



SERMON.

Spiritual Sluggishness.

By Rev. W. Scott Page.

Preached in the Wesleyan Chapel, Westgate-hill, Bradford, Sunday morning, August 9.

"That ye be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."—Hebrews vi. 12. (R. V.)

Almost everywhere is the fact recognized that novelty has much to do with enthusiasm. Very few are prepared to judge of the value of a worker by what he is at the commencement of his work. "Wait a while," they say. "He is new to the duties as yet; when the charm of their freshness is over then we shall be able better to estimate what we may daily expect from him." All of us have been deceived concerning ourselves at some time or other by the glamour of novelty. We undertook some new work—it may be for our own improvement or for the benefit of our fellow-men—and for a short time we seemed to be carried beyond ourselves in our zeal. Like a child which had been kept in seclusion for a while, our spring and elasticity were superabundant. The work was not a hardship, but a pleasure. We could not bear to leave it, and we imagined that it would be always thus with us. But we were mistaken. Novelty was the goad by which our enthusiasm was pricked on, and when this point came blunted there was no more tugging at the reins, but the slow, measured, ox-like tread, or, worse perhaps, complete standing still. In no department of work can we judge of our devotion or estimate our ultimate success by what we feel and accomplish in the early stages. "Ye did run well," is not only the mournful acknowledgment of a disappointed apostle, but the perpetual cry of all employers and teachers. Capital beginnings! Splendid enthusiasm to start with! If it were only kept up, the worker would soon have everything at his feet, but unfortunately, it is not kept up. Soon the inquiry has to be raised, "Who did hinder you?" The fine gold has become dim. What damp breath has tarnished it? The simple fact is that the novelty of the experience has gone, and taken the enthusiasm with it.

Such was the great danger of these Hebrew Christians. There had been a crisis in their spiritual history of very vast importance. They had broken from Judaism and accepted Christ. So far as their worldly affairs were concerned, the change was not for the better, but for the worse. They were cast off by their friends, persecuted and despised. Some of them had to endure the breaking up of their homes, one of the most distressing trials which can come to any. Yet so long as the fire of love to Christ burned brightly, they were able to take even that joyfully; not merely to suffer it without a spiteful or revengeful spirit, but even to rejoice in the midst of it. Standing even among the ruins of a wrecked home, they could still give thanks to God. "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing that in heaven ye have a better and enduring substance." Privation and persecution have never daunted the devoted soul; they have only acted as oil poured upon the flames, broadening and multiplying those aspiring tongues of light. What, however, stimulates an enthusiastic Christian will destroy a sluggish one, just as the mountain air which invigorates healthy lungs only hastens collapse in those which are diseased. The apostle felt that he had occasion to fear for these Hebrews, for the novelty of their Christian experience was over, and, in consequence, they were in danger of becoming more keenly alive to outward discomfort. It was a great peril, and by some of the most solemn words which were ever written he endeavored to avert it. He leads them to the edge of the awful pit of apostasy and waves his torch over the blackness of its darkness. Many were immured there already. Would they swell the number? He devoutly hopes not. "Beloved," he says, "we are persuaded better things of you and things which accompany salvation though we thus speak. And we desire that each of you may show the same diligence unto the fulness of hope even to the end, that ye be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Let us consider the sluggishness here referred to, and how it may be avoided.

The Lethargy of Declining Faith.

**Spiritual Sluggishness.** The word is one which usually relates to a bodily condition, and we must therefore first gain a clear idea of it in that sense before we can understand its use by the writer in relation to the soul. It is a difficult matter to define mind in a way that will satisfy a scientific mind, but, generally speaking, it is that condition when "all the functions of the body are performed easily, naturally, and well." Such, at any rate, is the description of it given by a distinguished physician, Dr. Charteris, and I do not well see in what way it can be improved. When a man's body is the cheerful and active servant of his will, when no part needs pressure to make it perform its office, it may be properly described as being in perfect health. All of us, however, have passed through seasons when some one bodily organ was not capable of performing its function, and when, in consequence of some complaint or other, it caused us considerable pain. We had no difficulty in localising the matter; we could lay our finger upon the exact spot, and our ability to do so led to the use of remedies which, happily, soon restored us.

