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# A Good Start: A Book for Young Men (Part One)

J. Thain Davidson D.D.

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A GOOD  
START

J. THAIN DAVIDSON, D.D.



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Moose jaw  
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# A GOOD START

A Book for Young Men

BY

J. THAIN DAVIDSON D.D

*SIXTH THOUSAND*

London

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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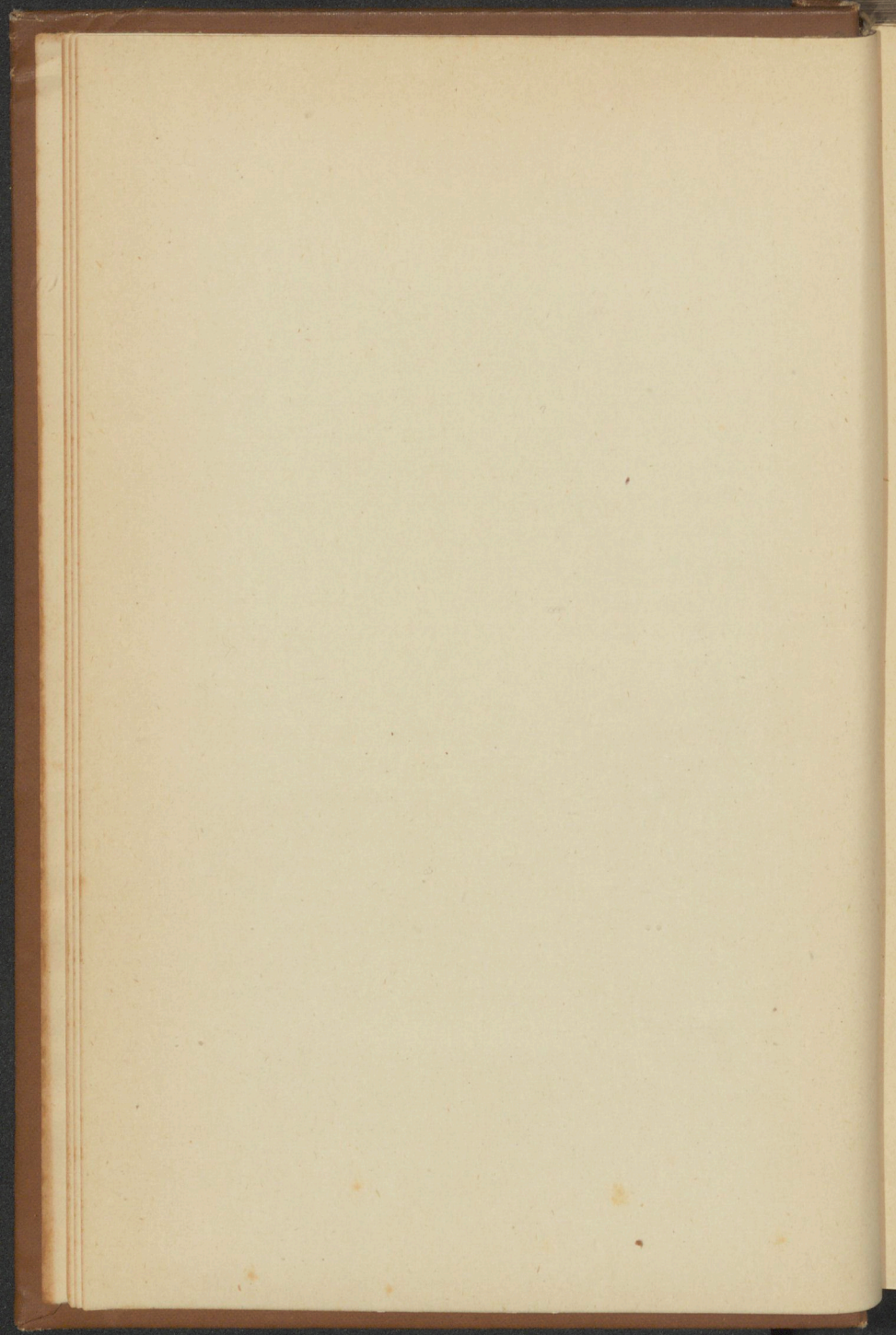
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## PREFACE.

To the thousands of young men who within the past quarter of a century have spent a little time under my ministry in Islington, and are now scattered to all parts of the world, I dedicate with warmly-affectionate recollections another volume of the special monthly addresses.

These homely talks may serve to recall happy Sunday evenings long gone by, and to revive wholesome impressions which perhaps have not altogether faded from the mind.

The history of many young men is a sad record of misplaced confidence, and of foolish tampering with temptation. Our cities have great moral vortices in which it is no exaggeration to say that hundreds of the choicest of our youth are constantly disappearing. It was the aim of these discourses to lay hold of young men before they were caught in the fatal whirlpool : and many a delightful testimony has reached the preacher that under the Divine blessing his aim has been realized. On this ground only does he yield to the request for their publication, hopeful that a further blessing may attend the perusal.



## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I.	
SOMETHING BETTER THAN RICHES. . . . .	I
II.	
THE LOVER OF PLEASURE . . . . .	15
III.	
£50,000 SACRIFICED FOR CONSCIENCE . . . . .	29
IV.	
IS THE YOUNG MAN SAFE? . . . . .	43
V.	
THE CITY'S WILDERNESS . . . . .	59
VI.	
MEN OF PLUCK . . . . .	73
VII.	
THE RECKLESS HORSEMAN . . . . .	87
VIII.	
THE SCAPEGRACE . . . . .	101
IX.	
BETTING AND GAMBLING . . . . .	115

	PAGE
X.	
THE BRAVE MAN OF OPHRAH . . . . .	129
XI.	
THE NORTHERN IRON . . . . .	143
XII.	
THE BRASS-FOUNDER OF TYRE . . . . .	157
XIII.	
ELIEZER OF DAMASCUS . . . . .	173
XIV.	
A LAWYER SEEKING THE LIGHT . . . . .	187
XV.	
THE MYSTERIOUS YOUNG MAN . . . . .	201
XVI.	
THE TRUE TEST OF RELIGION . . . . .	215
XVII.	
A PROMPT AND PERSONAL APPEAL . . . . .	229
XVIII.	
THE MEDITATIVE MAN . . . . .	243
XIX.	
STRONG IN THE GRACE OF CHRIST . . . . .	257
XX.	
A PERFECT MAN . . . . .	271

5

*SOMETHING BETTER THAN RICHES.*

*“ A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving  
favour rather than silver and gold.”—PROV. xxii. 1.*

I.

*SOMETHING BETTER THAN RICHES.*

**I**N other words, an excellent character is a fortune ; to be generally respected and beloved is better than to own all the wealth of London. Few persons are indifferent to the esteem in which their fellow-mortals hold them ; and, as Thomas Carlyle shrewdly remarked, even the man who occupies the highest social position is, to some degree, dependent on the position of the lowest.

You do not need that I should urge you to pursue wealth ; leave men alone for this ; they are bent on making money. From the lucky stockbroker or merchant, who, by a few successes, leaps into affluence ; or the renowned consulting physician, who rakes in gold from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. or the accomplished barrister, who is coining money ; to the humblest clerk or artisan, nearly every one makes it his aim to be as rich as he can : and I could tell you of not a few young men, once stated worshippers with us here, to whom, but a year or two ago, a half-crown was a consideration, who are now in possession of a handsome fortune. Well, all happiness to them ! If money comes to you honourably, and goes from you usefully, the more of it you have the better. It is a great privilege to be rich, when the owner—striking the mean between prodigality and miserliness—knows how to spend the treasure God has given him.

But we are told here of something more valuable still : of



something that is to be chosen rather than great riches, and is better far than silver and gold. Moreover, it is something within the reach of all of you. Wealth you may never be able to acquire; it may be your destiny to be poor all your days; but here is a possession within the reach of every one.

You may be worth a million of money; yet you will be poor, if you have not this. The meanest pauper on earth is he whose character is worthless. No amount of credit at the bank will secure you "a good name"; but a good name, apart from its intrinsic value, may open to you avenues of splendid success.

I greatly wish that I could fire the heart of every one of you with the ambition, the determination, to possess a solid, noble, and unsullied character.

I. The first thing I have to impress upon you is, that *a good name must be the fruit of one's own exertion*. You cannot possess it by patrimony; you cannot purchase it with money; you will not light on it by chance; it is independent of birth, station, talents, and wealth; it must be the outcome of your own endeavour, and the reward of good principles and honourable conduct.

Of all the elements of success in life none is more vital than self-reliance—a determination to be, under God, the creator of your own reputation and advancement.

If difficulties stand in the way, if exceptional disadvantages oppose you, all the better, so long as you have pluck to fight through them. I want each young man here (you will not misunderstand me) to have faith in himself, and, scorning props and buttresses, crutches and life-preservers, to take earnest hold of life; believing that, as the biographer of Goethe says, "man ought to regard himself not (as he is often told) as the creature of circumstances, but as the

architect of circumstances." Many a lad has good stuff in him that never comes to anything, because he slips too easily into some groove of life; it is commonly those who have a tough battle to begin with that make their mark upon their age.

Beethoven said of Rossini, "that he had the material in him to have made a good musician if he had only been well flogged when a boy, but that he was spoiled by the ease with which he composed."

Thousands of young men have turned out failures because they relied for a good name upon their excellent parentage, or on the patronage of friends, rather than on their own personal exertions.

It has not always proved an unmixed benefit to have a wealthy grandfather or an influential uncle to give the young spark a start in life, and a reputation on which he could trade; not seldom this has turned out a real misfortune. Such conditions generally issue in the production of a weak and molluscos character. Hence it happens so often that the sons of your merchant princes, of your big city men, turn out mere nobodies. It is quite observable that character and wealth rarely continue in the same family for more than two or three generations. "What I am, I have made myself; I say this without vanity, and in pure simplicity of heart;" so wrote that brilliantly successful man, Sir Humphrey Davy; and it is quite remarkable to notice how many of our worthiest and most respected citizens have risen to honour and position, simply by dint of their own stern principle and persevering exertion. The only good name worth having must be sought in this way.

It was eminently to the credit of the late Prince Consort, that he frankly recognised the fact that even royalty itself could only secure the respect of the people as it gave evi-

dence of a high personal character, and of steady and self-denying attention to duty.

It is an honourable ambition for a young man to wish to "get on"; it is a still nobler ambition for him to wish to "get up," to stand high in the respect of all who know him; but if you are hoping to reach this in any other way than by your own steady self-exertion, ah! my dear boy, you are looking through the wrong end of the telescope, and your prospect can only be dim and disappointing.

II. The next thing I have to say is that *the pursuit of a good name must be begun in early life*. Remember, it is not a thing that can be created suddenly; it takes years to establish; and when youth and adolescence are gone, is next to impossible. It will not shoot up in a night, like Jonah's gourd at Nineveh; but, like that gourd, it may perish in a night. The high character which it has taken long years to establish, may in one hour be hopelessly shattered. But, thank God, such a case is exceedingly rare, especially where the formation has commenced at an early age. The sooner a boy gives indication of sterling principle, of unbending truthfulness, and of genuine self-respect, the greater is the confidence we may feel in his honourable future.

Most of the men of our country whose names stand for exalted principle, a high sense of honour, and splendid beneficence, revealed, while yet they were beardless youths, the germs of their future character. Even at fourteen or sixteen years of age there were not wanting indications of what the coming man was to be. I should say that in most cases the third septennate of life—from fifteen to twenty-one inclusive—is the formative period. Let a young man pass this season with pure morals and an unstained reputation, showing command of himself, control of his passions, and

diligent application to duty, we need have little fear that "a good name" will crown his maturer years.

On the other hand, if at this stage of life he gives way to indolent habits, indulges in vicious courses, hobnobs with drinking and betting men, and betrays an undoubted want of conscientiousness, his character incurs a stain which no subsequent repentance is likely to remove. It is usually after he has reached his majority that a man begins to make money; but it is before he reaches it that he makes—what the text says is far more valuable—"a good name," a fair and honourable character. Nor must you suppose that it is an optional matter with you to acquire this; it is a duty. You cannot shirk the obligation if you would. You are not in duty bound to be rich, but you are bound to make an unblemished character. If you don't, you rob God, and inflict a bane upon society. Sir, you have no right to exist, to breathe so many cubic feet of air, to occupy so many inches of soil, unless you are a distinct blessing to the community, and unless the earth will be poorer by your removal. Oh, remember this, you young lads, and start life with a high aim and a noble purpose.

III. A good name, to be of value, *must be based on sterling and intrinsic worth.* The question is, What constitutes a good name? and the answer which you or I give will depend upon our own conception of excellence. Dugald Stewart tells of a young man whose supreme ambition was to be able to balance a broomstick on his chin; another's highest aim is to be the champion sculler; to be the first football player in the kingdom; to be A 1 at a game of billiards; to beat the record on his bicycle; to go without food for forty days; and so forth. Well, every man to his taste; I am not at present saying anything for or against these achievements; but you will hardly pronounce

any of them the noblest form of ambition. No man can be expected to rise higher than his own standard. If your standard be low and defective, so also will be your ideal of character. Merely to be famous, nay, even to be popular, does not of itself necessarily imply real worth. A certain popularity may sometimes be purchased at the expense of principle.

A member of Parliament, for example, may be popular with his constituents, although the world knows his character will not stand a moment's examination. Some blatant demagogue, who is morally rotten to the core, may win the favour of the streets, and be everywhere received with the crowd's applause. But no man of sense will value such a reputation.

The good name which Solomon declares to be better than great riches does not depend on the fickle breath of popular opinion. It is based on the eternal principles of honour and righteousness. It is immutable as truth, and carries with it the approval of conscience and the smile of Heaven. May I venture to mention one or two of the elements that go to the formation of that "good name" that all the gold in the Bank of England could not buy?

I give the first place to *stern truthfulness*. No prevarications; no innuendoes; no shams. Let the strict truth be spoken at all times and at all costs. Not this only; for a lie may be acted as well as spoken. There may be as big a falsehood in omission, or in concealment, as overt statement. As an old Latin proverb has it, "*Suppressio veri suggestio falsi*," i.e., the suppression of the truth is the suggestion of a lie. Let your word be as good as your oath any day; your promise as valuable as your bond. You are already of consequence in the world, if it is known you can be implicitly relied upon. Strict fidelity is an

article of high commercial value. You may have a pleasing address, good manners, and any amount of brain; all that is worth little, if absolute confidence cannot be placed in you. Loathe an untruth as you loathe death. Be jealous of any weakness on this point of character. Stamp it out, if it exists. Let there not be a trace of shuffling or slipperiness about you. Let your employer and your landlady feel you are as true as steel. Be always and sternly exact to your word. Such a reputation is better than great riches.

Again, let your name be a synonym for *purity*. Let your character, like Cæsar's wife, be above suspicion. Have such an abhorrence of the lewd, the vile, the base, that the veriest hint of a charge against you will rebound and fall harmless at you feet.

Beware of a word, a look, a gesture, a laugh, that may be misunderstood and bring a stain upon you; your attitude being—

“ My strength is as the strength of ten,  
Because my heart is pure.”

Remember, even a whisper of reproach, if there is cause for it, may ruin you for life. A pointed cannon is nothing to a pointed finger, when the conscience is not clear.

I would have you also to have a good name for *benevolence*. Sweeter than the perfume of roses is a reputation for a kind, charitable, unselfish nature; a ready disposition to do for others any good turn in your power. Strict integrity and purity are not enough; a man is not likely to get well on in the world if he thinks of nobody but number one.

It is a fine thing to win the affection as well as regard of those who know you. I know persons who are respected, but I can hardly say they are loved. You feel they are

worthy of your confidence, but they do not win your heart. Now, it is best to have both, as indeed the text expresses; not only the "good name," which is rather to be chosen than great riches, but the "loving favour," which is better than silver and gold.

There are many other qualities essential to a fair reputation, which time does not permit me to name; but very important it is to keep in mind also what may be called *the minor moralities of life*. A good name for punctuality, for example, of what immense service may this be to a young man; always up to the minute; his watch never behind time, and he never behind his watch. A good name for early rising; for clean and tidy habits; for uniform courtesy and civility; for an even temper; for an obliging disposition; for plodding perseverance; for regard to economy. My lads, there is not one of these points you can afford to despise, for they all go to make up the reputation on which your future must largely depend.

IV. Remember this, *a good name cannot be dissociated from the company you keep*. You must not allow an easy, good-natured amiability to entrap you into fellowship that can do you nothing but harm. I sometimes see a young fellow for whom I have a high regard, associating with a man who is not worthy to brush his boots; and I cannot but deplore it; for evil company is like tobacco-smoke—you cannot be long in its presence without carrying away the taint. It is not a good sign of a man if he chooses for his friends those who are inferior in character to himself. You will always notice that a youth of high *morale* likes the society of persons whom he can look up to with respect; as Quarles shrewdly says, "To be the best in the company, is the way to grow worse; the best means to grow better, is to be the worst there." I have known instances of men

who had only one blot on their fair reputation, and that was that they could associate with a character unworthy of respect. You cannot touch pitch without soiling your hands; though you yourself may be unconscious of the influence, that loose companion is surely dragging you down, and spoiling your good name. Where you perceive any want of principle, do not be drawn into intimacy. Never let yourself down; rather have no companions than bad ones.

Young men are often but little aware how much their reputation is affected—and their prospects too—by the company they keep. The character of their associates is soon regarded as their own. Shake off at once that fellow whose society is polluting you. You would no longer have any dealings with a companion who stole your watch or your purse; but it is just possible that that chum of yours may be robbing you of something infinitely more valuable.

“Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing,  
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.  
But he that filches from me my good name,  
Robs me of that which not enriches him,  
And makes me poor indeed.”

Bear in mind, character is capital—with many of you the only capital you possess. Money-capital it is not difficult to lose; this easier still. A day of folly, one night of shame, and it is gone for ever!

Break off, then, every questionable acquaintanceship, and remember what this great Book declares, that “the companion of fools shall be destroyed.”

V. I have reserved till the close the most important point of all—a good name can have no guarantee of permanency that is not founded upon genuine piety. The man of true religion alone stands on firm and elevated ground;



“his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.” The character that is without godliness, however fair it seem, can have no solidity. Nothing but the grace of God in the heart can secure you against moral shipwreck.

Let a young man go out into life with as clean a bill and as spotless a reputation as were ever known, I for one can feel no confidence in his future, if that is all. Some of you, who would be the first to own that you are not yet converted to God, have every purpose to do well, to keep in the right way, and to resist the tempter; it is your resolve to be sternly honest, rigidly temperate, scrupulously chaste, and to maintain a character without a stain; but, alas! you do not know your weakness till the hour of strong temptation comes. At such a time you will feel that you want a Divine arm around you, and that unless you have help from above you must fall.

Ah! I have seen young men, equal to any of you in promise, entrapped by the wily enemy of souls, and lured on to utter and hopeless ruin: they had laughed at danger, and thought they were proof against the foe; and *where are they now?* Some of them exiles at the ends of the earth; some of them walking these streets with remorse in their bloated faces, and rags upon their backs; and some of them in Abney Park or Highgate, lying in premature and dishonoured graves. They thought they were strong enough to beat the devil; but the arch-enemy laughed at them, and “led them captive at his will.”

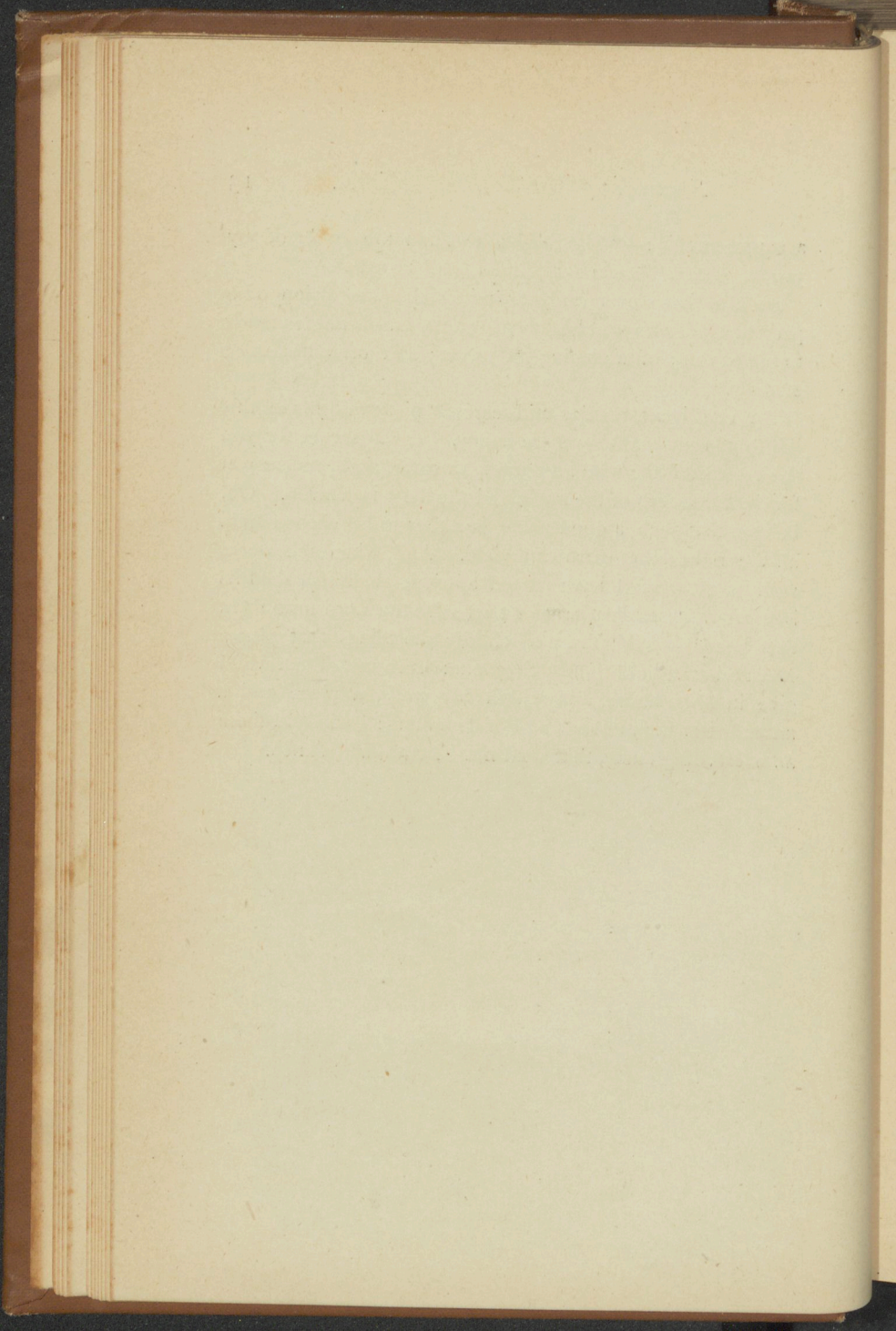
If there be one truth clearer than another, it is that men cannot attain to purity, or peace, or safety of themselves.

