his history. Some things that are done without prescribed form are more profitable than things that are done in a formal way. Work out of season is oftentimes as much blessed of God as things done in season.

Although a prudent man would scarcely undertake to lead a church into a revival in the midst of summer and the prostration of business, yet the summer is a time when men who have a heart to work—a tender heart, and a heart that loves Christ and men—can do things that they can never do so well at any other time. There are many persons who are comfortless, and need consolation; there are many persons who are cast down, and need to be lifted up; there are many persons who need to be led from a material view of life, and to be made in the hour of trouble to look beyond the things of this world, and learn that “a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” And if at ordinary times a man shows himself to have a heavenly mind and a true Christian conscience, his words and example have a power

which they would not have in a time of great religious feeling.

We are surprised much more to find a blossom where we do not expect to, than to find one in a flower-bed. And to find the fragrance of Christian conversation in circumstances where we do not expect to find it, makes it more significant than to find it in the church on Sunday, where you look for it.

In short, the summer is a time when those who love the cause of God will find enough to do. If the love of many has waxed cold, and if the cause of God in its church organizations seems to droop, then there is afforded just that which every true, untiring, faithful Christian heart ought to ask and desire—a chance to work “out of season.” The great trouble with men is not a lack of opportunity; it is the need of a disposition to improve the opportunities they have. Our trouble is not to know what to do; it is to have a heart to do what we know.

FERVENCY OF RELIGIOUS FEELING.

BY some, fervency of religious feeling is looked upon with disallowance, because, as they have seen it among ignorant and super-excitabile people, it has led to exhibitions of weakness and folly; because it sometimes manifests itself in modes that are offensive to cultivated tastes; and because it is supposed to be a kind of straining after unusual experiences, which are not fairly within the reach of common-sense piety. Therefore we hear a great many persons say that a moderate, low-toned state of practical fidelity is far better than a fervent state of feeling.

As between an experience of violent actions and reactions of high feeling with its corresponding indifference, and an experience that is low-toned but consistent and even all the time, there can be no question as to where the choice should be. There can be no doubt but that it is more favourable to piety, and to all that we seek in glorifying God by our example, to have a steady, uniform, decorous Christian experience.

The question, then, which I propose to consider is not at all whether an irregular experience, characterized by great heights and great depressions, is better than an experience that is uniform and consistent ; but whether, in a steady course of Christian life, it is better to be in an elevated or a low plane of feeling. And in the case of a person who may live consistently and uniformly, either at a low level of feeling or at a high pitch of feeling, I vote for the latter : not, however, for the reason that is usually given, and perhaps usually the one actually felt—namely, that it is the happier way. It undoubtedly is the happier way ; but the man who is constantly making his own happiness the object in view, whether that happiness be of the lower or the higher kind, cannot be noble. It is not noble to seek mere happiness even in Christian things ; for happiness is not the highest motive, by a great deal.

The reason why I prefer this higher tone of feeling, uniformly maintained, is, first, that it brings a person more easily and continuously into sympathy with God. The great point at which we are accustomed to say that our faith is faint and feeble is where the mind should gain a realization of the Divine nature ; and no man has a sense of God present with him upon a dull nerve, upon a low-toned or moderate state of feeling. Without going into the philosophy of the subject, it is enough to state the fact that, whenever we come into a consciousness of the presence of God so that anything in us responds—whether it be hope, or fear, or love,

or conscience—we are always in a state of exaltation. This takes place only when the nerve and the brain are awakened, and when the feelings are full, and quick, and high, and strong. The revelation of God to the soul is always through the medium of fervent feeling, and never through the medium of low and moderate feeling, no matter how consistent that low and moderate feeling may be.

The next reason which I urge for fervency of religious feeling is, that it is healthy. A great many persons think that high feeling will eat one up. It will if it is anxiety; it will if it is fear. There is nothing so corrosive as fear; and anxiety is fear, in its lower forms of application and development. A high feeling of passion is injurious to the whole physical well-being. But one of the subtle and intricate evidences of the truth of religion, is the fact that high feeling in the moral sentiments, so far from being exhausting, is nourishing. I believe that no other persons can have such health of body and soul as they may have who are accustomed to high, fervent, sweet religious feelings.

Now, let a church be inflamed, and let the preaching and the education which are brought to bear upon them be such as to stir them up to a sense of the peril of men under the law, and to a sense of their responsibility in relation to those that are around about them, and they will possess great power for a time; but they will wear out very quick. It is not in human nature for even the best men to endure being long under the influence of an excited conscience. They cannot bear it a great

while : a reaction will certainly come if it is continued beyond a given point.

But let a church, on the other hand, be brought up with a fervent love of God, with an overflowing joy in the Holy Ghost, with that faith which brings near the tranquillities of eternal rest, and that church will have food, not for forty days only, but for forty years. I do not think the moral sentiments react and wear men out, except in their extremest forms. You may have an average level of feeling many, many degrees higher than your ordinary level, where the feelings are of the higher class of Christian emotions, and not only not be worn out, but be made actually healthier.

You may smile, but I believe that fervency of religious feeling medicates the body. I believe that the brain administers the best medicine that any-body can take. When it is rightly employed, it controls bone and muscle, and corrects morbid tendencies in the physical constitution. And I believe that a person who lives in a fervid experience of these higher moral sentiments has health, not only of soul, but of body.

One thing more. It is from this state of mind—the state of mind to which the apostle referred when he exhorted men to be “fervent in spirit”—that care and trouble rebound.

If you heat a stove just moderately, and sprinkle water upon it, every drop commences hissing and dancing all over it, and there is a vast amount of sputtering before it is evaporated. But bring that stove up to an intense heat, and then sprinkle water

upon it, and instantly there is an explosion of the drops, and they are gone. There is something in the heat that changes them to vapour speedily : they cannot remain on the stove an instant.

Take a person who is in a low religious state, and his mind is just in the condition to be affected by care and trouble. Disturbances coming upon him are not readily dissipated ; they dance and hiss on his feelings, but do not evaporate. Little things become great to him ; small burdens get to be vast ; slight annoyances are intolerable ; and he doubts whether there is any such thing as religion, and whether there are any Christians in the world, and begins to suspect that all men are a pack of insincere, wicked beings, going together down to hell.

But oftentimes this low state of feeling, in which a man is highly susceptible to troubles and cares, and in which doubt predominates, is followed by the opposite state ; some circumstances operating on the mind in such a way as to raise its tone, and so clothing it with the power of easily vanquishing those cares and those troubles.

Why, you know how it is when on a summer's day you are languid, and are in a perspiration, and your patience is at a low ebb, and you are called to travel in a railroad carriage. They *will* have the window open the wrong way, and in come the cinders and smoke and dust. And there is *such* a noise ! and people do crowd you so ! Was there ever anything so inconvenient as travelling under such circumstances ? You have nothing to do but to surrender yourself up, and think of these things

in their selfish form—in their relation to your own pleasure and comfort.

But let a person who is inspired by some good tidings, or who is on his way home, and who is running over with joy, be by your side. He has to put up with the cinders and smoke and dust and noise, as well as you; and yet he is full of happiness. He is not affected by these things: he does not realize that they are inconveniences.

What is the difference between you and that person, but the power that he has in his joyful state of mind to throw off annoyances, and your inability in depression to throw them off? You know very well that at certain critical periods, when your mind is absorbed by great feelings, those little things which ordinarily would irritate you have no dominion over you. The soul, when it gathers its strength and feels its own majesty, rises above the trifling accidents of life, and rides triumphantly over them, as an ark over a flood.

Moreover, in this higher state of mind there is luminousness. In other words, it is the state of mind in which you fulfil unconsciously the command, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Both what you do consciously and what you do unconsciously become sympathetic among those that are around about you, and your example and influence are practically felt.

Blessed are they that know how to have fervour—that is, burning—in spirit.

GROPING AFTER GOD.

THERE is hardly any experience more pitiful than what may be called the experience of a sincere person groping after God, conscious of his own weakness, of his great want, and, in a sort of rude and imperfect way, of the infinite world, and of the great interests that belong to it. There are many who perpetually suffer from spiritual hunger, and are helpless ; and I find that in the majority of instances such persons have been misinstructed, or else have misconceived good instruction.

For instance, I find a great many persons who attempt to come to the Lord Jesus Christ as a person would go to a king that had given out invitations for a grand levee, and expected every one who came to wear a court dress. While all the rich that had silks, and satins, and money in profusion, were getting ready and going, others would be staying at home, because they had only homespun garments, or were in tatters, and had no means of better clothing themselves.

Suppose you should desire to go to the levee of the King—or the *President*, if you like that word better—but should hesitate because you had not better clothing; and suppose he should send out word, “Come without stopping for better clothing;” and suppose you should still hesitate, feeling that there must be some preparation necessary; and suppose he should send out again, saying to every one: “Make known your want, and I will supply it; I will send you the very garments you need; I will send you money with which to pay your expenses: only let me know what you want, and you shall have it—provision for your journey; the necessary funds for travelling; a convoy to guide and protect you; and a ticket of entrance; and finally you shall receive a hearty welcome. Only come, and all these incidental matters shall be provided for.” If such a thing should take place in secular affairs, you would not be in doubt as to what course to pursue. And it ought to be more easy and more glorious in a spiritual than in a worldly sense.

Here is one who says: “I had no advantages in my early life. I was brought up among people that swore, and stole, and drank, and did everything that was wicked; and I but just escaped the clutches of destruction. I formed many bad habits which cling to me now. And yet, when I look upon the life of Christians, I say, ‘It is good.’ I would give all the world to be as they are, and I strive to become like them; but I do not seem to make any progress. If I only had God to help me, I think I could make some headway.”

The Lord Jesus Christ is just exactly what such a person needs—a Friend; and not one who will forgive him when he has repented, but one who will help him to repent. He is not one who will reward him only when he has perfected his righteousness. He is a schoolmaster who says: “You cannot be what you desire to be till you go to school; and I have opened a school for just such as you; and if you will come to this school I will teach you that which you need to know.” He is not like a physician who should stand saying to the man that is sick, “Come to my office when you get well.” He is one who, when you say to Him, “Come and see my case—I am sick,” says, “It is My nature and My mission to do that.” He declared that He came to heal the sick, and not the whole. And when He made that declaration, He wanted men to understand that it was the key-note of the Divine nature to help them; that God had in Himself all that they needed, and that He was beforehand with them; that He thought of them before they thought of themselves; that He loved them before they loved themselves; that He made provision for strengthening their weakness before they knew that they were weak; that He exercised forbearance toward them while yet they were His enemies; and that when they rose to go toward Him, He stretched out His arms to receive them while they were afar off. Christ, while men were yet in their whole flagrant glow of sinful life, gushing selfishness, towering pride, and envyings, and hatreds, looked upon them, and loved them, and laid down His life for them.

And shall not God, having given His Son, freely give us all things that we need to get out of evil withal?

It is when I get these views of Christ as the All-helper, as the One in whom centres that which we need to enable us to go on to what are called *the conditions of acceptance*, that it pains me most to see men groping after Him in the dark. But why need they thus grope?

A person says: "I wish I was a Christian; I try to become one; I pray God to change my heart; I read; I meditate; I watch the source of my motives; and yet I do not succeed in attaining that which I strive after." But what does such a groper as that wait for? The moment a man really wants to be a Christian, he *is* one. The moment a man really wants to love me, he *does* love me. He could not want to love me if he had not that predisposition which amounts to the initial form of love. To be sure, where it is a thing that requires time and space and functional ceremony, the wishing for it is not having it; but where it is a thing that turns on the nature of the mind itself, wishing is having. For instance, the moment a man really wants to have knowledge, that moment he begins to have it. The want itself is the first step of knowledge. When a man begins to wake up in the morning, he is half awake. When a man feels an impulse toward a thing, that impulse is the thing itself in a nascent, undeveloped state.

It is true that many people have a kind of superficial desire to be Christians, that does not amount

to anything more than casual, transient flashes of feeling ; but where a person earnestly says, "I desire to be free from my sins ; I desire to accept Christ and to obey Him," those desires are preliminary and initial experiences of a Christian state. If such persons only knew that Christ was their Physician, their Teacher, their Nurse ; if they only knew that He put His arms about such as they, and drew them toward Him, and took them up, and taught them how to be Christians, and waited for them to become Christians, and helped them as the loving parent or the kind teacher helps the little child, they would have no trouble.

How does the village schoolmistress deal with little "abecedarians" ? She does not whip them nor turn them out of school, because they cannot read. She says, "They are little children, and it will take time and labour to bring them forward ; but they will come up to it by-and-by ;" and she encourages them, and pats them on the head, and so keeps them along.

Our Saviour, from the time when little children sat upon His knee, has been ready to help men, and to encourage them. He is for ever saying to men that need aid, "Let Me help you ;" and the moment a man wants to be helped, and says to Christ, "Help me," the work has begun in him. I think there are many and many persons that are Christians and do not know it.

My watch stops. Something is broken in it. I take it to the watchmaker, and he puts in a new mainspring. I do not know anything about it,

except that he does it. And when it is repaired he lays it aside. Presently I go for my watch, and ask him if it is done. "Oh yes," he says, "but I do not know as it is going." And he takes it, and, finding that it does not go, he winds it up. And then it does not go, perhaps; but he gives it a little turning shake, and it commences ticking and keeping time.

I know many persons who have a mainspring in them, and have been wound up, for that matter, but who have not been shaken yet! And there they are. If somebody would only take them up and whirl them round a few times, and say to them, "You are Christians; tick! tick!" they would commence keeping time, and go on keeping time. I have known persons that spent months and months, not only making no progress, but losing ground, just for the want of knowledge of the fact that the office of the Lord Jesus Christ was to take people *in order that they might be good*; and that it was His nature, after He had taken them, to be patient with them, and help them, and encourage them, and bring all the power of His being to bear upon them to save them.

There is a still more painful form of this groping after Christ, I think, where men feel that they have sinned away their day of grace; where they feel that they are so bad that God will not take them. Sometimes this is the result of bodily disease, and sometimes it is the result of a diseased theology. I can understand how one might come to have that feeling who had been brought up to think of God

as a spiritual being afar off, and as the conservator of law and government in the universe. But how one who thinks of Christ as the Helpful One, who heals the sick, and extends a helping hand to the needy, and is accessible to the poorest creatures that live—how such a one could ever feel that Christ would reject him in his distress, in his greatest need, I can hardly imagine. Yes, I can imagine it, because I had a little of it when I was sixteen or seventeen years old, at Amherst College. I remember how I tried to do impossible things, and how I thought God had given me up to eternal reprobation because I did not succeed. I remember how for weeks I felt as though God had shut the heaven up for ever and for ever upon me. When I look back upon it I see where my trouble was, and smile at myself. But I have a feeling of pity for men where they have grown gray, and have been overtaken with trouble and affliction, and have lost their children, and their companion, and their property, and are made to feel their poverty and their need of God, and they lift up their heart beseechingly to Him in prayer, and the answer is delayed, and they give way to despair, and come to the conclusion that God will not hear them.

Now, there is nothing that so belies God as such an imputation as this. It is true that He will not help anybody to sin, but anything short of that He will do. No matter how deep your sin is; no matter how proud and selfish you have been; no matter how sensual, how cruel, how insincere, how sceptical you have been; no matter how mischiev-

ous your-example has been to other men ; no matter if you have ruled with an infidel rule, and destroyed thousands of souls—it is the nature of God, the moment you feel your need of Him and turn to Him for mercy, to have mercy on you.

There is no man, therefore, who goes to God saying, "Help me to be free from sin," but may be perfectly certain that God's whole nature moves toward him, as broad and irresistible as the summer moves from the south toward the north. If you go to God and say, "Make me feel right while I am sinning," He will not. But if you feel the plague of pride, of selfishness, and of being godless in this world, and you want somebody to *help you out* of your unhappy condition, I do not object to your going to your minister or some friend ; but, first, go to God. He is the best Friend and Pastor and Lover that the soul ever had.

PRAYING FOR OTHERS.



REMEMBER that, when I first heard Mr. Finney pray, I was shocked at what seemed to me the unprayer-like topics that he introduced. I had been so accustomed to generalities, to reverent, wide-reaching petitions, or petitions that avoided specialties, that when he prayed for my father as "Dr. Beecher," instead of "the pastor of this church," I was startled! I felt as though that was not the way to pray. And when in families he prayed for individuals by name, as for "Caroline," or "William," I could not but feel that this was an irreverent mode of prayer. As I look back upon it now, and recollect my thoughts and feelings, I can very well understand how persons may think that a prayer is irreverent simply because it is familiar, and because it is particular and individual.

To be sure, there is to be good judgment, which always carries with it good taste, in such matters; but our prayers, I think, would be far better if they did express definite thoughts, or definite feelings, or

definite desires. And on this occasion I wish to call your attention to one specialty in prayer that I think does not abound, and that I think we might all of us cultivate with great benefit. I mean the habit of praying, according to the apostolic command, one for another.

We are not left in doubt as respects the example of the apostles. They prayed always, with all prayer, for the different churches. There is reason to believe that the Apostle Paul used to take one church after another, and spread the cases of different persons, and their wants, before God, as their various circumstances rose up in his mind; so that he felt, when he wrote to the churches, that he wrote to a large body of the brethren whose necessity he had canvassed spiritually, and whom he had presented often and often before God. Nor are we at liberty to doubt that he derived this practice from the Master's example. "Satan hath desired to have thee," said Christ to Peter, "that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Here was a foresight of the danger of the apostle; and here was, also, the statement that a man was made a special object of prayer by the Redeemer. Then there is the example of many holy men whose lives are a gospel to us, and who had this habit of praying for individuals.

In the first place, the question will arise in your minds, Whether it is necessary to do more than pray for everybody in general?

General well-wishing is very well; but it does not supersede the necessity for special acts of kind-

ness in the way of affection or in the way of devotion. So it is not enough to pray for a family. There are times when the individuals of a family should come up in remembrance before us. It seems to me that parents, for instance, should take each child, and make that child a subject of prayer. When we pray for our children separately, it is not necessary that they should know it. The father does not tell the child how much money he is laying up for him, or how much he means to do for him. There are a thousand joys and fears which relate to the child, that the father says nothing about. And while it is not necessary that we should tell our children how much spiritual treasure we lay up in heaven for them, they ought yet to be well prayed for. They ought to be well endowed where treasures are never stolen or lost. And it is inconceivable what a depth and delicacy it gives to a parent's affection, to habitually bring the children of the family, with their individual dispositions, weaknesses, and faults, before God, and plead for them.

One part of the influence exerted in this matter will be exerted upon ourselves. We shall very soon see what an awful and abominable pit Christian people are accustomed to live in. And when I think of the way in which people talk of each other, and even Christian people, there is nothing that seems to me more horrible. I know not to what circumstance I owe it, but from early life I conceived the utmost repugnance to what is called "tattling;" and it affects me now with a kind of cold shudder to hear people talk about each other. There may be an innocent conversation, badinage, or something

of that kind ; but I mean the low, the worse than unkind, way in which we are accustomed to look at others, and pick flaws in their character, and criticize their disposition, judging them in the lowest possible court of the mind. But if you are in the habit of talking to God concerning them, to think of their wickedness as immortal creatures, and to consider that they are journeying toward heaven like yourself, and that they have this or that impediment that you have excused, this or that evil course that you have extenuated, this or that transgression that you have made the subject of pleading—if you are in the habit, in other words, of dissecting those persons' history in the light of God's countenance, and striving to obtain God's forgiveness in their behalf, then, in the solemnity of such circumstances, you will sympathize with them, and refrain from speaking of them in a damaging way. To indulge habitually in stinging and ungenerous remarks of each other must result in lowering the Christian tone of your own minds and in degrading your own thoughts. But the habit of taking each other before God in prayer, familiarly and by name, is a habit that I think is eminently beneficial—in the first place, to yourselves. It will cleanse you. It will sweeten your disposition. It will take away from you every particle of the raven, that loves to feed on carrion.

Then the question will arise, What will it do for the persons for whom you pray? Well, it is not to be supposed that everything we ask will be granted ; but I think I am on safe ground when I say that earnest and sincere prayers for others are more

likely to be answered than prayers offered for our own selves. Let us look a little at this.

If one of your children should come to you begging for fruit, or for some article for his own personal gratification, you might be disposed to grant it to him ; but suppose one of them should come to you and plead for another child, and tell what his troubles were, explaining why he ought to be indulged, would not the generosity of the child open your heart ? Would you not feel a double obligation to grant the request, first, because the thing was proper for the child, and second, because it pleased you to have this disinterested importunity ? And, when we come before God, He loves, without doubt, to hear us plead for our own wants—for wants are not necessarily selfish because they are sought for one's self ; but when we plead for others there is an element of magnanimity, there is a grace, in it, which God, it seems to me, must love and be more inclined to favour than petitions in our own behalf.

Things that are emergent, things that are indispensable—succour, relief, rescue from destruction—God hears prayer for these things ; but I think God is accustomed to hear prayer for things that are not so outwardly and apparently needful—for the higher elements of Christian character ; for the endowing of ourselves with sentiments. When we plead for persons that are hungry, that they may have bread ; or for persons that are sick, that they may be restored to health—that is well ; but where we pray for the growth of the soul, that humility may be more golden in its shades, that love may be more

radiant in its higher lights, that faith may be more crystalline and far-reaching, and that there may be a refinement of piety and a delicacy of religion, I think God loves to hear our supplications.

Well now, because we cannot measure it, it does not follow that therefore we should undervalue the effect of the fervent prayer of the righteous for other men. Indeed, there is something in the not being able to measure it that ought to be witching and luring to this exercise of prayer. We have heard it said that there are some men who have the power of affecting the will of other people, even when they are separated from them, in another room, or house, or street, or town, even. I do not undertake to say how that may be; I apprehend, however, that there is not as yet much benefit in it, if it is a fact; but there is one kind of biology—or, if you please to call it so, mesmerism—about which there is no doubt. Whether you can affect the mind of another person directly or not, you can indirectly. You can, by pleading with God, get a hold upon every individual whom you love, or for whom your sympathies are excited. And you cannot tell, while you are pleading with this Fountain of benevolence, while you are drawing supplies from this treasure-house of God's soul, what are the possibilities of blessing that await those for whom you pray. This is, of course, a matter to be regulated. I could not, very well, pray for every one in my church, and yet I often pray for individuals. On some Sabbaths my mind runs on persons who stand as representatives of a class. You cannot pray for

everybody ; but the habit of daily making petitions for particular individuals—the teacher for his class ; parents for their children ; brothers and sisters for each other ; missionaries for those that they are to visit and labour with—this habit, I think, will be one of various blessings both to you and those with whom you have to do. I recollect hearing my father speak of a case.

He went to see a poor woman in East Hampton, when she mourned to him because she was so useless. She was bedridden. She had not been for many weeks, or months, or years, perhaps, to church ; and there she lay. “Useless ?” he said ; “oh no ; you are the most useful woman in my congregation.” “Why, Dr. Beecher ! what do you mean ?” said she. “I know,” he said, “that you are praying for me all the time, and I think the Lord hears your prayers ; and it does me more good to have persons talk to God *for* me than to have them talk *with* me.” “Well,” said she, “I *do* pray for you every single day. And that is not all, I pray for all the folks. I go into one house, and pray for all that are there ; and then I go to the next house, and pray for all that are there.” (It was an old-fashioned village, where everybody knew everybody.) “I pray,” she said, “down one side of the street, and up the other side ; and then, if I am not too tired, I go over the whole ground again.” And father very well said that she was the most useful person he had in his society.

I believe there are many that do not pray in public meetings, and that are scarcely known to the

officers of the church or to many of the members, who are living a life of silent prayer and of faith ; and I believe that many of those blessings that seem to come from the hand of the pastor, or from the outward ministration of Christ's gospel, have been engineered and prepared for disclosure by the fidelity of humble praying ones whom God will reveal in the day of judgment.

ANSWERS TO PRAYER.

SOME remarks which I made a few weeks since in reply to a letter from a lady, who, by reason of a rash imprecation that she had made, had for a great many years felt herself shut out from the mercy of God, answered, when she received them, every desired effect. They entirely rolled back the cloud from her mind, and began to bring peace and rest to her soul. This lady, in writing to me the fact, added an expression of surprise that God should have permitted her, when she prayed so earnestly for light, so long to go mistaken and deceived in such a way. And it so happened that, at the same time her letter came, I received a response to a private note that I had written to another person, who was in difficulty on a religious subject, assuring me that she had found relief and comfort, and containing a not dissimilar expression of surprise that God would permit one of His disciples to suffer so long for the want of a little light, for which she had devoutly prayed. And it occurred to me that it might be profit-

able to spend a few moments in looking at this matter.

I do not undertake to interpret the methods of God; and, certainly, I do not undertake to limit God's sovereignty. I do most firmly believe that God is at liberty to exercise direct and efficient power over us by, or in spite of, natural laws. But, on the other hand, there can be no doubt, as a matter of fact, and as a matter of implication in the New Testament, that God prefers to administer in His moral kingdom by the operation of stated laws, just as He does in the physical kingdom; and that the road to blessings in the moral kingdom of God is through an intelligent obedience to natural moral laws, just as in secular things, the road to any result is through a knowledge of natural physical laws, and an obedience to them.

Suppose that one who, having been almost starved, and having struggled with starvation through the whole summer, praying every day, "Give me my daily bread," should, in October, discover that there were esculent, nutritious roots growing abundantly in the edge of a wilderness near by, and should say: "It seems very strange to me that I should have been suffered to want for food when I prayed, day and night, 'Give me my daily bread,' and when these roots were within my reach, if I had only known where to go for them. Why did not God tell me?"—you would smile. Suppose a person should say, "Here I have been shaking with chills and fever for weeks and months, and all the time there has been this Peruvian Bark next door, with

which I might have cured myself, if I had known that it would cure me; but I did not know it, though I constantly prayed God to cure me." You would say at once, "No prayer will ever bring you medicine. You must know that it exists, and then apply it, in obedience to natural laws, or it will not meet your case."

Go further. Did you ever know a person that could pray down an arithmetic? Did you ever know a person who, going to school, and finding himself puzzled by a tough problem, could get it solved by asking God to solve it for him? Did you ever know anybody to accomplish anything intellectually except by legitimate head-work? We know that if a man wants to do anything in physics or mental culture, he must apply himself to it according to the laws of those departments. In other words, we must find out the appointed means of obtaining the things that we seek, and apply them; and no amount of effort, ordinarily speaking, will bring us to the desired end unless we use those means; so that the finding out what those means are is as important as their application when they have been found out.

Is it so morally? Yes; and nothing shows it plainer than the history of the Church and good men. A man may live in needless suffering for forty years, praying to God every day, and finding no relief, if God has made provision for his relief in natural law, while he just prays and does nothing more. A brother in this church suffered untold agony from depression of spirits, and prayed against

it long and vehemently, until, at last, finding a skilful physician, he obtained the appropriate remedy, and got well. There are persons who, though they are sincere and earnest, have such erroneous views of God that they intercept the law of Divine favour in its action on the mind, and all the prayers in the world will not make them happy until they rectify those views.

You will ask, "Then, is prayer in such a case useless?" No, I think not. I can conceive that, though it does not bring the answer directly, it may be preparing one to get the answer in some other way. For example, a woman prays for the conversion of her husband, under the impression that God will answer her prayer outright. She prays all the week with the general impression that all she has to do is to persevere in prayer. But as she is true, honest, and sincere, going before God and praying retroacts upon her disposition, and affects her, and makes her more heavenly, and deepens her affection for her husband, whom she is thinking of in the very highest relations, and makes her family life more exemplary. And although God does not convert the man directly, by praying, and praying, and praying, *she* is made better, and better, and better. And meanwhile the man says: "Well, my Mary is a saint, if there is one. She wants I should go to those meetings. I do not care for the meetings; but I will go to please her. She feels that somebody ought to pray for the children. I do not have that feeling myself; but for her sake I will treat it with respect." And such thoughts as these

run through his mind. So her patience and gentleness and goodness, augmented by prayer, acting upon him, at last produce a state of mind in him which is favourable to his conversion, and he is converted. Thus her prayer was answered, though it was answered not at all as she expected it would be, but indirectly, her own life being made an instrument of her husband's conversion.

The lady of whom I spoke at the outset of these remarks had been praying for eighteen or twenty years, and was at last led to write to me, and lay her case before me; and being in that state in which her case was susceptible of being remedied by the instrumentality of the truth, now that the truth is presented to her she emerges from darkness into light. And who shall say that, although God did not directly answer her prayer, it has not been answered through the mediation of the truth, and according to natural moral laws?

You will ask me, perhaps, "Ought we not to pray for direct spiritual gifts?" Yes, I think we ought; but I think that whenever a man asks God for any spiritual gift, the next step should be to ask: "Have I not asked God for something that I can get myself? Have I not asked God for something that He has made provision to give me in an indirect way?"

Suppose I should go to God and say, "Lord, be pleased to give me salad," He would point to the garden, and say: "There is the place to get salad; and if you are too lazy to work for it, I shall not give it to you." Suppose, standing by a crab-apple

tree, I should say, "Lord, give me pippins on this tree," He would say, "Certainly, if you will graft it." And if I grafted the tree, I would get the pippins. If I neglected to do it, I would not get them.

Prayer is often an argument of laziness. For instance, a person finds that his temper is a source of great trouble to him ; and if you divest his prayer of its reverential character, it amounts to about this : "Lord, my temper gives me a vast deal of inconvenience, and it would be a great task for me to correct it, and wilt Thou be pleased to correct it for me, that I may get along easier?" If prayer was answered under such circumstances, independent of the action of natural laws, it would be paying a premium on indolence. If, therefore, a thing is accessible to a person ; if, by proper exertion or inquiry he can compass it himself, it is not to be supposed that God will turn aside from those natural laws by which He has made provision for the supply of this very want, to give it to the man in a special manner.

You will ask me, "Are there any circumstances in which God may be disposed to do such a thing?" I am inclined to think that there are. I can imagine how He might do it in the case of one who was placed beyond the reach of those instrumentalities which alone could enable him to avail himself of blessings that ordinarily men could obtain by their own exertions. An angel was sent to release Peter from prison ; but if Peter had had a pass-key in his pocket, and had had the power to use it for his own release, I do not believe an angel would have

been sent to release him. When Paul and Silas were praying and singing in prison, an earthquake was sent that shook open the doors and set them free ; but if they had had files and saws, and could have set themselves free, I do not believe they would have got their liberty by any other means. I can understand how special answers to prayer might be granted to those in slave-life. I do not refer to its toils and exactions, but to its deprivations. Consider how the slave was not permitted to read the Word of God ; how only now and then a detached morsel of the gospel was vouchsafed to him ; and how he was kept in twilight so far as the outward forms of truth are concerned. In view of these things, it is not unreasonable to presume that God would answer the prayers of slaves as He would not answer the prayers of those who were more highly favoured. I can understand that God might do for little children, since natural laws are beyond their reach, what He would not do for grown folks. The same reason that led God to work miracles in earlier periods leads Him to answer prayers for blessings for which there is a provision made in natural laws, in cases such as I have enumerated.

I do not say that He does it every day ; but I meet cases that look exactly as if He were doing it. I meet cases in which it seems as though the Lord said : " If this had been a white man, I would not have answered that prayer so ; I did it because it was a poor black man, who could not know how to help himself." And the law for *you* is obvious—that your prayer must be accompanied with inves-

tigation and activity, and that you must *earn* what you pray for.

This is all on the supposition that prayer means *asking* for particular things ; but when you come to reflect that prayer means confession of sin and communion, how broad do you find it to be, outside of the department of supplication, which is the smallest part, although it is usually regarded as the largest !

DUTY OF CONVERSING WITH IMPENITENT SINNERS.

A STRANGER who addressed the meeting said it seemed to him, that, on the Friday evening previous, Mr. Beecher, in speaking of the duty of conversation with impenitent sinners, left the impression on some minds that he did not regard it as a matter of much importance. Mr. Beecher responded as follows:—

My position here is that of a teacher, and not merely that of an exhorter. I have been conscious of the errors of others in giving indiscriminate exhortations; and it has been a tendency of mine, therefore, to take occasion, when any truth was offered, not so much to enforce the thing that was obvious, and that had been correctly stated, as to add the next view, or some side view, or whatever explanations and discriminations might be needed, to broaden the knowledge of Christians and make it various.

There is an endless field of instruction here, and I doubtless have sometimes seemed to undervalue a truth that I thoroughly valued; but it has only

been because some co-related truth has, for the time being, seemed to require that prominence should be given to it. And it may be, as this gentleman says, that I left the impression of undervaluing the privilege of personal and religious conversation; but it certainly was not because I really do undervalue it, for I put the highest value upon it.

Yet there is a class of men that we often meet, who might be called, not so much religious talkers as religious *chatterers*. I have myself suffered from their infictions. Men they are, who, when they talk, go off like a watchman's rattle, and with a sound as dry and sharp. I have been in revivals of religion where the whole instruction seemed to run on the duty of talking with impenitents, till it seemed as if the whole duty of Christians consisted in hunting up sinners and running them down with talk. Not that it was not a duty to talk; but all other things were left out of view, and there was not sufficient breadth and qualification given to the teaching.

Now, in the first place, I do not think it to be everybody's duty to talk. I think that God's gifts in creation are as manifest as God's gifts in the pentecostal day, when some had the gift of language, others the gift of interpretation, others the gift of teaching, and others the gift of exhortation. There are many persons, I suppose, who, in going to speak to other persons on the subject of religion, go directly across the grain of their nature. And yet they have eminent gifts of usefulness in other directions. I do not say that persons should not overcome their

repugnance to conversing with others on this subject ; but they should not do that to the neglect of those instruments that are strongest in them. There are other persons who are pre-eminently ordained in their nature and birth for conversation. I remember some men now who were almost never without conversation ; and I may almost say I never remember to have heard them talk unedifyingly.

Our attention is called in Scripture to religious exercises that are for religious edification ; and he who finds that he has power to build a man up by his talking has a usefulness that is to be neither neglected nor put in a napkin. Some persons have such an insight into people, they have such a sense of times and seasons, they have such a power of putting the truth in an available form, that men can take it without hesitation, and digest it, as it were. There are unordained men that are ordained of God from their birth to be teachers in this way.

Many persons say, "If I had the gift of eloquence, and could stand up and speak, I think I would give everything in the world." I would have all such persons understand, that while, if they are able to speak to edification, they should do it, that is not the only way in which a man can be useful. Because a man cannot talk or pray to edification publicly, it does not follow that he cannot make his contribution to the cause of God. There are ways in which silence is most effectual, and example is most influential. Those are not the only useful

men who have gifts of speaking. There are various ways in which men may be useful without prejudice to the gift of speaking and without undervaluing our duty in regard to it. I want you to understand that you have a duty of conversation. And I add to it, that if you have no remarkable power in that direction, it does not necessarily take away from you the privilege of usefulness. There are other ways of doing good. Silence; example; a spirit of Christ, that hardly knows how to vocalize itself, and that yet pervades the features, and makes itself felt in all that the man does who is possessed by it, —you will find in the judgment-day that these were sowing seed all the time. Not, however, that, if you can speak, you should speak less, but that, if you cannot speak, you should not think that you cannot work in the Master's vineyard.

An ingenuous and modest young person, that speaks to another person on the subject of religion, often takes up a heavier cross, and practises a greater self-denial, than many others would in making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. I know it, because I have gone through it. You would not think it from the facility and ease with which I speak now, from long practice; but so it was. I recollect when I first tried to do my Christian duty. I remember when I was first asked to lead in prayer. If all the air between heaven and me had been put under the piston of a condenser, and crowded right down on my head, I should not have felt more as though I was suffocating! I gasped, literally, and said, "No, sir." I felt awfully. I was perfectly para-

lyzed. And then, when a teacher of mine was asked next to pray, and, with a sort of gentle submission, said, "I will try," and knelt down and made a prayer, that was worse than all to me. For I had known his history. He had been a poor ostler's boy in Canada. Professor Davies found him a boot-black and an ostler, and in making change he showed such an aptitude for arithmetic, and in reply to questions gave tokens of such an arithmetical gift, that the Professor became interested in him, and hired him for a servant. He subsequently got him appointed at West Point, where he remained until he was turned away on account of a Christmas frolic. He was afterwards my teacher. I owe much to him. He is still living. I said to myself: "Here is a minister's son, who has all his life long been under Christian instruction, and he is asked to pray, and he won't; and here is a poor boy that never had any Christian instruction in his early days, that never had any father or mother that he knew anything about, and he is asked to engage in prayer, and he turns round and does it!" It almost killed me. I look back without reproach upon it. I do not think I did wrong. It was all perfectly natural.

But the next time I went having my nerves strained up, and saying, "If they ask me to pray, I will pray." And if I had had to choose between being whipped with thirty-nine lashes and making that prayer, I think I should have said, "Give me the thirty-nine lashes." If it had been a choice between being put upon bread and water in close

confinement for a week, and making that prayer, I should have said, "Give me close confinement and bread and water." I suffered greatly in spirit. I was acutely sensitive to conscience, to praise and blame, to shame, to pride, and all of them were running wild in my mind, like so many colts in an open pasture-lot.

I recollect, afterwards, undertaking to talk to a man on the subject of religion. He was a regular engineer, and it would not have been half so much for him to have stormed Fort Fisher as it was for me to confront him. I felt as though I was not half as big as he was, and that, if he turned on me suddenly, I should be annihilated! I crept up to him cautiously, tremblingly, and in a way that I am sure excited his compassion; and he treated me with compassion, yes, with pity, evidently. Yet I felt that I had done my duty. It is sometimes very hard for a person to take up his cross and do what he thinks to be his duty.

For instance, it is hard to talk on the subject of religion to those who are in our own family. It is exceedingly hard for a wife to speak to her husband. It is equally hard for a husband to speak to his wife. Not in all cases, but in some cases; and in some cases it is harder than in others. It is very difficult for many parents to speak to their children. It is so in my case. I can talk to your children; but when it comes to my own, I feel a delicacy and reserve that is almost insuperable. If they come to me and propose questions it takes almost all the difficulty away; but I almost never speak to them

unless they desire it. I hardly ever speak to very intimate friends on the subject of personal religion unless they open the way for it. The nearer I come to any one, the more I shrink from what may seem a desire to thrust an unwelcome subject upon them, or to draw them to thoughts that they do not want me to draw them to. It may be carried too far; but there is an element of honour and delicacy here that is not to be unappreciated.

The young feel it more, perhaps, than those who are in later life: not because they are young, but because they have not the judgment and experience to enable them to discriminate in regard to times and seasons. As we grow older, we know what is right, and become firmer and more useful.

Many young persons think that their diffidence is evidence that they are not Christians. "If I loved the Lord Jesus Christ," they say, "should I be ashamed to speak of His name?" It is true of some men that they do not love Christ enough to be willing to speak of His name; but then there are other reasons besides a want of willingness to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ why men hesitate about speaking of His name. It does not follow in every case that a man does not love the Saviour simply because he feels great delicacy and reserve in this respect. There may be dishonourable reasons; but there may also be reasons that are not dishonourable.

Here is a young man who says: "So-and-so is doing a great deal of good, but I cannot do as he

does. I have not the power that he has; and then I should not know how to use it if I had." But it does not follow that you ought not to learn. The learning is very essential.

Then another important element is experience. An old Christian, out of the abundance of his heart, can talk all the time; but it is not so with a young person. In the earlier periods of life we have not so much to say.

How useful conversation is depends on what it is, or what it means. For instance, if you know a person to have been proved and tried in life all the way through, one simple sentence from him is very powerful. One sentence from Dr. Cornelius carried great weight with it. But suppose it were not he, but a man of a narrow sphere, an inferior mind, and no character, how much weight would it have? Dr. Cornelius's whole life was a sledge-hammer that drove home what he said.

If there comes to you a man whom you think to be a little whipper-snapper, and he talks about the *awful responsibilities* of this life, you do not mind what he says, nor care for it. You have no respect for him. His life has not given him a right to talk about such matters. That which makes conversation effectual is generally either the known life and disposition of the person, which give intrinsic weight to it, or else it is a moral wisdom and gravity in the thing said, which impresses it on the judgment according to the natural laws of the judgment.

While, then, it is your duty to talk, it is still more your duty to live so that you *can* talk. While

it is your duty to converse with others on the subject of their souls' salvation, it is still more your duty to live so that you will have something to say. These truisms that are bandied about everywhere do not amount to *talking*. And as we are to *watch unto prayer*, so we are to watch unto edifying conversation. I am speaking of cases where conversation is in some sense ministerial.

I now pass to a department in which everybody, it seems to me, can do something. I refer to daily family conversation. It seems to me that every person who has any degree of seriousness, any conscientious sensibility, any Christian love and zeal, will, in his daily round of intercourse, say something and do something which shall manifest these feelings. It seems to me that his business will be judged from a high stand-point, and that his social life will have an elevated tone. It seems to me that his hopes, his fears, his burdens, his endeavours, his mistakes, his temptations, his deliverances, his insight into God's Word, his knowledge of prayer, his memory of evils, his recollection of blessings, all his thoughts and feelings, will be tinged and dyed with the same Christian spirit. I can hardly think it possible for two Christians to live together under the same roof, or to be associated in the same business, week after week and month after month, and yet neither of them have anything that comes from Christian experience which he offers the other.

I think that every person ought, so far as possible, to find companionship and friendship which turns on religious congeniality. Young men ought to find

somebody that they can talk with naturally and easily. They ought to form associations where the pivot, the starting-point, of conversation, shall be moral, religious truth. It may be that other friendships will be broader and more absorbing; but every man ought to have somebody with whom he can naturally and easily talk on the subject of religion.

Q. An acquaintance of mine tells me that he has always found, when the time came for him to speak to a person on the subject of religion, that he had a sort of longing to meet that person; and I have felt the same thing. Is it a general feeling?

This longing is peculiar. Some have, and some do not; but where you *do* have it, it is a pretty good sign that you are in a state of mind to talk. It may not be that those to whom you talk are in a state of mind to hear what you say; but the wisdom that springs from our feelings is better than the dry light that we get from the understanding. Where your heart takes hold of persons, and you think about them, and pray for them, and brood over them, and they are continually in your thoughts, and you clothe them with the garment of your affection, then in conversation with them your tones are more gentle and winning, your themes are more appropriate, and the applications of what you say are generally wiser, than you could make them, probably, under any other circumstances. Dry talk, talk without any feeling in it, does not do much good; but where you find a person that you hunger after, you need not be afraid to talk to him.

I am not superstitious about this. My own experience corroborates it. I often know when I am

going to succeed in my ministrations, as certainly as I know anything. In many cases, when speaking to an audience, I have that in me that says, "I will carry them, and nothing can hinder it;" and I *do* carry them when I feel so. Sometimes, in periods of revival, I am clothed with a victorious power, and am conscious of it. There are cases in which I see persons whose souls I yearn to save, and it seems as though the Spirit of God came with power; it seems as though I were ten times as strong as Samson was when he lifted the gates of the city; it seems as though I could lift five thousand gates, and bring these persons to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I do not put any particular emphasis on this experience. If one has it, he has great cause to be thankful; but if he has it not, let him not mourn. Let every man take that which has been given him, and be content. God makes sparrows to sing, and they sing as sparrows; He makes bluebirds to sing, and they sing as bluebirds; He makes robins to sing, and they sing as robins; He makes wood-thrushes and larks to sing, and they sing in the way that they were made to sing. They are all members of a great choir, and each carries his part, and each sings sweeter and better in singing according to his own nature, than he would if he undertook to copy the style of some other bird-singer.

Now, there is some way in which you can aid Christ's cause, and if you are in earnest you can find out which way it is. There are many ways of usefulness, and it is essential that you should ascertain which way you can pursue the most efficiently;

and that you can do by a diligent trial of your various gifts. In some way every man should work for the building up of the kingdom of God in his fellow-men.

Q. Does not the difficulty which is experienced by wives and husbands and friends in speaking to each other, and by parents in speaking to their children, on the subject of religion, often arise from the consciousness which they have of the imperfection of their lives, and of the inconsistency of their conduct with the instructions which they fain would give?

There may occasionally be a feeling of that kind; but it does not cover the whole ground. Sometimes the reverse is the case. I have known persons who turned their infelicities of disposition and conduct to a good account. I have known passionate men that flew off the handle easily, and that, when they calmed down, would say, "My dear boy, it is a source of infinite mortification to me that I am subject to such an unhappy temper: now, take warning of your father;" and it has done the boy a great deal of good. I have known men that signed the temperance pledge because their fathers drank so hard. I have known a great many instances of that kind. On the other hand, there are cases in which parents feel: "If my children do not know by my conduct in the household that religion is to me the most important thing, no words that I can speak will impress its importance on them."

My father did not need to speak to me to impress me with the importance of religion. The way he lived, the spirit he manifested, was sufficient for that. He had no *religiousness*; he was very careless in this regard—so careless that I was shocked

at times. I have been horror-struck at things that I have seen him do in the pulpit, when prayer was going on. I have seen him do things at prayer-time in the family that did not seem to me reverential—and I should not wonder if they were not : but, after all, his views of the world ; his ideas in respect to the things to be lived for ; the way in which he treated men that did wrong ; his mildness, and gentleness, and love, and loveliness ; his deep sense of eternal things—these were evidence enough of his goodness. It is true that sometimes, right in prayer-time, and when others were praying, he would open his eyes and look out of the window ; yet, when he came to read the Bible, and he got to one of those beautiful passages of Christ, he would stop, and choke, and weep, and try again, and break down, and give up, and close the Bible ; and then, when he tried to pray, the tears would pour down his cheeks, and his words would seem to be utterances gurgling through water. And when he was so pervaded and saturated with a religious spirit ; when he was swept at times with such a flood of feeling about invisible things ; when his heart was full of religion, and his life was full of religion, what did he need to say to me ? I needed no one to talk to me except to comfort me. Already I was in bondage to conscience, my feeling of self-condemnation was too strong ; and what I needed was something to let me up, and not to press me down.

Sometimes the reason why persons do not talk to their children is a foolish sense of their own inconsistency ; but sometimes they do not need to do it,

because their whole life, their whole influence, is conversation enough.

I feel almost a morbid sense of the rights of the people. I will not intrude on persons' consciences and personal liberty. I will not invade the rights of others in the church, in the household, or anywhere else. I will not take advantage of my public position, or of my intimacy with persons, to attack them. I hate to corner people. I am asked: "Why do you not get men in this or that corner, and hammer away at them in your applications?" Because I will not take anybody at a disadvantage. If a man comes to Christ, he must come of his own accord. I will do all I can for him by reasoning and persuasion; I will endeavour to show him the path in which he should walk; but it is for him to say, "I will come," and to walk in it himself, like a man. I will not drag him into the kingdom of God.