All disorders, however, are not of this acute kind. Although sharp pain is the usual herald of a deviation from the standard of health, there are conditions in which the body is not as it should be, though there is no great suffering. There are other heralds besides pain, and

sluggishness is one of them. In this case you cannot put your finger upon any one spot and say, "The pain is here!" No, there is a dulness, a lethargy which affects the whole body. You have not to whip-up some lagging member, for all are alike in that respect. Most of us have passed through such experiences. We can remember times when we could find no pleasure in anything, when we could not throw ourselves zealously into any employment, and all we felt equal to was very light labor or complete rest. Sluggishness had seized upon us, and it made everything a burden.

Such was precisely the condition of these Hebrews in relation to spiritual things. Observe, the writer does not charge them with any flagrant offence, as Paul did the Corinthians. To them, that great Apostle boldly said, "You are envious and quarrelsome; some of you are gluttonous and careless!" He put his finger upon the exact spot, indicating the locality of the mischief and where the remedies were to be applied. The writer of this Epistle does not deal thus with the Hebrews. There was no glaring sin to rebuke. They went to the same place as before, and performed the same acts; yet they were not the same men. The difference was here: formerly, whatever they did, they did zealously; now, whatever they did, they did sluggishly. The stream was confined within the same banks; but whereas once it rushed on, smiling in the sunlight, carrying away many a poisonous element, turning many a water-wheel—musical, purifying, useful—now it moved slowly—the music was gone, the poison was accumulating and the wheels were still. The same stream? Yes; if you looked only at the old landmarks, but not the same stream by any means, if you looked at its flow and the purposes it served. To particularise: they still spoke of Christ as their Saviour, but there was no glow of affection on their faces or in their hearts. They prayed to Him still, but the old fervor was not there. They ministered to the needy, but the poor felt that the gift and the giver were separate.

"And the gift without the giver is bare."

They had drifted into another zone, and they who in the warmer climate had been full of activity, now were almost torpid in the cold.

Neglect of Spiritual Exercise.

Two other points in the analogy demand our attention, although I can only touch upon them lightly. In its milder forms sluggishness is generally the result of the neglect of healthy exercise, and further, although it does not always imply organic disease, yet, if not remedied, it is likely to lead to it, and so shorten the days. There were certain exercises of the Christian life which these Hebrews had neglected. In the previous chapter the writer charges them with being "dull of hearing." The Greek word translated "dull" is the same as that in our text; they had "sluggish" ears. They had not forsaken their teachers you see, but they did not give them proper attention. The truth was explained, but they were not mentally on the alert, and so they found no lodgment within them. The neglect of that duty was yielding its baneful fruit. Disease was threatening them. Unusual symptoms had shown themselves, and it was not without abundant cause that the words were written, "For the land which hath drunk the rain that cometh up on it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it is also tilled, receiveth blessing from God; but if it beareth thorns and thistles it is rejected and nigh unto a curse, whose end is to be burned." Thorns and thistles spring up on neglected land, and the Apostle feared that such growths would speedily appear in them. What had been a garden of the Lord was likely to become a fruitless tract, bearing growths only fit to be burned.

Had he known us, brethren, would he have expressed himself in the same way? Does the word accurately describe our condition? If so, let us make diligent inquiry concerning those exercises of our holy religion in which we have been negligent, and let the awful danger—as surely looming before us as before them—be to us a salutary warning. Observe, it is not a mere matter of slowness or swiftness; rightly regarded, it is one of life or death. "Not sluggish," but "imitators of them who go through faith and patience inherit the promises." A few words upon this important counsel. We cannot fail to be impressed with the wisdom which suggested it. Scarcely any one has accomplished a great work without moving on lines similar to those here laid down. Who can tell how much inspiration men have received by considering a noble end and noble human examples?

Now, the writer calls his readers to that two-fold contemplation. He reminds them first of the promises of God. Some of them had already been fulfilled, but many of them were still but promises—i. e., they had relation to the future. The reference, of course, is to the heavenly life which he wished them to contemplate, so that they might patiently endure their present afflictions. God had in store for them a tranquility such as they had never yet known—a tranquility which should never be ruffled by the stormy winds of trial, and a service which should never be hindered by persecution, or in which they should ever tire or grow weary. In that higher life work and rest should sweetly blend. In their present circumstances they were sharply and painfully separated from each other; but then the twin, by a heavenly wedlock, should become one for ever.

