

## Our Pulpit.

## THE CHARM AGAINST EVIL.

BY REV. ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D.

"He did evil because he prepared (marg. 'fixed') not his heart to seek the Lord." II Cor. 12:4.

In these words the chronicler puts the finishing touch to his portrait of Rehoboam, the foolish son of a wise father, who, by weakness and by listening to evil counsellors, flung away a fair inheritance. If you will glance, at your leisure, over the preceding part of the biography of this king, in this book, you will see that the characteristics which the writer emphasizes are weakness and vacillation, rather than wickedness. Rehoboam listened to the young men, took their advice, and wrecked the kingdom. Then he went on better for a time, and prosperity began to harm him; then down on him came the Egyptian army to avenge his disobedience, and he grovelled on his knees before God, and humbled himself. And then, as soon as the weight was lifted off, the spring went back into its old shape, and he did evil once more. Finally the writer gathers all the futile life up into this one striking sentence: "He did evil because he did not fix his heart to seek the Lord." That is to say, because he did not strongly resolve to do right, he did wrong, and that is a universal truth. Yet there is a deeper truth than that in the words—because he did not set his heart to seek God, therefore he tumbled into the gripe of every tempting evil. That is to say, the true way to overcome temptation is to fill the heart with God. Religion is the parent of morality and of righteousness.

Now looking at the words in the light of these thoughts, let me just say a word, to begin with, about what is meant by this remarkable Old Testament phrase, Seeking after God.

It is almost entirely confined to the Old Testament, and belongs to the stage of development which religion had attained in that epoch. But it carries the very essence of all religion in it, and it is not antiquated, rather it is filled out into more glorious and solemn meaning, by all that differentiates us from all those Old Testament saints. No doubt, as it was originally used, it very largely referred to mere external practice of the sacrificial worship dedicated to Jehovah. But even in the Old Testament something far more inward and spiritual than that is meant by the expression on the lips of psalmist and prophet. What does it mean, then, to "seek the Lord?" We may begin the answer by saying that we do not seek as if not knowing where to find, blessed be God! And, perhaps, it is just because, since Christ showed us God, we are so sure of where to find him, that the phrase has dropped out of the language of religion, for the most part. The Christian seeker after him as for hid treasure, for he knows that God is in Christ, nor does he need to search with the chill doubt in his heart if "haply he may find him," for he knows that in Christ God is ever found by seeking souls. But, keeping this negative answer in mind, we answer further that we seek God by desiring him. Desire; the stretching out of all our nature towards him, the yearning of heart, mind, will, for that all-sufficient, sweet presence, the aspiration which, like the flight of migratory birds from the Pole to the sunny lands of the south, wings its way through cloud and storm, and darkness, and passes careless over continents or towered cities till it

reaches its goal—that is the way to seek God. We should aspire to God, as the trees, every one of them in the crowded wood, are silently striving to climb higher and higher to the open air and the benediction of the light above. It is vain for us to call ourselves Christians unless, in some measure, we do know what that means, which the old psalmist put into another and yet more striking metaphor, "My soul thirsteth for God; for the living God." Brethren, are we seeking after God in this fashion?

There is included in this seeking, not only desire, but the making him our direct aim in the midst of all the distractions and pettinesses of our earthly life. That is a hard thing to do, not to suffer his face to be obscured by the cloud and swarm of shining gnats, so to speak, that come between us and it, but straight up through all the complications and confusions and struggles of this petty life of ours, to look to him and to see him everywhere in the midst of the lowlinesses and the earthinesses of our daily life. In the shop, in the market, in the kitchen, in the study, in the street, and in the solitude, when we are thinking and toiling and striving ever, still to have our face set towards God is blessed but difficult. Still, though difficult to unite, the two things are not incompatible. The world spins round on its own axis in four and twenty hours, but that does not interfere with its annual revolution round its central sun. And it is possible for a man to be "diligent in business," and yet in it all to be "seeking the Lord." Nay, it is not possible for a man to be rightly "diligent in business" unless in it he is "seeking the Lord."

But there is another element in earnest seeking God. There is not only this desire, but also the honest use of the appropriate methods. I am not going to dwell upon these, but I only quote one word of scripture which would afford opportunity for large explanation if I had time. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." The child's cry, the lamb's bleat, brings the mother, and is its way of seeking. Our way of seeking is prayer. Are you thus seeking God?

The next point that I would touch upon is the effort that is needed for this seeking.

