

Behold I Knock.

FROM THE GERMAN.

Behold I knock! 'Tis piercing cold abroad
This bitter winter time;
The ice upon the dark pines has not thawed.

Behold I knock! The evening shadows lie
So peaceful, near and far;
Earth sleepeth, but in yonder cloudless sky

Behold I knock! O soul art thou at home?
For thy Beloved's here;
Hast thou made ready flowers ere he should come?

Behold I knock! Say not 'Tis zephyr mild
Which rustles the dead leaf.'
It is thy Saviour, 'tis thy God, my child,

Behold I knock! As yet I am thy guest,
Waiting without for thee;
The time shall come when, homeless and distressed,

Behold I knock! To those who heard my voice ere 'twas too late,
I open in that hour my peaceful gate;
To those who scorned a closed door will it be.

The Visitor's Pulpit.

"This Year Also."

A SHORT SERMON FOR THE NEW YEAR,
FROM THE SICK CHAMBER OF THE REV.
C. H. SPURGEON.

"This year also."—Luke xiii. 8.

[The following short address was written by Mr. Spurgeon on his sick bed. He sat up to write when he was able, but some of it was written with his head on his pillow.]

At the opening of another year, and at the commencement of another volume of sermons, we earnestly desire to utter the words of exhortation; but alas! at this present the preacher is a prisoner, and must speak from his pillow instead of his pulpit.

The interceding vine-dresser pleaded for the fruitless fig tree, "let it alone this year also," dating as it were a year from the time wherein he spoke. Trees and fruit-bearing plants have a natural measurement for their lives; evidently a year came to its close when it was time to seek fruit on the fig tree, and another year commenced when the vine-dresser began his digging and pruning work.

The new year also reminds us of opportunities for usefulness, which have come and gone, and of unfulfilled resolutions which have blossomed only to fade; shall "this year also" be as those which have gone before? May we not hope for grace to advance upon grace already obtained, and should we not seek for power to turn our poor sickly promises into robust action?

Looking back upon the past we lament the follies by which we would not willingly be held captive "this year also," and we adore the forgiving mercy, the preserving providence, the boundless liberality, the divine love, of which we hope to be partakers "this year also."

I. If the preacher could think freely he could wherry the text at his pleasure in many directions, but he is feeble, and so must let it drive with the current which bears it on to a second consideration: the text mentions a mercy. It was in great goodness that the tree which cumbered the soil was allowed to stand another year, and prolonged life should always be regarded as a boon of mercy. We must view "this year also" as a grant from infinite grace. It is wrong to speak as if we cared nothing for life, and looked upon our being here as an evil or a punishment; we are here "this year also" as the result of love's pleadings, and in pursuance of love's designs.

that sin exceedingly multiplied. He who saw us misuse those golden months of youth, nevertheless affords us, "this year also," and we should enter upon it with a holy jealousy, lest what of strength and ardor may be left to us be allowed to run away into the same wasteful courses as aforetime.

Upon the heels of our youthful years come those of early manhood, when we began to muster a household and become as a tree fixed in its place; then also fruit would have been precious. Did we bear any? Did we present unto the Lord a basket of summer fruit? Did we offer him the firstling of our strength? If we did so we may well adore the grace which so early saved us; but if not the past chides us, and, lifting an admonitory finger, warns us not to let "this year also" follow the way of the rest of our lives.

Many of us are now in the prime of life and our years already spent are not few. Have we still need to confess that our years are still eaten up by the grasshopper and the canker-worm? Have we reached the half-way house, and still know not whither we are going? Are we fools at forty? Are we half a century old by the calendar, and yet far off from the years of discretion? Alas! great God, that there are men past this age who are without knowledge! Unsaged at sixty, unregenerated at seventy, unawakened at eighty, unrenewed at ninety! These are each and all startling. Yet, peradventure, they will each one fall upon ears which should be made to tingle, but they will hear them as though they heard them not.

The sound of the words "this year also" makes some of us remember years of great mercy, sparkling and flashing with delight. Were those years laid at the Lord's feet? They were comparable to the silver bells upon the horses—were they "holiness unto the Lord"? If not how shall we answer for it if "this year also" should be musical with merry mercy and yet be spent in the way of carelessness?

The same words recall to some of us our years of sharp affliction when we were indeed digged about and dugged. How went those years? God was doing great things for us, exercising careful and expensive husbandry, caring for us with exceeding great and wise care,—did we render in accordance with the benefits received? Did we rise from the bed more patient and gentle, weaned from the world and welded to Christ? Did we bring forth clusters to reward the dresser of the vineyard? Let us not refuse these questions of self-examination, for it may be that this is to be another of these years of captivity, another season of the furnace and the refining pot. The Lord grant that the coming tribulation may take more chaff out of us than any of its predecessors, and leave the wheat cleaner and better.

The new year also reminds us of opportunities for usefulness, which have come and gone, and of unfulfilled resolutions which have blossomed only to fade; shall "this year also" be as those which have gone before? May we not hope for grace to advance upon grace already obtained, and should we not seek for power to turn our poor sickly promises into robust action?

There will come a last year to each one of us; therefore let each one say to himself—is this my last? If it should be the last to the preacher he would gird up his loins to deliver the Lord's message with all his soul, and bid his fellow-men be reconciled to God. Dear friend, is "this year also" to be your last? Are you ready to see the curtain rise upon eternity? Are we now prepared to hear the midnight cry and go in to the midnight supper? The judgment and all that will follow upon it are most surely the heritage of every living man, blessed are they who by faith in Jesus are able to face the bar of God without a thought of terror.