The only strength which is a guarantee against moral disaster is that which comes from God, and is yours through your acceptance of Jesus as your Saviour. Let no day pass that does not find you on your knees, offering up such

a prayer as this :—" My Father, be Thou the guide of my youth. Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

Seek to have ever on your minds the impression of a present God, who watches all your acts, and is always ready to help you ; of a coming judgment ; and of a hastening eternity.

An intelligent, manly, and earnest piety will make this life to you unspeakably more happy. It will secure for you the esteem of the wise and good on earth, and prepare you for the fellowship of the noble and the blest in heaven. Oh, believe that such a good name is rather to be chosen than all the riches that earth can yield. And, when the world with its glory shall have passed away, it shall still shed its halo around your heads : " for thus saith the Lord unto them that keep My sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant : even unto them will I give in Mine house, and within My walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters : I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off." Amen.



*THE LOVER OF PLEASURE.*

*“He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man.”—PROV. xxi. 17.*

## II.

### *THE LOVER OF PLEASURE.*

**I**N this short, terse sentence the sage lays his finger upon the secret of the failure of nine-tenths of our young men. They loved pleasure, and gave themselves to its pursuit ; and so they have never got on, and never will.

I do not say that to be a poor man is necessarily to be an unhappy man—by no means ; but when poverty comes as the result of idleness, and sloth, and self-indulgence, it is both a curse and a shame. None of you wish to be poor men ; if poor just now, you hope to be rich, or at least fairly well off, some day ; and in this desire there is nothing to condemn.

Whatever view you may take of human life, and of the value of money, one thing is certain, and that is, that if happiness is not always found in success, it is never found in failure.

Poverty, of course, is a relative term ; what would be deemed indigence by one man would probably be considered abundance by another ; but you would be surprised to learn, indeed you would hardly believe, how large is the proportion of men having a fair start in life, who never in all their days come within sight of the measure of comfort they had confidently expected to reach.

A distinguished citizen in a large commercial centre, who had long been acquainted with the leading business men

of the city, gave it as his opinion that only three out of every hundred who entered upon mercantile life became ultimately successful. Of the twenty thousand young men who every year come up to London in the hope of doing well for themselves, there are but a few hundreds who reach a position of comparative affluence; whilst there are probably not less than ten thousand who never attain success at all, and with whom, to the end of the chapter, every day will be but a desperate struggle to keep their heads above water. Now, why is this?

It will not do to say that there is not room for all, or that mercantile life is just a great lottery, in which the prizes are so few, and the blanks so many, that thousands must of necessity go to the wall. No; a very large proportion of these failures can easily be accounted for; they are due to causes within our own control: and Solomon points to one of the most conspicuous when he asserts that "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man."

I am not forgetful of other causes of non-success—*financial speculation*, for example. There are always a number of men who lay themselves out to acquire money by any other means than good honest work; and when a young fellow once gets on this line of rail, you may say he is done for. "The darkest day in any man's earthly career," said Horace Greeley, "is that wherein he first fancies there is some easier way of gaining a shilling than by squarely earning it."

Then, undoubtedly, some remain poor men all their days, simply through want of business capacity; they are wooden-headed, and would spoil almost any job, unless it were that of turning a grindstone.

Others fail through sheer, downright laziness; others, because they have clearly mistaken their calling; others,

because of instability of application, and impatience for immediate results ; others, through an entire lack of originality and enterprise ; whilst, in still other cases that I have observed, failure has been due to an extravagant sanguineness and boastfulness ; to listen to them you would suppose that they had just tapped a vein that is to bring them a fortune ; but the looked-for fortune never comes.

In addition to all these, I might name two other prolific sources of poverty in later life which, indeed, are specified in the words that immediately follow our text ; for the whole verse reads thus : “ He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man ; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.” It is quite in accord with oriental modes of conception to regard “ oil ” as a symbol of luxury, and of pampering of the flesh ; and who needs to be told that for any young man who is addicted either to intemperance or to self-indulgence the future is dark indeed ?

Show me a lad that frequents the wine-shop, having already acquired a taste for alcohol in any of its forms ; or point me to the scented fop who gives more attention to his toilet than his trade ; and in either case I will venture to predict an ignominious career.

However, having chosen a little text, I mean to stick to it ; and my business now is to warn every young man against the love of pleasure.

But you may well bid me define what the wise man means by “ pleasure ; ” for, as the word is sometimes used, his statement is far from correct.

There are forms of pleasure that are not in the least incompatible with industry and success ; and, indeed, we are all so constituted, that the love of happiness is both a necessity of our nature and a positive duty. Sir John Lubbock says, “ I think that the world would be better and



brighter if our teachers would dwell on the duty of happiness as well as on the happiness of duty ; for we ought to be as cheerful as we can, if only for this, that to be happy ourselves is a most effectual contribution to the happiness of others." There is nothing, perhaps, that is so true an index of character as the kind of object or pursuit that affords us our intensest pleasure ; and truly marvellous is the variety of character thus revealed. What do you most delight in ? What form of pleasure would you select if you had an unlimited choice ?

In a moment of exceptional conviviality, Dr. Samuel Johnson averred that the throne of human felicity is an arm-chair in a tavern ; whilst the country boy's highest conception of earthly happiness was to "eat fat bacon, and swing on a gate all day." There are thousands in London to whom a holiday at Epsom on the Derby-day suggests the supreme idea of enjoyment ; to others, nothing could be more enchanting than to hunt buffaloes on an American wild ; a third class would find no pleasure so exquisite as to saunter in the Pitti galleries of Florence, or to glide in a gondola under moonlight amid the palaces of Venice.

With some no pleasure exceeds that to be found in the contemplation of nature, especially at such a season as this, when everywhere, in field, and forest, and meadow, a new life is bursting forth in beauty and verdure ; others of you never find any pleasures to surpass those of travel, or of music, or of literature, or of home ; and many a one, to whom a well-stocked library is like a heaven on earth, could join in the words of an old English song :—

“ Oh for a book and a shady nook  
Either indoors or out ;  
With the green leaves whispering overhead,  
Or the street cries all about.

Where I may read all at my ease,  
Both of the new and old ;  
For a jolly good book whereon to look  
Is better to me than gold."

Now, I should be far from saying, in regard to every one of these forms of pleasure, that the man who loves it will certainly come to poverty; for many of them are both legitimate and wholesome. But I must have you observe that the word "pleasure" is often used in the Bible in a distinctly evil sense, as denoting voluptuousness and carnality. Thus the Apostle James employs it—"Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton: ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter." So St. Peter speaks of ungodly men that "count it pleasure to riot in the daytime;" and St. Paul declares that "she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."

But a closer examination of the text will bring out yet more clearly its meaning.

In the marginal reference you see it reads thus: "He that loveth sport shall be a poor man;" and though it is not likely that we have many of the so-called "sporting gentry" with us, yet I dare say there are not a few young men who need some plain talking to on this subject; and I mean that they shall have it. I hereby enter my emphatic protest against a class of amusements that are demoralizing in the extreme, that tend to brutalize you, and take all the spiritual element out of you. The extent to which the sporting journals are read, and the large space afforded in the daily newspapers to betting intelligence and news of the turf, are somewhat disheartening to those who are working hard for the elevation of young men.

Unquestionably there are certain forms of sports that, in moderation, are perfectly legitimate. It is no longer

the fashion to decry athletic exercises as though they were unbecoming Christian men. Our Young Men's Christian Associations, not content with reading-rooms and class-rooms, are now establishing gymnasiums wherever it is possible, and encouraging in every way the development of the physical powers. More than this: amongst our leading cricketers, and oarsmen, and cyclists, and pedestrians, are men who are not the less distinguished for the robustness of their religious character. A few narrow-minded people there may be who condemn all outdoor sports as of the devil; but they are hardly to be taken account of. They are afraid to run, or leap, or laugh, lest it should disturb their spiritual equilibrium. They must be always "proper," and grave, and composed. They seem as if nature had framed them by contract, and had made rather a bungling job of it. They think that to be spiritual you must not be natural. So they have nothing but a frown for all sorts of sports and recreations. But we shall leave these good people alone, hoping they will grow wiser some day.

Our divergence from them, however, must not make us shut our eyes to the incalculable mischief that is being wrought amongst our young men by a too great fondness for sport and amusements. The text puts the case in the mildest form when it says they shall be poor men. Yet this is worth taking note of, for it is conspicuously true. Many a man who began life well has, through his love of pleasure, ended in the workhouse. I have seen youths become so enamoured of this, or that, or the other form of amusement, that business was neglected, books neglected, religion neglected, and away they went galloping to destruction.

These pleasures demand money, and when the little stock is exhausted, the stupid fellows are first tempted to

borrow what they cannot earn, and then to steal what they cannot borrow.

An occasional holiday is not enough for them ; they want every day to be a holiday ; and, instead of throwing their whole heart and soul into business, they are always planning and concocting new schemes of diversion. How many parents have written to me after this style : " I wish you would use your influence with my son, and get him to stick more closely to his work. James is a nice lad, but he is too fond of pleasure, and unhappily he has got among a set of companions that are doing him no good. Perhaps a word from you might be useful." Well, if Master James will listen to me, here is a word from David's son of three thousand years ago : " He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man." Whatever you do, keep clear of bad company. One idler in a house of business is a pest to the establishment. There is an old Scotch proverb which says, " Gang a year wi' a cripple, and ye'll limp at the end o't ;" which just means you are sure to acquire the character of the friend you associate with.

An evil companion is like a heavy smoker : you cannot be long with him without carrying away the taint.

The inordinate craving for excitement has much to do with the ruin of some young men. The dull routine life of the shop or office they cannot brook. They want thrill, and dash, and sensation. If danger mingles with it, so much the better. A Blondin on the tight rope ; an aeronaut dropping from the skies with a parachute ; a Jehu mounted on a fiery charger—these are the sights they like to look upon.

It has been the same in every age ; but we should have learnt more wisdom by this time of day. " Bring in the giant," shouted three thousand men and women in the

temple of Dagon at Gaza. Poor Samson had already had his eyes put out: but they thought he would afford them merriment, and so we read in the Book of Judges that "it came to pass, when they were merry, they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison-house; and he made them sport; and they set him between the pillars;" a passage I quote, as almost the only other in Scripture where the peculiar word in our text is employed. Wild, coarse, exciting, sensational pleasure. And—they got it too. But hear the end of the story. Samson took hold of the two pillars on which the house stood, "and he bowed himself with all his might;" and down came the great building with a crash, burying the whole company in the fatal ruin.

Ah! one moment, mirth, and madness, and shouting, and laughter; the next, three thousand bruised and bleeding corpses.

Such, full often, is the end of riotous pleasure—disappointment, disaster, death. Did you ever know a young man turn out well who read French novels, purchased vile photographs, gave all his spare time to billiards, was enthusiastic on pugilism, and was well up in all the leading horse races?

Suppose for a moment that the chief citizen of London wants a confidential clerk, and looks around to see if he can find a suitable young man. In what direction will he turn? Ah! my Lord Mayor, you are too sensible a man to select a youth who spends his earnings in the theatre, is addicted to betting, and is abreast of all the latest sporting intelligence. Too well you know that 95 per cent. of that class of men never come to any good.

I boldly assert, that if you wish to see the lowest type of humanity, the very refuse and offscourings of our race, you

must mark the crowd around the office door of one of the sporting journals when the news of some race is expected ; or you must look into the neighbouring hall, when, to the infinite disgrace of the community, thousands are gathered to see certain heavy, swinish men pounding each other's flesh to jelly.

I say that, to any man who has an atom of self-respect or refinement of soul, such things must be unutterably loathsome. I would sooner crawl through the sewers of London than spend an evening amid such environments.

The man who loves the pleasures of the turf or prizing very soon becomes battered in morals. The author of "Tom Brown's School Days" says :—"Of all the cankers of our old civilization, there is nothing in this country approaching in unblushing meanness and rascality to this belauded institution of the British turf." I would fain believe that you are all of the same mind as Thomas Hughes on this matter.

I am glad to be told in one of the metropolitan newspapers that there is decided moral improvement of late years in the middle-class youth of this city. Such is distinctly my own impression. It does not drink one-third of what it did of alcoholic stimulants. Many a publican will tell you with a sigh that "business is not what it was."

Go into any of the City restaurants, and watch the young men at their mid-day meals. The great majority are taking coffee, or tea, or some harmless beverage with their food ; it was very different even twenty years ago. The writer I refer to says : "Glance at their attire—it is neater, better, more sober than ever it was. The young man who puts his hat over one eye, wears a *loud* scarf, huge collar, and blazing waistcoat, is not wanted now-a-days in respectable offices ; to-day his employer would send him home."

There is, too, an absence of bad language, and an eagerness after business among our young men, which did not exist a score of years back. In those days the principal idea of the young man was to get through the business hours perfunctorily, and then rush off to the low music-hall, or ball-room, or public-house, or billiard saloon.

Too many do so still ; but the majority work hard from morn till night, and, when they take their pleasure, do it in a rational way ; whilst an increasing proportion give themselves to study, and the improvement of the mind.

Now, my brothers, though I have stuck to my text, and endeavoured to illustrate its true meaning, yet, as a Christian teacher, I could not be satisfied to end here. I have a higher ambition for you than worldly success. As regards close application to business, many of you, I know, are simply exemplary. Your employers have no fault to find with you. You do your work well, and keep pleasure in its own place. There is no nonsense about you. You respect yourselves, and are sure to win the respect of others.

Yet, for all that, you may be poor indeed. If you are working towards no higher end than earthly gain, it is but a low, miserable kind of life after all. It is a life that will never satisfy. You want something the world can't give you, to make you rich and to make you happy. You want what you may have this very day, if you really desire it. Once possess by faith a personal interest in Christ ; once know the joy of being forgiven, and at peace with God ; and you will not need to choose pleasure any more ; for a new gladness will fill your soul, a spring of pure delight will be awakened within you. I would take a pledge of you ere we part, that you will give this matter your first and supreme attention.

On the verandah of a pleasant residence at the northern

entrance of the Suez Canal, I once spent a delightful afternoon. Immediately below was the wonderful highway of water, with noble steamships passing to and fro, bound for distant parts of the world; whilst across the narrow line stretched the vast expanse of sandy desert.

Bidding me rise and look in a particular direction, my kind host said, "Do you see that lake about a mile off, looking so inviting?" "Yes." "Well," rejoined he, "there is not a drop of water nor a green spot there. That is an illusion—a mirage." It was difficult to believe it. But, sure enough, before half an hour had gone, the picture that looked so real had vanished, leaving nothing in its place but a waste of barren sand.

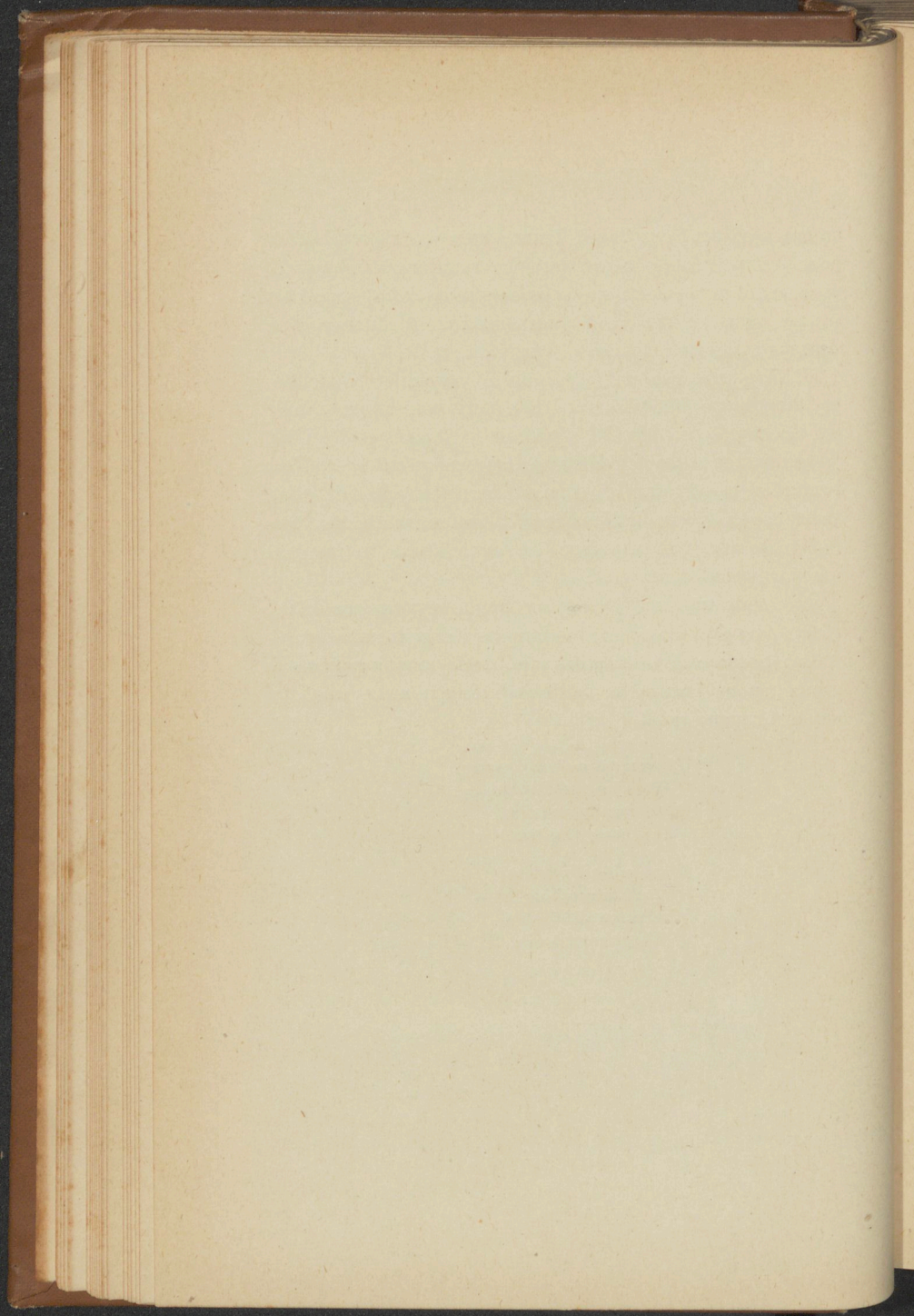
Ah! such and so fleeting are the fairest visions of the future that rise before you, so long as Christ is unknown.

But become His true disciple, and your happiness is secure; your fortune is made; all things must work together for your good.

"Do you ask me for pleasure?  
Then lean on His breast,  
In whom the sin-laden  
And weary find rest.

Even in death's valley  
You'll triumphing cry—  
'If this be called dying,  
'Tis pleasant to die!'"





£50,000 SACRIFICED FOR CONSCIENCE.

*"And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this."—2 CHRON. xxv. 9.*

### III.

#### *£50,000 SACRIFICED FOR CONSCIENCE.*

NO one can read the story without seeing that a great moral principle is here involved—a principle that, at some point of his career, tests almost every young man, and shows what stuff he is made of.

I scarcely know of an incident in Old Testament history more strikingly suggestive in its practical lessons for young men than the action of Amaziah in relation to the huge military contingent he hired out of Israel, to help him in thrashing the Edomites.

Fifty thousand pounds sacrificed in one hour, rather than do what was wrong! Better a clear conscience and the smile of Heaven than ten thousand times ten thousand allies at your back! It is quite possible that our heaviest losses may prove our greatest gains. It never pays, in the long run, to commit sin. No man will be a loser in the end by obeying the voice of God.

Well, this truth is so forcibly told by the story before us, it may be useful to recall the main facts of the case.

King Amaziah, who was just five-and-twenty when he ascended the throne, was, as regards character, a strange mixture. We read in the second verse that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart. He leaned to what was good, and wished to earn the reputation of a pious monarch; but his heart was not

steadfast with his God ; and accordingly he was easily led astray. He is a fair type, I fancy, of a large class of young men (many of whom are before me), who mean well, and are not without religious feelings and impulses, but, nevertheless, are sadly wanting in decision of character. If you will allow me to say it—and it is best to be plain and straightforward—your aim is to occupy a kind of borderline between piety and absolute indifference, quieting conscience by a certain measure of religious profession, and yet by no means committing yourselves to the obligations of a fervent godliness.

It is just you that are most likely to get into such a scrape as we find Amaziah in here. An attempt at compromise betwixt right and wrong is sure to land a man in difficulties. It never does, in matters where principle is involved, to sail too close to the wind. If any course you are tempted to take involves a decided stretch of conscience, you may be sure you will rue it by-and-by, and will get no sweet peace of soul until it has been overturned.

Well, to come to our story. One of the first things that Amaziah set himself to do, upon his becoming king, was to effect the re-conquest of Edom.

The Edomites, who occupied the territory to the south-east of the Dead Sea, had at one time belonged to the kingdom of Judah ; but in the days of Jehoram they had revolted, and made a king over themselves. Since that time they had been a thorn in the side of Judah, causing constant trouble and annoyance. Their lawless hordes were ever coming across the border and committing depredations ; they would cut down the trees, destroy the crops, burn the villages, and carry away the poor people as prisoners. This sort of thing was more than Amaziah could stand, and he formed the patriotic resolve to put

a stop to it for ever. Edom must be subdued, and the task must be undertaken with a strong hand. So he proceeded to organise an army of three hundred thousand men. All of these were thoroughly disciplined for war, and every man was armed with spear and shield. But, thought Amaziah, the blow must be crushing and final; and it might be well, if possible, to supplement these forces. So he hired a hundred thousand soldiers from the neighbouring kingdom of Israel to accompany his own army, and make victory more sure. For this he paid down a capitation sum of 10s. per head; in all about £50,000. But, just as they were about to set out on the expedition, there came to him a prophet of the Lord, who, in the most solemn manner, charged him not to take these Israelites with him to the war; for in that case God would not be with him, and his enterprise would not prosper.

This was a great blow to Amaziah, not only because it meant the diminishing of his army by one-fourth, but because he had already paid down in hard cash so large a sum of money; and this, of course, could not be recovered. He stood, therefore, in hesitation and perplexity. Clearly, he had not a doubt that that prophet was sent of God. Nor was he unwilling to obey his instructions. He felt that if the favour of Heaven was upon him, he could undertake the task with his own three hundred thousand men; he was not afraid of that; but then, said he, "What shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?" This was what stuck in his throat. Think what a terrible loss! Even kings cannot afford to throw away fifty thousand pounds!

