

LOVEST THOU ME!

MARGARET E. SANGSTER.

If Christ the Lord should come to-day, As erst to Peter by the sea, And low and tenderly should say, "O, my disciple! lovest thou me?" To thee and me— What would our answer be? "Yea, Lord, thou knowest," if we should cry With ready lips and beaming glance, "We'll stand for thee 'neath any sky, With flag unfurled and lifted lance," For thee and me— Would this the answer be? And if He showed His hands and feet, Soe wounded on the eagle cross,— And asked us still in accents sweet, "Nay! lovest thou me in pain and loss?" From thee and me— What would the answer be? For life is like a summer day, So bright, so full, so glad, so strong! And roses strew the onward way, And we are marching with a song,— For thee and me— What answer could there be? Just this: "We surely love thee, Lord; Our wills are weak, our hearts are poor, But clinging to thee, in thy word We trust, and we shall aye endure,"— For thee and me— This would the answer be. It would not do for us to boast; We have no merit, we are frail. Our strength is weakness at most, And oft when we are tried, we fall. "But we trust thee,"— This would our answer be. And Miss and bane, and joy and grief, And all things work for good, if we Can answer: "Yea, Lord!" swift and brief, To that question, "Lovest thou me?" For thee and me— This should the answer be.

Visitor Pulpit.

BANKRUPT DEBTORS DISCHARGED.

A New Sermon by Pastor C. H. Spurgeon.

"And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both."—Luke 7: 42.

The two debtors differed very considerably in the amounts which they owed; the one was in arrears five hundred pence, and the other fifty. There are differences in the guilt of sins, and in the degrees of men's criminality. It would be a very unfair and unrighteous thing to say that all men are exactly alike in the extent of their transgression. Some are honest and upright, kind and generous, even though they be but natural men; while others appear to be of a malicious, envious, selfish disposition, and rush into evil, sinning, as it were, with both hands greedily. The man who is moral, sober, and industrious is only a fifty pence debtor as compared with the vicious, drunken blasphemer whose debt is written at five hundred pence. Our Saviour recognizes the distinction, because it exists and cannot justly be overlooked. There are

DISTINCTIONS AMONG UNCONVERTED men, very great distinctions. One of them, a young man, came to Jesus, and he had so many fine traits in his character that the Lord looking upon him loved him; whereas when the Pharisees gathered about him our Lord looked round upon them with indignation. The soil, which was none of it yet sown with the good seed, yet varied greatly, and some of it was honest and good ground before the sower came to it. Sinners differ from each other.

But I call your particular notice to this fact—that though there was one point of difference in the two debtors, there were three points of similarity; for they were both debtors; and so all men have sinned, be it little or be it much; and, secondly, they were both alike bankrupt, neither of them could meet his debt; the man who owed fifty pence could no more pay than he who owed five hundred pence, so that they were both insolvent debtors. But what a mercy it is that they were alike in a third point! for "when they had nothing to pay," their creditor "frankly forgave them both."

O my dear hearers, we are all alike in the first two things! Oh, that we might be all of us alike in this last point, that the Lord our God may grant to every one of us the free remission of sins according to the riches of His grace through Christ Jesus!

Our first point for consideration is, their bankruptcies—"they had nothing to pay;" the second is, their free discharge—"he frankly forgave them both;" and the third is, the connection between these two things; for that little word "when" marks the connection—"when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both."

I. First, let us thing of THEIR BANKRUPTCY. This was their condition. They

were unquestionably in debt. If they could have disputed the creditor's claim, no doubt they would have done so. If they could have pleaded that they were never indebted, or that they had already paid, no doubt they would have been glad to have done so; but they could not raise a question; their debt could not be denied. Another fact was also clear to them, namely, that they had nothing to pay with. No doubt, they had made diligent search; they had turned out their pockets, their cash-boxes, and their lockers, and they had found nothing; they had looked for their household goods, but these had vanished piece by piece. They had nothing at home or broad that they could dispose of. Things had come to such a pass with them that they had neither stock nor money, nor anything in prospect which they could draw upon; they were brought to the last extremity, reduced to absolute beggary.