If we live to be counted among the oldest inhabitants we must depart at last; there must be an end and the voice must be heard—"Thus saith the Lord, this year shalt thou die." So many have gone before us, and are going every hour that no man needs any other mento mori, and yet man is so eager to forget his mortality, and thereby to forfeit his hopes of bliss, that we cannot too often bring it before the mind's eye. O mortal man, bethink thee! Prepare to meet thy God; for thou must meet him. Seek the Saviour, ye seek him before another sun sinks in his rest.

Once more, "This year also," and it may be for this year only, the cross is uplifted as the pharos of the world, the one light to which no eye can look in vain. Oh that

would make the blasphemer, the Sabbath-breaker, and the openly vicious to feel that a wonder it is that their lives are prolonged "this year also"! Are they spared to curse, and riot, and defy their Maker? Shall this be the only fruit of patient mercy? The procrastinator who has put off the messenger of heaven with his delays and half promises, ought he not to wonder that he is allowed to see "this year also"? How is it that the Lord has borne with him and put up with his vacillations and hesitations? Is this year of grace to be spent in the same manner? Transient impressions, hasty resolves, and speedy apostasies—are these to be the weary story over and over again? The startled conscience, the tyrant passion, the smothered emotion! Are these to be the tokens of yet another year?

May God forbid that any one of us should hesitate and delay through this year also. Infinite pity holds back the axe of justice, shall it be insulted by the repetition of the sins which caused the uplifting of the instrument of wrath? What can be more tantalizing to the heart of infinite goodness, than indecision? Well might the Lord's prophet become impatient and cry, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Well may God himself push for a decision and demand an immediate reply. O undecided soul! Wilt thou swing much longer between heaven and hell, and act as if it were hard to choose between the slavery of Satan and the liberty of the Great Father's home of love? This year also wilt thou sport in defiance of justice and pervert the generosity of mercy into a license for still greater rebellion? "This year also" must divine love be made an occasion for continued sin? Oh do not act so basely, so contrary to every noble instinct, so injuriously to thine own best interests.

The believer is kept out of heaven "this year also," in love, not in anger. There are some for whose sake it is needful he should abide in the flesh, some to be helped by him on their heavenward way, and others to be led to the Redeemer's feet through his instructions. The heaven of many saints is not yet prepared for them, because their nearest companions have not yet arrived, and their spiritual children have not yet gathered in glory in sufficient number to give them a thoroughly heavenly welcome; they must wait "this year also" that their rest may be the more glorious, and that the sheaves which they will bring with them may afford them greater joy. Surely for the sake of souls, for the delight of glorifying our Lord, and for the increase of the jewels of our crown, we may be glad to wait below "this year also." This is a wide field but we may not linger in it, for our space is little and our strength is even less.

III. Our last feeble utterance shall remind you that "this year also," implies a limit. The vine-dresser asked no longer a reprieve than one year. If his digging and manuring should not then prove successful he would plead no more, but the tree should fall. Even when Jesus is the pleader, the request for mercy has its bounds and times. It is not forever that we will be let alone and allowed to cumber the ground; if we will not repent we must perish, if we will not be benefited by the spade we must fall by the axe.

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millions would look that way and live! Soon the Lord Jesus will come a second time, and then the blaze of his throne will supplant the mild radiance of his cross; the Judge will be seen rather than the Redeemer. Now he saves, but then he will destroy. Let us hear his voice at this moment. He has limited a day, let us be eager to avail ourselves of the gracious season. Let us believe in Jesus this day, seeing it may be our last. These are the pleadings of one who now falls back on his pillow in very weakness. Hear them for your souls' sake and live.

Gems.

The Providence which watches over the affairs of men works out of their mistakes, at times, a healthier issue than could have been accomplished by their wisest forethought.—Froide.

Good works do not make a Christian; but one must be a Christian to do good works. The tree bringeth forth the fruit, not the fruit the tree. None is made a Christian by works, but by Christ; and, being in Christ, he brings forth fruit for Him.—Luther.

When the Lord drives us from one creature-rest, we presently perch upon another, but He will not allow us to fix long upon any; at length, like a bird, we become sensible that we can have no safety, no stable peace below; then our hearts take flight and soar heavenwards, and we are taught by His grace to place our treasure and affection out of the reach of changes.—Newton.

The Bible does not need defence so much as it needs proclamation: It defends itself wherever it is known. Deep in every soul there dwells forever a witness to the truth, whose clear eye and steady voice will see and respond to it wherever it is known. We do not need to implore men to believe the truth—we only need that that they shall apprehend it, and then we may defy them to deny it. And thus the Bible, an eternal truth, needs no other argument for its support than itself clearly preached.—Evangelist.

"Oh no, my dear sir," said Coleridge, within two years of his death, "it is to pray, to pray as God would have us; this is what at times makes me turn cold to my soul. Believe me, to pray with all your heart and strength, with reason and the will, to believe that God will listen to your voice through Christ, and verily do the thing that he pleaseth thereupon, this is the last, the greatest achievement of the Christian's warfare on earth. Teach us to pray, O Lord!" and then he burst into a flood of tears and asked me to pray for him.

A father dying leaves to his child a package, sealed, and inscribed, "Not to be opened till you become of age." The child often looks wonderingly on the sealed package; but he respects the father's dying will, suffers the seal to keep the secret, and wonders what surprise is in store for him in the future. The heavenly Father gives to each one of His children such a package, labeled, "The Eternal Glory, not to be opened till you come of age." Many a curious eye has gazed on the sealed package, many a curious imagination has ventured a guess at its secret contents; but they remain still unknown. A surprise is in store for us when school is over, and when we graduate and enter into the true life of our eternal home.

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