In the family we have each other at a great disadvantage. We know just where those whom we live with are sore, and we are able to put our finger upon the very marrow of their feelings. This is the reason why family quarrels are so bitter. And in religious matters, we confide in each other, we trust each other, we are open-breasted with each other; and it is not fair to take advantage of our knowledge one of another to talk to each other as we would to an outsider to whom we are under no special obligation. There is a law of delicacy and respect here which ought not to be disregarded.

THE UNWRITTEN WORDS AND DEEDS OF CHRIST.



THE last verse of the last chapter of John is one of the most tantalizing verses in the Bible. I sometimes wish it had not been written; or that, since it was, something more had been written. There is a great deal too little of the best part of the Bible—that is, if we might be permitted to express an opinion in the matter.

“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.”

We are not, when interpreting the language of the East, where hyperbole was almost vernacular, where the commonest thoughts were expressed in language that seems to us almost extravagant, to make too much of statements like this; but certainly it is fair to conclude that John designed to inform us that the Gospels were but the merest handful of the harvest of Christ's life. It is perfectly fair to infer from this passage, that the life of Christ was

fruitful both in actions and in speeches to a degree which the Gospels alone in no adequate measure represent.

And yet, no man can read the Gospels without being impressed with the immense activity of Christ. They never conveyed to my mind the idea of a man who bustled about or talked much. I can hardly conceive of the Saviour as having any of that intensive energy which you see in men of common practical power. If I imagine Him as walking, I never imagine Him as walking in such a manner that people would naturally step out of the way for fear that He would run upon them. I always think of Him as moving, not with a slow but still with a dignified onward motion, that was composed, self-possessed.

As to the fact that He was ready of speech to an extraordinary degree, we are not left in doubt; and yet, who ever conceived of Christ as talkative? That He was accessible, that He was inclined to converse, we cannot doubt. The slight glimpses which we get into what may be called the domestic life of Christ, His life with the disciples, give us that impression. His fluency in public discourse gives us the idea of one to whom speech was naturally ready and rich. He drew illustrations from every source. He was not abstract. He was an extraordinary instance of one who propounded universal truths, rather than relative ones, not making them abstract, but almost putting them into concrete forms. And yet, no man thinks of Christ as being garrulous, or excessively and loosely talkative. On the contrary,

we think that He probably never opened His lips to speak without so shaping a sentence that it was like coin. I think of the Saviour as uttering sentences so crisp, so fresh, and so complete, that every one of them might be cherished as a proverb, or a maxim, or as a rounded statement. And although they may not seem to us to cover—as they do not—the whole ground of modern thought, how immensely they outran the ground of thought in that day! This, unless we have studied the matter, we are not so well prepared to appreciate as they who are familiar with the round of rabbinical lore, and the manner of teaching in the literature of the East.

But the sayings of Christ were not remarkable more for their practical wisdom, for their directness, and for their being delivered to the moral feelings of men, which made Him seem like one teaching with authority, than for their comprehensiveness, their great breadth and variety.

And yet, after all that we have of Him, after all that we have of His healing miracles, after all that we have of His ministrations of various kinds, after all that we have of His sayings and doings in the four Evangelists, John says, "That is nothing compared with what He did." We have here these little Books of the New Testament that you can carry between your thumb and finger, which contain the sum of all that we know concerning Him; but John says that the unrecorded things which He did, if they were written, would make books which would fill, not a library merely, but the world itself, almost!

I cannot but feel sorry that more was not re-

corded. Doubtless, there are many subjects that He discoursed about which are not touched upon. I do not undertake to give any reason why it should be so. But I think it is natural, and I think it is not a sinful curiosity, since we have had so much, to wish to know what more there was. And we are not left altogether in the dark about it. Occasionally things fall out accidentally—for there are such things as accidents in the Bible—and these things make us feel more eager in collecting and appropriating all that there is.

One who was not a disciple while Christ was on earth, but who was afterwards brought into the disciple band, and who had never, except by a miracle, beheld the Saviour, was voyaging about the Mediterranean and Asia Minor, preaching Christ; and in one of his circuits he stopped, and called the elders of Ephesus to him, and had a short interview with them; and towards the close of his remarks he let drop this declaration:—

“I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Why, that like to have been left out! It so happened that Paul, away off in Asia Minor, by the merest chance, told these men to recollect this saying of Christ. There is not a word about it anywhere in the New Testament except here.

Now consider what that is. I call it the key-note of human happiness. I call it the very secret of the Christian philosophy. And just as long as the world stands, I think it will be found more and

more demonstrable, that both duty and moral health and happiness depend on centrifugal action,—not on centripetal; and that men who want to be happy, and go about seeking happiness with a different idea from this, will only repeat the universal disappointment of men—a disappointment that is proportioned and commensurate with the greatness of faculty, with the depth of desire, with the power of nature. For no human being, by drawing in knowledge, by drawing in taste, by drawing in love, by drawing in any element that is accounted as joy-inspiring, was ever more than momentarily illumined and made happy. And the representatives of happiness acquired in any such way reveal how slender, how imperfect, how unsatisfying it is. No man ever yet was happy, with a happiness that lasted, who had not the power of throwing out love, or throwing out taste, or throwing out thought, or throwing out action. And all this is shown by the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” It is more blessed to do for others than to have others do for you. It is more blessed to bestow good upon others than to have others bestow good upon you. It is more blessed to teach than to be taught. The great law of happiness is the law of outgoing, and not the law of incoming.

But the world does not believe a word of it. Neither does the Church, for the most part. Although Christians do, when sworn, or under examination, indorse that text, they do not live it. The great operating principle in the world and

throughout human society still is, that a man is to be happy in proportion as he gets and has. And so human life whirls round and round with its vortex sucking in as much as possible. And human life is full of disappointment, full of waves, full of echoes of sorrow and trouble. It is the few only that by some accident have stumbled upon this philosophy of the Saviour, and found out that men are to be happy in proportion as they are able to give from themselves to others.

Did you ever undertake to settle in your mind what were the happiest days that you ever had in your life? I think it would be a problem worth solving, to sit down and call back your happiest days. I have tried to do it. I think some of the happiest days I ever had were those of forth-putting. They were not days in which great influences were borne on me. I cannot recollect those days. That is, I know there was a day, at about such a period of my life, when I was extremely happy; but I have forgotten what the contents of it were. It lies back in my memory like a golden haze; but what the substance of it was I cannot distinctly remember.

I recollect a day that I had at Stratford-on-Avon, which was radiant as the sun in summer. I recollect another day when the full power and glory of the galleries of art broke upon me, on the Continent. I recollect another day that I had in Berlin. These days stand out; but their contents do not. I look back upon them, and they seem to me as a house of revelry does to a man who is passing by it in the

street. He sees the house, that is shaken with the dance, and that is full of light, and he hears the merry voices of the people within; but he cannot look in to see what they are doing. He merely knows that there is a house, and that there is great joy in it. I have a general, vague sense of having had days of receptivity.

But, on the other hand, there rise up before my mind many days in which my experience was that of giving out, instead of taking in. I have a distinct recollection of the first revival that I laboured in. It was in Terre Haute, Indiana. I used to get up early in the morning, and, immediately after breakfast, take a horse, and ride from house to house, and converse with people. I worked in that way till ten o'clock. Between ten and eleven I attended the daily prayer-meeting that was held there. Then I rode with the pastor till dinner-time. After dinner I rested till evening, when I attended another meeting. This I continued for two or three weeks. And those days I could almost take, one after another, in their order, and tell you just what I did. Those days were almost entirely without selfness; and yet they are clear to my memory. They stand out—ribs, bones, and all.

I recollect going home and having just such a time in my own parish. And I can draw from that period single days, as you would draw pictures out from a portfolio. They are like a volume shut; but I can go to my note-books, in which I took down lists of the names of the men and women to whom I ministered, and can give you whole histories of

individuals, and tell you what I thought of them, what their spiritual wants were, what I did for them, how I followed them up, and what the issue was. And I can do this in the cases of scores and scores of them. I think I can give you the histories of two hundred persons that I knew in Indianapolis. I can recollect the experience of whole winters there, and relate the details of events that took place in connection with my ministerial labours.

Though there are gradations of happiness, though it is not intimated that there is no happiness in receiving, yet "it is more blessed to give than to receive." And a man who has a heart and disposition to live so as to produce effects of thought, of taste, of moral excellence, of love and joy, upon other men, is unconsciously writing, also, the score of his own happiness. He may not at the time be conscious of the impression of these things upon himself; but if he takes the trouble to look back, he will find that while the things which he receives die out like lines that, written in phosphorus, shine less and less, and finally almost or quite disappear, the things which He gives are graven ineffaceably on his memory—are, as it were, cut in the rock.

And this principle, which I think you will find verified so amply, was almost lost out of the New Testament! I might chide myself, perhaps, for saying so, as if there were not a Providence that at the proper time and place would have remembered that important principle and had it recorded; but, speaking after the manner of men, I might say it was wellnigh lost.

Well, then, there is another application for it. I have many persons coming to me that are whelmed in trouble, that are afflicted with various distemperatures spiritual. Now and then there are cases of persons who are stumbling simply for want of general religious instruction. There are cases of other persons who are stumbling on account of ill health, and who merely need enlightenment with regard to physical conditions. There are cases of others who are stumbling from some misconception of the truth, and who only require a slight adjustment of points not understood. And so on. But my experience as a pastor is, that perhaps one-half of the uncertainties of men, and of their anxieties about their personal experience, arise from their seeking religion as a selfish stimulant. They want it as an exhilarating gas. They want evidence that their sins are forgiven for the sake of the joy that will spring out of it. They want evidence of Christ's presence with them on account of the delight that it will afford them. They want assurance of adoption; they want rapture in worship; they want joy in meetings; they want stimulus in preaching; they want everything that will play music on their soul. They are seeking experiences that shall be radiant and eminent and full of joy.

If people, instead of seeking joyful experiences for themselves, would seek to make other people's experiences joyful; if they would, instead of seeking to be happy, seek to secure the happiness of others; if they would, instead of seeking to get rid of carrying their own burdens, seek to bear the burdens of

others ; if they would, instead of spending their time in examining their evidences to see whether they are in the true way, seek to bring back to the fold of Christ those that have wandered from it ; if they would seek to *do* good, rather than to *be* good, —I think they would accomplish both objects. I think they would find that doing good was the shortest road to being good, and that contributing to the welfare and happiness of others was the shortest road to securing their own welfare and happiness.

Q. Do you think that the passage which you quoted has any necessary connection with religious sentiment or feeling? Or is it a universal law, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive"? In other words, will not men of the world, and even those whom we consider to be immoral men, when they perform a good act, experience the same glow and satisfaction in their hearts and minds which religious people do when they perform the same act?

Relatively they will. It *is* a universal law. It is more perfectly realized in the experiences of a Christian life ; but any man who wants to can take a taste, and see how he likes the specimen !

Now, do not go out to-morrow, and do some good thing on purpose that you may be happy. That will spoil it all. If you would be happy, you must do good for the sake of doing good, and not for the sake of the kicking back of happiness on you.

I am reminded of a man in Boston who was accustomed to go down to the police court regularly to relieve persons who suffered because they had no friends, nobody to bail them, and nobody to see that they were properly defended. Although the courts were generally served by men of humanity as well

as justice, yet there was a great deal of carelessness which resulted in the suffering of many who were arraigned and tried. And this man, though he was not a man of wealth, used to go surety for these wretches. He did it for years and years. And he was the means of rescuing many criminals from undeserved punishment, and of reforming and saving them. And I recollect that he said he never was permitted, in one single instance in which he rendered assistance to persons of this class, among whom were many abandoned people, to suffer pecuniary loss. If he went bail for a man, that man or his friends invariably made it up to him.

What I was thinking was that, in all probability, at that time, not the merchant that was the most prosperous and was making the most money, nor the artist that was gaining the highest reputation, nor the minister that was preaching the most attractive sermons, and getting the most praise, was the happiest ; but that the man who was reaping every day, unconsciously, the deepest satisfaction, was this man, who was really spending all his time for others, and not for himself.

PRAISE AND PRAYER.

NO one, I think, can look through the Book of Psalms without being struck with the amount which it contains of that particular experience which we call *the spirit of praise*. A great many have a vague impression that praise is closely allied to flattery; that it is, at any rate, the recitation into one's ears of all his good qualities. Nothing, it seems to me, could be more odious. And, as we grow finer and morally higher by imbibing the spirit of the gospel of Christ, it would become proportionately abhorrent, if praise meant the recitation before God, even, of what we conceived to be the Divine excellence, in any such sense as that of flattering Him, to conciliate Him, and to render Him more facile to our petitions. That is a low and ungenerous and gross way of viewing praise.

If men are surprised by a great pleasure, you will see the difference between one and another in this, that a stolid or selfish man will absorb his pleasure, while a generous nature, like a bell, will

ring out his. It is the instinct of every true and large nature to distribute its own sensations of enjoyment, to radiate its own emotions of pleasure. You cannot meet a noble man, and spend a few moments with him, without burning to tell your friends something about him. Occupation, or the time that has elapsed since you met him, may have quenched the impulse when you meet them ; but I think the first desire of every generous person, on seeing a thing which excites pleasure in him, is to excite pleasure in some one else. It is this tendency of the mind to reflect itself upon others, that is the key-note and fundamental element of the spirit of praise.

Where the soul stands before God, and becomes vividly conscious of any Divine excellence, of anything that is beautiful, of anything that is grand, it ought, if true to itself, to have an impulse to express it ; but it is the result of delight and pleasure produced by the action of the Divine Being upon the mind.

Praise is not, then, the recitation of all the good qualities that you can think of in God. It is the utterance of the joy and gladness which the Divine excellence tends to excite in you. That is the genuine language of praise.

I used, as a child, to hear heaven familiarly called the *day of everlasting rest*, the *Sabbath of the soul*; and I thought it was owing to my depravity that I had no relish for it. I had an idea that heaven was a place where everybody could sing, and was singing ; but the subject-matter of what they sang

I had no conception of. I was brought up in the back country, where singing was a duty, performed as best it might be by those who engaged in it, and my suggestions and imaginations concerning it were not very radiant. I had a notion that the saints stood around the throne and sang; and my imagination had been helped by seeing long rows of angels, like wax-candles, represented in pictures. I had an idea that angels stood about the throne very white and very pure, and recited before God what they thought of Him. I did not like it; and I thought I was a miserable wretch because I did not. I thought I was depraved, and that if I were only a Christian I *should* like it.


But as I grew older, it struck me that my child instinct was correct, that I was under a misapprehension, and that they who praised God in heaven were represented as doing it musically because high feeling tends to utter itself through the medium of music. It struck me that praising God was not so much reciting and rehearsing God's qualities, as the report of a man's own inward joy as excited by the aspect, the glory, the office of God.

Now, it seems to me, that, according to this conception of praise, Christians, for the most part, are not in a state to praise God. And it is very remarkable to see how men will open their prayers. A man will begin to pray by saying, "We praise, Thee, O Lord," and in a dull, measured, literal, methodical manner, will say that he is doing that which nobody ever does except in an ecstatic state,—except in language which implies intense and

rapturous excitement. You shall hear persons, because they think it their duty to praise God, utter the items of praise, one by one, as though they were reading off a merchant's bill of parcels; saying, for instance, "We praise Thee for creation, and we praise Thee for providence, and we praise Thee for grace," with suitable modifications under each head.

Far be it from me to say that no persons should utter praise unless he has arrived at the highest state of religious feeling,—for there are different degrees of this feeling which are compatible with a proper utterance of praise; but I wish to dissuade you, when such a feeling in any degree is excited in you, from supposing it to be your duty, and from acting as though it were a kind of duty, to recite God's qualities before Him, instead of being satisfied with and profiting by the effect on your mind of a near contemplation of those qualities.

To resume the original thought introduced by these remarks, I find, in reading the Bible, that it was the habit of the Old Testament saints and of the New Testament saints—that it was the habit of religious men both before and after Christ—to indulge in much praise of God. They had such ready access to Him, they had such sweet and joyous views of Him—He was so near and precious to them—that there was excited in them a continuous desire to praise Him. And this feeling sometimes amounted to a desire to caress. We are informed that John laid his head on the Saviour's bosom; and if he did it once, you may be sure that he did it many times. Many instances show that Christ's familiarity with



His disciples extended to caressing. And we have an intimation that there is such a thing as the soul's caress of God—that a man may have such a sense of God's presence that his heart shall touch, as it were, the Divine heart. And ascriptions of praise to God under such circumstances may be called a *caress of words*.

I hardly know how there could be a near life with Christ without praise, or the spirit of praise. I can scarcely conceive it possible that the soul of a man should be in intimate relations with the Divine soul, without having a desire to praise God excited in him.

How is it with us? How many dull, drudging days do we have! How many days unilluminated by one single wish to utter thanks or gladness! How many selfish days of duty! How many days of fear! How many days of secret uneasiness! How few days do we find in which we experience a spirit of praise, except those rare days of health in nerve and pleasure in external condition! Now and then, with many persons, there is a salient day, a kind of pinnacle, on which they are joyful, and feel like praising God. But a true Christian experience would find, during some part of every day, the soul in a condition to love and praise God. To be in a praising state, one must be in a most unselfish condition of mind; he must live relatively humble as before God; he must be sensitive to his obligations to God; he must have a faith that shall enable him to see God in the events which are transpiring about him. The desire to praise God presupposes a large experience. For one to have this desire

is almost the same as to be a rich and ripe Christian.

I anticipate the questions that you will ask. You will say, "How shall a man praise God who seems to himself to be in continuous trouble?" Look at the history of David, and see how you will do it. I think some of the most wondrous of his psalms are those that begin in supplication. He says, for instance, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me; all mine enemies are upon me; dost thou not care for me?"—and then, having exhausted the language of supplication, he breaks out into triumph, and says, "I will praise Thee." It seems as though there rose up over the horizon to him the bright star of Christ, and as though the light of it kindled in his soul gladness and peace that he could not refrain from giving expression to. You will find that in some of the psalms the soul begins in a minor key, and by-and-by rises to the major key; and then flies away—and sings as it flies.

Now, if a man is in trouble, let him go to God in his trouble, till he gets a sense of the divine, loving, pitying, sympathetic nature, and see if there does not spring up in him a spirit of praise. And whenever you feel an impulse to praise, give it wings. Do not lose a chance to praise. It is precious to the soul.

"How," it is asked, "shall a man who is not mobile, who is not sympathetic, who is naturally calm, learn to praise?" Every man must do it according to his nature, of course. Some can learn to praise only in a low degree; others can learn to do

it in a high degree ; but according to his measure every person may learn the spirit of praise.

So far as producing this spirit is concerned, I think nothing is so well calculated to do it as music. Singing is a means of grace. And those persons who are gifted with song, or those persons who can express their thoughts in the language of hymns, hardly need to ask how they shall learn to praise. Music and sacred hymns naturally go with Christian experience. They were born out of it, and will live with it to the end of time, I suppose. And if Christians conferred with each other more with reference to God's goodness to them, and helped each other more to sing and to praise, their communion in these matters would go far toward forming the habit of praise in them.

Another question is, "How are we to be redeemed from the stigma which too often rests upon Christian experience, that it is melancholy and morbid?" This would be to a great extent removed if we learned more to make the natural language of Christian life the language of praise, of exhilaration, of song, of gladness. These things are attractive to children even. They are attractive to all persons. A radiant piety, a loving piety, a hopeful piety, and, above all, a singing and praising piety, wins every class of men, and honours the name of Christ in the world.

I cannot, therefore, emphasize too much the duty of praise in the family and in the sanctuary.

I was struck, in college, with Dr. Humphrey's habit of mind. He used to go through a whole prayer, of a Sabbath morning, in which every single

sentence, from beginning to end, was, "We thank Thee, O God." I have heard him pray for nearly fifteen minutes, during which time he did not utter one single sentence which had not that initial form. It was a prayer of thanksgiving from beginning to end. It stamped itself upon my young and sensitive mind.

Now, if parents, as sometimes they do, and properly, spend a prayer in confession of sin, that produces a profound impression on the child; but if it is confession to-day, and to-morrow, and the next day, and the next, if in their prayers they continually wade knee-deep and neck-deep in a mere sense of sin, what impression is produced on the child and on the household? If, on the other hand, while this state of soul is recognized with profound sensibility, there is the sense of victory constantly expressed in the utterances of parents in the presence of the household; if they bear testimony to the goodness of God to them in the family and out of it, in their individual and social history, in dangers in temptations, in joys and sorrows, in hopes and fears, and they find perpetual argument for thanksgiving, it lends a motive for piety in the young, which is good.

Q. Is it proper to go to God with secular troubles, and make them subject-matter of prayer? Would you, for instance, encourage men who are in debt to pray that God would help them to means with which to discharge their indebtedness?

I would. Any trouble that a man would go to his earthly father about, he may go to his God. People say, "Do you believe that, contrary



to all the great laws of nature and political economy, God will provide a sum of money for a man in answer to his prayer? Do you believe that God contravenes natural laws to assist a man in paying his debts?" I do not. But when a man has used his means to the uttermost, and trusts in God, then God uses His means to control natural laws for that man's benefit. I know that, if I succeed, I must succeed, not by having my father's name, but by putting forth my own exertions. I know that I must make my own way in life, and I undertake to do it. But if I come to a point where I am shut up, held back, so that I cannot go forward, and I do not know what to do, I may go to my father for help. It is not for the sake of throwing off burdens, it is not with the expectation that he will contravene natural laws, that I go to him. I go to him because I have used up my stock of knowledge of natural laws; and I say to him, "You are older and larger than I am; cannot you use your knowledge of those laws so as to help me?" And he says, "Yes, I can." And he does. And nobody thinks there is anything strange in it. Everybody understands that a father can use his knowledge of natural laws for his child without violating those laws. But when you speak of God's helping men in their secular affairs, people are aghast, and say, "Do you suppose God is going to stop the laws of nature for the sake of enabling men to keep their bank account running?" I understand that God helps men, not by stopping natural laws, but by using them better for us than we can use them for

ourselves. And if there is anything justified, it is prayer for help in secular matters by those that love God. And the oftener you go to God for help, the more welcome you are. When a man comes to you for counsel concerning things that are important as affecting his welfare, it not only does not impoverish you to give him the benefit of your knowledge and wisdom, but you are gratified at his consulting you, and you take pleasure in lending yourself to him to that extent. I cannot conceive of a man who, having a store of discreet knowledge, should be unwilling to use it for the succour of his fellow-men, If ducats were as plenty with me as thoughts, I should be most happy to lend to everybody!

Now, when we go to God, we ask Him to do things that please Him. It is more blessed for Him to give to you and to help you than not to do it. And when a man is in trouble, and goes to God, and says, "I have done all I can. I do not know what to do more. I am willing to suffer or to be relieved. Thy will be done,"—I believe that then God hears and answers prayer, even though the trouble be of a secular nature. And I do not believe that in doing it he violates natural laws: I believe, on the contrary, that he controls natural laws, and makes them perform errands of mercy. I should feel almost as though I were an orphan if that doctrine were taken out of the world.

I recollect hearing my father say that once, when he came home from a journey on a Saturday night in the dead of winter, mother met him at the door, and said, "We have just enough fuel for this even-

ing, but none for to-morrow." Anybody that ever lived on Litchfield Hill in winter knows that a Sunday there and then would not suggest summer. Father used to be run very close for money in those days, and in this instance he had none, and did not know where to get any. And, in telling of it, he said, "I felt like a child, and I inwardly prayed God to help me." And he said he had hardly finished praying before an old farmer, who had never been particularly friendly, and who did not come to church very often, drove up to the door with a load of wood, which he said he "took it into his head he would like to give to the parson."

Do you ask me if that was an answer to prayer? Well, although I would not attempt a philosophical explanation of it, it is so pleasant to think it was an answer to prayer, and the circumstances point so strongly in that direction, that I prefer to think it was. I do not believe it will do anybody any hurt to believe that God loves us, that His ear is ever open to our cry, and that, while we use all lawful and known means in our own behalf, He stands ready to succour us in the day of trouble. I would not for anything have my mouth stopped so that I could not go to Him in my extremity, and say, "I am poor and wretched; oh, help, help!"

Q. Do not you think that the whole tendency of our people is toward an unseemly, if not a vulgar, familiarity with the Divine Being?

There is undoubtedly danger of using a familiarity which indicates a want of realization of God's presence. Nevertheless, there is a familiarity of

love as well as of irreverence. "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." You cannot very well lay down rules about this matter. All prayers, whether they are grave or light, whether they are reverential or familiar, if they bear evidence that the man who utters them has not a true filial feeling toward God, are perfunctory not only, but shocking; while all prayers that are the genuine expression of filial feeling toward God, no matter how familiar they may be, are proper, and do not repel.

As to the spirit in which we approach God, sometimes it is the spirit of conscience; sometimes it is the spirit of veneration; sometimes it is the familiarity of love; sometimes it is the augustness of fear; sometimes it is a sense of grandeur; sometimes it is a desire for help; sometimes it is a feeling of nearness and friendship. The language of prayer and the mode of approaching God vary through many degrees.

Q. Is it right for us to go to God with that spirit which Jacob exhibited when he wrestled with the angel, and said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me"?

That is not the language of every day. It was the crisis of the patriarch's life, and he was kindled to an ecstasy of feeling. When the mind is roused up as his was, it chooses its own language. There are crises in every man's life, of distress, and of ecstatic desire, in which the soul mounts up and employs language that could not ordinarily be employed. And when the feeling justifies it, there is

nothing that the soul may not use. When the soul is in battle, it seizes anything for a shaft, and lets it fly. And when a man is in anguish and agony, and is impleading God, he does not stand on grammar or words. But when a man in an ordinary key of feeling brings down this language of paroxysmal moments and employs it, it is wrong, of course.

REVIVALS OF RELIGION.

IF I were asked to give the clearest illustration possible of the difference between doctrine and experience, I would point to the doctrine of the soul's dependence on Christ, and to the experience portrayed in this hymn of Toplady's, which we have sung.* It is a hymn that breathes, I would almost say, the *Christianest* of experiences. It expresses jointly the feeling of longing, the sense of personal helplessness, and the sense of the Divine sufficiency, to a degree that I hardly know to be equalled in any other hymn. Toplady was one of the sternest Calvinists, and one of the stoutest controversialists. He and Wesley filled England with controversy on the Arminian question. And it is remarkable how two men, who could not preach together or live together in England, can be shut up in a hymn-book together without any trouble. Their hymns never quarrel. In going from the books of one of them to those of the other, you are impressed with their strong mutual

* "Rock of Ages."

opposition ; but you may sing Charles Wesley's hymns, and John Wesley's hymns, and Toplady's hymns, up and down, and across, and there is no jar between them—not so much as a railroad-train has when it is switched from one track to another that is parallel with it.

In the first place, the theological views of these men were doctrinal. That is to say, the forms of truth that they attempted to expound were intellectually conceived and stated. And they were oppugnant. But when they abandoned the realm of mere thought, and lifted themselves up into the sphere of true Christian feeling, they did not differ. The Arminian was as Calvinistic as the Calvinist, and the Calvinist was as Arminian as the Arminian. There was no difference between them when both of them were really inflamed by a common love of Christ, and by a common sense of their dependence upon Him.

I know not how it is with you, but with me, as I grow older, there is an increasing love for these pleading hymns ; these hymns that "seem," in the language of another hymn, "to throw their arms about the neck of Christ and plead." And this hymn, and the one that is set to the tune of "Williams," in our Plymouth Collection, commencing—

"When I survey the wondrous cross,"

become sweeter and sweeter to me as I grow older. In other words, I have more and more a sense of the soul's need of God ; and somehow the old-fashioned hymns, that plead on their knees, as it

were, meet my wants better than the newer hymns. Those are beautiful and useful; but I find myself guided back to the more childlike and utter abandonment of the soul before God. And it seems to me there is no person who has been a Christian, who has not, first or last, walked in the footsteps of these hymns of prostration, and yearning, and pleading. The experience may not come in a concentrated form; it may not come so that one can take it out, and look at it intellectually, and pronounce it to be just this or that. But humiliation before God, in view of one's sin and of one's consciousness of the sufficiency of Christ, and an irresistible yearning for Christ's help, love, and forgiveness—these have been, in a greater or less degree, the experience of every man that has the right to call himself a Christian. Some come to it in one way, and some in another. It is modified very much in men of different dispositions by the education which they have received. Education goes far in such matters. But, after all, the element is there.

Man is inferior. He is not only weak, but guilty. His own conscience condemns him; and God is greater than his conscience. And he has need of help in the Mediator, in the Intercessor, in Christ Jesus. And a sense of this need I suppose to be an inseparable part of every true Christian experience. A great many persons, however, undoubtedly, take the initial steps of a Christian life, and live more or less Christianly for years before they are brought to this state of feeling. Sometimes men are shut up unto sorrow; sometimes they are shut

up unto despondency; sometimes they are shut up unto doubts, and are beset with temptations to unbelief; and some come in one way, and some in another, to the fulness of a Christian life. Just as vessels sailing for New York from the east, the south-west, the south, and all points of the compass, converge, and make the same port, so Christians with widely different experiences all tend to the same spiritual condition.

Now there are times in which the bent of the mind in the direction of a sense of helplessness and of want takes on the social form, and leads to the organization of societies, or churches, or congregations in the community. And sometimes the whole community are, by a conjunction of circumstances, empowered by the Divine Spirit, and led to feel their need. And that is the beginning of what we call the coming in of a general religious movement.

I think you will find, ordinarily, that where the circumstances in which men live are such as to puff them up, and make them feel their own strength and sufficiency, revivals of religion scarcely ever take place. But where men are in circumstances in which the conscience is educated, in which everybody is led to feel how frail earthly strength is, in which sickness, or trouble, or difficulties of some sort strike the community at large, you will find the thoughts of men beginning to turn away from the world as a sufficient stay and comfort to the soul.

The question arises, Is there such a state in the community now? * There are always some, here

* January 1866.

and there, in well-instructed circles who are asking to be shown the way to Jesus; but what are the symptoms in respect to the whole community? Well, it is very difficult for me to say. I have been of the opinion for a long time that the very great trials through which we have passed as a people would have the effect to give the conscience of this nation a turn upward, and that we had reason to expect that from this higher tone of the moral sense there would be a quickened feeling of religion. On the other hand, however, there is a spirit of worldliness. The fever of speculation, the hope of quick and large gains, is widely diffused, is very strong, and is adverse to any deep and broad religious movement. Nevertheless, I learn with great delight that there are many signs of the presence of God among His churches. Not that I hear of great revivals, but there are tidings from various quarters of religious awakening.

A Methodist brother of a neighbouring church, who called on me a few nights ago, told me that in the ministers' meetings which he attended they had almost ceased to discuss speculative questions; that personal experience and individual piety had absorbed every other topic; that these meetings were so interesting that the pastors from the villages round about were coming into the city on Mondays to kindle their torch at this new light and flame; and that there existed in the churches of the vicinity strong indications of an approaching general revival of religion. A brother stated at one of these meetings that he had travelled through the West, and



that he found everywhere in that region much the same state of feeling.

It is like water to a thirsty soul to believe that we can again come out of our external excitements, and within these sacred enclosures hear, as of old, and even more abundantly, some rejoicing in the hope of salvation, and others inquiring, "What shall I do to be saved?" The anticipation is almost a fruition. And I look with the utmost desire and longing in this direction. I would that we again might have the rain as aforetime. But if God is visiting His people anywhere let us rejoice, and, as far as we may, go with them that are walking nearest to Christ.

Q. How far can we go in doing anything toward the bringing of a revival of religion into our midst? How far ought we to go generally, and just now how far ought we to go?

The difficulty with persons on this subject has been misapprehension, arising, perhaps, from earlier teaching. It was formerly supposed, and I think honestly, by the best men, that there were, as you might say, three modes of the activity of the Spirit of God. One was a general and diffused action. Another was a special action. A third was the outpouring of the Spirit in revivals of religion. It was thought that the work of God's Spirit was purely divine. Men were shocked when they saw behind it a certain sort of machinery from which it seemed to proceed. So that it came to be the theory and faith of the Church that revivals of religion were the result of the direct Divine influence upon the minds of men. But as intelligence has

increased among Christians, men have come more and more toward a better ground—namely, that while a revival is the work of the Spirit of God, it is not in any sense exclusively the work of God's Spirit. That is to say, the laws of the human mind are as much observed and obeyed in revivals as out of them; and the work of the Spirit of God in revivals is according to the law of the work of the Spirit of God out of revivals.

No one supposes that there is any getting up of education by machinery when a parent educates his child, so that when he is old he shall not depart from his early instructions. And yet you might say to parents: "You have been getting up your child's virtue; you have been arranging it." Certainly they have, if they are wise or discreet. In other words, they have been doing their part of the work. Persons say, "You have been getting up a revival of religion." So I have been getting up a revival of religion, just as I get up a harvest. God holds His great elements to their work, and in faith of the working of those elements I do my part of the work.

What is a revival of religion? It is a state of the community in which the whole or a large part of its members are brought into a common religious feeling. It differs from individual awakenings and conversions in this—that it takes the form of social contagion. There are times in which the community are susceptible of feeling together in religion. We see the same thing with regard to pleasure. There are periods in which the spirit of gaiety is electrical.

It is so in business. There are times when it seems as though the whole mind of the community was absorbed in business. The same is true of politics. And, blessed be God, it is so in religious matters. There are times when the hearts and minds of the community seem to bear off in moral directions.

Now, those times in which there is a susceptibility to a common religious feeling are the times when God is pleased to make our influence more direct and powerful upon the hearts and lives of men. And what may we do to promote this susceptibility? Anything that tends to draw away the minds of the community from an overweening worldliness; anything that tends to produce a common tender moral feeling, is a legitimate preparation for a revival of religion. Anything that tends to bring the great spiritual truths of our being steadily before the attention and conscience of the mass of the community is a legitimate preparation for a revival of religion. Anything that tends to quicken, and purify, and deepen, and strengthen the tone of the moral feeling in the community is a legitimate preparation for a revival of religion.

Well, as to details, little prayer-meetings and universal meetings are matters of expediency. Where the result shows that they are needed, they are justified. Doubtless, in the hands of unskilful persons, things may be done that are unwise. But I think the prejudice against labouring for revivals of religion arises from a misapprehension of the conditions of religious influences in this world. And if it is right for you to "get up" the conditions out

of which flow education, refinement, or accomplishments of any sort, then it is right for you to get up the conditions out of which flow reformation of morals, sound religious instruction, and deep religious feeling. But it is not attempted to take the work out of the hands of God. The command is, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for"—and that is the ground and reason why you should do it—"it is God that worketh in you." Hence you shall not work in vain. Otherwise you would.

LOVE TO ENEMIES.

Q. Will you please lay before us your idea of the meaning of the New Testament command, " Love your enemies " ?



WHILE yet we were enemies, Christ died for us. Did you ever attempt to imagine what must have been the state of mind that God was in when He looked upon those who were not repentant, who were His enemies still, and who were so vagrant as to reject His life-long services as to cause His passion, and as to work out His death ? Did you ever attempt to imagine what must have been that state of mind by which, after having toiled for them, and borne with them, and taught them, He could in the act of dying pray for them, saying, " They know not what they do " ? Do you get any idea of what the Divine feeling is toward a wicked, hating, and hateful being, which manifests itself in dying for him as the means of his restoration ? The question, I suppose, which troubles our brother is, whether we can love and forgive a man who has done us wrong ? No one doubts that we can forgive and love those who,

having done us wrong, repent of that wrong. A person who is a thousandth part of a Christian can do that. But the question is, Does not the Spirit of Christ (and that is the rule of Christian duty) rise higher than that?

In the first place, it does not follow, because you have a benevolent and forgiving spirit, that you approve a man's conduct or his disposition. Forgiveness does not imply that you approve the moral attitude of the man you forgive. For instance, often, in the street, as I go down the hill on my way to the Ferry, I pass a throng of little ragged, dirty urchins. Impudent wretches they are, many of them; and although in the main they are respectful to me, yet once in a while they blackguard. I walk along, thinking about something else, and all at once I find myself bawled out at by these children—many of whom were not born here. It touches nature a little bit at the instant; but the moment I have time to think I laugh at myself, and say: "Those children—how little they know! They are just reflecting the prejudices of their parents. And how much less in their thought is what they say than in my pride." And my feeling toward them is: "My dear little rascals, if I had it in my power, I would jerk you out of this, and put you to school, and have you going in the right way very quick!" It is a perfectly benevolent state of mind that I am in. I do not like or approve their conduct; nor do I consider the attitude of their minds lovely; but I compassionate them.

Now, if you know how to distinguish between a

man and his disease, you know how to distinguish between a mind and moral forces. You are conscious that you can love a man that is diseased physically; and you ought to be able to love a man that is morally diseased. If I say that I will forgive a man when he repents, and not before, I do not know what to do with the example of Christ. He did not wait till I repented. He did not wait till I was good. I should not have been good had it not been for His forerunning grace. It was Christ that waked me up and made me sensitive to that which was wrong. It was Christ's influence on my mind that brought my conscience to feel how hateful my life was toward Him. And when I began to feel that I had passed from death to life, I was distinctly conscious that I came to it by the forerunning grace of the Lord God. He saved me while I was an enemy, proud, selfish, and unlovely. And that always comes back to me as a rule of duty. And when I see men doing things that are wrong and wicked, wickedness and wrong are hateful to me; but there is the feeling of benignity, compassion, tender sorrow for them. And I am sure that it is Christ's spirit. And I am sure of another thing,—that you will be not half as likely to err on that side as on the other.

Q. Suppose your son had been killed during the late struggle, and suppose a man should come to you and say, "I was on the other side during the war, and my sympathy was with the South, and I indulged myself in sending over a few muskets, a little powder, and a few bullets to be used in the Southern army; and it so happened, to my certain knowledge, that one of those muskets, and some of that powder, and one of those bullets, were the means of the death of your son"—could you love that man?

If I saw a man that had slain my son, I believe I could forgive him and love him. I could love him, not in the sense of affinity of qualities, not on the ground of personal attractiveness, but in the sense in which God loves wicked men, with compassion, with sorrow, with pity, and with a perfect willingness to bear and forbear with him, and work for him. Let me read a passage that will explain what I mean :—

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy ; but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven : for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Q. Can we love those men who put our charity and patience to the proof, and showed themselves to be worse than even the fighting rebels, by deliberately rejoicing, during the war, over the victories of the South, in which were slain thousands and thousands of our young men that went forth and laid down their lives on the altar of their country ?

If you mean to ask whether we can love them as a man loves his wife or his children, I reply that we are not called to do that ; but if you mean to ask whether we can love them in the sense of cherishing a spirit of benevolence toward them, I say, Yes, unquestionably we can ; and we ought to maintain toward the worst men a love that will enable us to forbear with them, and pity them, and pray for them, and do them good.

Q. Are not such passages of the New Testament as that which you just read generally meant to apply to cases where the religion of Jesus Christ comes in conflict with the prevailing religion, and not to ordinary circumstances of life ?

I do not recognize any religion that does not have to do with the ordinary circumstances of life ; and I believe that this passage takes in heathenism, Judaism, and human nature. The language could not be stronger. You are to love your *enemies*. That is the word.


Q. Christ did not speak so when He called the Pharisees "hypocrites"—did He ?

No ; because He was bringing up the side of justice. A judge, when sitting in court, cannot love the culprit whom he condemns to prison or to the gallows in the sense that a private citizen might. He is intrusted with judicial power. Christ, I think, pronounced judicial sentence on the wickedness of the rulers of the Jews, and no more than that. And you will take notice that Christ's denunciations were aimed at official persons who used their power to break down and destroy the poor and weak. He pronounced vengeance on them as public malefactors. He heaped upon them epithets according to their moral character. But there is no form of wickedness so gross that in our individual capacity we are not bound to love the perpetrator of it. Towards even the wickedest men on the globe, I would, if they were before me, exercise the spirit of love. I should say, "It is hard, Lord ; but I will take up my cross and follow Thee, even for these." For if, in His mortal

anguish, He could look on men who were piercing Him, and nailing Him, and deriding Him, and wagging their heads, saying, "Thou that savest others, save Thyself," and could pray, "Father, forgive them,"—what am I that I should set up excuses and limitations, and try to justify my miserable human nature, instead of following my Christ. I tell you, there is no one point in this world so critical of Christian character as the power to maintain love toward all men—not a love of personal attraction, but a love of benevolence, that begets a willingness to bear with them and work for them. And you will take notice that the only prayer of the Lord on which He made any commentary was this: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." On this official prayer He says: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses." He conditions a man's own salvation; He makes the evidence of a man's own piety to depend on his capacity to forgive. And I think there is not another point on which men have such a fight as on that.



THE DYING HOUR.*

HE lady whose happy departure is described in this letter was one who scarcely thought herself worthy to be called a Christian. She is said to have "often exchanged experiences." Doubtless she exchanged experiences to get strength to hold on to her hope. She very likely asked others, "How are you affected?" or, "What is your ground of hope?"—thus comforting herself by discovering in them a feeling similar to her own. She probably was wont to say, "I am not able to speak from personal experience, but only from my general knowledge of others' experiences." It is probable that while she had many hours of great enjoyment, she was a person who, if surprised suddenly with the question, put to her emphatically, "Do you *know* that you are a Christian?" would have trembled, and shrunk from answering, and said, "I *hope* I am." And if some rude teacher, such as I have known, had come down on that

* Remarks that followed the reading of a letter in which was described the death of a member of Plymouth Church.

timid expression, with the declaration, "You have no business to merely *hope*—you ought to *know!*" she would probably have shrunk into herself, and been silent.

Here is a case in which the timid, trembling experience of a whole Christian life culminated in the most perfect serenity—the most absolute and conscious victory. It is a very great comfort and encouragement to those who are of that cast of mind to know that, though her day was cloudy, her evening was one at which the sun went down without a cloud, and shined gloriously.

Not that great confidence in the dying hour is a certain indication of a true Christian state of mind, nor that doubts and troubles in the dying hour are indicative of the want of true Christianity. Disease and temperament and original disposition have much to do with it. I have no doubt that there are many persons who, from a false education, have died with gloom or impending doom lowering over their heads, and to whom in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, all heaven was full of glory. I have no doubt that there are multitudes of persons who go hesitant, who have no voice of cheer to send back, but for whom the gate swings wide open. I have no doubt that great numbers who go out of life defeated enter heaven victorious, triumphant. But where a faithful, conscientious person is seeking all his life long to do his duty, and is self-admonitory, and lays upon himself crosses and burdens, and when there is a steady progress in the Christian life, and where his reason is preserved, and his last sickness does


not disturb materially the normal action of the faculties, and he dies calm, and with a clear vision, there is something peculiarly joyful to me. If a person has lived all his life long active and energetic and faithful, I do not care, I had almost said, how he dies. The tenor of such a man's life we feel to be the best evidence of his salvable condition. If a man has had Christian hope and cheer and joy all his life, we do not think that the hour of death is of much moment. The experience of dying is but transient. We do not mourn over it if it is not as triumphant as we could wish. We do not say, "Oh, if such a life could have been crowned with a magnificent departure!" But where a person has not had half the Christian comfort that he was entitled to; when, by reason of natural timidity and want of confidence in his own evidences, he has been all his lifetime *subject to bondage, through fear of death*, we want him to have a little taste of emancipation before he goes. We have toward him a feeling of tenderness. And I feel peculiar gladness in such a case as this, where the last hour was one of irradiation and cheer.

This is one more of the long series of testimonies that Jesus is sufficient for the dying hour. We believe Him to be, even when a person goes out of life as it were with his eyes shut, without his reason, with no special testimony; but when a person is brought to death through such circumstances as give him the opportunity of being a witness, there is something peculiarly cheering in adding his testimony to that of multitudes who went before

him, to the fact that Christ is sufficient for the dying hour.

My Christian brethren, the time to test religion is in the emergencies of life. When everything is prosperous, when your health is good, when your spirits are fine, when your circumstances are as you would have them, that you are joyful in religion is a thing to be thankful for; but after all it is not a test of religion in you. If it were presented as evidence of your piety, men would say: "Why should he not rejoice in the Lord? He has everything he wants. Take away his property and his family, and then see if he will be such a happy Christian." But if, when a man is unprosperous, he has a religion that will carry him through, that is a religion to be proud of—in the better sense of *pride*. If, when a man is in great affliction he has a religion that will hold him up; if, when a man is under vehement temptation he has a religion that is like a coat of mail; if, when a man has lost all that the world clings to, he still has that which is more to him than houses, or lands, or friends, or honour; if, finally, when heart and flesh fail, God is the strength of his salvation, his joy and his triumph—then he has a religion that is worth having. And nobody can well afford to be without the experience of intimate faith and love by which the soul is sustained in temptation, in adversity, and in death itself.

I am not much in favour of looking forward to the hour of death, as some have done, and as we have sometimes been taught to do; but I think there is occasionally great benefit in it, in tempering



the immoderation of our desires. There is a salutary consideration of the shortness of life and the certainty of death which sobers men, quenches the fever that gets into their veins, and teaches them to be more earnest and diligent. Such a forelooking into death is proper. But to hang over it merely for the sake of filling the soul with sorrow or alarm is not profitable.

When we look at this death, and others that are taking place in this church, I think every one will be disposed to breathe the sentence of one of old—“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.”

Meanwhile, our church triumphant is growing by recruits almost every month. Those that are on this side—are they the ones that we are to rejoice over? No. They are in the battle yet, and are liable to be smitten down; they are liable to stumble; they are liable to have mishaps: but those who have gone over and stand on the other side—they are safe. That part of our church which is absolutely and for ever safe—how large is it growing!

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER.



WE all know the difference between military parade and war—between a company of soldiers gaily dressed and drilled to make harmonious movements in a quiet parade-ground, where there is no enemy, and a company of soldiers equipped for fighting and led to battle. Soldiers on parade, how exact are their movements! How brave they look! How finely they carry themselves! How everybody admires them! and how much they admire themselves! But we all know that for soldiers to go through military evolutions under such circumstances is a very different thing from carrying themselves on a field of actual conflict in such a way that everybody looking upon them is inspired by their bravery, by their perseverance, by their power to endure. For there are a great many soldiers that make no show at all at home who are magnificent men in the field; and I suppose there are a great many that make a magnificent show at home who are good for nothing when you bring them before an enemy. The time to test a soldier is when he is under fire.