Did any of them, however, regard their difficulties and hindrances as insuperable? If so, the Apostle corrects the error by reminding them that many had already inherited the promises. Was their case while on earth different in any essential respect from that of his readers? Nay, they inherited the promises "through faith and patience."

The Virtues Wanted.

Faith. God did not give them glimpses of heaven while they were on earth. They simply had the promise to support them, not the sight of the realities themselves.

True, their faith was so strong that it became to them the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." But the faith of the Hebrews might be equally strong, for the Promiser was the same. It was possible for them to believe as simply and as firmly as those who were then in heaven.

Patience. They who were "within the veil" had, while on earth, the same trying and disappointing life that the Hebrews were enduring. Men did not recognise them as "the sons and the daughters of the Almighty," and so they had to endure privation and persecution. But they summoned patience to their aid. They reasoned: "If the heat of the crucible is great all our dross will be purged away by it, and we shall shine the brighter! If the journey is long and difficult, it will make the rest all the more welcome when it comes." And so, having patiently endured, they obtained the promises. "Their reward should be an encouragement and an incentive to you," says the writer. "Trust and endure, and by and by, their glory you shall share."

Let us, my brethren, take this counsel to heart. There is no royal road to heaven for any of us. Faith and patience have always been required, and always will be. Surely the prospect held out to us by the promises of God is too precious to lose—perfection of character, perfection of bliss. Let us consider it lest we grow weary and faint in our minds. Many very dear to us now "inherit the promises," and we remember that their faith and patience were often beautifully manifested during their earthly sojourn here. We rejoice on their behalf that the reward has come, and the long discipline of life is over for ever. They endured as seeing Him who is invisible. Let us, "considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today—yea, and for ever."

A Rabbi's View.

Dr. Kraskopf delivered a lecture last Sunday in Philadelphia on "Through Labor to Rest," in which he took the ground that the Jew above all others is a sufferer from overwork and under-rest. He argued that Sunday as observed in this country must be accepted by the Jew as his day of rest, otherwise the strain of life upon him would be more than he could endure. He said:

Christianity has taken much from us; it is no humiliation take something good from it. And in taking it we do not as a compliment, but to serve our own highest ends. We save our lives. We preserve ourselves as a people. Since we will not, or cannot, keep our own Oriental Sabbath, let us, for our lives' sake, keep at least the Occidental Sunday-Sabbath. It has already in one sense been made obligatory upon us by the law of the land. Our shops are closed. Our busy hives of industry are hushed. We suffer no financial loss by keeping Sunday. Let us also suffer no loss of vital powers. Let us obey the Scriptural injunction, and keep one day holy, holy not in the Rabbinical or Puritanic sense, that turned the Sabbath into a day of greater hardships, but in the sense of that which the prophet Isaiah advocated, a day of "joy and temperance and repose," a day that shall rest overtaken parts and bring others into activity that have been suppressed during the week, that shall recuperate lost strength, repair damages in the system, rake out the ashes and cinders and start the fire ablazing vigorously for the healthful resumption of the week's work."

Early Christians and Cleanliness.

In the reaction against the monstrous corruptions and unbridled sensuality of Pagan Rome, Christian enthusiasts rushed to the opposite extreme. An age of asceticism succeeded to an age of sensuality. The human body which Imperial Rome had pampered and indulged was now to be neglected and humiliated. A "cult of bodily uncleanness" began. A hideous, sordid and emaciated mania, passing his life in a long routine of useless and atrocious self-torture, became, as Mr. Lecky has said, "the ideal of the nations which had known the writings of Plato and Cicero, and the lives of Socrates and Cato."

