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Our Pulpit.

The Use of Calamities.

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Sabbath morning, Fred ericton, Oct. 14th., 1888.

"What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"—JOB II. 10.

The text is the answer the patient and pious Job gave to his wife in the day of calamity. He was the millionaire of his time. He had prospered in business until there seemed to be no bounds to his prosperity. The years as they came to him brought him only good, added more and more to his growing possessions, and he had come to be immensely wealthy, the greatest man of the East, an uncrowned king. And his growing prosperity did not hurt him. He continued the simple-living, God-fearing, good man he had always been. He went about among his people, and was a true father to them, their priest as well as their king. With his own lips he taught them the truth. With his own hands he ministered to their necessities. When they rejoiced he rejoiced; when they wept he wept.

But a day of calamity came to the patriarch of Uz, a series of remarkable and unaccountable reverses of fortune, and things went to pieces with him a good deal faster than he had been able to build them up through the busy years. It looked as if the judgments of Heaven had been let loose upon him. Hostile desert tribes fell upon his ploughmen, and massacred them, and carried off his cattle. His shepherds and sheep a terrific thunderstorm destroyed. The Chaldean bands drove off his camels. His seven sons were all cut down in an instant in the midst of their thoughtless levity. And as if his losses were not calamity enough, he himself was prostrated with a most loathsome disease.

Poor Job! it went hard with him. From the very summit of earthly greatness and success he was hurled down to the very bottom of the direst need. And it was not because he had been wasteful and extravagant, proud and reckless. Sometimes men of wealth lose their heads, and put all they have in one great venture that turns out to be a huge blunder on their part. But not so with Job. It was one of those sudden reverses that no human foresight can provide against that overtook him and swept him clean bare—as bare as he was when he was born. And then to add to his sorrow and woe, his old friends lost faith in him, and let their tongues loose upon him. And last of all, and almost worst of all, his own wife, the mother of his children, turned against him, and in her wild disappointment and impatience, told him that the best thing for him to do was to renounce religion, curse his God, and then go and take his own life, and thus put himself out of the misery he was in. Let us hope that the calamity that had swept down upon her once happy home, had, for the time, unbalanced her mind, and made her reckless. Her words are terrible. I quote them from the revised version. "Then said his wife unto him, dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? renounce God and die?" But his answer was worthy of him, worthy both of his head and heart. "But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh." He thus intimates that up to that time she had been like himself a believer, one who feared and trusted and worshipped God. And then he added in the words I am choosing for my text to-day: "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Now first, Job argues here, and unanswerably, that it would be unworthy of them, ungrateful on their part, after all the past good they had received from the hand of God, not to receive the evil as well at His hand, that, for reasons best known to Himself, He was pleased to send them.

For years and years, perhaps, for twenty years and more, it had been all but uninterrupted prosperity with them, year after year, in unbroken succession, pressed down and running over with good, and it was all right. They did not think of turning their backs, and refusing to receive the good, as it came full and free from the hand of God. Who would refuse to receive good no matter from what quarter and from whose hand it came? So long as it was good, or what men call good—prosperity in business, increasing wealth, getting on and up in the world, adding field to field and farm to farm, gathering property, growing in worldly success, it was received, and no questions asked, no difficulties raised. But when it came to pass, in the course of events, that, instead of the usual good, there was received something else—barrenness, desolation, disease, death, calamity, evil of every kind; then the hand that had been stretched out so readily to receive, drew back, and did not want to receive now. And who indeed wants to receive evil even from

the hand out of which so much that is good has been received? We naturally recoil from evil when it comes to us in the shape of calamity. The hand stretched out to receive instinctively draws back, draws back almost whether or not.

And Job's wife, and a good many others as well as she, would draw it back, and refuse to receive the evil; or, if they must receive, it would only be after loud complaining and protesting, and because there was no help for it. With her, and with them, it must be the good all the time, the good and nothing else—no bad years, no unprofitable undertakings, no reverses of fortune, no losses, no calamities, no seasons of sickness, no sorrows and deaths. If anything else, if the evil; then renounce God, the giver of all the good of the past; curse Him to His face and have nothing more to do with Him. Trust Him no more. Let all the good and glory of the past be forgotten in the one calamity of the present.

But not so with the patient right-thinking patriarch of the East. He looked at it differently. It was not clear to him any more than to her why the calamities that were breaking over them like wild waves had been sent. He could not see through it at all. But he felt it was not worthy of them, it was mean and small, it was a poor return for all the good God had been doing for them in the years gone by, to renounce Him now, and to renounce Him simply because He had been pleased to visit them with the grievous ills they were groaning under. His noble soul recoiled from such smallness on their part, such bare ingratitude. "What?" he asked; "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

And, my hearers, that is one way of looking at the losses and calamities of the present season. The other day out in the country it made me feel bad to see the rain pouring down from the pitiless clouds upon the grain lying reaped in the fields, and to see it in some instances being swept away by reckless floods. How strange, I thought, that God, after He had grown and ripened it, and filled the farmer's heart with hope and joy with regard to it, should come, and ruthlessly destroy it. It is not like God, I thought, and I let my thoughts run on, and wondered why it was, and if He could help it. And this that Job said came to me, and it was a ray of light piercing through the darkness. "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

It is not often such a poor harvest-season comes to us. People do not remember the like of it. Only once in a lifetime perhaps, once or so in forty or fifty years has the like occurred, and that being so, shall we not receive it from the hand that has given us so many good seasons? But we do not receive it very meekly and patiently. The land, from one end of it to the other, has been full of loud murmuring and questioning and doubting. As men remained within doors the other day, and looked out at the pouring rain and the swimming fields, and saw their grain going to ruin—the grain that was to feed themselves and their children during the long hungry months of winter, it seemed to them that God was neither good or wise, and they felt as if they had been worshipping and serving Him for naught. They began to question whether after all it paid to be religious, and the suggestion came to them to renounce Him. But the patient sufferer yonder in the far East, from amidst the ruin around him, raises himself up, and silences our murmuring, and rebukes our ingratitude, with his telling words, his unanswerable argument: "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Again, according to Job, and his teaching is sound, evil, in the shape of calamity, misfortune, is from the hand of God as well as good.