Now, as it has pleased God to call His disciples soldiers, and as we are of the army of the Lord Jesus Christ, every word of this applies to our experience. It is very brave and very good to be filled with Christian sentiments and Christian emotions in days of tranquillity and peace ; but when God's people come under fire, that, after all, is the time to test them. Anybody can run down hill ; but it is not everybody that can take a load and walk up hill. Anybody can be satisfied when he has his own way ; but it is not everybody that knows how to give up his way to God's will. Anybody can trust God when he has in his hands everything that he wants, and more ; but it is not everybody who, when God is taking out of his hands continually, can still say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." When God builds up your way, of course you can walk on it ; but when He tears up your foundations, and puts you in a rugged path, where at every step you are liable to stumble, if then you can walk, blessed are ye !

Christian brethren we are coming into a state—you have come into it, many of you—where we are to be tried ; and the way we carry ourselves under fire, amidst secular embarrassments, amidst humiliating reverses, amidst forebodings in the presence of troubles that shake the spear and flash the sword in our eyes—this will be the test of our real character and traits.

For my own part, I can say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Though He slay mine, though He destroy the very foundations of

prosperity under my feet, though He shake me out of my place, my heart and soul have made a covenant with God, and I will not distrust Him. "I will not fear what man shall do unto me." I have often quoted for you, and I quote for myself, this passage: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

It is a good thing, brethren, to draw near to God. It is a good thing to put your trust in God. It is a good thing to be happy; and it is a good time to be happy now.*

Q. Will you please explain one point? You have frequently spoken very strongly in regard to the necessity that Christians, in these times, should have a spirit of meekness and love; and that we should manifest such a spirit towards those who are arrayed against us. Now, I confess that this has been a perfect puzzle to me. I am so much a natural man as not to be able to obey the injunction which calls upon me to love my enemies. And when I stand on Broadway, in New York, and see men in regiments, who are bound for the field of battle, having been taken from their homes, their wives, their children, and all that is dear to them on earth, by the conduct of miscreants, I cannot understand how you can have such feelings as you express. I wish you would speak on that subject.

I have no doubt that the brother feels just as he says he does, and I have no doubt that I do not feel a bit so. When I consider the interests of God's advancing kingdom of justice, and judgment, and mercy, and purity, and truth, and liberty, I think that all the things in the earth are of no value at all in the comparison, and that the earth might

* The first year of the war of the Rebellion.

melt with fervent heat, the elements dissolve, and the globe vanish away, rather than that this kingdom should not prevail. "Let God be true, but every man a liar." Let the nations perish, let everything go, but let the eternal treasures of God—truth, liberty, mercy, judgment, and purity—be preserved. I feel lifted up to a sovereign height of inspiration when I conceive of the majesty of these treasures, effluent from the heart of God, which He is seeking to embody in our times, in our earth, in this nation. Therefore, when I see justice put down, I feel like a lion. When I see a great moral principle overborne, there are no bounds to my indignation. When I see a great humanity trodden under foot, I long to be a champion for it. And when I look on the face of an ignorant, erring, wicked multitude, I think of a great many things beside. For the sake of these great principles I would give my life as quick as I would pour out a glass of water; or I will do what is harder than that—I will keep it and use it for forty years, if God spare it, increasing its toil every year. I will make any sacrifice, or perform any labour, for the sake of a moral principle. But when I look at the South, other feelings besides those of vengeance are excited in me. Every one of those traitors are as wicked as you think, and more. The Floyds, the Davises, the Toombses, the Rhett, and all such as they, are more wicked than we know; and yet the Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour held up for every such one. They are all immortal, they are all like myself pilgrims toward the bourne of the eternal. And when I think how many ignorant

creatures are led by these base men to do wicked things, half of the wickedness of which they do not know, I feel compassion for them, and am sorry for them. If they array themselves against justice, it is necessary that they should be overborne; but not one blow more than is necessary for the defence of the principle assailed should be struck. We are not authorized to inflict vengeance. "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." About the use of every single sword and spear and ball needful to assert a divine principle there should be no squeamishness. I am for war just so far as it is necessary to vindicate a great moral truth. But one particle of violence beyond that is a flagrant treason against the law of love. And I can say to-night, that I would go to war with every State in the Southern Confederacy, if called of God to join the army, and would hold them to the conflict till the cause of right was vindicated; and that I could, at the same time, pray for those misguided men as easily as to-night I can pray for my own babes. I am as sorry for them as for any set of men in the world. I do not think I utter a prayer on any morning that I do not pray for them, and that God does not see my feeling of tenderness and sorrow toward them. And that is not all. I regard them as citizens yet. I love this whole country. I love it in its past and in its prospective history. God do so to me, and more also, if that hour comes when I do not feel for all of them,

misguided though they be, as anxiously as for my own kin and brethren. We cannot afford to be very critical with wickedness. I leave these questions with my God, and I say, What force is needful I will lay out for the maintenance of great moral principles; and, on the other hand, I will pray for the misguided men who oppose those principles; and there is not a thing that I can do for them which I will not do as cheerfully as I will eat bread.

Well, I do not know as the brother understands this matter any better now than he did before.

No, sir!

Then I must quote, as applicable to you, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." After a little practice I think you will discern them spiritually.

But the trouble is, I do not want to.

That is the case with all sinners. They must do what they do not want to. We make our fractious children do what they do not want to; and the Lord will make *you*. I confess, I think it will be a great while before you will be an apt scholar, but I think you will learn.

However, there are some difficulties involved in this question. Colonel Ellsworth, who has just been murdered by one of these "miscreants" of whom you speak, I knew well. I was thinking of my own sensations when I walked over from New York, after hearing the sad news. Why, I was forty feet high! I was scared, I grew so fast. I

walked so lordly that every step seemed to have the weight of a mountain ; and yet I did not feel the touch of the earth. For one hour, I think, I had enough volume of feeling to have swept away a continent. I was almost frightened at the turbulent and swelling tide within me. And I said : "Suppose my Master should come and say, 'My child, what are you doing with such feelings? Where is My teaching? What are you taking on yourself My supreme attribute for? Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.'" Is it not charming how these texts will exorcise the devil? I put that passage on my head as a crown, and I have felt as peaceful as a lamb ever since. And although it was very base and wicked for that man to murder Colonel Ellsworth as he did, I can say that had he not expiated his crime, and had the victim been my brother, I could still have forgiven him and prayed for him.

Now, my brethren, I am going to fight this battle straight through from beginning to end, and not lose my Christian feelings either. I am going to stick close to my Saviour. And, with regard to the past, I am not sorry for one sermon that I have preached among you, or that I have preached during the last twenty years of my life. If the question were put to me to-night, "When you look back upon your public life, and see what you have done to bring about the present issue, are you not sorry for the ground you have taken?" I would say No. I bless God for every word I have spoken and every influence I have exerted in that direction. Knowing

all that was to be, I would do over again all that I have done if the same state of things existed ; only my little finger should be as heavy as my loins have been.

Now that the time of conflict has come, we must accept it. I mean to go through it, and you shall ; and I pray God that the whole Anointed Church at the North may, bearing the banner of Christ along with the banner of our country. The stars over us shall not be brighter and purer than those that we carry into this very conflict. We have had examples enough to know that even in such a desperate case as civil war a man may be a Christian. I thank God that praying men have gone into the army from this church. Every day and night there is a prayer-meeting in our camp, and there will be to the end. And I believe that among our soldiers are those who, if they saw the bitterest and most blasphemous of the enemy suffering and dying, would relieve their sufferings by kind offices, and soothe their last moments by comforting words. God grant that it may be so, and that, both in the service of the country and in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, they may be true Soldiers !

TRUST IN GOD.

"I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes"—
MATT. ix. 22.



WHAT are those things that men cannot find out by their wisdom or by their prudence, but that the simplicity of the child steers it into? What is it that men find only when they come to that condition in which they are obliged to act with the simple trust of a little child?

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Oh, it is God and rest in the soul! The whole world is on a race; and if you ask them, "What are you after?" they will tell you, "We are after satisfaction, soul-rest." Now, watch them, and you will find that the strong ones, the tall ones, and the wise ones are lagging in the rear; and that the weak ones, the little ones, and the ignorant ones—the children—are leading off the race. And when it comes to rest in the soul, babes find it quicker than their fathers.

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls ; for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

When a limb has been dislocated, and the surgeon comes to set it, he says : “The stronger the ligaments are that bind the joint in its place, the harder it is going to be to put it where it belongs.” And oftentimes it is necessary to apply various poultices and emollients to relax the ligaments and make them supple before the displacement can be rectified. It is the strength of the man’s body that is in the way of his cure. The doctor wants him weak in order to make him strong.

Now, it is man’s natural strength that is right in his way when he is out of joint with God ; and he is putting between himself and the thing needed the strength of an arrogant reason. That self-reliance which is so necessary to him in secular things is a hindrance to him in spiritual things. That independent purpose and determination by which a man is carried forward through his outward life, when it comes to the inward and spiritual life is the very thing that is an obstacle to his success. And this is the reason why we do not find God’s yoke easy, or His burden light. When we come into the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, we do not find that that service gives us the deep satisfaction we expected it would. We cannot see the reason ; but God knows the reason. He understands that no person can come into a state of perfect rest until he comes into a state of implicit trust ; until all his purposes and

thoughts and feelings are so yielded to God that at every hour of the day he can say, "Thy will be done," and can roll his burden upon God. Our burdens are easy when they are on God; and our burdens are on God when He is in us, and when He fulfils the promise that He will come and abide with us, and we are conscious that our soul moves in harmony with His.

I have known men who were harassed almost to death about their business. They could not leave it. They could not enjoy meetings, home, or anything else. They had not time to be sick. But they had to be sick. And after fighting disease and the doctor as long as they could, at last they said, "I must give it up." And when they had made up their minds to let things take their course, and to have no more trouble about it, they began to have rest. The moment their will became submissive to the Divine will, they found peace. But men are not apt to have this as long as they have strength to fight with. It is, usually, not until they lose their strength, and become like babes, that they begin to have satisfaction.

Q. Can all obtain a spirit of prayer in which they may have such perfect confidence in the Divine wisdom and love and goodness as shall make them feel, when they send up their petitions to the throne of grace, "God knows a great deal better than you do about the things for which you are praying, and He will answer accordingly?"

Sometimes I have gone with a check to the bank, and the teller has looked at it and at me, and after seeing who I was, and that the check was genuine, has said, "What will you take it in?" meaning, "Will you have it in gold, or silver, or bills? And

if in bills, of what denomination shall they be?" Sometimes, in answering my prayers, God has, as it were, said to me: "What will you take it in? Will you take it in the thing, and nothing else; or will you take it in that which the thing was expected to give you—namely, such a spiritual insight or joy as you could not have from specific answers?" I think some men—not all—can rise to a state of mind in which the conception of God's entire control of things is such that there is always peacefulness in the way in which they speak; not so much from a sense of special answers to petitions as from a sense that God governs and overrules all things well.

If there is anything in the world that a person has a right to go to God about, it is a child. And where a child is in such a course that it is bound to hell, and the process seems as though it were nearly consummated, the question is whether the parent can rise to such a state as to be perfectly at peace; or whether, under such circumstances, the parent has not a right to demand of God a specific answer to the petition offered. I think some have risen to such a sense of the glory of God, of the infinite desirableness of having God's name honoured and glorified, that, for the hour at least, even their natural affections were swallowed up, and they felt that they could give their own children into the hands of God, and let Him do with them as He would. But the power to do this is the gift of few. The greater number of persons agonize at this point; and I think there is an intimation that the apostle himself could not get above it. I should like to

know how it was that for three years Paul went from house to house exhorting men, and weeping and crying over sinners, if he had come to a state in which he could take these cases and lay them at the feet of God, and feel no concern about them?

We read that the mother of Samuel J. Mills, when he left the house to go to college, went into her room to consecrate her son to God, and did not leave it until she felt that the burden had rolled off from her heart, and that she had really given up that child to the Lord. It is said that thenceforth her faith never failed her; that after that she did not waver. But it is not every woman that is the mother of a Samuel J. Mills; for he had a moral nature, he was rooted and grounded in spiritual instruction, his tendencies were in the right direction, and the event justified her faith.

On the other hand, I hear Paul, when looking on the Jews, saying, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

I hold, therefore, in general reply to your question, that it is given sometimes to God's people to rise so high above the visible and temporal that in the light of God's sovereignty they can roll off every burden, even that of their children's salvation; but it is not given to every one to do it. I know there are some people who tell us that they have come to this; but I never met a man whose case in this regard satisfied me.

Q. But suppose I was praying earnestly for the soul of a person, not of my own family, but connected with me socially, then could I

come to this feeling of implicit trust in God's love and goodness, and wisdom?

Yes ; that is a very different thing.

[The questioner related the circumstance of his having prayed a year or two for the conversion of a young lady in whose spiritual welfare he was much interested, but who, though she appeared to have a sincere desire, and though she passed through two or three revivals of religion during that period, was not converted then, her conversion having been delayed to a subsequent time, after he had given up praying for her, and after she had become settled in the idea that she was abandoned of the Holy Spirit.]

Sometimes men fish a long time for a particular trout in a particular hole. They try every kind of bait and all manner of invitations, but he will not touch the hook. But some day when they are fishing down stream, and are not thinking anything about this trout, they get a bite, and haul out a splendid fellow ; and lo, it is he !

I have caught fish in just that way. I remember preaching, during a period of great anxiety, through four weeks for one man, apparently to no purpose. He had been a *Hickory Quaker*, as it was said in the West ; and he had been seasoned at that. If anybody knows what hickory wood is, he can understand how tough it must be when it is seasoned. And I recollect that when the revival had passed by, and I had ceased to think of this man except occasionally, one Sunday, after I had preached a sermon from the text, " He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be

destroyed, and that without remedy"—which I meant for some very wicked young men who had resisted the truth, and were sweeping away many others—I found my old Quaker had been caught. I aimed at something else, and hit him. And so I have seen this same thing demonstrated in many other ways.

Here I want to call your attention to a very important distinction between what may be called the fervour of nervous anxiety and the fervour of the moral sentiments. They are very different. Persons sometimes become feverishly anxious for those about whom they are concerned—parents for their children, or Christians for members of the congregation to which they belong. Their anxiety takes on an intense or nervous form ; and it becomes unreasonable, not being limited by proper bounds of judgment or faith. It works mischief generally on the subject of it, and often on the object of it ; whereas the desire of the moral feelings is almost always in its nature calming. Our lower desires are usually intense, quickening ; but our moral feelings are almost always broad, deep, and quieting. And I have observed that those prayers which are the most availing, and which come from the deepest sources, are not those which are the most agitating, but those which are most tranquillizing.

Q. Is that sense of the uselessness of prayer which persons often feel, an evil that admits of remedy ? and if so, what is the remedy ?

You must not confound supplication or petition with prayer. It is prayer ; but it is not the whole of prayer. Communion, too, is prayer. We call it

conversation between ourselves ; but between God and us we call it communion. I think God has every one of those traits which belong to our relations here upon earth. He is everything that we conceive any variety of men to be to us.

You go to a judge and say, "What is your opinion in respect to a case like this?" He is off the bench, and gives you his opinion as a private individual. Then you say, "You are a lawyer ; will you please give me a legal opinion respecting it?"—and he gives you a legal opinion. Then you say, "As judge, will you pronounce a sentence in the matter?" He says, "As judge, I cannot talk with you on this subject at all." Thus there are three characters in which you can approach this one man.

Now, God is to us a hundred things. He is the Lawgiver ; He is the Governor of creation ; He is the God of providence ; He is the Lord of grace ; He is Redeemer ; He is Father ; He is Friend ; He is Teacher and Inspirer ; He is Advocate. He bears every conceivable relation to us.

I go to God, and say—"I am very poor, I am very ignorant, I am very sinful, I am utterly unworthy to speak to Thee ; but let me, O God, speak right on, and do Thou sort out what I say, and put it in its proper relations. Let me relieve my mind." And I speak on ; and sometimes it is petition, sometimes it is reverie, sometimes it is soliloquy, and sometimes it is like a child's talking backward and forward to a father. And I do not give myself any trouble about my prayer. I say, "God hears me,

and He sorts what I say, and gives it its right name." I never think of husbanding all that my ground raises from my sowing. I winnow my grain; and God winnows my prayers, and lets the chaff fly, and saves the wheat.

I say, therefore, in respect to praying, Why give yourself any trouble about whether the things for which you pray are best? If it comforts you to pray about them, then pray about them; otherwise, do not. Put yourself under the direction of God's Spirit, and follow its leadings. And as respects all questions which are to turn on human judgments, my own habit is to pray for things just as I want them to be, and then say, "Now, if there is anything better, please do that." I make up a case the best way I can, and then say, "If God sees anything better, let Him please to do it."

A capitalist, writing a letter of instruction to his agent in Marseilles, says: "I have a million dollars' worth of property in France, and the state of the empire is such politically that I think you had better dispose of it so and so; but you are on the ground, and I have perfect confidence in your judgment, and if you see reasons why these directions should not be followed, depart from them, and do as you think best."

And if men can give such discretionary power to their subordinates, how much more should we feel safe in leaving God to exercise it concerning the things about which we pray to Him?

Q. Do you think it would be extravagant to say that nine-tenths of men's prayers are answered?

I do, unless you include those which are followed by results which come from the application of means to ends, and which are of our own procuring. For instance, there was on my father's place a particular tree that bore sweet apples. As a boy, I used to pray that the Lord would give me some apples from that tree ; and then I would go and kick against the tree : and my prayers were almost always answered ! I never noticed that they were if I did not shake the tree. And so, in prayer, a man makes up his mind that he would like such a thing, and he prays for it, and then begins to seek it. It is because he wants it that he prays for it ; and, wanting it, he sets in motion a train of natural causes by which it is brought within his reach. And when he gets the blessing thus through his own exertions, his prayer is answered. If you mean such prayers, I believe that nine out of ten *are* answered. But where persons pray for things that do not lie within the sphere of any instrumentality that they can bring to bear—for things that lie beyond the reach of natural causes which are under our control—the case is different. If I pray that God would prosper me this year, the answering of that prayer to a certain extent rests with me. If I pray for life and health, though there is a Divine will by which these things may be granted or withheld, yet the analogies are that a man's health and life are much in his own hands. If I pray for these things, and I take care of myself, and they are secured to me, the realization of my desire does not seem so much an answer to prayer as a blessing on my endeavours.

But suppose the case is one such as once came to my knowledge. A woman said : " I cannot live in the thought that I am going to heaven, and that my husband is going to hell. He will not let me talk to him ; he will not go to church ; he seems more set against religion than ever before. He is shut out of the use of means, and I can only pray that God will convert his soul." The man was at last converted, and he told me how it happened. Said he : " I knew that my wife was praying for me, and I was as mad about it as I could be. I did not want her to pray for me, and I was cross and ugly ; and the uglier I grew the sweeter she acted. I could not provoke her. I tried her, and was determined to see if I could not break her down by tempting and tormenting her ; and though, of course, she was not perfect, she satisfied me that she had something that I had not. As quick as I came to that conclusion, I began to feel evil ; and the worse I felt, the worse I acted ; and the worse I acted, the better she seemed. And at last I had to give up."

Well, what is the philosophy of this case ? God began to answer that woman's prayer by the sanctification of her disposition—by making her, through faith and trust, and the holy fervour of love, so patient and so kind that the loveliness of Christ began to show itself in her. God was preaching to that man, not by the pulpit—he would not go to church ; nor by the Bible—he would not read that ; but by Christ in her, the hope of glory. He saw that, and could not get away from it.

You will notice that it is *the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man* availeth much. Many seem to think that it is the fact that a righteous man gives the fervent and effectual prayer that makes the prayer powerful. Not so : it is the fervency and effect of righteousness in the man that makes the power of prayer.

Q. But if we pray for persons with whom we have no communication, whom we cannot reach, and over whom we have no influence, will not God hear and answer our prayer ?

Under such circumstances, there is sufficient ground to encourage us to pray ; but more than that can hardly be said. We pray for the conversion of the heathen ; but I do not think they are going to be converted without instrumentalities. There is a train of causes at work through which I hope they will ultimately be converted ; but I should have little faith in prayers for their conversion which were unaccompanied by instrumentalities. I should not have much faith, I think, to pray that the Grand Vizier of Turkey might be converted, without knowing him, and without knowing that any means were being employed by which he could be reached.

Have you never heard of persons being converted where no prayers apparently were offered for them ? Do you suppose that God's grace limits itself to the prayers that are addressed to Him ? We are not to forget that all the desire of God's Church on earth is not a thimbleful compared with the desire that already burns in the heart of God, which is vaster than the sun in the heavens, or a thousand of them

If there is anything that turns me back with a sense of ridiculousness, it is to stand pleading and praying in the vestibule of God's soul. The thought comes over me sometimes, "Why am I praying for this thing? Compared with God, I am not as much as a dewdrop compared with the ocean. God wants it, and from all eternity He has been working for it; and yet I supplicate Him as though He had never thought of it!" The sense of God's love, and of His provisions of mercy, often comes in to rebuke the impatience of prayer. I do not doubt God's administration in this world. I do not know what part my prayer is going to have in that administration. I only know that if it has the part that it merits, it will not have any at all. Of how much importance God's infinite grace may make it, He knows, and I do not. Blessed be His name, He will treat my prayer better than it deserves—I know that. If you ask, "What is the use of praying?" I answer, "Woe is me if I do not pray!" There is an inward fermentation, and there must be a vent somewhere. I pray because it is easier to pray than not to pray. It is the soul that prays first; the tongue follows. It is no small privilege that we have of talking with God, and of laying our troubles upon Him so as to feel relieved of them.

TRUE WAY OF REPRESENTING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.



NEVER like to hear people speak of a religious or Christian life by its negatives, —by its limitations, and restraints, and necessary pains and self-denials. For, although at times there are struggles, and though there may be a proper mention of them, yet no man can consider what are the elements of a true faith, what are the promises and inspirations of God, without perceiving that those shadows are alternative, occasional, exceptional states, and that the New Testament designs the Christian man to be a child of light and joy. He is set free. He is adopted into the household of God. He is a friend,—no longer a servant. He is an heir expectant, but is not, like many heirs, waiting until the bequeathed estate comes to him ; for he has the earnest of it sent before, as it were, to support him on the road to it.

Although the New Testament abundantly recognizes an element of suffering, and our own experience corroborates it in the amplest manner, yet both

experience and the New Testament recognize privilege and triumphant joy.

It is always infelicitous when men fall into the habit of speaking of Religion as the mother of trials, and of their Christian experience from the side of its restrictions and limitations. It is a misfortune that men should leave the impression upon the minds of their associates, that their religion consists chiefly in keeping away from things that are rather agreeable, but quite sinful—that it is pretty hard to do it, but that sooner than be lost they will ; as if the Christian life were to be represented by a man yoked or harnessed to duty, and having to pull some heavy burden : or that it is a bridling of unruly passions ; as if it were to be represented by the figure of a man sitting on a bare-back colt, not half broken, and holding it in with all his might to keep it from running away. These representations have an element of truth in them ; and I can conceive that for special purposes they might be employed. They are employed in Scripture itself in many ways. But, after all, it is not right to represent that state which is called *the worship of God* by any such darkened, imperfect symbols as those. Since the predominant idea of the New Testament is that a Christian life is one of exaltation approaching to glorification, that ought to be the testimony, as it ought to be the experience, of Christians.

Now and then, in the providence of God, a man may be in peculiar social exigencies, where trouble is poured out to him from a full cup ; but surely the ordinary experience and testimony of a man who

has reason to believe that his sins are forgiven, that he is accepted of God, that he is guided by the continual presence of the Divine Spirit, that he is an heir of heaven, and of its glory, and that until he comes into possession of that he is under the supervision of the All-seeing and Almighty God—the ordinary experience of such a man ought to be courageous, helpful, joyful.

It is a bad thing for a man to talk too much about his cares to anybody. Cares are very much like pimples. If you let them alone, they will dry up and disappear; but if you meddle with them, they are apt to fester and become permanent. It is a bad thing, not only to talk about your own cares, but to talk about other people's cares so as to make them feel that they are overborne. It is a bad thing for the people of a parish to talk about their minister's cares. I am thankful that it is a habit which does not belong to you very much. I love to hear my people pray for me; but I always have a shrinking when people in their prayers speak of their pastor's "weighty cares and responsibilities." Because, although there are certain cares and certain responsibilities connected with the ministerial office, the impression conveyed is that the minister of the gospel is one that is burdened; whereas I think he is one that goes triumphant. I think he is the foremost son of joy, and that the Christian life which such a one leads is a life to be envied—never to be pitied—never to be spoken of as a life of subjugation. If a minister has dyspepsia, of course the people of his parish ought to pray that

he may get well, or that he may be patient under his suffering; but to pray for a minister, or any leading Christian, as if the fact of his being in an advanced, prominent position rendered him an object of sympathy and compassion, and a subject, therefore, of supplication, is to misinterpret the whole temper and spirit of Christianity.

Sometimes men fall into a whining and complaining way of speaking of themselves, and talking about their duties and burdens and cares. I am sure it is unconscious or unreflecting.

I was much struck, in my boyhood, by reading in Payson's Biography, where it states that he said, as he lay upon his dying bed, "If men only knew the honour and glory that awaited them in Christ, they would go about the streets crying out, 'I am a Christian! I am a Christian!' that men might rejoice with them in the blessedness of which they were soon to partake."

Look at it from this point of view. Suppose a woman who sorrows, being afflicted with bodily infirmities, or placed in exigencies, is braced up, and goes through an amount of exertion which would break most persons down; and suppose she is cheerful where most persons would be despondent. Suppose she is kind and thoughtful and charitable in her judgment where other people would be sharp and censorious. Suppose she sympathizes with others instead of being all the time suffering in sympathy for herself. Suppose she, in a modest and gentle way, makes it appear that this in her is simply the fruit of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

A person, no matter how much prejudice he may have had against religion, being under the influence of such a one a little while, begins unconsciously to feel his religious nature stirred, and to have a veneration for religion, and to wish that he might have a religion that would do for him what hers does for her. Suppose a woman under bereavement rises up into a state of exaltation, and remains in that state. The heart of everybody who knows her is touched to see that with her great grief comes also great comfort and support, exhibiting the positive and affirmative and sweet side. And how powerful her testimony becomes!

When people want to make things attractive in farming, they give exhibitions of their products. The women bring their very best butter, moulded into tempting golden lumps; and the men bring the noblest beets and vegetables of every kind; and from the orchards they bring the rarest fruits; and when you go into the room where all these things are displayed, they seem to you attractive and beautiful.

It seems to me that is the way a Christian church ought to represent the Christian life. You ought to pile up your apples and pears and peaches and flowers and vegetables, to show what is the positive fruit of religion. But many people in Christian life do as farmers would do who should go to a show, and carry—one, pigweed; another, thistles; another, dock; and another, old hard lumps of clay;—and should arrange these worthless things along the sides of the room, and mourn over them. What sort of hus-

bandry would that be? Christians are too apt to represent the dark side of religion in their conversation and meetings.

Christ prayed for His disciples, that they might bring forth fruit. He declared to them that in the Divine administration, God, as vintner, sought to make the vine bring forth more and more fruit. Bearing fruit, sweet, luscious, and blessed, is the business of the Christian life.

THE UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD OF CHRISTIANS.




HERE are inflections of feeling that belong to groups or to particular classes of persons. We have feelings toward single individuals which are not divided with any others. There are states of feeling that belong to single families which we scarcely expect to spread over the neighbourhood. It is supposed that the more individual and personal our feelings are, the deeper and stronger they will be.

Thus, it is customary for people to say that a feeling of piety or compassion toward some single individual whose case we know, is much more potent than the general feeling of benevolence which respects the whole world ; and it is true.

It is true of almost all our feelings, that they are strong and intense in proportion to their speciality ; but we must not suppose that this is the fact in respect to all the experiences of men. Some of the strongest feelings are the most general. I will instance the feeling of sympathy and affection which

we have for men because they are Christ's. If a person is truly a Christian, and loves Christian inflections of disposition, striving for them in himself and delighting in them in other persons, it is impossible that he should see a Christian-minded person anywhere and not be conscious of instant drawing toward him by an attachment that is strong in the proportion in which the Christian graces develop themselves in the person seen. And the very name of "Christian" carries with it a presumption of these things. Therefore, go where we will, if any person whom we meet, or who is pointed out to us, is said to be a Christian, we feel at once a nearness to him; we feel a claim upon him. But if he is not so called, and if in travelling with him we see that he is acting on Christian principles, and distinguishing himself by them from the world around him, all the more we are drawn toward him by what he exhibits himself to be. And the strength of this is such that not infrequently Christian dispositions in persons meeting casually, bring them together in friendships that last as long as their whole life, and are even stronger than the ordinary friendships that grow up in society and in common fellowship. So it comes to pass that one may travel all over the world and never be out of reach of his relations. If you go among the islands of the sea, there are Christians there; and they are your brethren. If you go to every part of our own land, there are Christians there; and they are your brethren. If you go under other skies, there are Christians there; and they are your brethren.



You will find Christians on every continent. Yea, if you go into other religions than your own, you will find Christians there. If you go from the Protestant family into the Catholic Church, you will find Christians there. Wherever you see individuals whom Christ has loved, and that are accepted of him, instantly you feel a brotherhood toward them.

And the moment that feeling comes to any one, how from the presence of it all selfish feelings and all worldly resistances die away ! There is in the consciousness of union with Christ an established fellowship one with another ; and there is in it an element that dissolves prejudices and takes away those repellences that separate men.

If those who are Christians could thus be brought together, and made to know each other, the best results would follow. If disputants in theology, who head the different sects and denominations, and who come to conceive violent aversions toward each other, could, without knowing it, meet in the prayer-meeting or conference-room, and see each other, and behold each other's zeal in common labour, long before they were aware of it how fast they would be clasped in a bond of ever-growing love ! If persons with national repulsions could be brought together so that the Christian sides of their character would come in contact, how much stronger than national repulsions would prove the Christian principle !

Men that love Christ cannot be far from me. If a man loves prayer, and loves Christ, and loves the Church, he and I must have a language that will

make us brothers. It is a blessed thing to feel that you have, through the Lord Jesus Christ, kindred the world over, and that there is a principle of love and faith that is stronger even than blood-love and family connection.



METHODS OF CONVERSION.

Q. Will you please make some remarks appropriate to the case of persons (some of whom are in this room) who expect that God will convert them under some powerful, stirring influence?



WELL, I suppose men come into the kingdom of God in as many different ways as plants come to flower. Some come right up out of the earth to blossom. Some come up and grow the whole summer, and then blossom. Some grow a year, and then blossom the second year. Some grow up like trees, and do not blossom till they are three or four or five or six years old. Some put the leaves out first, and the blossoms afterward; and some put out the blossoms first, and the leaves afterward. There is every conceivable method of inflorescence.

Now, when a man is converted, he blossoms; and some persons blossom almost from the cradle. I do not doubt that God's work begins in the hearts of children three or four years old, and of persons of every age beyond that period. As "the wind bloweth where it listeth," so God's Spirit works where it pleases. It comes when it pleases, and as

it pleases ; and no man can tell beforehand how it will come, or when it will come. The way in which the mind is affected when it blossoms into the kingdom of love and duty varies in almost all cases. Some men have a foregoing experience that has impressed itself upon their imagination and memory all their life long, and it is perfectly natural that they should expect other people to have very much the same experience.

An uncle of mine had a strong impression that everybody who was converted must have read a tract. His first question to young Christians was to find out whether any awakening tract had fallen into their hands ; and he was quite uneasy if they had not read a tract to which he could trace their conversion. A brother* in this church, now deceased, of blessed memory in our midst—a man of strong, intense feelings, and of earnest, vehement emotion—had, in his early religious experience, some hereditary will. To strive against it took considerable grace, and more to break it down. There was a severe quarrel in his mind before his will gave up. It was more severe, perhaps, than it would have been if he had had the saving grace of God presented to him earlier. He had a terrible struggle. And in the coming on of religious awakenings, he used to wax warm and yearn and talk and relate his own experience, and tell what his impressions were, and how, although he found that there was not one single way merely of entering the kingdom of God, and that men might be converted

* Mr. Edward Corning.

under a great variety of experiences, he took more satisfaction in persons that were converted as he had been than in others. He thought there was great thoroughness in a conversion where, as in his own case, a man had a quarrel with his Maker, and was beaten, broken down, and fairly subdued.

But I have seen Christians who said, to the end of their life, that they had never gone through a great conflict of that kind. They had, little by little, impressed upon them the conviction that they were living an unprofitable life, not worthy of themselves or of God. No sudden change had ever come over them. They gradually came to experience the indwelling of the Divine Spirit. They could not tell exactly when it was that they found themselves in the kingdom. They were timid, they hesitated, they feared, but, on the whole, the impression grew in their mind that they were Christ's, and at length they began to call themselves Christians.

God is sovereign; and He calls men as He pleases. Some He calls amid thunder and storm, some in a calm, some in winter, and some in summer. Some He calls as He calls flowers in spring, and some as He calls flowers in autumn. And our business is not so much to determine what is the way in which God must call us, nor the way in which we should like to come, as to get up and come to our Father, walking in whatever path our feet find. *Come*—that is the thing; with a deep experience, if you have it; without a deep experience, if you have it not; with a great tumult, if you cannot help it; without much tumult, if it

please God that it should be so. It is not to come in any particular way, or with any particular experience, but to arise and come to our Father, and say unto Him: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son; make me as one of Thy hired servants." It is to come back to God, *at any rate*.

Q. Why is it so difficult, in talking with people, to lead them to throw aside their doubts and accept Christ as their Saviour?

That is more difficult at some times than at others. I suppose on some days you have such a feeling that you can almost lift a soul on board, and carry it into harbour; while on other days you seem powerless, and cannot render any assistance to the souls that are perishing around you. Our efficiency depends very much upon the state of our own soul. A man whose Christ is near and dear to him, and who has a glowing experience, and pours it out into the souls of others, will help them faster and further than almost any one else. The most fruitful days that I have had have been those in which I had something to tell the inquirer about Christ that I myself had felt. I have had the best success when I had a heart filled with love and zeal and enthusiasm, which, flowing out in tides, would catch the hearts of those with whom I was labouring, and carry them along. And I have seen many persons converted.

Have you never, after a cloud has long cast its dark shadow on a field, seen the shadow slowly move away, and leave the field exposed to the full light of the sun? I have seen the shadow move off

from the souls of persons in the same way, and leave them exposed to the light of the Sun of Righteousness.

I have noticed that the Divine economy in religion is as much governed by natural laws as the economy of God in nature. As a crop answers to the cultivation given to it, so birth into the kingdom of God answers to the cultivation that precedes it. If you go into an Episcopal church, where they believe more in the institutions of religion than we have been taught to, where they preach Christ and Him crucified, but are not accustomed to revivals, you will find that persons will become serious, will appear restless, and will at last seem to dawn into a Christian hope and life. The method of their conversion will follow the line of their education.

If you go into a Methodist church, you will find that the brethren employ the emotions more. They preach and pray and exhort with all their power till the whole room glows, and everybody is expected to be fired up with religious zeal. And there the conversions, like the instructions, will be characterized by intensity and enthusiasm.

If you go into a Presbyterian or Congregational church, where a strong doctrinal element prevails; where men have been brought up on the old New England plan, and preached to, and catechised till all religion assumes an intellectual form, with definite statements, exact definitions, philosophical ideas, you will find a regular sequence in the process of conversion. I recollect hearing Dr. Nettleton and my father talk of the method of bringing people into a

regenerated condition. They said that first you must get the individual into a state of "attention." The state next to attention was "interest." The next to interest was "conviction." The next to conviction was a "deep, rebellious condition." And next to that was "conversion." These were the different stages that they deemed it necessary for the sinner to go through in order to become a Christian. And I recollect the treatment that men received when they came to talk with father about religion. He used to put them through a regular course. And the result answered pretty nearly to the education received.

Now, take another kind of preaching. I have been a pastor for a great many years. At the first church I had under my charge, in Lawrenceburg, we had no revival; but in Indianapolis, during the eight years that I was there, at the church of which I had the care, we had four or five revivals. I have never held up in my instruction the Law, as it is called, so much as I have attempted to hold up the Love of God in Jesus Christ, and to win men to the Saviour by the presentation, first, of duty, and second, of His loveliness. And I have kept down fear. I have not avoided it; but generally my preaching has not been such as to excite fear so much as hope and trust. And the conversions that have taken place under my ministry have, I think, been as valid as those under any other ministry. They have, as a general thing, proved sound, and made godly men and women. They have come in on the side of love, trust, and hope, rather than of

conscience and fear; and thus they have answered to the preaching under which they have been wrought; and, as a common rule, the sort of preaching which is presented to the mind will determine the character of the conversions that take place under it.

Now, the question arises, Is there nothing common to all in conversion? Yes; but the same substantial experience takes different forms in the cases of different persons.

Q. Can a person be converted without feeling himself to be a sinner before God, and without feeling that an application of the love of God to the soul is needful to his salvation?

I do not believe any person can be converted unless he is brought to such a state that he feels the need of a change; but I have no doubt that it is possible for a person to be converted without having had a doctrinal view of his sinfulness. Everybody that is converted feels that he is a sinner, that he has offended against God or God's law, and that he needs pardon and spiritual regeneration. Some believe in this transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit under one form of doctrine, and some under another; but the essential facts that man is dead in trespasses and sins, that he is born to worldliness, that he must be changed, and that he must render obedience to the law of love, I suppose nobody doubts.

Some men wait to be convicted of sin. It is like collecting water to turn a wheel. One dam is made here, and another there, and another further up the stream; and when there are heads enough, and falls enough, the water is let on, and the wheel begins to

turn, and the mill begins to go. And a man may lie back and let the truth press upon him, and press upon him, until at last there is developed an intensity of feeling that will produce conviction.

But let me illustrate my way of convicting persons of sin. How would I attempt to convict a person of ignorance? If a little sprig of a fellow comes where I am, thinking that he knows everything, and that he is going to teach me everything, it is not necessary for me to say to him, "You are a popinjay, sir; you are a conceited fool!" One of the best ways to deal with him is to assume that he knows everything. I introduce one subject, and assume that he is familiar with it, and question him upon it till he begins to say to himself, "I do not know quite as much as I thought I did." I at once pass from that to another subject, and assume that he knows something on that, and push him along till he begins to boggle, and feel that he is not half so wise as he thought he was. And by the time I have swamped him on half-a-dozen subjects, he will be quite crestfallen, and have some idea of his ignorance.

And if a man comes to me and says, "I cannot see that I am a sinner," I say, "Then you do not need any change nor repentance. But you ought to act like a Christian, if you cannot see that you are a sinner. Do you pray?" "Well, I—yes." "Do you enjoy prayer?" "I cannot say that I do." "But why not?" "Well, my thoughts wander, and I do not seem to be speaking to anybody, and nobody seems to hear me." "Ha! you

do not think that you are sinful ; but the moment you attempt to speak to God He is nothing to you, and you are nothing to Him. You are from Him ; and your breath is from Him ; the bounties that every day shower upon you are from Him ; and yet, according to your own admission, nothing is so foreign to your nature as communion with Him ; and when you address a few words to Him, your thoughts are roving from one end of the earth to the other !” “And how is it,” I say, “in respect to Christ, His sacrifice, His resurrection, and His ascension ? What are your feelings towards Him ?” “Well, I want to love the Saviour.” “Do you love the Saviour ?” “I cannot say that I do.” “You profess to have no sense of sinfulness, and yet you admit that you have no love toward the Saviour, who died for you, and who, having ascended to heaven, there intercedes in your behalf !” But I say still further, “Take the idea of a Christian life as the rule of your conduct, and attempt to govern yourself by the law of gentleness, meekness, and love for one day.” The moment he does this he finds himself in difficulty ; and at the end of the day he comes back and says, “Oh, I broke it here, and I broke it there. I found myself unequal to the task.” I do not care which one of the fundamental precepts of Christ a man undertakes to follow, he needs undertake to follow it but one day to have revealed to him the barrenness of his spiritual life and the sinfulness of his nature.

Talk French, if you want to know how little you know about the French language. I was convicted

when I went to Paris. I had learned French. I could read newspapers in the French language almost as easily as in my own, and I thought I understood French very well; but when I went to Paris, and heard it talked, it seemed like jargon, they talked so fast, and ran the words into each other so. I went into the shops, and undertook to talk French, and the shopkeepers could not understand me any better than I could them. I came near starving to death because I could not ask for what I wanted! I could take up French books and newspapers and read what was in them, but I came to understand very soon that I did not know very much about French.

Many and many a man reads the Bible, and reads it well; but let him undertake to talk in the language of Zion, and see whether he does not stagger. Nothing staggers a man so quickly as trying to live a Christian life. And nothing will convict a man of his sinfulness sooner than the attempt to practise the teachings of Christ. But many persons seem to think that there is to be a projected conversion, a spiritual phantasmagoria, if I may say so. They seem to expect that there is to be brought before them, by the power of God's Spirit, something equivalent to Calvary, with its three crosses, and the Saviour hanging on the sacred middle one. They seem to be looking for some mysterious disclosure which shall answer to the very crucifixion of Christ. And they are waiting, and waiting, and waiting to behold the wondrous spectacle; whereas they should at once endeavour to obey God's law. The first step

in that direction will show you how far you are from obedience. Try to love, try to pray, try to practise the Christian virtues, and do it from hour to hour, and you will not be long in finding out how selfish you are, how proud you are, how unsympathetic you are in spiritual things, how closely allied you are to worldly things.

Q. Will you have the kindness to say a few words to those that are putting off the duty of accepting Christ to-day, in the hope that to-morrow they may see something or hear something that shall make their way more clear.

When Christ was on earth, a great many persons that came to Him were going to be His disciples after a preparation. One says: "I will follow Thee, but suffer me first—" "Stop!" says the Saviour; "I do not want you unless you will follow Me at once." These suffer-me-first folk are not the ones to follow Christ. If you have any secular preparation to make, you are not the one to follow Christ. When He was on earth, and people came to Him, what He demanded of them was this: "Follow Me now." And that is what He demands of every person to-day. If any say, "Lord, we do not understand the doctrine yet," He says, "Then follow Me for that reason, and I will teach you." "Lord, we do not feel that our hearts are sufficiently subdued." "Follow Me, and they will become subdued." "But, Lord, we do not know as we shall hold out." "You certainly will not if you do not begin. The best way is to follow Me just as you are." You must either follow Christ or go away from Him. You must either accept Him or renounce Him. And if there is anybody to-night

that is conscious of being sinful, that has a burdened conscience, that has a heavy heart, and that needs consolation and salvation, I beseech you to follow Christ unhesitatingly, unquestioningly ; and He will reveal, hour by hour and day by day, what your duty is, and all that is needful for you to know.

CHRISTIAN JOYFULNESS.



RECOLLECT, when I was young, hearing a great many exhortations to men who were not Christians, on the ground that if they became such they would be exceedingly happy; and I remember distinctly my impression, that a Christian was always happy; that only Christians were happy; and that if I became a Christian I should know it, just as I know when I go out of darkness into light, or out of shadow into sunshine. I thought there would be a palpable and distinct change of sensation, and that, so long as I remained faithful as a Christian, I should experience uninterrupted and transcendent joy.

Far be it from me to dissuade you from Christian joy; and far be it from you to attempt to live a Christian life for the sake of being joyful.

It is true that the Word of God declares joy to be one of the *fruits of the Spirit*. Peace and joy in the Holy Ghost are a part of the kingdom of God in us. And yet, I think that if any man, in any part of his Christian life, sets out to find joy, it will be fictitious. It will be some form of excitement, or

something other than joy. It certainly will not be that joy which the Word of God contemplates, and which is unconscious; which comes, as it were, unawares; which comes, not in the form of exhilaration and ecstasy, but in those milder forms which constitute satisfaction rather than intense pleasure.

What, then, are the great ends which a man is to seek? If he becomes a Christian merely that in another way he may derive that pleasure which other men find in worldly things, his experience will be simply that of moral selfishness; but if he is living really to glorify God, to do good to men, to be more manly—more manly in thought and feeling and motive—and to be truer, better, and more noble, then joy will come to him. The effect of the whole of religious living is to produce joyfulness. If you single that out, and hold it up as the special thing after which you seek, you will come short of it, or you will only get a spurious kind of joy; but if you make it your highest end and aim to live for the glory of God, and for the welfare of men, and seek your own soul's highest manhood in seeking these things, you will be happy.

But then, all men will not be happy just alike. If I strike the table before me, there is a sound produced; but it is not a musical sound. If I strike the flesh on my arm, there is another sound produced; but that is not a musical sound. If, however, I strike the chords of a piano, or force air through the pipe of an organ, there is a musical sound produced. The nature of the sound depends on the nature of the thing acted upon.

Some men have natures that tend to produce joy. Other men have natures that are quiet, tranquil, peaceful, rather than joyful. Then there are others who are of a melancholy temperament. It is hard for them to come into a state of enjoyment. And you will find in every considerable church a long gradation from the top to the bottom of the scale. There is one dear soul and another and another that seem, and are, full of joy. They are possessed of high, emotive natures, and they have Christian joyfulness; and when they pray they pour out their requests with great vehemence. They frequently speak of the great joy that God sends down upon them. And everybody that hears one of them thinks, "He is a Christian—he is joyful." And many say: "I shall never feel as he says he does, and as he seems to. My life is a struggle. I am in a perpetual state of self-condemnation and of sadness, and it cannot be that I am a Christian. He is a Christian because he is joyful; and I am not a Christian because I am sad."

Both of them may be Christians. It is true that that is a more perfect type of religion which is accompanied by joy; but it does not follow that there are not many types of Christian experience lower down which are genuine. You will recollect that it was said of Gideon, when he was pursuing his enemies after a long chase, "Faint, yet pursuing;" and so there are many Christians that can say of themselves, "Faint, yet pursuing." There are many who are not very joyful, but who are as conscientious, as earnest and sincere, as others that are joyful; and

sometimes they put forth a great deal more disinterested exertion.

