

A Sermon.

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Caithness.

Preached in 1809, and hitherto unpublished.

[This is a Sermon by “the great” Mr. Gunn, who was born in 1773, ordained minister of Orphir, Orkney, in 1803, and translated to Watten in 1805, where he died in 1836. See Auld’s “Ministers and Men in the Far North.” This Sermon is the only discourse, with the exception of a short address (see Magazine, January, 1897), of this eminent minister that has ever been published, and while it belongs to the earlier and less powerful period of his ministry, it still contains sound, evangelical truth, fitted to be spiritually useful, and giving some index of the commanding ability of the preacher. – ED.]

“But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician,
but they that are sick” – Matthew 9:12.

There is no article of faith more certain than that Jesus Christ is an all-sufficient and most willing Saviour, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, and that those that come unto Him He will in no wise cast out. Those that entrust their souls to His hands He keeps, and none of them is lost. It is also certain that all the guilty sons of Adam stand in the most absolute need of Him; in vain do they look for salvation in any other; without Him they are undone for ever. And without Him their very existence becomes a curse, and their immortality but the duration of their misery. The disease of sin has so deeply infected their souls that none but this divine Physician can heal them. Since this is the case, who would not expect that Jesus would be universally the desire of mankind? Ah, who would not expect that as many as are wounded and just perishing of their wounds, would all earnestly apply to this Physician, and seek relief from Him upon any terms? Who would suspect there should be so much as one heart cold and disaffected towards Him? Must not all love and desire Him, since all need Him so extremely, and since He is so completely qualified to be their Deliverer? But, alas! notwithstanding such favourable expectations from the nature of the thing, it is a most notorious fact that this divine Physician is but little regarded in our dying world. This all-sufficient and willing Saviour is generally neglected by perishing sinners. There are thousands among us that have no affectionate thoughts of Him, no eager longings after Him. They exert no vigorous endeavours to obtain an interest in Him, nor are they tenderly solicitous about it. They indeed profess His religion and call themselves Christians after His name; they pay Him the compliment of a bended knee, and now and then perform the external duties of religion, and thus have high hopes they shall be saved through Him; but as to their hearts and affections, He has no share there – these are reserved for the world which, in practical estimation, they prefer to Him, whatever they profess.

Now, whence is this strange and shocking alienation of affection from Him who is the Lord of life and glory, the fountain of all good? Whence is it that the dying are careless about a Physician – that a Saviour is neglected by those that are perishing? The true reason we may find in our text – “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” That is, they who imagine themselves well, however disordered they are in reality, do not feel their need of a Physician, and therefore will not apply to Him and put themselves under His care. This is the answer of Christ to the proud, cavilling Pharisees who censured his free conversation with publicans and sinners at an entertainment which Matthew had prepared for Him.

The publicans were a sort of custom-house officers among the Jews, appointed by the Romans, whose tributaries they then were, to collect the duties imposed by the Government. They were generally persons of bad morals; and particularly given to rapine and extortion in raising the taxes. On this account they were particularly hated by the Jews – especially by the strict sect of the Pharisees. Their very office would have rendered them odious, even though

they had behaved well in it, for it was a public badge of the slavery of the Jews to the Romans, which, to a people so proud and so fond of liberty as the Jews, was a mortification they could not patiently bear. The publicans were therefore objects of general contempt and abhorrence, as an abandoned sort of men; and the Jews – particularly the rigid and haughty Pharisees – held no conversation with them but kept them at a distance, as though they had been excommunicated. Hence says Christ concerning one excommunicated by the Church for incorrigible wickedness, “Let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican” – (Matthew 18:17). That is, “have no intercourse with him, but treat him as the Jews do the publicans.”

The compassionate Jesus, who came “to seek and save that which was lost,” did not conduct Himself towards those outcasts upon the rigid principles of the Pharisees. They held them in such contempt that they did not labour to instruct and reform them. But Jesus preached to them, conversed with them freely, used the most condescending, affable, and ingratiating measures to reform them, and called some of them to the honour of being His disciples. Of this number was Matthew, the author of this history. Once an abandoned publican, afterwards a disciple, an apostle, and one of the four evangelists whose writings have diffused the vital savour of the name of Jesus through all ages and countries. O! the condescension, the freeness, the efficacy of the grace of Christ! It can make a publican an apostle, an abhorred outcast the favourite of heaven and the companion of angels.

What abundant encouragement does this give to the most abandoned sinner among you to turn unto the Lord! Let publicans and sinners despair of mercy and salvation if they continue in their present condition; but if they arise and follow Jesus at His call and become His humble, teachable disciples, they need not despair. Nay; they may rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and be assured they shall be admitted into the kingdom of God when the self-righteous children of the kingdom are shut out.

When Matthew had embraced the call, he made a feast for his new Master, that he might show his respect and gratitude to Him, and that he might let his brother publicans and old companions have an opportunity of conversing with Him and receiving His instructions. The blessed Jesus, who was always ready to embrace every opportunity of doing good, whatever popular odium it might expose Him to, cheerfully complies with Matthew’s invitation, and mingles with a crowd of publicans at his table. Like a physician, He employs Himself among the sick and dying, and not among the healthy and gay. The conversation of sinners could not be agreeable to Him. To converse with His Father and the holy angels would have been more pleasing to His holy soul, but if by conversing with sinners in our guilty world, He can but save the perishing creatures, He cheerfully submits to the self-denial, and even rejoices in it, just as a compassionate physician, though he has no pleasure in the melancholy mansions of sickness, yet frequents them that he may relieve the distressed.

The Pharisees now thought they had a good handle to raise popular clamour against Christ, and therefore cavil at these freedoms as though they had been profane, and inconsistent with the character of the Messiah, or even of a prophet. If He claimed this character, they thought it much more becoming Him to keep company with them than with profligate publicans. Hence, to stumble and perplex His disciples, they come to them and ask, “Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?” The disciples were not as yet endowed with that mouth and wisdom which all their enemies could not withstand, and therefore Jesus answers them, and takes upon Himself His own defence: “The whole,” says He, “have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.” Some suppose that by “the whole” Christ means those that were really whole, or that were not so infected with the disease of sin as to stand in need of Him as a Physician. When such persons can be found among the sons of men, this exposition will appear plausible. But since we know that all have sinned and stand in need of Christ as a Saviour, it is much more reasonable to suppose that, by “the whole” Christ means those that imagined themselves whole, though really languishing with the deadly disease of

sin. As if He had said, "I come unto the world under the character of a physician for sick souls. Such these despised publicans are, and therefore these are the persons I have to deal with, and these are most likely to make application to me. But as for yourselves, you think you are righteous; you think you are not so far gone with the disease of sin as to need a Physician sent down from heaven to heal you. While you continue to entertain this high opinion of yourselves, I have no business with you as a Physician. I must therefore rather choose to converse with these sinners, who now begin to see themselves such, and to be sensible of their need of a Physician." Thus, as I observed, Jesus here vindicates His conduct even upon the principles of the Pharisees themselves. It was not now to His purpose to dispute the high opinion they had of themselves. But when it was proper, He faithfully exposes their true character as proud, self-righteous hypocrites, and denounces the most terrible woes against them.

