

The Visitor's Pulpit.

Evil, and How to Eradicate it.

SERMON BY REV. DR. CULROSS, GLASGOW.

"Overcome evil with good."—Rom. xii. 21

No one can possibly be blind to the existence and prevalence of evil in the world. There has never been a golden age in which evil has not been found. You see the existence of it in every book of human history—you see the existence of it in every work of man's hand—you find it in your fellow men with whom you have intercourse—you find it showing itself in your nearest and dearest friends, however willing you may be to overlook their faults. It is impossible to shut our eyes to the existence of evil. When we look within we find evil there in our very hearts. It has struck its cancer roots so deeply, and has so intertwined itself in our feelings and affections, that no education or culture will eradicate, and no force tear it up. Look abroad upon the world and see the greatness of the problem.

How, then, is evil to be overcome? There it is, entering into every human relationship. It is to this problem that I ask your attention this afternoon. There is a strong and subtle temptation to every one of us—there is a tendency in good men, even in God's own children, to meet evil, to encounter it with its own weapons, but it is impossible in such a way to overcome it. For example: You have been wronged, suppose, and injured in some way, by some neighbor or some friend—some one whose love and justice you have a right to count upon, shows dislike to you, stands in the way of your interests, misrepresents you, talks behind your back and blackens your character, wounds your feelings by unbrotherly or un sisterly behaviour—what a strong and subtle temptation there is to retaliate, to pay the person back in his own coin, to do to him as he has done to you, to bring him down and have our revenge upon him. What a temptation there is to take such a course as that! Pride whispers you would be a coward, and mean and craven hearted, if you would submit to such usage as you have been exposed. That is human. But you do not overcome evil in that way. You smite it in the teeth, you smite it with double force, but you are not the conqueror. Instead of overcoming evil, you are yourself overcome by the evil. The wrong-doer has done you a double wrong. He had made the injury first and then he has made you act in an unchristian spirit, he has provoked you to retaliate, and instead of you overcoming the evil the evil has overcome you.

But take a different case, not less common. There is some one with whom you are thrown into intercourse, who has a great deal of influence over you. He can annoy you and make you very uncomfortable. He shows bad temper to you, speaks sharp, bitter words, that not only pierce you, but when they have pierced, you find that they are bad, and they stick in the place and rankle there. While he subjects you to these sharp and bitter words, suppose you lose your temper. Suppose that you answer him back with a word still keener, still sharper, still more sarcastic than his. Suppose that you put the man down, have you overcome evil? No, but evil has overcome you, and has gained a double victory. Or, take another case. Suppose that in business dealings you are thrown in with men who are unscrupulous and false, who take every advantage of you they can by treachery and by sharp practices, and who seem to think that there is no sin in cheating, if only they can make anything of it. Suppose you meet them by their own weapons, suppose that you encounter sharp practice by a little sharper, that you meet the trick played upon you by one more clever. Suppose you do that, you have not overcome evil; on the contrary, you are overburdened by the evil, dragged to the world's level, and there are two wrongs where there was only one before.

I could multiply instances to show that you cannot overcome evil by evil. The only way to overcome evil with good is God's way, and that is what he teaches. God had it in his power, as soon as sin entered the world, to stamp it out, but suppose he had, there would have been the extinction of the race, a strange episode in the history of the universe, teaching lessons, it might be, to some different order of being. God has chosen another way—the Divine way—to overcome evil with good; that means firmness, kindness and saving grace. God meets man's alienation from himself—how? With a manifestation of the most marvellous love. God meets

man's sin—how? With a revelation of his forgiving mercy in righteousness through Jesus Christ. Look to the revelation of all this in the death of the Son of God. There, in Jesus, is a display of infinite magnanimity and graciousness. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—the world that slighted and spurned his life. That was the Divine way of overcoming evil. And the children of God can overcome evil in the same manner. The only weapon that you and I may use in encountering evil are such weapons as love, truth, righteousness and self-sacrifice. You remember that in the parable of the tares, the householder sowed good seed in the field and the enemy sowed tares, and by-and-by the servants found there was tares among the wheat and they proposed to root them out. The field is the world and the tares are the children of the wicked, and the proposal to root them out is the proposal to persecute evil—to put it down by force. That, I believe, is the root of all persecution. That was the secret of all the religious persecutions that have taken place. Christ condemns and disallows persecution, and for you and me the only weapons allowed are truth and love.

