

SOME DAY.

Some day with heart and pulses still, With folded hands and sealed eyes, And quiet face turned to the skies, Not every thy touch shall wake one thrill.

PRODIGALS HAVE RETURNED.

BY G. H. GOUDY.

In the reports of revivals in our churches so frequently placed before us, extensively or otherwise, how often is this statement made; as if this were an important factor in the work, and these so-called "prodigals" coming back were a very considerable part of the object desired in this work.

Now who are these prodigals, who always along with sinners who forsake the error of their ways return to God? Where have they been all this time since the last revival? What do they come back to? And how long will they stay home after having returned? All these are questions worthy of notice, and answers to them are provoked by the phrase which has become stereotyped into our revival nomenclature.

The term is metamorphosed from the narrative, or parable, as contained in the 15th chapter of Luke—the parabolic description of the younger son who demanded his portion and went away from home into a far-off country, and there wasted his goods in riotous living, and after a time came home again, and was welcomed by his father with song, dancing and joy. Well, what analogy is there here? What is there in all this that minatures such an experience? Did Jesus mean to teach that the conduct of this young man well illustrates the character and actions of many of his own disciples? Did he mean to say that this younger son is the average christian, while the older one stands for the faithful church member—a little to be blamed for his censoriousness—who stays home and takes care of things while the other fellow has a "big time" away from home? I trow not. It is a graphic and striking illustration of the sinner's perversity and folly, persisted in until influences outside of himself, and inward impulses in their origin extraneous to his own depraved heart, compel him to turn to God, on the one hand; and on the other hand, the readiness of God in his Fatherhood to forgive him, on condition of repentance, for Christ's sake. To make this parable illustrate a christian disgraced coming back to God, when he can't help it, seems to us to be a wresting of the scriptures. If this is the teaching here then we have a genuine case of falling from grace; and when his portion is all spent in riotous living—keeping in view the experience of all such prodigals—he returns for more with which to fall again, only waiting for the famine (Revival) to make him feel his want, and repeat his role.

Our doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints—based as we claim upon the doctrines of grace, as well as formulated from the plain teachings of God's word—certainly leaves no open door through which prodigals may depart at their will and leisure. Nor does this doctrine make any allowance for the average prodigal—the man who stays home long enough only to see his father for a brief period; to get filled from his bountiful table after a happy and protracted stay in the Devil's domains; to persuade his all merciful and indulgent parent to make another division of his goods; and then, as soon as the calf is devoured, and the robe, shoes, and ring are well adjusted, and the music and dancing subsides, and the folks home begin to think the young man has come home to stay now—picks up his goods and starts off again, to waste his substance in riotous living, and wait until another feast is made in his fathers house, and another notice to the effect that "The prodigal has returned."

Some of these prodigals show about as close a relationship, in character and practice, to our Heavenly Father's family, as a dishonest tramp does to the father who bore him, and trained him in the way he ought not to go. They live, and eat, and sleep, and enjoy themselves everywhere else but at home; and only return when there's a big time at the homestead, and he can get a feast that cost him nothing

in them; that he only who keepeth Christ's commandments evinces that he loves him; that Christ's sheep hear his voice and follow him; that he that is born of God cannot sin, because he is born of God, and because "His seed remaineth in him." No open doors here for men who find Christ's yoke galling and the service of God irksome! No margin here for prodigals certainly! No provision made here for self gratification, sensual delights and moral debauchery! No far off country here, just a sort of accommodation for depraved saints or perverse disciples, who may take it into their heads to run away from home and stay away the most of their time!

Paul's idea of the sovereignty of grace is after the same sort. What a massive argument that is of his, as conducted through the first five chapters of Romans. Notice how he forges and welds these links together until the chain is complete. See how sedulously he shuts out all idea of works as furnishing any real grounds for justification with God; and how the climax is reached when he triumphantly asserts the doctrine of justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law. Old Mr. Antinomian whispers: "Now here's a chance for prodigals sure enough. Saved by grace and grace alone? Good! I like that. Sure enough, 'If the Son make you free ye shall be free indeed.' Liberty! blessed liberty! Now I'm off to the far off country. I can read my title clear to mansions in the skies and so I'll bid farewell to every fear and wipe my weeping eyes, and see the world a little. Truly religion never was designed to make our pleasures less, and so I mean to get my fill." But stop! Read on. Half truths are as misleading as lies; and this is the statement only of half a truth: a precious one it is, but there is more belongs to it. There is no liberty given here to sin. "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein." Note carefully the reasoning through the entire chapter—a perfect rebuttal of any such inference. Here Paul plants the sentries of stern logical truth in the very highway to the regions of rioting and prodigality; and these grim sons of righteousness challenge every comer, and they pass beyond the lines of redemptive grace only such as "Are enemies to the cross of Christ; whose God is their bellies, who mind earthly things." In this sixth chapter Paul shows that the grace that justifies also, and always, sanctifies; that the faith that saves also overcomes the world; that the kind of service shows the master's character whom we serve.

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Then he is off again until the next revival comes.

These prodigals often betray considerable shrewdness. So long as the "substance" lasts, and the harlots are winsome, and friends are plenty, and the revelry is enchanting, and the husks can satisfy, and the swine are congenial, and the clothes last, they care nothing about home or father either. The messengers of reconciliation may plead never so tenderly. The memories of his boyhood plenty may haunt him never so persistently. The elder son may be duteous never so perseveringly; but he won't come home until there's a "feast of fat things" prepared for him, through the sweat and toil of the faithful few; and his ear is greeted with the sound of the music and dancing; and the dear old father with all the rest of the family go all the way down into the far off country and actually hire him to come back.