To give a fuller view of this text, and to adapt it to practical purposes, I intend to describe the character of those that are whole and of those that are sick, in the senses here intended.

There are none of the sons of men who are really "whole." Their souls are all diseased; for all have sinned, and there is none righteous, no, not one. And perhaps there are none upon earth so proud and so ignorant of themselves as to affirm in so many words that they are whole, that is, perfectly righteous. Therefore by "the whole" cannot be meant either those who are really free from all sin or those who imagine themselves entirely free from it. It does not appear that even the proud Pharisees were capable of flattering themselves so far. But by "the whole" are meant those who are indeed guilty, depraved sinners, and who are ready to make a superficial profession in words that they are sinners, but continue secure and impenitent, insensible of their guilt, their corruption, their danger, and their need of a Saviour; that is, those who are really sick and dangerously ill, and yet are as easy, as unapprehensive of danger, as careless about applying to the Physician as if nothing ailed them. The disease is of a lethargic, stupefying nature, so that they are not sensible of it. It renders them delirious, so that they think themselves well when the symptoms of death are strong upon them. What multitudes of such may we see in the world. The Word of God pronounces them dangerously ill; their friends may see the most deadly symptoms upon them; but, alas! they are insensible of their own case. Jesus, the divine Physician, warns them of their danger, offers them His help, and prescribes to them the infallible means of recovery; but they disregard His warnings, neglect His gracious offer, and refuse to submit to His prescriptions. This is the general character of those that are "whole" in the sense of my text.

By "the sick" are meant those who, like the former, are really guilty, corrupt sinners in extreme need of a Saviour, and who readily confess they are such. But here lies the difference. They are not only such in reality, and they not only acknowledge that they are such, but they are *deeply sensible of it*; they are tenderly affected with their case; their temper and conduct, their thoughts of themselves and of Jesus Christ, their designs and endeavours, are such as are natural to a soul sensibly sick of sin, and such as bear a resemblance to those of a person sick in body and using all means for a recovery. It is the characteristic of this class of sinners, not that they are less holy or in more danger than others, but that they are more sensible of their condition and more solicitous and laborious about deliverance. They feel themselves disordered; they put themselves under the care of Jesus, the only Physician of souls; they submit to His prescriptions, and use all means for recovery to soundness of mind from the deadly disease of sin. This is the general character of the sick in the sense of my text, but it is necessary I should descend to particulars.

The particular characters of the whole and sick, in contrast, are such as these: –

1. He that is whole has never had a clear, affecting sight and sense of sin, but he that is sick is fully convinced, and deeply sensible of it. The one has only a general, superficial, unaffecting conviction that he is a sinner, that he has not been so good as he should have

been, that his heart is somewhat disordered, and especially that he has been guilty of sundry bad actions. But, alas! he neither sees his sinfulness in its full extent, nor is suitably affected with that little of it he sees. He does not clearly see the entire and universal corruption of his heart and the numberless principles and seeds of sin that are there, the blindness of his mind as to divine things, the secret disaffection of his heart towards God and holiness, the carnality of his mind, and his lukewarmness and formality in the duties of religion. He may have a transient glance – a superficial view – of these things, but he has not a deep, settled conviction of them, nor is he suitably affected with what he knows of his own sinfulness. It does not appear to him such a mighty matter to have such a disordered heart towards God, to have dropped a forbidden word now and then, or to have committed a few bad actions – few, I say, for so they appear to him, though repeated times and ways beyond number. Sin appears to him a small evil, and he has a thousand excuses to make for it. Hence he is as easy, as careless, as presumptuous in his hopes, as if he believed he did not really deserve punishment from a righteous God, and therefore was in no danger. Though the leprosy of sin spreads ever so wide, and breaks out into ever so many putrid and mortifying sores, yet he is easy and secure and insensible of the disease. Thus, like a man in health, he is unconcerned, and neither apprehends himself sick, nor uses the least means for his recovery. O! what multitudes of such are among us. They will confess themselves sinners with as little concern as if they were quite free from sin, or as if they thought there was little or no danger in it.

But is it so with the poor, sick sinner? O! no; he sees, he feels, that his whole head is sick and his whole heart faint, and that from the crown of the head even unto the sole of the foot there is nothing but wounds, bruises, and putrifying sores. He feels the plague of a hard, senseless heart, and the secret springs of wickedness within him. He feels that sin has enfeebled all his powers, and that he is no more able to exert them in religious endeavours than a sick man is to employ himself in active life. When he is awakened out of his security and his eyes are opened to see himself in a just light, he perceives the symptoms of spiritual death strong upon him. So clear are his views of his entire and universal depravity and imminent danger, that he is utterly astonished he was so blind as never to discover it before. Now, also, he has a deep sense of the evil of sin. He not only sees himself universally disordered, but he sees and feels the disorder to be deadly. Sin now appears to him the greatest evil upon earth, or even in hell; as worthy of the severest vengeance from a righteous God; as contrary to the divine purity; as a base, ungrateful violation of the most strong and endearing obligations; as destructive to the soul, not only according to the penalty of the divine law, but in its own native tendency.

During the progress of the Christian life the believer feels himself recovering a little, though very slowly, while he follows the prescriptions of his divine Physician and receives healing influences from Him. He feels his enfeebled soul gathering a little strength, his vitiated taste gradually corrected, and the welcome symptoms of returning health. But O! he is sensibly sick still. The cure is not complete in this world, but the remains of his old disorder hang upon him all his life, and he is subject to many dangerous relapses in which it gathers new strength, and he is often afraid it is incurable.

2. They that are whole are generally easy and secure and unapprehensive of danger, but the sick soul is alarmed and anxious, and cannot be easy till it perceives some appearance of recovery.