It does not cost me much to be joyful. Yet it is not a sign of any attainment in me. I was born so that it is easy for me to be joyful. My mind rises into a joyful state spontaneously. It did before I knew anything about religion. As a child, I was always merry, sportive, and joyful. I have been so all my life, and I mean to be so all the rest of my days. But I do not attribute my joyfulness to my religious state. Undoubtedly my religion has had something to do with it; but I know there are many Christians who are better than I am, who put forth more effort to be good than I do, who are more earnest, more self-denying, and more consistent than I am, but who are not so joyful. With me joy is largely constitutional. It comes from the harmony of my physical frame, and of my mental economy. It results from the balance of the joy-bearing elements that are in my composition. God gave me these elements as gifts to profit withal, and I am thankful for them; but it does not follow that if persons do not possess them in the proportions that I do, they are not Christians. It merely shows that they are not happy. Some men are conscience-bound, some are careworn, and some are sad; and, at the same time, they are Christians.

Twenty of you, we will suppose, are making a pilgrimage across the continent on foot. You travel twenty miles a day. Some of you are so full of vigour, and so springy, that you can make circuits, and chase the hare, and run down the herd, in

addition to walking your twenty miles. That distance is nothing to you. The next five walk their twenty miles in comparative ease—without any special difficulty; but they have no strength to spare. They go through the day and come out fresh at night, and that is all that can be said of them. The next five get along pretty well, but the journey tells upon them. They are very weary at the end of the day. They find it hard to keep their courage up, and are glad enough to have night come, so that they can rest. The last five are tired when they begin, and are tired all the way, and love to sit down and rest often, and they linger behind the others, and it is long after the camp is pitched, and the fires are lighted, that one by one they straggle in. But they all get in. There is a great deal of difference between the first, the second, the third, and the fourth platoons, in regard to their ability to hold out; yet, is it not true that they are all travellers going the same way, and getting over the same distance? Some do it easily, some do it less easily, some do it with difficulty, and some with still more difficulty; but they are all pilgrims and travellers, and they all advance over the route.

Now, in going to Heaven, some make the journey easier than others. Owing to the circumstances of life, there are very many differences in this respect. But, although it is desirable to be a joyful Christian, it is not of so much importance that you should be joyful as that you should be true, conscientious, earnest. Therefore, I say, especially to the young,

Rejoice in the Lord. Still do not *aim* at rejoicing. Have a cheerful, hopeful, joyful courage, if you may; but aim at no motive lower than God's favour. Aim at the truth. Aim at Christian benevolence. Aim at building up a holy manhood that shall be higher than that which belongs to the world around you. Then, doubtless, you will find more and more that the fruit of the Spirit in you is joy and peace.

THE REASON FOR AFFLICTIONS.

IF you think of Christ as the official Head and Governor of the realm, I do not know how you can form an idea of His tender and personal love except by some sort of comparison. The idea that God, who governs the heavens and the whole universe, should not only stoop to think of each man, but should be interested in every phase of the experience of each man, so that we may literally say that the Divine sympathy attends every step of every individual human life—this idea, when you look at it in the light of gubernatorial love, or the love of an officer of government, does seem extravagant. It seems impossible. Nor does it become likely, and address itself to our feelings as a thing real and true, till we look at the affection that we behold in the social relations of life—for instance, the paternal and the maternal—and see what the effect of loving is. Then, how trifles cease to be trifles! how little things, and disagreeable things, become neither little nor disagreeable! They are changed. If you were to take the love that a

woman shows outwardly for her friends, and the things that she admires and relishes in life, you would not judge, by her ordinary carriage and the tastes which she usually displays, that little and almost silly things could ever please her. But see her at home with her little child of one year old or less. Take notice how that stately, self-poised, cultured, fastidious woman, who, in general society, would disdain the trifles of life, and still more its prattling trifles, abandons herself to the little ways of the child. See how its little quirks and pranks, that to everybody else would be ridiculous, please her and engross her. And since it is very much so with fathers too, every one perceives plainly that it is in the power of love to entirely transform things, so that they shall seem different and be different. And that which is true of love is true of every other faculty or feeling.

Through this analogy I can understand how God may have an interest even in the lowest and the least. He charges His angels with folly; but He loves them. And if men are a great deal more foolish than angels, still it is in the power of Divine love to take an interest in them too; not judicially, not officially, not on account of God's majesty, but on account of God's love. "As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him."

It seems as though the providence of God frequently belied these representations of Scripture, and our dreams and thoughts of them. We can hardly understand how God, if He so loved us, would permit us to fall into temptation and into sin, when He

might perhaps hold us back by His right hand. Sometimes it is even more difficult for us to understand how, if God loves us, He will permit what seems to us unnecessary troubles—troubles that vehemently afflict us; and especially so when the troubles are just those that we should not have chosen.

Now, if God is to afflict us for our good, that we may be partakers of His nature—and that is the declaration—it is very likely that when He undertakes to afflict us, and permits afflictions to come, He will send those that are special and peculiar to our case; and we shall know that they are adapted to our condition by the fact that they take us just where we do not want them, and that they are particularly hard to bear—for an affliction which is easy to bear is hardly an affliction. If I meant to punish my child, I should strike him where it would hurt him, and not where it would not. For if there is an aim in affliction, suffering is an important part of that affliction. The learning to bear, the learning to give up, the learning to submit to God, the learning to say in regard to evils, where it is very difficult to say it, “Thy will, not mine, be done,”—that is the very end of afflictions, many of them.

So God may be dealing with us as a parent deals with a child. “He doth not willingly afflict, nor grieve the children of men.” He does it, “for their profit.” When the hand of God rests heavily upon us, every one is tempted to believe that, in his own special case, the affliction is greater than he can bear. But only think what a time God has had in

this world, comforting the human race. Is there a combination of circumstances that ever will occur which has not already occurred? Is there a cause that shall bring a tear to the human eye which has not been in operation through ages? Is there one thing that can humble the pride, desolate the affections, or try the patience, which is not known to men? Is there one element left in this world that has not been brought into play? God is the consoler of the human heart, the comforter of His people; and even if, in His infinite wisdom, He had not known in the beginning how to comfort those that were in affliction, He would have learned how by the universal experience, the world-wide practice, which He has had in dealing with the children of men.

RELATION OF FEELING TO DUTY.



ONE of the things which men learn by a Christian experience, is how to work from a lower intensity of motive-power. When young persons begin their course as Christians, they are said to have exaggerated ideas. It is with a religious life as it is with colours. We laugh at negroes, Indians, and uncultivated people, because they love flashy colours. It is true that their fondness in that direction is in part owing to their balance of organization ; but it is in a great measure owing to the fact that it requires intense excitement to make an impression on that faculty in them which appreciates colour. It is only by the most glaring yellows and reds that their sense of colour can be waked up. But as persons become cultivated, they take in lower tones, until by-and-by they have what is called *an exceedingly refined taste*. And what is the meaning of that? Simply that it does not take one-tenth part as much colour to excite the feeling of colour in them as at first. They see beauty in lower tones, because their susceptibility to colour is increased.

Now, Christian duty, in the beginning, requires intense specific moral feeling ; but as the work goes on, and habit comes in, it does not require one-tenth part of the feeling to put a person on a certain course of conduct that it did in the beginning. His moral susceptibilities are so raised that less fire is necessary to make him boil.

A Christian is like a man who has been out in the cold all night, and is brought in chilled through. When he gets thawed out a little, he complains of the cold, and says, "I cannot keep warm," although the thermometer is up to eighty degrees, such is his reduced state. After a while the heat begins to penetrate his system, and he is stronger ; and although the thermometer has gone down to seventy degrees, he says, "Why, I am sweating !" At last, when he is warmed through, and his accustomed vigour has returned, he can let the thermometer go down to sixty degrees, and not be as cold as when it was at eighty degrees. When the body is in a healthy state, it can work in a low temperature better than when it is unhealthy. And what is true of physical life in this regard is true of Christian life. Many Christians commit the mistake of wanting high feeling when it is against nature that they should have it. It is an ordinance of God that the sensibility of your soul should enable you to live and work well with low measures of joy and feeling, and that this should give a much more healthy Christian development than where there are high reaches of feeling that touch only one or two points. I have told you that it is well to live in an

atmosphere of high religious feelings in the realization of God's presence. So it is. But it is also true that the experience of Christian life should so educate and refine the soul in its moral sense that it can appreciate and make use of all the lower ranges of incitement.

THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE.

EVERY army leaves along its track a belt of stragglers. Some are too weak, by sickness, to go further, and they fall out of the ranks. Some are lame, and cannot hold on with their comrades. Some are skulkers. For a variety of reasons the ranks become thinned out, and a fringe is left all along the country where they march.

It is not altogether unlike this in the army of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are around the churches a large number of stragglers, from weakness, from lameness, from a variety of reasons, and reasons, too, which do not all of them imply voluntary guilt. There are a great many persons in every such community as this, that have been professors of religion, but are not any longer known as such; who have been members of churches, but in one way or another have ceased to belong to any church. There are a great many persons that have had what is called a *hope*, and lost it; or, what is worse, kept it and dried it.

I want, this evening, to make some remarks respecting persons who are not living an active Christian life, but who have some trouble about their hope. You should recollect that a great many persons are brought into the church while they are yet young, before their nature is really developed; and that the struggle which has to take place in every nature often comes on after, and not at the time of the initial religious experience, and frequently overthrows and overmasters it. Especially is this the case where persons are out of the way of instruction, and have very little knowledge of themselves. I have known persons who were very docile, very gentle, very sweet, in all the early period of their life, till they were sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen years of age, and in whom then the tides broke loose, so that it seemed as though their nature was totally changed. Elements were manifested in their character which were not suspected to exist there before, as they moved on toward manhood, laying out and executing new plans in life.

Such persons have been brought by father and mother, not improperly, into the church; and it is not strange that when this change takes place in their nature, they should throw overboard all their old notions, and treat them with disgust. Sometimes this reaction in their experience continues for several years, sometimes it continues through their life, and sometimes they go back to their old state of mind little by little.

Then, again, there are a great many persons who are not subject to this very marked change, but who

grow gradually and evenly to manhood. They are highly susceptible to emotion. And so, during some time of social religious excitement, they become a good deal interested, and everybody tells them that they are converted, and that they ought to join the church. They do not think they ought to, and they hesitate; but their companions are joining, and they are pushed along, and "sweetly constrained," as it is said; and they give way half reluctantly, and half wishing it might be as favourable with them as others think it is. So long as they are at home, and are under the influence of faithful and intelligent friends, they glow with a measure of what seems like Christian zeal; but when they go out into the world, and mingle with society of other sorts, and come under different influences, this little beginning is overlaid and dies out. And they are ashamed, after a year or two, to have anybody say to them, "I understand that you are a member of the church." They wish they were better; but they feel the inconsistency of their bearing the name of Christ, and the prevalent thoughts and feelings and actions of their lives.

Often it is the case that they do not dare to get out of the church. In many cases they cannot get out. Our old-fashioned New England churches were such, you know, that you could get a man in, but that, once in, you could not get him out again unless you fired him out. Once in, if he went out, he must go to heaven or to discipline, one or the other. And so it is now-a-days to a certain extent. There are men in the church that do not feel that they are

fit to stay there, and they do not see any way to get out, and they do not know what to do. It is a source of great trouble to them ; and they hopelessly drift about in that state.

Then there are persons who have been brought into the church with views of religion which have had no permanent foundation, and who have found those views gradually changing. They have read and listened to other notions, and they cannot say that their present views conform to the creed of the church. They do not want to take on themselves the odium of heresy, and they do not know what to do. So they sit down quietly and do nothing ; and gradually their feelings become less intense, and their suffering is diminished. But their thoughts remain, and they are left in an unsatisfied and unhappy state of mind.

Then, again, there are others that went into the church honestly and intelligently ; but the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and ordinary influences in society, have overlaid their religious experience, and they have dropped out of the church. But, after a time, trouble or responsibility or increasing thoughtfulness, or some other cause, has begun to make them feel the need of religion.

And here let me say, my friends, that religion is not to be regarded as a duty. You might as well talk of the duty of breathing, or the duty of having the pulse beat, as to talk of the duty of being religious. It is a duty to breathe, to be sure, and it is a duty to have the pulse beat ; but we do not talk of these things as being duties. It is one of

the *indispensable necessities* that we should breathe, and that our pulse should beat. And I regard religious life as not only a duty but a *necessity*. You cannot be a *true* man and not be a *Christian* man. And everything that makes you relatively better than your fellow-men is an indication that you are so far on the way toward a Christian manhood. For I understand Christianity to be simply the ideal form of manhood which was represented to us by Jesus Christ. I understand it to be perfection wrought little by little in us by the Spirit of God through the truth as it is in Jesus.

When such persons begin, under favourable influences, to draw near to the sanctuary, it is very strange to see how God works in them sometimes. I have known Him to take a man and send him away from home a thousand leagues, among wicked men, where he was surrounded by the most contaminating influences, so that the greatness of his danger appalled him, and he said to himself: "I shall not stand and escape destruction unless I have something more than I now have to hold me up and preserve me. I must have religion here, or I shall certainly be ruined."

Sometimes God puts persons under new religious teachings; and it is a good thing. There are unquestionably many persons in my congregation who would be converted if they would go away from Plymouth Church. They have listened to me too long; and it seems as though, if I were to send them away, and some other minister were to take hold of them, their case would be reached, and there would

be hope for them. Sometimes persons, in going to another church, come under such influences, social and religious, that, though they have been accustomed to experience little or no effect from the ministrations of the gospel, they are speedily awakened to a sense of their condition.

But then comes up their old hope. One of the very first questions, where persons have been professors of religion, and have for various reasons backslidden and declined into a carnal and secular life, and their moral sense and conscience have begun to be quickened, always is, "What shall I do with my old hope?" One would think, from their talk, that a hope was a literal, visible, tangible thing, like a title-deed, and that however one's old hope may have been neglected, when he starts again he must connect it with his new hope, or else there will be a flaw in the title!

My own impression about this is, that an old hope is just like the Jews' manna on the second day. It is said, if I remember correctly, that it *stank*. The Lord did not let them pick up manna for more than one day. If any of them thought they would—if any of them, greedy, as men are now-a-days, picked up enough for two days, it stank in their vessels. I think our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ is to be gathered up every day fresh, and that if any man undertakes to keep it, it spoils in the keeping. And whether a man thinks he has been a Christian or not, and whether he has been deceived or not, has little to do, it seems to me, with his present duty.

Let me put a case to you.

A man has learned to read of a very poor master. He makes up his mind that he will take lessons of a rhetorical teacher. He takes his book and reads, and, as he reads, draws his words and runs them together, and makes bad work of it generally; and the teacher says: "Stop! *stop!* STOP! What sort of reading is that? That will never do in the world. You are no reader at all." And the man says: "Then I suppose I must go back and read my A B C's again." He has already learned them; he simply reads poorly, without proper emphasis, without any appreciation of the sense, and without indicating the pauses; and what has he to do but to start where he is, and do the right and best thing?

Suppose a man has been prescribing for himself for some ailment, and, finding that he is getting no better, he calls a doctor, and the doctor says, "You have been mistaken about yourself; you have not understood your own symptoms; you have employed improper remedies; you have not hit the difficulty at all; you have aggravated your trouble"—would there be anything for that man to do except to stop just where he was, and take the new course, that, under skilful direction, would lead to entire sanative restoration?

Now, it is precisely so in religious matters. A man who has begun a Christian life, and stopped; or a man who has begun a Christian life, and gone through devious and circuitous ways till he is quite out of the right path; or a man who has been swept away by worldly influences;—such a man, the mo-

ment he comes to himself, says, or should say, "There is but one course for me." Right there, where he is, without stopping to think of the past or anything relating to it, he should begin to live a humble, loving, obedient life to the Lord Jesus Christ. Standing right in his tracks, he is to begin there and then, and just as he is, as though he had never had any hope or known anything about religion. Throw away all the hope you ever had, and take a new one.

I do not mean by this to bring contempt upon old experiences ; but your transcendent duty is to begin instantly, in your place, to fulfil your obligations toward God and man. If you have been a Christian before, you will find it out ; and if you have never been a Christian, it is time that you were one ; and in either case the way is not to go back and try to analyze and test old evidences, but to take a new start, with a new hope, and a new love, and a new purpose, for the Saviour.

It is wonderful how many persons begin a Christian life—shall I say *over again*? Yes ; I do not object to that phrase. Sometimes I hear people say that they think they have been converted twice. I have no objection to that. I believe it pleases God in the dispensation of His grace to sometimes produce upon the minds of men a shock, if I may so say—a spiritual impetus, an enlightened, inspiring influence—greater the second time than the first. I do not know why we should limit the Divine power in this regard. It would not be strange if, having gone a certain way in religious experience, you should, in your business, in your family, or in some

other sphere of life, receive an impression on your spiritual nature such as you never knew anything about before. It may take place where there are prevalent strong religious influences, and you may be caught and lifted so high that you will never again sink down so low as you are now. And your second conversion may be a great deal more full, more clear, more blessed, and more continuing than your first was.

Therefore I would say, that if you have ever lived a religious life, and if you are, in a feeble manner, trying to eke out your old hope, let the past go, and seek at once the loving heart of the Saviour. To-night, without a moment dishonouring Christ's patience and goodness, say: "Let the dead bury their dead; let the past suffice for the past; now, Lord, for the future, for Thee and for life eternal I will live, with Thy help." Begin like a child again, right where you stand. Throw away all excuses; throw away all pride; throw away all vanity; throw away all shame; throw everything away that stands between you and your soul's highest good. There is nothing worthy of a man but to obey God, and to let the fulness of the Divine blessing fill his heart as he obeys.

RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION.

Q. Ought Christians, when they have no natural gift in that direction, and when they are liable to do as much harm as good, to make it their duty to converse with others on the subject of religion?

EVERY man must, to a degree, judge of his own gifts ; but we are more in danger of erring on the side of excusing ourselves than on the other side. Now and then we find a man that is super-serviceable, over-zealous ; but twenty men are not zealous enough where one is too zealous. And, in one way or another, we are to speak of Jesus to men whom we meet. It may be by the qualities which we exhibit, and it may be by some other means ; but somehow you must “let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” You cannot get over that. That is the universal condition. Some can do it by the deeds which they perform, some by the traits which they manifest, some by the narration of their Christian experience, some by relating the history of the work of Christ in their souls, and some by expostulation. There are a thousand ways in which it can

be done ; and in some way or other the light must get out of you. A man that is a Christian, and is a dark lantern, is not of the New Testament pattern.

As for myself, I seldom speak to persons on the subject of religion unless I am addressed by them on that subject, or unless they show a disposition to talk about it. The reason is, I found that the young people used to avoid me, on the supposition that I would attack them on religion ; and I said to my parish, soon after I came among them, " My work, night and day, week in and week out, is to spread the gospel of Christ ; but I wish you to understand that you can come where I am as often as you please, without having the subject of religion intruded upon you." It was to break down the barrier that there was between the young people of my parish and myself that I took this course.

I think a man that is a minister may fall into professionalism, strictly so called, and not be as useful as he would otherwise be. But every man must judge of this matter in his own case, and with the understanding that he is more liable to excuse himself than to go to the extreme in the opposite direction.

Q. What is the matter with the church, that it should be in its present state of lukewarmness or indifference, with reference to the great objects for which it was instituted ?

I think the way to test that question is for every man to ask himself, " What is the matter with *me*? Why do not *I* feel zealous? Why do not *I* pray as I used to? Why do not *I* work as I once did? Why do not *I* gather fruit as I did in days that are gone by?" You may be sure that the decision which is

arrived at on these points with reference to individuals will apply to the church which those individuals compose. And when individuals come into that state which you long for, the church will come into it also.

Q. Why is it that we who profess to love Christ above all things do not talk to each other about religion more?

There are a great many persons that think much about religion, who do not talk much concerning it. Many are fastidious about talking of those things which are nearest the heart. We do not talk much about our miseries and our family joys. We feel a certain delicacy in conversing on such topics. And there are many who, having the same feeling about their inward religious experience, shrink from talking about the work of Christ in the soul. With respect to conversing about their feelings on the subject of religion, men are usually shy. And, after all, as I understand it, the thing that is operative in conversation is the efflux of love and zeal and divine fervour. It is that which, coming out of a man, stirs others. It is not the logical weight of what he says. I suppose that frequently you preach more gospel to a man in a word than you could in a whole sermon. In circumstances where men expect, because they have treated you shabbily, that you will perhaps become their enemy, if you do them a kindness, and do it so heartily that there can be no doubt of its being genuine, I think they will, in many cases, get a better idea of the gospel than they could from talking.

GROWTH IN GRACE.



THE promise is, that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled. I suspect that the greatest number of persons have an impression that all religious experiences are of a nature so separate and apart from ordinary mental traits that they are to be sought, not by the usual processes of life, nor by the common modes of education, but by some exterior, supernatural forces—by what are called *the means of grace*.

What is *hungering and thirsting after righteousness*? A great many persons at once rise, on the announcement of this promise, into a very large general conception of a perfect and righteous character. They have before their mind a sense of superior excellence. They long to be spiritual heroes—not exactly angelic, but something more than creatures possessing mere human attributes. And there can be no question that there is in their aspirations a certain propriety. The state which they yearn for is one to which we hope to come by-

and-by. But there is a great deal of practical doubt whether this is the right end at which to view the matter. Let me illustrate.

Suppose it should be said to a child, "Blessed are the children that are diligent in study; they shall become pre-eminent scholars;" and suppose that child, instead of thinking of the tasks of the school, should instantly call up before his mind Milton, and Selden, and Bacon, and Newton, and Leibnitz, and great men like these. Suppose he should only have a vague and general conception of what it was to be educated, and on the strength of that should say, and content himself with saying, "I wish I had an education." You see, at once, that the ideal, as a substitute for the duty next to the child, would defeat its own object, and, instead of stimulating all minor, common points of education, would draw the child's mind away to what is called *wool-gathering*. I think there is more of religious *wool-gathering* than of any other sort. There is a vast amount of imaginative thinking about and longing after spiritual traits, without any use of the means necessary to the acquisition of those traits.

What I understand our Saviour to have included in this statement is this; a germinant state of faculty; a condition of every part of the mind such that we are dissatisfied with the past, and dissatisfied with the present as a permanence. We feel a desire to be better off in the future. There exists throughout the community a real generous desire to be more thrifty. Persons brought up in the North,

with but few exceptions, want to better their situation. They want a better house, better furniture, better pictures, better things generally; and they strive for them by legitimate methods. And the tendency to perpetual growth which these facts indicate is right, even in material things. All I have to say about it is, that it ought not to be limited to material things. It ought to extend to intellectual matters. It ought to make itself felt in the department of taste and refinement. It ought to be a power in the higher realm of the moral sentiments. It ought to reach through the whole character.

“Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit,”—that is, a man who thinks that he is finished, done up? He will admit that a little more added might improve him; but still, he thinks he is very well as he is. He does not deny that his moral nature needs a little polishing to make it perfect; and yet he thinks it is pretty much complete. He is conscious that there are some little roughnesses and incongruities; at the same time, he feels that substantially it is all there. He thinks that his conscience is about right; that his taste is about right; that his understanding is about right; that he is about right in every respect. Do you know what God says of a man that is wise in his own conceit? He says, “There is more hope of a fool than of him.” You cannot do anything with him.

We ought to be content with our lot. When we have travelled all day, and stop at a tavern, if it is but a log-cabin we are thankful it is no worse; and as a place at which to stop overnight we are content

with it. Be content with whatever state you are in; find the right side of it. But who would want to stay in a log-cabin tavern more than a night? Early in the morning we resume our journey, and are pressing onward toward home. In our condition we ought not to indulge in a feeling of discontent such that we can find no argument for thanksgiving. I have no complaisance with that mock humility which leads a man to say, "I have made no attainment, and I ought to be baptized with shame." If you are in a Christian church, and are surrounded by the ordinary means of grace, and have not made attainments, and are no better than you were before you were converted, then you have *not* been *converted*. But have you not made attainments? Do you not apply conscience to more things than you did? Are you not more generous than you were? Have you not more faith than you had? Do you not have higher ranges of vision than you did? If so, why should you deny it? Facts are facts, and it is not immodest to state them. What would you think of a husbandman who, when he had raised a good crop of corn, declared that it was no crop? But here is a man who has really availed himself of the means of grace that were placed within his reach, who has become a Christian, who by the love of Christ has been constrained, and who has succeeded in tying up his temper, and who, after many conflicts, is able to say, "I have made great attainments." And people say, "A man that talks about himself in that way cannot have much modesty or humility." Well, has he not made attainments?

and is it not right for him to state that simple fact in simple language? I say that about this, and about a hundred other things, mock-modesty is not becoming.

A lady is handsome. She knows it, others know it, and it is a subject of common remark; but, according to the general opinion which prevails with regard to such matters, she ought not to say that she is handsome; and if she should, probably all her friends would exclaim, "What a slip! she said she was handsome!" Well, is it not so? Suppose I should say of myself, "I am five feet and ten inches tall," do you believe anybody would think I overstepped the bounds of propriety? Suppose I should say, "I weigh one hundred and eighty pounds," do you believe anybody would check me, and say, "Oh, do not tell such a thing!" The Lord made a man as he is made; and if he is strong, there is no immodesty in his saying, "I am strong;" if he is tall, there is no immodesty in his saying, "I am tall;" if he is handsome, there is no immodesty in his saying, "I am handsome."

And as it is with these things, so it is with moral and spiritual things. If a man is growing in grace, he knows it, and ought to know it, and there is no immodesty in his saying, "I am growing in grace." There is no immodesty in a man's saying, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and am a great deal more than I was in the beginning," if it is true. I think it does a man good to say these things. Certainly there is no harm in it.

On the other hand, it is a bad sign for a man to

be content not to grow. You have heard me say that I had a large apple-tree in my orchard. It has done growing. And every year more and more parts of it are dead. The branches, one after another, are dying. A tree that has not vitality enough to make new growths has not vitality enough to keep the old growths alive; so the forces of nature are expiring in this tree, and soon it will be cut down and taken out of the way.

It is much so with the Christian state. A Christian that has not vitality enough to grow in grace has not enough Christian vitality to maintain what grace he has; and he will be lapsing and falling back.

Now, the general spirit in which this promise is made is that spirit which leads a man to feel enterprise in every part of his being—enterprise in benevolence, in self-denial, in faith, in hope, in courage, in love, in every one of the elements of manhood. It is that spirit which leads a man to strive to make more and more of himself. This is to be done in part by studying the lives of holy men, and imitating their example; but, after all, the way to grow in grace is to make each particular part of your life an occasion of grace, and to see that the little daily experiences are kept in harmony with the principles which Christ has given us for our guidance.

For instance, one man will want to see a vision of angels; will desire to have rapturous intercourse with Christ; will pray that the invisible sphere may be opened to him; and, after all, it does not occur to him that there is a great work to be done in him-

self; that there are habits that he should cultivate which represent meekness and gentleness and patience; that there is in him a want of unselfishness and kindness; that he is so absorbed in his business that he does not think of anybody else; that he is regardless of the injunction, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." But it is quite in vain to neglect these obvious and necessary ways of growing in grace by overleaping them ideally, and seeking to grow in grace, in a kind of romantic manner, through high contemplative states. Grow in common things, and that will enable you to grow in uncommon things. Grow in practical elements, and that will enrich you in these extraordinary and conceptional elements.

EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION.



HAVE received a letter from persons in Pennsylvania, requesting me to give certain desired information which may be published. I will read an extract:—

“That you may know the points we most wish information upon, permit us to state generally some questions that we would be pleased to have you elucidate in a sermon, if you will be kind enough to preach one on the subject of this communication. They are these:—

“What steps are necessary to make us Christians? Can a man know within himself that he is a Christian? If so, does that constitute experimental religion? Is religion a delusion or a blissful reality? Are there just so many things necessary to make us Christians and keep us faithful? If so, what are they?

“Not wishing to encumber this note with a large number of names, we shall merely subscribe ourselves,—Yours, etc.

There are really but three questions here:—1. “Is experimental religion a delusion or a blissful reality?” 2. “Can a man know within himself that he is a Christian? If so, does that constitute experimental religion?” 3. “What steps are necessary to make us Christians?” I shall make a few remarks on these three points.

1. “Is experimental religion a delusion or a blissful reality?”

I take it for granted that by "experimental religion" is here meant those peculiar experiences of feeling which Christians are reputed to have. And the question is, Are they fantasies and imaginations, or are they realities? Is there such an experience, distinctively and peculiarly, in men who call themselves Christians, as differs from the experiences that men have or may have who are merely moral men? If a man knew and observed all natural laws in this world faithfully, would he not become possessed of all the feelings that any one can have who simply professes to be a Christian?

In reply to this, I would say: I believe, I *know*, and ten thousand witnesses join me in the affirmation, that there is a distinctive experience of feeling and thought belonging to a Christian nature which results directly from the communion of our minds with God's mind. That experience is mainly emotive: not exclusively (for all emotion of this kind is accompanied by some degree of intellectual activity), but *mainly*. It is a high state of moral feeling. The feeling in part may be painful, as in certain stages of sorrow for sin, and in various kinds of self-denial. It rises out of these into low degrees of enjoyment. It may be raised to the very summit of the mind's capacity. Every Christian has not necessarily every Christian feeling; and every feeling that is experienced is not necessarily known in all its plenitude. There is endless variation in these respects. But the main point, the salient fact, is that to the disciple of Jesus Christ, who is truly and spiritually born, belong states of mind different

from those that belong to men in their unchristian condition.

They are states of mind, too, that cannot be produced by simple obedience to common natural law—that is, by *morality*. True religion must include that; but that alone does not give the distinctive Christian emotion which is characteristically the result of the presence of God with us, and of the action of His mind upon ours.

Take a remote illustration. You go out into life, form many acquaintances, and have a feeling of goodwill toward all men. You form many friendships also; and there is an active interchange of sympathetic feeling between you and your several friends. By-and-by you meet one person who is more to you than any other friend, or than all other friends—your appointed friend for life; and you are conscious that friendship rises now to a degree of emotion. There is both an intensity and a fineness in it; and there is a reciprocal surrendering of thought, of imagination, of love, of the understanding, and of the moral sentiments, so that there is an interpenetration of the two natures. Your feelings differ, not simply in quantity but in quality, from the feelings that you had for a mere friend, or for a common acquaintance, or for a stranger that was a human being simply. You are conscious that you have mounted up into a region of your own mind which you never before entered.

Now suppose a person should say to you, "Do you believe there is anything in loving more than a higher state of kind feeling toward mankind? Do

you believe that love is anything more than benevolence in a somewhat concentrated form?" Anybody that had been in love would laugh at such questions. Benevolence is well enough as far as it goes; but when a man has been really in love he knows the difference between love and benevolence. And they are different not only in quantity but in kind; for, although love carries benevolence, all benevolence does not carry this intense love.

A man asks me: "What do you call Christian emotions? Are they different from moral feelings, such as all men have? Are they different from those feelings which accompany the keeping of natural laws, of God's laws?" One who has had the distinctive feeling of love to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour of his soul could scarcely refrain from laughing at a man that should ask such a question. For there is a state in which Christ seems a real Being; in which He seems inexpressibly beautiful in all His attributes; in which He presents Himself, not merely as your Creator in the beginning, and your Judge in the end, but intermediately, and all the way through, your Lover, your Brother, your Friend, whose friendship was sealed in blood, your Redeemer, who comes to you bringing with Him from the eternal world all that there is in the Infinite of self-denying love; in which His true nature is so distinctly portrayed before you that you involuntarily exclaim, "This is my Lord and my God!" and in which you have the feeling: "My Christ is the universal providential governor; all things are given to Him in heaven

and upon earth; the issues of my life are in His hands; He loves me; I am utterly His; all that concerns me is of His ordering; He will save me in life, and when I die He will receive me to dwell with Him eternally in the heavens." And when the soul rises into that state, there spring up a class of emotions that have neither parallel nor analogue in the lower degrees of emotion.

It is true, and you may say it without fear, that it is not a vain thing to be a Christian; that there is an experience, an experimental state of mind, in a true Christian, which is different from what he had before he became a Christian, and unlike it, and including in it the most blessed and ecstatic feelings which it is given men to know on earth. And that man who has never known what it was to exhale, as it were, in the presence of his Master; that man who has not felt that every thought, every feeling, every power of his being went out toward Christ—has not felt those emotions which belong to the experience of a Christian. He does not know what is in him, and what he is capable of experiencing.

So far as concerns the question as to whether there is any such thing as experimental religion, this, it seems to me, is a very calm and mild statement of facts.

2. Next, it is asked, "Can a man know within himself that he is a Christian? If so, does that constitute experimental religion?"

If it were not that men's minds have been greatly perplexed by diverse and often contrary instructions,

so that they are really bewildered, I should almost be disposed to ridicule such a question. When I think of the truth itself, it seems preposterous that a man should not know whether he is a Christian or not. Suppose a man should ask you, "Do you know, sir, whether you are sick or whether you are well?" I think there is no difficulty in your being able to answer that question. You either are well, or you are sick, or you are a little unwell. You can state almost to a degree where you are on the scale of health.

Or, to take it out of the sphere of bodily sensation, suppose a man should ask you, "Do you know, sir, whether you are happy or unhappy?" Would you be in doubt as to that?

Suppose a man should come to you and say, "Have you any idea whether you are a man of truth and veracity or not?" If a man wants to know himself on that subject, can he not? Do you not generally have a pretty near estimate of what you are?

Suppose a man should ask you, "Are you a thief, or are you not?" Cannot a man know it if he is honest? It is hard work, I know, for some; but still it can be found out.

Or, put it in a different form still. Suppose a man should ask you, "Are you on the side of justice and liberty, or are you on the side of false aristocracy and oppression?" Can a man doubt which side he is on?

Again, suppose a man should ask you: "Are you a British subject or an American citizen? Do you

belong to Great Britain or to the young Stars-and-Stripes country? Which government are you under, anyhow?"

Now, if I think simply of the truth, I aver that it is just as easy and natural that a man should know whether he is a Christian or not, as that he should know whether he is an American or a Briton, whether he belongs to Canada or the United States, whether he is sick or well, whether he is democratic or aristocratic. For religion is not a mystic veil that descends upon a man from afar, that he has no connection with, and that comes and goes as atmospheric conditions do. Religion, as I shall show, has in it all the great distinctive elements of intelligent being—namely, reason, conviction, moral will, and distinct and classified emotions; and they belong to man in such relations that he can tell whether he has them or not, and whether he has them on one side or on the other.

But when I look at the feebleness of many persons' minds; when I see their want of discrimination; when I remember how they are blown about by many winds of doctrine; when I observe how some men have the idea that religion is mere ecstatic fervour, and how other men have the idea that religion is something widely different from that; when I call to mind the fact that the tests of religious experience have been varied by different schools and in different ways; and when I consider how a sensitive conscience and an emotive nature must be drifted hither and thither by these conflicting views—I am constrained to say that a man may be a

Christian, and yet be in great doubt as to whether he is one or not.

Why, there are some instructors that seem to make it their business to keep those whom they teach in doubt on this point. I know churches that would shiver if I were to go into their lecture-room, where they were holding a meeting like this, and were to get up and say, "A man ought to know it, if he is united to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and is His disciple; it is not only his privilege and right, but it is his *duty* to know it." They would say that it was a most audacious assumption for a man to even think that he was in Christ. Ministers of the gospel often teach people that it is a fatal thing to cherish such a belief, and attempt to keep them in a state of uncertainty, under the false impression that such uncertainty is beneficial. But I do not believe in uncertainty. It is not a thing that is recommended in the Bible. Hope, confidence, positiveness, is characteristic of a true Christian, as set forth in the Word of God. The undying conviction that Christ loves you and that you love Him; the swearing of the whole soul to the banner of the Lord and Saviour, and the knowing that you are fighting under it—this I believe to be indispensable to any great growth in grace. And as to uncertainty in these matters being a benefit, it is no more a benefit than it is to be ignorant as to which side you are on in any other great question of moral and spiritual truth. It is a positive damage. It is a dead weight. It pulls men down.

I say, therefore, that a great many men *may* be

Christians, and yet be in great doubt about their experimental evidences; but a man *ought not* to be in doubt, and does not *need* to be in doubt, on this subject. The nature of Christian experience, the nature of the truth, and the disclosures of God in men's conversion and sanctification, do not require that they should be in any uncertainty in the matter.

3. Then comes the question, "What steps are necessary to make us Christians?"

It is almost impossible to tell generally what steps will make a man a Christian. God, as I learned early in my ministry, is sovereign in the disposition of His grace. That is to say, He brings men to Himself in that way which pleases Him—and, in general, I have noticed that that way pleases God, in His sovereignty, which is most in accordance with the peculiar natural disposition of the person that is brought to Him, and with his former education and his present knowledge; so that when different men are brought to Christ, though the general result is the same, the process is not. You will hardly find two cases in which the method was the same in all particulars.

To illustrate this matter, suppose there were a vast malarial district, a great circuit of country, in which were generated all manner of diseases; suppose there were, towards the centre of that district or circuit of country, a mountain lifted up; suppose that on that mountain there was a sanitarium—an immense building to which men might go, and going to which they might rise out of the morbid in-

fluences beneath into the pure air above, where all the conditions of health were fulfilled ; and suppose word should be sent out to all the sick in the region round about, "Come up hither, for here is health." Now, if a man was sent to me, as the one having charge of that sanitarium, to inquire what steps were necessary to get there, how could I tell him ? For, here, on the north, is one man a little sick. If he undertakes to come, he will be obliged to travel by easy stages. And the particular experiences which he will have on the road will depend in part upon the route he takes. But, whatever those experiences may be, if he perseveres, and no serious accident befalls him, he will finally reach the sanitary height. On the south is another man who is sick of a certain disease, who has not left his bed in six months, and who requires a certain kind of treatment. He has heard of the sanitarium ; and he says to his attendants, "Will you carry me over this road by easy stages, and get me there ?" He will have to go northward, and his experiences, as regards climate at least, will be different from those of the man who goes southward. But he will recover at the sanitarium. Another man is off at the east. He has a different disease, and requires a different kind of treatment. He must go by another road, right west, and his experiences will differ from the experiences of the other men ; but he will find his way to the sanitarium. Each man, whether he travel north, or south, or east, or west, will sooner or later, and with more or less difficulty, come into the enjoyment of the advantages proffered to him,

and such as he, on this mountain in the centre of the malarial district. They will go by short stages or by long ones; they will travel a great many miles, or but very few; they will ride, or will walk on their own feet; and, if they ride, they will go by public conveyance or by their own conveyance. These various matters will be determined by the circumstances which surround them. But they will all go to one point. They will go with different degrees of activity or speed, and with different degrees of comfort; but the destination will be the same in each case. Do you not see it?

Well, it is just so in going to the Lord Jesus Christ. When men are sick, there is this great central Mountain of spiritual refuge to which they may go for relief. But where they are, how ignorant or how wise they are, how much or how little they have given way to their appetites and passions, what their entanglements and temptations are—all these things will have an influence upon them in their journey. And what steps are necessary, and how many of them, and how hard or how easy it will be to break away from that which is evil, and take hold upon that which is good, it is impossible to say. No specific answer can be given on these points. But let me say, in one word, that this Mountain is provided for all, and that the steps which are necessary in the case of each to enable him to reach it will be determined by his peculiar circumstances.

But we will suppose that, after these various sick persons have reached the sanitarium, they hold a

conference with themselves, some calm evening, sitting on the porch. All of them feel greatly relieved. Some are almost nimble, and are exhilarant. Others, who have not been there long, say: "We are better; but still we have not the enjoyment that those people have." And they begin to talk over the question of their evidences that they are there. One man, springing up and capering about the floor, says: "Ah! I know I am here!" Another man, lifting himself up goutily, says: "I cannot jump in that way, and I am very uncertain whether I am here or not!" Another man, turning on his couch, and looking around languidly, says: "Oh, if I could sit up, I should feel more sure that I was here!" And so they reason, from their different sensations, as to whether or not they are in that sanitarium.

They go further. One says, talking with another, "Where did you come from?" "I came from North Perdition," is the reply. "Ah! I came from South Perdition." "What sort of a road did you travel?" "Why, I came from a region where it is winter six months of the year; and the roads were horrible. It seemed as though I never should get out of the quagmires. I did not see one flower or leaf till I got to the foot of this mountain. If it had not been for getting my health and life again, I never would have undertaken such a dreadful task." "Well, then, I am afraid I am not here." "Why; what sort of a road did you come?" "Oh, I came a most beautiful road! I travelled all the way in the midst of flowering vines, and blossoming apple-trees, and everything sweet. It seemed to me as

though I was between gardens all the time ; and either you are not here, or else I am not—we had such different experiences.” And yet, they *are* both there.

You see how absurd this is in speaking of men in a physical, actual place ; but it is just as absurd in speaking of men in spiritual experience.

I hear one man say to another : “Did you have such awful feelings as you describe ? I never had any such feelings ; and I am afraid I am not a Christian.” The other man says : “You say that the moment you thought of religion you broke out into rapture ; but I did not. I was two months without the dawn of light ; and I fear I am not a Christian.” Each thinks he is not a Christian because he did not feel as the other did. One thinks he is not a Christian because he did not feel joyous, and the other thinks he is not a Christian because he did not feel bad.

What is that experience which the true Christian has ? It is love—and a love which leads the soul to devote itself to Christ. *I love Thee, and I will do what Thou dost command me because I love Thee*—that is the root, the seed-form of experimental or spiritual piety. *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.*

Now, this believing on the Lord Jesus Christ ; the perception of Him ; the going out after Him with your heart's affection ; and the devoting yourself to His will because you love Him, and because He loves you—that is what I understand to be conversion.

Does that take place the same in all people ? Not

in its disclosures. The root is the same, however. For instance, one man is given to philosophical reasonings and investigations. He is living a moral life. Outwardly, his character and conduct are above reproach. He begins to seek the Lord Jesus Christ. With him the process will be pre-eminently an intellectual one. He will think it all out. When he beholds Christ, it will be with strong convictions. There will be some emotion in his case, but not nearly so much as there is in other cases.

Next comes a person with equal intellectual endowments, but a more poetic and imaginative nature. The first man sees through the truth by patient thought. The other sees it instantly; it flashes over his mind. To one it looks like a crystal; to the other it looks like an irradiating star. The second man sees the same thing as the first, but sees it more vividly.

Then comes the third man. He perceives the same truth, and perceives it imaginatively; but he has what neither of the others have—a large endowment of emotive nature, and perception, and love; and with this affection and perception and imaginative glow will be joined deep feeling. He will rise up in transports. He will enjoy, in new and recurring forms, the spiritual presence of the blessed Jesus. He will see one picture to-day, and another to-morrow; and there will be no end to the productions of his ideality. And every view will fill him with joy and love.

Other men will have the spirit of wonder and reverence, and will adore as well as love.

And so different men, looking at the same thing, and bringing a different conjunction of faculties to bear upon it, will be differently affected. But the root in them all is just this : *Jesus Christ, the Chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely, Thou art my Lord and my God. I love Thee, and I will obey Thee.* That is the sum and substance of a true piety.

When a man—no matter how slight the perception is, no matter how small the feeling is—can bring himself to say, “Lord, I do love Thee, and I am determined to obey Thee,” if he instantly begins to do what he promises, and in God’s strength begins a course of Christian conduct, he has a right to say, “I have begun to be a Christian.”

MAKING RELIGION ATTRACTIVE TO CHILDREN.



HAVE been requested to say a few words on the subject of making religion attractive to children,—especially to throw light on the path of parents who are despondent about being able to perform their own duties.

It does seem strange that that which is intrinsically the loveliest of all things should be the most difficult to make attractive.

There can be nothing more beautiful than the character of Christ. He is altogether lovely. If our Saviour were on earth again, and could visit our houses, our children would flock around Him, as in the olden time; and He would again take them in His lap, and put His arms about them, and His hands on their heads, and bless them. If in person Christ were on earth, I think that, with the present state of moral feeling existing, He would be the most attractive and winning, and the most thronged of all our friends.

And why is it, there being in the subject itself such attractiveness, that it is so difficult to make our children comprehend, love, or care for religion ?

Of course, every one will think of this subject very much according to the way in which he himself felt as a child. My childhood experience was a very deep one. I was, from my earliest recollection, healthy, buoyant, active, good-natured, and mirthful. I had a large stock of animal spirits, which impelled to mere motion for the sake of the pleasure of motion, or, rather, from the impatience of sitting still. And so far as religious restraint was brought to bear upon me, as I look back upon it, I think it was painful for physical reasons mainly. There was something inexpressibly attractive to me in the stillness of the Sabbath-day; and yet the Sabbath-day was rather a burden to me. There was nothing so pleasant as to have my aunt sit down and read stories from the Scriptures to me; and yet there was nothing less tolerable than to be obliged to read the Bible. There were very few subjects on which I liked to talk so little as the subject of religion; and yet among the grievances of my childhood was the heart-swell, the wish, that somebody would let me talk to him, or would talk to me on this very subject. My childhood was doubly strong, deep, religious, both inbred and cultured; and at the same time there was a good deal of impatience and some waywardness in my disposition.

In this matter it is different with different children. Some children seem naturally to fall under

restraint. They almost want it. They lean naturally upon their parents, and never feel happier than when they have something that marks out the way to which they docilely incline. Others are naturally independent. They do not think of leaning. They never thought of it even in childhood. You cannot expect to take every peculiarity of childhood character, and by one regimen succeed with all.

The first thing for Christian parents to do, is to inspire their children early with the love of religion. They should study the disposition of each child, and adapt their training to the nature which they have in hand. Hundreds of parents have the impression that a child is a child, and that religion is religion, and that, with those fixed quantities given, all you want is faith and perseverance to bring them together. It is true that absolute truth is one and the same; but men's power to apprehend truth varies through infinite degrees. It is true that a child is a child; but it is not true that children are so nearly alike that one pattern will do for them all. And no person can bring a child up, so far as it depends upon his skill, without profound study, and profound patience and perseverance therein.

One of the first things that I shall criticise is the attempt to make our children too good too early. I think many parents, because they believe that their children may become Christians in the morning of their lives, attempt to make them adult Christians in their earliest years. I believe that little children, as soon as they are able intelligently to converse with us, are able to be intelligent Christians; but

they will be little-children Christians. We never expect a child to be completely versed in secular matters. We smile at his judgment and taste in multitudes of things ; and yet, when it comes to the matter of religion, we think it is so fixed, that, if a child has it at all, it has it in full. Whereas *religion* is but another word for the soul, according to what it is, acting in the spirit of love toward God and toward men.

