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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

"Lay hold on eternal life."

A HOMILY FOR THE NEW YEAR.

BY THE REV. J. M. CRAMP, D. D.

Brethren in the Lord:—

Fatherly goodness has watched over us an entire year. We have borne the toils and the trials allotted to us, and now look back upon them with thanksgiving for the grace by which we have been upheld. Another period of our lives is begun. Whether we shall see the close on earth is one of the "secret things" which it is not given us to know. God has wisely and kindly withheld that knowledge from us. But we are "called unto his eternal glory," (1 Pet. v. 10), and the "salvation is nearer than when we believed," (Rom. xiii. 11). Amid the turmoils of life and the numberless distractions of these eventful times, some of us, perhaps, suffering also from wounds which have pierced us to the heart, is it not a comforting thought that home is almost in sight? And shall we not be better fitted for duty, and strengthened to bear sorrow, if we "lay hold on eternal life."—(1 Tim. vi. 12.)?

Six-and-thirty years ago the writer entered a place of worship one Lord's day evening in the company on that occasion has since joined the "general assembly and church of the first-born," (Heb. xii. 23), just as the congregation were beginning to sing the first hymn. It was one of Kelly's, and the chorus was—"Hallelujah! We are on our way to God." The tune was simple and suitable, and it was well sung, the chorus being repeated by female voices, most gently and sweetly, and then taken up by the whole body with a power that seemed to betoken heartiness of feeling. The effect was thrilling. It has been often thought of since, and many a time has the writer imagined himself standing there again, and listening to the refrain—"Hallelujah! We are on our way to God."

It is a blessed thought. The journey is no uncertain one. We know where we are going, for Jesus has said, "Where I am, there shall also my servant be," and he has gone "to prepare a place for us," (John xii. 26; xiv. 2). It is not far off. We have the earnest already in our hearts—in the pantings after God, the struggles to be free, the groanings under the burden, the desires for inward holiness, which mark those who are "sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephes. iv. 30.), a little while, and all will be realized. Every hour shortens the distance.

"Here in the body pent,
Absent on earth we roam;
And nightly pitch our moving tent
A day's march nearer home."

J. MONTGOMERY.

"Dying is but going home"—"and home," said a dying saint the other day, after repeating those words—"is a pleasant place." How pleasant, who can tell? Scripture gives us little more than brief hints, and bold, rich figures. A literal description could not be understood by those who are yet in the flesh. Heaven is rest, from toil and from conflict—joy—purity—light—glory—life—such life as earth knows not, that is, in degree. "To be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Rom. viii. 6.)—heaven begun. Yet it is a poor, sleepy, dreaming kind of life that we live here—hardly worthy of the name—so dim are our perceptions—so cold our love—so feeble our purpose—so fitful our fervours! But in "the bright world to which we go" there is life real—life in earnest—life sublime—life everlasting.

It is fellowship with God. Unspeakable complacency—delight—contentment—satisfaction. Those who "see his face" are fully and for ever "satisfied." God is their "expected joy." They can bear to look at his whole character, and praise him as he is, without doubt or reserve. And he himself, in some wondrous manner, explains all his dealings with them while they were upon earth, so that they joyfully exclaim, "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Rev. xv. 3), and review their history with the feelings of children who are conscious

that their father's hand guided them and held them up in the dark paths, and a father's tenderness cared for them. "In thy presence is fulness of joy" (Psalm xvi. 11).

It is fellowship with the saints. We shall be introduced to the old worthies, and hear the story of the church from their own lips. The blanks of the sacred history will be filled up. Enoch will tell us how he "walked with God." Noah will relate his trials and consolations during the long period in which "the ark was a preparing." Abraham; Isaac, and Jacob will relate their varied experiences—on the "mount of the Lord"—in the field of vision. Moses will complete the annals of the wandering in the "great and terrible wilderness." Job and David, and Daniel will clear up the difficulties caused by the brevity of the holy narratives. Paul will finish his own biography—explain 2 Cor. xi. 23-27.—and recount his labours between his first imprisonment and his martyrdom. Peter's missionary life will be traced and unfolded, and the events of John's protracted pilgrimage will be at length made known to the church. And so of the rest—all down the stream of time—the Wickliffes—the Luthers—the Tyndales—the Bunyans—the Careys—and tens of thousands more, who will glorify God before their brethren in strains of heaven's own eloquence.