He that is whole is benumbed with a stupid insensibility, but he that is sick is in pain from the disease of sin which he sensibly feels. The one can walk about merry and thoughtless, with a hard, depraved heart within him; the other is perpetually uneasy, and, like a sick man, has no taste for anything while he feels such a heart within him. If the one is anxious, it is with some worldly care; if the other is anxious, it is chiefly for the recovery of his dying soul. The one can give himself up to business or pleasure or idleness, as a man in health and at

ease; the other is apprehensive that his soul is in great danger. He is alarmed with the deadly consequences of sin, as it exposes him to the wrath of God, the loss of heaven, and all the miseries of hell. But this is not all that distresses him; he considers sin in itself as a loathsome disease, and is pained with its present effects upon him. As a sick man is not only alarmed at the consequence of his disease, namely, death, but considers it as a present pain, and as depriving him of the present comforts of life, so the sick soul feels sin as a loathsome, painful disease that now deprives it of the exalted pleasures of religion, and renders it incapable of serving its God with vigour and life. This indisposition of soul for the exercises of religion is in itself a constant uneasiness to him who is spiritually sick. How strongly does Paul represent the case when he cries out, "O, wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" – (Romans 7:24). This is the character of the soul sick of sin. But he that is whole hath little or no uneasiness upon this account. If he is ashamed at all, it is with the consequence of sin; he fears nothing but the punishment. As for the disease itself, it is so far from giving him uneasiness that he is fond of it, and unwilling to part with it. It affords him sensations of pleasure rather than of pain, and he rather dreads a recovery than the continuance of the disorder. That holiness which is the health of the soul is disagreeable to him, and he would rather continue languishing than recover. May be you can easily distinguish between sickness and health of body, and you are very ready to do it. And will you not inquire what state your souls are in – whether they are sensible of their sickness and in a way of recovery; or whether they are insensible of their danger, and unsolicitous about their recovery? May you examine yourselves in these particulars.

3. They that are whole are unwilling to apply to a physician or to follow his prescriptions, but to the sick a physician is most welcome, and they will submit to his directions, however self-denying and mortifying. This is the point my text has particularly in view, and therefore we must take particular notice of it.

They that are in health have no regard to a physician as such; they neither send for him, nor will they accept of his help if offered gratis; they look upon the best of medicines with neglect, as of no use or importance to them; the prescriptions proper to the sick they hear with indifference, as not being concerned. Thus it is with thousands who imagine themselves whole in spirit. The Lord Jesus exhibits Himself to the sons of men under the character of a physician. The gospel makes a free offer of His assistance to all sick souls that will freely accept it, and what reception does He generally meet with? Why, multitudes neglect Him as though they had no need of Him. They may indeed pay Him the compliment of professing His religion because it happened to be the religion of their fathers and their country, but they have no eager desires after Him; they are not in earnest and laborious to obtain His assistance; they do not invite Him with the most affectionate entreaties to undertake their case; they do not beg and cry for relief from Him like blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:47), "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on us." In short, whatever regard they may possess for Him, they are not deeply sensible of their absolute need of Him; they are not feelingly affected towards Him as towards a being with whom they have the nearest personal concern – a concern of the utmost importance – and the reason is, they are whole in their own apprehensions; or if they feel some qualms of conscience – some fits of painful remorse – they soon heal their own hurt slightly, crying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. They make a medicine of their own prayers, tears, repentance, and religious endeavours, and with this they hope to heal themselves. Thus Jesus is neglected. They give Him the name of a Saviour, but in reality they look to themselves for a cure. How is the gospel that makes the offer of relief from this heavenly Physician generally received in the world? It is neglected as the offer of superfluous help. It is heard with that indifference with which men in health attend to the prescription of a physician to the sick, in which they have no immediate concern. But this neglected gospel is the only effectual means for healing your dying souls.

Then what means the inattention with which it is heard? What means the general neglect with which it is treated? But thus it is all around us.

Again, Jesus prescribes to the sons of men the only means of their recovery. Particularly He enjoins them no more to drink poison, that is, no more to indulge themselves in sin, which is, in its own nature, the most deadly poison to the soul. This divine Physician likewise requires them to use the means of grace instituted in the gospel, to meditate upon their condition, and obtain a deep sense of their disorder, to read and hear the Word with solemn attention and self-application, to pray with frequency and importunity. These are His prescriptions to all that would recover under His hands. But how few observe them in earnest. A general neglect of the means of grace prevails, or they are attended upon with carelessness, which is equally pernicious. Christ also enjoins them to submit to Him as their Physician, to flatter themselves no longer that they can heal themselves by means within their own power, but to apply His blood as the only healing balm to their wounded souls. But, alas, they disregard this grand prescription; they will not submit to Him, but, like an obstinate patient, will have their own way, though eternal death should be the consequence.

But this is not the case of the sinner spiritually sick. He will do anything – he will submit to anything – if it may but save him from the mortal disease of sin. How ardently does he long after Jesus! With what willingness does he put himself under His care! With what joy and gratitude does he hear the offer of free salvation in the gospel, and how dear is the gospel to his heart on this account! With what anxiety does he inquire whether he is upon the recovery or not! With what pleasure does he discover the signs of returning health – to feel a little eager appetite for spiritual food, to feel a little spiritual life in religious exercises, to feel himself able to run in the way of God’s commandments, to feel the principles of sin weakened within him. How willingly does he submit to the prescriptions of his Physician, and attend upon the means of grace, however disagreeable to a carnal mind! He makes the law of God the rule of his conduct. He guards against relapses, and keeps out of the way of temptation as far as possible. But those that think their souls healthy and vigorous boast of their strength and what mighty things they can do in religion. As for him, he feels his weakness; he feels he can do nothing aright but as he receives daily strength from Christ. He feels himself every day troubled with some disorder or other, therefore he is daily sensible of his need of the Physician, and makes daily application to Him. He does not grudge to take time from his other affairs that he may use means for the recovery of his soul. For if he lose his soul, what would the whole world profit him? In short, the sick sinner is a tender, frail creature, entirely dependent upon Christ, and every day taking means from Him, anxious for his recovery, and willing to submit to anything that may promote it. This is the man, in our Christian-despising world, that gives Jesus a most willing and welcome reception, and embraces His gospel as containing all his salvation and all his desire. May the number of the sick among us be daily increasing!