One happy day when all seemed well with Job and all he had, a messenger came running, and reported to him that the Sabaeans had fallen upon his ploughmen as they were at their work, and slain them, and then possessed themselves of his oxen and asses. As this messenger was telling his dolorous tale, another messenger was seen running from a different direction who reported the loss of the sheep with their shepherds by a terrible thunderstorm. Still another messenger came running breathless, and told how that the Chaldean bands had driven off the camels and slain their keepers. And still another came with the saddest news of all, for it was his to tell of the sudden death of his seven sons by a cyclone. Thus wave after wave of calamity, each succeeding one more terrible than the last, rolled their fury upon the hapless patriarch, and you would say, that if anything would make shipwreck of a man's faith, it would be to pass through such a testing experience. But the patient Job was able to overcome; his faith and patience triumphed. Instead of breaking out into a storm of rage against those who had swept down upon him and dispossessed him of his property, and instead of cursing with fierce

anathemas the wind and the thunder, he bowed down on his knees before Him who was over all, and he meekly and reverently said: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

You hear the people talking to-day, and they let out against the weather, they curse the country, blame the government, growl against "old Hutch" of Chicago for putting up the price of flour, and give way to their foolish and impotent rage at the losses and calamities that are befalling them. But Job looked at things differently. Of course the cruel Sabaeans and Chaldeans were only too ready to pounce down upon his oxen and asses and camels, and carry them off. It did them good to strip him when it was in their power, and with a savage sort of pleasure they tore at him when he was down. They were jealous of his success; they were mad to see him prospering as he had been, and they would have liked all along to have got at him with their hate and rage. But somehow he was kept from them, and they could not touch a hair of his head. Around him and his was a cordon of angels, so to speak, and he was safe, and he grew in sweetness and grace. But there came a time when it was in their power to hurt him if they wanted to, and of course they wanted to. It came to them like a revelation from Heaven, or perhaps from Hell, "Now you can steal his cattle! Now is your opportunity to have your will against him!" And all the evils got at him together—the Sabaeans, the Chaldeans, the lightning, the cyclone, and they soon made havoc of his prosperity. But Job did not blame them for his losses. It was the will of God, and he received his reverses from His almighty hand, and felt that it was well.

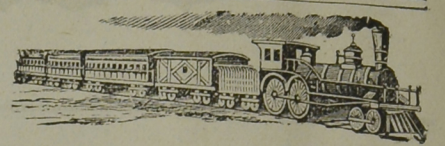
And let us see, in the capricious and broken weather of the present season, the floods that have done so much damage, the frosts that have blighted the crops, the losses and calamities that are preying upon the prosperity of men, and even the cruel avarice of those modern Sabaeans in Chicago and New York and Montreal and perhaps nearer home who are only too ready to take advantage of the bad season to add to their millions;—let us see in all this the hand of God. Let us understand with Job that it is His will if these evils are upon us, if the winds linger in the east and the rains continue to fall, if the harvests are rotting in the field, if the outlook for the winter is gloomy, if the cattle pine in empty stalls and the children of the poor cry for bread and there is none; and let us bow down at His footstool, and receive what He gives us, even though it is not pleasant to the taste, nor joy-giving to the heart. "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

You think it is a harsh doctrine to preach and hear, that God is the author of our calamities. But it is the doctrine that Job held, and it helped him safely through his calamities. And it is the doctrine the word of God teaches throughout its sixty-six books, and to me, hard and harsh though it is, it is full of unspeakable comfort and hope. I look over history, and I see the floods of evil wildly tossing and raging down along the ages, and strewn the world with wreckage. I look over the nations today, and I see the rage and hate of men at work, the tempests of human passion breaking out, the cyclones of calamity bursting, wrongs of every kind doing their worst, jealousy and murder and revenge desolating, and it is awful to behold. But I look again with the Bible open before me, and now I see the hand of the Lord in it all, and I am not afraid for the results, I tremble not at the consequences. "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice." "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Again, if our evils come to us from the Lord, as the stricken patriarch of Uz argues here, then there must be a purpose in them, a need of them, a use for them.

It is not because it happens so that this or that is or is not. Neither our good nor our evil comes to us in a haphazard sort of way. It often seems so indeed. You cannot always account for the way things come about. You ask why one season is wet and another dry. It is so easy sometimes to sow and reap, and then it is so hard. Men tell you they have tons of hay to make yet, acres of wheat to reap yet. And not because they idled and trifled away the good weather of the months past. No; they are not the men who fool away their time. They are the men who make hay when the sun shines. They are the men who are quick to take advantage of every opportunity. But unlike other seasons the sun has not shone much this season. He has kept a veil of clouds over his face, and only now and again has he peeped out to ask tauntingly how men were getting along with their hay-making and harvesting, and he seemed to laugh at their futile efforts to get along without him.

But we are not left to chance or fate. God rules. A wisdom that makes no mistakes, an intelligence that knows all things and never errs, guides our affairs, and cares for us. The sunshine and showers are from the hand of God. It is



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3.15 P. M.—For Fredericton Junction, St. John and points East.

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2.30 P. M.—From Fredericton Junction, Vanceboro, Bangor, Portland, Boston, and points West, St. John St. Andrew's, St. Stephen, Houlton, Woodstock.
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