Meanwhile, their great creditor was pressing them for settlement. That idea lies in the heart of the text. The creditor had evidently brought his over-due accounts, and had said to them, "These claims must be met. There must be an end to this state of affairs; your accounts must be discharged." They were just brought to this condition—they must confess the debt, and they must also humbly acknowledge that they had nothing to meet it with; the time for payment had come, and it found them without a penny. No condition could be much more wretched.

This being the case, I want to spend a minute in noticing certain temptations to which all bankrupt sinners are much subject. One of these is to try and forget their spiritual estate altogether. Some of you here to-day have never given serious thought to your souls and to your condition before God. It is an unpleasant subject. You suspect that it would be still more unpleasant if you looked into it. The man who is going backward in business has no pleasure in stock-taking. "Oh," says he, "don't bring me my books; I shall not sleep at nights if I look unto them." He knows that he is sinking lower and lower, and will soon be a ruined man; and the only way in which he can endure his life is to drive dull care away by drink, or by going into company, or idle amusement. But

WHAT A FOOL HE IS!

Would it not be infinitely wiser if he would look the thing in the face and have it out, and know his actual state? Such ignorance as he chooses is not bliss to a right-hearted man, but suspense and misery. I have often prayed this prayer—"Lord, let me know the very worst of my case," for I do not wish to entertain a hope that will at last deceive me. Disappointment will be bitter in proportion as false hope was sweet. This is the temptation of the bankrupt soul, to shut its eyes to unwelcome truth.

Another temptation to a man in this condition is to make as good a show as he can. A man who is very near bankruptcy is often noticed for the dash he cuts. What a horse he drives as he comes up to business! What fashionable parties he gives! Just so, he desires to keep up his credit as long as ever he can. He is going to make a smash of it by-and-by, but for a season he assumes the airs of my Lord, and everybody near him imagines that he has money enough and to spare. There are some men of like manners; they have nothing that they can offer unto God; but yet they exhibit a glittering self-righteousness. Oh, they have been so good, such superior people, so praise-worthy from their youth up; they never did anything much amiss; there may be a little speck here and there upon their garments, but that will brush off when it is dry. Who could find fault with such good people? Just so; this profession is the fine horse and trap with which they too are cutting a dash just before going through the court. There is nothing at all in you, and there never was, if you are as nature has made you; wherefore then do you try to brazen it out, and make yourself to seem something when you are nothing. You may by this means deceive yourself, but certainly you will not deceive God.

Another temptation which lurks in the way of a bankrupt sinner is that of making promises of what he will do. Men in debt are generally

VERY PROMISING MEN:

they will pay next week for certain; but when the next week comes, they meant the next week further on, and then payment shall be doubly certain; yet they put in no appearance even then, or, if they do, they give a bill. Is not that a precious document? Is it not as good as the money itself? They evidently think so, for they feel quite as easy as if they had really paid that debt. But when the bill falls due, what, then? It falls, never to rise again. Ah me! a bill is often just a lie with a stamp on it. So will debtors go on as long as they can. This is what every sinner does before he becomes cleared by the sovereign grace of God. He cries, "I mean to do better." Dear sir, you cannot raise our hopes now. Neither God nor man will trust you; you have promised these twenty years, and in no one year have you made a real move in the right direction. You have not lied unto me only, but unto God, and how will you answer for it? Know you not that every promise that you make to God which you do not keep is a great addition to your transgressions, and helps to fill up the measure of your iniquities? Give up the way of lying, I pray you.

Another temptation is, always to ask for more time—as if this was all that was needed. "It is not convenient just now, but do wait a little bit, a suitable hour will come." With this temptation Satan has destroyed multitudes of men, tempting them to ask for more time, instead of coming up to the mark at once and asking for immediate pardon. What are the fabled virtues of to-morrow? Why do men dote upon the unknown future? To immediate decision I would press you at this moment; and may God by his Divine Spirit deliver you as a bird from the hand of the fowler, that you may no longer procrastinate and waste your life in disobedient delay.

