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Religion in Common Life:

A SERMON PREACHED AT CRATHIE CHURCH, OCTOBER 14, 1855, BEFORE HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN AND PRINCE ALBERT, BY THE REV. JOHN CAIRD, M. A., MINISTER OF ERROLL, SCOTLAND.

Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.—Romans, xii. 11.

[Concluded.]

As a last illustration of the possibility of blending religion with the business of common life, let me call your attention to what may be described as the Mind's power of acting on Latent Principles.

In order to live a religious life in the world, every action must be governed by religious motives. But in making this assertion, it is not, by any means, implied that in all the familiar actions of our daily life religion must form a direct and conscious object of thought. To be always thinking of God, and Christ, and Eternity amidst our worldly work, and, however busy, eager, interested we may be in the special business before us, to have religious ideas, doctrines, beliefs, present to the mind,—this is simply impossible. The mind can no more consciously think of heaven and earth at the same moment than the body can be in heaven and earth at the same moment. Moreover there are few kinds of work in the world that, to be done well, must not be done heartily, wholely that require, in order to excellence, the whole condensed force and energy of the highest mind.

But though it be true that we cannot, in our worldly work, be always consciously thinking of religion, yet it is also true that unconsciously, insensibly, we may be acting under its ever-present control. As there are laws and powers in the natural world of which, without thinking of them, we are ever availing ourselves,—as I do not think of gravitation when, by its aid, I lift my arm, or of atmospheric laws when, by means of them, I breathe, so in the routine of daily work, though comparatively seldom do I think of them, I may yet be constantly swayed by the motives, sustained by the principles, living, breathing, acting in the invisible atmosphere of true religion. There are under-currents in the ocean which act independently of the movements of the waters on the surface; far down too in its hidden depths there is a region where, even though the storm be raging, on the upper waves perpetual calmness and stillness reign. So there may be an under-current beneath the surface-movements of your life—there may dwell in the secret depths of your being the abiding peace of God, the repose of a holy mind, even though, all the while, the restless stir and commotion of worldly business may mark your outer history.

And, in order to see this, it is to be remembered, that many of the thoughts and motives that most powerfully impel and govern us in the common actions of life, are latent thoughts and motives. Have you not often experienced that curious law—a law, perhaps, contrived by God, with an express view to this, its highest application—by which a secret thought or feeling may lie brooding in your mind, quite apart from the particular work in which you happen to be employed? Have you never, for instance, while reading aloud, carried along with you in your reading the secret impression of the presence of the listener—an impression that kept pace with all the mind's activity in the special work of reading; nay, have you not sometimes felt the mind, while prosecuting without interruption the work of reading, yet at the same time carrying on some other train of reflection apart altogether from that suggested by the book? Here is obviously a particular "business" in which you were "diligent," yet another and different thought to which the "spirit" turned. Or, think of the work in which I am this moment occupied. Amidst all the mental exertions of the public speaker—underneath the outward workings of his mind, so to speak, there is the latent thought of the presence of his auditory. Perhaps no species of exertion requires greater concentration of thought or undividedness of attention than this; and yet, amidst all the subtle processes of intellect,—the excogitation or recollection of

ideas,—the selection, right ordering and enunciation of words, there never quits his mind for one moment the idea of the presence of the listening throng. Like a secret atmosphere it surrounds and bathes his spirit as he goes on with the external work.—And have not you too, my friends, an Auditor—it may be, a "great cloud of witnesses,"—but at least one all-glorious Witness and Listener ever present, ever watchful, as the discourse of life proceeds?—Why then, in this case too, while the outward business is diligently prosecuted, may there not be on your spirit a latent and constant impression of that awful inspection? What worldly work so absorbing as to leave no room in a believer's spirit for the hallowing thought of that glorious Presence ever near? Do not say that you do not see God—that the presence of the divine Auditor is not forced upon your senses, as that of the human auditory on the speaker. For the same process goes on in the secret meditations as in the public addresses of the preacher—the same latent reference to those who shall listen to his words dwells in his mind when in his solitary retirement he thinks and writes, as when he speaks in their immediate presence. And surely if the thought of an earthly auditory—of human minds and hearts that shall respond to his thoughts and words—can intertwine itself with all the activities of a man's mind, and flash back inspiration on his soul, at least as potent and as penetrating may the thought be, of Him, the Great Lord of heaven and earth, who not only sees and knows us now, but before whose awful presence, in the last great congregation, we shall stand forth to recount and answer for our every thought and deed.