[November 1908]

(Concluded)

But, alas! amidst the full means of recovery, the generality die in their sins, and the great reason is, they will not be convinced of their danger nor be persuaded to apply to the Physician. How affecting a case is this, and what may render it the more so to us is that it is the case of some of us. Yes, though I am unwilling to harbour one hard thought of any of you, I cannot avoid concluding that there are some – I am afraid, many – souls in this assembly who are not sensible of their dangerous disease and their need of Christ as a Physician, and therefore are in danger of perishing without Him. Sin, like a strong dose of opium, has laid you asleep, and you feel easy and whole-hearted, as if nothing ailed you, when the symptoms of death are strong upon you. We can weep and lament over the sick-bed of a dying friend,

and we even drop our tears after him into the grave, but shall we drop no tears this day over dying souls that are so numerous among us? O, that our head were waters and our eyes a fountain of tears, that we might “weep day and night over the slain of the daughter of my people.” Ye secure and whole-hearted sinners, must it not terrify you to think that Jesus Christ, the only Physician, gives you up? You see in my text He looks upon you as persons that He has no business with. He had rather converse with publicans and sinners than with you, as having more hopes of success among them. Let publicans and sinners take the hint, and be encouraged to apply to Jesus. Come, ye profligate and libertines, drunkards, swearers, whoremongers; come, sinners of the most abandoned character, apply to this Physician. He is willing to heal you; He offers you healing. “Wilt thou be made whole?” is His question to you this day. He is also perfectly able – able to save to the uttermost, however inveterate your disease may be. If the children of the kingdom shut themselves out, if self-righteous Pharisees reject this Physician and die in their sin, do you come in, put yourselves under His care, submit to His prescriptions, and you shall yet live and be restored to perfect health and eternal

life. Your being sick of sin is a necessary qualification to render you His patients; they are such He loves to converse with, and they are only such who are recovered by Him. Therefore, this day give yourselves up to Him as His willing patients. Cry to Him, “Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed.”

I shall conclude my subject by giving answers from it to some questions that may arise in your minds on this occasion.

What is the reason that so many lie in such a dead security around us? Whence is it there is so much sin, and so little fear of punishment? Whence is it that men will entertain such hopes of heaven upon such slight evidences, or rather, with the full evidence of the Word of God against them? The reason is, they are whole in their own imagination: they think themselves well, and therefore apprehend no danger, but lie in a dead, inactive sleep.

What is the reason that so many neglect the means of grace in public and private? Whence is it that there are so many prayerless families as a piece of useless lumber? Why is the house of God so thinly frequented in many places, and the table of the Lord almost deserted? Why is Christian conversation so unfashionable? And why do we hear so few inquiries from sinners, what they shall do to be saved? The reason is, they imagine themselves well: they are whole-hearted, and therefore it is no wonder they neglect the means of recovery. The only method to bring them to use those means in earnest is to make them sensible of their dangerous disease. And may the Lord enable us to use all proper means with them for this end, and may divine grace render them effectual!

Would you know what is the reason that the blessed Jesus – the most glorious and benevolent person that ever appeared in our world – is so generally neglected? Why is His love forgotten by those very persons for whom He shed His blood? Why are there not more longings and cries for Him? Why is not a Saviour, an almighty and complete Saviour, more sought after by perishing sinners? Why is His name of so little importance among them? How comes it to pass that He may continue for months, for years, for scores of years, offering salvation to them, entreating, commanding, and persuading them to accept, and warning them of the dreadful ruin they will bring on themselves by rejecting it? Whence is it that, after all, He is despised and rejected of men, and that but very few will give Him a suitable reception? Whence is this shocking conduct in reasonable creatures? It is the same reason still – they are whole-hearted, and do not feel themselves dangerously ill; and how then can they be solicitous about a physician?

Would you know why so many fools make a mock of sin, why they can go on impenitent in it, apprehending little or no danger from it; why they are every day sinning, and every day merry, thoughtless, and gay; why they can live and delight in sin, which God hates and which

He has threatened with such heavy vengeance? Whence is it that, for the recovery of their mortal bodies, men will submit to the most self-denying regimen, take the most nauseous draughts, and be at great pains and expenses, whilst for their souls they will take no pains, use no means, deny themselves in no gratification? What is the reason of this? It is the same reason still – they do not feel the least sickness of their souls, but imagine themselves well, and to have no need of the divine Physician or His prescriptions.

Would you know why so many hate faithful preaching, and resent it if any means are used for their recovery? It is because they imagine themselves well, and such do not like to be treated with the importunities of a physician, nor to have disagreeable medicines forced upon them. O, were they but sensible of their condition, they would willingly submit to have their wounds probed and their sores ripped up in order to an effectual cure.

Some of you, perhaps, have wondered why you see poor, mourning creatures here and there that cannot live as you do – thoughtless, careless, unaffected. You ascribe it perhaps to melancholy, to preciseness, to hypocrisy, or an affectation of singularity. But I will tell you the true reason. They are sick; they feel themselves sick; whereas you imagine yourselves well; and you cannot wonder that the sick and the healthy should behave in a different manner.

Why do they not neglect Jesus Christ as you do? It is because they are sick – heart sick – and therefore must long and cry for the Physician of their souls. Why do they not indulge themselves in sin as you do? It is because they are sick of it; they see it to be a mortal poison, and they cannot be easy while they feel it working through their frame. Why do they use the means with so much earnestness? Why do they pray, and hear and attend upon every religious ordinance with so much zeal and solicitude? Why can they not, like you, attend upon them in a careless, formal manner, or entirely neglect them? The reason is, they are sick – heart sick – and they are using these means for their recovery. And did you view yourselves in the same just light, you would use them too. Yes, you would be as strict, as earnest, as laborious as any of them. Why do they not, like you, abandon themselves, and devote all their time to some worldly pursuit? It is because they are sick, and must take time for the use of means for their recovery, whatever be omitted. Why are they so much afraid of temptation, and keep out of its way? It is because they are afraid of a relapse, and that sin, their old disease, will renew its strength. Whence are they so often filled with doubts and fears and anxious perplexities? It is because the symptoms of the disorder are doubtful, and they know not whether they are in a way of recovery or not. When they are satisfied on this point then they can rejoice, and that with a joy more noble than you are capable of.