Now, a child's mind is immature ; and if children are Christians, as I think they may be at an early age, they will be Christians in an infantile way. If you attempt, therefore, to make a child feel, all over the conscience, all around the understanding, all through the sympathies and tastes, as an adult does ; if you attempt to bring him up to your ideal of an adult Christian, you will make a monstrosity of him. You will make a child that is literally *stuffed*, and not naturally developed. And it will not come out well. Every such case must have reactions. And persons express wonder that a child who began so well should end so badly. It began *ill*, and sometimes the reaction is the best part of it, as laying the foundation for a new start in later life on a better basis. Do not, then, try to make a full-grown man out of a little child, even in Christian matters.

I think a great deal of the wickedness of children arises from the want in them of growth in intellectual and moral resistance, from a deficiency in the higher elements of their nature, and from the unwitting coercion which we put upon them. I re-

collect distinctly that I used to tell lies. If there are any here who did not, they may cast the first stone! I was truth-loving—I preferred the truth—but I took refuge in falsehood as a rabbit takes refuge in a hole to save himself from the hounds. It was a covert from something that was worse to me than telling lies. My father's short, sharp, abrupt way of speaking, and his very abrupt *something else* when I had done wrong, was a terror to me. I did not want to tell a lie, and I was always sorry when I had told one; but the dread which I had of being reprimanded and punished was such that I sought to avoid it by resorting to falsehood.

Children have not had experience as adults have. They have not broad reflection about the consequences of falsehood as the adult has. They have not a conscience educated to resist this tendency. They have not had that training which enables their moral nature to easily put down their animal nature.

Not that lying is not to be discouraged, not that petty thefts are not to be punished in one way or another; but in dealing with children that are inexperienced, our government must take a form so gentle, though firm, that the child will never be scared into wickedness within his heart. The wisest parents frequently find a match for their wisdom in this direction. It is not an easy thing to bring up a child, I do not care how good he is; but because it is difficult, we should be more watchful and anxious, and should attempt to overcome the difficulty by studious skill and care.

Then, next, it seems to me we should attempt to teach our children as much as possible, as the Scripture teaches us, by narrative. You never had to persuade a child to listen to a parable. You never had to persuade a child to listen while you read a thrilling history. The Bible is written largely in the narrative style. A vast proportion of the instructive part bears that form. I do not object to a child's being drilled, little by little, in higher forms, in intellectual presentations of truth. I approve of it. But, after all, most of the truth that we teach children ought to be, it seems to me, in a parabolic or narrative form. It ought to be more nearly objective, and less abstract and purely intellectual. The fancy wakes early. In the early youth of the race, when the minds of men are uncultivated, or among children, the imagination is extremely active; and no book ever was written so full of appeals to the imagination as the Bible. There is the clearest indication of the Divine intention that we should draw the child's understanding through the power of the imagination.

A word as to the restraint which we put upon children. During the whole of my early life, almost, I was brought up to do things because I *must*. I went to church because I *must*. I kept Sunday, so far as I did keep it, because I *must*. I do not know that there was one effort made by my father or mother to make the Sabbath-day pleasant to me, and for the most obvious reasons. My father was a clergyman, and Sunday was to him the most laborious day of the week, and it was

absolutely impossible for him to take charge of the children at home. My second mother—the one that brought me up—was one of the most devoted women that I ever knew, having been a convert and a member of Dr. Payson's church, in Portland, Maine. She was naturally proud, though grace had made her good. She looked at everything in the light of duty. Her whole religious life was strained very high, and was filled with crosses. She took them and carried them herself, and put them upon her children. And everything that was brought to me was brought as a duty. I *must* read the Bible; I *must* learn the Catechism (which I never did learn); I *must* do a great many things.

Now, I do not know that it would have made any difference—though I think it would—if pains had been taken to make me feel that the Sabbath-day was the delight of the Lord, and beautiful. I do not think there was ever anything brought within the range of human knowledge that was so beautiful as the idea of the Lord's day. The older I grow and the more I think of the day, the more radiant it seems to me; the more sublime is the conception that all the earth on that day lays down every secular occupation, and that there is a standing still of the whole world, that the soul may have a chance to rise up through its superincumbent influences, and worship God. And I think a child may be made to think and feel so. Yet the Sabbath-day was always to me a shackle and a burden. It always came to me with *Thou must!* I did not see the sun rise often; but I saw it go down always—and never

without great joy. For, in Connecticut, the Sabbath-day began at sundown on Saturday night, and ended at sundown on Sunday night. We children used to sit by the great west window in the sitting-room, and watch the sun; and I used to wonder why it did not go down faster. Now the red orb was down within reach of the vapour. Now it was behind the cherry-tree. Now it was below the branches. Now it was almost down. And as we looked, and the sun neared the horizon, I would look at Charles, and he would look at me, with an expression of exultation. Pretty soon it had dropped down to the horizon. Now it was half out of sight. Now it was almost entirely gone. And the moment it was down, we would give utterance to an outcry of joy. And I recollect my mother saying to us, "Boys! boys!" "Why, the sun has gone down, mother!" "But you should not rejoice because the sun has gone down. God made the Sabbath-day for your good, and you ought to keep it cheerfully." But that thought had not occurred to me, and I was glad to see the sun go down on Sunday.

Now, in the first place, for children to sit still as much as they used to—I do not know that they do it as much as they did then—on the Sabbath-day, is to provoke them to break it. You must not make that day like a stiff harness that rubs and irritates the skin, but must adapt it to the child's emotion, and to the whole of childhood, in such a way that shall be elastic and pleasant to the child.

I do not speak of the management of my childhood censure it. I feel that I have every occasion to

thank God for such parents as I had, and for such influences as surrounded me; but I perceive that there were here and there things that might have been modified so as to produce a more favourable impression on me, particularly in regard to the Sabbath. Though it was in old Connecticut, and on one of the highest hill-tops of one of the oldest towns, and among the Puritanest of Puritans, yet I thank God that I was born under the influence of such a Sabbath. It is stained through me. I never shall get over it, and do not want to. And though I do not now keep the Sabbath as I was brought up to, and do not teach my children to, and though it might have been better if the rigour of my early experience in this regard had been relaxed, yet the Sabbath-day has been to me more than I can express. It has left a sweet association, a balmy and blessed influence, a sacred reminiscence that has transformed the face of life and of nature itself. For to this hour I fancy that the sunlight on Sunday is different from what it is on any other day; and the sounds seem different to me.

It would be endless to go over everything connected with this subject: but there is one more point of which I wish to speak, namely, that our children, instead of being taught religion as a thing to be *thought of*, should be more drilled in it as a part of *life*—as a thing to be practised. I do not think any of us know how much our religion stands in negatives.

Here is a fast young man. He has been breaking the Sabbath-day. He has sworn a good deal,

and tossed off a great many more cups than were for his health. And in various ways he has violated the fundamental laws of his body and mind, of society, and of God's government. He is arrested by thought. He begins to talk about repentance. And what is to him, largely, the idea of religion? Well, it is—not swearing; not lying; not drinking; not going into bad company; not riding on Sunday. It is a collection of *nots*. It is avoiding this, that, and the other thing. Religion is thought by many to consist in what in the New Testament is denominated *repentance*.

But religion comes after that. When you have had your *nots*, your negatives, which are necessary, then come the positives, the affirmatives. Real love of truth, real meekness and gentleness, real generosity, real high-mindedness, real love to God and genuine love to man,—these are religion. When a man repents and reforms, he is doing John-Baptist work preparatory to religion. Then he begins to be Christ's man. Then the development becomes positive, affirmative. We largely bring up our children under the impression that religion consists in restraints, that it consists in a round of evils that we must avoid. If we could manage to teach our children more things to *be* and *do*, I think the love of religion would be developed earlier in them.

One thing more. While we are attempting to teach our children by example, by precept, by reading, by conversation, by using on them and round about them all the things that Christian society has furnished us, there is, after all, one thing without

which our work will come short. You might as well undertake to raise flowers without sunshine as to undertake to raise Christian affections in children's hearts without the Divine Spirit. In some way their souls must be open to that influence which is the father of all that is good in every experience.

And when you have secured this condition, and done such other things as your circumstances dictate, remember that, in the providence of God, you are working in the family, which is His ordinance. And when you are tempted to be discouraged about your children because they do not show the fruit of your teaching in one year, or five years, or ten years, or fifteen years, remember that God has waited for you many more years than you have for your children. And God, who is waiting for you, and is patient with you, will help you to rear your children. For you are under a dispensation of infinite Divine sympathy and mercy; and more often than otherwise the very signs and tokens that fill the souls of parents with discouragement turn out to be premonitions of the greatest Divine mercies.

REALIZATION OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE.



HAVE received a letter from a lady who some time ago came to me with reference to her religious feelings. She writes of the benefit that she has derived, and the great happiness that she has experienced ; and then she propounds the question : "How shall I be able to continue the consciousness of Christ's presence with me ?" She avers that at times she has had great joy, and that she has now an abiding faith, which is the fountain of life to her ; and she asks : "How shall the intermittent periods be shortened ? How shall I have a continued sense of the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ ?"

As our Master promised that He and His Father would come to His disciples, and abide with them, this inquiry is a legitimate one ; but the first step toward a practical solution of it is, to inquire how far one may live under the dominion of any feeling—for I bear in mind that our senses have no relation to this matter. It is a question of the exercise of our reason and imagination—such an exercise of them as is styled, in the Word of God, *faith*, or the

realization of an invisible presence or truth. And the question arises, first, How far is it possible for the human mind to live in that state continuously? When it is said that a person is always conscious of the presence of Christ, what is the meaning, the scope, and the power of that word *always*? Does it mean every hour? Does it mean every half-hour? Does it mean every quarter of an hour? Does it mean every period of five minutes? Does it mean every minute? Does it mean every second? Manifestly not.

Let us take some of the most undoubted experiences. We will take, for instance, the experience of a mother's love for her child, which I suppose is as vivid and continuous as any affection. Would you say that there is not a moment of the day in which the mother does not think of the child? It may be, that, where it is an infant in her hands, its physical wants may demand her attention every moment: but let the child be two or three years old, and competent to run hither and thither, and take some care of itself, and may there not be times when the mother, especially if it devolves upon her to do the work of the household, will be thinking of how to provide for the child its food or its raiment, and of other family duties? Is not maternal love, which is the most nearly continuous of any feeling, an intermittent feeling? Is it not one that comes and goes? Is it not one that, under ordinary circumstances, passes out of the mind and comes back again many and many a time in a single day, although the object of it is present all the time?

There was formerly, at the lower end of New York

City, looking out on the Bay, a revolving light ; and I used to stand on Brooklyn Heights and watch it, to see the different colours come and go. There was first a red light ; then that would go away, and a white light would appear ; and then that would pass out of sight, and a dimmer side would come round.

It is very much so with a mother's affection. And there is no feeling in the world that ever was absolutely continuous, or that ever will be, unless the person who has it is insane. Physicians will tell you that when your child has any feeling on which its mind dwells continuously, it is in a morbid condition. Prolonged feeling is a sign of mania. The law of healthful feeling is one that demands change. The mind is multiform. It is subject to many feelings. One comes, and subsides ; then another comes and takes its place, and subsides ; then a third comes and takes its place, and subsides ; and so on. Thus feelings act and intermit. And as this is the case in our daily experience of affection toward those that are with us and can minister the knowledge of their presence through our senses ; so, much more, is it the case with our daily experience of affection toward any being that is invisible. As, where a child or a dear friend is in a distant land, there may be many hours, and even days, when that child or friend is absent from your apprehension ; so, much more, where our approach to God, or Christ, or the invisible Spirit, is rather through the mediation of duties and acts than by direct thought, the divine Being is likely to be absent from our thought.

My first reply, then, to the question, "How shall

I maintain the conscious presence of Christ with me all the time?" is this: There is no such thing, literally, as that. You may maintain such a sense of Christ as shall diffuse an influence through the heart all day long, acting as the most vivid earthly affections do; but the most vivid earthly affections, according to the law of the mind, are alternative, and not unintermitting.

It is to be remembered, that, as the flute has its own quality of sound, and the clarionet has its own quality of sound, and the trumpet has its own quality of sound, so different minds have their own peculiar qualities. Of men that have this gift of faith, some have it low and faint, and some have it strong and overpowering. Many times in the New Testament this truth is recognized.

Now and then you will find persons whose faculties are so harmonious, who are so sensitive to spiritual influences, and whom God has inspired with such eminent upward tendencies, that they come much nearer to an abiding vision than others, by virtue of the gifts that were vouchsafed to them at birth. But such persons are rare; and the rest range all the way down, the difficulty of obtaining heavenly visions growing more and more difficult, until you come to those who find it almost impossible, at any time, to form a distinct and vivid conception of an ideal presence. The great mass of persons lie somewhere midway between having this conception seldom and having it frequently; but nobody—not even the best endowed—have it every hour and every minute.

Now, then, since this is a thing which we are to gain by education, and which we are to come into by degrees, what are the steps by which we are to cultivate and develop it?

The first step is *health*. If a person should hear some most exquisite organ music from a complete and superb instrument, and then undertake to reproduce it on an imperfect, wheezing organ, and, failing, should come to me and say, "How shall I get out of this organ such wonderful combinations and ecstatic effects as I heard at that concert?" I would say to him, "The first essential condition is, to see that the instrument is in order. Until that condition is complied with you cannot hope to accomplish your desire." Half the spiritual difficulties that men and women suffer arise from a morbid state of health. If a person is sick—especially in such a way as to impair the nervous system—there is in this fact an important reason why his experience is not luminous or satisfactory, and the first step toward a good, enjoyable spiritual condition is the step toward health.

You will say, perhaps, "What! is there, then, no religion for the infirm and sick?" Yes; but that does not alter the fact that in their religious experiences they tend to be more or less gloomy and desponding. It is not always the effect of disease to produce gloom and despondency. Sometimes it heightens the sensibilities to the brighter influences. But, as a general thing, religious experiences are sounder and more rational in a healthy mind and a healthy body. As the first step, you must be

healthy if you expect to have naturally broad, and deep, and sweet experiences. Health is a Christian duty. I have heard persons praying, and praying, and praying, for the presence of God; and I have thought that, if they would eat less and work more, and spend twice as much time in the open air, they would not need to pray so much. What they wanted was not answer to prayer, but simple obedience to the laws of God in nature.

The second step toward a realization of the presence of Christ is *occupation*. This may strike you as being very singular. It is not singular at all. Did you ever see a man drive six horses at once? If you did, you have perhaps seen six-horse teams that were not well trained to draw. An unskilful man is on the box, and the horses back and caper and get into a snarl, one having his leg over the pole, another having his foot outside the traces, and all kicking and jumping. Now a trained driver mounts the box, draws up the reins, cracks his whip, and speaks to the horses, inciting them to the steady, straightforward action of *work*, and in a moment every animal is in his place, the traces are straightened out, and everything goes well. There is no difficulty in driving them when there is a man that understands how to bring every horse to his work.

Our faculties are so many horses; and nothing will make a man's mind act steadily like occupation. This will keep the faculties from running into excesses, and keep the mind from gnawing upon itself in trouble, as nothing else can. And

that is true which a great French philosophical observer gave to the world as the law of happiness, when he said that it consisted in three things—first, occupation; second, *occupation*; and, third, OCCUPATION! And nothing is truer, in prose or poetry, than that “Satan finds some mischief still for idle” *minds* as well as “hands, to do.” When people are idle you cannot do anything for them. For instance, here is a woman of great susceptibility and great capacity, who is in circumstances of wealth, who has no children, who has no special avocation, who has nothing to occupy her time but a little round of visiting, and who is full of *ennui* because she does not know what to do. Can I direct her so that she shall be able to reap the enjoyments of religion? No, I cannot. Nothing short of a miracle would be needed, unless she has something to do—unless she has every day a regular and methodical occupation that will give employment to her faculties and talents.

So, then, if persons ask me, “What will minister to me a realization of the presence of Christ?” I say, First, health; and, second, occupation.

From these, which are not usually included in pulpit instruction, we will go on to the next step, which is *association*. If you watch the action of the mind, you will perceive that it works under the influence of suggestions. For instance, a swallow suggests spring, from the circumstances that swallows have been accustomed to come in the spring, or early in the summer. Again, when we read of *Zion* and of the *New Jerusalem*, those words carry religious

suggestions to our mind. And with regard to the Sabbath, with regard to ordinances and observances, with regard to a thousand things, we have associations, so that, when we see or hear them, they produce a certain religious response in our mind.

Now, why do you not carry this experience further along? You are commanded, whether you eat, or whether you drink, or whatsoever you do, to do all to the glory of God; and why do you not take your daily duties and sanctify them? To come right at the thing itself, you have to get up in the morning and put your room in order; and why do you not form associations with the arrangement of your room, so that it shall minister to your mind more or less of spiritual suggestion?

One of the Mathers—Cotton Mather, I think it was—had an almost ridiculous way of spiritualizing everything he saw. When he was walking along the street, if he saw a tall man, he would say, "May he be tall in grace." If he saw a short man, he would say, "May he be short in sin." There was something queer in the habit as he carried it out; but in the idea of giving to every common event a spiritual suggestion, there was nothing queer. It was pre-eminently wise.

It may not seem as though kindling a fire could minister any spiritual suggestion to the mind; but I can conceive how a person might think of the kindling of the Holy Ghost in his own soul while kindling a fire in a stove. It may not seem as though going down into a cold kitchen and getting breakfast could be made a means of grace, but I

think it could be. If I were staying with a person whom I loved, on whom devolved the duty of preparing food for the family, and who was sick and withheld from activity, I might say to myself: "Early to-morrow morning I will steal down quietly and surprise the family with a breakfast," though I was unaccustomed to such duties, and though in and of themselves they were not attractive to me. And as I built the fire, and made the coffee, and prepared the various elements of the meal, I might derive pleasure from the thought that I was doing it for my friend. Do you not know that many a wife and mother, in preparing the daily repast, is rewarded for her toil by thinking of how pleasant it will be to sit down at the table with the husband and the children, and see them enjoy the results of her painstaking? She is working for them, and that reflection lightens her task.

And there is such a thing as doing for Christ everything that we do: not with such particularity as that with which we do things for our companions, but to a degree which affords us satisfaction and happiness. There is such a thing as living so that the whole round of common duties shall suggest Christ to us. I do not believe it possible for a human being to get a vivid conception of Christ by rising above common duties, and have it remain. I believe that, if we have a constant realization of the presence of Christ, we must gain it by the help of daily suggestions.

The first step, then, is health; the second is occupation; and the third is the association of ideas, so that

our common daily duties shall be made, in one way or another, to suggest to us our present Redeemer.

The fourth step—and now I come to the place where most ministers begin—is the employment of *the means of grace*, as they are called. Just as though health, and occupation, and the association of ideas, were not means of grace! First, in speaking of these so-called means of grace, let me say a word about the Scripture. I think as there are always among violets some that are very much sweeter to us than others, so among texts there are some that are more precious to us than others. When I go to the Bible, it is not once in a hundred times that I ever read a whole chapter for my own devotions. I turn to Isaiah, for instance, and run my eye down, and, like one that goes out into the field to rest, I do not take the first spot that presents itself, but wait till I find a nook where the mosses are right, and the flowers are right, and the shrubs are right, and then sit down and feast my eyes on the beauties around me, and take great comfort. I wander along till I come to a passage which, though I cannot tell why, I read over, and over, and over again. One or two verses or sentences, perhaps, will linger in my head all day, like some sweet passage in a letter, or like some felicitous word spoken by a friend, coming and going, coming and going, all the time. I find often that one single text, taking possession of the mind in the morning, and ringing through it during the whole day, does me more good than the reading of a whole chapter. Sometimes, when I am hungry for Scrip-

ture reading, I go over one, or two, or three chapters; but it is because I want to, and I do it without thinking of doing it. But generally I am not inclined to take in so much. Frequently some one thing that Christ said fixes itself in my mind, and remains there from morning till night.

You may over-read. Persons want to be vigorous and strong, and they say, "To eat is the way to become so;" and they gorge their stomachs with food, and overlay their powers, and make themselves weak and stupid by excessive eating. And you may eat too much Bible, as well as too much bread.

Prayer is another of the recognized means of grace; and some people attempt to bring down blessings by much praying. They go to the throne of grace, as it were, without any definite object in their mind. They pray without knowing exactly what they are praying for. This is not wise. In my own experience I have found that, when my thoughts have been withdrawn to other things, and being brought back to God, my mind is not eager to hold converse with Him, it is not well to plead with Him in measured prayers, as though I were bound to say so much to Him every day, and as though He would not be satisfied with anything less. My father and mother and friends never required me to talk with them a given amount. If I came where they were, and did not feel inclined to talk, they bore with my silence. And when we go to God, He will not blame us for talking only a little. So that, when I go to God, if I do not try to make long prayers, I make short ones. I do it,

first, because I have not much to say, and it is not truthful to go on praying when you have nothing to say; and, secondly, because short prayers under such circumstances are positively more beneficial than long ones.

Then it is often exceedingly desirable that you should kindle your zeal by sympathetic contact with other people; and it is frequently the case that, when you go among Christians, you meet those whose zeal kindles yours, and that you go away feeling like a Christian, though when you came you felt more like almost anything else than that.

This does not always take place in your dwellings; but sometimes God sends to you there a saint, at the light of whose soul you can kindle a light for your own soul.

When this does not take place, you can sing. Blessed be God for hymns! Hymns are songs of the soul. And any man that wants to chord any state of mind can do so if he is familiar with our hymn-book. For the hymns that it contains are representations of real experiences in others; and we find that representations of experiences which came from a reality in others are apt to touch a corresponding reality in us. As for myself, I count the singing of hymns as being among the most eminent ways in which the soul can be brought into the conscious presence of Christ at its own sweet will. The shepherds heard the angels singing in the sky. Soon, however, the angels left them, and they heard them no more. But we have a sky in which the angels sing, and we can hear

them when we have a mind to. The songs of saints are angel-voices to us.

When one wishes to kindle in his soul a vivid sense of the presence of Christ, the conditions which I have mentioned being taken for granted, great help can be obtained from reading works like the *Lives of Harlan Page, Edward Payson, and Henry Martyn*, whose history used to be a great favourite with me. The reading of such works almost always kindled me with religious zeal, and never failed to exert a powerful influence on me. I never read the account of Henry Martyn's last recorded hour, and never till I die shall I read it, without shedding tears. Whatever was my mood, when I resorted to books of this kind they invariably wrought upon me wonderfully. And in the use of hymns I have had substantially the same experience. It has been a very desperate case of stupidity in which I could not rally my religious feeling on a hymn. Hymns are like trumpet-calls to a sleeping warrior, which wake him, and instantly bring him to his feet, sword in hand.

Well, there is one step more. While we are not unmindful of health, and occupation, and association, and the cultivation of religious feelings by the use of those same feelings as they have been expressed by others, there should be one thing more. We are to do all this with a certain sort of low tone or childlikeness; not with a rigour of desire which implies such a tension and stress of mind that the nervous energy is exhausted, and that we do not have an answer to our longings, because the vitality

is wanting on which that answer was to have developed itself. We are to be in such a condition of simplicity as shall keep the mind, if possible, from becoming overwrought, because an answer that shall bring Christ to the soul must have a wholesome state of mind on which to expand itself.

If I had been talking to particular individuals, I should have been obliged to make some modifications in what I have said ; but these are general views, which I give for the benefit of the many. They will, I doubt not, apply to a large proportion of cases where difficulties are experienced such as I have been considering. And I think that, as a general thing, if persons will pursue this course, they will come as near having the presence of Christ with them, consciously and continually, as is possible for them according to their natural gifts. And as we form the habit of doing it, the difficulties decrease, and our power of realizing Christ ever present increases.

I do not know of a day for years in which I have not been able, almost at will, during some part of the day, to form very vivid and satisfying views, sometimes of one kind, and sometimes of another, of the great invisible world, and of Him that dwells therein. But with me it has been a matter of education and constant habit. And there is this comfort before you : that though at first it may be difficult to form such views, yet by perseverance and steady culture it grows more and more easy, until at last it becomes a second nature.

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.

LET me read a letter that I have recently received :—

“ MR. BEECHER,—Do you think it is our privilege as Christians to have an abiding assurance of our acceptance ? At the age of eight years I united with the Church. From that time the life to come has been uppermost in my mind ; and to be fitted for that life, the strongest desire of my heart. At that time, and through most of my childhood, I enjoyed assurance ; but gradually fears that I might be deceived troubled me exceedingly. I have never felt impelled to give up my hope ; but it has not been as firm as it ought to be—an anchor sure and steadfast to my soul. At times my fears and doubts are so great as to almost unfit me for the duties of life. How can I be delivered from them ? I pray God that you may be able to teach me, lest I be found at last among the fearful ones without the gate of the New Jerusalem.

“ ONE WHO LONGS TO KNOW THAT SHE WILL
AWAKE IN THE RESURRECTION MORN-
ING IN THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST.”

This letter gives evidence of coming from a person that is very deeply religious. It is simple and sincere, and as it covers a ground on which thousands stand, I may perhaps meet a general want by occupying some time with this petitioner's request.

In the first place, what is it that after which she and others like her are feeling ? I understand it to be such a conviction of personal interest in Christ

as shall give rest, if not joy. What she means by "assurance of acceptance," then, is a conviction that she has such a permanent relation with the Lord Jesus Christ as will result in her guidance through life, in her support in death, and in her salvation in the world to come. And the question arises, May one have the assurance, may one have the certainty, of being saved by-and-by?

Well, as it respects *certainty*, all that one wants for certainty is to have that which is a comforting conviction. It may be certain, or it may not; but it amounts to the same thing, so far as the feeling is concerned, if one has a conviction which dispels fear, buoys up hope, and produces peace or joy.

Is there, then, any provision in the truth of the gospel, on which one may rely in this regard? Did our Saviour contemplate that His original disciples should have an abiding and quieting conviction of their acceptance with God and their final salvation? I do not see how anybody can read the life of Christ, and the history of His discourses to His disciples, and have any doubt on that subject. To me it is as clear as the noonday sun. It seems to me that my children have as much reason to doubt whether my house is to be their home as long as they live, as the disciples of Christ had to doubt that their condition ran through this life, and took hold on the life that is to come. He designed that they should have faith in the future. He even carried it further than we should be inclined to do. We should say that a man ought to be more anxious to perform his practical duties in life than to have a guaranty of

this or that condition beyond this world; but Christ said: Do not merely look upon your present work here; also have regard to the future final result. And the early disciples, under the apostles' teaching, were taught to rest in a perfect certainty of the love of God to their soul. Their Christian life, although it was a warfare, was a victory too. And through all their sufferings, being, as they were; beleaguered by enemies, and surrounded by temptations which caused them frequently to stumble and fall into sin, there was such a view of Christ presented to them that the apostles expected that they would rejoice. "Rejoice in the Lord always," says the apostle; "and again I say, *Rejoice!*" And the comfort of the Spirit was declared to be peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, among other things. Thus you will find, that, in all cases where there is inspired teaching on this point, there was believed to be such a relation between the converted soul and the Lord and Master as to fill the soul with light and joy and peace.

Now for an answer to the first question which I proposed—namely, Is there provision made in the gospel for assurance of salvation? I say unhesitatingly that this is the teaching of the New Testament.

The next question that arises is this, Is there no argument of fear and doubt in the New Testament? Yes. "Let us," says the apostle, "labour to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the example of unbelief." There is argument of fear, but is it to be a paralyzing, chronic fear? Is it to be anything

more than a motive for us to make our calling and election sure? There is a kind of fear which spreads over the soul like a mist and fog. It neither rains nor is dispelled. Day and night it wraps the soul in its chilling and visionless embrace. That is a very disastrous form of fear. It is low, annoying, deadening. There is another kind which is like a sharp rain-storm in summer. A great deal of thunder and lightning comes with it, but it soon passes away, and everything is better for it. This kind of fear, instead of being deadening and paralyzing, is quickening and vitalizing, and it brings a man to see how important it is that he should examine his ground and know that he stands. It is a kind of fear which, so far from being injurious, is to the last degree salutary.

While, then, there is in the gospel a recognition of the function of fear, it is also taught that *with* it, and in part *by* it, we are to come to a state in which we have an abiding confidence that our souls shall be saved through the Lord Jesus Christ. So much for the groundwork.

Now, the question comes up, May I attain to this assurance? This depends upon two grand elements. First, it depends upon the teaching to which one has been subject. Secondly, it depends on one's peculiar personal disposition.

You are aware how different ministers are, not by a difference of the truths which they preach, but by a difference of the emphasis which they put upon truths. One minister is a man of great conscience. He is not without benevolence, and he is not with-

out sympathy ; but these are decidedly secondary in his nature. Conscience, in the sense of authority and government, predominates in him. In the Word of God, all through, he sees government, Divine authority, Divine headship. And when he teaches, his mind runs through those topics. He insists upon the law. He says that God is a consuming fire twenty-five times in a year, and twice in a year that God is love. He emphasizes those parts of the gospel which appeal to fear.

I remember a venerated minister who, when he saw persons in an elated state of mind in the belief that they were converted, always said, " My child, take care ! It is an awful thing to be deceived." He put them right back on the ground of fear. And if it had not been that he had common sense, so that he supplemented these warnings with instructions that amounted to a correction of them, he would have driven young Christians into despair or indifferentism.

I know how it was with me in this regard. Had it not been for my buoyant temperament, I could not have gone through what I did during my early years in my father's house without being driven into despair. I had a vivid imagination, that caught and unduly coloured truths when they were presented to it ; and the sense of infinity, the out-reaching, unrolling, endlessness of eternity, and the thought that it all balanced on a single volition, have at times whelmed me, if not in despair, yet in discouragement.

Now, if a man has been brought up under a

minister in whose teaching fear was foremost, and love and hope were secondary, I should expect that all his life he would be enveloped in doubts and forebodings. And in conference and prayer-meetings you will hear persons who have been brought up under such ministers say, "My brethren, I have my beliefs and hopes; but my doubts and fears are more than these." And that term *doubts and fears* has almost passed into the phraseology of Christian life. It is almost thought that no religious experience is complete which has not doubts and fears. A person that does not talk about doubts and fears is not supposed to have had deep heart-work. I admit that there is an experience of doubt, and a work of fear. I am only censuring the idea that persons *must* have them in order to be true Christians.

Then there are views presented of "God" rather than of "Christ," which incline men to apprehensiveness rather than trust. If God be represented as an administrator of government; if He be represented as a governor and king that watches His law with jealous guardianship, and looks upon men as secondary thereto, then, although there may not be much work of fear, there is the hiding of that other view of God from which confidence springs. It is the glory of God shining in the face of Christ Jesus that enkindles in the regenerated soul the hope of salvation. For, although confidence may come from constitutional hopefulness, after all, that which is to be an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, must spring from what God is, and not from what you are.

A man that learns to measure himself by the law

of love, and then looks at himself, cannot but feel every day of his life that he is utterly sinful before God. He must lay his hand on his mouth, and his mouth in the dust, and cry, "Unclean! unclean! God be merciful to me a sinner!" If a man looks at himself all the time, I do not see how he can be very hopeful or confident. Confidence comes from Christ; and where a man looks at Christ, I do not see how he can have doubt or fear. For the question is not whether we are perfect or imperfect. We are not saved because we are holy. Christ came not, it is declared, for the sake of the righteous. We are sinful in Christ, as we were out of Christ. We are, by reason of the imperfections of our nature and the violent temptations which are brought to bear upon us, constantly sinning more or less. And there is little to kindle hope in a man if it depend on the relative elevation of his spiritual nature.

But if the ground of our hope be that we have a God whose love is boundless, if we have some direct insight into the heart, so that we see the length of it, the breadth of it, the height of it, the depth of it, the majesty of it, and the power of it; and if we feel, "Christ loves me, and His love is enough for me, and it is this love of Christ that leads me to believe that I shall be saved," then we have a sufficient ground for hope. Where that is the view presented, I can see how a man may understand that he has imperfections and sinfulnesses, and yet have faith that he shall be saved in spite of them, because Christ is so cleansing in the power of His love.

I might go on to show that the intensifying of the penalties of the law of God has an injurious effect upon the mind, particularly in the case of those who have imaginations of a certain kind—*material* imaginations, if I may so say; for it seems to me that imaginations may work upward toward spiritual elements, or downward toward material elements. I have seen a great many persons whose imaginations seized hold of certain texts, or truths derivable from texts, and became, as I cannot but think, morbid upon them. Take persons who have been taught that they are in danger of grieving the Holy Ghost. That is a very serious and solemn truth; but it may be preached so that a person who has not much of the faculty of reason shall get it so fixed in his imagination as to revolve around about that one thing more than around the whole throne and being of God. Eternity and future punishment have hitherto been represented by material symbols, and the mind may be so affected by these symbols that it shall seem impossible to detach one from them.

I remember a minister that came to our house when I was a boy. He was one of those men who seemed to think that religious impressions were beneficial just in proportion as they made children cry—and it was as easy to make me cry as to make a tree rain after a shower by shaking it. He used to talk with us children on the subject of religion, and he told me some hobgoblin stories about bad boys. And oh, they were the *naughtiest*, the *wickedest* boys that ever lived! He told me how a bad boy got sick, how he saw the devil coming

after him, and how he cried, "O mother, mother, there is the devil! There he is as far as the onion-bed! There he is coming through the gate. There he is inside the door!" I saw forty devils in the air. I dreamed of them. I did not shake off the feeling of terror which that conversation produced on my mind for years. And I cannot recall that I was a bit better for it. I used to suffer terribly on account of it, but I did not see that I was any better able to resist temptation. I did not put forth any greater efforts to avoid those evils that are incident to boyhood. I was just as likely to get mad and thrash my younger brothers. When I was sent to the mill with instructions to come right home again, I was just as likely to linger by the way. I was just as likely to do work by eye-service. I do not recollect that frightening me by telling me about the devil ever did me any good, though it caused me a great deal of suffering.

Now, there may be such a way of representing the realm of malign spirits and the penal sufferings of the other world as shall brace up the conscience; as shall, acting co-ordinately with hope and trust, make a much more powerful moral impression than either of them can alone. But the one-sided, materialistic way of representing these things often gives a set to the imagination which will torment persons all their life long. And I do not see how such persons can have an assurance of hope in Christ Jesus. So much for men's dependence for assurance of hope on the instructions of those whose influence they are under.

Besides this, the disposition has very much to do with it. There are persons that cannot do otherwise than hope; and after they have once resolved that they will live a Christian life, it never enters their head that they are going to do anything else, or that there can be but one result. They say: "If a man comes to me, I will not cast him out; and when I go to Christ, He will not cast me out." They consider it a settled thing. It may be presumptuous sometimes; but when persons are soundly converted, it is not. Then it is eminently gospel-like. A man says to his creditor: "I owe you a debt, and I am utterly unable to pay it. You hold my note. It lies against my industry. I do not see how I am going to get along." "Well," says the creditor, "I will cancel that debt;" and he takes the note, and dashes his pen across it, and hands it to the man. And you cannot persuade the man that he any longer owes the debt. He knows that it is cancelled, and that that is the end of it.

Now a man says: "I owed Christ a debt, and could not pay it; but Christ has cancelled it, and it cannot stand against me any longer." Then he acts as if he really believed that it was cancelled. Is not that sensible? Is not that Christian? Another man says: "I should like to do just so, but I cannot. I do not know what is the reason. Sometimes, when I go to the prayer-meetings, and sing sweet Christian hymns, and hear the brethren pray, I get lifted into this joyful experience; but, I do not know why, the next morning I feel worse than I did before." There are a great many persons who

are of a vine-like nature, and who depend for their religious support on the influences that are exerted upon them by stronger Christians. And when they are left to themselves, they are like vines that, having fallen, are trailing on the ground.

Many persons do not know how to feed themselves spiritually. When food is presented to them by others, they see it, and are nourished by it; but the moment others cease to present it to them, they cease to perceive it and to be benefited by it. They have not the power to minister it to themselves. They are unable without help to gain these views; and, failing to have the views, they fail to have that experience of peace which is the result of them.

There are persons whose conscience is morbidly sensitive, and is a stern, relentless, inexorable critic. I have known persons who were all the time before the judgment-seat of their own moral sense, and who were so busy finding fault with themselves that they had not much time to think about the Saviour. I have seen persons who spent so much time looking downwards and inwards and examining their motives, that they had not much leisure to think of Christ, and His wonderful provision of grace for sinners.

Then, a great deal of spiritual darkness and doubt is the result of physical causes. I know persons who in health are always confident, and who when they are unwell are always desponding. Physical conditions have so much to do with moral states, that toothache, tic-douloureux, and ague are no more physical effects than these states are. Persons come to me frequently, who, I know, the moment I

look at them, and before they open their mouths, have come to talk on the subject of religion ; and I know on which side it will be. The stomach and liver have a great deal to do with moral character. And where there is action in the one, and all is right in the other, a person will be far less apt to have spiritual troubles than where they are diseased and refuse to perform their functions.

I recollect the case of a lady, about thirty years of age, a light and pattern in the church to which she belonged, who had laboured for the oncoming of religion till her devotedness was a theme of admiration among the brethren, and who, just as the work of grace broke out with triumphant power, was seized with evil experiences. The devil would not let her pray. She was in the greatest distress of mind night and day. She wanted to curse God. It was a horrible struggle. Word was sent to me, and I went to see her. I questioned her, and found that she had been labouring out of all measure, and had overtaxed her brain and nervous system, and I suspected that from reaction the chest, the heart, the circulation, everything about her, was affected. And the more I talked to her the more I was satisfied, first, that she was a Christian ; and, secondly, that physical reasons would account for these phenomena. I therefore, without attempting to contradict the actuality of her experience—for that would have destroyed her confidence in me—said to her : “Have you faith enough in my judgment to take my prescription ?” She said she had. “Will you follow it ?” She said she would. “Do you before

God solemnly pledge yourself to do the things that I command you?" She said she would. "Then I command you not to go, before I give you permission, to another meeting; and to do as much physical work as you can at home." I gave her minute directions about her rest and diet, and said, "I forbid you to open your Bible, or speak one word of prayer till I give you permission." She shuddered. Said I, "It does not concern you. You are under my care, and I am responsible for any evil consequences that may result from your obedience to my commands; I put you on your conscience." I knew that conscience was a strong point in her nature. She was to walk out of doors every day, and pay particular attention to her diet, and take charge of her household affairs regularly. Provision was thus made for the diversion and wholesome occupation of her mind, and her restoration to health. I heard from her every day, but did not go to see her. In about a week she became rested, she began to have a natural tone of system, her digestion came back, she slept regularly again, all her unfavourable symptoms disappeared; and at last she sent me a note saying, "Come quick! I shall break my promise. I must pray." "Well," said I, "pray, then!" And she did not have any more trouble with the devil, and did not want to curse God any more. The moment she was rested, all those terrors that afflicted her went away of themselves. The simple fact of her being in health of body and mind saved her from any further distress.

There are a great many persons who are in this or a similar condition. It is more apt to be women than men; for the nervous system of woman is subject to a greater amount of dilapidation and weakness and strain than that of man. Women are less robust than men. They are more shut up. More than men, who work out of doors, they are placed in circumstances where persons of strong and sensitive natures are likely to be carried into morbid excesses. And among women it is not unusual to find cases like that of the person who wrote this letter. I refer particularly to the state of mind which is indicated by that part of her letter where she says: "From the age of eight years the life to come has been uppermost in my mind, and to be fitted for that life the strongest desire of my heart." There I find this predominant desire to be fixed. I have no doubt whatever about it. And I say to this woman: You have been under the influence of an inordinate preaching of the terror of the law of God; or you have not listened to the preaching of the amplitude of the Divine mercy and love; or else you are, by reason of sickness, in a morbid state of mind. For any person who, with a consciousness of being a sinner, has gone to Christ and reposed trust in Him, has no occasion, in circumstances such as this woman seems to be in, to draw back a moment from that confidence which we are permitted to have. When once we trust in God, He takes charge of our souls, that we may trust Him to the end.

Ah! if I were starting from Europe, and a friend should come to me and say, "My only child, my

daughter, is going to America, and she is all alone on the ship; will you take charge of her during the voyage?" I should be sensibly touched by his confidence. And aside from my attachment to the child (if I had known her and loved her), and my regard for her parents, do you suppose I would suffer my oversight of her to intermit, though I might be in need of rest and sleep, and though I might be sick and require attention myself? Would I not, night and day, carry that charge upon my mind, to see that her wants were all supplied, and that no accident befell her? And could I live if, by any fault of mine, she walked too near the perilous edge and fell overboard, and was whelmed in the tide and lost? How could I ever look my friend in the face again?

Now, when God has put His children in the arms of the Lord Jesus Christ, that He may carry them across this perilous voyage of life, and land them safe in heaven; and when Christ has promised to present them pure and spotless before the throne, do you suppose He, under whose feet is all power, will fail to fulfil His promise, and to perform what He has undertaken? If there were nothing but ourselves, we might fear; but as long as we have the amplitude, the fidelity, the tenderness, and the love of Christ, we have that which is more than a match for our sin. As long as we have a government of grace, as long as we have the provision of God's providence, as long as all things in heaven and on earth are for the salvation of God's people, why should we doubt? Doubt yourself as much as you have a mind to; but do not doubt Christ.

If you say, "I do not know why He should save me ; I am not worthy to be saved," that is a fact ; you are not. If you say, "I do not think I have a right to look to Him for salvation ; I have not done anything that should give me a claim on Him for so great a blessing," that is true ; you have not. It is not because you deserve Divine mercies that you have a right to expect them.

I take a dozen beggar-boys out of the street, and they say, "I do not know why you should like me ; I am unlovely, and there is nothing attractive about me." That is so. And I take you that you may become lovely. "But I am filthy and ragged." Yes, you are ; and I take you that you may be washed and clothed. "But I am stupid and ignorant." So you are ; and I take you to educate you. "But I am full of all manner of wickedness." I know that ; and it is because you are so wicked that I am determined, with God's help, to rescue you from the devil. I take you because you are such unmitigated urchins, to give you a better chance in the world.

Now, Christ does not take us because we are so pure and sweet, and virtuous and lovely. He takes us because He cannot bear to see a soul that is destined to immortality less than high and noble ; and because He means to make us what He would have us to be, He sends us to school. "They that are well," He tells us, "need not a physician ; but they that are sick." If you are sick, and will accept Him for your physician, He will cure you.

H E A V E N.



WHEN the apostle commands us to set our affections on things above, where Christ is, at first thought it seems strange, not to say impossible. If there is anything that is visionary, if there is anything that seems to be a mere creature of the imagination, and to be what the imagination may make of it, and therefore different in different persons' experience, it is heaven. There is no place assigned to it ; and although it is spoken of under material figures, there is no materiality that is more than figurative, if I may so say. Those emblems that are employed to designate the degree and quality of feeling are little more than that ; and yet there is no fact so sure as that the whole human race are both qualified for using and desire to use the imagination away from real things, and toward the ideal. Not the most philosophical alone, but the least cultured as well, manifest this tendency. The whole race go out of present conditions into imaginary ones.

When we are commanded, therefore, to set our

affections on things above, we are not commanded to exercise a new power, or an old power with unusual difficulties. We exercise this power at any rate. Children do it. The very savages do it. And the whole history of the race shows that the mind needs to go out of itself toward something different, higher, better, more perfect, than the round of daily imperfect life gives.

Now, the question comes up : If there be no very definite revelation respecting heaven, its nature, and its pursuits, what is there to guide us in our conceptions of it? how shall we prevent every person's framing a heaven to suit himself? how shall we prevent every person's populating it according to his own will and fancy? I reply, that moral qualities and moral characteristics are taught unmistakably in the New Testament ; and, so that you do not fill heaven with selfish, proud, vain experiences, so that true Christian virtues are the animating principles of the personages that you put there, you are at liberty to frame heaven according to the exigencies of your own experience. I esteem it to be one of the blessings of revelation that it does not make known to us a vast, cold, fixed, immovable heaven ; that it presents to us a heaven which draws near to us in those aspects which we particularly need. If we are over-tasked, heaven comes to us as a place of rest. If we are impatient of our narrow, circumscribed spheres of labour, heaven comes to us as a sphere of unbounded opportunity. If our circumstances are such that we have no resources for pleasure, heaven comes to us as a land of true delight.

If we are tired of this world as the abode of imperfect human nature, heaven draws near and presents itself to us as the home of just men made perfect. If we find all human creatures to be weak and fallible, heaven reveals to us God and all the glory of the Godhead. Whatever our want may be, whether of joy, or sorrow, or hope, or aspiration, right over against that want heaven bends down, and is easily moulded by our imagination. Heaven is made up of divine and glorious qualities. Those that are there come to us as father or mother, brother or sister, or friend, sometimes in suffering, sometimes in love, sometimes in meekness, sometimes in courage, sometimes in one mood, and sometimes in another. Heaven has as many moods as there are different creatures dwelling in it.

To make heaven merely the race-ground of our imagination would be but little else than to make us the prey of endless vagaries. I apprehend, therefore, that, when we are commanded to set our affections on things above, something besides this is meant. It is not the luxury of dreaming. Still less is it the abandonment of the disagreeable duties of daily life to take refuge in the reveries of a heavenly contemplation.

I have noticed, when watching artists at their work, that they are sometimes accustomed to put coloured pebble-stones on their easel, and once in a while to take them up and look at them; and I said, "What is that for?" They said, "In working paints into tints, the eye gets down, and it is necessary to have some colour at hand to tone it

up with, in order to be able to distinguish nice shades."

Now, heaven is that place which we have been accustomed to regard as the centre of all that is perfect ; and we have, day by day and month by month, been remitting there our ideal conceptions of everything that is beautiful and true and honourable and noble and loving ; and we have gained a standard, at least, of what character ought to be ; and we bring that down to tune up our eye with in this world. Every day we are among people that are highly tempting, that are lax, that are stumbling, that are sometimes hateful, and that are but just lovely at the best of times ; and we become worn, weakened, jaded, and depraved by this commerce with the world. We want to lift the mind up, so that we may get a conception of the possibilities of being and character higher than we have found in this world ; and we are to get it by setting our affections on things above.

Heaven answers with us the same purpose that the tuning-fork does with the musician. Our affections, the whole orchestra of them, are apt to get below the concert-pitch ; and we take heaven to tune our hearts by. In this way, instead of making the heavenly state a romance-ground, we are every day framing it by the imagination, and ascribing to it all our higher and nobler and finer ideals, and then taking this state and bringing it down to measure our daily life by. And so, instead of taking us away from the duties of life, it brings us back to them with renewed strength, with better moral dis-

crinations, with more patience, more gentleness, and more hope. We thus set our affections on heaven without taking them away from the world.