Just take the case of those who love their children most dearly, and in whom you see evil. Take your children. You see the root of evil in these little ones, winsome and loving as they are, in a thousand ways. How are you to get the victory over that evil? You won't get it by scolding them, by being irritable, getting into a passion at them, sternly ordering them about, and continually shouting "Don't." You won't cure the evil in that way; but by being good and doing that which is good—and that is done by firmness, by gentleness, by truth, by loving-kindness, by self-denial, by self-forgetfulness, and self-sacrifice—can you ever hope to win the victory. Or suppose that you were thrown into the society of selfish people, every one of whom looked upon you as their prey, you do not overcome that evil by being selfish. We must meet selfishness by unselfishness—the opposite good of the evil we find.

In the biography of a good and gracious woman who lived a quarter of a century ago, there is a story interwoven which I shall try and take out. This woman was one of a family of four or five, one sister and brothers; and a young girl, a distant relative, about sixteen years of age, was bereft of both her parents and left destitute, and she came to live in the family I refer to. The young girl of sixteen had been brought up under Christian influences and had imbibed the spirit of the Saviour. When she came to this family she found them thoroughly worldly—the father, mother, and children thoroughly selfish. Going in amongst them she found it exceedingly hard to get on. They were perpetually taking advantage of her, sneering and making game of her, but she was never betrayed into this selfishness, and gradually—leading a simple, unselfish, Christian life—her influence began to tell, first on the younger members of the family and they soon began to be ashamed of their usage of her; and by and by every member came under her influence—felt that she was their friend, and the issue was that she won the whole family to Christ.

Some one might say that all this is very fine—the morality of it is very fine, only, unhappily, pitched too high. The morality is superfine. It won't do in this practical life. The rule must be brought down nearer to our ordinary life if it is to be any use. I answer that thought by saying that the preachers don't make the law. The Lord Jesus Christ laid down that law. This is the principle, the very principle, which Christ taught—the overcoming of evil with good. I have tried to bring out simply the charge that is here addressed to the Christian people—"Overcome evil with good." It belongs to every-day life, to family life, to business life and to church life. Our whole life affords room and scope for carrying out this plain rule of the kingdom of God. There are opportunities every day, in the life of every one of us for the application of the words; and it is a sign of a low state of spiritual life if we do not seek to obey what the law has laid upon us. In this passage we have not only a grand idea to be admired or to be used as an argument for the Divine origin of Christianity; but it is a law laid down to be obeyed, opens up room for Christian heroism of the loftiest forms—room for Christian heroism in the life of every one of us. The old saints and heroes in the Gospel did not go about as you do. See them to-day represented carrying crosses

in their hands. They were men of the same mould and pleasure as ourselves—men who denied themselves, and who, in God's strength, went about overcoming evil with good, and that is what makes heroes. And I believe there are heroes round about us still—grand, noble, saintly figures—if we had only eyes to behold them. Sometimes they are to be found in the workshop, and in every sphere of industry. But the saintly heroes are those that go out to encounter the evil that is in the world with God's good—plenty in their hearts, and kept living in their souls by his Holy Spirit, and that shows what room there is for you and for me to exercise the grand principle.

THREE LITTLE SERMONS.

The Restoration of Peace.

When once we have learned to distinguish between the essentials of Christianity and accidental appendages, and between accidents of Christ's appointing and our devising, and to dread the affixing of our own devices to so sacred an institution; when we have learned not only not to add devices of our own to that sacred frame, but much more not to presume to insert them into the order of essentials or necessities, and treat men as no Christians for wanting them; when the Gospel shall have its liberty to the furthest ends of the earth; when the regenerating Spirit shall go forth with it, and propagate a Divine and Godlike nature everywhere among men; when regeneration shall be understood to signify the communicating of such nature and such dispositions to men; when the weight of such words comes to be appreciated, "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death;" when to be born of God ceases to signify with us being proselytized to this or that church formed and distinguished by human device; when religious practices cease to serve political purposes; when the interest of a party ceases to weigh more with us than the whole Christian interest; when sincerity shall be considered the noblest embellishment of a Christian—then shall our peace flow like a river.—John Howe, 1697.

Hast Thou God?

Sanctification is so imperfect here below, our strongest faith so feeble, our brightest hopes so dim, our most fervent love so cold and selfish, our waywardnesses and inconsistencies so many, that it is wonderful that God would dwell in such hearts. Yet, child of God, it is the sober, literal fact. What a difference it makes in our estimate of life and in our calculation of human happiness or sorrow, to take this into account. Here is the true standard of dignity and honor, here the true test of human happiness. Hast thou, or hast thou not—God? Hast thou God? Then thou art rich and noble. Poor, it may be, in this world's goods low in station, uneducated in earthly learning, struggling for thy daily bread, and like thy Master, a man of sorrows, yet if thou hast him within thee, thou art high as the angels and as glorious as the heavens. The Deity abides with thee, and thou, like a smiling land dost bask in the everlasting sunshine of his love. Hast thou not God? Then rich in worldly goods, high in station, clever and learned in human wisdom, possessed of all earthly goods, yet thou hast really nothing; poor indeed, since in thy void and empty soul there dwells no heavenly inhabitant. All other differences are comparatively lost in this. Dost thou dwell in God and God in thee?—Canon Garbett.

