

Perfect Through Suffering.

God never would send you the darkness
If He felt you could bear the light;
But you would not cling to His guiding
hand
If the way were always bright;
And you would not care to walk by faith,
Could you always walk by sight.

'Tis true He has many an anguish
For your sorrowful heart to bear;
And many a cruel thorn-crown
For your tired head to wear;
He knows how few would reach heaven at
all
If pain did not guide them there.

So he sends you the blinding darkness,
And the furnace of seven fold heat;
'Tis the only way, believe me,
To keep you close to His feet,
For 'tis always so easy to wander
When our lives are glad and sweet.

Then nestle your hand in your Father's,
And sing if you can, as you go;
Your song may cheer someone behind you
Whose courage is sinking low;
And, well, if your lips do quiver—
God will love you better so.

—Selected.

The Angel of the Church in Sardis.

Notes of Sabbath evening Lecture in United Free St. George's, Edinburgh.

BY REV. ALEXANDER WHYTE, D. D.

Themistocles, Plutarch tells us, could not get to sleep at night, so loud was all Athens in the praises of Miltiades. And the ministers of the other six churches in Asia were like Themistocles in the matter of their sleep, so full were all their people's mouths of the name and the renown of the minister of Sardis. When he went to the communion-seasons at Ephesus, and Smyrna, and Pergamos, and Thyatira, for months and years after, the captivated people could tell you his texts, and at every mention of his name they would break out about his preaching. His appearance, his voice, his delivery, his earnestness and impressiveness, and his memorable sayings, all contributed to make the name of the minister of Sardis absolutely a household word up and down the whole presbytery. Now, it was after some great success of that pulpit kind: it was immediately on the back of some extravagant outburst of his popularity as a preacher, that his Master could keep silence no longer toward the minister of Sardis. In anger at him, as also at those who so puffed him up; both in anger, and in love, and in pity, his Master sent to his inflated servant this plain-spoken message and most solemn warning: "Thou hast a great name among short-sighted men. Thou hast much praise before men, but not before God. All men think well of thee, but not God. All thy great sermons are so much sounding brass before God. And, what is not already spiritually dead in thee, is ready to die, and will soon be for ever dead, unless thou dost become a new manner of minister, not before men, but before God."

"Of all men in the world," says James Durham, "ministers are most obnoxious to this temptation of vanity. And that because most of their appearances are before men; and that in the exercise of some gift of the mind which is supposed to hold forth the inward worth of a man more than any other gift. Now, when this meekness with applause, that applause has a great subtlety in its pleasing and tickling of them, and is so ready to incline them to rest satisfied with that applause." Durham is right in that. For praise and popularity is the most dangerous of all drugs to a minister. Dose a minister sufficiently with praise, and you will soon drown his soul in perdition, if God does not interpose to save him. He is as happy as a king all that day after a sufficient dose of your soul-intoxicating praise. He is actually a sanctified and a holy man all the rest of that day. His face shines on all men he meets all that day. He loves all men he meets. He even walks with God all that day. But you must give him his dram again on his awaking to-morrow morning, else, as soon as he has slept off his debauch, he will be a worse man, and more ill to live with than he was before. To him who lives on praise, all the world is as dark as midnight, and as cold as winter to him, when he cannot get his praise. The wings of angels sprout in his soul as long as he gets enough praise; but he is as good as in his grave when he opens his mouth wide and you do not fill it. It is true, that is a very weak mind which values itself according to the opinion and the applause of other men. But, then, it is well known that God chooses the weakest of men to make them His ministers. For many reasons He does that; some of which reasons His all His ministers know, and some of which reasons the wisest of them have not yet found out. "It were vain," says one of the wisest of ministers, "to pretend that I do not feel in me that mean passion that can be elated

by applause, and mortified by the contrary; but there is nothing under heaven that I more sincerely and totally despise, and nothing which ever makes me so emphatically despise myself. I feel it infinitely despicable at the very moment the passion for praise is excited; and I hope by degrees, as time goes on, to be substantially delivered from it. I have a thousand times been astonished that this mean passion of mine should not have been completely extirpated by the sincere and deliberate contempt I have long entertained for human opinion. Opinion, I do not mean, as regarding myself, but as regarding any other person, or any other book. To seek the praise that comes from God only, is the true nobleness of character; and if a due solicitude to obtain this praise were thoroughly established in the soul, all human notice would sink into insignificance, and would vanish from our regard." By the end of his ministry the angel of Sardis will subscribe to every syllable of that of John Foster. But he is a long way from that as yet; and he will need to have some plain words told him about himself, and about his ministry, before he comes to that.