I think I see the young man standing there before God's minister, deeply anxious, and doubtful as to how to act. There is a conflict waging in his breast. He wants to obey

God ; but he doesn't want to lose that big sum. The prophet watches him ; he sees there is a struggle going on within, and he gently whispers, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this."

Instantly conscience triumphs ; the better principle prevails ; the money shall be sacrificed ; and, going into the camp, the king separates from his own men the men of Ephraim, and bids them return home again. Jehovah could not give a blessing so long as His own people of Judah were associating with themselves a people who had forsaken His worship, and were doing homage to the idolatrous calves at Bethel ; for God will not smile on those who smile on sin, nor prosper those who are at peace with evil.

Now, this is a terribly personal subject. In all likelihood what I have to say will be a home-thrust to some ; and, indeed, I shall bless God if it is ; for there is no better evidence that the Holy Spirit is blessing the truth. You may not be aware that the primary meaning of the Latin word *sermo* (from which sermon comes) is a thrust, a stab ; so that, in point of fact, no sermon is strictly worthy of the name that does not pierce some conscience, or prick some heart.

Well, the first lesson the text suggests is the mistake of taking any step which is not transparently right, and above the shadow of suspicion.

In the case of most of us, who, like Amaziah, are not without the fear of God, our chief danger lies not in courses of conduct that are openly and confessedly bad, but in those which are dubious, and capable of a favourable construction. The act of the Jewish king was not one of those things which every respectable man would at once condemn ; and yet it was so displeasing to God that no blessing could go along with it. "How was that ?" you

say. I answer, In two ways. In the first place, the men of Ephraim, or Israel, were living in gross idolatry; and God could never approve of His own people of Judah accepting help from such a quarter. But, in the second place, it was mean. The relations between the two kingdoms were at this time what we called strained; there was no cordiality between the sovereigns; Amaziah, therefore, did not send to King Joash, and ask him to lend him a detachment of his army, but he sent his emissaries amongst the Ephraimites themselves, and succeeded in bribing a host of them by a sum of money. No doubt he persuaded his conscience it was all right. When self-interest is involved, it is wonderful how elastic the conscience sometimes becomes. The same act which, told us of another, would cause an ominous shake of our head, we can excuse and justify when we ourselves are the actors. There is many a thing in business, which, though not exactly dishonest, is not exactly honourable. It may not bring you within the pale of the law, and yet you can scarcely ask God's blessing on it. You are not afraid of the policeman laying his hand upon your shoulder in the street, and saying, "You are wanted, sir;" and yet, when you kneel down to your evening prayer, you have not the freedom and comfort which you know you ought to enjoy.

I don't know that Paul is ever grander in my eyes than when I see him, as it were, baring his breast, and, as he lays his hand upon it, saying with a clear voice, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man." Almost every career of evil begins with the tampering with conscience in some seemingly small matter—taking a step against which the inward monitor makes a protest. That protest (perhaps because it is a mild one) is disregarded; and the



moral tone of the man is distinctly lowered. When the next temptation of a similar sort comes, you will be an easier prey.

It is a sorry business when you have once lost the high self-respect that comes of conscious rectitude and purity.

It is a merry hour for the devil when a Christian young man takes the first step which he feels to be a questionable one.

There is such a thing as what the apostle calls "making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." This was the very passage of Scripture that proved the turning-point in the history of the great Augustine. Long had there been a terrible struggle within his breast; till one day he sought refuge in prayer, and poured out his very heart unto God. He was reading the thirteenth chapter of the Romans, and it seemed to him as if the whole truth and reality of the Divine life flashed upon him in these words: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ; and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." In that moment his heart was surrendered to God. He shut the Bible, and ran with the joyful news to his mother, who had long been praying for him. It was to both an hour of unspeakable joy. Grace had conquered; a new life was begun!

O young man—and you too who are not so very young now—keep your hand upon the brake; and if you find that you are gliding into a course of doubtful principle, with all the strength you have, and asking God for more, pull back the lever, hold hard as for very life, and go not one inch in a road that may mean ruin, and remorse, and everlasting death!

The second lesson which the text suggests is the necessity of, if possible and at once, retracing a step which we find to have been evil.

Who the man of God was that came to Amaziah, and solemnly warned him against the course he was taking, we do not know, though there is a tradition amongst the Jews that it was Amoz, the father of Isaiah; but it is evident he bore with him the credentials of a messenger from heaven. Corresponding to that "man of God," there is, in your case and mine, the voice of conscience, that faithful inward monitor that pronounces judgment upon all our deeds. When a man disregards that voice, it is just as if he were to stop both his ears with his fingers when God is speaking to him.

Conscience, remember, may be a very troublesome companion; it may seem to stand in the way of our interests, of our money-making, of our pleasure; but, be sure of this, every step taken in violation of it will have to be retrodden, if you are to have peace and the blessing of Heaven.

What advertisement is that I read? "The Chancellor of the Exchequer begs to acknowledge the receipt of £10, conscience-money, from A.B." Ah! those ten sovereigns were very hot; they were burning a hole in the pocket of the possessor, and there was no peace for him till he got rid of them. And yet I don't think the State is the creditor that ordinarily troubles our conscience most. If God were to publicly acknowledge the receipt of all moneys grudgingly returned to Him, many a strange tale would be unfolded. But, how vastly greater are the sums that are never returned! And yet, be you sure of this, they will all have to be returned. "He that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at the end shall be a fool."

As Zophar said, with awful plainness of speech, "He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up

again ; God shall cast them out of his belly." If you have a shilling in your pocket, or £50 in the bank, which in your most solemn moments conscience whispers you have no right to, you had better just part with it at once, or you'll find it a bad job when you go into battle with the Edomites.

Ah! well I know it, many a man is hindered from becoming a Christian because there is an obstacle of this sort in the way. Yes, out with it. I have marked persons keep away for months from the communion-table for a similar reason. A struggle was going on within the breast : "What shall I do for the hundred talents?" "I want to have the Divine blessing, but I can't see my way to sacrifice all that money." Conscience and cash have often a sore fight between them. "I would close my shop on Sundays," said a man to me, "but my Sabbath gains pay my rent ; and how can I afford to do without them?" "I hate and loathe the business I am in," says another, "but it pays me well ; and if I give it up, I am in beggary." No man has a right to follow a pursuit which, to his knowledge, is detrimental to the welfare of the community. No man can have the smile of Heaven who remains in a mercantile house where the profits are dishonestly made, and where the public are regularly swindled. Show me an establishment where adulterations are practised, where shoddy goods are sold for genuine, where the yard is a trifle under thirty-six inches, where customers receive less than full value for their money ;—I say it is at the peril of his soul that any Christian young man accepts a situation in it. "Oh, but they offer a good salary, and I can't afford to lose the chance."

Ah! it is just Amaziah and his hundred talents over again.

Sir, the loss of God's favour and of your soul's peace is a heavy price to pay for these few extra pounds of income. No; you had better follow the Jewish king, and say, "Perish the money, I will obey the man of God."

Our third and last point is this—God always gives full compensation. "And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this."

A man never suffers in the long run from obeying conscience, and listening to the call of duty. Believe me, fidelity to principle is an article of high commercial value. Let a youth be scrupulously truthful, straightforward, and honourable, he will not be without his reward, even in this world. Any loss he may at present encounter will be made up to him by-and-by.

King Amaziah was no poorer for the sacrifice of that big sum. In a sense the hundred talents literally came back to his family. For, in chapter xxvii. 5, we read that the children of Ammon gave to the King of Judah "an hundred talents of silver"; ay, and compound interest into the bargain; "and ten thousand measures of wheat, and ten thousand of barley." Said a canny Scot to his son, "Honesty is the best policy, Tom; I've tried the other plan, and it doesn't pay." Although I am far from basing my advice on so low a ground, it is well to know that, as a rule, God sees to it that His faithful servants are no losers, even in the present life.

I met with a striking illustration of this some time ago. A man came to see me about a difficulty of conscience. Closeted with me in my study, he made a clean breast of his trouble. He was engaged in a trade—and in a particular branch of it—which his conscience could not approve of. He said, "I am making a capital living, but at the expense of all peace of mind. I feel I cannot ask

God's blessing on my daily employ, and therefore I cannot pray at all." With tears, he told me his soul was wretched. "But what am I to do? If I give it up, what about my wife and children? I see only beggary staring me in the face." His difficulty was just Amaziah's, only far more serious.

"The Lord is able," I said, "to give you much more than this." Oh, what a struggle there was within his breast! He left my house in deepest distress of mind; and I prayed that the Lord would open up his way. A few days after I met him in Cheapside, his face beaming with joy. He had sacrificed the hundred talents; had thrown up his situation; and already, in a remarkable manner, God had provided for him another opening, in which, with a clear conscience, he could earn a living.

But, even though compensation does not come in the form of worldly substance, the path of duty is no less plain; and the compensation will come in other forms.

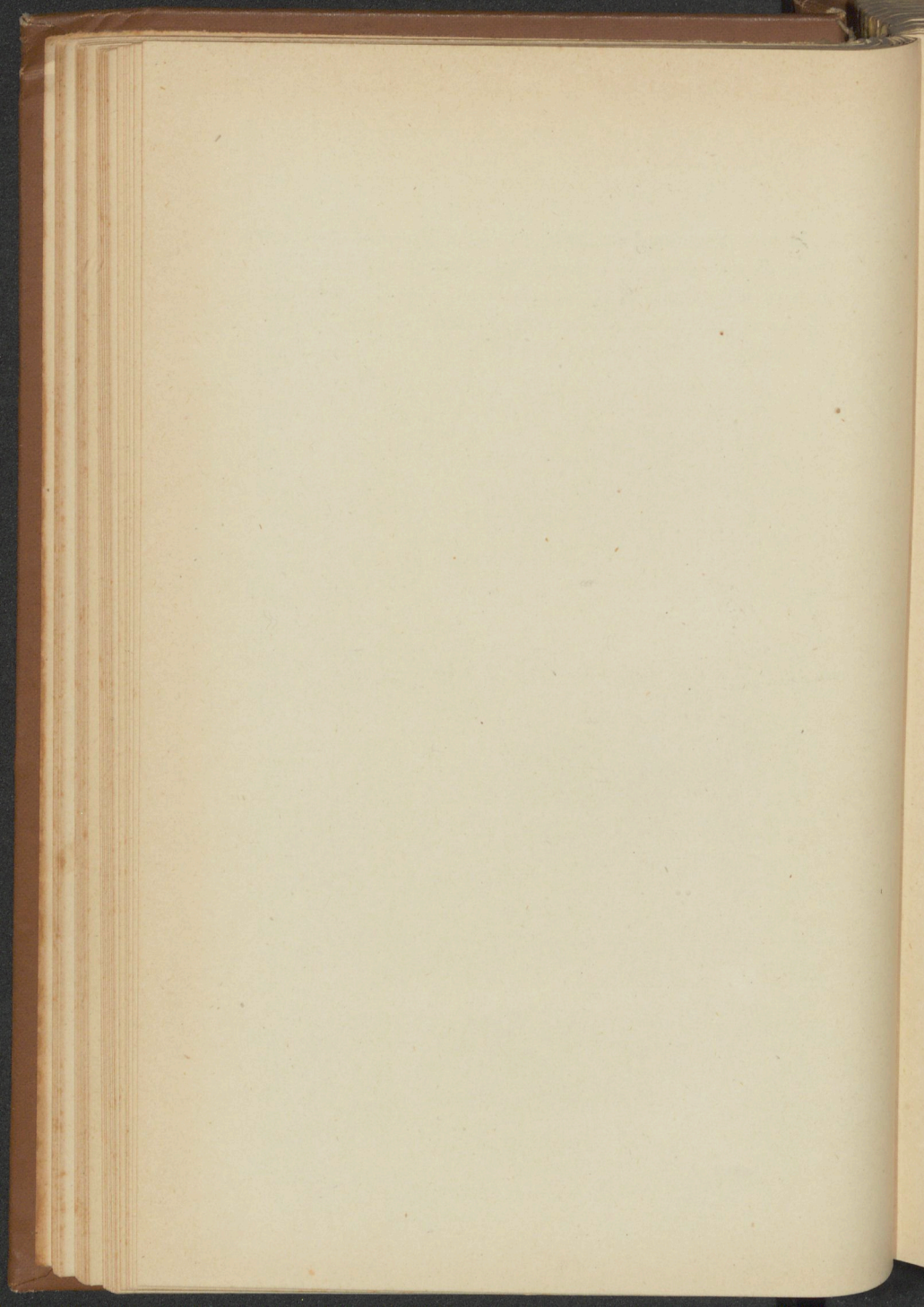
The mere getting of gain is not happiness; there are rich men who are poor, and poor men who are very rich. You may have wealth in the bosom, even when you have none in the bank. To have a clear conscience singing within the breast is to have sweet music all the day long.

And when you go to your evening prayer—for, surely, there is not one of you that leaps into bed without bending the knee to your Maker—oh, what a comfort to feel that no known sin is standing between you and your God! How soft it makes the pillow! How sweet your rest!

Yes; and now you can embrace the Gospel with your whole heart. No latent reserve; no conscious hypocrisy; no suspicion of self-deception; you are taking Christ for your pattern as well as your Saviour, and can lie restful in His loving arms.

£50,000 *Sacrificed for Conscience.* 41

Young men, and middle-aged men, too—ay, and old men as well—lay this message to heart; and, if need be, borrow a leaf out of Amaziah's book, when he sacrificed £50,000 rather than disobey his God!



*IS THE YOUNG MAN SAFE?*



*"Is the young man Absalom safe?"—2 SAM. xviii. 29.*

IV.

*IS THE YOUNG MAN SAFE?*

YOU know the story, for we were reading it just now, and you have often read it. I shall not attempt to paint the scene; no words of mine can approach the simple and touching narrative on this page. I found it difficult to read it. When you come to the closing verse, you feel as though you had a lump in your throat. The agonizing wail of this disconsolate father quite overwhelms you.

But we don't go so far as that now. Old David—as our text finds him—had not yet received the sad tidings. He was sitting anxious—very anxious—at the gate of a fortress, waiting to hear the first news from the scene of a wretched insurrection which his son had stirred. Oh, with what eagerness he strains his eyes as he looks out upon the plain to see if there is any appearance of a messenger coming! At length he observes something like a moving cloud of dust; and, by-and-by, a man in breathless haste runs up to the fortress gate. As soon as he is within hearing distance, the king (who for the moment has forgotten all about his dynasty and his crown) shouts to him, with all the passionate solicitude of a father, “What of my boy? Is he spared? Is he alive? Is the young man Absalom safe?”

I want to speak to you for a little while about the safety

of young men ; and, as a sermon is of no use unless it is personal, you will allow me to be as direct and plain-spoken as possible. There are some young men listening to me just now whom I believe to be as safe as sound moral principle and the love of God can make them. I have not the slightest fear for you. I have no anxiety about your lapsing into error or infidelity, or plunging into vice. You have given yourselves to Christ, and

“ He will keep you by His grace,  
And guide you when perplexed ;  
And free you from all ills  
In this world and the next.”

But, alas ! it is not so with all ; and if you will kindly bear with me, I wish to speak to the other class, and show you, in some very plain words, wherein your great danger lies.

Oh, what a sad, sad story has been enacted over and over again, before my very eyes, in this congregation ! Dear young fellows—as amiable and attractive, as full of hope and promise, as you would ever wish to know—ensnared by the tempter, caught by his wily bait, and enticed along a path which has brought untold agony upon their friends, and upon themselves disgrace, remorse, despair !

Beginning from the outside circle, and finding our way to the centre, I am going to recount some of the dangers of young men.

I. “ Is the young man safe ? ” No, certainly not, *if he drinks*. Some one says, “ You had better let that subject alone.”

Sirs, God knows I would gladly let it alone, if it would let us alone ; but when I see this giant evil blocking up the way to heaven, and every year blasting the happiness, and ruining the prospects, of some of the finest lads in this city, I dare not be dumb.

Let the subject alone! But do you know that drink has been the destruction of some as promising young men as ever sat in these pews; some who are now lying in a premature grave; some who, though living, dare not show their face in these streets; some who are virtually exiles on the other side of the globe! The worst of it is, that not seldom it is the most genial, lovable, and attractive natures that it lays hold of, this heartless fiend, alcohol!

The cold, stingy, selfish being, it leaves untouched; but, if there is a youth more ardent, warm-hearted, high-spirited, than the rest, it marks him out for its prey.

The young man, we shall suppose, has everything to recommend him—good talents, pleasing address, excellent penmanship, comes from a good home, brings capital testimonials, but it is whispered, “He drinks!” That is enough. He is not “safe.” All his other advantages will not secure him. I don’t know anything that grows more loathsome and hideous to me, as I get older in experience, than the merry, warm, hearty, “hail fellow well met” sort of influence that lingers round the brim of a glass of liquor when two or three friends are gathered together. Oh, it seems so pleasant, so harmless; why, all a man’s kindest nature comes out; he forgets all his wrongs, and there is nothing but beaming looks and genial smiles.

But, the devil is there! I tell you, there is not a condition, nor influence, more antagonistic to the Gospel, more fatal to every religious impression, than that!

When a young man once gets under this influence, and begins to enjoy it, he might as well be at the bottom of the sea. Somehow it seems to eat out his spiritual nature. I cannot explain it, but it is a fact, that a man who gets into the way of using alcohol till the brain is stimulated, loses even now that part of his being which Scripture calls the

“soul”; ceases to be capable of really spiritual impressions. He may be very bland, very kind, very-social; he may be what the world calls “excellent company”; but the soul is taken out of him; there is more of the beast and less of the man! The image of God is becoming obliterated; and what is worse, incapable of being restored. Now, you may think it quite absurd of me to talk thus to a respectable company like this. It is nothing of the kind. There are men here to-night just on the brink of the precipice. It is an awful thing to say, but I cannot hide it from myself, that in all likelihood I am speaking at this moment to some one who will meet a drunkard’s doom. I have seen men in these pews, looking as earnest and devout as any of you, who, ruined by drink, have blown out their brains with a pistol!

I have seen members; ay, office-bearers, who, maddened by alcohol, have taken their own lives, and dashed into a lost eternity! I could tell you of a man, in good worldly position, who, when warned of the effects of drink, replied, “I can’t give it up. If there stood there a loaded cannon, and a glass of wine was set at the mouth of it, and I knew that the instant I swallowed the wine you would discharge the cannon, I should drink it off!”

Oh! if that demon can ever hold you in so tight a grip, is it safe to let him touch you at all? Far be it from me to say that every man who uses stimulants is imperilling his whole character and happiness; but I do say, that if a young man is seen going in and out of liquor establishments, and beginning to indulge a regular habit of drinking, he is in greater danger than if a spirited mule carried him into the tangled forest of Ephraim; and, if you ask me, “Is the young man safe?” I can only answer with a round, equivocal, emphatic, No.

II. "Is the young man safe?" No, *if he gambles*. (Excuse me.) Some of you, my hearers, have not the slightest idea of how this vice is on the increase; and therefore I pardon you for thinking, "Really the minister might let this topic alone." The crime is so greatly on the advance, that if it is not soon checked, it will be the moral ruin of our country. You, good women, haven't a conception of how it is extending, and how your husbands and brothers and sons are getting entangled in it. You can hardly go into a public conveyance but you will find a young man reading with avidity one of the sporting journals; at every corner of the street you may hear the phraseology of betting men; and even the best of our newspapers devote whole columns to news from the turf. But the gambling spirit finds its way into every department in life—into every form of otherwise innocent pleasure, and every line of otherwise honourable business. There are some sins that only nibble at a man's heart; this binds him as with a cart-rope. Once get caught, once acquire a disposition to hazard, once take up the notion of adding to your income by betting, and almost in all certainty you are a doomed man. I am bound to warn you, for gambling has ruined several who have sat under my ministry here; and, if it has done so before, it may do it again. It was only lately that a well-known magistrate said: "I wish that the clerks in mercantile houses of London would come to this court, and see what I see, and hear what I hear. This is only one of a multitude of cases where prisoners placed in your position have confessed that their robberies are entirely due to betting. I regard it as a curse to the country, because I see how young men are lured until they fall into a state of misery and wretchedness."

With some natures, there is a fascination in danger, in

risk. Did you never notice how some skaters will go as near the broken ice as possible? or how some who are out yachting will, in the face of a gale springing up, put on every inch of canvas? It is the same frenzy that leads some foolish young fellows into the betting circle. "Here I have £20. I may make it £50. I shall risk it. I shall stake my £20. Shuffle the cards. How the heart thumps! How the blood boils! Gone! Ah! it might have been otherwise. Let's have another chance. I will borrow £5." Young man, stop! Stop? You may as well think to stop the express train by fixing your walking-stick between the rails. Let a youth once begin to find music in the click of the dice-box, and all the harpies of darkness laugh at him, and claim him as their own. There is no safety for the man who gambles.

III. "Is the young man safe?" No, *if he keeps bad company*. Mark you, gentlemen, I am not a raw recruit, standing up to lecture you on what I know nothing about. I have been here long enough to learn something; and for every point I advance to-night, I can bring you, not merely the authority of Scripture, but of personal observation. Solomon wrote many true things, but he never wrote a truer than this:—"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but the companion of fools shall be destroyed." I have seen it again and again. I have seen as fine a fellow as I would ever wish to grasp by the hand, by some evil chance thrown into acquaintanceship with a loose unprincipled character; and, from the day the intimacy began, there has been a steady and sure degeneracy. There never was a more hopeful lad under my ministry than one—an only son—whose widowed and broken-hearted mother was laid under the grass some time ago, her last years embittered by his heartlessness and folly. What was the cause

of the change that came over him? Only one answer. Bad company. Stupid fellow! he opened his ears to all that they had to say, and believed them. So they soon laughed him out of what they called his puritanical notions; and to-day, humanly speaking, that young man's doom is already sealed. Oh! there are incarnate fiends—vultures of hell—hanging about the streets of London, who make it their business to entrap every new-comer that they can find, and lure him into the vortex of vice and shame; and no man is safe for an hour who will venture to associate with them.

IV. "Is the young man safe?" No, *if he is idle*. I am thankful to say there are not many of you exposed to that danger. What a sight, to be sure, the great inlets to the city present any week-day morning about ten o'clock! What with the rattling of wheels on the causeway, the shuffling of feet on the pavement, and the humming of innumerable voices, the hive seems as busy as it can be. But, haven't you noticed, just once in a while, a man slouching carelessly about, his hands in his pockets, and vacancy in his eyes?

