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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-
other 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
his companion on that occasion has since
joined the "general assembly and church of
the first-born," Heb. xii. 23), just as the con-
gregation 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 re-
peated 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 thrill-
ing. 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 pant-
ings 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 earn-
est—life sublime—life everlasting.

It is fellowship with God. Unspeakable
complacency—delight—contentment—satis-
faction. Those who "see his face" are fully
and for ever "satisfied." God is their "ex-
ceeding 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 "walk-
ed with God." Noah will relate his trials
and consolations during the long period in
which "the ark was a preparing." Abra-
ham; Isaac, and Jacob will relate their var-
ied 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 difficul-
ties caused by the brevity of the holy narra-
tives. 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 in-
formed that the relationships of earth will be
known no more; but kindred spirits will
feel again the mutual attraction, and un-
bosom themselves to each other with a free-
ness 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 pecu-
liarly 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 heav-
enly 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 ex-
pected. 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 ques-
tioned. Nor is the importance of self-in-
spection 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 ac-
customed to retire for a quarter of an hour
every day, to meditate on death and eternity.
Whatever method we may adopt, the desira-
bleness 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 ever-
lasting 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 re-
ceive "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 grasp-
ing after gain which sinks so many "in des-
truction 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 engage-
ments;—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. xii. 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 com-
merce 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 dis-
tribute, willing to communicate," are said to
"lay up in store for themselves a good founda-
tion 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 bound-
en 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 re-
prove sin, and seek the salvation of the sin-
ner. 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 frag-
ments 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 en-
countered, 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 wayward-
ness subjects us to chastisement. The dis-
cipline 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 ques-
tion"—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 cha-
racter is really permanent, but virtue and per-
sonal worth—These remain.

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