For one thing, admitting and allowing for all the good work His servant did, "I have found it far from perfect," his Lord says. But, perfection in the work of the ministry at Sardis, or anywhere else, is quite impossible; and thus it is that when we look closer into our Lord's words, we find that it was not so much absolute perfection that his Master demanded as ordinary honesty, integrity, and fidelity. What He really said was this, "I have not found thy work at all filled up on its secret, and spiritual, and God-ward side. On its intellectual and man-ward side I have nothing to complain about—but not before God." You see the state of the case yourselves. No one can long command pulpit popularity without hard work. And it is not denied that this minister paid for his popularity with very hard work. He was a student. He took off his coat to his sermons. He wrote them over and over again, till he got them polished to perfection. And his crowds of polished people were his reward. But, while doing so much of that kind, and no man in all Asia doing it half so well, at the same time, he left a whole world of other things not done. Milton did all his work from his youth up under his great Taskmaster's eye. And so did the minister of Sardis. Only his taskmaster was the great crowds that hung on his elaborated orations. Take away the eyes and the ears of those captivated crowds, and this thrilling preacher was as good as dead. "Death," indeed, is the very word that his Master here so bitterly charges home upon him. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

His preaching was all right. None of his neighbour ministers, not the most accepted of God and the most praised of God of them all, could preach half so well. His preaching was perfect; but his motives in it; his aims and his ends in it; the sources from which he drew his pulpit inspiration; his secret prayers, both before his sermons were begun, and all the time they were being delivered, and still more after they were delivered,—in all these things,—"thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Be watchful, and strengthen these things," said his Master to him. "It is good to study; only, strengthen it with much faith and with much prayer before God. It is good to give thyself to reading, only read and write in the presence of God. It is good to bring up thy very choicest work to these great congregations of thine; only seek their salvation in every sentence of thy great sermons. It is good to take captive with thy wonderful eloquence the attention and the admiration of these crowds; only do so in order to take their hearts captive, not to thyself as heretofore, but to Me henceforth. Strengthen, I say unto thee, the things that remain and are ready to die. And, above all else, and with a view to all else, and as a means to all else, strengthen thy closet-prayer before God. Strengthen it in the length of it, and in the breadth of it, and in the depth of it, and in the height of it. Strengthen it in the time you take to it, in the intensity you put into it, and in the way you work it up into your sermons, both in their composition, and in their delivery, and in the way you continue to wait and to pray after your sermons; to wait, that is, not for the applause of the hearers, but for their profit and My praise."

And his Master still proceeds with His pastoral counsels to this minister of His, very unwilling to give him over to the decay of soul into which he has fallen. "Remember how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent." As if He were to say to some such minister among ourselves, "remember thy conversion, and the

spirit of truth and love that was instilled into thee, and that made thee turn into this ministry of Mine. Remember thy college days, and the high hopes and generous vows made to Me in those days. Remember also how I delivered thee when, in thy deep distresses, thou didst call on Me, and what communings and confidences used to go on between us. Remember thy ordination day, and the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, and the way thy heart swelled within thee as they pronounced and enrolled thee a minister of Mine." Yes, even to call such things to remembrance, my brethren, will work together with the seven Spirits that are in Christ's right hand, and with many other things, to set a fallen down minister on his feet again, and to give him a new start, even after he is as good as dead and deposed in the sight of God. Aye, such remembering and such repenting will yet save this all but lost minister of Sardis, and it will save some ministers among ourselves who are quite as far gone as he was. And as he was saved through this Epistle, so will they; and, like him they will yet receive the heavenly reward that is here held out to us all by Him who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.

The last thing of the nature of a threat that is addressed to the minister of Sardis is this, "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." There is a certain note of terror in that warning which is here addressed to all ministers, the most watchful, the most prayerful before God, and the best. And yet, no; for perfect love casteth out all such terror; perfect love to Christ, and to His work, and to His coming, delivers them who through fear of His coming have all their days been subject to terror. He cannot come as a thief to me if I love His appearing. If I love you, you cannot come too soon to me. And the more unexpected your coming is to my door, the more welcome will you be to me. If I am watching and counting and keeping the hours till you come, you cannot come on me as a thief. Christ could not come on Teresa as a thief as long as she clapped her hands for His coming every time her clock struck. He cannot come too soon for me, if I am always saying to myself,—why tarry the wheels of His chariot? If my last thought before I sleep is about you, I will be glad to see your face and to hear your voice the first thing in the morning. When I awake I am still with Thee. The name of that chamber was Peace, and its window opened to the east. And every night after he received and read this Epistle the minister of Sardis always slept in that chamber till the sun rising.

And now that the tide is beginning to turn in this Epistle, and in this minister's heart and life, this so unexpected word of encouragement and comfort is spoken to him. "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white; for they are worthy." It was with the minister of Sardis somewhat as it was with Thomas Scott when he was first awakening to his proper work. Scott, in his youth, had been ambitious to be an author, but he was now beginning to see that preaching was second to nothing on the face of God's earth; and that it had praise of God as nothing else had, when it was well done. Scott's preaching was not yet well done, by a long way, but it was far better than it once was. And one of the best proofs of its improvement was this, that his parishioners began to come to ask guidance from him in the things of their souls. But, at that stage, Scott had put all he knew into his sermons, and he had little to add as pastoral counsel to his enquiring parishioners. And it would be something like that in Sardis. Some of his people had been kept in life all through their minister's declension and death. There is nothing more surprising and touching than to see how a tree will sometimes cling round a rock, and will suck sap and strength out of a cairn of stones. "How do you manage to keep yourself alive, then?" I asked an old saint who is in a case not unlike those few names in Sardis. "O," she said, "I have an odd volume of Spurgeon's Sermons, and I have a son at the front." I did not ask her, but I suppose she meant that the thought of her son in his constant danger made her life of intercessory prayer in his behalf perfect before God, and all Spurgeon's readers will bear her out about his sermons. Even in Sardis, their sons in constant peril, and a volume of some first-century Spurgeon, kept alive those few names all those years that their minister was dead.