That's the man the devil thinks he will have an easy job with. Let me at once say, I have the deepest sympathy for one who, through no fault of his own, is out of employment. I don't know what makes so many gentlemen of that kind find me out, as though I kept a list of vacant situations, and had power to place them in them; but I am truly sorry for every earnest man who can find no work to do. Ay; but there is often a great want of energy about such persons. They keep on "hoping that something will turn up," as they say, but don't push and exert themselves to the last vestige of their ability; and so they not unfrequently get into mischief. I am certain I would rather



take a broom at a street corner and resolve to make mine the cleanest crossing in London, than hang about idle and aimless all the livelong day. If any of you are unfortunate enough to be at present out of a situation, I do hope you will not be long in that position; for it is attended by a class of dangers all its own.

V. "Is the young man safe?" No, *if there is anything in his business inconsistent with the strictest integrity.*

Don't talk of being "safe," if you have every day to make a compromise with conscience, and smooth things over the best way you can. I am grieved to say the mercantile conscience at the present day is not very sensitive. Are there not many houses of business where some of the clerks or assistants might say, "I could tell some things, if I would, but I won't. It's not all straight and above-board. Customers don't get all for their money they think they are getting." Are there not things you have to wink at, if you would keep your situation, and get a rise by-and-by?

Some of you, I am sure, are like to get up in your pew and say with indignation, "No; there is nothing wrong, nothing improper, nothing underhand, nothing that isn't perfectly straight and honourable."

Thank you; I believe you. But it is not so all round. Very far from it.

There are enough lies told in the City every day to swamp London.

I don't know that Thomas Carlyle was too severe when he wrote, "The look of England is to me at this moment abundantly ominous; the question of capital and labour growing ever more anarchic—insoluble altogether by the notions hitherto applied to it.

"Two things are pretty sure to me: the first is that capital and labour never can nor will agree together till they both

first of all decide on doing their work faithfully throughout.

“Loosely speaking, we may say that all England has decided that the profitablest way is to do its work ill, slimly, swiftly, and mendaciously. What a contrast between now and, say, one hundred years ago! At that date, or, still more conspicuously, for ages before, all England awoke to its work with an invocation to the Eternal Maker to bless them in their day’s toil, and help them to do it well; now, all England, shopkeepers, workmen, all manner of competing labourers, awoken as if with an unspoken but heartfelt prayer to Beelzebub. ‘Oh! help us, thou great lord of shoddy, adulteration, and malfesance, to do our work with the maximum of slinness, swiftness, profit, and mendacity; for the devil’s sake. Amen.’”

Now that is plain speech; but is any one here prepared to say that it is not true?

Well, my brothers, let me assure you of this—that, in the six thousand years of past human history, there has never been so much as one occasion when it was either a man’s duty, or his real interest, to sin against God. It can never be right to do wrong. You may try to trick your conscience with all sorts of excuses, and arguments, and pleas, but, I dare to say to you, that if there is anything in your daily life that you have to hush up, and try to hide from your conscience and your God, you are not in a “safe” condition.

VI. “Is the young man safe?” No, *if he does not make conscience of keeping the Sabbath-day.* Some foolish but very self-conceited people have a habit, whenever this subject is touched, of treating it with a sneer, as though none but old-fashioned and strait-laced persons would ever dream of arguing for the sanctity of the Sabbath.

Now, gentlemen, look here [and I speak all the more boldly because I am one of those who have no sympathy with a certain class of sour, strict Sabbatarians; and because I believe, that, whilst the Jewish dispensation was one of restriction, the Christian dispensation (see all our Lord's teaching on the subject) is one of liberty]; will any of you be kind enough to put your finger upon one of the Ten Commandments, and prove to me that that one is less binding than the remaining nine? Will you explain to me why, if these commandments were given (as they were) not for the Jewish race merely, but for all men, and for all time, I am at liberty to say, "I dare not break the eighth commandment, but I may break the fourth; it is wrong for me to swear, to kill, to steal, to lie; but it is not at all incumbent on me to remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy"?

But, come now, I don't want to take that line, and appeal to stern and peremptory law; is there any one here who is so lacking in common-sense as not to perceive that, even apart from our spiritual or highest nature, man needs, his system demands, the rest of the Sabbath? He is not "safe" without it. A celebrated merchant declared, "I should have been a maniac long ago, but for the Sabbath." Really, you are not "safe" without it. The brain is not safe; the intellect is not safe; the nerves—the muscles—the bones—the moral nature—the immortal soul. And recollect, my dear brothers, that in that command (which is as old as Sinai, and will not be abrogated nor dissolved till the eternal rest of heaven is begun), God does not say, "Remember half of the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy." God never deals with half measures. Whatever He wants, He wants whole and entire.

A seventh part of the week He claims for Himself.

The fact is—and the thing has been proved ten thousand times over—that a real piety cannot live without a holy Sabbath. I said, “cannot live.” A man may keep up a religious profession all his life, content with a brief service on the Sunday morning, but I never yet met with a real Christian, a man of God, who did not think that the whole Sabbath-day was all too short for the holy rest, and worship, and meditation which are needful, which are indispensable.

VII. “Is the young man safe?” No, *if he neglects his private devotions.*

What is that that Christ says? “Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.”

The man who knows nothing of the snibbed door, and the bended knee, and the earnest breathing up to heaven, is no Christian; put that down for certain. Ah! you may have a nice room, pleasant look-out, clean-curtained windows, cheerful picture or two on the walls; tidy bookshelf, with just a select dozen or two instructive volumes; photographic album, which you often look at, with the faces of those you love most on earth; soft and comfortable pillow to lay your head upon; but—if that is all—oh, there is a terrible want there! Can you not point me to the Bible which you nightly study, to the chair at which you daily bend as you pour out your heart to God? If you can't, then let me tell you, you are not “safe.” No man can fight life's battle successfully, and reach heaven in the end, who doesn't endeavour to spend a little while every day alone with God. Make conscience-work of it. Don't lie so long in the morning, or go up to your room so wearied at night that you hardly know what you are saying when on your knees; for that is not prayer, and will do you no good. Look at your watch, and give a set time to calm

and earnest devotion. Don't merely snatch up your Bible and read the 23rd Psalm—a psalm more read than any chapter in the Bible; first, because it is extra beautiful; and secondly, because it is extra short. Read the Scripture carefully and systematically through.

Make a point (as McCheyne used to say) of seeing God's face the first in the morning and the last at night. Oh! could I drop in upon you, and look at you as you lay fast asleep, and did some one whisper to me, "That man lives without prayer to God," I should feel that no blessings hovered around your bed! It is impossible. A man cannot be "safe," who has no daily communion with his Maker!

Lastly. I have pointed out to you, in a plain and homely way, various sources of danger; but could you introduce to me, at the close of our service, an acquaintance, and say, "Here is a young man who has escaped them all; he never touches drink, never made a bet in his life; has no acquaintances but sound Christian men; conducts a business that is unexceptionable, makes conscience of keeping the Sabbath-day, and never omits his daily chapter and private prayer"—were you to say all this of him, and then ask me, "Is he safe?" I would still reply, "No, *if he has not given his heart to God.*"

No man is safe who is out of Christ. A good disposition will go for much, regular habits will go for much, sound moral principles will go for much; but they are not enough.

You may have all these, and yet, in the hour of temptation, irretrievably fall.

Only this week I had an agonizing letter from a young man who, to use his own language, is "filled with intense remorse and humiliation," because, under what he calls a Satanic influence, he has committed a sin which he believed impossible for him to be entrapped into.

Ah! there is only one thing that is sufficient for you in such an hour, and that is the grace of God. Let this be your daily prayer, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

My dear brothers, it's of no use my prophesying smooth things for you. Life cannot be easy and bright all the way. Snares, temptations, and assaults you are sure to meet with. Are you furnished to meet them?

When a ship leaves the docks for the other side of the globe, she is provided as far as possible against storms. She has a carpenter's shop on board, with extra cordage and canvas, and spars and tools innumerable.

The sea may be as smooth as a mill-pond at starting, but who does not know that within three days she may be struck by a tempest, the sea running in mountains, and the waves beating in her bulwarks.

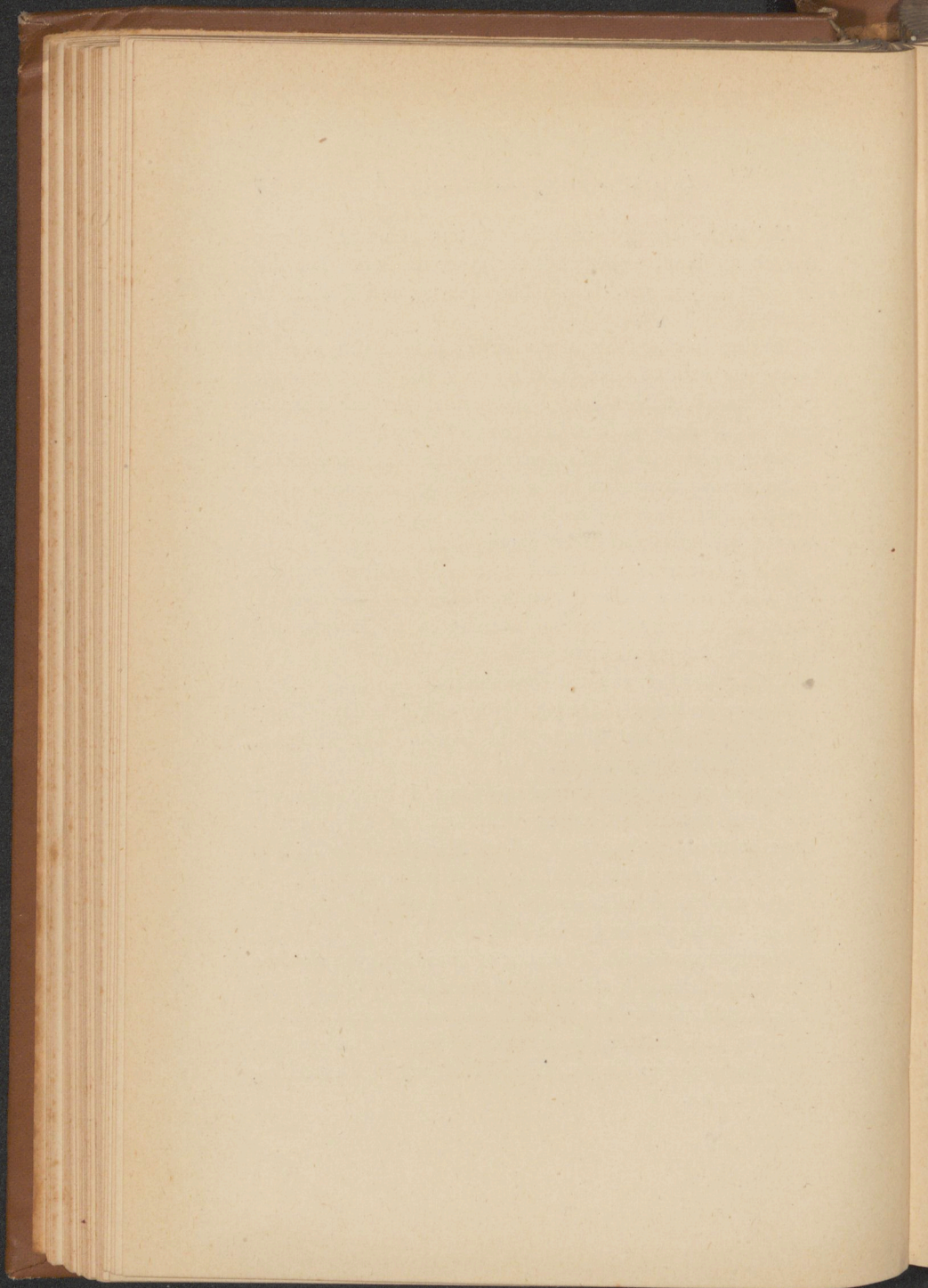
● Ah! my brother, you will have storms.

Prepare for them. Give yourself to Christ to-day. Grasp His warm hand, that is now held to you. Wrap yourself in His perfect righteousness.

In one of the antiquarian museums I have seen the wonderful armour of Henry VIII. and of Edward III. Look at them, clad in mail, robed from head to foot in iron. Ah! young man, you may be safer than that.

It is not helmet of brass nor gauntlet of steel that will protect you from your fiercest foes.

But "put on the whole armour of God, and you shall be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." With all the warmth of my heart I commend you, one and all, to Him who "is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy!" Amen.



*THE CITY'S WILDERNESS.*



*“He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness.”—DEUT. ii. 7.*

V.

THE CITY'S WILDERNESS.

I KNOW no spot on the earth which—as it presents itself to many an inexperienced stranger during the first few months, or even years, of his sojourn in it—appears more truly “a great wilderness” than this five-million-peopled aggregate of bricks and mortar! There is an old Latin proverb which says, “*Magna civitas, magna solitudo*”—“a great city, a great solitude;” and many of you can bear testimony to its truth; for, for a time at least, you felt that in no Arabian desert, or Highland moor, or American prairie, could you feel more absolutely solitary than you did in this multitudinous Babylon.

Devout and saintly men there have been who, with no companionship but that of their God, have been able to feel, even when deprived of all human society, that “when most alone they were least alone”; but the converse is not less true; for, whilst pacing these busy streets, and jostled by the eager crowd, you may still be oppressed with a crushing sense of friendlessness, and feel that “when least alone, you are most alone.” The mere presence of a throng gives no sense of companionship, so long as there is no hand that gives a loving grasp, no face that returns a smiling recognition.

In the absence of friends, the busiest place may be a solitude; and there is no vacuum which nature more abhors

than that. The human heart craves for sympathy ; however circumstanced we may be, we want other hearts to divide with us our sorrows, and to share with us our joys. It is all very well to talk of the charms of solitude : and brief and occasional retirement is a wholesome thing ; but, for Heaven's sake, let not that isolation be too long. Cowper shows his usual sagacity in the lines—

“I praise the Frenchman, his remark was shrewd,  
How sweet, how passing sweet, is solitude !  
But, grant me still a friend in my retreat,  
Whom I may whisper, solitude is sweet.”

I am going to have a little quiet talk now specially with those of you who have come from a distance, and who have not been long here ; who have not yet got acclimatized to the big city, and who do at times have a sense of loneliness creeping over you.

Those who know you best and love you most have many an anxious thought about you ; and no wonder ; for, unless you are decided Christians, and your character firmly formed, you are just at the most critical point of life. This very feeling of loneliness increases your danger ; for in your craving for diversion you are apt to fall into the hands of men who will do you no good. There are always prowling about worthless fellows who are on the watch for such as you ; despicable creatures, living idle and vicious lives, and ever ready to sponge upon new-comers who are seemingly without a friend. So long as it suits them, they will be hand and glove with you ; but as soon as they have got every advantage out of you, they will drop your acquaintance or fling you away like a squeezed orange.

It is of prime importance, then, that you are able to realize and enjoy the continual presence of that Divine and unseen but all-seeing Friend, who, in the prophecy of

Jeremiah, thus addresses you, "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, My Father, Thou art the companion of my youth?" (See marginal rendering in Revised Version), and whose comforting voice you may hear in the words of the text:—"He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness."

Many, many are your difficulties, your dangers, your discouragements, and you are apt to imagine that you are fighting the battle all alone; that no one knows the mental conflicts you pass through, the fierce assaults you have to withstand; but this is an entire mistake; and I would remind thee to-night, thou young pilgrim and warrior, that there is One above who is marking thine every step, watching thine every struggle, and who, if thou trust Him, will carry thee safely through.

I. I want the ear of that down-hearted young man, who has utterly failed to find a situation. Of the twenty thousand youths who every year find their way to this city, it is only a limited number who come to enter vacant places which have already been secured for them; the rest have just to look out for themselves. In truth, some would have been wiser not to come at all. In many a distant country-place the notion prevails that, if a lad can but raise as much money as will pay his way to London, he is sure, within forty-eight hours, to get a berth to suit him. Indeed, so valuable an acquisition as he is will be eagerly sought after. Too often the illusion vanishes when his feet patter these hard pavements. The stranger is mortified to find that no one wants him, and that the big city can get on without him.

It is a curious picture of Eastern life which our Lord gives us in the parable we were reading to-night of a householder, who has plenty of work to be done in his vineyard, finding a number of men standing idle in the market-place.

This he saw at nine o'clock in the morning ; again at noon, at three, at five, as often as he went, there were always lazy, indolent fellows loafing about, waiting for somebody to come and put bread in their mouths. "Why are you standing here all the day idle?" says he. "Because no man has hired us." It never occurred to them to go round about among the vineyards, and see if they could find a job. I suppose they would almost starve before they would exert themselves to secure honest employment. Such gentry are not unknown in this city, and they claim no sympathy.

A student, when being examined before the Presbytery one day, was asked, "What is original sin?" and with great simplicity answered that he did not know what other people's might be, but he rather thought that his was laziness. I fear a good many might make the same confession.

The idle man—I mean the man who is content to be idle—is an annoyance, a nuisance. He is of no benefit to anybody, an intruder in the busy thoroughfare of life ; like a "crawling cab," hindering the traffic, blocking the way.

There is nothing more demoralizing than idleness. Better turn a heavy grindstone all day than keep the hands plunged in the breeches pockets.

Idlers are the very stock out of which come gamblers and drunkards and suicides. When a man has nothing to do, his spirit sours, his energy dies out of him, his manhood withers. Old Dumbiedikes bids his son to be "aye stickin' in a tree when he had nothing else to do," and the advice was sound.

Industry, as Isaac Barrow says, is a fence to virtue. We are sometimes told of persons who are killing themselves with overwork ; but of this I am certain, that many a life is shortened through sheer *ennui* and aimlessness. "You are right," said Frederick the Great to a friend, "in supposing

that I work hard. I do so in order to live, for nothing has more resemblance to death than idleness." In the Louvre, at Paris, the anvil is still exhibited at which Louis XVI. was in the habit, with a smith's apron on, of endeavouring to keep his energies employed.

But my business just now is with those who detest idleness, but for the life of them can find nothing to do. Oh, it is chilling to go to this house of business and that, to call on one, and another, and yet another employer of labour, or head of a firm, and find there are no hands wanted; to tramp the weary streets day after day, knocking at every door that offers a ray of hope, presenting testimonials that ought to be sufficient, and yet, at the day's close, to be no nearer an appointment than before! It is very trying! My heart has often bled for such a man, and it has grieved me that I was unable to find him an opening. Yet I am bound to say, that, in many a case the person himself is in part to blame; perhaps too lightly throwing up one situation before another has been secured; or coveting a line of calling for which his talents did not fit him. There is a good deal of truth in what Sydney Smith said: "Be what nature intended you for, and you will succeed; be anything else, and you will be ten thousand times worse than nothing." This, of course, presumes that you have some gift. A lady once requested Rowland Hill to examine her son as a candidate for the ministry, remarking, "I am sure he has a talent, but it is laid up in a napkin." Mr. Hill had a lengthened interview with the youth, and then said to his mother, "Well, madam, I have shaken 'out the napkin, but I cannot find the talent." Every lad who is to get on in the world must study his own aptitudes. How many young fellows prove total failures, simply because they mistook the line for which God designed them; whilst others with

less talents have met with brilliant success, because they got into their appropriate groove! Young Ferguson's wooden clock gave a hint of the future astronomer; Humphrey Davy's chemical experiments in boyhood; Faraday's electric machine made with a big bottle; Michael Angelo's pencil sketchings at school; all these showed the bent of each young mind, recalling the answer of a certain splendid equestrian, when asked how he sat so gracefully on the saddle, "Oh," said he, "I was born on horseback!"

But, I come back to my point. Even with all these deductions, there are always some who, through no fault of their own, either fail to get situations, or are thrown out of situations which they have filled—Christian young men too, it may be—and they get sadly despondent. Just over in that corner, I can fancy, is the very youth I am describing; and, after tramping London for days without success, he has turned in here this evening, if perchance he may get a word to cheer him; my young brother, let this message fall like music on your ear: "He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness."

It may encourage you to know that several men, who afterwards became famous for their success, almost despaired at first of getting an opening at all. George Moore, the distinguished merchant, who died about twelve years ago, came from a quiet home in Cumberland when he was nineteen years of age, under greater disadvantages than most of you know anything of. Many was the rub and snub he had to put up with. "It seemed," he said, "as if nobody would have me. The keenest cut of all was from Meeking, of Holborn. He asked me if I wanted a porter's situation. This almost broke my heart." But, on he plodded and persevered; and as soon as one door was shut against him, he tried another. And, at the close of

his marvellously successful life, he acknowledged that God had been guiding him all the time, and that these early disappointments were for his good.

Don't lose heart, my young friend ; there is still room for you. See that the grass does not grow under your feet ; set about your endeavours to-morrow with greater energy than ever, and I believe some door of usefulness will open.

II. Now, I want a word with another young man who, I am certain, is here to-night. It is you, I mean, who are having a terrific battle with the lusts of the flesh, and imagine no one in heaven or on earth knows how desperate is your struggle. I can easily hold up the mirror to you, and show you your picture ; for indeed, my brother, you are far from being alone ; with many of you conscience and the flesh are in daily conflict. Only last week a young man sent me a letter—such a letter—threatening an action for libel, because, in one of these sermons, I had held him up to the execration of the congregation. Poor dear fellow ! I knew as little of his character and life as I do of the Emperor of China ! But such a letter is encouraging, for it shows that the arrow of the truth is piercing between the joints of the harness. I believe that impurity in one or other of its forms does more than any other sin to ruin the youth of our age. In a recently published book the Christian pulpit is severely blamed for guilty silence on this matter.

I rebut the charge ; and assert in a mixed congregation any other course would be scandalous and criminal. This is not the place to lift the veil. I firmly believe I should do far more evil than good, were I to do as some mistaken moralists recommend, and enter into the details of this form of temptation.

The highest authority asserts that "it is a shame even to



speak of those things which are done of them in secret." But, what I want to impress upon you, young men, is this, that you must be prepared for terrible assaults, must be determined to resist to the death, and must remember that God on high is watching you in your struggle, and will give you the needed strength if you ask it. This word "knoweth" in our text scarcely expresses the full force of the original. You might read it "keenly observeth." His eye is on you, my tempted brother. When you are apt to think you are all unseen, and when this feeling of secrecy adds to the power of the temptation, He is looking on to register your defeat or reward your victory. Many a young man bitterly and angrily complains that he is tempted. "Why," he says, "should I have this painful ordeal to pass through?" forgetting that conquered temptations are spiritual promotions. This sore discipline, though we would fain escape it, may lead to our eventually rising to a moral height to which, apart from conflict, we could never attain. Every time you crush the enemy and send him away vanquished, you mark distinct progress; you make a gain in moral strength; you are better furnished for the next attack. Hence the tremendous importance of Paul's precept to Timothy, "Keep thyself pure"; for you are enormously weakened from the moment of your first indulgence in vice. There are hundreds of men who would willingly give their right hand to be able to assert they had never done an unchaste deed; hundreds who are tortured with the remorse of one vile act, and are ready to cry in vain, as Lady Macbeth did, "Out, damned spot!" A dear friend wrote me last week from Ireland, in connection with a sermon I had preached in Dublin, that an expression used had been made, by God's Spirit, the turning-point in the life of one who was present: "Young man, look out

when you find yourself beginning to lose your self-respect." "These words," wrote my correspondent, "he could not banish from his mind; they kept continually sounding in his ear, and were the means at last of constraining him to seek Christ; and, God be praised, he is now a humble but earnest disciple of the Lord Jesus."