The cleanliness of the body was regarded as the pollution of the soul, and the saints who were most admired had become one hideous cloth of clotted filth. To borrow one or two illustrations from the "History of European Morals," St. Athanasius relates with a thrill of admiration, how St. Anthony had never once been guilty of washing his feet. For 50 years St. Abraham, the hermit, washed neither his face nor his feet. Another saint had never seen himself naked. Another, a famous virgin, joined herself to a community of nuns, who shuddered with horror at the very mention of a bath. This cult threatens to reappear. We note that some curates are abandoning clean collars and necks, and imitating the priests abroad in these matters; and where a complaint was made of this to a bright woman of literary tastes, she replied, "But uncleanness is not a crime." It seems as if it threatened to become a merit.—Temple Bar.

Christopher Columbus' Bell.

A little church in Haleyville, Cumberland County, N. J., composed of colored people, is going to loan to the Chicago Exposition a bell that once belonged to Christopher Columbus. It was presented to Columbus by Ferdinand and Isabella, who received it as a trophy from a chapel in the Alhambra, and he in turn gave it to a congregation of monks in New Granada. These monks lost it by a band of pirates, whose vessel was in turn wrecked, the bell alone being rescued and carried to South America, where, after many years, it was given to a New Jersey sea captain, from whom it has since come into the possession of the colored church at Haleyville.

He Preaches to the Rich.

A preacher of New York who always attracts a large audience is Dr. John R. Paxton. He is a man of stocky build, a bold, seamed face that denotes a deep thinker, and his methods both in and out of the pulpit are those of one who believes he has a great mission to perform in life, and has no fear that he will not do his work well. Dr. Paxton preaches to the wealthiest congregation in the world; not that this makes him any more influential than if it were the poorest, but it so happens that Jay Gould, Russell Sage and other men, whose fortunes may be multiplied by many millions, have pews in his church.

Jay Gould and the Church.

Of the meeting of presbyterian divines at the house of Jay Gould, at which Mr. Gould gave a cheque for \$10,000 in the interest of church extension, the Rev. Dr. Rainsford of Toronto, said recently: "When I hear of a church, strong, numerous, influential, and rich—a body of christian men remarkable for the championing of what they claim to be Apostolic christianity—calling a meeting for the extension of Christ's church in the house of the one man who before the people of all these United States has confessedly represented what is the very opposite of christianity—a man who has done more to degrade and debauch the morals of business life than any other citizen—when this happens, I say it is time to speak as well as to pray. I state the matter as temperately as I can when I say a mistake has been made which has put tens of thousands of christian people to the blush; and more, I say it is idle to talk of praying for the advancement of Christ's church if such things are allowed to pass unchallenged, or those who are responsible for them to pass unrebuked."

INSTRUCTION.

Carrie A. King, in the Indian Office, Washington, D. C., learned the New Shorthand in less than three months. Four hundred and eighty applied for the position.

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Notice of Dissolution

THE undersigned hereby give notice and certify that a certain limited Partnership under the laws of the Province of New Brunswick, conducted under the firm name of "W. C. PITFIELD & Co.," for the buying and selling at wholesale of dry goods and other merchandise, and generally a wholesale dry goods and general jobbing and commission business, which by the certificate of Limited Partnership registered in the office of the Registrar of Deeds of the City and County of Saint John in the said Province, was to commence the Twenty-eighth day of December, A. D. 1889, and terminate the First day of January, A. D. 1892, did terminate and is and was dissolved the said First day of January, A. D. 1892.

(Signed) WARD C. PITFIELD,  
S. HAYWARD.

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAINT JOHN, to wit:

Be it remembered that WARD C. PITFIELD and SAMUEL HAYWARD, parties to and the signers of the annexed notice and certificate, personally came and appeared at the City of Saint John, in the City and County of Saint John and Province of New Brunswick, before me, J. E. BARNES, one of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace in and for the said City and County of Saint John, and acknowledged the said WARD C. PITFIELD that he signed the said notice and certificate, and the said SAMUEL HAYWARD that he signed the same.

Given under my hand at the said City of Saint John this Twenty-first day of December, A. D. 1891.

(Signed) J. E. BARNES,  
J. P. City and County of Saint John.

Partnership Notice.