And then, to put the capstone on this far-shining case of a minister's recovery, and to send him back to his work till, like his much-tired neighbour

in Thyatira, his last years should be far better than his first, this splendid seal was set on his second conversion—"to him that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment: and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels." It will be on that day to the minister of Sardis like that great vision in the prophet, when Joshua stood before the angel of the Lord, and Satan stood at his right hand to resist him. Satan will resist him, and will tell to his face how he sought his own things in the early days of his ministry, and not the things of his people, or of his Master. How he swelled with vanity in the day of his vanity. How his own name was in every thought of his, and nothing else but his own name. Only let his name be blazoned abroad, Satan will say, and he was happy, and all about him were happy. And so on, till Christ will stop the accuser's mouth, and will confess His servant's name. The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord stood by.

After Many Years.

She was poor and feeble and old and the end of her journey was very near. Her last stopping place this side the unknown river was an Old Ladies' Home. Here she waited while, day by day, as memory and reason failed, earth loosened its hold upon her. She rarely remembered even the faces of friends; it seemed as if she had done with everything down here, and that when she took up her friendships again, it would be in the beauty of another world.

But one day an acquaintance of her girlhood came in to see her. She, too, was aged and wrinkled, but her old friend knew her at once, and looked up with eager pleasure.

"It's Mandy," she cried. "Why, it isn't Mandy!"

"Yes, it's me," Mandy returned, delighted at the recognition; "I didn't know's you'd remember me."

"Of course, I remember you, Mandy," the other replied, positively. They talked on for a long time, then Mandy leaned forward earnestly.

"Becky," she said, "be ye 'fraid to go?"

Becky glanced up, smiling. There was no haze over her memory then; only a simple wonder spoke in her voice.

"No," she replied calmly; "Why should I be afraid to go through them golden gates?"

It was only a little while after that she fell asleep. They looked up her record then, for nobody who knew her could remember when she had not belonged to the church, and they found that far back in her girlhood, she had confessed her simple faith.

It was beautiful to remember. One by one, as her need of them ended, earthly things had fallen away from her, but the faith, which was the only necessity for the mysterious journey, remained clear and shining to the last. Surely, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."—Forward.

WHY CROUP IS FATAL.

When croup attacks your child you must be ready for it. It comes as an accompaniment to an ordinary cough, or it may attack without warning. All ills of children develop quickly, and when any kind of cough appears there should be something at hand to stop it with promptness. Many a child has choked to death with croup because the right remedy was not convenient. Every one should know that the right safeguard for a child's cough or any cough is Adamson's Botanic Cough Balsam. With this soothing compound in the house, croup is always easily checked and relieved.

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Right and Wrong Use of the Tongue.

The sins of the tongue all point to the necessity and profit of self-mastery. So evident and so important did this appear to James that it occurs again and again in his epistle. "In many things we all stumble," he writes. "I am a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also." If this confession of failure and magnifying of the office of the tongue seem exaggerated, let anyone sit down quietly and think of the sins and cruelties of human speech. The careless words which no repentance can call back again, the rash promises which it has cost us so much to fulfill, the expression of the lower nature which has shamed the higher, the confessions of evil and yieldings to falsehood, the hot and angry words which sober thought condemned—these are some of the perils of the tongue. On the other hand, like most of the uses of the world which turn so easily to evil, the tongue may be the instrument of great and lasting good. "Therewith bless we the Lord and Father." If we can, by God's grace, hold it to blessing, there is no better testimony to the indwelling of God's Spirit in a human soul than righteous, considerate, modest, truthful speech. The faithful Christian's manner of words as well as of life already has the mark of heaven's purity and truth upon it. Speaking the truth in love, men trust him. Seeking not his own, men come to speak unselfishly in his presence. Considering others, they in turn become considerate. Cherishing no resentments, he awakens no angry feelings. Such a Christian self-control is not easily attained, but it is worth striving for, and by God's help it is not out of reach.—The Congregationalist.

The Duke of Wellington once ordered an officer to perform a difficult service. The general replied, "My lord, I will do the work, but first give me a grasp of your conquering hand." He received a hearty grip, and away he rode to the deadly encounter. Often has my soul said to her Captain: "My Lord, I will do that work if Thou wilt give me a grip of Thy conquering hand." O, what power it puts into a man when he gets a grip of Christ, and Christ gets a grip of him. Fellowship with Christ is the fountain of the Church's strength.—Spurgeon.

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