And, poor sick souls, be of good cheer, you shall yet be healed. Yes, there is balm in Gilead; there is a Physician there. Jesus can heal you, and blessed be His name, He is as willing as He is able. Continue steadfast in the use of the means appointed for your recovery, and He will make them efficacious. Yes, these sick souls of yours shall yet be as healthy and vigorous as an angel, and you shall ere long be advanced to the region of immortal health, where the inhabitants no more say, “I am sick.” Do not think much of it that a disease so inveterate and mortal should be painful and difficult in the cure. The operation will not last long, and if it does but succeed, self-denial will be infinitely more than compensated.

The deep sense of your disorder is often discouraging to you; you are afraid it will at last prove mortal. But this very thing ought to encourage you. The persons that I cannot speak one comfortable word to are not of your character: they are the secure, whole-hearted sinners. But for you there is strong consolation – so strong that it may bear down all your fears before it. The sense of your disorder qualifies you for the Physician, and renders you proper objects of His care. The poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind, the broken-hearted, are the characters of the persons that He has to do with, and who are recovering under His hands. And are not

these your characters? They are indeed humbling and mortifying, but they are encouraging, as they prepare you for Christ's healing care.

But as for you, whole-hearted sinners, I must pronounce you lost and dead souls. Jesus Himself has declared that He has no business with such as you. And if He casts you off, what other physician can you employ? Alas! you will die in your sins – dreadful death! Better you had never been born, than die in your sins! O, therefore now labour to be sensible of your disorder while it is curable, for all that are not healed in this life are given up as incurable for ever. Now, apply to Christ as a Physician, for He is willing to undertake your case.

Of all divine institutions none is so peculiarly adapted to promote improvement in spiritual graces and comforts as the commemoration of the death of Christ at His table.

What, then, is the great desire of every real servant of God in this house? Is it not to have your hearts more inflamed with the love of God, and more devoted to His fear? Is not sin your greatest burden, and its remaining influence your greatest grief? Now, where can you have a more reasonable hope of getting your gracious dispositions strengthened, or your sins mortified, than at a Communion Table? Is it not expressly designed for your spiritual nourishment and growth in grace? What can more strengthen your faith in a dying Saviour than being allowed to look upon the signs of His broken body and His blood poured out? What can speak greater peace to the conscience than your being allowed and invited to receive Him explicitly: "This is my body broken for you"? What can more happily serve to kindle and inflame your love to God than the immediate contemplation of His infinite love? Where can you take such a hateful view of sin as at the Lord's Table, where you see it in the Saviour's sufferings? How can you give such a deadly wound to your strongest lusts as by nailing and fixing them to the Redeemer's Cross? What motive of future obedience equal to bearing about in your bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus? See what the apostle says (2 Corinthians 5:14) – "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead"; (Galatians 2:20) – "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." What remedy can you find for your own weakness like the all-sufficiency of Christ? "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Is it not well known, and do not believers at His Table – sensible of their own weakness and confident of their Saviour's power – get their feet upon the neck of their enemies and say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." They have here a complete remedy for their cases as well as their sins. As at the Lord's Table you lay hold of the covenant of grace, so there, if anywhere, you may see that it is "ordered in all things and sure." Your food and raiment, and all necessary provision, are contained in it, and Christ's body is the pledge. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" How gracious the promise, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of these things." "O taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." "He shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure." Deliverance from suffering is contained in it. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, "but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. "Strength and grace to suffer with patience are contained in it. "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." The sanctified use and improvement of suffering is contained in it. "And we know all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." "For which cause we faint

not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” The path of a Christian is sometimes thorny and difficult, and many of the weak and feeble of Christ’s flock are ready to sink and become heartless under a frowning Providence. But is not the Lord’s Table a place of refuge? And is it not matter of experience that they have found consolation there? Whatever their complaints have been – whether of sickness, or poverty, or loss of relations, or the slanders of their enemies – they have adored the sovereign will of God in them all. Nay, they have happily seen and confessed His wise and merciful purpose in them all. It was not without a view to his trials that the Psalmist, in the forty-third Psalm, desires to go unto the altar of God – unto God, his exceeding joy. And in the following verse he expresses himself, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”

I shall now conclude by desiring you to use the language of the Psalmist in going unto God, who says in the third verse of this Psalm, “O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.” In order to raise and elevate your minds, to fix and engage your unsettled hearts, apply to God, who hath the hearts of all men in His hand, that He would dispose you for His service, that He would shed abroad His love in your hearts, and make you joyful in His house of prayer. And my earnest prayer to God for you is that He would at this time convert every whole-hearted and self-righteous sinner in this assembly, pull off the mask of hypocrites, and show them their own likeness; that He would make it a joyful Communion to many of you, and a profitable Communion to all. Amen.

I shall now leave the matter with you after making this remark, that in vain do His enemies oppose Him, in vain do sinners despise Him. He is getting Him a name by the preaching of the gospel. It is still serving its purpose for the calling and confirmation of the vessels of mercy, for aggravating the guilt and increasing the condemnation of the obstinate and disobedient. “And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” – (Luke 20:17,18).

[December 1908]

A Sermon.

By the REV. JOHN R. MACKAY, M.A., Inverness.

Preached before the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church, met in St. Jude’s Hall,
Glasgow, on 10th November, 1908.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” – John 3:16.

Our text, as Luther has said, is a little Bible in itself. In our exposition, we shall regard the text as a chain, by means of which poor sinners may become bound in the bundle of life with the Lord their God. A chain is made up of links, and the links of this chain are four in number. These are: –

- I. – The source of the salvation of sinners of mankind;
- II. – The way in which this salvation was procured;
- III. – The greatness of the salvation; and
- IV. – The manner in which sinners become interested in this salvation.

