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REV. I. E. BILL,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth Peace, good will toward Men."

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CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR HIS DISCIPLES.

"Take them not out of the World."

The Convention Sermon, delivered at Brussels Street Meeting House, Oct. 9, 1854.

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John xvii. 15.—"I pray not, that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

At first view this seems rather a strange petition. Surely it were no undesirable thing for Christians to be soon taken out of this world to a better. For of a truth, this is a sad world. It is under the dominion of sin, and thoroughly hostile to the cause of Christ. It is governed by the prince of darkness, with all his power, and malignity, and skill. The taint of sin cleaves even to good men; and many of them have been overcome by evil for a time, though they have prevailed against it at last. But what a world is that to which the friends of Christ are going! In that world there exists no evil of any kind. No natural evil is found there, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. But especially no moral evil is to be encountered there; nothing "that defileth," or "worketh abomination, or maketh a lie." Nothing is to be feared there from the world, or Satan, or men. All are holy there, and knit together by the bonds of holiness. All are safe there, and enjoy a finished and eternal redemption. They see their Lord, and love him as they ought, and serve him as they would. Could we then leave this world, or be translated to heaven too soon? May we not count a Josiah, or a Stephen, or such a one as the converted thief supremely happy in their early removal? Nay, are not dying infants more to be envied even than they? And yet Christ pleads with his Father, "I pray not, that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but [only] that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Why was this? Why did Christ thus petition? The remainder of the present discourse will be occupied for the most part with our answer to this inquiry.

This petition before us was dictated, we remark,

I. By compassion for the world.

The world, the ungodly world, cannot spare the disciples of Christ. Their presence is needed here.

First.—To protect the world from judgment.

For the sake of God's people the world is not destroyed. In them the purposes of God find a centre. "All things are theirs—all things are for their sakes—all things work together for their good. When, therefore, the plans of heaven with respect to them are completed, then may the world look out for judgment. It is always a bad sign for the wicked when the servants of God are taken out from among them. The hand that shut Noah into the ark, shut out the guilty world, and left it exposed to the terrors of the coming deluge. No more respite for filthy Sodom when Lot was led out of the city. The flight of the disciples of Christ from Jerusalem, was the signal for the gathering together of the Roman armies, to inflict upon that devoted city her final doom. And when the saints at the last day shall have been "caught up—to meet the Lord in the air," then "the Lord cometh—to execute judgment upon all that are ungodly."

The presence of the saints are needed here.

Second.—To rouse the world from the contamination of their own wickedness.

Saints are "the salt of the earth." What would this earth be without its salt? One shudders to think of the putrid waters, the poisoned air, nature spoiled of sweetness, and life rotting out upon a soil no longer fitted to be its home. And what would men be, were it not for the presence among them of the people of God? Recal the case of Sodom,

without so much as ten just men to modify its character, or avert its doom. See what monsters the sons of Jacob could become when placed at a distance from their father. How easy and natural to them were deeds of treachery, of blood! How nearly they became fratricides? Remember what France became, in her dread revolutionary period, when she had driven away the poor shadows of Christianity which still lingered in her land. What a pandemonium of blasphemy! what a stew of licentiousness! what a carnival of lust! what a "den of thieves!" what a "field of blood!" Look around you, and think what would become of St. John, if all the pious people were to leave it to-morrow. Doubtless there is vice enough here as it is. But what would become of the place then?—its Sabbaths, its ordinances—all—the checks of religion gone! Would it not soon be as though seven devils had obtained possession instead of one—or as when the two thousand demoniac swine rushed down their "steep place into the sea?"

The presence of the saints is needed here.

Third.—To conduct the processes of evangelization.

Saints are not only "the salt of the earth," its preservative from moral putrefaction, but also, the "lights of the world," God's agents for its spiritual renovation. To them the faith has been delivered. The Gospel is at once their treasure and their trust. It is theirs to guard, and theirs to dispense. True, alas! we have very imperfectly discharged these our obligations. Yet neither have they been wholly neglected. And in proportion as we have done our duty, the world has been blessed. Now suppose the saints withdrawn from the world, and all their labours for the salvation of the world brought to a close. What a dreadful state of things must then ensue! Men might still have the Bible among them, certainly. But the propagation of the truth requires something more. The Bible possessed merely is salvation nowhere. In how many houses does it repose, unread, undusted, unheeded, and therefore unblest! No! the Bible must be written out in men's hearts—exemplified in their conduct—spoken by their lips—hallowed in their prayers. Then it becomes a LIVING Bible—an efficacious Bible—"mighty through God to the putting down of strong holds." This was what Christ meant, when he said, "Go ye into the all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature;" and thus it is, that the ends of the Gospel are to be ultimately attained in the conversion of the world—in the ushering in of the millennium, and the maintenance of its glories. Suppose, then, we say, that men were deprived of this preaching!—the minister, the missionary, the church taken away—the "candlestick" of the world "removed out of its place!" How deep the darkness which must then settle down upon the condition and prospects of our poor, forsaken race! No more salvation then! Life has lost its purity, and death its comfort. Spiritual abomination stalks triumphant over the globe. It is delivered to the Evil one. It becomes an outpost of hell—a province, disputed no more, of the infernal empire—Christless—godless—hopeless—undone!