I want you to remember this, that purity is possible; it is a possession, and may be kept. "Keep thyself pure."

It is not enough to pray, "Lord, keep me pure"; you must keep yourself. But how is this possible if you indulge unclean thoughts, or harbour vicious desires, or utter indecent jests, or read scrofulous novels, or look at vile pictures, or linger in haunts of unblushing iniquity.

Stamp out the first plague-spot the instant it appears. Pitch into the fire that book or pamphlet you always stow away out of sight when you have read it.

Break acquaintanceship with that lewd fellow whose conversation is suggestive of uncleanness. Turn with loathing from the heartless merriment of the brutes who laugh and trifle with the fascinations of the pavement. And ever remember that, in this "great wilderness," where you think you can walk unnoticed and unseen, there is One who says, "I know thy walking through this great wilderness."

III. There is just another brother here, to whom I would like to say a word before we separate. I meet him very often, and he tells me no one knows what mental agony he suffers through religious doubt. He says, "I like to hear you preach; my conscience goes with all you say; and I see in the Gospel of Christ just the rest my soul yearns for; but my reason bristles up against it; my intellectual difficulties are insuperable; and I see no way out of my trouble; I must give up hope of ever believing as you do; but oh! no one has a conception what I experience."

Now, of course, such a wide question cannot be taken up in the tail of a sermon; nor, for that matter, would fifty sermons be likely to clear away all your doubts; yet I may remove some misapprehension.

Never were you more mistaken than to imagine that others do not understand your conflict. Why, the man who now speaks to you has wandered in a darkness that might be felt, and has trembled on the verge of atheism. I have doubted, and doubted, till I thought I must give up Christianity; every light above has gone out, and the heaven has been without a star. I have drifted on waves of agnostic speculation, till the land was almost out of sight, nearly every long-cherished belief being swallowed up in an ocean of hopeless mystery. If a fellow-sufferer's sympathy is of any value, be assured I can feel profoundly for you in your dark entanglement.

But, it is more to the purpose to tell you that, in the words of the text, God Himself knows and narrowly observes your walking through this great wilderness of doubt, oh, so bleak and barren. And the discipline through which you are passing may prove in the end to be a blessing. It is not those who glibly and jauntily accept all the truth without a trouble or a difficulty that prove the strongest Christians. Rather, commonly, is it those who, in such a conflict as I have described, wrest it, bit by bit, from the hand of the enemy.

Let none of us forget that the innate tendencies of an evil heart are against a holy religion. Not a tenth part of the scepticism of our day comes of deep study and careful thought; the bulk of it is due to that prejudice which exists in our fallen nature.

Hundreds reject Christianity because they dislike its restraints. If the arguments in its favour were fifty times

stronger than they are, it would make no difference as regards their acceptance of the truth.

But I shall presume that you are sincerely groping for the light. You wish to believe; but a great deal that you read unsettles your early convictions, and makes you ask yourself "Is it true?" There is a fashionable and fascinating literature in our day that is soaked in infidelity, and that is inoculating thousands with the poison; the progress of science necessitates a change in many of our old-fashioned convictions; severe Biblical criticism has raised questions which our fathers would have deemed it impious to name; and the study of other religions of the world has brought out elements of nobleness in systems of thought which we used to think unworthy of notice. Some will dare to tell you that Buddhism has as much to be said in its favour as Christianity; and others that all our systems of divinity must now give place to what they call the religion of humanity.

The cynical sneers of Professor Tyndal; the innuendoes of men like Spencer and Harrison, and even Matthew Arnold; and the open and bitter attacks of Huxley (though the latter has been crushed and pulverised by Dr. Wace): all these have a powerful effect; and many a young man, almost before he is aware, finds himself a disbeliever in the religion of Christ.

And then, what follows? Is there rest within? Is the life now brighter and nobler than before? Is there a new impulse to purity and beneficence? Is the horizon of the future grander than it used to be? Ah! ask those who have made the change. Why, you do not need to wait for a reply. In nine cases out of ten it is but too clear that the aim of life has gone; the most ennobling and inspiring influence has vanished; the very countenance tells of a dark

void within, of a deep and settled melancholy. It is forgotten that the spiritual world is as real as the material. There is a realm in which the soul and conscience reign ; and that realm has its facts and phenomena, which only revelation can deal with and explain.

Unless you can persuade me that you have no soul, you will not persuade me that you can do without religion ; and, if you need religion, then, as Pascal says, though the evidences in favour of Christianity may not amount to a mathematical demonstration, yet, when its principles are fairly considered and submitted to the experience of our inner nature, there is a response, there is an attestation from the very heart, which we can no more doubt than we can doubt our own existence. It is long since my dark doubts vanished : and in the religion of Jesus I find, what I can find nowhere else, a strength on which I can live, and a hope on which I can die ! But meanwhile, oh, honest, earnest, agonising soul, the Lord knoweth all thy walking through the great wilderness of doubt and fear.

Cheer up, brave heart ! thou hast Jehovah on thy side. I speak to men who wish to grasp the truth, and to do the right. Your difficulties will fade away ; your path will become plain.

As you have larger views of the love of God, your hard problems will melt away.

“ But we make His love too narrow  
 By false limits of our own ;  
 And we magnify His strictness  
 With a zeal He will not own.  
 If our trust were but more simple,  
 We would take Him at His word ;  
 And our lives would be all sunshine  
 In the sweetness of our Lord.”

*MEN OF PLUCK.*

*“These of the sons of Gad were captains of the host: he that was least was equal to a hundred, and the greatest to a thousand.”—I CHRON. xii. 14 (Revised Version).*

VI.

*MEN OF PLUCK.*

NO doubt some of you were interested in a visit that was paid to the Cape last spring by eleven English athletes, who went to play cricket with their brethren of the South ; and who, after eighteen matches (in twelve of which they were successful), returned, covered with the laurels of victory. A similar company, I believe, came over from Philadelphia in the summer, to try their skill on English soil—with what success I know not ; and I understand (though not in the secrets of the sporting world) that in a few months a visit may be expected of a famous Australian team.

I have to introduce to you this evening a yet more illustrious eleven. I am to speak to you of a band of young men from the hill country of Gad, who rendered noble service to King David in his time of peril, and whose names, engraven on a tablet more durable than granite or marble (even on the page that lies before me), shall be afresh honoured to-day, after the lapse of 3,000 years, as I now recite them in your hearing in the order of their merit :—“ Ezer, the first ; Obadiah, the second ; Eliab, the third ; Mishmannah, the fourth ; Jeremiah, the fifth ; Attai, the sixth ; Eliel, the seventh ; Johanan, the eighth ; Elzabad, the ninth ; Jeremiah, the tenth ; Machbanai, the eleventh.” Splendid fellows they were—hardy sons of the mountains,



their faces like the faces of lions, and their feet swift as the wild gazelles. They were all the descendants of Gad ; every one of them was born to be a captain ; the least of them was worth a hundred ordinary men, and the greatest of them was worth a thousand.

Now, in times like our own, when of the half million young men in London there are many not worth their salt, so limp and nerveless, that it would take a hundred of them to make one real hero, it may be worth our while to look at these grand figures of the olden times, whose names, you may be sure, are not here without a purpose.

Remember, you have a Prince to serve as well as they. See whether it is not possible for you to catch the inspiration of their courage and enthusiasm, and throw yourselves loyally into the cause of your great King and Lord.

Well, to see the point of the text, you must try to grasp the situation. The Lord had rejected Saul from being king over Israel, and had raised up David, the son of Jesse, to be ruler of His people.

But, as you well know, Saul was not disposed to part with the kingdom ; and for long and tedious years there was war between the two, "the house of Saul (as the Scripture puts it) waxing weaker and weaker, and the house of David waxing stronger and stronger." At the period to which this chapter alludes, David, whose forces were still limited, was being pursued as an outlaw, hunted by his enemy from place to place ; and at length had taken refuge away south in the country of the Philistines, in the fortress of Ziklag, where he resided for a year and four months, and where he at last received news of the death of Saul. Whilst here, biding his time, he was joined by successive detachments of men (many of them from the ranks of Saul's own people), who felt that his was the cause of righteousness,

and that the Lord was with him. Three separate lists of such men are given in this chapter. And it is the second of these companies to whom our text refers when it points to eleven men of the tribe of Gad who were made "captains of the host; the least of whom was equal to a hundred, and the greatest equal to a thousand."

These are the sort of men we want to get engaged in the service of Christ—not mere muffs and milksops, but young fellows of grit, and pluck, and daring; and I hope it may stimulate you a little just to look at these hardy sons of Gad.

Well, first of all, they came from the country. They were stout, rough chaps from the mountains. Their home lay to the east of the Jordan, in that high table-land that stretched away to the most northerly point of Arabia. They were highlanders indeed; born and bred among the forests and cattle pastures of the mountains of Gilead, accustomed to the dangers and delights of a free, roving, Bedouin life, and but little acquainted with the higher civilization and softer manners of Judah.

Well, there is often something very attractive in the character of such men. The dull conventionality, commonplace ways, and matter-of-factness of lower regions is unknown to them; their spirit seems to catch the inspiration of the noble mountains, dark ravines, and lowering tempests; and the result is a fearless heroism and a patriotic fire, not unmingled with superstition, which makes them invaluable as friends and terrible as foes. Possibly they are a trifle too warlike, and keen for battle, just a little hot-headed and pugnacious; like some of the old Scottish clansmen, that were never at peace unless they were fighting. You know there was a farmer who had a great many sheep on the mountain, and a great many in the valley;

and, when asked the difference between them, said that those in the valley had the finest grass, and gave the best meat, but that those on the hills had the best horns.

If I come across a young man with strong horns, I generally find he comes from the highlands. There may be capital stuff in him for all that. It is not a bad thing to have two stout horns; they are often needed in the battle with iniquity; and if they are well used, they will grow in size; I give you Scripture for it—"The horns of the righteous shall be exalted" (Ps. lxxv. 8).

Never be ashamed, William, of being "a young man from the country." These smart town fops may laugh at some of your rustic ways, but it would be well for them if they had a little of your moral backbone and strength of principle. The fact is, I don't know what we would do without this continual importation of fresh country life into the great city. Go into any of our churches, you will find that, as a rule, the most vigorous workers, the most valued office-bearers, are men who were brought up in a country home. Look over the names of the executive of our great religious and philanthropic societies, you will find it the same; and I have remarked that, even in the leading mercantile houses, not a few of the men at the top of the various branches—men who have won their way up by dint of conscientious attention to business and high Christian principle—are men whose very accent tells you that their youthful days were spent in some remote part of the country; or, it may be, in "the land of the mountain and the flood, land of brown heath and shaggy wood."

I suppose you read the remarkable letter from Stanley published lately, dated Ugogo, Central Africa, October 15th, in which he says:—"These mission societies certainly contrive to produce extraordinary men. *Apropos* of

Scotchmen, can you tell me why they succeed oftener than other people? Take Moffat, Livingstone, Mackay, real Scotchmen with the burr. They stand pre-eminent above all other missionaries, no matter of what nationality. It is not because they are Scotchmen that they succeed. It is not because they are better men in any one way or the other, physically, mentally, or morally—of that we may rest assured—but it is because they have been more educated in one thing than all others. That one thing is duty.”

Well, such of you as are here—I call you “sons of Gad,” young men of Gilead—we look for you to be true to your godly upbringing; do not forsake the faith of your forefathers; never be ashamed of the stern and sturdy piety of your early home.

It is often a fine type of character that is developed in, as I may say, the mountains of Gad. Where will you find in history a more scrupulous conscientiousness than that of Jephthah, a more genuine generosity than that of old Barzillai, or a sterner righteousness than that of Elijah; and each of these men belonged to that mountain tribe. This is the stamp of man so much needed amongst ourselves; the least of them is worth a hundred, and the greatest of them is worth a thousand.

But, secondly, we must not forget their fine physical development. Splendid and imposing fellows were they, powerful athletes, these eleven of Gilead. They are described as “men of might, men of war fit for battle, who could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and who were swift as the roes upon the mountains.” Moreover, the 15th verse declares: “These are they that went over Jordan in the first month, when it had overflowed all its banks; and they put to flight all them of the valleys, both towards the east, and towards the west.”

Undoubtedly, a great soul is sometimes enshrined in a miserable body ; and many an instance might be given of truly noble characters who had all their days to contend with wretched physical conditions ; all the same, we should regard such cases as exceptional, and strive to enlist in the cause of God all the powers and energies of man. The Christian Church in these days must not be open to the reproach of consisting largely of unmanly creatures, limp as blotting-paper, and soft as jelly-fish, men who need to be wheeled about in perambulators, and dare hardly speak above their breath ; no, no ; that won't do ; it must be made clear that the religion of Christ appeals to what is noblest in humanity, and tends to the invigoration, not only of the mental faculties, but even of the bodily powers. We want to engage for Christ men of broad chest, and brawny muscle, and iron frame ; men who have the courage of lions and the swiftness of roes, whom no dangers will intimidate, and who know how to "speak with the enemy in the gate."

Not long ago, a gentleman said to an esteemed friend of mine, "Do you know the man I don't like? He is what you call a Christian young man." "Do you mean a prig?" said the other. "Yes ; that is just about it." Now I am not sure that you will find this word in the dictionary, but we all understand pretty well what it means ; and all that it does mean is just what a true Christianity abhors. Show me a prim, self-conscious, narrow-souled young professor, who is himself always right, and thinks every other person wrong, who carries his nose in the air, and looks with contempt on all physical sport and pastime ; I say he is just as unlike the true type of a Christian as you can well imagine ; he wants to be put under the pump, and have his conceit taken out of him. The religion of Jesus is essentially manly

and invigorating ; it is bracing, like the mountain breezes of Gilead.

When I look at these eleven of Gad, courageous as lions, fleet of foot as roes, and nimble as fishes to swim the full-flooded Jordan ; and when I see all their powers given to the service of David, "the man after God's own heart," I am filled with admiration.

Bravo, ye heroes! your deeds of valour are not forgotten. It was no child's play to cross the Jordan "in the first month," that is, the month of March, after the snows and rains of winter ; it is then an impetuous torrent, carrying all before it. I went down to its brink in the same month, to have a swim ; but the dragoman said it would be at the peril of my life to attempt it ; and sure enough its angry and muddy waters quite deterred me from the venture. Never let it be imagined that athletic exercise is unbecoming a Christian man. Let it be taken in moderation, and absolutely dissociated from every semblance of gambling or betting, it is morally as well as physically wholesome. I am sure some of you would be much the better for a little more of it than you have. So far from it being irreligious, I claim, first of all, for Christian young men the exhilarating pleasure of the tennis racket, and the cricketer's bat, and the golfer's club, and the football and the angler's rod, and the sportsman's gun, and the cyclist's steed. Where God-fearing youth are assembled, let springing happiness abound, and the shout of innocent laughter rend the air ; let healthful sports expand the chest, and strengthen the muscle ; let the graceful oar dip the stream, and the evening tide be resonant of boatman's song, as the bright prow splits the crystal billow.

Remember that our Prince David—no less than he to whom He was at once Son and Lord—delights to have in

His service a band of able-bodied, well-developed men, the least of whom is equal to a hundred, and the greatest of whom is equal to a thousand, mean and puny mortals.

But, thirdly, these eleven of Gad were separated men ; they consecrated themselves entirely to the service of David. Mark what the 8th verse states : "And of the Gadites there separated themselves unto David into the hold to the wilderness." That is to say, these men were formerly the supporters of Saul ; whatever the amount of allegiance they gave him, they certainly belonged to his side ; but now they perceived that the Lord had transferred the kingdom to David ; and they cast in their lot with the son of Jesse. I have not time to go into detail, to show how fully justified they were in taking this step, and what abundant evidence they had that Heaven was on the side of the latter ; but, in a history that is full of spiritual analogy, no one can fail to see that the respective kingdoms of Saul and David symbolized the two equally distinct and mutually hostile domains of law and gospel, of sin and grace, of the world and God. Unless we have been converted in infancy, a time comes to every one of us, when we are called to transfer our allegiance from Saul to David, to come over to the camp of Jesus, "David's son and Lord," and throw ourselves heartily and loyally into His service. This idea of "separation for God" runs through the whole of Scripture teaching. Again and again were the children of Israel solemnly reminded that they were "a separate people unto the Lord," disjoined from all other nations, that they might be His peculiar inheritance ; and equally emphatic is the New Testament in enjoining upon all who would be Christians that they must "come out from the world, and be separate therefrom." These men of Gad, no doubt, incurred risk and self-sacrifice. It was at the peril of the

loss of all they had, and of life itself, that they cast in their lot with David, at that time treated as a rebel and an outlaw. There was no possibility of a compromise or a middle course; it was out of the question to keep in with both; they must choose their side, and they did so, and "separated themselves unto David." It was a choice that meant hardship, and poverty, and suffering for awhile. David was not in a palace, not even in a castle or fortress, but only "in a hold in the wilderness." But they counted the cost, and never had reason to regret it.

One day a young man came up to Jesus, and said, "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." How did the Lord receive him? Did He throw open His arms and say, "Come along, then, and share the joys and blessings of My disciples"? No; I believe He waved His hand as though He would bid him think twice before he took such a step, and then He said, "that even the foxes had holes, and the birds nests, but the Son of Man had not where to lay His head."

If you will pardon me being so plain, some of you, dear men, are still in the service of Saul; and a poor, unsatisfying service it is. I want to enlist you on the side of David. You know what I mean. But it is of no use to think of being Christians unless you are prepared to separate yourselves unto Christ. It must be a clean-cut determination that you will be the Lord's.

I feel that some of you would make fine soldiers in His army. You are too precious far, to be wasted on the service of the world or the devil. But half measures will not do. It must be out and out for Christ, or not at all. If you don't be quick about it, your opportunity will soon have gone, your day of grace fled for ever!

Are you yet "separated"? Perhaps you complain that



you find no comfort, no reality, no happiness in religion. May it not be because you are still halting and undecided? "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you." What is that letter of introduction or note of disjunction doing lying in your desk all these months, my brother, when you ought to have presented it and openly joined yourself to some Christian Church? How can that evening prayer of yours be honest and sincere, or how can God answer it while you are still unheeding the voice of conscience within? What peace and joy in religion have you a right to expect so long as you decline to come clean over to the camp of Christ? Are there not times when you are sick of the world's empty glitter, and long to have something nobler to live for than mere earthly pelf and pleasure?

You are here to-night, dear stranger, for a reason best known to yourself—(and right glad I am to see you, and hope you will not be a stranger any more)—but why is it that you have not a sitting in any place of worship, have not identified yourself with any congregation, and are just floating here and there without a spiritual home? Think, if all others did so, the Christian Church could not exist upon the earth. What a help and a blessing you might be, if you were only decided, like these men of Gad, and, with all your youthful energy, came over, and enrolled yourself under the flag of Christ!

Remember, so long as you hold back, you are on the losing side. Very significant are those words in 2 Sam. iii. 1: "Now, there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker."

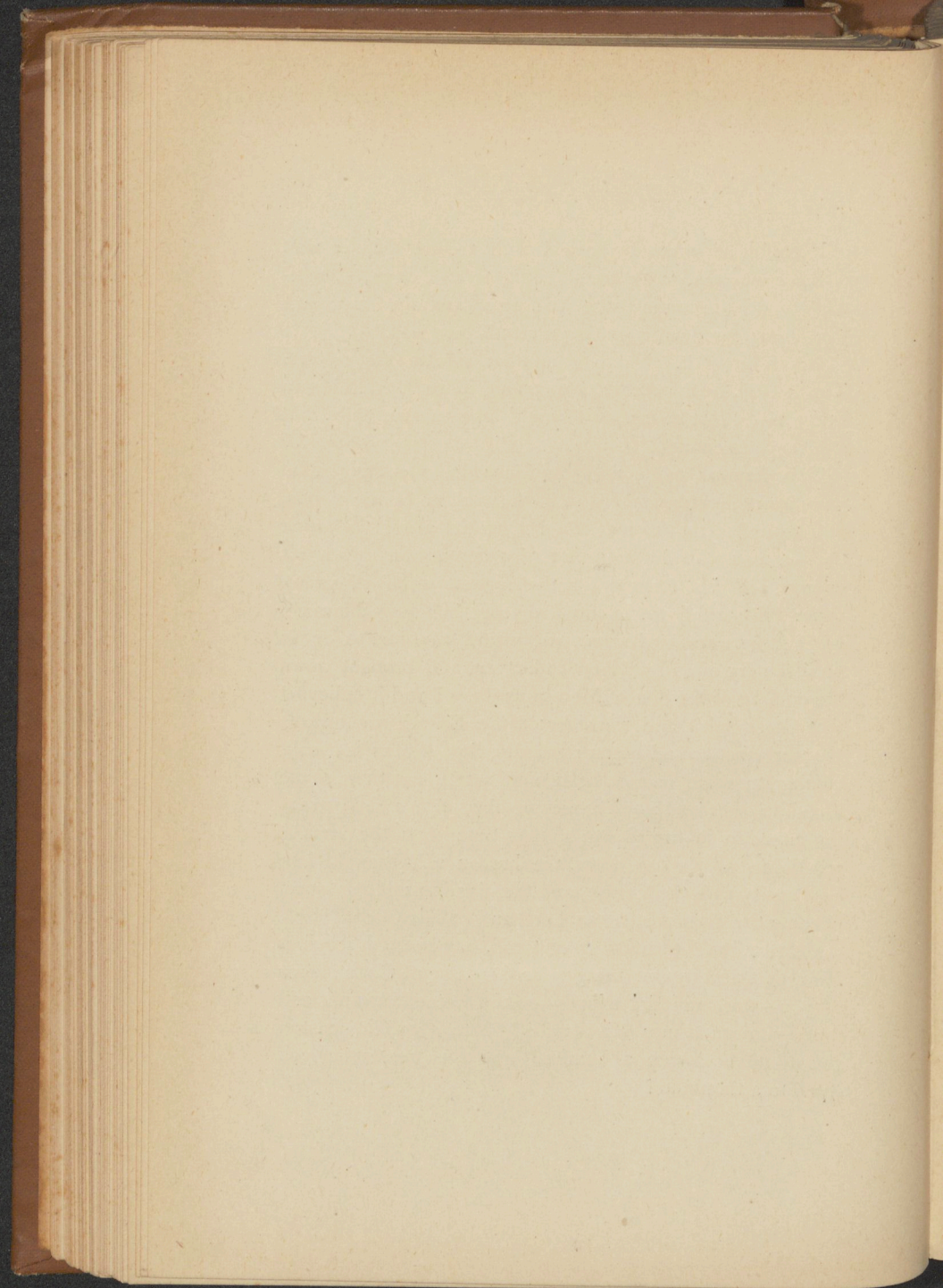
"Zion's King shall reign victorious;  
All the earth shall own His sway."