Or, to take but one other example, have we not all felt that the thought of anticipated happiness may blend itself with the work of our busiest hours? The labourer's evening release from toil—the school-boy's coming holiday, or the hard-wrought business-man's approaching season of relaxation—the expected return of a long absent and much loved friend—is not the thought of these, or similar joyous events, one which often intermingles with, without interrupting, our common work? When a father goes forth to his "labour till the evening," perhaps often, very often, in the thick of his toils, the thought of home may start up to cheer him. The smile that is to welcome him, as he crosses his lowly threshold when the work of the day is over, the glad faces, and merry voices, and sweet caresses of little ones, as they shall gather round him in the quiet evening hours—the thought of all this may dwell, a latent joy, a hidden motive, deep down in his heart of hearts, may come gushing in sweet solace at every pause of exertion, and act like a secret oil to smooth the wheels of labour. And so, in the other cases I have named, even when our outward activities are the most strenuous, even when every energy of mind and body is full strung for work, the anticipation of coming happiness may never be absent from our minds. The heart has a secret treasury, where our hopes and joys are often garnered—too precious to be parted with even for a moment.

And why may not the highest of all hopes and joys possess the same all-pervading influence? Have we, if our religion be real, no anticipation of happiness in the glorious future? Is there no "rest that remaineth for the people of God," no home and loving heart awaiting us when the toils of our hurried day of life are ended?—What is earthly rest or relaxation, what that release from toil after which we so often sigh, but the faint shadow of the saint's everlasting rest—the repose of eternal purity—the calm of a spirit in which, not the tension of labour only, but the strain of the moral strife with sin, has ceased—the rest of the soul in God! What visions of earthly bliss can ever—if our Christian faith be not a form—compare with "the glory soon to be revealed"—what joy of earthly reunion with the rapture of the hour when the heavens shall yield our absent Lord to our embrace, to be parted from us no more for ever! And if all this be not a dream and a fancy, but most sober truth, what is there to except this joyful hope from that law to which, in all other deep joys, our minds are subject? Why may we not, in this case too, think often, amidst our worldly work, of the Home to which we are going, of the true and loving heart that beats for us, and of the sweet and joyous welcome that awaits us there? And, even when we make them not, of set purpose, the subject of our thoughts, is there not enough of grandeur in the objects of a believer's hope to pervade his spirit at all times with a calm and reverential joy?

Do not think all this strange, fanatical, impossible. If it do seem so, it can only be because your heart is in the earthly hopes, but not in the higher and holier hopes—because love to Christ is still to you but a name—because you can give more ardour of thought to the anticipation of a coming holiday than to the hope of heaven and glory everlasting.—No, my friends! the strange thing is, not that amidst the world's work we should be able to think of our home, but that we should ever be able to forget it; and the stranger, sadder still, that while the little day of life is passing,—morning—noon—evening,—each stage more rapid than the last, while to many the shadows are already fast lengthening, and the declining sun warns them that "the night is at hand, wherein no man can work," there should be those amongst us whose whole thoughts are absorbed in the business of the world; and to whom the reflection never occurs that soon they must go out into eternity—without a friend—without a home!

Such, then, is the true idea of the Christian life—a life not of periodic observations, or occasional fervours, or even of splendid acts of heroism and self-devotion, but of quiet, constant, unobtrusive earnestness, amidst the commonplace work of the world. This is the life to which Christ calls us. Is it yours? Have you entered upon it, or are you now willing to enter upon it? It is not, I admit, an imposing or an easy one. There is nothing in it to dazzle, much in its hardness and plainness to deter the irresolute. The life of the follower of Christ demands not, indeed, in our day, the courage of the hero, or the martyr, the fortitude that braves outward dangers and sufferings, and flinches not from persecution and death. But with the age of persecution the difficulties of the Christian life have not passed away. In maintaining a spirit of Christian cheerfulness and contentment—in the unambitious routine of humble duties—in preserving the fervour of piety amidst unexciting cares and wearing anxieties—in the perpetual reference to lofty ends amidst lowly toils—there may be evinced a faith as strong as that of the man who dies with the song of martyrdom on his lips. It is a great thing to love Christ so dearly as to be "ready to be bound and to die" for Him; but it is often a thing not less great to be ready to take up our daily cross, and to live for Him.

But be the difficulties of the Christian life in the world what they may, they need not discourage us. Whatever the work to which our Master calls us, He offers us a strength commensurate with our needs. No man who wishes to serve Christ will ever fail for lack of heavenly aid. And it will be no valid excuse for an ungodly life that it is difficult to keep alive the flame of piety in the world, if Christ be ready to supply the fuel.