Now I ask is this prodigality consistent with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints? No! The weight of practical evidence is on the side of perseverance of the sinners! In other relations a man goes by the name of what he gives the most of his time and attention to. If a man who practices medicine, once in a while takes a trip to sea, you do not call him a sailor. If a man who practices law, once in a while performs a journey, you do not call him a traveller. If a man who follows the sea comes home once in a while, and remains for a short time, you do not call him a farmer. And by parity of reasoning, if a man whose practice it is not to avail himself of the means of grace, and to live in continuous violation of all his vows and social obligations does once in a while, under strong religious forces, do better, and come home to his "father's house" where there's "bread and to spare," you do not call him a saint! This isn't his occupation. It is only his diversion. Serving God is not his daily employment, it is merely his vacation. "If any man will be my disciple let him—take up his cross daily and follow me."

If the doctrine of "Final perseverance" is intended to make allowance for all we see around us of lukewarmness, ease and indifference, if not of actual flagrant sin, in the lives of many professors of religion, then away with it. Better save the character of God, even if you let the doctrine go. This would be salvation by sin and not by grace; A cure of the malady while yet the disease remains; a rescue of the drowning man while yet all the billows overwhelm him; a pardon for the criminal and still he must expiate his crime upon the fatal gibbet. Don't, for Jesus' sake, for the sake of his pure and holy religion, call that ragged, emaciated, wretched prodigal a disciple, a follower of the Lord, a child of God. Don't, for consistency's sake say, when a man gives the strength of his life, and the most of his time to the service of self-hood; or spends his strength and time in sensual indulgences, that he is denying himself, and taking up his cross, and following Christ. Don't, for the sake of those who are as yet not sons of God, point to such a character as that, and say, "This is the younger son of my father, he's a little eccentric, and a little odd as to his notions of paternal duties, and a little singular in his tastes; but he's the image of his father and shows you the advantage of being born again into his family." No, don't do it. Call things by their right names. Hang out no false lights to misdirect the wayward. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Perhaps if we paraphrase this doctrine, or put its words under a different collocation, we shall the better get at its meaning. All who are the saints of God will persevere finally. "The saved will endure to the end." "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Old things have passed away" "Having begun a good work among you he will carry it on." "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth

more and more unto the perfect day." Christ is represented as the stronger than Satan and casteth him out, and keepeth him out forever. The religion of the Lord Jesus Christ is called a "kingdom within us;" a power which rules, legislates, and subordinates to itself. Like leaven, it is accretive, or aggressive, and ceases its impulse only when universal assimilation occurs. In a word, the believer is "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

With this view of the doctrine, even though it does chill the ardor of some of these well established prodigals. I can understand the cause of joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth; and see a reason for the merry-making in the father's house when the prodigal returned. Because the lost is found; the dead is alive again; a soul is saved. Because the son is going to stay home; he has done with harlots, and swine and husks; his prodigal days are ended. He sits at the father's feast never more to depart. He enjoys the father's lavishments and hospitalities, never again to abuse them. Evermore now shall he stay, there is no place like home. Suppose the father knew that the son would only remain a short time, and then go of again, and again consort with harlots, and "waste his substance in revelry and debauchery." How could he rejoice, or how could there be merry-making in the household? Would you play the farce of all heaven rejoicing over this prodigal coming home in view of the fact that this found one will soon be lost again, this one that now lives soon will be dead once more? There might be an effort at merry-making, the attempt of despair, not of gladness surely, but the thoughts of the future must palsy the hand of harper, and stiffen the limb of dancer, and make tremulous the voice of seraph. A note of joy might be struck, but this, ere its symphonies swell into the volume of thanksgiving, must lose its upward sweep and die away into the sad calmness of disappointed hope, and unmitigated grief.

I say if christians do persevere, and stay home with their Father, after they come, as did this young man of the parable; then I can understand the joy in heaven over his recovery. But if they come home only once in a while, and stay away the rest of the time—and that's most all of the time—then it is highest folly, and unpardonable nonsense to talk about "joy in heaven" or joy on earth over these, to say the best of them, are damning more souls by their careless sinful lives than all the few faithful ones can possibly save.

Why don't the churches tell us, after the revival is over, and these prodigals have been on a short visit to their father's house, and have surfeited themselves upon the feast of fat things that the "servants" have prepared, that these religious sensualists have gone back again; that they have called for another division of the estate, and with pack upon back, and a good bye all round, have left home once more; that the Father is grieved, and the dear Saviour is crucified afresh and put to an open shame, and the pastor is disappointed and wounded at their conduct, and the brethren are discouraged. Why not tell us—it would be just as profitable—that "prodigals have gone off again" and have taken a few new converts with them to assist them in chewing husks and feeding the devil's swine.

It hardly pays for the pains we take, just to have these prodigals home with us for a little, and then say farewell for a long period of desolation. To prepare a feast costs something, and to produce a famine is more expensive, and what comes of it all? Why prodigals have returned" to eat the fatted calf, and get a new outfit, and return to the far off country and wait until the Lord comes round again, and another famine fetches them home to a feast.

"Prodigals have returned;" Ah! yes, we know that. They let us know when they come back. Of all who repent their repentance seems to be the deepest; of all who praise they shout the loudest; of all who

give themselves up to the service of God they seem to make the least reserve in their consecration; and of all who vow fidelity to Christ and his church they protest the strongest of all. But we know what will happen soon. Their goodness is like the "early cloud and the morning dew, it goeth away." Like fish in fly time they make remarkable gyrations, and astonish the beholder by their wonderful zeal only to slip back into their natural element when summer is gone, to keep near the bottom until another season returns. O prodigal, if you have returned, stay home. Stay there I say and rejoice.

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