I – *The source of the salvation of sinners is God's love to the world.*

In regard to those who ultimately perish, the Scriptures everywhere represent them as the proper cause of their own ruin. "The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." As that ruin comes from God upon sinners, we must, with the Scriptures before us, conclude that its source in God is His avenging justice. It is because to Him belong vengeance and recompense that their foot slides in due time (Deuteronomy 32:35). But the Scriptures nowhere teach that sinners are the proper cause of their own salvation. The source and, indeed, cause of the salvation of as many of the race as escape perishing, is God's love. So is the matter represented to us in the words of our text: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

This love, which is the spring and proper cause of the salvation of sinners, is a love that, as being the love of God, is like God Himself – infinite in its nature. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His thoughts of love towards poor sinners higher than our thoughts. It is a love which passeth knowledge. That, we may say, is the manner in which Scripture generally speaks of the source or origin of the salvation of sinners. And being infinite in its nature, it is comparatively but little that we can really comprehend of it. Yet, from another point of view, it may be held that not a little concerning this love may be learned if we consider *its object*. The object of that love which is the spring of man's salvation, is "the world." From this we gather: –

(1) That this love is a pitying love. The world is here viewed as an undeserving – yea, an ill-deserving – world, a world of sinners. So the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, puts it elsewhere: "He commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Our text teaches that it was not God's purpose, in virtue of the gospel, to manifest the goodness of any creature, but rather to manifest His own goodness, seeing that He bestows such unspeakable favours upon creatures who deserved so ill at His hands. And, to use an illustration, just as a teacher, in giving demonstrations, makes use of a blackboard because the blackness of the board sets forth to better advantage the whiteness of the chalk he makes use of, so God, in order to make the nature of that pitying love which is the source of our salvation better understood, and to make its freeness more abundantly evident, set it not upon objects that were deserving of it, but upon creatures the most undeserving – a world that lay in wickedness.

(2) That this love is a large or comprehensive love. It is a love which embraced not the nation of the Jews only, but every nation under heaven.

We have often thought that this aspect of divine truth must have been to the Apostle John, the human author of the Gospel in which our text occurs, a source of profoundest comfort. He was, as to birth and upbringing, a Jew of the Jews. But as the Scriptures themselves – corroborating the consentient testimony of the ancient Church – teach us, his lot, in his riper years, was to have had his mission assigned him in Asia Minor, to have been placed among a people who but recently had been aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise. The case having been so with him, it must have been with

profoundest gratitude that he recalled so many of our Lord's utterances in the days of His flesh, which intimated that His saving operations were not to be limited to the Jewish nation, but were to embrace every nation and people under the sun. As the labours of his riper years were among a people not by fleshly descent of the seed of Abraham, he would, with great comfort, recall that it was not for sinners of the Jews only that the good Shepherd laid down His life, but that His were other sheep also which were not of that fold, and that, by His death, them also He must bring in, so that there should be but "one fold and one shepherd." It would be with like gratitude that he recalled the promise that, when the Holy Ghost should come in New Testament fulness, they were not sinners of the Jews only who were to be the subjects of His saving grace, but that He was to convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. And in like manner, we believe that it was with unspeakable comfort the Apostle John recalled the words of our text, declaring that the love of the Father embraced not sinners of the Jews only, but had as its objects the world. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish; but have everlasting life." The Apostle John, although removed so far from his native land, would still feel at home as he recalled the circumstance that his labours – if not among a people who were Jews by nature – were, notwithstanding, among a people who were the objects of the Father's love, a people for whom Christ died, a people among whom the Holy Spirit was carrying on His saving operations. And if the Apostle, who was not by nature a sinner of the Gentiles, dwelt thankfully upon this aspect of divine truth, as the place the doctrine in question obtains in his writings clearly shows, how much greater cause of thankfulness have we, who are not of the Jewish race by nature, but sinners of the Gentiles, that the grace of God should embrace us in its ambit?

(3) That this love is a love which is fruitful in results. The fact of "the world" being said to be the object of that love which is the source or spring of man's salvation, suggests how marvellous the ultimate success of Christ's cause is to be. For it implies, we believe, that at the last day it will appear that Christ was worthy not only of the name, "Saviour," but also of the title, "Saviour of the world." And just as when one views the comparative smallness of Denmark and the greatness of Britain, King Edward VII. may be said to have honoured the whole Court of Denmark in taking his bride from among them, so God may be said to have honoured the whole human race in taking from among them a bride, even the Church, for His Son, Jesus Christ.

(4) But this infinite love of God, which is the source of the salvation of sinners, as it is, in relation to its objects, a pitying and comprehensive and marvellously fruitful love, so it is, on the part of God, a love which is self-denying. For as truly as it was a self-denying act on the part of the Son to have made Himself of no reputation, in assuming the form of a servant, so truly was it equally a self-denying act on the part of the Father when He sent His Son into the world to be the Saviour of that which was lost. But this brings us to the second link in our chain.

II. – *The way in which the salvation of sinners was procured.*

How was the salvation of sinners procured? It was by an infinitely marvellous display of that very love which is the source of their salvation. God gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. In this connection, then, we have to attend to the marvellousness of the manifestation of divine love, which is made through Christ crucified, and also to the manner in which this manifestation of love procures the salvation of the lost.

(1) Consider then in connection with the former of these considerations that the Son given is the only begotten Son of God. Other sons, indeed, God had. For example, angels appear to be called His sons in Job 38:7; and an innumerable number of redeemed sinners of

mankind become sons in virtue of adoption. But not one of these is, in this high sense, a begotten son. Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father; that is to say, Christ is a Son, the only Son who has the Father's very nature, and that not in the sense of having part of the whole, but in the sense of having the same identical, infinite, divine nature with the Father. Nor is it an unwarranted, but well grounded conclusion, that the Father beholds His own infinite nature in the Person of this Son, and loves it infinitely in that Person. The Word that was and is in eternal, ineffable fellowship with God, was and is Himself God; one with the Father "in the incomprehensible unity of the Godhead," as the late Dr. Charles Brown, of Edinburgh, was so fond of putting it. That, we take it, is the force of the expression "only begotten," viz.: – that to Christ appertained the Father's own nature, a circumstance that as to His essential nature raises Him infinitely above all creatures, and a circumstance which implies that Christ was and ever is the object of the Father's necessary, as well as infinite love.

(2) But, still further, we have to remember what indeed the Gospel everywhere lays so great emphasis upon, that this Son, the object of the Father's ineffable love, did not become in a less degree the object of His love, when, in order to carry out the Father's own will, the Son assumed a nature which was not His from everlasting, and thus entered upon a state of poverty and of humiliation. Christ was none the less the Son of God because, being made of a woman, He became man. The Son of God incarnate is still the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16), His own Son (Romans 8:32); and as He was none the less the Son of God when, through the incarnation, He became what He had not been – so, equally, He was none the less the object of the Father's ineffable regard and love as the Son of God incarnate, than He had been the object of that love ere yet the incarnation had taken place, in the Father's bosom, with no nature His but the divine. It was touching the incarnate Son that the voice was heard at Jordan: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It was touching the same incarnate Son that the voice from the excellent glory, on the mount of transfiguration, was proclaimed: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him." And it was through the giving of this beloved Son that the Father gave perfect expression to His own pitying love towards sinners, and it was through that manifestation of pitying love that the salvation of sinners was procured.