A man deposits in the bank a thousand dollars, and draws on it, and keeps depositing, and keeps drawing. And we deposit what we are in heaven, and then draw on that. We first invest our whole life, and then take back from it for use here, and then lay back what we take ; and thus, repeatedly using it on earth, and remitting it again to heaven, we maintain a kind of heavenly temper while performing our earthly labour.

CHURCH PRIDE.

DURING my ministry among you, I have been very careful of one thing ; and that is, begetting or suffering to arise a church pride. I have never liked to hear brethren speak about our own church in certain ways. I have felt, of course, an affection for this church above all other outward affection ; but I have not had, I trust, a vain-glorious in it. I can hardly imagine any circumstance in which I shall cease to have a feeling as strong as my heart is capable of bearing for it. But I perceive how easy it is for us to be tempted into vanity. I perceive how easy it is for a church to substitute their own selves for the Saviour, and to glorify their meetings, their prosperity, and their usefulness, and by-and-by to begin glossing over the most unmistakable pride and vanity with sacred names. There can scarcely be any affectation and insincerity more odious than that which puts a veil of humility over things essentially carnal and boastful. I can imagine a case where a church is so low in sensibility that you are obliged

to stimulate it to activity by such motives as pride and self-respect; but it is a low ground to stand on, and should be abandoned as quickly as possible. And in such a church as this, I think it is inexcusable ever to stand on that ground. It is not safe; because there is in your history a sufficient degree of various kinds of fruit and success to make you susceptible to vanity and boastfulness, and a comparison of yourselves with others, and censoriousness arising therefrom.

The deceit of vanity is more rich; there is more genius, usually, in the organ of vanity than in almost any other. Its developments are more shrewd. Its guises are more skilful. It is one of those things which, in the affairs of the church, should be put as far from us as possible; and yet there is a certain line of truth in this direction which ought not to be lost sight of as bearing upon our church character.

It would be affectation for any of us to attempt to disguise the fact that Plymouth Church is known throughout Christendom. Your name is known in the country of the Alps as well as in our own country. It is known throughout the kingdom of Great Britain as well as throughout the state of New York. The question is, What is the secret, what are the sources, of influence and power here in this church? There have been various theories about it. One thinks it is sensationalism. Another thinks it is a fervent domestic affection. Another thinks it is something else. I believe the secret and root of your history lies in one single word; and that is CHRIST. Far as you are from perfectness—far as

we all are from representing Christ truly—I believe that in the services of the pulpit, in the services of the prayer-meetings, and in the private experience of home-religion, to an unusual extent and to an unusual degree of depth, the name of Christ has been precious. Nay, the heart of Christ has been powerful among us. And this is what I should be glad to have known abroad; namely, that a church which is thronged, and a church whose name, although it is of comparatively recent establishment, is almost co-extensive with Christendom, derives its power primarily and chiefly from the living presence of Christ in its midst.

I should be glad to have known everywhere, what is undoubtedly the truth, that you have not built upon foundations of wood, hay, and stubble; that you have not resorted for success to the ordinary provocatives of curiosity; that whatever there has been of that kind has rather followed your success than preceded it and been the cause of it. I think, on the whole, this society has been singularly free from any of those advertising agencies by which a church might seek to draw attention to itself, whatever there may have been of apparent externality arising from the magnitude of the enterprise; whereas the secret influence of this church I believe to have been that Christ has been a reality to this people—that there has been a faith in Him which has led to a higher conception of life. I believe that the presence of Christ among us has been, to an unusual degree, a provocation to a higher life. I believe that the brethren of this church, at home and in

business, have attempted, in an unusual degree, to reproduce in themselves the disposition and life of Christ. It has been your strength in weakness, your consolation in sorrow, and your shield in temptation; and I say again, what I really believe, that it is the power derived from that name which has made you, and that you can say like the apostle, changing the passage by a word, "By the grace of God we are what we are."

I may be permitted to speak so far of myself as to say, that in my judgment this is the whole secret of my success in preaching the gospel. I do not underrate the gifts of judgment and experience; but it seems to me, that, if I might be permitted to pass a judgment upon myself, I should say that, were I to have taken away from me the sense of living by faith in the Son of God, and the feeling that all I have been, all I am, and all I expect to be, I owe to the love of Christ; if I were to have taken away from me the sense which I have of immortality in Christ, and the consciousness that day by day I am drawing nearer to Him, that I work for Him, that I hang upon Him with all my heart, and that every hope I have culminates in Him,—if I were to have taken away from me that sense, I believe all other things in me would collapse. I should be like Samson shorn of his hair, and powerless. It is from Christ, I believe, that I derive my strength to labour successfully among you.

Now, the point I make is, that it is desirable not only that the fact should exist, but that the impression should go with your name, and that persons

going abroad should be able to say, "We have visited this great church, and found that it was Christ among them the hope of glory that made them what they were." That testimony would strengthen ten thousand churches; that simple conviction breathed into the minds of men would encourage the faith of the disheartened, and would work mightily in every direction. And I should be glad if every man and woman who comes here from distant villages, and cities, and towns should go back and report, "Whatever else there was, I found a heart that was warm toward Christ, beating back love-beats, throb for throb." That testimony itself would awaken like sympathies, like hopes, and like desires.

This, then, is the central thought, it seems to me, of true Christian work, the fountain from which everything else must flow. Many persons say, "It is a church that is preaching all sorts of things." The question is, not how many branches a tree has, but what is its root? where does it get its sap and nourishment? These are the questions. A true love of Christ should work out in infinite ramifications of practical morality. The question which is more important than any other is, Why do they work in that direction? You are a temperance church; what makes you so? You have always been anti-slavery; what made you so? It is desirable that the public should understand that you were, first, Christ's living men; and, next, the friends of every development of purification in the community. For Christ is the source and fountain

of all that is good and pure in this world. It is a bad moral influence that any church has, where the impression is produced that they hold alone to externalities. However important they may be in their place, they are but the offshoots of the deeper life, of the inner spirituality. It has been so in your experience, and it is very desirable that it should be known.

When that is known, then there comes a reflex testimony, which in its turn is scarcely less important than the other; namely, that a church which is truly in communion with God manifests that inward spirituality by external labours. We have been in danger, and, I think, are still in danger very largely, of contracting church-life to a mere matter of sentiment. Holy hopes and aspirations, prayers, singing—in other words, a round of spiritual enjoyments within ourselves—this has been the ideal of many; and they have been afraid to let anything come in or go out but this strictly spiritual experience. Now, when the impression is produced that you are deep in the life of Christ and spiritual life, it becomes very useful to have it known that this life works itself out in ceaseless labours, and that these labours are co-extensive with the want of humanity; that high and low, everywhere and always, a true piety seeks to embody itself benevolently in the community in which you live.

One word more. As soon as the fountain begins to dry up, so soon the influence will begin to wane. Just as long as the altar-fire burns brightly, there are some who will go to seek its light and warmth;

but when the name of Christ begins to lose power, though for a little time there will be an influence derived from the repute of the past, the stream will begin to shrink and diminish, and only the channel will remain.

If you go on the Campagna, near Rome, you shall see huge aqueducts of stone which for ages served to supply old Rome with water. Now they are a crumbling heap of ruins. Though they have remained comparatively intact to this day, there is not a drop of water there except what the rains and dews deposit. They bring nothing and carry nothing.

I have seen churches that were like these aqueducts. They used to bear waters across the wide plains to the great and populous cities; but now they are broken down, and only channels remain, and they are old and useless memorials of the past. As soon as a church ceases to be a great channel through which Christ pours His influence into the world, it has lost its function. It is a byword, a matter of curiosity, a thing of the past, utterly dead.

We need not trouble ourselves with the future if Christ abides with us; and nothing can save us if He does not.

A HIGH CHRISTIAN STATE.



THE popular ideal of a high Christian state is in some respects remarkably correct, and remarkably consonant with the scriptural teaching. The apostle commands us to be fervent in spirit—glowing, burning, shining; and there is no question that this is the type of religious feeling which is set forth in the New Testament. That state which men call *the blessing* in the Methodist Church; that state which is called *the glory*, or *the coming in of the glory*, by the same class of people; or that state of great joy which people aspire to;—this constitutes the popular conception of the highest Christian experience. When the Bible speaks of fervency and joy in the Holy Ghost as being the fruit of the Spirit, the popular apprehension runs in the same direction; so that it is a very common thing for people to say that they have a great deal of religion when they have a great deal of joy, and to say that they have lost their religion when they lack joy—as if it was a garment that they could put on or off, instead of being in the nature of character.

Now, there can be no question, that, under another name, or in another way of looking at it, the highest type of Christian life is this type of spontaneous involuntary activity of the moral affections, of the understanding, and of the life. The inference that men draw is very erroneous—namely, that when they have not this high feeling, it is of no use for them to try to do anything. They ought to have the high feeling; but the question arises, Suppose we have not got it, then what? Are we to lie still till we get it and then act as Christians, or are we to act as Christians without it? It is a very important question.

In the first place, we ought to strive to act habitually in our religious life from a character and a condition so high that religious exercises and duties shall be spontaneous and involuntary. This is the type that we should seek. In order to that, however, several things are necessary.

First, it must be relative to each man's own temperament. Brother Corning used to be one of our burning and shining lights, and you who were here when he was alive remember what a glowing experience he used to have. Brother Burgess was another extreme. Brother Burgess was as good a Christian as Brother Corning, and as useful; but he never went into transcendent states. He was always quiet. Brother Corning rose to great heights of exaltation. Both of them, however, lived in that state in which the experience and utterance of Christian emotion were almost involuntary and spontaneous. A man who has naturally a small

measure of excitability is not to hold himself to account for overflowing feeling, as a man does who by nature has a large measure of excitability. Religious feeling is to be relative to what a man is when he starts in life. According to that which God gave him, every man must judge of the spontaneity of his own Christian feeling.

Second, I think that none can ever follow a narrow conception of religion, and then be in a high, overflowing state. Unless you make your religious life to be so comprehensive that it touches every faculty in your being; if it is simply avoiding wrong, and then labouring for the conversion of men; if it is simply abstinence from evil, and then soliciting men to turn from sin and come to the Lord Jesus Christ, you will find, very soon, days in which you are exceedingly weak of impulse to perform such duties. There will be many days in which you will not experience strong feeling. If such is your sole idea of religion, there will be two blanks to every day of positive feeling that you will have.

A man's life as a Christian ought to be like a farmer's life. It is raining to-day; and the old farmer says, "Well, what of that? I meant to get in my hay to-day, but there is something else that I can do. There is that old hay to be moved into the old barn; and there is that door to be hung on new hinges. I have been waiting for a rainy day to repair this machine. There is the big waggon to be fixed. Besides, I must mend that harness." There is enough work for five wet days; and is he not working on the farm as much while doing these

things as though he were getting in his hay? In the spring he ploughs and sows. When July and August come, he mows, and reaps, and garners. When it is winter, he does neither; and yet the labour of winter is husbandry. There are parts of the year's work to be done in January, as well as in June. He has a wide range of occupation; but, although his work varies from day to day, and from season to season, it is all husbandry.

Now, a Christian ought to live on so broad a scale of experience, that if to-day he does not feel like acting in one direction, he will in another. To-day it may be your duty to teach. It may be your duty to-morrow to receive instruction. It is Christian life to-day filled with fervency of prayer. To-morrow it may not be feeling of this type; it may be benevolence, that produces sympathy for others in trouble. The next day it may be some other Christian disposition that will open up in you. It may be the restraint of selfishness. It may be doing a generous deed in this or that relation of life. There are a thousand things that go to constitute you an agreeable, kind, loving, and loved Christian—one whose light, shining before men, is such that they want it, and seek to kindle their lamps at the same altar where you kindled yours. In that way a man can live so that his life will be spontaneous all the time.

But you cannot live on one or two strains of experience, and have them all the time spontaneous. You must have variety that shall bring different parts of the mind up, and all of them. On you

devolve duties that must be performed. You do not want to perform them. Now, what? If you only had the mood, you say you could do it. But, ah! the mood is not there. Now what? Must you wait for it? It depends much on what you have to do. If a man wants to write a piece of poetry, I do not think it will do any good for him to undertake to write till the mood comes; but if a man has to preach a sermon, Sunday does not wait for his moods. I have found that out during the last thirty or forty years. I have to preach whether I feel able or not. And I find that the knowledge of the fact that I must preach whether I want to or not, or whether I like it or not, has a wonderful influence on me. I know that when Sunday comes I have got to preach (for I do not exchange pulpits, and I never ask anybody to preach for me), and what is the consequence? My whole system has conformed itself to the necessities of the case. Everything about me, from my head to my feet, knows that when Sunday comes there is that work to be done. I almost feel before I know it that it is Sunday. My whole mental economy has trained itself so, that ninety-nine times in a hundred I want to preach when I ought to.

The same to a considerable extent may be said in regard to duties of an executive character—duties not of the higher order of artistic duties. You may not feel inclined to them, yet conscience, instead of a mood, will not only put you through the duties, but will after a while make your very nature respond to the necessity; so that, though at first

you do not feel like performing them, though in the beginning they are laborious and disagreeable, afterward you will hardly think about that part. A well-bred, thoroughly trained Christian addresses himself to duties that he does not feel an appetite for; and frequently in performing them his dislike for them disappears. *

Do you ask me whether this condition, in which one performs duties as a matter of necessity at first, and then comes to do them without reluctance, is the highest condition? No, it is not the highest; but that impelling power which is second-best is a great deal better than none at all.

Suppose you have no conscience about doing your duty, but you say to yourself, "I am a member of the church, and I must live a consistent life. There are many people looking at me, and if I stayed at home on Sunday they would know it and talk about it; so I fancy I had better go to meeting, though I do not want to, and would not if I could do as I wanted to." Well, you are a mean fellow, but you had better do your duty even from such a poor motive, if you cannot act from an appetite of duty—from a generous, glowing desire of doing that which you ought to do—from a sense of right and wrong. If the motive is fear of men, if it is love of consistency, if it is a motive of necessity, it is a thousand times better that you should do your duty from such considerations than that you should not do it at all. It is better that you should do it from a generous ardour and enthusiasm than that you should do it from some lower feeling; but it is

better that you should do it even from that, than that you should fail to do it altogether.

Why, a man should fly like an eagle toward the kingdom of God ; but if he cannot fly, let him walk ; and if he cannot walk, let him crawl. Let him go in the poorest way rather than not go at all. You can go down along the scale of doing right and being right ; and there is no excuse for any man not to do right and to be right. It is a mere question of gradation. It is a question as to doing it from the lowest, the intermediate, or the highest motive. The highest is the best ; but we should always do right from some motive or other.

A great many persons, I think, in a Christian life, err from want of variety, from want of versatility. There are many things that you can do, if, when you do not incline to take one side, one style, one range of Christian experience, you take another and act in accordance with that. Seek to live with diverse experiences. Have a broader conception of Christian life than consists in merely saying prayers, singing hymns, and talking to men about their souls. These are an important part of Christian duty frequently ; but, ah ! there are a thousand other things that are essential. There is the beauty of holiness as well as the power of holiness. There is the soothing duty as well as the rousing duty. There is instruction as well as exhortation. There is preparation for future duty as well as the execution of present duty. These are all parts of one Christian character. There are not only two strings to your bow, but thirty, in the Christian life ; and a man

should live so broadly that every day he should find something to do which he wants to do, and which he does with appetite. Then other duties which are regular, which press themselves upon him, and which he has no appetite for, let him do because they are duties. And if he cannot do even that, and they are urgent duties, let him do them, whatever the motive may be. So he will rise higher and higher toward the true Christian plane, which is the plane of spontaneity, of involuntary activity, of being and doing from the love of that which is essentially true, and beautiful, and pure, and right, and good.

COMMERCIAL HONOUR.



LETTER of inquiry has come to me from a gentleman in Boston. It seems a long way to send to find out one's duty. After some preliminary remarks, he says :—

“To be brief, my case is this : Six years ago, I failed in business. At that time I could have paid my bills in full, but, fearful that my family would suffer, I compromised with a part of my creditors by paying fifty per cent. The other portion remained unpaid. At that time I made my house over to my wife, and she has it now in her possession. What I would like to know is, if I have a moral right to use her property to pay my bills. Or, in other words, is it my duty, as the case stands, to have the house sold, and make a full settlement with my creditors ?

“I hardly dare to trouble you with such a matter ; and had it been in any other cause than of Christ, in which I knew you to be so deeply interested, I should not have written.”

He began the letter by saying :—

“Having had a strong desire to become a Christian for some time, and having stumbling-blocks in the way, I would like to present my case to you, provided you are willing to answer my questions.”

I do not propose to spend the whole evening in discussing this case of ethics ; but I shall make a few remarks with special reference to this case, and then consider the whole field in which all such cases stand.

In the first place, I think that man is in a gospel exercise. I think it is a genuine case of awakening. It is a case that is fit for modern times. It is not a case of metaphysical trouble. It is not a case of morbid feeling. It is a case that springs up in the man's life. And one of the signs of promise is, that his conscience has become so sensitive that he cannot feel quite contented to abide to-day in that which six years ago satisfied him.

In the next place, I would say, in regard to this particular case, that he may be right or he may be wrong. An agreement between him and his creditors, if it is equitable and Christian, is so, not merely by the fact that it is an agreement, but by the whole spirit and temper with which it was executed. He may have put them into such circumstances that they were driven to this, and did it unwillingly, perhaps with the feeling that there was some un-equity in it; or they may have considered his whole case, and heartily agreed to it. The whole thing would be sound or unsound very much according to those minute shades that go to make equity, justice, rectitude.

However, I think that the presumption of duty always is in favour of doing more than a man is inclined to do in such matters as this. No one thing can be more unfortunate for a man who is beginning to live publicly as a Christian than to have attached to him the impression that he has winked at injustice and selfishness, and that he has now entered upon a Christian course, as it were to cloak his wickedness, and to get release in his own

feelings from trouble concerning it. There is nothing in the world that a man who is beginning a Christian life wants more than to give evidence to the world that his righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. It must more than equal that, and certainly cannot afford to lag behind it. I should say to a man in these circumstances, "Look you! Call to mind cases that you have known. There have been men who have made settlements before, and gone out of their houses into poverty and actual suffering, and borne a witness for Christ which was perhaps the most impressive and convincing that it was in their power to bear. And consider whether it is best for you, merely for the sake of the comfort of yourself and your family, to make a good and snug arrangement, or whether there is not an opportunity for you to do a thing that is more significant than almost anything else that you ever did in your life."

Now look at this case. It is very likely all right. I know nothing about the facts, and have to exercise my imagination respecting them. Let us suppose that this man, on making a compromise with his creditors, and getting released from his obligations, turns over his house to his wife, as much as to say, "I will see to that in future, so that no debt shall ever take it out of my hands." He loves his wife and children, and he says, "I will keep them in comfortable circumstances, and will keep my children at school, and will keep my family well clad." That is amiable. And he says, "I am determined to put forth my best efforts, and work night and day, and

pay off the other half of my debts as quick as I can." That sounds very well, and he means what he says; but it is not quite as it should be. We are apt to put off present duty to be performed by-and-by. All men mean to do right next year. It would be a very wicked man that did not mean to do right next year. The peculiar trouble about doing right is the neglecting to do it now.

But we will suppose that in this case the man is all right. And, this being the state of facts, his conscience leads him to a further development of Christian life and testimony; so he goes into the church. And now, as a member of the church, we will suppose that he goes to prayer-meeting—for members of the church often do!—and that he speaks. He is called upon to take part in prayer, in conversation, in the various exercises of the meeting. A revival comes on, and he is called upon to go out and work for Christ's cause. And what will inevitably be the case, but that the very spot where he is weak will continually be the spot where he will want to give instruction and exhortation? And he will feel, "I cannot say to young men, 'Avoid dishonest courses,' lest they should turn round and say to me, 'Why do you not pay your debts?'" He cannot put in certain strains of prayer, for fear that everybody will be thinking, "Physician, heal thyself." And he will go on hampered in his usefulness all the time. A shadow of that delinquency, the thought that he has compromised his debt at one half, and that yet he is living in a good house, and carrying his children along in their

education, and making his family comfortable, will weigh upon him, and he will feel as though people were talking about him, and as though they had a right to, and he will not be very happy about it. And the probability is that, though technically he may be in the way of right, yet there will be a stumbling-block, a difficulty, besetting his whole Christian life, which will be the means of keeping him down.

Let us now try the opposite course. Suppose a man should gather his wife and children about the fireside, and should say to them, "I have called you together, because the burden of the Lord is on my conscience. I have been living a worldly life; I must be a Christian, and I do not feel that I can follow Christ without taking up my cross. Now, are you willing to go down, in order that I may bear a testimony to the sincerity of my love to God and man? My dear, can you wear less, and live in less comely and less comfortable quarters with me?" She is no woman, she is no *Christian* woman, she is not a true wife nor mother, if she does not jump at the chance, and say, "You are right, husband, and I shall go wherever you go."

And suppose he says to his children, "You will have to take up your part of the cross; you will have to work more than you have done; you will find that your companions surpass you in opportunities and privileges. But, my dear children, can you submit to so much for the sake of enabling me to acquit myself, not only in the sight of God, but in the sight of men?" Consider what an impression it will make on those children. They might

go to Egypt and see the Pyramids, and shake before them with veneration ; they might go to Jerusalem, and stand in the presence of things sacred and awe-inspiring in that ancient city ; they might behold the wondrous treasures of Italy and Greece ; they might visit all those places in Europe which are renowned in history,—and it is not probable that these various scenes put together would produce upon them such a profound impression as to have their father and mother sit in counsel with them on this question, and to have the father say to the mother and to them, “Are you willing to take this most practical and personal step with me, for the sake of bearing a witness for Christ and religion ?” I know just how I should have felt if my father had made such an appeal to his family. I should have rejoiced at the opportunity of complying with a request of that kind coming from him. I would willingly have eaten bread and water for a year, if I could only have had the satisfaction of knowing that I was aiding in some moral work. I recollect that when I was a boy I had a conscience that wanted some exponent. I wanted to do or forbear in some way. There were many things that I might have done or forborne that did not then present themselves to me as duties ; but the appetite was there. And if my father had said to me, “I am poor, and it is necessary that we should practise the most rigid economy ; and are you willing, for my sake and that of the family, to forego such and such things ?”—no pilgrim ever girded on his sack-cloth, and took his staff, and bore the severity of

cold or the weariness of travel to visit a sacred shrine, no anchorite ever performed penances, with half the alacrity that I would have practised the utmost self-denial. And I tell you, the simple fact that a whole family have given their consent and co-operation to a step of this sort, and that they are willing to leave the fine house in which they have been living, and wear poorer clothes, and go down in society, has a wonderful power in it.

Well, the man, after he has broached the matter to his wife and children, and received assurance of their sympathy and support, goes to his creditors. He enters the office of one of them, and says, "I am going to join the church." "Ah!" says the creditor, "I am glad to hear it." "And I came to say to you, sir —" The creditor is not a Christian; and supposing that the man is seeking light on spiritual topics, he says, "You had better go to your minister. I do not feel that I am in a situation to give you any advice in this matter." "You do not understand me, sir," says the man. "I came to say that I feel that I ought to live a Christian life, and that I ought to profess Christ; and I cannot feel satisfied without doing my duty. I made a settlement with you and such and such gentlemen with which I do not feel satisfied, and I should like to see you altogether. If you would ask them to meet me, I should esteem it a favour." "Certainly, certainly," is the reply; "I will bring them right in." When a proposition comes from a debtor to meet his creditors, they respond very quickly, and in half an hour they are all in.

The man is very modest, and he says to them, "Gentlemen, I wanted to see you, and to say that I am about to join the church, and that although I supposed the arrangement which we entered into six years ago was equitable and just, I am not satisfied with it; but, feeling that I ought to do something about it, I have determined to give up my house, and all that I have, to pay the balance of that debt. Then I shall feel that I can enter upon a Christian life." These men look at each other with surprise. They do not know much about the different religious schools; they do not know the difference between Arminianism and Calvinism; but here is a man that is going to join the church, a part of whose creed is to pay his debts. He professes to love Christ, and to want to follow Him; and here is the first-fruit of his religion. When the man goes out, they rub their hands and say, "If that is religion, we had better look out!" And they talk it over. And one of them, when he goes home at night, says to his wife, "One of the strangest things happened to-day that I ever knew." "What was it?" "You know Mr. Acorn. Five or six years ago he was owing several of us, and became hard pressed, and paid us half the amount, and we released him. To-day he came to us and said that he was going to join the church, and that he was going to sell his house and furniture, and pay us off." Another man goes home and tells it, and another, and another.

And what is the result? Why, among this man's creditors there is another man that has been settling

up some little debts. He has been in the very same condition. And it worries his conscience. And he says, "If Mr. Acorn feels that he ought to settle his affairs so, I do not know why I ought not to settle mine so." There is another man who has not any debts, but who has a very thorough habit of extracting debts. And he begins to think, "That man's religion makes him consider other people's feelings as I never have, although I have always supposed that I was a Christian, as the world goes." He was, *as the world goes*. And the effect is to bring a conviction into that mind also.

If this man had called his creditors together in his house, and had a prayer-meeting, and knelt with them, and prayed, they would not have been impressed at all; but this interview was the best prayer and conference meeting they ever had. In coming before them, and bearing testimony to his faith in Christ, and to his love of the cause of religion, and giving up his house and property to pay his debts, that his life might be consistent with his profession, he did that which they could all understand, and which led them to believe there was more in religion than they had supposed. And the effect would naturally be, if they heard religion denounced, to lead them to stand up for it, even if they had not before had faith in it themselves, and say, "Look here! you need not talk about religion. I know one man that I think has got it—Mr. Acorn."

You will say, "Is it evidence that a man is a Christian, because he pays his debts?" No; but

you recollect that in the day of Pentecost one of the wonders was that every man heard the gospel preached in his own tongue. When a man pays his debts, he preaches in a language that is understood by more men than when he preaches in almost any other language that is spoken.

Now, when a man comes into the church under such circumstances, see how he grows! And one such self-denial, one such heroism (I am ashamed to call it a heroism, for it ought to be a matter of common, every-day life), will give a man a power, an impulse, that will not spend itself in his whole life.

Against this it might be argued that it is a brave thing to try to keep a family up out of the reach of want in life—and it is; but which is better, to make them comfortable outside, or to give them moral inspiration inside? It is not now a question of bargain and agreement, but a question of moral capital laid up.

I should say, therefore, to this brother, I will acquit you of all dishonesty in the past; I will admit that you did, according to the doctrine of the world, the thing that was honourable and right; but I advise you, if you want to be a thoroughly good Christian, to part with that house, distribute your goods, and begin with a clear conscience not only, but, according to the Word of God, be *honest in the sight of men*. There is a great deal in that.

So much for this case.

Now let me say, that, when we enter upon a

Christian life, or when—as men are continually doing—we come to successive periods and epochs of Christian experience (for as trees grow in rings, resting in winter and developing in summer, so men in their Christian experience rise by stages, taking an inspiration from one circumstance, and stopping to solidify and ripen that; then taking another inspiration from some other circumstance, and stopping to solidify and ripen that; and so on), there is a tendency founded in nature to give some external form to our internal condition of feeling. That is the true function of the ordinance of baptism, of the Lord's Supper, and of a public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are valuable, but they are not enough. Every man must make ordinances for himself besides those which now exist. Almost every man, aside from the ordinary observances of men who profess Christ, is called to do something which belongs to himself alone. The command is, "Take up"—not *the* cross, not the *generic* cross, not the *historic* cross—"take up thy cross, and follow Me." What it is, everybody must determine for himself. The probability is that it will interpret itself to you very quickly.

When men are propounding to themselves this new life, it is particularly desirable that they should signalize it by that which to them and to all the world is an act of heroic endeavour.

Let us take an instance. We will suppose that there has been a quarrel between two men. It has run on for many months, and is heaped up and heaped up by little aggravating circumstances. In

the providence of God one of them is inspired by a higher Christian feeling, and, proposing to go into the church, he feels it to be his duty to set himself right with his fellow-men. The first man he thinks of is this man with whom he has quarrelled; but Satan says to him, "You have nothing to do with that man; you have behaved yourself right, and you have nothing to do with him." The probability is that Satan is a lying counsellor in ninety-nine cases in a hundred. There never is a long-continued quarrel in which, either negatively or positively, both parties are not at fault. Some may be more to blame, and some less; but it seems to me that if a man is in the least a cause of offence to another man, he should approve himself before God and man—he should say, "Here is my cross: I must make overtures to this man, and ask his forgiveness for everything that I have done which is wrong."

"Well," it is asked, "suppose it is a case in which I do not feel that I have done anything wrong?" My reply is, "Then so much the worse for you." "But would you have me go and ask a man's forgiveness when I did not feel that I was wrong?" If your conscience were as sensitive as it should be, you would feel that you were wrong. There is enough in your temper that is wrong, if you are not guilty of any wrong action. At any rate, let it be known that because you were about to profess the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, you went and humbled yourself to that man, and asked pardon, that the old difficulty might be settled, and almost said to him, "Make your own terms, only let there

be peace between us : I cannot go into the church and feel that I am carrying this quarrel with me." Would not your attitude toward him melt him if he had a spark of nobility in him ; would not he try to lighten your yoke ; and would not the whole community say, "That is a sincere man ;" and would not the doing of that disagreeable thing put you along further in the Christian life than all the hymns, good as they are, and all the prayers, useful as they are, that you could utter in a year, or in a decade of years ?

I have a case in my mind which occurred twenty years ago. A man who was going to unite with the church where I was pastor came and handed me four or five different sums of money, with names attached to them, and said, "I want you to go to these persons and say to them that in transactions of which they know nothing, the firm to which I belonged cheated them, and that though I knew it, being a younger partner, I did not feel free to interfere, but that now I do not feel that I can keep this portion of the profits." See what a good conscience he had. He remembered these cases, and ascertained the sums, and calculated the interest, and brought the amounts to me, that I might hand them to the persons to whom they rightfully belonged. He would not let his name be known. Said he, "If my name should be disclosed, my partners would be disgraced ; and if they do not choose to acknowledge their part in the wrong, I cannot expose them." But he could not take the step of joining the church without repairing his share of the wrong. I recollect

that one man whom I went to begged me to tell him who it was. Said he, "I want to know that man." I said, "He is about to unite with the church, and he felt called upon to settle these matters; but I am not at liberty to disclose his name." I did not question the man, and I did not know whether he was a Christian or not; but I saw that such a testimony touched his very heart.

Now, was not that an ordinance a great deal more in accordance with Christ's spirit and practice than baptism is once in a thousand times? It *was* a baptism; of a different kind, to be sure; but it was one which every man understood, and which the subject of it felt.

If there is any wrong thing that you have done, lose no time in making reparation for it, if it be not too late. There are some wrongs that cannot be repaired; but there are many reparable wrongs. And no young man who is surrounded by the temptations of life, and who is constantly balancing in his mind between right and wrong, can afford to go into Christian life without seeing that his conscience is void of offence toward God and men. The question ought not to be with any man, when he becomes a Christian, "How much wrong can I reserve, and cover up, and evade repairing?" The feeling with every man who becomes a Christian should be, "I am about to take upon myself the name of my glorious Saviour, and I cannot afford to do it except in circumstances which will show that I am earnest and conscientious, and that I am moved by the Spirit of God."

There is one other line of thought connected with

this, and that is, the relation of positive actions of this kind to Christian emotions. One of the difficulties that I find among men is the great want of combustion. When they go to church, where there is singing, and praying, and talking, they feel no lack of fuel and fire; but when they go away a reaction takes place, and they say, "When I am at the meetings, I feel well and comfortable; but when I go home, somehow I lose all that which I have gained, and almost the whole week seems dreary and cold." They don't know how to keep up the warmth from day to day. And when they try to, they usually go into a dark room that is ventilated, and kneel down, and try to say their prayers, and fail to derive satisfaction; and they are quite helpless and ignorant of how to kindle the flame of real feeling and satisfying love in their own souls. And let me say to you, that while devotional exercises are pre-eminently necessary—more necessary than you think, even—you will find that they will come in far better after some positive act, than when you rely on them as mere abstract means of grace.

Now suppose, when you contemplate the want and suffering in the community, instead of saying, "I cannot spare my time to relieve the needy," you should say, "Somebody must go and visit the fatherless and the widow, somebody must look after strangers, somebody must seek out the poor and minister to their necessities, and it is as much my duty as anybody's." If you should go with a sincere desire to do them good, their condition would touch

your feelings, and your heart would be kindled into a glow of Christian fervour. This is not an ideal picture. It is not an imaginary case. It is a reality.

Go and ask God first to bless others, and next to bless you ; and then see if prayer is not as succulent and full as a spice-bush in spring, and as beautiful as a rose-tree all a-blossom. If you find it hard to engage in devotional exercises, *do* something ; and do something that *is* something, and that *means* something, and see if the gate is not opened.

I think that one of the most indispensable means of grace is personal, vigorous, practical activity in the cause which you profess to believe in ; and if it does not react in the form of prayer and devotion, then your case will be a rarity.

Q. Suppose a man is prosperous, and his business is all right, with no failure impending, nor apparently any chance of such a thing, and, feeling that he would like to make his wife and children secure against contingency, he says, " I have that house, and I will make it over to my wife," and he does make it over to her, is he justified in taking such a step ?

I hold, not only that he is justified in taking it, but that he would be sinful if he did not take it. I think that with the known contingencies of business, if a man is out of debt, and is in circumstances such that he can do it, and everybody knows it, or he can prove it to everybody, it is a part of his duty to his household to secure them a shelter. I think, that, when a man has prospered, he has a right to secure a foundation to stand on, from which to work in order to make headway against his debts, and ultimately pay them, if he should chance to become

involved ; for, ordinarily, when a man is in prosperity, and he secures a piece of property for himself and his family, I regard it not merely as securing a shelter and a bulwark against poverty, but also as a means of enabling him to recover himself if he fails. Such is the nature of society, that, when a man is unfortunate in business, and goes down, he can find no place on which to rest his foot that he may regain his position. And you shall often hear men say, who have lost their property, and are in debt, "If I could only see my family provided for, and comfortable, I could go to work and soon make up this money. All I want is a fair chance." That is the reason why the National Bankrupt Law ought to have been passed scores of years ago. Such a law is a great national humanity. I call it a great national *morality*. For what a man wants is a place to put his artillery. He must have room for his gun-carriage, or he cannot fight to any purpose.

But here is the case of a man who got into difficulty, became involved in debt, failed, and could have paid all he owed, but who, instead of meeting his obligations in full, settled with his creditors by paying them fifty per cent., and *then* made over his house to his wife, to secure her and his children against suffering. The cases are widely different.

If a man uses foresight, and in the days of his prosperity builds himself a refuge in the mountain against the storm and the flood, I think all the world will say that he has a right to resort to it when the storm and the flood come ; but when a man has not had foresight, when a man has not

taken any such precaution, and then, when the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon his house, he begins with materials that belong to his creditors, with that which is not his own, to build a refuge for himself, or for his wife and children, people will differ in opinion as to the propriety of his course. Some will be very charitable toward him, and some will not.

As for myself, I am very far from taking sides with those who indiscriminately denounce men that have failed in business, and have reserved a portion of their property to shield their families from distress. I go to the other extreme, and take the part of such men whom I hear people railing out against. Much of the wrong that men do is done through the force of affection. It is not because men would not gladly pay their creditors that they withhold a part of their means in such cases as we have been considering; but many a man, who would willingly take the rain and hail on his bare head, and go with a crust of bread, says, "I *cannot* see that woman and those children suffer." And if there is ever a case where a man sins under the influence of sanctified affections, it is where he does it for the sake of his wife and children. I therefore have great sympathy for those who are in bankruptcy. There is much odium heaped upon them that does not go above the atmosphere of the earth; and God takes the part of many men who are cast out, and whose names are hated, and says, "They are more sinned against than sinning."

But I am speaking to-night for the sake of those

who are not involved—for the sake of young men who have their life yet before them. And I say to them, first, “Do not get into this place;” and, secondly, “If you do get into it, get out in such a way that the name of Christ shall be honoured in you, and not brought to shame.”

Q. Suppose the circumstances had been changed, and this man, when he failed, had made an assignment of his entire property—had given up everything, not keeping any house for his wife; and suppose, subsequently he had earned this house, and acquired some other property, would you have advised him now, as a matter of duty, to have sold all he had, and handed the proceeds over to his creditors?

I should certainly say, in regard to ordinary debts—I am not now speaking of those ethereal transactions that take place in connection with stocks and such things which I do not quite understand—in regard to ordinary debts I should say, that, if a man owes a debt, in the court of honour and conscience no agreement can rub it out except the *quid pro quo*. I think every young man should feel, “If I contract a lawful debt, I will pay it, if I work to the last minute of my life.” If it is necessary, that, at the same time that you are doing it, you should carry along your family, let every one see that it is consistent with this heroic purpose. It ought not to be considered heroic—it ought to be considered simple duty; but it *is* heroic in this dark world. Where a man has contracted a debt, nothing can liquidate it in his conscience but the cash. That does it. And the last dollar that a man pays of such debt is a dollar that does not touch the pocket of the creditor half so much as it does the

strings of the harps in heaven, making sounds that are sweet in the ears of God and angels.

There ought to be more sacredness attaching to a man's word than there is. In this great whirling population, fortunes are ground not half so much as men's consciences. And we want to come to a higher sense of the obligation which rests upon men to keep their word and honour intact and pure to the very end.

THE FULNESS OF CHRIST'S LOVE.

IF there is any one thing in which I feel that my own Christian experience has developed more than in another, it is the all-sided use of love and worship toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Every man's mind that acts for itself has to go through its periods of development and evolution. In the earlier part of my Christian career and ministry, I had but glimpses of Christ, and was eagerly seeking to develop in my own mind, and for my people, a full view of Christ, particularly with reference to the conversion of men—to start them, in other words, in the Christian life. And for a great many years it was *Christ as the wisdom of God unto salvation* that filled my mind very much; and I preached Christ as a power—not a bit too much, but almost exclusively.

I think there has been going on in me, steadily and gradually, a growing appropriation of Christ to all needs, to every side and phase of experience; so that at no period of my life was I ever so conscious of a personal need, so definite, and at so many points,

as now. I do not know that I experience such enthusiasm as I have at some former periods of my life; but I think that at no other period did I ever have such a sense of the fulness of God in Christ, or such a sense of the special point at which this Divine all-supply touches the human want.

A few points I will mention, that are much in my mind.

The love of Christ, as I recollect it in my childhood, was taught almost entirely from the work of redemption. That work of redemption was itself a historical fact, and it was sought to stir up the heart and the affections by a continual review and iteration of the great facts of Christ's earthly mission, passion, atonement, and love. I became conscious, very early in my ministry, that I did not derive—nor could I see that Christians generally derived—from the mere continued presentation of that circle of facts, a perpetual help to anything like the extent that life needs. There would come to me, as there come to the church, times in which all those facts seemed to be fused and kindled, and to afford great light and consolation; but these were alternative and occasional, whereas the need was perpetual.

And it was not until I went beyond these—not disdaining them, but using them rather as a torch, as a means of interpreting Christ in a higher relation—that I entered into a train of thought that revealed to me the intrinsic nature of God. I had an idea that He loved me on account of Calvary and Gethsemane, on account of certain historical facts; but I

came, little by little, through glimpses and occasional appreciations, to that which now is a continuous, unbroken certainty—namely, a sense of the everlasting need of God in Christ to love. I began to interpret the meaning of love, not by contemplating a few historical facts, but by running over in my mind human faculties, exalting them, and imagining them to have infinite scope in the Divine mind. I began to apply our ideas of infinity and almightiness to the attributes of God, and to form some conception of what affection must be in a Being who had created, who had sustained in the past, and who was to sustain throughout the endless future, a race of intelligent creatures such as peopled the earth.

In that direction my mind grew, and in that direction it grows. And from the inward and everlasting nature of God to love I have derived the greatest stimulus, the greatest consolation, and the greatest comfort in preaching to others.

I find many persons that speak of loving Christ ; but it is only now and then that I meet those who seem to be penetrated deeply with a consciousness of Christ's love to them, or of its boundlessness, its wealth, its fineness, its exceeding delicacy, its transcendency, in every line and lineament of possible conception." Once in a while people have this view break upon them in meeting, or in some sick-hour, which leaves the mind not only not obscured but more acute, or in some revival moment. That is a blessed visitation which brings to the soul a realization of the capacity of God to love imperfect beings

with infinite love, and which enables a man to adapt this truth to his shame-hours, his sorrow-hours, his love-hours, and his selfish-hours, and to find all the time that there is in the revelation of God in Christ Jesus all-sufficient food for the soul. It is, indeed, almost to have the gate of heaven opened to you. The treasure is inexhaustible.

Out of that has grown something besides ; for it is impossible for me to feel that Christ loves me with such an all-surrounding love, and to feel, as I do every day in my life, that He has to love me with imperfections, that He never loves me because I am symmetrical, never because I am good, never because I deserve His love, never because I am lovely, but always because He has the power to love erring creatures—it is impossible for me to feel thus, and not get some insight into Divine charity. Being conscious that He takes me with all my faults, I cannot but believe that He takes others with their faults—not only such as are least exceptionable, but such as are narrow-minded, such as are bigoted, such as are pugnacious, such as are unlovely. I believe that Christ finds much in them that He loves ; but whether or not He finds much in them that He loves, He finds in Himself much of capacity to love them. And so I have the feeling that, in all churches, in all denominations, there is an elect class, and that in regard to them Christ *sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied.*

That is not all. Aside from this catholicity of love for Christians in all sects and denominations, I have a sense of ownership in other people. It may

seem rather fanciful, but it has been a source of abiding comfort to me for many years that I owned everybody that was good for anything.

I came here, you know, many years ago, under peculiar circumstances. I came just at the critical period of the anti-slavery movement; and I came without such indorsement as is usually considered necessary in city churches in the East. Owing to those independent personal habits that belonged to me, and which were strengthened by my Western training, I never consulted brethren in the ministry as to what course I should pursue, but carried on my work as fast and as far as I could according to the enlightenment of my conscience. For years, as you will recollect, it excited remark, and various states of feeling. And so I felt always as though I was not particularly acceptable to Christians beyond my own flock, with the exception of single individuals here and there in other churches. But I have felt not resentful, and hardly regretful; for I have always had a sort of minor under-feeling that when I was at home I was strong and all right, though I was conscious that outside of my own affectionate congregation it was not so. This, acting upon a nature proud enough and sensitive enough, has wrought a kind of feeling that I never would intrude upon anybody, and never would ask any favour of anybody—as I never have had occasion to do; and I stood very much by myself. But I never felt any bitterness toward those who regarded me with disfavour. And I speak the truth when I declare that I do not remember to have had

toward any minister a feeling that I would have been afraid to have God review in the judgment-day, and that I do not remember to have had toward any church or denomination a feeling that Christ would not approve.

On the other hand, I have had positively, and springing from my sense of the wonderful love with which I am loved, and with which the whole church is loved, the feeling that these very men who did not accept me or my work were beloved of Christ, and were brethren to me; and I have said to them, "I am your brother. You do not acknowledge it; but I am. And though you do not own me, I own you. All that is good in you is mine, and I am in sympathy with it. And you cannot keep me out of your church." I belong to the Presbyterian Church. I belong to the Methodist Church. I belong to the Baptist Church. I belong to the Episcopal Church. I belong to any church that has Christ in it. I go where He goes, and love what He loves. And I insist upon it that, though these churches exclude me, they cannot keep me out. All those that I have reason to believe Christ loves, I claim, by virtue of the love that Christ has for me. Hence I have a great sense of richness. I rejoice in everything that is good in all these denominations, and sorrow for everything that is bad, or that hinders the work of Christ in their hands. And I look and wait and long for that day when all Christians shall recognize each other.

I think that people in the church are like persons riding in a stage at night. For hours they sit side

by side and shoulder to shoulder, not being able, in the darkness, to distinguish one another; but at last, when day breaks, and they look at each other, behold, they discover that they are friends, and, it may be, near relations!

So we are riding, I think, in the chariot of salvation, and do not know that we are brethren, though we sit shoulder to shoulder; but as the millennial dawn comes on, we shall find it out. I have great comfort and consolation in this thought.

I think, moreover, that I have an increasing practical and personal view of the complementariness of Christ, in the sense that for any lack that there may be in any part of my nature there is a supply in Him; and that He makes good in Himself, and, by grace and providence, in me, every point that is deficient.

I might enlarge this statement, and show how it works in matters relating to the intellect. It is impossible for an active mind, free to think and explore, not to have its own peculiar trials and difficulties with regard to investigations. But there is always one remedy, there is always one refuge. When you cannot probe to the bottom, when you cannot make up your mind, when you are tormented by doubts and perplexities, there is the sense of Christ, who is wisdom itself, and is made wisdom to us, and to whom we may safely commit the thought or the inquiry that vexes us. It is an unspeakable comfort.

As a man, fevered all day from heat and dust, at last throws himself into the ocean to cleanse and refresh himself, and comes out another man; so, driven

and tossed about by questions in relation to life's pressing duties, we may bathe ourselves in the ocean of God's love, and rise prepared with new zeal for new labour. Of every point of disposition, and of every element of grace, Christ is made unto us wisdom. He is sanctification; He is justification; He is all, and, blessed be His name! *in* all.

WORKING FOR OTHERS.



HERE are some of the commands of the New Testament that respect actions, which are far more important, on account of the implied psychological action back of the external, than we are accustomed to think. The simple matter of concerning ourselves for the salvation of men ; or, to put it in more common phrase, of labouring for men's awakening, and conversion, and upbuilding in the Christian life,—this, either by command or implication, is the New Testament duty of every person who is brought into the kingdom. When we enter upon the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are bound, not simply to bear in our hand, as it were, the testimony that we are saved, and to rejoice in our own safety, but to have a distinct purpose, either uttered or understood, of bringing in others. Nor can we possibly fulfil that purpose by labouring once in a while, when there is a revival, and when the whole church and all the community are stirred up.