To all, then, who really wish to lead such a life, let me suggest that the first thing to be done—that without which all other efforts are worse than vain, is heartily to devote themselves to God through Christ Jesus. Much as has been said of the infusion of religious principle and motive into our worldly work, there is a preliminary advice of greater importance still—that we be religious. Life comes before growth. The soldier must enlist before he can serve. In vain, directions how to keep the fire ever burning on the altar, if first it be not kindled. No religion can be genuine, no goodness can be constant or lasting, that springs not, as its primary source, from faith in Jesus Christ. To know Christ as our Saviour—to come with all my guilt and weakness to Him in whom trembling penitence never fails to find a friend—to cast myself at His feet in whom all that is sublime in divine holiness is softened, though not obscured, by all that is beautiful in human tenderness—and, believing in that love stronger than death which for me, drained the cup of untold sorrows, and bore without a murmur the bitter curse of sin, to trust my soul for time and eternity, into his hands—this is the beginning of true religion. And it is the reverential love with which the believer must ever look to Him to whom he owes so much, that constitutes the main-spring of the religion of daily life. Selfishness may prompt to a formal religion, natural susceptibility may give rise to a fitful one, but for a life of constant fervent piety, amidst the world's cares and toils, no motive is sufficient save one—self devoted love to Christ.

But again if you would lead a Christian life in the world, let me remind you that that life must be continued, as well as begun, with Christ. You

must learn to look to Him not merely as your Saviour from guilt; but as the friend of your secret life, the chosen Companion of your solitary hours, the Depositary of all the deeper thoughts and feelings of your soul. You cannot live for Him in the world unless you live much with Him, apart from the world. In spiritual as in secular things, the deepest and strongest characters need much solitude to form them. Even earthly greatness, much more moral and spiritual greatness, is never attained but as the result of much that is concealed from the world—of many a lonely and meditative hour. Thoughtfulness, self-knowledge, self-control, a chastened wisdom and piety, are the fruit of habitual meditation and prayer. In these exercises Heaven is brought near, and our exaggerated estimate of earthly things corrected. By these our spiritual energies, shattered and worn by the friction of worldly work, are repaired. In the recurring seasons of devotion, the cares and anxieties of worldly business ceases to vex us; exhausted with its toils, we have, in daily communion with God, "meat to eat which the world knoweth not of;" and even when its calamities and losses fall upon us, and our portion of worldly good may be withdrawn, we may be able to show, like those holy ones of old at the heathen court, by the fair serene countenance of the spirit, that we have something better than the world's pulse to feed upon.

But, further, in availing yourself of this divine resource amidst the daily exigencies of life, why should you wait always for the periodic season and the formal attitude of prayer? The Heavens are not open to the believer's call, only at intervals. The grace of God's Holy Spirit falls not like the fertilizing shower, only now and then; or like the dew on the earth's face, only at morning and night. At all times on the uplifted face of the believer's spirit the gracious element is ready to descend. Pray always; pray without ceasing. When difficulties arise, delay not to seek and obtain at once the succour you need. Swifter than by the subtle electric agent is thought borne from earth to heaven. The Great Spirit on high is in constant sympathy with the believing spirit beneath, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the thrill of aspiration flashes from the heart of man to God. Whenever anything vexes you—when, from the rude and selfish ways of men, any trials of temper cross your path—when your spirits are ruffled, or your Christian forbearance put to the test, be this your instant resource! Haste away, if only for a moment, to the serene and peace-breathing presence of Jesus, and you will not fail to return with a spirit soothed and calmed. Or when the impure and low-minded surround you—when, in the path of duty, the high tone of your Christian purity is apt to suffer from baser contacts, oh, what relief to lift the heart to Christ!—to rise on the wings of faith—even for one instant to breathe the air of that region where the Infinite Purity dwells, and then return with a mind steeled against temptation, ready to recoil with the instinctive abhorrence of a spirit that has been beside the Throne, from all that has been impure and vile. Say not, then, with such aid at your command, that religion cannot be brought down to Common Life!

In conclusion, let me once more urge upon you the great lesson on which we have been insisting. Carry religious principles into everyday life. Principle elevates whatever it touches. Facts lose all their littleness to the mind which brings principle and law to bear upon them. The chemist's or geologist's soiled hands are no sign of base work; the coarsest operations of the laboratory, the breaking of stones with a hammer, cease to be mechanical when intellectual thought and principle govern the mind and guide the hands. And religious principle is the noblest of all. Bring it to bear on common actions and coarse cares, and infinitely nobler even than the philosophic or scientific, becomes the Christian life. Live for Christ in common things, and all your work will become priestly work. As in the temple of old, it was holy work to hew wood or mix oil, because it was done for the altar-sacrifice or the sacred lamps; so all your coarse and common work will receive a consecration when done for God's glory, by one who is a true priest to His temple.

Carry religion into common life, and your life will be rendered useful as well as noble. There are many men who listen incredulously to the high-toned exhortations of the pulpit; the religious