Not a bit of sympathy have I with the pessimistic wail of those who say, "We are all going to the dogs; Christianity is on the wane; vice and error are more rampant than ever; the devil is getting it all his own way."

Not a bit of it. There is another side to the picture. Thank God, fresh recruits are coming in to David's camp every day. Not so fast as I would like to see, truly, but still they are coming.

This London has a noble and increasing contingent of stout-hearted young men who have sworn to be the Lord's, and to fight His battles. Said Quentin Hogg the other day—a man who for a quarter of a century has given his energy and his fortune for the highest good of young men: "I started my twenty-five years believing the world was getting worse and worse, and would continue to do so until the cry of evil reached to heaven, and brought down the coming of the Son of Man in wrath. I end it believing that God's Spirit and the story of the Gospel are making the world better and better; that the Son of Man is always coming to some human heart, and setting up therein the kingdom of heaven; and believing also, with a daily growing intensity, in the advent of that time when the arms of rebellion shall be laid down, the human will brought into conformity with the Divine, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ."

Oh that, amid the throng of timid, half-hearted religious folks, that never move a finger for the cause of Christ, some of you—fine, stalwart fellows—would come forward, and throw yourselves into His service! I tell you, the least of you would be worth a hundred, and the greatest of you equal to a thousand!



*THE RECKLESS HORSEMAN.*

*“ And the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi ; for  
he driveth furiously.”—2 KINGS ix. 20.*

VII.

*THE RECKLESS HORSEMAN.*

*JUVENIS gaudet equis canibusque.* So says an old Latin proverb, which many of us learnt in our school-boy days :—“The young man delights in horses and dogs.” In horses, certainly. It seems to have been the case in every age ; and no one can look upon many an ancient fresco or piece of sculpture, whether Roman, Egyptian, or Syrian, representing scenes from the chase, the stadium, and the battle-field, without perceiving that this passion existed in very early times.

To many persons no sight is more attractive than a display of horsemanship ; and whether the actors sit astride the saddle on the racecourse, or, reins in hand, stand on the bare backs of the bounding steeds in the hippodrome, or tear along at break-neck speed in chariots at the circus, the pleasurable excitement is, to most people, intense.

We all know those whose supreme delight is in a high-mettled horse. If on the saddle, they must fly at full gallop ; if driving a conveyance, they must leave every one else behind ; and it is my firm belief that to equestrian recklessness more fatal results are due in this city in one year than can be laid at the door of all the railways in the kingdom put together.

If any name in human history is proverbial for furious driving, it is that of the man who is introduced to us in the

text. Significantly enough, the first time we meet with him he is seated behind a horse ; for it is when he rode with King Ahab on the fatal journey from Samaria to Jezreel, and heard—never to forget—the warning of Elijah against that royal murderer, that Jehu first appears upon the page of history. Already, however, he had been known to Elijah as a youth of vigour and of force of character ; for when that prophet was concealed in a lonely cave on Mount Horeb, the Lord had intimated that Jehu was one day to be anointed king of Israel (though years should elapse before the prediction would be fulfilled).

Had he attained to no other distinction but that of furious driving, I should scarcely have selected him for our subject this evening ; but that reckless horsemanship was only the outward index of a rash, impetuous character, which betrayed itself in all the acts of his life, and made his career a memorable one in the history of his country. Worthy of your imitation in respect to the thoroughness and earnest zeal with which he accomplished everything that he took in hand, he stands out yet more conspicuously for your warning as a stern and unscrupulous fanatic, a selfish and inconsistent man, one of those whom, indeed, God sometimes employs as instruments for the execution of His will, but in whose personal motives there is little to approve.

Jehu, when quite a youth, was made a member of the royal body-guard, an attendant on the king's person. I fear it does not say much for his character, that he soon became a favourite with so unprincipled a monarch as Ahab, and was selected by him to ride with him in his own chariot. From step to step he obtained promotion, until good fortune carried him to the highest post under the crown, and he was made "captain of the hosts of Israel."

As the curtain rises upon him in this chapter, we find

him in the city of Ramoth-Gilead. Ahab is dead : Joram is now upon the throne. The Moabite rebellion having been crushed, Joram allies himself with Ahaziah, king of Judah, in the hope that their united forces will deliver the country from the Syrian invasion. Joram has already been wounded in battle, and leaves Jehu at Ramoth in charge of the town and the soldiery, whilst he himself goes to Jezreel to be doctored. Possibly there is in that town something of the nature of a military hospital ; or it may be some notable physician, under whose care he wishes to be placed.

Jehu, meanwhile, is seated with the other military officers in the court of a house at Ramoth, possibly holding a council of war, but more probably engaged in pleasant, friendly intercourse, when a tragic incident occurs which changes the whole current of his life.

Mark what happens. (There is no reason to believe that Jehu had any finger in the transaction, or had as yet formed any ambitious designs to possess the throne.)

As the generals are chatting together, suddenly a frantic-looking youth, carrying a vial of oil in his hand, bursts in amongst them, and summoning Jehu apart from the rest, empties its contents upon his head, saying, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord." The young man (who was a messenger of the prophet Elisha) immediately bolts and disappears.

At first Jehu does not know what to make of it. The narrative reads as if he thought that some practical joke was being perpetrated on him by his companions. So, when they say to him on his return, "What was that crack-brained fellow wanting with you?" he replied, "Ye know the man and his communication ; you are up to this business, and need not inquire of me." They solemnly



protest they know nothing about it. Instantly Jehu's quick mind grasps the actual situation. He rises to the occasion, and poses as the heaven-appointed deliverer of his country. All the others rise, and spreading their outer robes upon the floor as a carpet of state for the new monarch, they blow with trumpets, and shout, "Jehu is king." The troops are ready for the change of government, and at once acquiesce. There is not a moment to be lost: delay or hesitation may be fatal. Jehu's first business is to seize the person of King Joram, where he lies sick in Jezreel. It is of prime importance that he hears nothing of the insurrection till he himself is made captive. "Let no one escape from Ramoth," says Jehu, "to tell it in Jezreel." With incredible speed his own chariot is got ready; the gates fly open for his exit; and lashing his foaming horses into furious gallop, he bounds off for the distant city. Full sixty miles have to be covered. How the dust flies at the horses' heels! The ploughmen busy in the fields stand aghast as they see the mysterious charioteer with lightning speed hastening westward toward the Jordan. At length he is descried from the watch-tower of Jezreel; and, in reply to the sick and timid king, who wants to know who this comer can be, the watchman replies in the words of my text, "The driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously."

This little sentence is enough to throw a flood of light upon Jehu's character; and it sets him forth as a type of a class of men—young men chiefly—to be found in all communities, who are headstrong, reckless, and impetuous. Often it shows itself in very early life. The little fellow, before he leaves the nursery, betrays a daring disposition and ungovernable will; whatever he takes into his head, he will find means to accomplish; there is no holding him in,

no curbing of that vehement spirit ; and even on the rocking horse the tiny Jehu tells unmistakably "what manner of man he is to be."

When such a young fellow grows up, he is naturally impatient of restraint, and flies into all sorts of danger. I do not say that he has not some good features of character ; but he is so bold and desperate, you cannot but fear for his future.

You men of this ardent, vehement spirit, are exposed to special peril ; if any persons pre-eminently need the grace of God every hour, it is you. Your passions are strong ; your temper is quick and high ; you are creatures of sudden impulse ; and if the devil gets hold of you (which God forbid) you are certain to gallop headlong to ruin. I know perfectly well I am not addressing an audience of saints ; it is high time for some of you to put the brake on, for you are living too fast, and sowing those wild oats, whose harvest "shall (in the words of Isaiah) be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow."

I have seen quite sufficient slaughter of young men in this city to give intensity to my tones, as I beseech some of you to slacken your pace, and all of you to put the reins into the hands of God, saying, "My Father, be Thou the Guide of my youth." I have sometimes been assailed with the cynical sneer, "What's the use of talking as you do? These youths are no better than others ; young men must have their fling and their spree."

Men who speak thus are the active emissaries of hell. They seek to justify vice, and to discourage those who are aiming at a nobler life. Thank God, my poor words here have again and again been the means of arresting some young Jehu in his headlong course, and of persuading him to dismount from the chariot of his folly, and henceforth

walk softly before God. I should be unworthy of the name of a man, not to say of a Christian, if, having seen what I have seen of the wages of sin, of the agony, and remorse, and ruin, and shame that follow in the track of vice, I did not hold up my outspread hands right before any of you who are careering along the downward road, and shout, "Stop! Put your hand upon the brake! The end of these things is death!"

Oh, what mischief I have observed to come out of the first timid, hesitating, experimental, self-reproachful venture out of the high road of righteousness! Experimental? Yes! the young lad says, "I may just try. One single step, and—I will draw my foot back again." You cannot. The first step means a second, and—a third. Now you are fairly started. No snail's pace will do for you now. You harness your team in the chariot of Jehu, and—whip in hand—are off at full speed for the city of destruction. The panting coursers, with distended nostrils, and foam dropping from the bit and whitening their flanks, dash along the road, still urged on by lash and shout; alas for the reckless driver, he knows not what is before him! At last he sees the peril, pulls hard the reins, lies back with all his might, puts on the brake, and cries for help till his throat is hoarse, and his arms rigid, and his eyes start from their sockets, and his brain reels, as over the precipice they go, horses, chariot and driver, tumbling in horrible and fatal disaster.

This is no extravagant picture. It has been my lot to see it in real life over and over again. I could give you the queer, terrible history of many a London Jehu. My desk could reveal strange tales (that not a human being knows but myself and the unhappy victims), of men who have given the reins to their passions, and, drawn by the

wild team, have dashed on to wreck and ruin. The trouble is, that so many do not perceive the danger till it is too late to stop. The first crack of the whip was the knell of their doom. If all the gold in the Bank of England were at their disposal, they would willingly give it to recall that first fatal step; to blot out of existence, were it possible, that ill-starred night when they ventured on the path of shame. They are ready with Job to say, "As for that night, let darkness seize upon it; let it not be joined unto the days of the year; let it not come into the number of the months."

Ah, my dear boy! Once they had as smooth a cheek as you, as manly a forehead, as merry and stout a heart. But, when Satan whispered, they yielded. They encouraged the tempter. They read French novels. They looked at bad pictures. They walked with lewd companions. They indulged in stimulants. They kept late hours. They laughed at what they ought to have abhorred. Out of mere curiosity, as they said, and just to see for themselves—perhaps excusing themselves with the plea that one taste of the cup would make them loathe it, and dash it from their lips for ever—they entered the house of sin; and they never were the same thereafter. That day they lost the brightest jewel that a young man can own—they lost it, never, never to possess it again.

Oh, you whom God's mercy has as yet held back from open vice, before you mount the chariot of sin, go and see the end of those reckless drivers, and tell me if it be not true that "the way of transgressors is hard."

Go and mark the fatal brand upon that bloated countenance; the blur of drunkenness in that reddened eye; the restless twitching of those shattered nerves; the stiffened gait of that wasted form.

These men began the downward course just as some of you are tempted to do now, or will be tempted during these long winter evenings, when your social and animal instincts crave for excitement ; they kept those at home waiting for hours expecting their return in vain ; they accepted the friendship of gay and loose companions who could teach them nothing but evil ; they took to billiard-playing, and gambling, and drinking, and midnight larks with the very scum of the city, and hellish orgies in haunts of nameless infamy ; and what and where are they now ? “Fast” young men, indeed ! Jehus of very truth !—the fiery chargers of their uncontrolled passions hurrying them onward into the blackness of everlasting night ! Will any of you follow them to their doom of agony ? Will you sell your birthright for a brief moment of sensual pleasure ? Will you part with your purity, your self-respect, your principles, your manliness, your nobleness, and, sinking to the level of the beasts, have God’s image blotted off your brow for ever ? That dear lad, still in his teens, thinks I am a gloomy croaker, and with a light giggle cries, “Ah ! no fear of me !” Just the very words that have too often preceded a career of ruin. As Gray beautifully says :—

“Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows,  
 While, proudly riding o’er the azure realm,  
 In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes,  
 Youth on the prow, and pleasure at the helm ;  
 Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind’s sway,  
 That, hushed in grim repose, expects his evening’s prey.”

I look you straight in the face, and ask you, Is youth with you to prove an illusive dream, manhood an empty struggle, and old age a whining regret ? Are you to spend a vain and worthless life, and see your sun go down while it is yet noon ? Are you going to meet your Maker with the record

of an existence thrown away, splendid opportunities trampled in the dust?

It is the glory of man to keep his body in subjection, and to hold with a tight hand the reins of appetite and passion. Surely vice is sufficiently rampant in this city to make it imperative that every one who can get the ears of young men should put the trumpet to his mouth, and proclaim the judgments of Heaven upon the men who are wallowing in the foulest sink of iniquity, and bringing on the whole land the scandal of their abominations.

I met only last week a gentleman who has travelled all over the world, and has been in every capital in Europe, and whose deliberate opinion is that London is morally the foulest city on the globe! I trust he is wrong; but, can it be denied that there is more than enough to make us hide our faces for very shame?

In one of her novels, George Eliot says that the young men of our day "are squashy things; they look well, but they won't wear." Undoubtedly there are thousands who seem to have lost their manliness and the sturdy self-respect which was once the glory of our nation.

Ancient Rome, during the hardy times of the Republic, was almost free from licentiousness; but when wealth and luxury came, she lapsed into gross effeminacy. Tacitus declared that the ancient Teutons "lived secure in their chastity"; but how different a tale must be told of many of their descendants in England to-day!

Another Juvenal is needed to scourge us, as he did the Romans of old. We want some modern Cato, armed with authority above the law, to seek out men who are leading infamous lives, and mark them with the brand of infamy.

Let no one be fool enough to imagine that it is manly to go in for a certain measure of vicious indulgence. Do I

need to tell you that the very word "virtue" comes from the Latin "*vir*," a man, and literally means the highest form of vigorous manliness.

Personal religion ennobles and dignifies. The secret of true manliness is true godliness. I think it was Rowland Hill who, reading in the pulpit the apostle's words, "putting off the old man," remarked, "This does not mean putting on the old woman."

There is a word—a suggestive word—a word I do not like, which occurs but once in the Bible, and the passage is one which many in this London may tremble to hear. Writing to the dissolute Corinthians, St. Paul says, "Be not deceived . . . the *effeminate* shall not inherit the kingdom of God." He classifies them in one breath with idolaters, and thieves, and drunkards, and adulterers, and the vilest creatures that crawl the earth.

And yet, having grouped in one lot the foulest characters that even Corinth could produce, he adds, "And such were some of you. But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Here is your hope. Some acts are already done beyond recall. Some stinging memories haunt you, that will go with you to your grave. But there is an effectual washing and cleansing, even for you. In the blood of Christ there is pardon for the past. In the Spirit of our God there is renovating power to restore the wasting vigour of your moral life. Deciding for God at once, you will not only be forgiven wherein you have fallen, but be held up and kept from falling in the time to come. Even a Jehu's impetuous spirit may be tamed by the grace of God. But, alas! of the son of Nimshi we read that he "took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart"; and, in consequence, for all the righteous zeal he

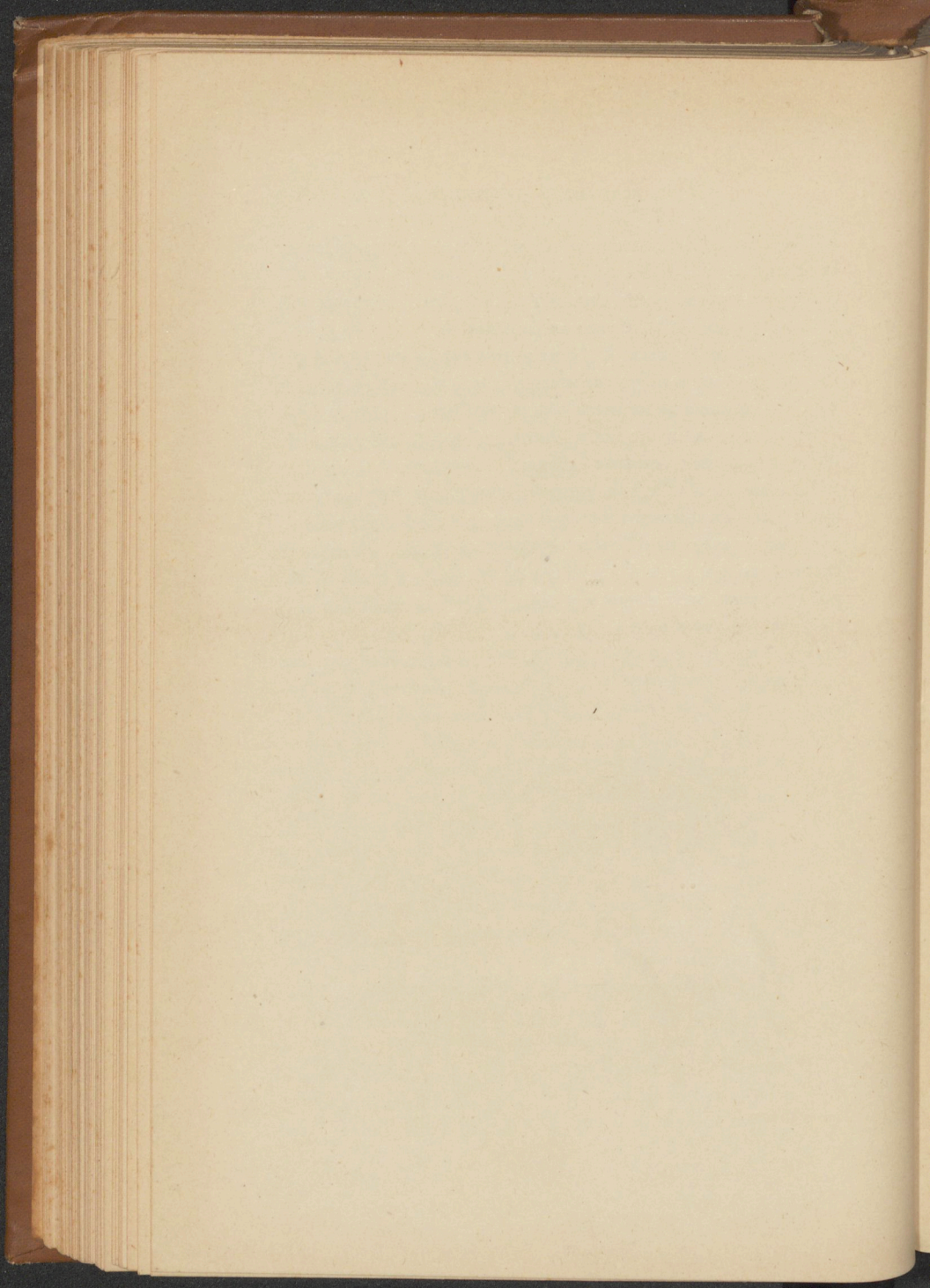
had shown, he died under a cloud, with none to bless or lament him.

Believe me, it is only through faith in God that you will get the inspiration to a pure and noble life.

You cannot do without religion ; and when you are about it, you may as well get the only true religion, even that which is kindled at the altar of love of Christ.

Scepticism is in the air. Awful and horrible doubts are flying about on every side of you. What are you to do? "Take heed to walk in the law of the Lord with all your heart," and doubts won't do you much harm. Travellers, when they cross the banks of Newfoundland, often find themselves in a thick fog. What do the sailors do? Why, put the steam on, and get out of it. That is what you are to do. The best way to beat back infidelity is to go in for holy living and hard work for Christ. God bless you all. Good-night.





*THE SCAPEGRACE*

*“This is that king Ahaz.”—2 CHRON. xxviii. 22.*

## VIII.

### *THE SCAPEGRACE.*

**A**LMOST fierce is the emphasis in these five words! One positively shudders at the accentuation which they indicate.

Here is a man—a young man, mark you—held up to universal execration, pointed at as a warning to all who should come after him, branded like Cain by the finger of God, pilloried as a monster of iniquity.

Look at him; stand aghast at the sight; and tremble to be like him.

His various crimes are recorded in order, with the aggravations of his guilt, the insults he offered to Jehovah, and his determined refusal to bend under the stroke of affliction: the black and terrible indictment is made out: and then, as with a pen dipped in red ink, the narrator adds, "This is that king Ahaz." In the words of Job may we not say, "Men shall clap their hands at him, and hiss him out of his place." Verily, "he, doubly dying, did go down to the vile dust from whence he sprung, unwept, unhonoured, and unsung." I have held up before you in these sermons many a bright example; this evening it shall be a solemn warning.

Possibly some of you are not familiar with this man's history. You ought to be. It is full of instruction. A similar career is run by many a youth in our time; ending, as that of Ahaz did, in remorse and shame.

We have before us now the worst of all the kings that occupied the throne of David. He came to the throne at twenty years of age, and died at thirty-six; and these sixteen years—the very flower of a man's lifetime—instead of being given to noble pursuits, were squandered on profligacy and every form of impiety, as though he did not care how he disgraced his royal lineage, degraded his country, and defied the God of heaven. In vain did he recall his pious father's example; in vain did the holy prophet Isaiah advise, warn, and rebuke him; in vain did God send heavy judgments upon him; on he went, from bad to worse, from worse to worst, till he sank into an early and dishonoured grave—his very bones being refused a resting-place in the sepulchre of his fathers.

Poor, miserable reprobate! possessing neither courage, nor prudence, nor patriotism, nor self-respect; not even a decent regard for the traditions of his family; one of the few men of history of whom not a single good thing is recorded; living with none to love him; dying with none to lament him. "This was that king Ahaz!"

Now, the first thing that strikes me about this young man is the remarkable fact that he came of so pious a parentage—that so foul a bird should have come out of so good a nest.

Of his father Jotham it is recorded that he "did right in the sight of the Lord." He was a truly good man. His grandfather, Uzziah, had also been a man of piety, though Jotham, we are told, was yet more decided in his principles; and the historian declares of him that he "became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God."