The so carrying our life and nature that we shall

fulfil this duty toward our fellow-men is, I had almost said, indispensable to the experience of those Christian graces which we are all striving for. We are covetous of the gifts of the Spirit ; we are covetous of humility, and meekness, and gentleness, and long-suffering and joy in the Holy Ghost. We not only want these things, but we pray for them ; and the discipline of using our whole sympathy as a power upon other minds is one of those things which stand almost indispensably connected with the development of such special Christian experiences. If you observe, you will see that persons who are eminent in a Christian life are in some way always active in behalf of other men's spiritual condition ; and you will see that men who are active for others are apt, other things being equal, to excel in the difficult and rare graces. It is not a mere accidental juxtaposition of facts. It stands in the relation of cause and effect. We cannot do this work faithfully and continuously without putting ourselves into a condition in which our mind unlocks, as it were, all the mysteries of experience.

One of the first things that suggests itself is the staple and almost hackneyed exhortation of prayer-meetings. There is nothing more common than for Christians to exhort one another to labour for the conversion of men ; and there are hundreds of persons who are disgusted with that treatment of the matter. Then there are many others who feel that they might as well attempt to storm a fort, with sword and musket, as to undertake to storm the human heart, or bring any influence to bear upon it.

In the first place, men are tired of being exhorted to take care of each other's souls. Then they feel that, though it may be some men's duty to look after others' spiritual welfare, it is not theirs.

Now, there is not a man living on the face of the earth who is not accessible, in one or other of his moods, to spiritual influences, as conveyed by his fellow-men. There is not a man so high or strong or wise but that he is accessible by the lowly. There are a great many persons high in station who would not permit an equal or a superior to speak to them on the subject of religion, but who will take very kindly the preaching of a person who makes no pretensions, and whose position and carriage indicate that he comes to them almost reverentially, certainly deferentially. There are some who can only be reached by persons that have "no influence," as the saying is—persons that cannot "speak in meeting;" persons that are not socially their equals; persons that cannot measure understanding with them.

If you go to the door of a great man who has great official influence or power, you will see crowds thronging thither to get access to him: and one can get in because he is the governor of a State; another can get in because he is a senator; another can get in because he controls such and such pecuniary or political influences. But there is a whole swarm of men who cannot get in. One is a merchant, another is a banker, another is a publisher, another is a traveller, and another is something else. They are not known, and are shuffled one side. But while the door is open, and the governor and senator and

influential men are going in, a little dog slips in, because he is a dog. A man would not be allowed to go in, but a dog is.

I would rather go into a great man's heart as a dog, than to be shut out because I was a man. A little man, who does not put too much on himself, and is willing to go in anyhow, oftentimes gets the liberty of slipping in at the door of a man's disposition, when, if he were a great man, he would not be permitted to go in. The trouble is not that you are so humble, but that you are not humble enough. It is because, being little, you are not willing to do the work that a little man can do. If you could only forget yourself; if the thought never came up whether you were big or little; if you had a grateful sense of what Christ has done for you, and a realization of the peril which hangs over a man's head all the time; if you carried the man in your heart night and day, and could not get rid of him, if you prayed for him, and yearned after him, and desired his good, —with that state of mind you might safely venture to go to him. Under such circumstances, do not stop to ask, "Am I fitted to undertake this work?" You will find that out when you have tried. What if you get a rebuff? It will not do you any hurt, and it may do you much good. At any rate, Christ took buffets for our sake; and we ought to be willing to take buffets, not only for His sake, but for others' sakes.

Now, you never will understand the innermost feelings of Christ until you stand related to men just as He did; until you suffer for them; until

you bear them on your very heart; until you are willing, I will not say to lay down your outward life, but to give your life as a power by which they are to be lifted up. And if you are humble, gentle, sincere, and earnest, and are constantly in commerce with souls, dealing with them, persuading them, it will open up a realm of experience inexpressibly sweet and rich. And when a man has once made a beginning in this way, the work will become easier and easier.

The persons that bring the most souls to Christ are not those who have the greatest overt power in the world, but those who are the most gentle, unassuming, earnest, and sincere.

A man says, "Oh! I am not worthy to engage in this work. I do not live worthily enough. I am ashamed to go to persons, because they will say, 'Who are you?'" What if they do? "But they know how I live." Well, that fact will have a powerful influence in making you live better. It will not hurt you nor hinder you. It may do them good, and it certainly will do you good.

But, of all things, do not fall into the conventional way of thinking that you *must* talk religion. You have seen rich men go about rattling their money in their pockets. I can remember standing and looking at great, prosperous men, who used to have their grand hands grandly in their pockets, and rattle their gold and silver. I thought they were immense. And I see men who put their hands in their spiritual pockets, and rattle, and rattle, and rattle their experience in the same way. They have their little

round of talk which they inflict upon everybody. "My friend, how is your soul to-day? What is the state of your feelings to-day? How is religion prospering to-day?" It is excessively distasteful to me, and I should think it would be to other people. That is not the thing. There is more than that.

This ought to be a personal matter. You ought to breathe in on persons as the wind does through the lattice in summer. You ought to make your presence known to them as the honeysuckle by your window tells you it is there by filling the room with its fragrance. Go to persons in your best hours. Go to them when you are under the influence of your sweetest experiences. Go to them when you are under the pressure of trouble. Go to them when the world seems barren and cold. Go to them when those precious revelations come to you which God is working through your business and in your heart. At these times, speak a few words to men. Not on set occasions, not once a year, or once a month, or once a week; but whenever by your business, or your social intercourse, or any trouble, you are brought into a frame of mind in which you can do men good, then go and talk with them. One of the most precious forms of truth is that which it takes from the actual experiences of the heart.

Have you heard of the death of a schoolmate or childhood companion? Does the mystery of life and the mystery of death weigh upon you? Are your feelings deeper? Does the horizon of your



thoughts stretch with wider bounds? Employ that mood for the welfare of others. Do not waste it. Carry it to your fellow-men. God will bless it. It will have power for their good and yours.


Have you buried your own child? Have you laid your own companion in the grave? Are you softened by it? Are your feelings not only deeper, but more solemn? Are you more charitable and more loving? Take that mood, and ask God to enable you out of it to say some things that shall help needy souls. Ask Him to assist you to carry it so that a gospel shall shine forth from it. For these moods are really parts of the gospel. The truth as it lies in the letter is of no use till it is quickened by the Spirit, and it has become an experience in you.

And that you may carry your moods so that they shall speak truths to your fellow-men, and minister to their conversion, watch. There is always a time when a warrior lies down to rest. There is always a time when a man takes off his breastplate. And that is the time to attack him. There is also a time when a man feels as though all the world was worthless. Therefore be on the watch, so as to know when that time comes, in order that you may take advantage of his state of mind to impress upon him religious truths.

We know when to hunt birds and animals. The books tell us when they run, and when they are in the best condition. We study the habits of every species of game, that we may be able to take them at the right time. And if we would study men, if

we would make ourselves acquainted with their times and seasons, if we watched for them as we do for game, what a difference it would make! If in their little spheres, and in their circumstances, all the members of a church like this would take their heart as a torch to light the path of others, the places would soon be too strait to hold the multitudes that would be brought in. And this would not be the best of it. You would be so advanced by such a Christian experience, through the reaction of this work upon yourselves, that year by year you would "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." You never will know the feelings of God till you are doing the work of God toward your fellow-men.

NATURE AND BLESSINGS OF A CHRISTIAN LIFE.

HERE is no way by which you can walk through life so safely and so happily as by the road that Christ trod. To be a Christian is to be a *man*, in the noblest sense of the word. It is to have the best object that is possible for life, the best patterns, the best company, and the best joy. What is the object that a Christian pursues? He is sometimes described as one being built like a temple, that gradually is going up, and being firmly established in beautiful proportions for God to dwell in. He is at other times spoken of as being rooted, or as growing, like a tree that spreads its branches, and develops through years, till it is the sightliest and most beautiful thing in the vegetable kingdom. He is at other times described as being a scholar, and as being taught in the lore of God, and in the laws of right-living.

But whatever the figure is, a Christian is a man that is living to perfect in himself a better manhood. He is living, not to waste his understanding, either

by dissipation or by a selfish and perverse use of it, but to ennoble and use it for the worthiest purposes. He is living to carry higher and higher in himself the moral sentiments—conscience, benevolence, faith, hope, and love. He is living so as to be better. There are a great many persons who are living simply for wealth, or for honour, or for power. A Christian may have wealth and honour and power; but these are not the things that he is living for. He is to become better in every part of his being. The consequence is that he takes the highest rule—that is, God's law—to measure his conduct and disposition by in all the changes of life. However poorly he succeeds here or there, he still keeps that standard before his mind, and strives after it, saying, as the apostle did, "Not as though I had already attained; I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind"—all mistakes, all stumblings, all sins—"and reaching forth into those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Now, to live for the ennobling of one's self inwardly, in consistence with the laws of God—that is to live for the best object; and he who lives thus has the best Guide. The most lenient, the most charitable, the most forbearing, the most patient, the most loving of all guides is the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who follow Him are being built up into the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. And the inspiration, the joy, the settled peace, that at times comes into the soul from a conscious faith in Christ,

an utter trust in Him, is the best company, as well as the best friend that one can have.

Christian brethren, you are witnesses that there is not such friendship, and that there is not such enjoyment in the world as there is in the Church. Here and there you shall find churches that are not true to their calling ; here and there you shall find churches that are dead and dry, and that do not show leaf, or blossom, or fruit. But, taking them at large, if you ask Christian men that have enjoyed most in this world what their greatest joys have sprung from, I think it will be found that they have sprung from those friendships which have grown up in the church, in connection with religious feelings and labours. And it is these joys that are most enduring. The enjoyments of an evening in an exhilarating social meeting, when you look back upon them, though you do not reproach yourself, you regard as transient and perishable ; but, on the other hand, when you look back upon the enjoyments that arise from fellowship in the church, in memory they are as sweet as when they were experienced, and sometimes even sweeter. The recollection of meetings that I have attended here, participating in prayer, and singing, and religious intercourse, grows brighter and brighter, instead of diminishing ; and I go back to the revivals that have taken place in this church, one after another, as the brightest events of my life. And hundreds of our number will bear the same witness. The joys of the soul are joys that never will wear out. They are topics that ever interest. There is no friendship so pure and so un-

sullied as that which is formed by Christians while they travel together homeward toward Zion.

I say these things for the comfort and consolation of all, to bring out the testimony of Christian brethren, and because I have the strongest dislike to holding up before those who are entering the kingdom of God the idea that they are entering into darkness and trouble.

BACK AGAIN.*

WHEN I am once back with you in the prayer-meeting, I feel as though I had got home. The communion of prayer is the most enduring of all intercourse. There are no attachments that come from elective affinities and from personal similarities that can compare, in depth and preciousness and enduringness, with the friendships which spring up among those who meet around the throne of grace. Having Christ in our midst brings down upon us the preciousness of Christ. We learn to see each other in the light of His countenance, and to associate with each other our own higher spiritual joys in such a way that more than the love of kindred is the love which a common faith and a common holy service beget.

Every one who ever laboured in a revival of religion remembers how precious, all his life long, they were who were most with him, and who seemed to him most like the Master. How those who have been born into the Christian life remember those who were with them in strait and trial, and those

* Friday evening, October 1, 1869.

who were born at the same time! What a subtle and enduring charm there is in the memory of those persons who joined the church on the same day that we did! Precious is the pastor's name wont to be by whom we were succoured and brought out of darkness into light through Jesus Christ.

So it comes to pass that in the Christian household we begin to taste the joys of a superior affection, and to learn that in God's house and in His service, even upon the earth, there is a higher relish than the most congenial friendships or the most ardent loves can give. Christ's love is more than all others, and when it sanctifies our love makes it exceedingly precious.

And so churches should be schools of friendship. To a very large extent they are. This church has been. It is impossible that there should be in every member the knowledge of every other member. To suppose that we could form two thousand intimacies would be absurd. So large a membership compels us to break up into circles; and the members of the church find in those that are near them and next to them their appropriate sympathizers and companions. And yet, there is such a general interest one in another, that if you were to meet on a foreign shore, or in a remote part of our own land, one that you knew to be a member of Plymouth Church, though you had never spoken to him, your heart would go out toward him, and you would feel, "He is my kindred." God has so blessed our tarrying together, that many of us are more to each other than brothers and sisters are.

I remember my first coming here. I remember every constituent name in the formation of this church. I remember those who stood around about me in the early revivals of religion here, when we went into the great battle of the Lord. Exceedingly precious are their memories, as well as the memories of those who have gone from us that they might be with Jesus.

And now we begin another term together. My dear Christian brethren, I feel to-night anxious to say but a single word ; and that is, to express the hope that we may strive to serve God this year, not as we have in years before, but with a *higher relish*, with a *better mind*. I will tell you what I mean by that.

I am sorry to say that there is a great deal of religion which is not *gentlemanly*. It is neither refined, nor generous, nor magnanimous. I see a great deal of religion which I consider *dragooned* religion. It is a poor, compulsory, starveling thing. I never hear anybody pray who I believe is afraid not to, that I do not think, "God does not thank you for your prayers." I never see persons come to meeting when I think they wish they could stay away, but suppose they must come, that I do not say to myself, "God does not thank them for coming." That *must* destroys the whole of it, in my regard.

Suppose I should hear a company of young gentlemen saying among themselves, "How long is it since we have been to see Mr. Beecher ? Why, it has been ever so long ! We all understand that it is a disagreeable task ; but then, we ought to go. It looks

badly. What will he think? It will interfere with our prospects. Let us go and be done with it." Do you suppose I would open my door very cheerfully to let anybody in who felt in that way? If they do not want to come, I do not want they should. I may wish they desired to come; but if they do not, I have no desire to see them.

Do you suppose God wants anybody to come to Him who does not want to—who comes grudgingly and reluctantly? If there is ever a time that a heart should render willing and cheerful service, it is when a soul that professes to love Christ, and owes his hope of immortality to Him, comes into His presence.

One of the Mosaic commands was that men should bring for sacrifice and offering only their very best things. No blighted heads of wheat would do. If going out, a man should say, "I must offer a sacrifice to-day, and here is a lamb that, though it is not a very good one, will do for a sacrifice," the old law-giver said, "No; you shall not offer anything that has a blemish. If you are going to offer God anything, you must pick the very best things you have—the best of the wheat, the best of the olives, the best of the doves, the best of the lambs." Nothing but the best was fit for God. I was always thankful for that. It held up a generous idea that must have affected the Jewish service all through.

It should be precisely so with us. Nothing is fit for us to serve God with but our very best things. For instance, if one hour of the day is clearer and more radiant than any other, you must not say,

“There, I cannot spare that hour ; for my business is very perplexing, and this is an hour when I can see daylight through these complex matters ; but when I get back at night, and am so tired that I cannot attend to business, I will pray.” God will not thank you for the parings, the peelings, the chaff, the shucks of your time. If there is an hour when your thoughts are clearer and your affections are stronger than at any other time, take that hour for God. I should be ashamed to say that if you do this you will more than get your pay back again, though you will. I would exhort you, rather, to do it because it is fit, generous, and noble.

Serve God with your best faculties. Serve Him not only with the best times and seasons, but with the best feelings that you have. You never serve God well when you serve Him with fear. There is a fear that is enjoined upon us ; but there is another fear from which we are dissuaded—the fear of the bond-slave, the fear of the prisoner. There is a filial fear which consists of that apprehension which love always has that it will not please, and that fear we are to feel in the presence of God ; but that other fear is not the right feeling to serve God with.

We are to have “a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men ;” but conscience is not the highest faculty. An unfeeling faith—a faith that works by love and its concomitant feelings—these are the states of mind in which we should serve our dear Saviour from day to day. And that we may, we are to take care that we keep our most royal hours and our most golden moods for His service.

If I were to come to your house by chance, and you were at work in your kitchen, I should hope that you would be ladies and gentlemen enough not to apologize. I always have a poor opinion of people who, when I find them at work in the kitchen, are agitated, and say, "I beg your pardon. If I had known you were coming, I would not have been found here." That is where you ought to be; and you need not be ashamed, nor apologize. It is *for* you, rather than against you.

But if you had invited me to your house that you might show me some favour, and you were expecting me, I should not expect that you would invite me into the kitchen, or the garret, or the cellar, but into your best room, if it had not been opened before for a year. I should expect that you would provide your table with your very best things. Not that it is necessary for friendship to have eating and drinking; but the preparing our best things is a testimony and symbolization of our desire and feeling toward our friends.

If we do this toward those whom we esteem among our fellow-men, we certainly ought to do it toward our Saviour. We ought to invite Him into the best room that there is in our heart. We ought not to put Him off with a poor apartment. Nor should we furnish Him with mean or indifferent meals. Whatever the soul can give in its best moods, that belongs to Jesus Christ.

Indeed, I think we ought to live in our best rooms ourselves a good deal more than we do. We owe it to ourselves and our children that we use the best

things we have in the house. Live as well as you can, and accustom your children to as good living as you can afford them. At any rate, in spiritual house-keeping this is eminently desirable. Christians should live in the best rooms that their souls contain, because Christ comes to them every day, and they should be ready at all times to receive Him.

Not that we do not have edifying and excellent meetings; but we ought to have still more precious meetings. One great trouble about prayer-meetings is that people come to them from their workshops—not literally, but figuratively. One comes with all the savour of business on him. Another comes with all the thoughts and associations of his office about him. Another comes with all his desires and ambitions still throbbing in him. Many of you, instead of bringing those influences which fill the room with rich and blessed associations, bring discords or icicles. If you lived more in your higher feelings; if that was where you loved to live; if, the moment the world let go, your mind sprang back into the higher and better spheres of your experience,—then, when we came together, the hour would not be long enough for the singing, and prayer, and discussion, and mingling of joy. But we live too meanly before we come; and then we come like a crowd of beggars, bringing our rags. Even that is better than nothing; it is better to go to prayer-meeting to get warmed than not to go at all; it is better to kindle yourself by the warmth of another man's fire than not to be kindled. But how much better it would be if more of us, as the time of

meeting comes round, would dwell in the Spirit of the Lord all day long, so that we might meet full of tender suggestions, and sweet memories, and holy impulses, and sympathetic desires, and the spirit of prayer! If we lived better out of the prayer-meetings, we should have more glorious times in them. So there would be action and reaction. Good lives out-of-doors would make good meetings, and good meetings would make good lives out-of-doors. They would help each other, backward and forward.

Now, Christian brethren, in the year that is opening before us, it seems to me that while we are to live for the awakening of men, for the succour of men that are perishing, for the salvation of souls that are ready to perish, we ought to pray that our power to do good may lie in the quality and intensity of our own spiritual life. Whatever makes you better will make you more useful. Whatever leads you to live higher, nearer to Christ, with a serener faith, with truer love, with more unflagging zeal, will make you a more able minister among the lost and perishing.

May God bless us in the year upon which we are just entering! October is our January. We begin our new church year the last of September or the first of October. And what a beautiful month October is in which to begin! It is the opal month of the year. It is the month of glory, of ripeness. I love to think that when the summer, with all its fulness of innate beauty, has gone through its course, and is about to die, it knows how to break out with more gorgeous beauty, and die with more glory on

its head than it had in its positive freshness and vernal beauty. And so it should be with Christians. They should be bright and beautiful through all their youthful life, and gorgeous as they grow old and are about to step into the kingdom of God's glory.

We begin again, in this picture month, in this month of the revelation of God's glory in the outward world about us, to pray and work, with the hope that we shall rise by-and-by into that resplendent land from whence we shall go out no more for ever.

YOUR FATHER KNOWETH.*



HAVE sometimes had persons ask me, "What portions of the Bible are most delightful to you?" I am reminded of the answer to a question once propounded to Daniel Webster. He was a great reader of Shakespeare's plays, and was asked which he liked best. He replied instantly, "The one that I read last." It is very much so with Scripture. That portion which distils as the dew from heaven upon the thirsty soul seems for the time the most precious of all Scripture; and which part it is will depend very much upon the want of the man's own feeling, or heart-life.

In times of deep despondency there now and then flash out from passages of God's Word truths which were never suspected before. They are searching. They really enter into our experience. So that many a person has thought, almost, that certain parts must have been written for him. I have known persons to go and read passages to their

* Friday evening, October 8, 1869.

friends, and say, "Does this strike you as it does me?" It seems to them that there is a revelation. If one is suffering from a very cutting bereavement, there sometimes spring up, out of God's Word, passages the meaning of which he never knew before. And what is more remarkable, the same passage will comfort a person two or three times, and it will seem as though each time was the first that it ever comforted him. There is nothing so fresh and original as a grief or a strong emotion of the soul; and it makes everything that fits it seem perfectly original too.

But it was not this that I wished to talk about. I was going to say that one of the always juicy and ripe clusters, to my mind, which hang out of the Scriptures, is that passage which fell from the lips of our Master himself: "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." I love to repeat that one phrase, *your heavenly Father knoweth*. Nobody else knows as God knows. He knows hundreds of things that nobody else can know. He knows many things that nobody else ought to know. He knows many experiences that you will not tell, and many that you do not understand. *Naked and open are you before Him with whom you have to do.* There is no sorrow so deep, there is no darkness so profound, there is no complication of circumstances so entangling, but that you may say, "There is nothing that affects me which my heavenly Father does not know."

If you will take notice of the whole passage, you will see that our Saviour was saying to them, "Do

not be anxious ; and through a spirit of excessive anxiety do not be saying, all the time, 'How shall I get a living?' for that is the meaning of the questions, "What shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" "Do not," said He, "give yourself any concern ; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." When men think of God's taking care of time and eternity, they are apt to feel that He has on hand so much more important business than our clothes and our bread-and-butter that He scarcely can be expected to pay much attention to these things. They are apt to think, therefore, that He remits to natural law the care of physical things, which are scarcely worthy of His own special thought. But God is the most minute housekeeper in the universe. Nobody else knows so well as He what is needed for the meal and for the wardrobe. Nobody else knows so well as He what the till has in it. Nobody else knows so well as He about rent and fuel. Nobody else knows so well as He about the body. He attends to the physical wants of His creatures. He is a Father to us in these respects. And it was apparently with this thought that Christ was pleased to say, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

If, in regard to your great religious experiences, in which your souls were stirred with emotion, Christ had said, "God knows about them," you would have said, "Yes, they are worthy of the Divine knowledge;" but when our Saviour goes down to the lowest point and takes the minimum of life ; when

He goes down to those things which pertain to the every-day using and every-day consumption of this life, and says, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things, so do not be troubled about them," you do not understand how it can be. But the declaration stands, and we might as well accept it.

And if He knows about these things, how much more may He be supposed to know about things that concern you at every step upward—about your affections, about your religious beliefs, about your anxieties and doubts, about your temptations, about your sins and your trials in sinning, about your repentances, about your aspirations, about everything that belongs to Christian life, or to a life that is trying to be a Christian!

That sentence hangs in the heavens like a bell, to me; and every time I take hold of it, it is like a sexton's taking hold of the old church-bell. If I pull it, it rings,—and I hear it every time,—“Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” There is no part of your experience about which you need be afraid to stand and say, “God knows it.”

It is not that God merely knows those things as I know a thousand things when I read my morning paper, running my eye along column after column of advertisements, knowing that they are there, and having a general perception of what they are, but not caring a farthing for them. That is not the way that God knows. And this passage is an argument to relieve from care and suffering those

who trust in God. Our Saviour says, "Even those things which seem least likely to come under God's attention—your clothes and bread—your heavenly Father knows about; so do not be anxious."

A child says to its father, "Mother says we have no bread in the house, and it is Saturday night." "But, my child," says the father, "I know all about that; do not trouble yourself." And what does the child understand, but this,—"I know; I have arranged for it; there is no occasion for anxiety."

I recollect going, once, with my father, a trout-fishing. I went with him many times, but I have a special recollection of this time. After riding a mile or two, we came into a road that was unfamiliar to me. There we stopped, and father hitched his horse—that was always safe to be hitched! He then gathered up his rod and line, and we started across the field. My little soul was not big enough to hold the pleasure that I had in going with father to fish, and I ran and capered on behind him, and behaved myself quite like a little dog.

Father went on throwing his line, without paying much attention to me. He was a natural-born fisherman, and he never threw his line in vain. When we had got across the first meadow, and were climbing over the fence into the second one, a strange fear came over me. We were in an out-of-the-way place, and I did not know the way home; and the thought of being lost frightened me. But I looked back and could see the carriage-top, and that dispelled my fears. So long as I could see the old chaise-top, I had no trouble in trusting my father. And there

are many people who can trust God so long as they can see their way before them.

But by-and-by we got so far that I could not see the chaise-top; and then my fear returned, and I said, "Pa, do you know the way home?" "Yes," he said, and did not pay much attention to me. That made me feel a little better, and I got along very well till we came to the third fence, when my fears were stronger than before, and I came up to father again, and said, "*Pa, do you know the way home?*" "Yes," said he; but it scarcely crossed his mind what the meaning of it was. I was comforted once more, and I went on pitapat, pitapat, again, my heart going pitapat all the time too, until we came to still another fence, where there was a kind of thicket, when I could not stand it any longer, and with tears on my face I cried out, "PA, *do YOU KNOW THE WAY HOME?*" He turned round and put his arms about me, and said, "Why, Henry! I am ashamed of you. Yes, I know the way home. Do you suppose I would take you where I did not know the way?" And he patted me on the head, and parted the hair on my forehead; and I was perfectly content after that.

Now, we are following after our heavenly Father in about the same way. So long as we can see the carriage-top we feel safe; but when there are no landmarks by which we can distinguish our course, we become frightened, and grow short of breath, and say, "Lord, dost Thou know the way?" And He says, "Yes, your heavenly Father knoweth." And we are comforted for a little time. But by-and-by,

when we come where it is thicker and thicker, and our fears return, and increase, we break down, and with tears say, "*Lord, dost Thou know the way?*" And then His Spirit, with infinite tenderness and graciousness, puts its arms about us, and says, "Your heavenly Father knoweth perfectly."

Well, how far may you carry that trust? Just as far as you can carry life. It is a good thing to have sight. That helps faith. But there are emergencies in every man's life in which he can neither have sight, nor memory, nor experience. You must trust God, not because you see the law by which He is going to help you, but simply because He is your Father. And you will never hear it better expressed than it was by him of old, who said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." That is a tenet that will bear a man through almost everything. There is no difficulty, there is no sorrow, there is no threat in the future, there is no impending trouble, that cannot be vanquished by the thought, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and I know that my Father knoweth."

NEARNESS TO GOD.*

Q. Is it not mockery for us to sing the hymn which we have just sung ["Nearer to Thee"], and which is a prayer that we may be nearer to God, unless we really want to be nearer to Him?



HIS hymn, quite aside from its general effect, which is inspiriting, comforting, hope-inspiring, has, all the way through, a supplicatory character. It expresses a yearning for nearness to God.

"Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." But no man is pure, any more than gold in the natural state is pure when it is mixed with a great deal of quartz and dirt. And as gold has to be stamped and ground and smelted before it can be extricated from its natural bondage, so no person ever yet came near to God while in his natural condition. If we come near to Him, it must be by hard, though blessed, dealing.

Now there are many who want the *nearness*, but who do not want the *dealing*. They want the presence of God, and the joy of His salvation; but

* Friday evening, October 22, 1889.

they do not want the steps by which these things are ordinarily secured. So that when persons pray that they may be nearer to God, I sometimes think it is as if a balloon that has been inflated, but that is held down with cords, should grow very tired, and pray for release to the god of the air. The balloon pleads, "Let me ascend;" and, in response, one cord is loosened, and then another, and another; and at the loosening of each cord the balloon groans; and by-and-by, as it begins to go up, it says, "Not that! I did not mean that." It wants to go up; and yet it does not want to leave the ground!

I have heard persons pray God to bring them nearer to Him; and when He commenced to answer their prayer, and struck at vanity, or some other one of the cords that bound them ignobly low, they went back to Him in prayer, and said, "Lord, why is this? Why am I persecuted and treated so! Am I worse than other men, that I should be so dealt with?" There is no voice from heaven; but if there were, it might reply, "Did you not pray to be brought nearer to Me? and is not this which I have smitten the very hindrance that has kept you from Me?"

A man beseeches God not to let the world go over him, but to lift him up to enjoy His salvation for ever. The idol which he worships is Mammon; and God seeks to win him from it. But when he will not be won from it, God breaks his idol, and all his prosperity seems to be overwhelmed; and he goes to God in the utmost perturbation, and prays that He will reveal the mystery of this dealing. And yet, is it anything but the answer to his

prayer? He prayed for that which could be had only by certain courses; but he does not want the courses.

A sick child wants to get well; but when he tastes the bitter medicine he does not want to take that. A sluggard longs for riches, but he does not want industry. An intemperate man wants to be temperate, but he cannot give up the cup. And so men, in prayer, from day to day are asking God for that which, when He is disposed to give it, they resist, and put away, and do not want.

God is good to us in that He does not answer our prayers suddenly. We could not bear to have the answer given all at once, so He administers it little by little, tempering His administration to our weakness and necessity. This praying for grace, for nearness, and for elevation of soul, is glorious, but it is dangerous. You do not know how God will take you.

Domestic animals deal with their young very much as God deals with us. When a cat of mine had little kittens, and we went to look at them, she was disturbed to think we knew where they were, and, determined to convey them to some other place where they would be safe, took hold of them, one after another, by the neck, and after seven or eight attempts, to get hold so that the teeth would not hurt, carried them off to the barn, and hid them. And these kittens, if they could have reasoned, might have thought it was rather rough treatment.

Now God sometimes takes us, as it were, by the neck, with the teeth of His providence, and we cry

out as if we thought we were going to be devoured. We think we are in the jaws of a dragon, when we are only under the dealings of our heavenly Father. And when the work has been completed, and we have been released from what seemed to us a monster, who ever said that the teeth met, or that the skin was torn, or that he had suffered in the portage? It seemed like rough usage; but the end justified the means, and there was kindness all the way through.

Q. You have quoted the passage, "Blessed are the pure in heart." The trouble is that our hearts are not pure. The consequence is that the streams that flow from them are not pure. How shall we cleanse our hearts, so that there shall be pure streams flowing out from them?

It is a comfort to know that there is a way. A case in point is found in the history of John. John, apparently, was one of the most irascible of the disciples. He was the one who, when walking with Christ, asked that He might bring down fire from heaven on the villagers because they would not receive the Master. When people do not do as we would like to have them, or as we think they ought to do, we are apt to burn them with our tongue—to afflict them with a fiery temper. It was much the same way with John. And see how he was changed. From being fiery and hot as the sun at midday in summer, he became most gentle, serene, and sweet. There is a way to get a pure heart; but a man must want it enough to get it. There are three degrees of want. We may want a thing only so far as to wish we had it, or even so far as

to feel unhappy without it, or, finally, so far as to put forth the effort necessary to acquire it. And in our growth in grace we frequently go far enough to make ourselves extremely uneasy, but not far enough to achieve complete victory.

Listen to a portion of Scripture which has a bearing on this general subject :—

“ Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith [the One who inspires these desires, and who will take care of them]; who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

There was the victory at last; but He had to come to it by the cross, and through a long period of suffering on earth.

“ For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children. My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

DIFFICULTIES OF PRAYER.*



HERE is no characteristic of the new life more striking than the disposition which it develops in us to prayer. *Behold! he prayeth*, may almost be said to be the description of the beginning of the Christian life. If there is anything in religion, it consists in the soul's taking hold of God by faith, affectionately, lovingly. It consists in our appropriating God in some way to ourselves. And this personal acquaintance, if one may call it such, must have some mode of intercourse. The moment we are conscious that we are reconciled to God, and begin to feel that we are His sons, it seems impossible but that there should arise spontaneously some thoughts and feelings toward Him. It is about this point that a great many difficulties cluster; and I have thought that to-night I would say a few words on the subject of the difficulties of prayer—private prayer, family prayer, and public prayer in our social meetings.

* Friday evening, October 29, 1869.

A great many persons experience no difficulty whatever. The moment they begin to be Christians, they feel that they have a right to call God their own. Their hearts rise up toward Him, and prayer is the natural language almost of their experience. Although they have, as it is said, their *clouded days*, yet these are not the result of difficulties in this direction.

I suppose there are gifts of prayer that inhere in the original construction of the mind. As there are gifts of poetry, gifts of oratory, gifts of art, gifts of reasoning, and gifts of moral sentiment; so the devotional tendency which expresses itself in prayer is a matter of original birth, and there are praying natures. I have known persons to pray who made no pretension to being Christians. I know some very wicked men who have had lucid intervals, as it were, when they feel the strongest disposition to pray. It is but little more than a constitutional impulse in their case. It works no special benefit. It shows, however, the drift of a strong natural tendency in them.

But these cases are rare and exceptional. For the most part, praying is like speaking a foreign language. We have to learn to feel and think, and at first we speak broken language, and come to speak better and better as we practise.

This will throw light upon one of the difficulties which persons have when they first begin to pray, especially those who have not had the advantage of early religious culture, or have not been where they were taught to pray, or have practised praying but

little. They say, "If I am a Christian, why do I not love to pray? I pray because it is my duty, but I do not love it. When I hear other people pray, and speak of their enjoyment, I am confident that they and I are in different spheres of experience."

There may be many reasons why you do not like to pray. One may be that you really are not a Christian, and cannot speak the language of Canaan. Another reason may be that you have not learned to pray in a manner that is adapted to you. It may be that you undertake to employ forms of speech which to you are unbecoming. You remember how David attempted to fight the battle with Goliath in Saul's armour, how he found it too large and too heavy for him, and how he went back and got his simple sling, with which he slew the giant. Many of you make a similar mistake in praying. You try to pray as the minister does, or as some elder or class-leader does, or as some fluent brother does, and you do not succeed. You try to walk in the prayer of another person who has had more experience than you have, and it rattles about you as Saul's armour did about David. It is a world too big for you. It does not fit you anywhere. I do not wonder that you do not want to pray under such circumstances. If, imitating David, who went back to the sling, the simplest of all weapons, you would be content to pray as a little child, if you would go back to lisping monosyllabic prayers, you would have less difficulty, and would like prayer better.

If a man is in trouble, and he says, "Oh, help me!" that is a prayer. One single sentence is a prayer from a burdened heart. Even interjections are prayers. Sighing may be praying. If you are in distress, if you are tempted, if you have a special grief, if you are in any way carrying a yoke or a burden, just put your prayer on that spot; and do not try to make a good prayer, but be willing to make a poor one, as you consider it, and you will experience much more comfort in your devotions. Never mind how your prayer begins, or how it ends. Most of our prayers would be a great deal better if we were not so particular about the beginning and ending. Let your prayer be the upspringing and bursting forth of your real feelings. Prayer, at the beginning of the Christian life, and all the way through, is more or less interjectional. And such prayer is more apt to be sincere, and to strike at the centre of real want, and to be free from sham, than almost any other.

"Should young people, then," you will ask, "be encouraged to avoid hours and places of prayer, and led to feel that they need only pray when they feel like it?" No; very far from it. It is better that there should be set occasions and places; only there must be no feeling of bondage. You must learn to make the hour of prayer and the place of prayer sweet. If the sweetness does not come in one way, it must in another. At any rate, there must be freedom from bondage in the matter. You must not go to God as to a hard yoke or a heavy burden. A yoke that is not easy, or a burden that is not

light, is neither acceptable to God nor profitable to you. And in by far the greatest number of instances where you set apart time and place for devotions, and regularly observe them, they will soon become attractive. And when the habit is once formed, it will become one of the most delightful experiences of your life, and will be a source of amazing comfort to you. It will be like the bath in the morning and at evening, which cools and cleanses and exhilarates the body. There should be no day without prayers, and many of them ; and if there be set occasions of prayer, in the morning, at evening, and even at noonday, as is the case with some, the soul loses no time. The old proverb is, "He that prays well studies well ;" and you may say that he who prays well works well, and does everything better.

But do not overdo this. Do not suppose that you can fill up any certain amount of time with your devotions, to the greatest profit. Do not feel that you must read a whole chapter or pray fifteen minutes every day. I began with that idea, and began wrong. It was according to my temperament and disposition to carry things to excess. I meant to pray seven times a-day. I did it for a time very faithfully ; and I need not say that it was not wise. Still, there might have been more foolish things than that. If you set out to pray by your watch, the probability is that your watch will pray as well as you do. You want to lose the mechanical element. There must be liberty and congeniality in prayer. Of all things do not let it

be gloomy. Let everything about it be agreeable. If I were to begin again with my present feelings, I would have some sweet nook where the sun shone into the window, and I would have a pot of flowers for my eye to feed upon, and I would kneel down, or sit, or stand, as the case might be, and I would make that place a heart-place, dear to me in all my tastes and affections, and out of that I would day by day love my Saviour, and make the season one of love and joy.

Do not suppose that prayer is not for you because you have tried to pray once or twice and failed. If you were learning to make a watch, you would not give up because you could not succeed in a week. Before you can make a watch, you must serve an apprenticeship; and persons must *learn* how to pray. The knowledge comes little by little, by "patient continuance in well-doing."

When persons begin, they cannot ordinarily pray for a great breadth and variety of things; and their prayers should be brief. This general direction, if followed, will relieve many from *wandering thoughts*, as they are called. Such thoughts are a protest of nature against your conventional prayers. You commence praying, and go on till you have said all you have to say, and then you try to go farther, and the consequence is that your thoughts wander. If you would stop when you have no more to say, no matter how short the prayer may have been, you would cease to be troubled with wandering thoughts. If you have but little to say, say it, and let that suffice. It is not for you to pray any longer than

your heart dictates. Make short prayers, and your thoughts will not be tempted to wander. I do not believe a man ever had any difficulty in this respect who said, "God save me from temptation!" I do not believe the publican, when he said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" had wandering thoughts; but if he had prayed for an hour, his thoughts *might* have wandered.

Let your prayers be very simple in so far as they are praise; very simple and brief in so far as they are supplication, compassing the want that swells in you at the time; and in so far as they are communion, no longer than just sufficient to enable you to give forth what your soul really has in it. If it is but little, then be satisfied with that little. Remember that you are praying to Him who commended the widow because she gave two mites, and said that she put in more than all they that put into the treasury, because they put in "of their abundance," while she put in "all her living." If a great rich nature prays an hour, he does not pour out so much in proportion to what is in him as a lispng, sighing nature does in sincerely uttering one single sentence from the heart in prayer to God.

You pray to a generous God, to a lenient God, to one who loves you better than you love yourself, to one that would fain take you up in His arms, while you are praying, and help you. His "Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Now, one word as to prayer in the family. I

mean, not simply the prayer of father or mother, as the case may be, but prayer where you are called, in the family, under any circumstances, to lead in prayer in behalf of others. Never refuse to take up your cross in this regard. I have known parents who, as they were about to come into the church, felt that they must "set up the family altar," as the phrase is; and they knelt down to pray, and, never having heard their own voice in prayer before, they trembled and broke down and could not go on. And then the devil said to them, "Pretty business you are making of it! I advise you to attend to something that you can do better than this." And they got up in disgust, and said, "I am making a fool of myself."

Now, a child that, when it commences walking, totters and falls, does not make a fool of itself. A boy in school that forgets his French, and cannot recite his lesson, does not make a fool of himself. And you do not make a fool of yourself, if, when you first attempt to pray in your family, you do not succeed. You rather excite gentle compassion in God. Do you suppose you have a scoffing God and sneering angels as listeners, when you make a halting broken prayer? Suppose you do break down, that is only an argument for your trying again. What kind of a life have you been living, what sort of habits have you formed, that the first time you undertake to gratefully recognize in your household the providence and kindness of God, you should give up because you stumble and fall down? It ought to be an argument not of discouragement,

but of persistence. You ought to say, "By the help of God, I will persevere, and do my duty."

In this matter, I would affectionately exhort every man or woman who is asked in any household to pray not to refuse. You are in a boarding-house, and it is said to you, "There is nobody here to lead in family devotions. I understand that you are a member of the church. Perhaps you would be willing to read and pray." You have never done such a thing. Here are all these boarders; there are clerks among them; you do not know what they will say or do; and everything in you says, "I cannot!" Here is an opportunity for you to serve your Master. And you do not know but God will bless your poor prayer. You do not know but it will be blessed, not only to your good, but to the salvation of many others. And you never should shrink when the cross is manifestly laid on you. This is a case in which I can say unhesitatingly, "Stand up for Jesus, and be faithful to the call of God's providence."

I knew an instance in Chilicothe. A plain and humble man was visited by one of the first lawyers of the whole region, who spent the night with him. In the morning he, being a Christian, had a great struggle as to whether he would not omit family prayer; for this lawyer was a sceptical man, and a man of great learning and eloquence. But, although vehemently tempted, this plain humble Christian man said, timidly, on rising from the table, "Sir, it is our custom to read a portion of Scripture, and follow with prayer; and we should be happy to

have you join with us if you please." "Certainly," said the lawyer—for he was a gentleman. And the man read from the Bible, and knelt down and prayed. That day the lawyer went home, where, providentially, a powerful revival was in progress, and at night he went to meeting; and when persons were requested to rise for prayers, to the amazement of all present, whom a thunderbolt would not have astounded more, he rose. And the result was that he was converted. And in bearing his testimony, he said: "In staying over night with this man, whom I knew to be a plain man, and in no respect superior to ordinary men, and seeing him take his Bible, and read, and then kneel down and pray, and knowing how much he must suffer in doing it, I knew he had something that I lacked." Having come under the influence of this man, and been impressed by his fidelity to his religion, he was led to think; thinking led to feeling; the more he thought, the deeper he felt; and he went to this meeting, asked for prayers, and was converted, and became a very influential man in the church.

Now suppose this man had shrank from his duty. The lawyer would have gone away, very likely, sneering and saying, "What sort of a religion is that which will not stand before the face of man? I went to that man's house, and stayed over night, and though he professes to be a Christian, and belongs to the church, he did not have family prayers." No matter if a man can only make a poor prayer, he should be faithful even under such circumstances.

In family prayer, except in cases where families

are away in the wilderness, and the children get all their religious instruction at the family altar, it seems to me that the services should be very brief, morning or evening, or both, as the case may be. We ought to have regard for the infirmities of the weak. The servants and little children ought not to dread the hour of prayer. It ought to be made so sweet and pleasant that they shall look forward to it with delight. It is your business to think, not of yourself, but of those for whom you are officiating. There ought to be no place so dear to a family as the throne of grace. And every day the father and mother, with the children about them, should have prayers. It is a sad thing for children to grow up in a household where there is no such thing as prayer at any time in the day. It is not right for the children; it is not right toward God nor toward man.

When you are away from home, and are asked to take part in prayer under circumstances that embarrass you, that is the time for you to be faithful. Everybody can run down hill, but it takes a *man* to run up hill. What is a religion worth that can conform to everything that is easy and natural and agreeable, but cannot stand in emergencies? When God brings you into places where your natural feelings tend to shrink, that is a time for you to show that you are acting on principle, and not on pleasing impulse.

In public prayer, at conference and prayer-meetings, as a general rule there should be brevity and

simplicity, and there should always be fidelity and such fervour as you really have. The great trouble with people in public prayer is that they are not willing to make poor prayers, and they cannot make good ones. Just as soon as a man is willing to become a fool for Christ's sake, the difficulty is out of the way. The moment a man says, "I know that my utterance is poor; I know that my thoughts run all sorts of ways; I know that my prayers cannot be edifying; but still, if my brethren ask me to pray, I shall pray, my poor prayer being all the offering I can make"—the moment a man says that, he will have no further trouble.

The service of the temple, in olden times, required that when a mother brought her child to thank God for its deliverance from sickness, she should offer a lamb and a dove; but if she was so poor that she could not afford both, then she brought simply a dove. The Lord calls for the firstlings of the flock; but if you are so poor that you cannot carry them, He will take a bird, or anything that you have to give. Carry according to what you have.

If you excuse yourself from praying in meeting, and say, "How can I stand up among my brethren and make a prayer? I am so unlettered that I can hardly speak the king's English, and any prayer that I could make would be poor indeed," nevertheless, if you are called upon to pray, perform the duty according to that which is in you. If your brethren want the benefit of your gift, exercise it. And do not let your pride make you believe that you are humble. Do not say, "Oh, if I could only do some-

thing worthy, I would not decline! but I am so humble—"Humble! It is the very quintessence of pride! There are more persons who are proud in their humility, a thousand times, than men suppose.

I had a good lesson from my father, once, in this very matter. I had lectured for him under circumstances that mortified me a good deal. I made such poor work that I felt bad about it all the next day; and I said to father, "I feel perfectly humbled." "Humbled!" said he; "I wish you *did* feel humbled. It is nothing in the world but *mortified pride!*" It *was* mortified pride, though I tried to persuade myself that it was humility.

There are many persons who will not pray on account of mortified pride. Oh that their pride might be humbled and lowered! Oh that they might feel a sense of their obligation!

Q. What advice would you give in regard to prayer, to a person who was conscientious, honest, desiring to do right, not scoffing religion, rather desiring it, but still not a Christian, not loving Christ, not having a sense of prayer, and not understanding how the great God, who sees the end from the beginning, can listen to prayer?

If there is anything laid down over and over again in the Bible, it is that God is a hearer of prayer. The question which a man should ask himself is, Have I anything to do in the way of praying? And I hold that a man may pray who is not a Christian. I hold that the prayers of persons who are not converted are heard—some of them at least. Prayer cannot be to such persons that work of affection which it is to a truly Christian man; but may not a man who has fallen into the water cry out,

even to his enemy, "Help me!" And may there not be supplication to God for help to enable one to clear his mind? How was it when Christ was on earth? Did He wait till people were good before He would listen to their petitions? Did He wait for people to heal themselves before He would do anything for them? Look at the example of Christ, and see where and how He took people, if you want to know how and where He takes them now. Let anybody pray that feels the need of prayer.

I should say, decidedly, that a man might pray who was honest, and who at times almost believed that God did hear prayer, but who, on the whole, could not say that he fairly believed.

Suppose I was sick, and did not know exactly what to do for myself; and suppose I had been told that the doctor had gone into the country with his family, and suppose I credited the statement. That would not prevent my going to his house to see whether I had been correctly informed. I say to myself, "He may be at home, after all. I will go and ring, anyhow." My impression is that he is not there; but when I ring, to my joyful surprise he opens the door himself. I say, "Why, doctor! I thought you were in the country." "Well," says he, "I have been, and got back, and I should have been there again in the morning." Here is a case in which I do not really believe, but in which I go and see. And I say that even if a man does not believe that God hears prayer, it is worth his while to try praying and see. The answer may be the means of opening his eyes or softening his heart.