Unreported Success.

There is one point in connection with the success of missions, which has often struck me. There is a part of our work and success for which there is no column in the schedules—it cannot be tabulated. We are accustomed to think there has been little progress in missions unless we can calculate upon chapels built, schools erected, congregations brought together and numbers reported. But there is a blessed work going on quietly and secretly—something like one of the mighty influences of heaven. Nobody can weigh a sunbeam. You may concentrate the intensest heat of the sun on the nicest balance, but you cannot make the balance quiver at all; and yet there is intense influence and power in that sunbeam. And many of our successes are of this class. They are hardly appreciable; we cannot put them into the schedule; we cannot talk much about them. Who can tell the amount of influence that has been circulating through India, for instance, quietly changing the gloom of midnight

into the brightness of morn? Who can tell the vast amount of curiosity that has been awakened in many minds there? Who can tell us what are the deep convictions that have been impressed upon many minds, which pride often conceals and which men are ingenious to smother? But these convictions will by and by break out in conversion to God. We cannot tell, I say, what secret influences are going on as the result of missionaries living and laboring among these people. The fact is there is a great deal to be thankful to Almighty God for which can never be seen in the society's report. The secretaries cannot find figures and language to express it in the annual statements.—Canon Farrar.

Reading the Bible.

Sir Robert Peel, for many of the latter years of his life, was in the invariable habit of every night reading the Bible or some religious book for some time before retiring to rest. And the favorite book of the late Duke of Wellington, during the last twelve months of his life, was Baxter's Saints' Rest. The dying testimony of Webster and Jackson are well known. Well has some one said, in view of the expressed faith of the last two, "How puny, even to despicableness, are the sophisms of those little men who charge faith in Christianity, with being weakness or hypocrisy; when Daniel Webster and Andrew Jackson bowed themselves to the authority of the Bible? If Daniel Webster be weak, what is strength? If Andrew Jackson was a hypocrite, what is honesty?"

How to Convert an Infidel.

Do not try to disprove his error. Peapahs that error, because no error is wholly erroneous, is better for him than no faith at all. But make your truth live and convincing. Through every entrance force its life home on his life. Let him hear it in your voice, see it in your face, feel it in your life. Make it claim its true kinship with the truth that is lying somewhere in the midst of all his error. Would you go a hundred miles merely to make a Mohammedan disbelieve Mohammed? Who would not go half around the world to make him believe Christ and know the richness of the Saviour?—Philips Brooks.

Trust in God.

To trust in God when our warehouses and bags are full, and our tables spread, is no hard thing; but to trust Him when our purses are empty, but a handful of meal and a cruse of oil left, and all the ways of relief stopped, herein lies the wisdom of a Christian's grace. Yet none are exempted from this duty, all are bound to acknowledge their trust in Him by the daily prayer for daily bread; even those that have it in their cupboards as well as those who want it; the richest prince as well as the meanest beggar. Whatever your wants are, want not faith, and you cannot want supplies.—Charnock.

Really to feel God's love to us, and our love to Him, is the very highest blessedness of which the human soul is capable. There is lavishness in all true love, which only those who truly love can understand. And when God loves us, His heart goes out towards us, and with His heart all that He can bestow. All the resources of His power, all the counsels of His wisdom, all the preciousness of His promises, all the gifts of His Spirit, are at our disposal, if only our hearts are opened to receive them in the day of His power. To know and believe the love God hath to us—here in a single sentence is the beginning of Christian life, the history of Christian experience, the fullness of Christian joy. That God should love me, and yet refuse me anything for my good, is as utterly impossible as that He should cease to be God. To suppose that Christ can have suffered for me, and yet in sight of His cross deny me the needful grace to carry it after Him—oh, rather than think this, let us boldly say at once that He died in vain.—Bishop of Rochester.

JESUS THE SUN.—Take a big stone and a little stone; throw them into the sea; the sea will cover them both. Cast your sins, whether big or little, into the love of God; it will drown them all. The young need to be saved as well as the old. Jesus died for the young as well as the old. Our souls are like the dark night; Jesus is the Sun that turns night into day.

Whoever hath Christ cannot be poor; whoever wants Him cannot be rich.



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