What is meant by "giving" the Son? God may be said to give the Son in a twofold way, and although it is to the former of these ways that our text immediately looks, yet the second manner of giving is implicit in our text, and must be attended to in expounding the mind of the Spirit in this portion of His word.

(1) First of all, the Father gave the Son when, in the fulness of time, He sent Him into this world. To whom did He give Him? He gave Him doubtless on behalf of sinners, and, because of that, He may be said to have given Him to sinners when He sent Him into the world. But although Christ was thus given on behalf of sinners, it was really to Himself that He gave Him. And why to Himself? In order to satisfy His justice, and in order that – His justice being satisfied – it should be He, whose gracious countenance would be the salvation of lost sinners. But, one may ask, Is it clearly revealed that God, in sending His Son into the world, gave Him to Himself, gave Him, in other words, in order to satisfy His own justice? Unquestionably it is so revealed. For Christ, in coming into the world and in being obedient unto death, was but carrying out the Father's will and purpose; so that, in that sense, what the Son did the Father did also. But that Christ gave Himself to God is expressly and frequently taught us in the word of inspiration. Did He not give Himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour? (Ephesians 5:2). Did He not, according to Hebrews 9:14, offer Himself through the Eternal Spirit without spot to God? There can be no question that Christ's main end in coming into the world, His main end in descending into the valley of humiliation, until He reached the Cross, was that He might give Himself as a sacrifice unto

God. And it was just in that sense and for that main end that the Father gave His Son, gave Him to be lifted up, the anti-type of that brazen serpent which Moses erected upon a pole in the wilderness. And, truly, it was a fearful thing for the Son to have been given in this sense. But we must be on our guard against imagining for a moment that because God gave Christ to His own avenging justice, that, therefore, the sufferings of the Son of God, when thus given, were a matter of indifference to the Father who gave Him. It is just as we realise that when He bruised Him, He was still the object of His infinite affection, the object of a love which, although free, was necessary, that we can have any apprehension of the proof given of God's love to sinners in the death of Christ. The cries of the young ravens when hungry are not a matter of indifference to God. How infinitely more could it not have been a matter of indifference to Him when it was His own Son, the only begotten Son, who offered up to Him prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears? Nay, must we not say that if, according to Jeremiah 31:18-20, when He regards the pangs of a sinner whom He hath rebuked for his sins, and who, in consequence, lays his sins to heart, God's bowels are moved for such an one, how infinitely more is the language applicable to the state of mind in which He must have heard the cry of the only begotten Son when, having been made a curse, He cried, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The giving of the Son of God, to which our text primarily refers, was so far from being a matter of indifference to God that it was through it God gave perfect expression to His infinite self-denying love, and through this giving His pitying love is felt upon Calvary in its noon-day heat. And, moreover, this was a wise giving on the part of God, for by giving His Son to Himself, even to His avenging justice, He realised a basis in righteousness whereby He is just, in the sense of giving each his own, especially in the sense of giving to God, the Judge of the whole earth, His own, when He justifies those that believe upon Jesus. In this way it is seen that He procured the salvation of sinners by an infinite manifestation of pitying, self-denying love.

But (2) in order that God's purpose in giving His Son to His own avenging justice in the days of that Son's flesh, might be accomplished, it is necessary that there should be another manner of giving, that is to say, it is necessary that God who, in sending His Son into this world gave Him to Himself, should through a preached Gospel give Him to sinners. This He does. For in the offer of the Gospel, Christ Jesus is, according to Galatians 3:1, evidently set forth before the eyes of sinners, crucified among them. The testimony of a preached Gospel is that God hath given to us sinners, eternal life, and that life is in His Son. Sinners as such have through the Gospel, a warrant which must not be questioned, to appropriate Jesus Christ for salvation as their own. No other but sinners have this warrant, for Christ did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He came to save that which was lost; and if we can prove ourselves sinners, no creature in heaven, earth, or hell can legitimately call in question our warrant to appropriate the Son of God, the satisfier of divine justice, as our own.

III. – But how great is that salvation which God through the giving of His Son procured for sinners? They are saved from perishing, and they are put in possession of eternal life. That is an awful word, perishing, when it is spoken in regard of creatures who are destined to have a self-conscious existence, not only after they have drawn the last breath upon this earth, but even after the great day of judgment is past – who are destined, in a word, to enter upon an eternal state. The devil, who is a murderer from the beginning, only then realises his full wish, when that state proves for sinners of the human race a lost state. Yet apart from the intervention of the Son of God, it is certain that the portion of the whole human race must have been with the devil and his angels. Do not the words of our text clearly imply that, if no Saviour had been provided, the whole human race would have miserably and eternally perished; that those, who by believing upon the Son of God are saved from perishing, would, if they had not thus believed upon Him, have inevitably perished; and that those who do not believe upon the Son of God will certainly for ever sink in endless despair? For we through

sinning against God lost that favour with which God regarded us in our first creation, and we procured for ourselves God's intolerable wrath. Now, herein is seen the greatness of the salvation which God procured through the death of His Son. Christ, through His blood and righteousness, not only turned away the intolerable never-ending wrath which we procured for ourselves, but also inasmuch as His work was the condition of God's countenance being lifted upon us, procured for us a favour which is better than natural life, which indeed from its depth and enduringness is worthy the name, eternal life. We opened hell for ourselves, and we closed heaven against ourselves. But Christ opened heaven – the heaven that we had shut against ourselves – opened it, we say, for us, and the hell that we had opened for ourselves, He closed against us, achieving the opening of the former and the closing of the latter in such a sure way that His gracious work for us can never be reversed – whilst, blessed be His name, the opening of hell and the closing of heaven which we, through our wicked works, achieved, is, through grace, reversible upon earth.

IV. – This brings us to say a word in the last place in answer to the question, “How may sinners become interested in this much needed and glorious salvation?” Our Lord's answer is that it is by faith in Him who, on behalf of poor sinners turned away the avenging wrath of God, and procured for sinners a favour which is better than life, in which indeed true life lies. It is by faith in Him who must needs have been given, in order that these blessings might be procured, and in the thus giving of whom the pitying infinite grace of God came to its rights, that we are saved.