And then, as the happy throngs mingle on the starry plains, will there not be many a joyful recognition, and a sweet renewal of former communings? We are expressly informed that the relationships of earth will be known no more; but kindred spirits will feel again the mutual attraction, and unbosom themselves to each other with a freeness never before realised. There will be no withholding of thought or suppression of emotion—for there are no secrets in heaven. Neither will there be any change. There will be no withdrawal or expulsions from that society—no cooling down of affection. Love will be ever growing. The members of the church triumphant will be continually becoming dearer to each other, and the ardency of the fellowship will glow brighter and brighter.

Among the representations of heavenly glory contained in the word of God there is one which cannot but be regarded as peculiarly interesting. "The lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters" (Rev. vii. 17). Probably most of us have often wished that we had seen and heard the Saviour. We have traced his journeyings through Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, as he "went about doing good" (Acts x. 38), and spoke to the multitudes words of unimaginable sweetness and power—and we have said, "Oh that we had been there!" Our desires will soon be gratified in a far higher degree than they could have been on earth. We shall listen to his heavenly voice, and roam through yon glorious world under his guidance. Jesus the Teacher! Jesus the Guide!—In what way this privilege will be enjoyed—how it will be ordered, so that He who is "in the midst of the throne," governing the vast universe, and receiving the homage of all beings, will at the same time take such measures for the happiness of his people as to warrant the impression that he is personally engaged in promoting it—we know not, and need not care to ask "hard questions" on the subject. But there is the promise;—"the Lamb shall feed them—shall lead them." Whether able or not to comprehend the mode, we shall be conscious of its fulfilment.

Such is the prospect—the "good hope" of the saints. Ere long the actual enjoyment will be experienced. Some of us, according to the course of nature, are near the end of our pilgrimage. It may come to a close this year. Others, who are looking for longer travel, may have their purposes cut off and finish the journey much sooner than was expected. The Lord says to us all—"Be ye also ready" (Mat. xxiv. 44). And how shall it be? By "laying hold on eternal life."

Let us begin the year in this spirit, and determine, by God's grace, to spend it all in the same way, singing as we go along—"We are on our way to God."

This will have a happy influence on our spiritual state. It will infuse into our souls

a serious cheerfulness which cannot fail to do us good in many ways. Christian experience, as it is called, is too often made up of doubts and misgivings and sore complaints. Now, it may be granted that there is reason enough for them. We can easily believe all that our lowly-speaking brethren say, and if they "write bitter things" against themselves the truthfulness of the record is not to be questioned. Nor is the importance of self-inspection to be overlooked. We ought to look within, that each may know "the plague of his own heart." But let us learn to look upward, too. If we are converted, God has prepared heaven for us, and we shall shortly be there. Let us familiarise ourselves with the prospect. It was said of Saurin, the celebrated French preacher, that he was accustomed to retire for a quarter of an hour every day, to meditate on death and eternity. Whatever method we may adopt, the desirableness of acquainting ourselves with our ultimate destination will be admitted by all. And when we say this we do not mean merely that we should be well established in the faith and hold sound doctrine respecting everlasting life—but that we should regard going to heaven rather as an actual reality, a fact to be every day known, and its influence felt, than as an article of our creed. Instead of ringing changes on certain notions and modes of expression, and thus becoming skilful in hair-splitting divinity, let us gratefully receive "the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life" (1 John ii. 25.), gird up our loins for the journey, and daily "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling" (Phil. iii. 14.), emboldened by the love and sympathy of the divine Forerunner, who has taken possession of the heavenly home, and beckons us thither.