Both father and grandfather, then, were men of God. Ahaz ought to have had good blood in his veins; he came of a good stock. His early days were spent in a religious

home. He had the advantage of a holy example. We cannot doubt that parental influence would all be used to lead him in the right way. If there is anything in heredity, in the transmission of tendencies from father to son, we should have expected Ahaz to be a decided character, a true-hearted servant of God.

Certainly, it added greatly to his responsibility. It was an awful aggravation of his guilt that he had been brought up in a pious home. Oh, there is no earthly blessing to be compared to this!

Well do some of you know it. Of a thousand things you have to be thankful for, this is one of the greatest, that the home of your childhood was such a holy and happy spot. What sweet and blessed influences gathered round you!

You thought there wasn't a happier family circle in the world! You thought no one could have so kind a father, so saintly a mother! You feel like putting your sleeve to your eyes when you recall those happy days. Never whilst you live, or wherever your lot may carry you, will the recollection fade from your mind.

“ Still o'er these scenes your memory wakes,  
And fondly broods with miser care ;  
Time but the impression stronger makes,  
As streams their channels deeper wear.”

In the last public letter he wrote, Henry Ward Beecher said, “ I never can pay back what I got from my parents. If I were to raise a monument of gold higher than heaven, it would be no expression of the debt of gratitude which I owe to them for that which they unceasingly gave, by the heritage of their body, and the heritage of their souls, to me.”

There is not a more touching poem in the English

language than that which William Cowper wrote on the receipt of a picture of his departed mother. It brought back to him so vividly his childhood's home. What pathos in the lines—

“Shortlived possession ! but the record fair  
That memory keeps of all thy kindness there,  
Still outlives many a storm, that has effaced  
A thousand other themes less deeply traced.

\* \* \* \*

My boast is not that I deduce my birth  
From loins enthroned, and rulers of the earth ;  
But higher far my proud pretensions rise—  
The son of parents passed into the skies.”

But, where such advantages are thrown away, such influences thwarted, there is generally a rebound. If the child of godly parentage turns out bad, he is generally an exceptional reprobate. He plunges deeper into sin than all his fellows. He is wilder in his profligacy, more daring in his profanity. He is an utter scapegrace, in the most literal sense of the word, that is, one who has escaped the grace that seemed to run in his ancestral line. Christian birth abused becomes a curse. In the natural course of things, the youth who has most resisted the Spirit becomes the greatest slave of the devil. It is a law of character. Just as the resistance of temptations proves the strengthening of virtue, so the defiance of holy influence and example proves the deepening of depravity. Some of the most loathsome men I have ever known have been persons who, with everything in their favour, have recoiled from a moral and religious life. They have become desperately wicked. Devils have come in to occupy the place from which the Spirit of God has been expelled.

If a parent has been pre-eminent for his saintliness, and

his son goes to the bad, you may expect the latter to turn out one of the most vile and hardened of sinners. Tell me the gracious influence he has resisted, and I will give you the gauge of his depravity.

I have no doubt this has given occasion to the common saying that the children of pious parentage are often conspicuous for their ungodliness. When they do take the wrong path, they rush to the extreme of wickedness. The terrible contrast makes them the subjects of common talk. They become a scandal to religion. Worldly men make a handle of such cases, and scoffers point to them and rejoice.

The notoriety which every such instance acquires naturally leads to the impression that they are frequent; and so the unwholesome proverb I have referred to obtains currency.

I am prepared, here and now, to give a direct denial, as plain and emphatic as words can express, to the assertion, that the sons of godly men generally turn out depraved.

It is a lie, as mean and base as ever the devil concocted. It is the rarest thing in the world for this to occur. Were there any real foundation for the assertion, it would falsify the promise of Scripture, "Train up a child in the way that he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The promise is true. In the rare and exceptional instances in which it seems to be falsified, there is almost invariably some circumstance, some peculiarity of the case, some special dereliction of duty on the parents' part, which goes far to provide an explanation. (Should we have time, I will tell you something about Jotham, good man as he was, which may throw light upon the sad career of his son Ahaz.)

But I am going to take occasion from the subject before



us to give a public deliverance, none too soon, upon a matter in which there should be no misapprehension.

It is an allegation that has constantly been made—we have all heard it a thousand times—that, as a rule, the sons of ministers of the Gospel turn out very far from a credit to their fathers' name and profession.

I have carefully looked into the matter, and am prepared to give to the slander the most absolute and emphatic contradiction. Nay, I will turn the tables upon the slanderers, and prove to you that the direct opposite is, praise God, most conspicuously and triumphantly true. As myself the son, and doubly the grandson, of ministers of the Gospel, I am naturally jealous of their repute, and rejoice to be able to put into your hands a conclusive answer to the wicked calumny.

I confess I am rather interested in the whole subject of heredity. I have been at some pains to inform myself as to the calling or occupation of the fathers of many men who have risen to honourable distinction in the world; and perhaps you would like to have some of the results of that inquiry. I shall select a few at random, taken from a very varied list.

The distinguished astronomer Kepler was the son of an officer in the army; the poet Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott, of attorneys; Chatterton, of a schoolmaster; Handel, of a surgeon; Thomas Hood and Samuel Johnson, of booksellers; Mozart, of a bookbinder; Blackstone, the eminent lawyer, of a silk-mercant; the poet Pope, of a linen-draper; Sir Isaac Newton, of a farmer; Thomas Arnold, of a tax-collector; De Foe and Aikenside, of a butcher; Dr. Jeremy Taylor, of a hairdresser; the artist Turner, of a barber; Christopher Columbus, of a wool-comber: the great astronomer Halley, of a soap-boiler; Haydn, of a wheelwright;

Luther, of a miner ; Lord Eldon, the famous lawyer, of a collier ; George Fox, of a weaver ; Captain Cook, of an agricultural labourer ; and last, but not least, John Bunyan, of a tinker. Now, let me give you a few names from the lengthy list of those who were the sons of the manse or the vicarage. Amongst celebrated poets I may mention Goldsmith, Thomson, Young, Cowper, Coleridge, Montgomery, Heber, Lowell, and Tennyson. Amongst historians and men of literary fame, Hallam, Macaulay, Kingsley, Addison, Swift, Stern, Thackeray, and Emerson. Amongst eminent physicians, Dr. Jenner, Sir Astley Cooper, and Sir Charles Bell. Amongst men of science, Boerhaave, Berzelius, Linnæus, Playfair, Wollaston, and Sir D. Brewster. Distinguished officers, Lord Nelson, and Sir Francis Drake. In architecture, I have but to name Sir Christopher Wren ; while in art, Sir Joshua Reynolds will worthily represent the class. In intellectual philosophy the catalogue is almost too numerous to record ; but the names of Dugald Stewart, Cudworth, Reid, Brown, and Bentham will suffice.

Tennyson's vigorous lines occur to me :—

“Oh for a man with heart, head, hand,  
Like some of the simple great ones gone  
For ever and ever by ;  
One still strong man in a blatant land,  
Whatever they call him, what care I,  
Aristocrat, democrat, autocrat, one  
Who can rule, and dare not lie.”

I have not included in this list the names of men who themselves became famous in the pulpit, and in whose family the preaching gift seemed to run for successive generations ; but I might mention Robert Hall, Archbishop Whately, the Wesleys, the Beechers, and the Spurgeons ; all of which names provide, at least, some refutation of the

slander that the sons of Christian ministers commonly take a devious course.

For my own part, why should I hesitate to say, that during a residence in the metropolis of thirty years, in which time I have enjoyed the acquaintance of hundreds of Christian ministers and their families, only in two instances—one of these being doubtful—have I seen the sons bringing discredit on their father's name. I was lately speaking on this subject to a venerable minister, who said that in a pastorate of fifty years he had known likewise only two cases. A recent French writer, a man of science, but himself without a religious faith, even he, a most unlikely witness (I refer to M. De Candole), asserts that during the past two hundred years the sons of ministers' families have, in their contributions to the roll of eminent scientists, surpassed those of any other class, not excepting physicians, surgeons, and chemists.

In a well-known work of fiction by Lord Lytton, one of his characters is made to say, as he warms up into oratorical enthusiasm, "Why, sir, are you not aware that there are no homes in England from which men who have served and adorned their country have issued forth in such numbers as the clergy? What other class can produce a list so crowded with eminent names as they can boast, in the sons they have reared and sent forth into the world? How many statesmen, soldiers, lawyers, physicians, authors, men of science, have been the sons of village pastors? Naturally so; for they receive a careful education; they acquire of necessity the simple tastes and disciplined habits which lead to industry and perseverance, and, for the most part, they carry with them a purer moral code, a more systematic reverence for things and thoughts religious, associated with the earliest images of affection and respect, than can be

expected from the sons of men whose parents are wholly secular and worldly." Occasional instances, alas! we have (as every age has produced) of young men brought up in godly homes, going clean over to the devil; so that no one must presume too much upon early training and advantage; and when they do occur, each one stands out individually as a solemn and conspicuous warning: "This is that king Ahaz."

The next notable lesson which we carry away with us is this, that a man may become so hardened in sin that even trouble and affliction will only drive him further from God.

Mark what this very verse declares, "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord." It often happens that a man's attitude toward his Maker does not appear until some calamity befalls him. "You must not suppose," said a thorough man of the world, "that I hate God. No, sir, you will not make me believe that. I am a sinner, I know, as we all are, but, take my word for it, I'm all right at heart; I have no enmity to God."

That was said when all was going prosperously with him. But a few months afterwards a series of calamities befel him; the money he had amassed was swept away; and, as he stood amid the ruins of his earthly hopes, he with horrible profanity cursed God to His face. A man may get into such a moral condition that trouble only sours his spirit. He becomes angry with the Almighty. He becomes sullen in temper, or plunges into more desperate iniquity. Nothing is a truer touchstone of character than the way in which we are affected by heavy affliction. The same fire that softens the wax hardens the clay. It has again and again been observed on the occasion of a shipwreck, when the lives of all on board were in eminent peril, that the near prospect

of eternity, whilst it led some to fervent prayer, drove others to the rum bottle. When the great plague was raging in London, vice assumed hideous and diabolic forms. The churches, indeed, were thronged by one class, but another class gave themselves to riotous excess. Men even followed the dead-cart through the streets, singing profane and ribald songs. Certain parts of the city were like a hell on earth. Do not suppose, then, that the chastisements of God always humble the sinner. If you resist the strivings of the Spirit through years of health and prosperity, you are not likely to turn to God when the cloud of sorrow gathers over your path.

I have seen young men stricken down in their sins, and seemingly more set against religion than ever.

Then again, the career of Ahaz shows us that when a man has cast off God, the very things that promise him satisfaction may prove his destruction.

We are sure to worship some object. If it be not Jehovah, then it will be an idol of man's creation.

This young blasphemer turned to the gods of Damascus, and said (see the verse that follows our text), "I will sacrifice to them, that they may help thee." "But," it is added, "they were the ruin of him." Oh, how true to the life! How exact a picture of what we have seen with our own eyes, over and over again! A young man casts off the fear of God, scoffs at the religion of his fathers, gives himself up to bad company, to loose living, to late hours, to card-playing and gambling, to theatre-going, and every kind of imaginary pleasure; and with what result? Ah! The story of Ahaz is just repeated over again: "they are the ruin of him." Ruin of his character; ruin of his prospects; ruin of his health; ruin of his immortal soul!

You may well look uneasy and alarmed, my boy, for you

are just beginning the fatal course. I tell you it is a crucial time with you, if you do not put your foot down firm, and vow you will keep back from the first steps of vice : every week lessens your chances of a safe, and happy, and honourable career.

Remember, one thread broken in the garment of your virtue, no one can tell how much of it will speedily unravel. Passions you have, awful passions : but grapple with them now, and by God's grace you will vanquish them. Yield, and they will become fiercer, and will overmaster you.

An old man once pointed out to a young lad four shrubs of unequal size. "Go, pull up the least one," he said. In a moment it was up by the roots. "Now the next." Ah, that did not come so easily. "Now the next." It seemed as if No. 3 could not be torn up. But at last, with a tremendous effort, up it came. "Now try the fourth," said he. In vain the lad tugged and pulled. His face flushed with the strain ; he gave it up as hopeless. "This, my son," said the old man, "is just what happens with our passions. There is a time when they are under our control ; but if we offer no resistance, if we indulge them, and let them cast their roots deep into our being, we shall find they have become too strong for us, and that we are helpless before them."

Now, I appeal to you to nip your lower appetites in the bud, and let your higher nature dominate your life. Don't let me hear you say, this is grandmotherly advice, and young men must have their fling and their spree. I would be a heartless creature if, knowing what I have seen, I did not entreat and implore every youth before me, who has not yet lost the priceless jewel of personal purity, to fight and resist to the death "those lusts which war against the flesh," and which, indulged, have been the ruin of hundreds of as fine fellows as I now see before me.

If you will run on to destruction, at least you shall not go unwarned; I point the finger now to one in whose history not a single good thing is recorded—who lived unloved and died unlamented. "This is that king Ahaz."

If one says to me, "How can you account for a man turning out such a scapegrace, whose father was a devout servant of God?" I think an explanation is not difficult to find. Jotham, good man as he was, seemed to devote all his energies to matters outside of his own family and people. "He built cities in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers." He was much engaged in wars with the Ammonites, and he devoted himself to the embellishing of the Temple. But of the internal administration of his kingdom and of the upbringing of his family we have not a word. Need we wonder, then, to read that "the people did yet corruptly," and that his own son turned out so ill? It is to be feared that, like the old high priest Eli, he was negligent of his parental duties, and illustrated the truth of those words of Shakespeare:—

"If our virtues  
Do not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
As though we had them not."

Now, my brothers, gird you like men; be strong. Beware of what Tennyson calls "sins of emptiness." Let your hearts be preoccupied by the grace of God, so that there will be no room for evil thoughts. Grasp the hand of Christ held out to you, and go from this place determined to live a noble life, and full of confidence in that promised grace from above, "which is able to keep you from falling, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified." Amen.

*BETTING AND GAMBLING.*



*"Ye that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for Fortune, and fill up mingled wine unto Destiny, I will destine you to the sword."—ISA. lxxv. 11.*

## IX.

### *BETTING AND GAMBLING.*

**I**N these words I hear the thunder of Heaven against the whole betting and gambling fraternity, alike of ancient and modern times.

I will not deny that the passage is somewhat obscure. It has puzzled the exegetical skill, and exercised the ingenuity of the ablest expositors. But, on the general principle it expresses, most of them are agreed.

I have read the verse, not as it is rendered in the Authorised Version (which is certainly incorrect), but as it appears in the Revised Version, where the two prominent words are "Fortune" and "Destiny." The Hebrew terms are "Gad" and "Meni," the names of two heathen deities, and the anger of Heaven is here expressed towards "those who forsake Jehovah, who forget His holy mountain, and who prepare a table for Gad, and fill up mingled wine unto Meni."

We are informed by Jerome that, even as late as in his time (that is the 4th century), it was the custom in all cities, especially in Egypt and at Alexandria, to set tables, and furnish them with various articles of food, and with goblets containing mingled wine, on the last day of the month and last day of the year, as a token of gratitude to the gods.

The Lord here reproaches His people for following the idolatrous practices of the heathen around them. These

special deities (which may be called Fortune and Fate) were supposed to preside over all matters in which chance was concerned; were identified with what we call luck, good or bad; and were doubtless worshipped with various games of hazard, in which the innate propensity for gambling would find full scope.

It is a curious thing—as showing the inveterate endurance of old customs, and the connection between countries geographically remote—that to the present day there are traces of such worship in Scotland.

As some of you know, the last day of the year is by many called “Hogmanay.” Now, what is the origin of this word? The most learned authority I can find traces it to a Chaldean word (sounding almost identically the same), which means the feast of Meni or Destiny, and, sure enough, this singular custom is carried out in the north after a similar fashion; a table is spread, good fare and strong drink are placed upon it, and each person wishes the other “good luck” for the coming year.

The learned Gesenius believes that by these two words in our text, “Gad,” and “Meni,” are indicated Jupiter and Venus, whose respective stars were known in the East as “the greater good fortune,” and “the lesser good fortune.” The general idea here appears to be that the persons addressed had incurred the Divine displeasure by falling into the idolatrous customs of the heathen. First, as my text states, they had forsaken the Lord; then, secondly, as a natural result, they had forgotten His ordinances; thirdly, they had crept into the senseless, superstitious, and immoral practices of pagan idolatry; and fourthly, they had specially been lured into the worship of Fortune and Destiny, with the hateful rites associated with it.

Now, I suppose that Gad and Meni have had their devo-

tees in almost every age of the world. The disposition to betting and gambling, in some form or another, seems to be innate in fallen human nature. And its effect is always to deteriorate the character, and blunt the moral sense.

It is a cancer that eats into the soul, and speedily destroys all that is most noble and Godlike in it.

I have long thought that one of the most revolting pictures of degraded humanity that ever was drawn is that scene which St. John describes as occurring beside the Cross in the last hour of our Saviour's agony; when the brutal men who had crucified Him sat down to cast lots over His clothes. The enraged priests could taunt the Sufferer on His helplessness; the frivolous passers-by could wag their heads, or shout in cruel derision: but no creature but a gambler could be so lost to all feeling as to sit down coolly under a dying Man to wrangle for His garments, and, with hands still spotted with His blood, cast dice for the very coat He had worn. But gambling is one of those things of which it is true that the baser a man is, the more he delights in it, and meets with success; the more honourable he is, the worse are his chances, and the less pleasure it affords him.

It is deplorable to have to say that the vice is greatly on the increase in our land. It is proving the ruin of thousands of young men. It will hardly be believed by some good people what a hold it has upon a large portion of the community. Its withering blight permeates every class. I assure you the evil is growing so deadly and terrible, some bold and decided steps must be taken to check it, and that promptly, or we shall, as a nation, become completely demoralized.

Some years ago the appalling spread of intemperance so startled many good men that they rose up in alarm and

determined they would grapple with the monster ; and, but for the noble efforts put forth by the various societies which sprang up, I don't know where we should have been to-day.

Dr. Farrar asserts that it is the fashion of selfish doctrinaires to sneer at and despise temperance societies ; " though, had it not been for their work, we should ere now have been merged in such a deluge of drunkenness and crime as would have swept away our whole civilization."

But the evil I speak of is, if possible, still worse, because its iniquity does not consist in excess, but in the thing itself. The first touch of it defiles.

It is high time that we had a National Anti-Gambling Society. I wish some public-spirited men would form an association on the basis of total abstinence from this vice in all its forms, and that every young man would take the pledge. Moderate drinkers there may be ; but moderate gambling is impossible.

Again and again have I received letters urging me to call attention to the subject, and speak some words of solemn warning ; and therefore, those of you who are perfectly free from the habit must kindly bear with me now if my address has but little application to yourselves. Many a time have I tried here to speak in beseeching tones to the worshippers of Bacchus and of Venus ; but my message at present is to another class, quite as large as either, who " prepare a table for Fortune, and fill up mingled wine unto Destiny."

Singularly enough, in a popular newspaper I have just read a letter in which the writer says : " As a working man, claiming some interest in the welfare of my fellow-workers, I feel grateful to your correspondents who have called attention to this growing curse, with a view to suppressing it. I do not like the word ' suppression,' either in

connection with this or with the drink question, but of the two evils to humanity, I think gambling is the worse, as it generally leads its victims to the other ; for the disappointed gambler, in order to console himself and fortify himself for fresh efforts, mostly flies to drink ; and, if my observations are reliable, I believe gambling is responsible for more drunkenness than any other cause. Therefore, if our teetotal friends would devote some of their energy and attention to this curse, they would, to my way of thinking, be doing more good. The ministers of religion might make their work more profitable to humanity by adopting the same course, for certainly there is no vice more degrading and demoralizing than that of gambling."

On no principle whatever, and under no circumstances, can the habit of betting or gambling be justified.

It is distinctly an immoral act for a man to enrich himself, or win his livelihood, by means of unproductive skill, from which no profit accrues to the common weal, and by which the gainer renders no equivalent to those whose money he receives.

The man who bets hopes to get money out of the pockets of other people without giving them anything in return.

"But," replies such an one, "they try to do as much by me." Precisely ; and what a noble attitude it is for persons who have no ill-will towards one another ! The practice has its root in a union of indolence, selfishness, and avarice. When indulged, it grows into a demoralizing passion, before which everything must be sacrificed. The vice creeps on, acquiring more power every day, till it swallows up every good and generous instinct of the heart. No lust carries its subject to such fearful extremities. It arouses all the devil that is in a man. It kindles the fires of hell within his breast. It nurses rage, develops jealousy, and

engenders strife ; or, on the other hand, it turns the heart to stone. Forgery, murder, and suicide are in its train. William Cobbett says, "I never in my whole life knew a man addicted to this habit, who was not, in some way or other, a person unworthy of confidence."

How it grips the soul like a demon and blunts every feeling of humanity, is illustrated by the anecdote that Walpole tells, of a man who at a gambling-table fell down in a fit of apoplexy, whereon his companions instantly began to bet upon the chances of his recovery ; and when the physician came in, they positively would not allow him to minister to the sufferer, on the ground that it would affect the bet. Some of you may recollect that when, a good many years ago, the Prince of Wales was lying dangerously ill at Sandringham, his life hanging in the balance, heavy stakes were laid upon the issue ; and when the late excellent President Garfield was almost given up by his doctors, a similar thing occurred, men betting large sums, and even selling pools in Chicago. In a recent notorious criminal case, when all the country was waiting with bated breath to know whether an unhappy woman was to go to the gallows, or to be reprieved, I saw it stated that, among a certain class of the population in Liverpool and elsewhere, large sums were staked upon the issue. Some years ago, when in the South of France, I went as a visitor to see that strange place—material paradise and moral hell in one—Monte Carlo. I peeped into the gambling saloon. What a picture ! It haunts me still. What agony on those faces gathered round the green table ! Hollow eyes, haggard looks, quivering nerves, the em-maddening lust of gain ; may I never look on such a sight again ! The floor was scarcely dry of his blood where a fashionable young man, having risked and lost his all, had blown out his brains with a pistol ! Yet, as though nothing

had occurred, these eager players went on with their infernal game!

In the "Papers" of the late Mr. Greville, you will find him making the following humbling confession in his journal, with reference to his attendance at the Races on Epsom Downs: "This demoralizing drudgery reduces me to the level of all that is most disreputable and despicable, for my thoughts are eternally absorbed by it. Jockeys, trainers, and blacklegs are my companions, and I cannot leave it off, though I am disgusted with the occupation all the time."