This being the temptation, let me hint to those of you who are bankrupt what your wisdom is. It is your wisdom to face the business of your soul. Your soul-matters are the most important things you will ever have on hand, for when your wealth must be left, and your estate shall see you no more, and when your body is dead, your soul will still be living in eternal happiness or endless woe; therefore, do not let your state in reference to God have the go-by. It is the most important matter; give it the first place. Settle this business before you attend to anything else. Take care that you

FACE IT, LIKE AN HONEST MAN,

and not as one who makes the best of a bad story. Though it be bad, yet still the best thing you can do is to go right through with it in truth and soberness before the Lord. Hope lies that way. Before God nothing but truth can stand; the painted hypocrite is spied out immediately. The Lord takes off all masks, and men stand before him as they really are, and not as they would seem to be; so be true with yourself. Do not take your pen and write down sixty if you owe a hundred; but put the fair hundred down. Tricks and falsehoods had better be put away once for all when you deal with God.

One thing more; it will be your wisdom to give up all attempts to pay, because you have nothing to pay with. Do not delude yourself into the idea that you will pay one day for you never will. Do not make the slightest attempt at paying, for you cannot do it; but take quite another course, plead absolute poverty, and appeal to mercy. Say, "Lord, I have nothing, I am nothing, I can do nothing, I must throw myself upon thy grace." Of this grace I am now going to speak. May I so speak as to encourage you who are bankrupts to come to the Lord, that he may frankly forgive you all.

II. Our second head is,

THEIR FREE DISCHARGE.

"He frankly forgave them both." What a blessing they obtained by facing the matter! These two poor debtors, when they went into the

office, were trembling from head to foot, for they had nothing to pay, and were deeply involved; but see! they come out with light hearts, for the debt is all disposed of, the bills are receipted, the records are destroyed. Even thus the Lord has blotted out the handwriting that was against us, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

In this free discharge I admire, first of all, the goodness of the great creditor. What a gracious heart he had! What kindness he showed! He said, "Poor souls, you can never pay me, but you need not be cast down because of it, for I freely cancel your debts." Oh, the goodness of it! Oh, the largeness of the heart of God!

But then, observe the freeness of it—"He frankly forgave them both." They did not stand there and say, "Oh, good sir, we cannot pay," and plead and beg, as for their lives; but he freely said to them, "You cannot pay, but I can forgive. You ought never to have got into my debt, and you ought not to have broken your promises to me; but behold, I make an end of all this weary business; I freely blot out all your obligations!" This is a fair picture of the grace of God. When a poor sinner comes to him bankrupt, he says, "I forgive you freely; your offence is all gone. I do not want you to earn a pardon by your tears, and prayers, and anguish of soul. You have not to make Me merciful, for I am merciful already; and my dear Son Jesus Christ has made such a propitiation that I can be just and yet can forgive you all this debt. Therefore, go in peace."

Furthermore, this debt was fully discharged. The creditor did not say, "Come, my good fellow, I will take fifty per cent of the account if you find the remainder." As they had nothing wherewith to pay, they would not have been a bit the better if he had reduced it to a ninety per cent. If he had taken half the debt, the one would have owed two hundred and fifty and the other twenty-five; but still their case would have been hopeless, since they had not a farthing of their own. Now the Lord when he blots out his people's sin, leaves no trace of it remaining.

And I believe that when this is done, I may add another adjective—it is an eternal discharge. That creditor could never summon those debtors again for debts which he had remitted. He could never think of such a thing with any show of justice. He had frankly forgiven them, and they were forgiven. God does not play fast and loose with His creatures, and forgive them and then punish them: I never shall believe in God's loving a man to-day, and casting him away to-morrow.

He, you with a little bill, bring it here that infinite grace may write upon it "CANCELLED!" Ho, you with a more weighty account, come and place it near that gracious right hand for though your bill be never so long and heavy, the hand of Infinite Love can write "CANCELLED" in a moment! My joy overflows at having such a Gospel to preach to you; whatever your guilt, my gracious God is ready to forgive you for Jesus's sake, because he delighteth in mercy.

III. I now beg your very special attention to the last point, and that is

THE CONNECTION

between this bankruptcy and this free discharge. It is said "When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." There is a time when pardon comes, and that time is when self-sufficiency goes. If any person in this place has in his own conscience come to this point, that he feels he has nothing to pay, he has come to the point at which God is ready to forgive him. He that will own his debt, and confess his own incapacity to meet it, shall find that God frankly blots it out. The Lord will never forgive us until we are brought to the starvation of pride and the death of boasting.