Already, then, we begin to understand the petition of the text. Christ "came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." He came to offer himself as "the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world." His sacrifice he was now on the very point of presenting. To the cross he dedicates himself in that solemn word, "for their sakes I sanctify myself. The preparations of mercy for the salvation of the world were all but complete. It needed only that Christ's dedication should take effect. If, however, the disciples had been taken away with their Master—had gone

up with him from Olivet, one grand link in the chain of means bearing upon human salvation would have been wanting. The truth, "the truth as it is in Jesus," would still have been in existence. Still, too, had there been that Holy Spirit whose province it is to "take of the things of Christ," and "shew" them unto men. But that agency would have been wanting,—the agency of man upon man—of sanctified man upon the unsanctified—of the church upon the world, by which the truth is disseminated, and the Spirit is wont to work. In entire harmony, therefore, with the whole scheme of the Divine dispensations towards our wretched yet favoured race, did Christ plead, as in the words before us,—"I pray not that thou shouldest, take them out of the world. To them it might be pleasant; but to the world,—that world over which my very heart yearns, and for which I am now about to shed my heart's blood,—to the world it would be utter, unutterable perdition. Continue then, therefore, yet for a season. For pity's sake take them not away. Let them finish their work, even as I am about to finish mine. Then, and not till then, receive them to thyself."

One word in passing. From the day in which Cain rose up against Abel, and slew him for his mere goodness, the seed of the serpent has been at enmity with "the seed of the woman." The excellencies of the saints fret the souls of sinners; and as for their faults, they feed upon them. At heart they wish them and their religion out of the way. We wonder whether there are any such now in the presence of God. Alas! poor creatures! you know not what you do. These saints! why you owe to them your very rain and sunshine, and all your daily bounties. These saints! Ah! do your eyes never moisten when you think of your obligations to pious friends, or parents, now perhaps passed into the skies? The saints! Are not they the people for seasons of woe, and in conviction for sin, at the hour of death? Who wants the children of this world around him then? An old woman who knows, and loves, and lives, and prays the Gospel, is in higher esteem than the noblest, richest, wisest, merriest among such as possess not this precious qualification. Admirably has Mrs. Stowe pointed to this great fact. When St. Clair loses his Eva, or is visited by solemn thoughts about the future, or lies upon the verge of that future, in the agonies of death, his poor slave, "Uncle Tom," is then the only friend for him—understand, therefore, you who dislike the saints, and dislike them for their saintship, what this enmity of yours means. It is enmity against your best and purest friends—those "friends in need" who are friends indeed. It is enmity, too, against Him to whom they belong, and whose image they bear, and their likeness to whom is the cause of your enmity to them. It is therefore an enmity of which he will not fail to take special account in "that day." Ah! you will wish yourselves among these saints then. You will then surely be of the same mind with that wicked man who exclaimed, "Let me die the death of the righteous! and let my last end be like his!" Is not this your mind now, in your subdued moments—when passion sleeps, and conscience is suffered to speak out? And will you not hear the voice which urges you to "forsake the foolish, and live," and to "go in the way of understanding?" There yet is time. Will you not improve it? The Saviour yet calls. Close not your ears against his intreaties. And these very saints from whom you now shrink, and whom you go about to scorn and hate, with arms and hearts alike open, long to receive you into their society, and to give you a place in their best affections. When, when shall it once be? For "blessed!" Oh! how

"Blessed! are the sons of God; They are bought with Jesus blood— All their sins are washed away; They shall stand in God's great day— One with God, through Jesus on, Glory is in them begun. With them numbered may (you) be, Now, and through eternity!"

We return to our more immediate subject. We proceed to remark,

I. That Christ's love for his people dictated the petition before us.

If the disciples of Christ were to be uniformly removed from the world at an early stage in their career—if their journey to the skies were always a brief one, they would suffer great loss.

First.—In present attainment.

Christians do not all at once reach the heights of their professions. They have a progress to pursue, a life to cherish and advance, difficulties to overcome, and victories to achieve. Doubtless effort and pain are connected with these things. But joy and dignity are associated with them likewise. And if they were taken away from the world, that they might not be exposed to evil, they must also lose a vast deal of substantial good. The babe in Christ knows nothing of the pleasures of the young man and the father in Christ. He who has but just acquired the alphabet of the Gospel knows not how good it is to "comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." He who has but now buckled on the armour of Christ cannot taste the gladness of the veteran warrior, accustomed both to combat and to conquest. And he who is making his first attempts to do good must needs be a stranger to the joys of those who have already won souls to Christ, and hope one day to stand before the throne, uttering the extatic exclamation, "Here are we, Lord! with the children which thou hast given us!" Surely it is well worth while to live, aye, and to suffer too, for such purposes as these. So taught Paul in his prison, and John in his banishment, and Luther in his contests, and Whitfield in his mighty toils. Not one of them would have wished to die sooner than he bid. How great had been their loss, had they been transferred to heaven as soon as they had learnt the way thither! And so in his sphere of every disciple. The longer he remains upon earth, the more may he learn of Christ, and effect for the cause of Christ—the more ample may his achievements be, and the brighter may become his honours. And hence our Lord's request—He would not that we should be deprived of any advantage; but that we should run our race to the end, fight our battle out, gather in our portion of the harvest of the world; accumulate our full share of moral grandeur, and then, and not till then, be removed to a higher state. He would have us enriched and ennobled to the utmost here, ere he introduces us to our possessions, our principalities beyond the skies, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world."

Nor would he that we should suffer loss.

Second.—In our final elevation.

We here touch upon the doctrine of the diversity of future rewards. The works of God are exceedingly various here. Are they reduced to a dead level in that nobler state to which we are advancing? Saints are very various here. Can they,—can the idea be for one moment entertained?—CAN they, in point of knowledge, and of grace, and of glory, be put upon precisely the same footing hereafter? Does the parable of the pounds,—where he whose pound had gained ten pounds receives authority over ten cities, while he whose pound has gained only five pounds receives authority over no more than five cities,—