THE undersigned, desirous of forming a Limited Partnership under the Laws of the Province of New Brunswick, hereby certify:

1. That the name of the firm under which such partnership is to be conducted is "W. C. PITFIELD & Co."
2. That the general nature of the business intended to be transacted by such partnership is the buying and selling at wholesale of dry goods and other merchandise, and generally a wholesale dry goods and general jobbing and commission business.
3. That the names of all the general and special partners interested in said partnership are as follows:

WARD C. PITFIELD, who resides at the City of Saint John in the City and County of Saint John and Province of New Brunswick, is the general partner, and SAMUEL HAYWARD, who resides at the Parish of Hampton in the County of Kings and Province of New Brunswick, is the special partner.

4. That the said SAMUEL HAYWARD has contributed the sum of forty thousand dollars as capital to common stock.

5. That the period at which the said partnership is to commence is the Second day of January, A. D. 1892, and the period at which the said partnership is to terminate is the Second day of January, A. D. 1896.

Dated this Thirty-first day of December, A. D. 1891

(Signed) WARD C. PITFIELD,  
S. HAYWARD.

PROVINCE OF NEW BRUNSWICK.

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAINT JOHN, SS.

Be it remembered that on this Thirty-first day of December, A. D. 1891, at the City of Saint John and Province of New Brunswick, before me, JAMES A. BELYEA, a Notary Public in and for the said Province, by lawful authority duly commissioned and sworn, residing and practising in the said City of Saint John, personally came and appeared,

WARD C. PITFIELD and SAMUEL HAYWARD, parties to and the signers of the annexed certificate, and in the said certificate mentioned and severally acknowledged, the said WARD C. PITFIELD that he signed the said certificate, and the said SAMUEL HAYWARD that he signed the same.

In witness whereof, I the said Notary have hereunto set my hand and Notarial Seal at the said City and County of Saint John, the said

Thirty-first day of December, A. D. 1891.

(Signed) JAMES A. BELYEA,  
Notary Public.

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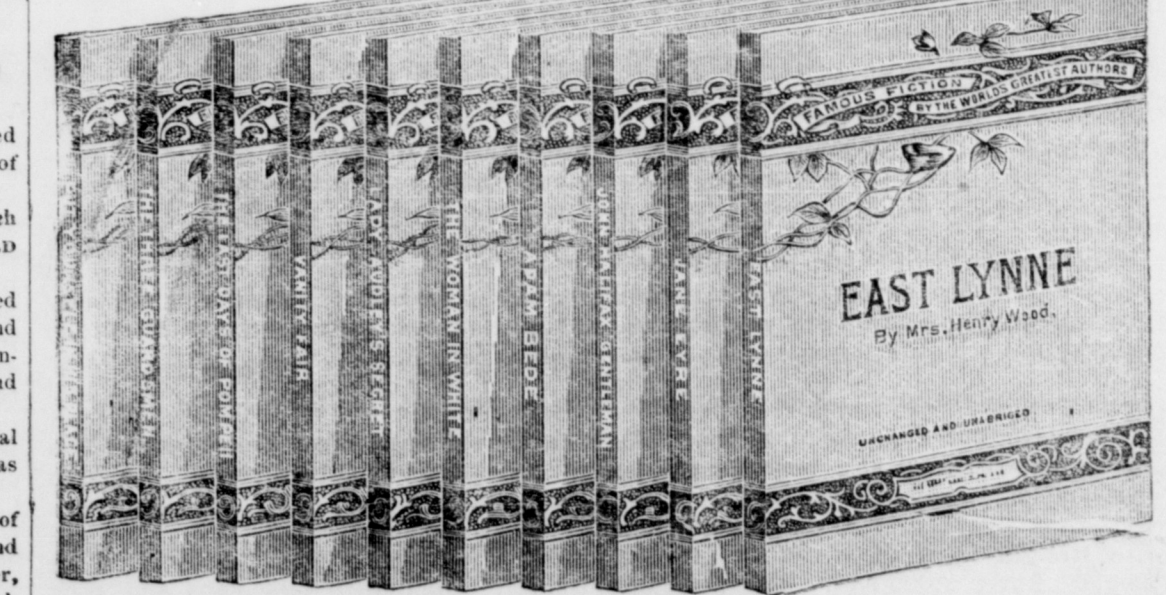
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