"He set not his heart," said the chronicler, "to seek after God." Rehoboam is the very type of a weak character in a wicked world is, sooner or later, a wicked character. One might almost say that the main point which makes the successful man to differ from the unsuccessful, the good man from the bad, is perhaps chiefly this, that one has a will like an iron rod, and the other has a will like "a reed shaken with the wind." Sure, at all events, am I of this, that we are meant by the witness of our very make, and we are compelled by reason of our circumstances, and the swarm of inducements to evil which abound in the world around us, far more than inducements to good, to keep a very tight hand upon the vagrancies of our own hearts, and to put a very strong coercive foot on the serpents and toads and evil beasts of all sorts that are within us, and that, if we do not set our hearts to seek God, and resolve strongly, and will mightily, and use our wills to suppress ourselves, we shall never so seek him as to find him. There is no blessing in Christianity for spasmodic searches, begun to-day and dropped to-morrow. There is no blessing in Christianity for half-hearted searchers with one eye fixed on the world and the

other than God. There is no place in the Christian race for those who run "uncertainly," not sure whether to run for the shining "prize" that hangs beside "the mark," or for the flowers by the side of the course. If we allow our lower selves to take the reins as they are for ever clamoring to be suffered to do, they will, sooner or later, overturn the coach and land us in the ditch. We shall never reach our journey's end, which is God, if we put the ordering of our lives into the hands of any part of ourselves but a strong will, enlightened by conscience, and taught by the Spirit of God. And be sure of this that if you do not set your hearts—aye, and your teeth—in the effort to seek the Lord, you do not come under the terms of the promise: "They that seek me earnestly shall find me." "Unite my heart to fear thy name;" and let us love him and seek him with all our hearts, and with all our wills, and with all our strength, and with all our minds.

Now, lastly, one word as to the security from evil, which such a whole-hearted search brings with it.

We all know how, if some great love, or some imperative duty, or some enkindling enthusiasm, comes into a mind or heart, lesser objects fade and disappear. "The expulsive power of a new affection," to use the expression of a great preacher, is mighty to drive out old, meaner loves, as young beech leaves in spring push last year's growth from the boughs. There is the great truth that underlies these words of my text. To set one's heart to seek God is the surest way to become masters of the evil that tempts us. The moon rises in the mighty heavens, and all the stars are hid in the pure whiteness of the quiet light; so when, like the moon out of a stormy ocean, there rises out of the fluctuations of a soul the great purpose to seek the Lord, temptations dwindle and disappear, and we are strong as we never were before. The heart that is filled with the quest after the chief good has no leisure and no care for lesser temptations. They do not appeal to the man who has gathered himself together in the search after God, or who is blessed beyond all other blessedness in the possession of him. Mists and malaria lie in the hollows, and cling to the bogs. You will need a great deal of quinine if you stop down there, but if you will go a couple of thousand feet up the hill, you will have changed the climate, and have left the malaria and the poisoned atmosphere behind you, and you will be in a sanatorium. Go up towards God, and the poisonous air cannot rise to harm you.

## DON'T.

How often, alas, do estimable brethren who have had some trouble among themselves draw back from Christian work altogether, or cast in their life influence with some other body, in much of whose teaching they do not concur. Neither is it usually a sense of unworthiness longer to continue to attempt to serve their Lord which prompts this action. Those who pursue this course usually are ready to justify themselves and cast all the wrong on those with whom they have been in strife. Why, then, when others have been wrong and they feel they have been right should they withdraw from the service of Christ? This is practically deserting their Lord and his truth because of what they consider the offence of a brother, or brethren. On the other hand, ought they not, if their hearts are disinclined to the work of their Lord, to be convinced that they

are possessed by a wrong spirit, who ever may have been to blame more outwardly during the time of division? What should we think of soldiers in face of the enemy who should refuse to fight for their country against the common foe, because they had some little petty dissension among themselves? Is it not unspeakably worse when we refuse to do our part in the great unceasing struggle for God and heaven against Satan and hell, because we are displeased with one at our side who may not have done just right perhaps.—*Can. Baptist.*

## HOSTILE FRIENDS.

God sends sometimes our enemies for our deliverance. Dangers, diseases and deaths he has made ministering angels to do his will. Are there not those who, looking back on life, can see that the arm of God which wrought marvelously for them was a sore sickness, a dreadful failure, or a great sorrow? In southern England the owls are the fiercest enemy of the small song birds, yet, in the time of the northern migration of the birds over the channel, owls have been seen flying in from the sea in the morning, and on their shoulders perched little golden-crested wrens, which, wearied with their long flight, seize this possibility of rest and safety coming to them in the shape of their bitterest enemy. May we not find, living through what frightened us, and even harmed us, that ministry and mercy were there provided? In the disease we dread, in the death we fear, in the fault we fight, in the enemy in our way, God may send us a message of help and of salvation.

There are cases of consumption so far advanced that Bickle's Anti-Consumptive Syrup will not cure, but none so bad that it will not give relief. For coughs, colds, and all affections of the throat, lungs and chest, it is a specific, which has never been known to fail. It promotes a free and easy expectoration, thereby removing the phlegm, and gives the diseased parts a chance to heal.

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This is a sad world for those who have no faith.

For internal and external application we have found Perry Davis' Pain Killer of great value, and we can recommend it for colds, rheumatism or fresh wounds and bruises.—*Christian Era.* Avoid substitutes.