On the last occasion of these races I was somewhat surprised to see next morning in a leading article in one of the principal secular newspapers of London, this statement:—"Looking round upon the gathering on the ground, one could not help speculating on what might not be the moral effect on England if Epsom Downs had yawned open, and swallowed up that betting, swearing, brutal-looking, brazen-throated throng. There they came, streaming up through the clover fields, gay with buttercups and clumps of yellow furze, in hideous din and uproar, as though there were no larks carolling overhead, nor musical tremor of breeze in the woodlands, and nothing delightful in the hazy, sunny landscape around. There was a general atmosphere of blackguardism and vulgarity; and a positive relief it was to get out of the thick of it into the quiet green lanes again."

What a fearful blotting-out of the image of God from a man's soul must there be, when in such associations and scenes he can find pleasure! Will any one dare to tell me that there is a single mitigating circumstance? or that there is anything amid such environments to develop manliness, to improve the mind, to refine the character, to elevate the taste, or to better the heart?

Even the *Times* newspaper bore the following testimony:



—"Horse-racing is an amusement to which is directly traceable more misery, more ruin, more demoralization, than to any other pastime." No young man who possesses self-respect—at least, no Christian man who desires to live in the smile of God—will ever patronise those haunts of infamy and folly.

But thousands who were never at Epsom or Newmarket, and who never saw a horse-race in their life, are addicted to the evil habit I condemn. Mere lads begin to bet before their beards are as long as their teeth. It is the easiest thing in the world to engender a gambling spirit, and the hardest matter to eradicate it. On many natures it possesses a marvellous fascination. In some breasts the passion, once roused, becomes desperate; and, as it advances, everything must yield before it. I have never known a gambler who did not come to a wretched end. Young man! trifle with the fiend at your peril. Did you ever look on Hogarth's famous picture, and mark the expression of the gambler at the moment when he has made his last throw? If that sight does not make you shudder, I fear there is no hope for you. I question if any evil of our time is working more mischief than this. The extent to which it has now reached is almost incredible. Unquestionably, it is on the increase. The land is filled with the curse from one end of it to the other. It appears to lose none of its fascination in the highest and most refined circles. From the courts of royalty to the back slums of White-chapel you find it the same. Even in quiet country villages, in pleasant summer watering-places, in the gloomy coal and iron districts, and in the fashionable resorts of great cities, everywhere this horrible vice exists. All society is inoculated with it.

There is the gambling of commerce, of the Stock Ex-

change, of the racecourse and casino, of many popular forms of amusement, and of the unwashed urchins who toss coppers on the street. If possible, thief gambles with thief in prison; ay, perhaps the judge who tried them, the lawyer who prosecuted, and the counsel who defended, all gamble too.

There is no social level that is not infested with the plague. It prevails in many political and friendly clubs, turning them into nurseries of dishonesty. At a recent meeting of the Lower House of the Convocation of Canterbury, it was stated upon evidence that even women and children now engage largely in the practice of betting. And it was pointed out that the increase of late years in the number of races, and of cheap trips to reach them, as well as the extended sale of sporting journals, and enlarged space devoted in the daily papers to racing and betting news, all indicate beyond question a movement in the wrong direction. Such manly games as cricket and football are turned into occasions for staking money; public houses are made common centres for so-called pools and sweepstakes; coursing and pigeon-flying are simply opportunities for the indulgence of the passion.

It is well known that the Oxford and Cambridge boat-race is responsible for sowing the seeds of this vice in many a youthful mind; and hundreds of young men have commenced the evil habit by hazarding a little of their scanty pocket-money on that event.

But, indeed, there is hardly a thing into which the element of chance or uncertainty enters that is not made the occasion of a betting transaction.

In the mining districts, on a holiday, you may see grimy colliers standing on the bank of a stream, intently watching several floating straws. These straws have been put into

the water together, and bets laid upon them. And there are the men, eagerly waiting to see which of the straws will be the first to reach the goal determined on.

“Bookmakers,” as they are called, hang about the street corners in all our great towns. Their slang now colours the common talk of the people. Will it be believed that there are close upon fifty sporting journals of one sort or another now published in and around London? If we are to credit a recent writer in the *British Weekly* newspaper, our own district of the metropolis has, as regards this vice, an unenviable distinction; and the authorities are glaringly negligent in pursuing those who are wilfully defying the law.

Now, all this inevitably tends to lower the *morale* of the country, and especially to injure the rising generation. How often have I seen it, that the first steps in youthful dishonesty have been taken in order to recoup the loss of money sustained in bets or games of chance; and I distinctly recollect the late excellent Postmaster-General, Mr. Fawcett, stating that nearly all young men in the Post-office who went to the bad, did so through betting. The practice invariably disinclines the mind for sober thought and rational amusement, and steels it against religious impressions. The love of it incapacitates for business, and withers up all the better feelings of one's nature; it destroys manliness; it petrifies every noble instinct of the soul.

There is not a Christian merchant in London, there is not an astute business man, be he Christian or not, who would not at once dismiss from his office the clerk whom he knew to be addicted to this habit.

Young men! as you value your self-respect, as you look forward to an honourable and successful career, as you prize the comfort of a good conscience, and as you shrink with horror from the prospect of a death-bed of remorse,

don't bet. I defy any man to look me straight in the face, and say that he could kneel down and thank God for a shilling or for a hundred pounds which he had acquired by a bet.

No, there can be no blessing upon it. There is a curse upon it, and you can't do better than fling such ill-gotten gain into the sea. In nearly every other form of vice there lurks some minute shade or semblance of good, some microscopic atom of plea or excuse; here there is none; it is "evil, only evil, and that continually." Set your face determinately against it. Refuse to stake so much as a sixpence. Young men, whatever you do, don't bet!

But you may notice in the text that this worship of Gad and Meni is the third step of a fatal down grade.

The first step is "forsaking the Lord," and the second is forgetting His holy mountain," that is, neglecting His sacred ordinances. The course of the reprobate is gradual. A man does not become a gambler all at once. It is rare indeed that a youth who has had a godly upbringing plunges directly into a career of infamy. No. He first of all forsakes the Lord. Perhaps some of you have as yet only gone this length, and no further. But it is sad enough, and it is a beginning to a bitter end.

Once you felt the power of religion, but now it's all gone! You have lost your faith, you are no longer in touch with the spiritual and Divine; an icy callousness has taken the place of earnest yearnings after God.

No heart now for secret prayer, no pleasure now in reading the Bible, no sweet sense now of being at peace with God: all that is passed away. And, perhaps, you think you have got into liberty. You have made escape from old-fashioned notions and superstitions. No, sir, you have "forsaken the Lord."

And what is the next step. "Forgetting His holy mountain." Literally, Mount Moriah, on which the Temple stood; hence the expression means forgetting the public worship of God and the ordinances of religion. When a man forsakes God, he is not long of forgetting His sanctuary. He drops off his attendance in the house of prayer; his seat is rarely occupied. He finds some other method of spending the Lord's day. He is more and more disinclined to join with the great congregation and to listen to the word of God. He falls away from even the outward semblance of being a Christian; he lapses into practical heathenism. Ah! how often have I seen precisely this career run by young men, who knew what was right, yet, with their eyes open, took the path to ruin, and ultimately gave way to gambling and all licentiousness.

My mission is to blow the trumpet of warning. I see two diverging roads, and many of you just at the point where they separate. One leads to self-respect, and peace, and honour, and prosperity, and eternal life; the other to trouble, and disaster, and remorse, and the blackness of everlasting despair. And now must the choice be made! The present decision may fix your eternity. Will you not come clean over to the Lord's side? Christ is a perfect Saviour, and, if you absolutely trust Him, He will undertake your case. To God's almighty grace I commend every one of you. Amen.

*THE BRAVE MAN OF OPHRAH.*

*"The time would fail me to tell of Gideon."*—HEB. xi. 32.

*THE BRAVE MAN OF OPRAH.*

IT is no small honour to have a niche in this gallery. Every name is an inspiration; every character a miracle of grace. Astronomers tell us that the naked eye can count about five thousand stars in the dome of a clear and moonless night; but of these there are many hundreds that, to most observers, are scarcely visible; and only a score or so are brilliant orbs of the first magnitude. If you were challenged to point to twenty or twenty-five of the brightest luminaries of Old Testament history, I think Gideon would be sure to have a place in the number; and all the brighter is his beam because he shines out from a background exceptionally dark.

It was a sad, sad time with Israel when God called this unlettered peasant to the front. There was practically no government, and the land was wasted and laid bare by hordes of Midianites, Amalekites, and other warlike tribes, who periodically swept down upon its fields and pastures, and carried off all that they could lay their hands upon. Ophrah, where Gideon had his home, was not far from Shechem, in the centre of Palestine, and in the immediate vicinity of the plain of Esdraelon—one of the richest districts of natural soil, I suppose, in the world. It is painful to say that that fertile territory, which might be more beautiful and prolific than the finest garden in England, is at this day lying waste and desolate.



Under the intolerable yoke of the Turkish Government, which is a curse to the country, there is no protection to industry; and, therefore, the down-trodden people have no heart to cultivate the land, and to raise produce which, in addition to being outrageously taxed, may at any moment be ruthlessly seized and carried away.

As I rode northwards through that plain, with Mount Tabor's beautiful form in the foreground, the horse's hoofs plunged with every step into a fat loam that might produce crops such as few other spots on earth could yield; and yet all was a dreary waste, and my steed literally waded through white thistles, tall enough to reach the stirrups.

I looked east and west through a broad, open valley, in which not a single smiling cottage relieved the eye, nor a peasant was seen busy at his work; and I could not but contrast the scene with many a fair strath in my own native land, where, despite its sterner climate and its rougher soil, the whole landscape would be dotted over with cosy farmsteads, and on every side would be the tokens of peaceful industry. The condition of things was similarly sad in Gideon's time, and yet, in some respects, widely different.

Scarce seven years had gone by since the land enjoyed a fair measure of prosperity. For forty years after the triumph of Deborah, it had known something of security and rest. But now, tempted by its rich produce, the Midianites and other "children of the East"—the Bedouins of those times—would sweep into the land across the fords of Jordan, and, like a swarm of locusts, devour all before them.

As surely as harvest-time came round would those wild invaders appear, covering with their black tents the hillsides and valleys, and appropriating to their own use grain they had never sown, and flocks and herds they had never reared.

Season after season this went on, till the people were reduced to extremest want; and on the back of hunger came pestilence and disease.

Yet no one arose to repel the invader. The people were demoralized. It almost seemed as if God had forsaken them.

It was at this juncture that a message from heaven summoned to the front the man of whom I am to speak to you—whose memoir, though brief, is so copious with thrilling incident, and so rich in lessons for young men, that I may well start with the words of my text:—"The time would fail me to tell of Gideon."

But, though our time is limited, I shall make the most of it! and in a series of pictures, or *tableaux*, present the man before you. Very rapidly must the panorama pass.

I. And first of all, behold Gideon *at the flail*. The curtain rises, and lo! a tall, powerful man bending over his work, busily engaged in threshing wheat; and doing it, not in the usual place, but at the wine-press, that he may conceal it, if possible, from the rapacious Midianites.

His father, Joash, is a humble farmer—"crofter," shall we say—and his family must earn their bread. The times are hard, and every one must put a hand to the work. They are plain, honest people, and make no pretensions.

A strange visitor appears to Gideon, and, in the name of the Most High God, bids him rise up and be the deliverer of his nation. Never, probably, was man more taken by surprise. It was the last thing he had dreamt of. His first impulse is to doubt the authority of the messenger; but, such evidence is presently given that this is indeed an angel of God, that the young farmer is awestruck, and perceives that Heaven is really calling him to the mighty task.

Well, don't we see here that obscurity of birth is no

obstacle to a life of noble service ; and that posts of honour and distinction come to men whilst they are engaged in the common and prosaic duties of life.

Gideon imagined that, because he was poor, and of humble origin, it was impossible he could be called to the noble undertaking ; but God showed him his mistake. And all history impressively teaches the same lesson. Show me any list of men who have distinguished themselves in one department or another of philanthropy, literature, science, or art ; of men who have proved the signal benefactors of their race ; of men who have shone in the pulpit, or at the bar, or in the nation's senate-house, and I will venture to say that of these, a large proportion sprang from a lowly level. Never be ashamed of it, if your hands are horny with honest toil ; never account it a thing to be concealed, if you were born in a thatched cottage, that had but two rooms and an attic ; or, if your old father is a humble weaver, or follows the plough, or keeps the toll-gate, or works in the village smithy ; think it no dishonour to say, with Gideon,—“ My family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.”

Learn, too, that it is to the busy, not the idle, that honours and promotions come ; as to Moses and to David whilst each was tending sheep ; as to Saul, when he was looking after his father's asses ; as to Matthew when he was busy at the inland revenue office ; as to Simon and Andrew, when they were mending their nets ; and as to Gideon, when he was threshing the wheat. Whatever your present duty be, do it thoroughly and well ; this is the likeliest course to advancement.

Your work can hardly be humbler than flogging corn with a flail ; but do it to the best of your ability ; and when you least expect it, preferment will come.

II. The next picture I see is Gideon *at the altar*. Humble and industrious, he is also a God-fearing man. He cannot go forth to the great mission to which he is called without seeking the Divine blessing, and offering solemn worship to his Maker. "Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom, that is, 'The Lord send peace.'" Nor was this all. His father, Joash, had unhappily departed from the true religion, and fallen into idolatry; so much so, that on his own farm there had been erected an altar to Baal, the Sun-god of the Canaanites. There it stood on a prominent place, surrounded, according to the custom, by a grove of trees, and offering a standing insult to Israel's God. That altar must be thrown down. Gideon did not hesitate to endanger his own life. He is prepared to face the displeasure of his father and the whole family. What did he do but yoke two powerful young oxen of his father's, and drag down the altar, and pull down the trees, and using them as fuel (whilst one of the oxen served for the victim) offered it as a burnt-sacrifice to Jehovah.

This bold and spirited act he did under cover of night. Morning broke, to find the grove cut down, and Baal's altar gone! The deed was traced to Gideon. "Death to him!" shrieked the infuriated idolaters, who possibly would have accomplished their purpose but for the cynical ready wit of Joash, who suggested that, if Baal were a god, he was perfectly able to look after himself, and to revenge the dishonour, and he had better be left to do so. But, as no harm came to Gideon, the popular opinion turned in his favour, and straightway he became a hero, and acquired the title "Jerubbaal," that is, "The Discomfiter of Baal."

Young men! I commend to you Gideon's stern fidelity

to religious principle. Never be ashamed, wherever you go, to build your altar to the true God, and to enter your faithful protest against error. At the very starting of your business life take a firm and decided stand. Let there be no mistake as to the Being whom you worship. Your library may be small, but let the Bible be the most prominent volume. Your leisure moments, morning and evening, may be few, but set apart a portion for prayer.

Don't be afraid to show your colours. Denounce ungodliness wherever you meet it. Exhibit the pluck of a Christian hero, face iniquity with your sternest frown, and demolish every altar of vice. Aim, in short, each of you, to be a Jerubbaal, a discomfiter of the devil.

III. Now for the next picture : Gideon *and the fleece*. He has begun at the right place, at home, where all reformers should begin ; but he is now to enter on the great mission of his life, to deliver his nation from their cruel oppressors. The Spirit of God comes upon him, and, seizing a trumpet, he sounds a loud *reveille*, summoning his countrymen to arms. The war-cry is caught up and repeated through Northern Palestine, till not only his own clan, the Abiezrites, but also the Manassites, and the fiery warriors of Zebulon and Naphtali, whose fathers had fought so bravely in days of old, and even the Asshurites, who had no high reputation for courage, gather to his standard. But—but—he could not go forth to his great undertaking without the perfect assurance that God was with him. In humble distrust of self, he asked the Lord to give him a token of acceptance ; and spreading out a fleece of wool in the open air, he requests that in the morning he may find it wet with dew while all around is dry, and again that he may find it dry when all around is wet. God condescended to grant him this double sign. The twofold

miracle was performed ; every doubt fled from Gideon's mind ; and now, with strong faith in God, he was ready for the task before him. None of you will draw from this the inference that, before buckling on to any serious task, you are at liberty to ask for supernatural tokens of the favour of Heaven. The age of such miracles is past ; nor in our more privileged and spiritual dispensation are they necessary. Blessed indeed was Gideon, who saw and believed ; but yet more blessed may you be, who, not seeing, still believe.

The moral from this picture is the indispensableness of the Divine favour and blessing, if we would carry through successfully the tasks of life.

At the outset, make sure of your own acceptance with God. Do not let this be the last, but the first, thing to be seen to. Your life-work is not properly begun until the truce-flag of Heaven's smile is waving over you. Realize that all true success is from Him. It is His alone to withhold or bestow the dew of blessing.

Take Him into all your counsels. Invoke His favour on every fresh step and undertaking. Remember, God counts for something in His own world after all. It will be a poor job in the long run that is started without Him. "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich : " which is as much as saying that you may acquire wealth, and yet be miserably poor. It is a grand thing, young men, to have, in the true sense, *Dei Gratia* on every shilling, the favour and goodwill of God.

IV. The next picture I shall call—Gideon *at the well*. He is now at the command of a considerable army. Thirty-two thousand men have gathered round him, and he is making ready to thrash the Midianites. These Arab hosts lie encamped on the north side of the great plain of Esdrae-

lon. They are like grasshoppers for number ; and even their camels, we read, are "as the sand by the seaside for multitude." Gideon's rendezvous is to the south, beside the fountain of Jezreel, or "Well of Harod."

It is now called Ain Jalud, and a very interesting spot it is. I have a vivid recollection of it. On our way towards Shunem we made a detour to the east, in order to visit it. On the northern side of a somewhat precipitous hill was a large pond, supplied by a copious fountain, whose waters, clear as crystal, issued from within a rocky cavern under the cliff. The cave was large enough to admit of our riding in, the horses standing about two feet deep in the water. Very thankful we were for such a place of shelter ; for there came upon us the most terrific thunder-storm I ever witnessed. The arrows of lightning seemed to fall thick around us, whilst all the artillery of heaven was roaring overhead. I confess it was indeed to me the "Well of Harod," *i.e.*, of trembling, for never was I so awed by the majesty of a storm.

And yet, the spot had a marvellous interest. Here it was, in the opinion of most competent authorities, that Gideon prepared for the deadly onslaught on the oppressors of Israel. Thirty-two thousand was not a large army in the face of the countless swarms of Midian. And yet they were far too many ; for God, not man, must have all the glory of the victory.

"Whosoever amongst you is timorous," shouts General Gideon to his men, "he is at liberty to retire from the army, and return home again." There must have been much "trembling" in that host, for instantly twenty-two thousand took the hint.

Ten thousand still remained. Too large a company, for they may yet boast of the arm of flesh. Another thinning

process must be applied. They were all taken down to the waterside, for they were parched with thirst; and it was observed that, whilst three hundred of them smartly lapped the water from their hands like men in haste, ninety-seven per cent. lay down leisurely to drink. It was but a small thing that marked the difference; nevertheless, it indicated a specific quality; and, as all the cowards had been sent about their business, so now all the lazy ones are dismissed. Gideon and these three hundred choice, brave, active men, are, in God's strength, to do the work and win the day. Now, young men, is there not something for you to learn here?

When a good work is to be done, it is never accomplished by mere numbers. Indeed, they sometimes prove a hindrance.

A dozen or twenty men of energy and resolution will often prove a greater help to a good cause than a hundred of a less decided character. The latter is but a rope of sand, the former is a stout hempen cable, which, though the strands be but few, will bear a stiff and continuous strain; ay, even a "three-fold cord is not quickly broken."

V. Our next *tableau* may appear slightly grotesque—Gideon *with the whip*.

But it brings out the thoroughness of the man. "Time would fail me" to enter into details of his encounter with the Midianites. Suffice it to say he won a brilliant victory. The vast host, seized with panic, became an easy prey.

Numbers fled eastward towards the Jordan, only, however, to find their flight intercepted; for the Ephraimites had seized the lower fords, and they cut off all who attempted to escape. The upper fords were held by our hero himself, who followed in pursuit of two chiefs of Midian, called Zeba and Zalmunna, that is, the "Raven" and the "Wolf," fit names for Bedouin robbers.



In those northern parts, however, his great victory was not credited, and the people refused to side with him, the men of Succoth and Penuel in particular making themselves obnoxious, and denying bread to Gideon's faint and hungry, but brave little army. Gideon vowed they would catch it, when, having captured the two princes, he should return that way.

And he was as good as his word, for he levelled the Tower of Penuel to the ground, and, taking thorny branches of the trees, administered severe corporal castigation to the men of Succoth.

They are not always the best men who do desperate things, and, like Jehu, say, "Come and see my zeal for the Lord"; and I am far from commending the somewhat vindictive spirit of Gideon; and yet we must view him, as we must view Elijah, and Martin Luther, and John Knox, and many others, in the light of the times in which he lived.

Rough times need rough measures, and if occasionally the cause of truth may be injured by the rude violence of some stern iconoclast, I suspect it more frequently suffers from the compromising weakness of half-hearted professors.

There is far too much trimming and see-sawing in our day; the age wants men of stern fidelity to the truth.

VI. The last picture I am to point to is one which may, perhaps, have escaped the notice of some of you—Gideon *with the ephod*. The ephod, need I remind you, was the sacred and often richly jewelled vestment worn by the priests, and deemed characteristic of their office. The victorious army had carried off much costly spoil from the Midianites. The first impulse of the people, when the battle was fairly over, was to make Gideon king; but the noble-minded man would not listen to the proposal. He said,

“The Lord shall rule over you.” Nor did he cast a covetous eye upon the spoils that had been taken. The only share he asked for was the ear-rings of gold that they found among the plunder.

Throwing off his war-cloak, he spread it out to receive them, and a magnificent contribution he received.

Every man who possessed such golden trinkets, willingly threw them into the heap. Gideon did not want them for himself. But, like every pious Hebrew, he had a household altar, and he conceived the notion of covering it over with an ephod, richly decked with the spoils of Midian. I suppose he meant this to be a memorial of his gratitude to the God of battles, who had granted him good success. His purpose was good, but his act was unwise. Bishop Hall says, “Never man meant better than Gideon in his rich religious ephod, yet this very act set all Israel a whoring after idolatry.” To himself, no doubt, it was a harmless symbol, and a memento of a glorious victory; but it became an object of idolatrous reverence to his ignorant and superstitious countrymen. Even great and good men have their faults; and that which in the case of an obscure individual would be deemed only a trifling indiscretion, may amount with a prominent person to a serious scandal.

But we shall not allow this incident to impair our general estimate of Gideon’s character, which well deserves both the admiration and the imitation of all of you. I commend to your example his humility, his promptitude in obeying the call of God, his self-denying patriotism, his righteous severity against evil, and, above all, his strong faith in God. The fame of this great achievement long lingered in Israel.

Samuel, the prophet, spake of it; the psalmist sang of it; Isaiah exultingly referred to “the day of Midian” as one of the most notable in Jewish history; and last, but not least,