Q. Suppose I should go to you and say, "Mr. Beecher, I am going to ask you to do me a favour, but I do not believe you will do it?" Would it not be an insult? Is not that question answered by the apostle in a way that cannot be dodged, where he says, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him"? Would it not be an insult to God for a man to pray to Him who did not believe in Him?

It is absolutely and philosophically true that a man cannot pray in the true spirit of prayer who does not believe in God, and come to Him as if he expected He would hear him. That covers the general flow of prayer. But we are supposing the case of one who is not a Christian, and does not believe in God; and the question is whether such a person *may* go to God in prayer.

Now, God represents Himself in Christ as going forth to *seek* and to *save*. He *goes after* men. It is that God who does not wait for men to do right, but goes to them while they are yet in the wrong, loving them while they yet hate Him, and having a heart toward them while they are yet His enemies—it is *that* God that I am speaking of. And to that great Physician who goes to men so stained through with disease that they do not even know how to take medicine, and rouses them up, and gives them the medicine against their willingness to take it—to that God a man may go experimentally and say, "O God!—if there is a God—bless me." Though it is wrong when viewed in one point, yet remedially and experimentally, and in the light of that mercy of God's great nature which does exceeding abundantly more than we deserve not only, but than we *ask or think*, it is profitable to do it. And I would rather that a man who does not, on the

whole, believe there is a God, would once in a while pray, to see what it would do, than that he should go down to hell without a word of supplication.

I therefore say to men, *Pray*. Though your prayer be poor, and though your whole state of mind be bad, *very* bad, yet you are praying to a God whose mercy and love are so great that He saves men from their sins—not on account of their doing right, but on account of His own infinite goodness.

THE BROODING LOVE OF CHRIST.



HERE is no possibility of living right without a sense of duty. The element of duty should underlie every experience of life. Yet it is a product of the conscience which alone will never make a man happy. It is not in the nature of duty or conscience to afford gratification. It is not possible that a man should derive satisfaction from following a strict line of duty. The spirit of duty, where it is magnified, specialized, intensified, seldom brings as much satisfaction as it does care and anxiety. It is the union of trust, springing from love, or love including trust, with the spirit of duty, that gives at once fidelity and ease of mind.

There are a great many persons who are very good-natured and very happy : but they are not broad ; they are superficial ; they are not dutiful. They have an easy, good-natured trust, which does not mean much, except that they have a pleasant temperament. They have a certain kind of satisfaction, but it is not a moral state. They do not do much that is wrong, and they do not do much that is good.

On the other hand, there are many persons who

are exceedingly punctilious about their duty, who are very anxious to do right ; but they are far from being happy. They are more frequently consumed by bitter retrospect, and by fears in regard to the future, than by any other feelings.

The great art of living Christianly is to have conscience for the undertone, and to have love for the upper, and, if possible, for the stronger experience. And I do not know how these conditions can be secured without an active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If your God is a being afar off—if He is an unformed, inaccessible Father—if He is a merely ideal Jehovah—you may fear Him ; through the imagination you may comprehend Him in various ways ; but I do not see how you can love Him. I do not think any man can take a cloud to his bosom and love it ; and this abstract idea of God is but little more than a cloud.

It pleased God to take on the form of a man, chiefly, among other reasons, doubtless, to present the Divine Spirit in just that aspect in which we are accustomed to look at being. We can imagine Christ, because we are at liberty to frame Him as a man. And believing Him to be God—very God, equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit—we are able by the imagination to transfer Him to the heavenly state, and conceive of Him there ; whereas a spiritual being, that is outside the limit of the senses, we cannot take hold of except in a vague way, because we have had no experience such as is peculiar to spiritual beings. And vagueness does not breed love. Love springs from definite appre-

hensions. And the attributes of God, so far as we are competent to apprehend them, are represented by the Lord Jesus Christ.

A great many ways have been tried of presenting Christ so that He shall be lovely to us. He is represented as the *suffering* Saviour; He is represented as the *triumphing* Saviour; He is represented as the *ever-living* and *ever-reigning* Saviour: and there is much reason for joy and gratulation in these various aspects.

But I have been thinking all the week of one figure that our Saviour Himself used, which has brought Him very near to me. As He sat looking upon Jerusalem, with a multitude about Him, and talking to His disciples, or rather soliloquizing, He alluded, not to what He had done, but to what He felt that it was in Him to do. He said, "Often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" That was the feeling He had.

I have on my farm one hen that has twenty chickens, and several that have from twelve to fifteen each. All together, I have some two hundred chickens running about up there; and I have seen the brooding process in all its stages. Simply as a feature of natural history, it is extremely interesting; but it is interesting to me also because it reminds me of the words of Christ which I have quoted. I like to look at those things which God has laid His hand on in the Bible, and stained through with familiar truths. The clouds tell me some things; the winds tell me some things; the trees tell me some things; the rocks tell me some

things; the blossoms tell me some things; the thorns tell me some things; the birds that fly, and the very hens, tell me some things.

The hen is really one of the most simple creatures that ever lived, and in some respects she is one of the most helpless. Yet there are some things that are extremely beautiful in the actions of a hen. For instance, if a chicken following her gets tangled in the bushes, and peeps piteously, she stops, and, though all the rest of the brood go on, runs back to see if she cannot in some way extricate that chicken. But she cannot. If it is a hawk, she cannot fight. If one of her chickens gets in a ditch the wrong way, and cannot get out, she will wander around it all day; but she can do nothing to relieve it. A poor mother she is. But it is the *disposition*, the *feeling*, that I look at.

The hen diligently hunts after food for her little flock; and if, as she scratches, she sees a most tempting worm, it is not for her, but for her chickens. She forgets herself in caring for them. The moment they begin to be tired, she seems to know it, and seeks a corner where the wind does not blow, and settles down, expanding her wings. And one after another the little wretches come running to her and nestle under her. And then come their little peeps and her cooing. It is the very spirit of domesticity that the scene exhibits; and I never see it that I am not reminded of the tenderness and love which Christ manifested toward His enemies—toward those that He knew were about to shed His blood—when He said, "How often would I have gathered thy

children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

To-day I saw the same thing in birds. I was at work among my grape vines, when my attention was attracted by two robins that were making a great noise. I was sure by their actions that they had young ones which they thought to be in danger. And I said, "Why, you old fools! I won't hurt you nor your little birds." Just then I heard a noise that I recognized; and I said, "The cat is here." And sure enough, looking down, I saw the cat curled up under the trellis. It was the sight of him that had set the birds all agog. "What is he doing here?" I asked. He had no business there; and all the more because I had just written an article saying that my cats had been so brought up that I did not believe any of them hunted birds! In my indignation I seized him by the neck, and walked off with him to the other side of the cherry-orchard, and gave him an opportunity to see how it would seem if he were flying; and I sent one or two stones after him by way of application.

Well, about a rod from where I had been standing, in a dwarf cherry-tree crotch, two feet from the ground, there was the nest of these birds, and in it were four robins. The cat had gone out there, and, of course, did not know that the nest was there, or it would have been destroyed. The birds, to whom nothing was so precious as that nest and its contents, inspired by the feeling of fear, were flying round the cat to deceive him as to where the nest was, and endeavouring to draw him off as far as

possible from their young—at times perilling their own lives that they might save them from destruction. Look at that faithfulness, that fearlessness, and that love in those birds, which should lead them to put themselves where they were in danger of being stricken by the cat's paw, rather than that their little unfledged things should receive harm.

When I see these things, I say, "Where did that instinct of love come from, which we see throughout the world? Worms take care of worms, hogs take care of hogs, birds take care of birds; and as you rise in the animal kingdom, the instinct becomes stronger and stronger. And where did it come from?" We see the same feeling exhibited among human beings under the name of the *parental instinct*. And what are these various manifestations but so many fingers pointing upward, and saying, "The great God that made us, and taught us to love, is Himself the great Lover? He broods over the universe. He looks after all those that are imperilled or in need." They are signs and symbols of God's nature; and I find no difficulty in resting on a God with such a nature. If the line were laid on my conduct, I fear it would be zigzag from day to day; but I have a God whose heart is large enough to take me in, with all my faults and imperfections;—God over all, blessed for ever—*my* God! And so I can live by faith—that faith which works by love; and I can look upon my sins and my faults, and yet not feel cast down, because of the greatness, and love, and faithfulness of God.

CONCEIT OF CHRISTIANS.*



HERE is apt to grow up in us a conceit in reference to our work. We get on the wrong side of our own labour oftentimes. We think we have given a good deal when we have watched and prayed long and earnestly for others, when we have given time and money, when we have suffered buffet. Our pride or vanity hardly fails to keep a little account of these things. And we rather assume the air of benefactors. We think, "How much have I done!" And sometimes there is the language of complaint: "Why should one who has done so much as I have be treated as I am?" There is a kind of injured innocence that we put on.

Now, there never was a person that did anything worth doing, who did not really get more than he gave. This is pre-eminently true where the good which you do is less and less physical, and more and more moral and spiritual; but no man ever rendered discreetly even any bodily service to another, that

* Friday evening, November 5, 1869.

he was not more blessed than that other. No man ever discreetly gave away a dollar, that that dollar did not make him happier than it did the recipient. No person ever watched with the sick, sympathized with the sorrowing, or carried burdens and bore cares for other people, who, if he would scrutinize his experience, would not say, "The happiness that it gave me more than repaid me for all my trouble."

A mother has, perhaps, the hardest earthly lot. Her life is one perpetual emptying of herself of her own convenience in behalf of her little child, that for many years can return nothing, and can never make any adequate return, for her care of it. There is no other instance of such spontaneous and thorough emptying of one's own nature for another that we know of in this life. And yet no mother, worthy of the name, ever gave herself thoroughly for her child, who did not feel that after all she reaped what she had sown.

No person was ever called to suffer for a principle, and suffered manfully, that he was not himself conscious that he was a victor. When your name is cast out, and trodden under feet of men; when you are counted as the offscouring of the earth for faithfulness to duty, do you not experience a peculiar joy? Can you not then understand what the apostle meant when he said, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations"?

I am speaking of the qualities that are infused into the essential character of a person by doing the work of the Lord in this world; and I affirm that

any bounty which you have conferred on others blesses you as well as it does them.

That is not all. The biggest end comes to the benefactor. In other words, it is a large exemplification of that exquisite sentence of Christ, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." I consider that to be the key-note, the interpreting principle, of the new life which is wrought in us by the Spirit of God, and by the power of Divine love. It is the very interpretation of the reign of love in the soul.

A man has had a class in Sunday school that has tried his temper, tried his faith, tried his courage; but he has stuck to it, and would not give it up. And some have fallen off; and of the others, some have remained on his hands for two years without seeming to get any better. And he thinks he is deserving of great praise. He pats himself, and takes to himself credit that he has been so faithful under such discouraging circumstances. He says, "I have taught this class now for two years, under circumstances of great discouragement; and ought I not to be praised?"

Why, my dear sir, those children have taught you a thousand times more than you have taught them. They have done you more good than you could do them. The records of the other world will show that noble principles—great essential qualities of true manhood—have been developed in you, and that the fountains of patient, disinterested benefaction have been cleansed in you, by the influence of this class upon you. You are a hundred times more like the Lord Jesus Christ than you would have

been but for them. The benefits which you have derived from your efforts to instruct and elevate them have been multitudinous. You have your remuneration. There is no person in this world that so uniformly takes his pay as he goes along, as he who does good at the expense of his own comfort and convenience.

It is poor water that will not run down hill. The person who will not do good when it is easier to do good than not to do it, I call a very poor Christian indeed. Doing good under such circumstances does not amount to much either. That is a poor engine that can only drive water through hose or pipes down hill. A good engine is one that can lift large quantities of water up steep acclivities. Those vast giants of iron at the Ridgewood Water-works, which supply this city, day and night, easily lifting a ton of water at every gush, so that all the many thirsty faucet-mouths throughout our streets cannot exhaust their fulness,—those are the engines that I admire.

There are many Christians that can pump down hill; and they are very conceited frequently, and say, "See what I am doing. See the pulsations of my heart. Stand out of the way!" But anybody can do all that they are doing. It requires no grace to stand and do good where doing good is spontaneous. But let a man's heart, like a mighty engine, night and day, against strength, against power, labour for others until there is developed in him a moral spontaneity such that his benefactions are unconscious, involuntary,—and is there anything that could have happened that would have been so great

a blessing to him as the growth in true and noble manhood which he has achieved ?

God's mercies come more frequently in the form of sufferings than in the form of joys. God sends His cross to men to develop their essential manhood. As the life of the world was in the cross of Christ, so still the life of individual souls resides in pains and penalties. Christ bore sufferings, and carried sorrows, and dispossessed Himself of all His joy, that He might lay the foundation for happiness in others. It is what has gone out of Him, in the form of truth and influence and benefactions of various kinds, that has made you what you are, by the grace of God.

So then, my dear brethren, let us avoid conceit, even though we may have done a great deal. I do not believe anybody, with a generous nature, ever did any good, that the first effect on himself was not to make him feel, "How little I have done! and how poor is what I do!"

When I think of what a work it is to build up a human soul, and what an opportunity God's kind grace has given me for doing it; when I think what a God I have had, and what a Saviour I have had, and what advantages have been vouchsafed to me, I feel ashamed and humbled to think that I have done so little work in the Lord's vineyard, and have done it so poorly. My opportunities have been vast, and my performances, compared with what I should have done, and might have done, have been very meagre and poor. And I think mine is not a singular experience. You probably feel the same

way. You never in the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ do anything, that you do not feel, "It is not as good as I wish it were."

A little child brought me, one day, some flowers. He evidently did not know much about flowers. He said he picked them by the wayside. Some were savoury, and some were not so savoury; but as he handed them to me, he said, "They are the best I could find." He showed that he would have been glad to give me better ones, though he had only a vague idea of what "better" was in my case. There was just the beginning of generosity in the child manifesting itself through taste; and his feeling was, "I wish they had been better flowers."

Now, you never carried flowers to one whom you loved without feeling that better flowers were deserved by that one. You never did anything for one who was dear to you, without feeling that the service was far less than you fain would have had it. And no man ever suffered for the Lord Jesus Christ, or served Him with any worthiness at all, without saying, "I have not done half so well as I would like to do." There is such superiority, such gentleness, such sweetness, such sympathy, such patience, such faithfulness of love, in Christ, that one is ashamed of the best service he can render Him, it is so far beneath His desert. In serving the Lord Jesus Christ, the more you suffer, and the more you deny yourself, the greater is the evidence which you give of love for Him.

If I hear that a friend is sick, and it is a balmy summer's day, and he lives enshrined in beauty, and

I visit him, I give no special proof of love ; but if one lives in great poverty, and I am greatly pressed for time, and it is in the night, and a storm is raging, and I, in spite of excessive occupation, give up my pleasure and convenience and interest, and go to the squalid bedside of this poor person, and extend to him sympathy and succour, I *do* give evidence of love,—more than if I were serving a crowned head. Therefore, “endure hardness as a good soldier,” and remember that the more you give the more you get.


Still, do not give for the sake of getting. Do not make commerce of your hearts.

Our joy sometimes comes to us in an unexpected way. I enjoy my work. I have fallen into a profession that agrees with me. I run with the current all the time. But, after all, I now and then get an instalment of remuneration that I do not expect. I never shall forget an incident that took place last week when I was in Hartford. I had stepped out into the street, and was about to get into a coach, when a plain woman, apparently in the ordinary circumstances of life, about thirty years of age, with a girl of ten or twelve, approached me, and seized one of my hands in both of hers with a convulsive motion, and pressed my hand with her two, and said, in a broken, agitated way, “Mr. Beecher, I *must* take you by the hand. I want to tell you what you have done for me. I was nothing but a poor sewing-woman”—and then she dropped my hand and ran. That is all I know about it ; but that is a good deal.

She was evidently a person of sensibility, and there was the mark of good sense about her. She would not have overcome the instinct of reserve so far as to catch hold of a person's hand in the street, and break out into that kind of revelation of herself, if she had not had great reason. There is a history there, though I do not know what it is; and I feel as though there was something laid up somewhere for me. I had part of it then.

Oh, to have helped a soul is a great thing! and when a man knows how to strike the deep places of the heart, and sees the response, there is no joy so pure, so lasting, or so unselfish, as that which he experiences. You may plant as many spiritual seed as you please in this world, and every one of them will spring up into everlasting life; and you shall see its fruit hereafter.

CONSOLATION IN TROUBLE.*

VERYBODY has to pass through his discipline in this life. Some take it in the inside, and some on the outside. It is this discipline which, like the sculptor's chisel and mallet, brings out the Divine likeness—so much so that any man who is without it, either externally or internally, is renounced and denounced of God, who calls him a “bastard,” and says, explicitly, that every man who has a true, Divine manhood reaching out and taking hold of the qualities and dignities and promises and prospects of the Divine nature, has to go to school to trouble—must have affliction.

There are some men whose business in life seems to be to reconcile warring elements in themselves. They are described in the seventh chapter of Romans, where the apostle speaks of two men, as it were, in one skin, quarrelling incessantly; one being up and the other down, and *vice versa*, the spiritual man longing for heavenly things, and the carnal man for

* Friday evening, November 19, 1890.

earthly things. There are a great many persons whose whole business in life seems to be this harmonization of themselves within, this fighting with that which is evil in themselves—holding it down, strangling it, smothering it, treading it out. This conflict goes on, sometimes, from one point to another, to the very end of life. These persons may have outward trouble; but the main and characteristic element of their experience is that they are plagued within.

Some men are plagued with doubts on spiritual subjects; other men are plagued in their consciences; others in their appetites and passions. There is a war, an insurrection, in one part or another of their nature against that spiritual conception of manhood which they hold up, and by which they are trying to live. It is a hard fight; and often such men are discouraged, and feel as though there was no hope for them, and say, "I must be very bad."

Other men tell of their victories. Others speak of their joys. Others say, "I sing in twilight, if I sing at all." Others compare themselves to the wretched man that cried out, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Now let me say to those who find trouble: There is one point of view in which there is comfort for you. God has called you to this work; and if you are a good and faithful soldier to the end of life; if, by the power of Christ, you fight manfully the battle of thought and feeling with temptation—God is dealing with you as with sons. And though you seem to be making but little progress, as compared

with this or that singing-bird of a Christian, after all, you have a lenient God, a pitying Father ; and He may think better of your progress than you yourself do. You are going through the dark part of your life, it may be ; nevertheless, there will be a time for thanksgiving and gratulation when the victory shall be won.

There are a great many persons who are organized harmoniously. They have much to thank God for in their parents, and very little in themselves. They were born in good health, with good digestion, with good sound heart and lungs, and with such equipoise in all their members that there does not seem to be a conflict between the different parts of their nature within. But I am inclined to think that such persons get their troubles outside.

If you take a lighted candle, beautiful and symmetrical, and carry it out of doors unsheltered, the wind blows the flame about in every direction. If it is a candle that is not lighted, it makes no difference whether it is protected or not ; but the moment it is lighted, the flame begins to flare right and left, and melt down the body on which it feeds.

Now, take people of a kind and genial disposition, and put them in a selfish world, and let them undertake to carry that disposition for the medication of other souls, and they are frequently jarred and jolted by the discords which they encounter outside of themselves ; and they have all the time to fight with their circumstances. God sometimes puts a man in such a position in life that he is at peace with himself and out of joint with the outward

world ; and that is a very solemn situation to be in. A man who is thus placed is ordained to be a preacher of consolation to all the world about him ; and woe be to every such man who betrays his trust ! In proportion as a man is harmoniously organized within, and is placed in outward circumstances where he has to pass through struggles which develop in him a rich experience, God says to him, "Let your struggles in those circumstances be an example and an encouragement to others. Strive for their sake. Be to them something of what Christ has been to you, and what He is to all the world." If a man takes this equipment within—the harmonious organization with which he has been endowed—and makes it a means of gratifying his selfishness, and sits down for his own pure delight, he has betrayed his trust most grievously. God requires very much of those who have no struggle of their own to wage.

But for all those (and they constitute ninety-nine parts in a hundred) who have their struggles within, or within and without, there is a great deal of comfort and consolation in the Word of God, provided they accept the situation and maintain the conflict.

"Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant ; because your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

It is said that "misery loves company." There is a side of that proverb which is very selfish, but

there is also a side of it which affords a great deal of joy. For a man to know that others are suffering is no comfort ; but for a man to feel that others, suffering, gain victories, and that he, suffering, and following their example, may gain victories, is a great comfort.

“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

The marrow of it is this : *The God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect.* Oh, to feel that, is our consolation while we are in the dirt !

Did you ever see a sculptor make a statuette or statue ? He begins with dirt, you know. He has a few rude sticks for a frame ; and then he puts on the clay. When it is properly tempered, he roughs out the general form. Then he begins to scrape off the plaster. Then he works for symmetry, and lines, and grace, and proportions. Then he works for resemblances. And at last, as the work is becoming consummated, he puts on the finest touches. And all the way through it is dirt, dirt, dirt ! But this is not half so dirty as bringing up men in this world of temptation and passion, where all their desires are overflowing like a flood. Yet, as the sculptor goes on working thus with this lifeless material, to bring out at last the finest lines and lineaments, that the model, when completed,

may be transmuted into the glowing marble, or bronze, or silver, or gold, as the case may be—so God is dealing with us; so He is building us up: He is taking off and putting on, that after a while, when the work is completed, we may be transmuted into higher forms, and be as pillars in the temple of our God, and become men in Christ Jesus, glowing with all the light of blessedness and immortality.

Now, to those that are in the midst of trial, to those that are in the crucible, walking through the fire, there is this consolation: your troubles and trials are watched of God, and you are beloved of Him; and though you may be tried with great temptations to wickedness, yet, if you are "steadfast in the faith," He will not forget you, nor give you up, nor suffer you to be tempted more than you are able to bear, but with every temptation will open a door of escape.

PERSONAL DUTY IN RELIGION.*



THINK there is more squandering of thought and feeling on the subject of personal duty in religion than upon almost any other subject. There are a thousand ways in which men can improve intellectually and æsthetically; but the motives to it are not rolled upon them as are the motives to a godly life. The force of education, surrounding social influences, the preaching of the truth, the solicitation of personal friends—all these awaken and stir up the moral sense of men. And not only men who are living, comparatively speaking, godless lives, but men who are positively wicked, carry unrestful thoughts with them.

You know how it is with lameness. Sometimes there is what we call a "stitch." There is a sore muscle that lies buried in the side. If you carry yourself in a certain way, you do not feel it; but if you happen to turn a little, you get a wrench.

* Friday evening, November 26, 1899.

which brings you right back again. When you have such a sore muscle about you, wherever you walk you have a consciousness of it, and you carry yourself so as to keep it from being twisted and hurt.

Now, even wicked men, given up to revelries, have a sore place about them. There is a sore spot that the mother left. There is a sore spot that their own experience has caused. There is a sore conscience buried in them. And every once in a while, when they are inadvertently carrying on their wicked ways, they give it a twist, and it sends a pang through them. And in company or alone, wherever they go, and whatever they do, they are conscious that there is this sore place, as it were, in their moral nature.

It is not particularly reputable to be living in such contrariety to a man's own best judgment; but the knowledge of the fact should go far to determine Christian duty. There is in almost every man who is armed against religion a power that is in favour of religion; there is a voice in every man's heart that speaks for religion; and if you can parley with him, and get access to that inward feeling, there is hope that you can save him.

As it is in respect to those who are going on in open or concealed wickedness, so is it in respect to those who are living what we call moral, but not spiritual lives—in external morality, and not in an active, vital relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. There are times of great uneasiness in the experience of such persons. They feel, in sum total, a hundred

times over, all that a man needs to feel in going through conversion and becoming eminent in Christian life. No man will ever suffer in dying half as much as he suffers in living. If you collect all the aches of any man during one year, they amount to positive pain enough to kill him fifty times over. Take a man with an aching tooth. He nourishes it, and poultices it, and threatens to have it out. It keeps him awake all night; and he says, "In the morning I will have it out so that it will not trouble me any more." But in the morning it does not ache, and he changes his mind. At dinner he eats something that sets it to aching again; and away he starts for the dentist's, and says, "I will have an end of this;" but when he gets to the door, it has stopped aching, and he says, "Maybe it will not trouble me any more; I think I won't go in." And while he is in the cold air, and the nerves are less susceptible, it behaves very well, and he does not think much about it. But toward evening on comes the toothache again; and he says, "What a fool I was this morning! If I had had this tooth out then, my suffering would have been all over: I wish I had."

I have seen just such experiences in regard to men's moral condition. I know wicked persons who are so profoundly uneasy that they cannot keep company with themselves. I know men that are so much exercised in their mind that they say to themselves, "Well, it is no use; I will go and see the minister"—for he is the dentist in such cases. There are persons—I have been told about them—

who have come to my door, and walked by just as if they did not come to see me. There are persons that have done it not once, nor twice, but often. Then there are persons that have come to see me, and have commenced talking about something else besides their own personal condition—the thing which brought them to me. They have gone through enough embarrassment, and unrest, and conscience-pain to have delivered their souls a hundred times, if they had had the manliness and straightforwardness to carry out their moral intentions.

All these uneasinesses within a man are God's voices. They are the workings in the soul of man of that Divine Spirit by which we are enlightened, and by which we are called from death unto life. They are the influences of the Holy Ghost, by which we are sanctified, and which we are exhorted not to grieve.

Now, to such persons as I have described, if there are any here to-night, let me say a few words.

1. Be true to your own convictions. Be true to your own best thoughts. Do not dismiss them. You may dismiss worldly business thoughts or not, according to your own pleasure; but these thoughts and feelings of which I have been speaking have to do with your own highest life. There is eternity in them. There is everlasting joy or everlasting woe in them. If they are consummated, they carry in them holiness, they carry in them reconciliation to God, they carry in them hope through the Lord

Jesus Christ, they carry in them "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Then let them blossom and bring forth their fruit.

2. Of all things in the world, do not wait to see if your convictions will not do something of themselves. When the dairyman brings in his overflowing pail from the yard, and pours the milk into the pans, and sets them on their various shelves, there is nothing better than that these pans should stand still, that the cream may rise; and many people seem to treat their hearts as though they were pans of milk, which should stand still while the cream rises on them. But nothing comes from involuntary life. "*Work out,*" says God, "*your own salvation.*" It is not passivity, but *activity*, that befits the nature of that which you carry within yourselves. Therefore, if you have a yearning desire for something, carry it forward and ratify it.

Do you ask what you shall do? One of the first things I exhort every man to do is this: Look and see what sin, what hindrance, what entanglement, what yoke or bondage, there is in you. *Begin* that way, but do not feel that the work is accomplished when you have done that. That is only the preparation. As, when a person that is working in mortar or clay is summoned to go and see a friend, he begins by throwing off his working-clothes and washing his hands as a preliminary step to getting ready, so a man who is going to see God should begin to prepare himself by breaking off his outward sin. If it is love of liquor, if it is any dishonest trait, if it is any cherished hatred, if it is any

bitter animosity, if it is any illicit attachment, if it is an entanglement of any kind, the first step for you is to cut loose from it. If it requires you to break with companions that are leading you on in sin, break with them at once. Nothing will test a man's earnestness quicker than this. If you do that, you are in a state in which, even though you are not a Christian, there is much hope for you.

3. Find some friend to whom you can speak on this matter. If it is necessary that you should go outside of your own circle to find that friend, go out. Make bold, for once, to ask help of another.

If one is sick in a great boarding-house, and is liable to drop off in the night, he would give everything in the world if he could find a person who, hearing him call, would step in and see him, lest he should die, and have no one with him. How much more, when a man's soul is in a perilous condition, should he want somebody to confide in! And there is no reason why, under such circumstances, you should not seek to interest some one in your behalf. When a man shuts up his religious thoughts and feelings inside, he is like a man who kindles a fire and shuts both the vent and the flue. A fire cannot burn without air. Everybody that has had any experience opens the flue and the draught, and lets the air through; and then there is a flame. But people, when they try to kindle a fire in their souls, put in the material and shut it up as tight as they can, so that nobody would suspect it. That is not the way. Commit yourselves. "But," says one,

“I do not know which way it will go.” Well, for that very reason, speak to somebody, and so *make it go right*. “But suppose, after speaking to somebody, it should turn out, as it often does, to be only smoke?” Then that friend would chide you; and it is because you know he would hold you to the purpose with which you set out that you are afraid to speak to him. You are irresolute on that account. But open your heart to some one. Bring near to you some faithful friend. There is no better friend than a man’s own mother, there is no better friend than a man’s own father, if they are truly Christian. If you are removed from them, it is sometimes the case that your wife or husband is the best person that you can go to; and all the more if you do not want to,—if your pride does not want to. Why, I know of cases where, if a man would humble himself, and overcome his pride and combativeness, so as to go to his wife and say, “My dear, much as I have said about religion, I now see that I am a sinner before God, and that I must have it,” he would find all the rest easy. I have seen whole struggles like that waged in souls, and have found that when a man could bow his head and speak thus to the intimate companion of his life, all his trouble was over.

Go, then, and speak to your pastor. Go and speak to your brother. Go and speak to some Christian man that you have faith in. Speak to somebody. Let your soul have a partner in travail and labour.

4. Do not feel that you need to go on from day

to day and from week to week through a long process. The reconciliation of a man's soul with Christ is, I will not say one of the easiest, but one of the simplest, things in life.

Have you ever had a quarrel with your father and mother? You have, unless you have been an exceedingly good boy. Do not you recollect how you did some wrong that you did not want your parents to know; and how you feared that they would find it out; and how you looked to see if they knew it, after the servant had threatened to tell them, and thought they did when they did not; how all this time you shrank from them; and how by-and-by they expressed a confidence in you which showed that they did not know it; and how an impulse came over you to make a clean breast of the matter, and you went to your mother and burst into tears, and told her yourself, and put your head in her lap, and cried; and how you felt better; and how, the first thing you knew, her hand was on your hair, and she said, "Well, my child, I am sorry you did wrong; but you have done right now in coming to me and telling me. I do not believe you will do it any more. Look up, and kiss me;" and how she put her arms about you and drew you to her? Was it not the sweetest and best way, when you had done wrong, to go and tell your mother, and get her blessing? If you do not know, I do, how good it was, when I had done wrong, to be reconciled, so that I could go on again with a light heart, singing like a bird,—for I *could* sing when I was a boy.

Now the Lord Jesus Christ is dearer than any mother, sweeter than any parent, more tender than any lover, better than any friend. Most gracious and helpful is your God. And go to Him. On your way you may stop and tell your minister or friend ; but go straight to God, and say, "Father, I have done wrong ; take me and help me."

HELPFUL ASPECTS OF CHRIST.*



SUPPOSE all of us think, at times, of meeting the Saviour in heaven. I suppose that at times, and in a general way, every one has the vision of the Lord Jesus Christ. Naturally borrowing the figures of the New Testament, we imagine the scene of His coming with all the glory of His Father and with all His angels. We call up, perhaps unconsciously, the tracery of some picture which has represented this theme, and dwell upon it. But I think every devout person who has made use of the Saviour's presence by faith to overcome temptation, and to recover himself from sin, who has associated his life intimately with the conscious presence of Christ, thinks more than he is aware of the *helpful* aspects of Christ. These incidental, glancing thoughts which we have are frequently truer and deeper than those which we think on purpose. It is apt to be so through life. The things which we do unconsciously are, as a general rule, better done than the

* Friday evening, December 8, 1869.

things which we attempt to do well in every relation in life. And so, I think, those fire-sparks, as it were, which fly off from our minds almost unbeknown to ourselves, are frequently more precious than those which we strike off on purpose. To sit down on Sunday, and read, and attempt to bring up before our minds a picture, is most unsatisfactory. But when we are almost worn out and discouraged, there sometimes comes a glancing thought of Christ's patience with us and of His sympathy for us. We are not thinking whether He is or is not divine. All we have is a consciousness that there is the ideal of Christ brought near to us, bearing us up, and lending us His strength. It may go almost in the moment that gave it birth, but it is real.

I have sometimes seen parents, in playing with their children, go from without to the window, or behind the leaves of a bower—the children not knowing of their presence—just opening a space large enough to show the eye or the brow, and perhaps speaking a name, and then, as soon as the children caught a glance of them, disappear; and the children with laughter and glee would pursue them. There is a piquancy in such sportiveness, to the child's affection, not only, but to his curiosity.

Now, it seems to me that there are such effects produced by these momentary outlooks of Christ upon us. Where we have been in great grief, where the days have been sudden and heavy, where the current of life seems to have turned to mud, which has no flow in it, and we are bemired,—then often there comes to us out of heaven a sense of Christ's

love and life-giving power, and of Christ saying to us, "Because I live, ye shall live also. If ye suffer with Me, ye shall reign with Me." The thing itself may last only a moment, but the sweetness lasts for years.

In looking up into the heavenly land, the sense of Christ to me seems as real as the last earthly experience through which I have gone. Sometimes it is an ever-changing presentation which I have, full-orbed and advanced to the very height of transcendent glory. At other times Christ seems to me most companionable, and I fancy that I walk with Him, just as His disciples walked with Him when He was on the earth, and talk with Him. At times I see Him to be potential in mercy. At other times I see Him encouraging and most sweetly winning. But I think the aspect of Christ which predominates is that in which He shows Himself a Saviour; in which He is seen to be saving men—saving them from danger, saving them from temptation, saving them from sin, saving them from those snares which sin brings upon them, saving them from those pitfalls into which transgressions plunge them, and out of which it is so hard for them to climb.

The view of Christ as saving His people—as working in them, working for them, working by the great round of providence, working by His special manifestations, and working in them *to will and to do*; the aspect of Christ as one having a saving nature, and that spirit in which He says, "I came not to condemn the world," in which He calls men

to Him, and which He manifested in laying down His life that He might save the world ;—this aspect of Christ is the most precious to me, for my own sake, and for the sake of my fellow-men.

But there is nothing so piteous as the weakness of men, and their trouble and suffering under sin. Life is full of it. Life sometimes seems to me like a boiling caldron, and men like bubbles that come to the surface and burst at every moment. Still they rise and perish, and still the caldron boils. And at times I have the darkest thoughts as to such a world as this, seemingly so abandoned. If I lost faith that the heart of the world was love, and that it was still driven by the energizing and recreating power of God, I should lose faith in everything. I should hardly want to live ; or, if I did, I should want to shield my eyes from the suffering that is in the world. And the truth that that Christ who was in the flesh now lives, advanced at the right hand of God, clothed with power, and having a sympathetic heart ; that He is still labouring to save men ; that those who have sinned against Him have no other friend that is so near to them, that is doing so much for them, and that is willing to do so much for them ;—this truth is extremely precious to me.

A man who analyzes human nature as much as I have to, and sees as much as I do of the aspects of life, if he be of a stern nature, grows harder and harder as he grows older, and more and more hates sin. If, on the other hand, he is affectionate and sympathetic, as I am, he *pities* sin as he grows older. I do not think I condemn sin any less than I should ;

I see the wickedness, the exceeding sinfulness of it ; but as I grow older, and see men tossed to and fro, and see their tears, and listen to their groans, and hear them saying, "I would do good, but evil is present with me. The good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not that I do. O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"—then I, as did the apostle, "thank God" that there is One who can and will deliver men. I thank God that Jesus Christ is at work in the world, that He has pity for men, that He is going forth still, by His Spirit, to seek them and to save them. It is my growing consolation. It is my only hope for myself and for others.

When I know that mischiefs are going on, and when I know what necessities there are in the great congregation, my heart would break if I thought there was no power but that which I can bring to bear. I feel every day what the apostle meant by "the foolishness of preaching." It seems to me like foolishness when arrayed against the great swell and swing and gigantic development of human depravity. But if God is at work, and all divine sources of power are at work, then I have hope.

I believe that by faith in Him who came to open the prison doors and deliver the captives, any man can recover himself, and become a child of God.

A LOOK AT THE PAST YEAR.*



OUR church year is just closed ; and it is about the close of the secular year. This month and all circumstances conspire to lead us to look back at the way in which God has brought us during the last year as a church, and also at the effects of God's dealings with us in our own disposition, and upon our Christian experience at large. I, of course, from my very position and duty, am obliged to study in my thought the state of feeling, the general tendency, of the congregation all the time. Therefore, in some sense, every week is to me just like a closing week. It is a week in which I take the bearings of things.

I have never been accustomed to preach according to the class of subjects belonging to a system of theology. I have preached very much as a mother feeds her children, giving them the things which their health requires. Their age and their circumstances have to be taken into consideration. I have preached very much on the plan that the physician

* Friday evening, December 10, 1869.

follows in giving his prescriptions. His wisdom sometimes consists in not giving anything. I think that often what a man does not do, although there is no reckoning of it, amounts to a good deal. What one *does* do is determined by the state of the patient,—by his needs and necessities. And my whole habit of preaching has been largely founded on that principle.

I do not say this in criticism of another style which may be applicable to certain conditions of the community, or to certain communities where the church is almost the only source from which moral truth is to be learned. It is different with us. That which I am perpetually watching is the spiritual vitality which is produced. I do not judge of my preaching from the immediate effects which I perceive, although there is the presumption that God's good Spirit is with us when in our congregation men are melted to tears on the presentation of truth. When there is enthusiasm of listening, it is a good sign, and a comforting sign, and a sign that is very helpful to him who has the Lord's message to deliver. But, after all, it is not infallible. The sympathies may be moved without the moral life being very much stirred at the bottom. And so it is the working out of these things that is watched for.

In looking over the congregation (I speak of the general course of events, and not of exceptional cases), I have the impression—and the comfort of having it—that the church and congregation have been, for the last year, on the whole, in a quickened and truly growing state. There has not been that

outbreaking which we call a *revival*; there has not been that zeal and enthusiasm and joy which come in certain great harvest periods; but still I think there has been a great deal of enjoyment and a great deal of advancement in the Christian life, in the cases of multitudes,—I think there are many who are walking far more clearly by faith than they have done before. I think the truth in our midst, during the last year, has comforted men in trouble, strengthened men that felt weak, and inspired men with a nobler ideal of life. I have reason to believe that there are multitudes of persons who are endeavouring to live far more manly and Christianly, and to carry out the spirit of the gospel in all the details and parts of their lives. I know that there are a great many who are silently and obscurely bearing the yoke, and carrying the cross, and doing it for Christ's sake, with heroism.

It is very sweet to me to think that Christ is happy when He is among us. I think He is. He of course finds none among us that are without blemish (that will take place only when He presents us without blemish before His Father's throne); but I think He finds among us hearts that are open to receive Him, and that are growing into the likeness of His Spirit, and that are attempting to carry it out among their companions, and labour for it. I have reason to believe that a great many listen to the truth, and are convicted by it, whose conviction does not leave them. I have reason to hope that there are a great many cases of persons who erelong will openly avow themselves on the Lord's side.

This spiritual vitality, this tone in the heart and conscience and feeling of the church, is a matter of very great satisfaction and comfort to me. For outward growth does not make strength. Mere numbers and external forms do not make us strong. After all, it is that which the church has in common with the Lord Jesus Christ, it is nearness to Him, it is sympathy with His Spirit, it is the inspiration of the Holy Ghost by which they are living better lives—it is these things that show what the strength of a church is.

Besides this, I have seen with very great joy the success of those continued efforts which are making for the instruction of the young in our Sunday schools and Bible classes; and also the labours of so many of our brethren and sisters, in preaching the gospel to the poor and needy, and in general missionary work. I have reason to think, that, although the church has never come up to its full strength and privilege, yet it has been greatly blessed in its activity. And on the whole I take courage.

I do not choose to look on the dark side of things. I do not think churches are often edified by being preached to about their faults and sins. That is a way to discourage them. As Paul discreetly spared men, and seemed to rely on the recognition of their excellences to lead them on and make them better, so I look upon the good in my church and congregation more than upon the bad. I am cognizant of the bad, and I aim at its correction; but I do not like to look on the shady side of events.

As to my own personal history during the year, I have been strengthened for my labour in body. In the main, I have been able to hold myself steadfast by faith in God's promises, and by the comfort of His presence. I think care and trouble have been blessed to me. And although it has not been such a year as I meant it should be, there is much occasion for me to give thanks to God. There is much occasion for me to renew my confidence, and to enter upon the next year with more consecration than ever.

There is one thing that I will say now, because I do not say it often. I do not think you have any knowledge, nor a chance to have any knowledge, of the depth of affection which I bear to this church. I have never, as you know, attempted to catch your fancy. I have never attempted to play upon your sentimental feelings. I never used that side of the truth much.

The great taxation of brain under which I am continually kept in the organization of material for my ministerial work, and for my public work outside of the pulpit, uses up my strength to such an extent that I cannot be a pastor. I cannot go from house to house. If I do, I cannot preach in the pulpit. I have strength enough to fill either the office of preacher or that of pastor, but not enough to fill both, in so great a congregation as this; and I simply have not attempted the pastoral work. But, though there are many disadvantages arising from this fact, it has not been so disastrous as it would have been if it had not been for the fidelity of

the brethren of the church. There are a great many good women in the church who use their religious and social influence for the benefit of those who need succour and advice and help, and there are a great many brethren in the church who have been very faithful; so that, on an average, I think there has been as much pastoral work done in this church as in any ordinary church. And in thus making up for the want of a pastor, the brethren of this church are doing just what every Congregational church ought to do. The church is pastor in the sense that one member takes care of another. And I have looked upon the labours of the brethren during the past year with great gratitude to God.

I have looked upon the whole membership of the church with ever-growing affection—with desires which are at times literally unutterable. I have felt sensible of your sympathy with me. I believe that in the main I have had the sympathy of my people in my labour. I hope that in the great outline, and in the filling up of my work, I have had the consent of your judgment. I have never desired that you should forego your own individual opinions and honest judgments, and follow me blindly. That has never been the effect or fruit of my teaching. And yet, where, exercising your own judgment, you can see it in your way to be in harmony with me, it affords me great pleasure. I would a great deal rather be at agreement with my people than at disagreement. It is always a pain to me to find that I am at odds with the community, or with my church. And if at any time I am at

variance with them, it is because I am obliged to act according to my best light, and to say what seems to me to be right. But having thus acted, or said, I cannot go back, though every single man should leave me. Not only is that my nature, but it is what grace has given, and does give. Yet, on the other hand, when it has pleased God to give me the sympathy and concurrence of my brethren of the ministry and of the church, it has been an unspeakable pleasure to me. And, in the main, I think the year has gone on with an undivided feeling on the part of the church and the pastor in regard to the work in our midst. I cannot be too thankful for that.

I have never said it to you before that I know of, but I am very sensitive to your prayers. I am especially touched by the thought that I have the prayers of little children. I have sometimes said that no punishment that God could inflict upon me would be harder to bear than the loss of the affection of little children. Nothing, it seems to me, goes so far to keep up a man's youthful feelings as to be in ardent sympathy with the young, and to know that they love him and pray for him.

When John Brown was going out to the gallows, he was touched by the prayer of a poor slave woman. He asked for that, rather than for the prayers of ministers that were offered to him. I know what the feeling was, although in very different circumstances, and without the same reasons and the same bitterness which existed in his case. And the thought that families, and especially little children,

remember me in my work, is matter of unspeakable joy. And in the year that lies before us I have but one thing to ask of you, and that is, that in addition to your other kindnesses, which are unremitting, I may still be remembered from day to day in your prayers, and that my sermons may be remembered by you before God—not only those which are simply preached, but those which are printed, and which go out and are doing the work of the Lord in various ways—which are comforting so many in sick chambers, which find their way into so many solitary homes, which are carried to so many villages where there is no preaching. Pray that they may be more and more efficient in going forth to do the Lord's work.

In one sense the publication of my sermons has acted back upon me. For, although I have always tried to preach what I thought would be edifying to you, yet I have a growing desire, since my sermons are republished both here and abroad, and are being translated into different European languages, that they shall preach Christ more, and especially those experimental views of Christ which have been such a comfort to me and have helped so many of you, and are, I believe, helping so many of the dispersed and scattered, up and down through the world.

JOY IN CHRIST.*



ALTHOUGH Christmas Eve is pre-eminently a home-evening, and detains a great many, yet this meeting is home to those of us who have come out to it. And the evening ought to be a very joyful one to us in all its associations—in all the truths which it naturally brings to the soul.

I have never felt as though the world were happy enough and joyful in its religion. Religion has not been, as it should be, a radiant thing. In its history on earth, it has created a great deal of joy, and it has assuaged a great deal of suffering; but, on the whole, the teaching of it and the profession of it have not been characteristically joyful. At the same time, the spirit of true Christianity is the spirit of pre-eminent radiance, bountifulness, generosity, beneficence—and not the less because it bears burdens and carries yokes. It is—shall I say *gay*? Yes, if you employ the term in its higher sense—that sense in which it is applicable to the sphere of

* Friday evening, December 24, 1880.

spiritual influences. Rightly considered, religion is genial, hopeful, joyful, and should be sparkling, radiant. A man's soul is to be as the heavens were on the night when the shepherds looked up, and saw them full of angels, as well as stars.

As I grow older, this is my experience. I do not mean that cares are fewer, that sorrows are fewer, that suffering does not abound in its own way and times; but this—that my constant thought of the Divine throne grows sweeter. God seems to me more ample in goodness, and a world more gentle. And, although I believe in the alternative justice of God, although I believe that He inflicts pain as the necessary means of the greatest good, yet, after all, the predominant conception which I have as I grow older, is of the Fatherhood of God, and the ineffably gentle mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I bear testimony, to-night, that the nearer you come to the Lord Jesus Christ, the nearer you come to the true view of the Saviour, the more joyful your Christian experience is.

Even those things which at first are not joy-breeding, at the end are. This is according to the words of Christ, where He says, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me." "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." The figure is that of a pair of bullocks, freshly yoked up, that twist and turn, and try to break away from restraint. They are not accustomed to regular work, they do not believe in it, they dislike it, the wildness of their animal nature is in them; and yet after a little time their neck gets hardened to the yoke, and they

become used to the load. And although at first a very few pounds seem heavy, soon they take a great load and scarcely feel it.

Now, the Saviour says, "Put My harness on ; and though at first it may seem to gall and strain, after a very little while it shall be comfortable. My yoke shall be easy, and My burden—the load which you draw by that yoke—shall be light to you."

A growing experience in the Christian life reveals more of joy, more of confidence, more of hope, and more of victory, than it does of pain and regret. So that if a man could take his choice of all the lives that are possible on the earth, there is none so much to be desired for its joy-producing quality, as a truly self-denying, consecrated Christian life. This is my conviction, founded not only on my faith, but on my observation of men and of their lives ; and it is the testimony, I think, of God's people everywhere.