A sense of spiritual bankruptcy shows that a man has become thoughtful; and this is essential to salvation. Must there not be serious thought before we can hope for mercy? Would you have God save us while we are asleep, while we are giddy, frivolous, trifling, and without concern about our sin? Surely that

would be giving a premium to folly! God acts not so. He will have us know the seriousness of our danger, for else we shall treat the whole matter with lightness; and we shall miss the moral effect of pardon, while He will be robbed of His glory.

Next, when we come to feel our bankruptcy we then make an honest confession, and to that confession a promise is given—"he that confesseth his sin shall find mercy." The two debtors had owned to their debts, and they had also openly confessed, though it must have gone against the grain a bit, that they could not pay. They humbled themselves before their creditor, and then he said, "I frankly forgive you." If one of these debtors had bounced and bragged, "Oh, we can pay;" in all probability he would have been sent to prison.

As for you, poor trembler, I do not know where you are this morning, but here is comfort for you; when you go unto God in your chamber and cry, "Lord, have mercy upon me, for I am guilty, and I cannot justify myself before Thee, nor offer any excuse to Thee;" then it is that He will say, "Be of good cheer; I have put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." When you have nothing to pay and confess your insolvency, the debt shall be wiped out. When you are brought to your worst, you shall see the Lord at His best.

It is in their utter destitution that men value a discharge. If God were to give His mercy to every man at once, without his ever having had any sense of sin at all, why men would count it cheap and think nothing of it. So the Lord takes care that the sinner shall know his need of mercy by feeling the pinch of conscience and the terror of the law. If I may so speak, He puts in the sheriff's officer, and makes

A DISTRRAINT UPON THE SOUL by convincing the man of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. The Lord puts an execution into the heart, and then it is, when the poor creature cries, "I have nothing to pay with," that free discharge is given by the Lord, and heartily prized by him to whom it comes.

Under conviction a poor soul sees the reality of sin and of pardon. My dear hearer, you will never believe in the reality of forgiveness till you have felt the reality of sin. I remember when I felt the burden of sin, and though but a child, my heart failed me for anguish, and I was brought very low. Sin was no bugbear to scare me; it was a grim reality, as a lion it tore me in pieces. And now, to-day, I know the reality of pardon. It is no fancy, no dream, for my inmost soul feels its power. I know that my sins are forgiven, and I rejoice therein; but I should never have known the real truth of this happy condition if I had not felt the oppressive load of sin upon the conscience.

I do believe that the Lord will give us our quitance when we have got to our last farthing, and not till then, because only then do we look to the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, my dear friends, as long as we have anything else to look to, we never will look to Christ. That blessed port into which no ship did ever run in a storm without finding a sure haven is shunned by all your gallant vessels; they will rather put into any port along the coast of self-deceit than make for the harbor which is marked out by the two light-houses of free grace and dying love.

WE BREAK TO MAKE.

We are emptied to be filled. When we cannot give, God can forgive. If any of you have any goodness of your own you will perish forever. If you have anything you can trust to of your own you will be lost as sure as you are living men and women; but if you are reduced to sore extremity, and God's fierce wrath seems to burn against you, then not only may you have mercy, but mercy is yours already.

"This perfect poverty alone That sets the soul at large, While we can call one mite our own We get no full discharge. "But let our debts be what they may, However great or small, As soon as we have sought to pay Our Lord forgives us all." Blessed are ye poor, for ye shall be rich! Blessed are ye hungry, for ye shall be fed! Blessed are ye that

are empty, for ye shall be filled. But woe unto you that are rich and are increased in goods, and have need of nothing, and boast of your own goodness! Christ has nothing to do with you, and we have nothing to preach to you except this—"Thee that be whole need not a physician. The heavenly Surgeon did not come to save those who have no need of saving. Let those who are sick pride up their ears and hear with delight for the Physician is come with a special eye to them. Are you a sinner? Then Christ is the Saviour of sinners. Join hands with him in faith, and the work is done; you are saved forever! God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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