A well-instructed christian sees clearly that this holy habit is compatible with due and assiduous attention to his earthly pursuits. We are to "abide in our callings (always supposing them to be lawful) with God" (1 Cor. vii. 20-24), and to furnish to the world examples of diligence, truth, and uprightness. At the same time, if our hearts are set on heaven, we shall studiously avoid that grasping after gain which sinks so many "in destruction and perdition" (1 Tim. vi. 9);—we shall strive so to order our affairs and to arrange the duties of those who serve us or are under our charge, that there may be time for soul-concerns;—we shall watch and pray against the abuse of this world's engagements;—and knowing that we are "strangers and pilgrims," we shall aim to him in such a manner as that we shall be "not slothful in business," and yet "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. xiii. 11.)—perfectly willing to work hard as long as God bids us do so, and cheered in the performance of daily duty by the thought that the resting-time is near. Nor shall we be forgetful of the claims of suffering humanity, or of God's cause and people. Successful trade or commerce and profitable labour of any kind will give us opportunities for the exercise of christian charity in its varied applications. Those who "live unto the Lord" in their worldly avocations, and are "ready to distribute, willing to communicate," are said to "lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come," and thus to "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.). This is not working for life, but from life. The godly man who is in the world but not of it (John xvii. 15, 16.) and who holds and uses as a steward and trustee whatever the Great Proprietor has placed in his hands, is much more really under training for glory than he who shirks the duties of life, and dreams of safety by going out of the world, after the manner of the monks of the olden time.

We hope to do something for God this year. The Lord distributes his gifts at his will. He expects a return from every one of his servants. "According to his several ability" (Mat. xxv. 15), saved ourselves, and on the way to glory, it must be considered as our highest happiness, and felt to be a bounden duty, to labour for the souls of others by all the means in our power. We have facilities for it in rich abundance. It may not be ours to raise the living voice in public appeal, and take our stand among those who preach for eternity. But who is there, in whose heart the love of Christ dwells, who is

not desirous of embracing the opportunities constantly presented of telling of that love, and testifying of the grace and faithfulness of the blessed Saviour? Who is not ashamed of that cowardly reserve which is so often yielded to, and which hinders us from trying the persuasiveness of christian compassion? "It is high time to awake out of sleep" (Rom. xiii. 11.) Away with sloth and fear! Speak and act, brethren, for your Lord. The ignorant, the vicious, the formal, the sceptic, abound on every hand. How much less numerous would they be if all the servants of God acknowledged the duty of individual effort! This is a warfare which is peculiar to earth. The witness-bearing belongs to this world. Here, and here only, can we reprove sin, and seek the salvation of the sinner. The holy pleasure of this benevolence is confined to the present state. Its objects are dying daily before our eyes. And we, too, "soon expect to die." Let the fragments of time yet remaining to us be spent as by men who "wait for their Lord." Let us stir up one another to action. The more we do for God the happier we shall be. It will be pleasant to enter heaven fresh from the scene of christian labour—

"My body with my charge lay down,
And cease at once to work and live."

It may be a year of heart-breaking grief. Heavy trials, such as we have not yet encountered, may be in store for us. Be it so. The "man of sorrows" has trodden the path, and as he bids us follow his steps he points, upwards, saying, "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John xiv. 2). Now, we are in Christ's school, and our waywardness subjects us to chastisement. The discipline seems sometimes to be sharp, but it is administered by a loving hand, and the end shall be that we shall be "partakers of his holiness."

"O glorious hour! O blest abode!
I shall be near and like my God;
And flesh and sin no more control
The sacred pleasures of my soul."

This year may be our last. And then—what? Will it be, "glory?" No doubt of that—if we are Christ's. The "good work" is to be finished. Life in Christ—life for Christ—must be followed by life with him. The "marriage of the Lamb" will certainly take place at the appointed time, and all "the friends of the bridegroom" will be there.

The last year! Oh may its precious moments be well employed! Brethren and sisters in our common Lord—ministers—deacons—"servants of the churches" (Rom. xvi. 1)—teachers—all ye who "name the name of Christ;"—the darkness is fleeing apace, and the morning dawn is close at hand. We have no time for "foolish question"—or "strifes of words"—or profitless speculations—or disputes about trifles. Live and labour for Jesus—and with strong faith, ardent love, and joyous hope, "lay hold on eternal life."

"Ever yours till glory. R. MURRAY
McCHEYNE." A fit ending for the letters of a heavenly-minded man.

"Resolved, to obtain as much happiness to myself in the other world, as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigour, vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to, any way that can be thought of." These were the words of a young Christian—afterwards the celebrated divine, President Edwards. An admirable beginning of life!

Listen to one greater than they. "This I say, brethren the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." 1 Cor. vii. 29-31.

The MASTER speaks:—"Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing." Luke xii. 48.

Political eminence and professional fame fade and die with all things earthly; nothing of character is really permanent, but virtue and personal worth—these remain.

God's mercies are like a large chain, every link leads to another; present mercies assure you of future ones.