When the Israelites were bitten of fiery serpents, and God had ordered that a serpent of brass should be erected upon a pole, there was one condition upon which alone the wounded of Israel got good of the provision of God in the brazen serpent. The bitten of the serpents must look upon the serpent of brass; in no other way could they benefit by it but by attending to this. But as God could not lie, neither could they who looked, die of the wounds inflicted by the serpents. And similarly in regard to sinners and the Gospel. Sinners in yielding to the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience have wounded themselves with a wound which, if not attended to, must end in the second death, while in regard to God's provision for sinners so wounded, namely, Jesus Christ and Him crucified, it matters not what we do, if we do not believe in the only begotten Son of God, crucified for us; we shall have no lasting benefit through this provision; but if, on the other hand, we fall in with this way, as God cannot lie, we cannot be lost, nor fail of being put in possession of eternal glory.

It is a great matter in this concern that the object of faith be understood. “The Lord Christ,” says a scribe well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, “in the work of His mediation, as the ordinance of God for the recovery and salvation of lost sinners, is the proper adequate object of justifying faith.” It is this object which we have sought, however feebly, to set before ourselves and you in this discourse.

The faith to which we are called in order to our eternal salvation is essentially trust in the one foundation laid for the poor in Zion. This trust is wrought in the heart of sinners through that Holy Spirit, the indispensibleness of whose new creative work, Christ insists upon in the beginning of that discourse with Nicodemus of which our text forms a part, even that Holy Spirit whom Christ by the work which He finished upon Calvary procured for sinners. The warrant for our exercising, as sinners, self-condemned, this trust is God's giving this Mediator to sinners as such in the offer of the Gospel; and we believe no one ever fully realised how freely God gives His Son to sinners in the Gospel. This faith, whereby we become interested in the salvation of God, may indeed be considered as a new, or spiritual eyesight, a new, or spiritual hearing, but it is, as we have said, in its essential act, trust, or confidence.

Is it not a matter of profoundest thankfulness that God requires of us in order to our being saved only that we should be heartily shut up to His own way of saving sinners through

Christ crucified, yea, so shut up to this way, as that we should renounce every other, especially the way of having some dependence upon ourselves as the authors of our own salvation? May the Lord bless to us His word!

[January 1909]

A Sermon.

By the late REV. CHRISTOPHER MUNRO.

Preached at Strathy on the 28th July, 1873.

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way;
and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” – Isaiah 53:6.

In this chapter the prophet evidently speaks of Christ, of whom Moses, the prophets, and psalmists wrote. The revelation given them of Christ served two important purposes, namely, to foretell His advent and to preach Him, as the only name whereby sinners can be saved, to the Old Testament Church. And in no portion of the Old Testament Scriptures is Christ more clearly revealed, as the way of salvation, than in this chapter. In the verse now read as a text we have, in the form of confession made by the Church or by a believer, two fundamental truths of the Bible laid down, to which I would, for the present, endeavour to direct your attention, namely, man's fall and the divine means for his recovery; and then I shall observe the belief expressed by the Church concerning both these doctrines; and lastly conclude.

I. – Man’s fall is taught here in figurative language that may be understood by men in all ages and countries, for what it is for sheep to go astray is either known from experience or may be easily understood by individuals having no practical knowledge of the habits of these well-known creatures. When sheep go astray they wander away from their accustomed walks, and have not the sagacity to return. Man fell by sin from his state of innocency, holiness, and communion or favour with God; and as he fell, so all his posterity, descending by ordinary generation from him, fell with him, and therefore they all come into the world without God’s image, which consisted in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures. This was a great fall, or going astray far away. The change was a very great one, something like the fall of Lucifer, the son of the morning; like the fall of a star from heaven – the star that became worm-wood; for man’s peace and love and happiness were lost, and his state turned into misery. But, instead of seeking to return, man of himself continues to depart. He has no understanding to seek after God; he has no sense to see and understand his misery and wretchedness, nor to appreciate the good of which he is called by God to make choice.

All are here said to have gone astray, each one his own way. Men’s characters differ in various points, and to one man another may seem very different from a third. One may be discreet, sober, amiable, and temperate; the other may be in all respects the very opposite. But, according to this passage, each is astray, though on different ways. It was the first man’s own choice to go astray, and in committing sin, everyone, as long as he is in his natural state, does this of his own will. He willingly shuts out the knowledge and fear of God; he willingly occupies his time and talents in the service of sin, that is, in disobeying God, in refusing to turn unto Him, and in setting his heart on the lust of the eye, of the flesh, and on the pride of life. In heart, all, whatever be their character outwardly, have forsaken God, love Him not, hate Him, and are opposed to His glory.

In the lands of the Bible, sheep astray were exposed to various dangers. On the one hand there were wild beasts, on the other thickets of thorn and quagmires, and also thieves and robbers ready to take them and slay them. The lion and the wolf were ready to tear and devour them; the thicket to entangle them and retain them to starve, or fall a prey to ravenous birds, or to the robber who would carry them into his den. In the same way men are exposed to death eternal, to the wrath of an offended God, and to the fury and malice of Satan, the destroyer. This then is the condition of all mankind – astray, foolish, having no understanding, and exposed to the greatest dangers, justly condemned under the wrath of God, and deceived and blinded by the god of this world.

II. – Let us consider the divine remedy provided for saving men as set before us in this text, and which is described in these words: “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Here there are two persons presented to our view – one called the Lord or Jehovah, and the other is the person principally spoken of in this and the foregoing chapters, and it is evident that this person is the second in the adorable Trinity, the person early spoken of to man in the Garden of Eden, of whom it was then said that the serpent should bruise his heel, and that He should bruise the serpent’s head; of whom also it was said to Abraham that all the families of the earth should be blessed in Him; and of whom the Spirit spoke through David in the twenty-second Psalm, as suffering the just for the unjust that He might have a seed in all ages. There is also a third party – some of those who had gone astray like sheep, who were sinners, who had iniquity in their hands, and who, according to strict justice, were appointed to die the death threatened in the covenant of works, but who were loved of God with an everlasting love. And, having thus loved them, He contrived a way in which to shew and exercise this love towards them consistently with His truth and justice. For, since He assigned them death as the wages of sin, this punishment must have been what could satisfy justice, and having said, “In the day thou eatest of the forbidden fruit thou shalt surely die,” His veracity, as well as His justice, demanded the execution of the sentence. As they could never

render complete satisfaction for sins, and so would have to be subject to death for ever, God, in order that they might be saved, elected His Son to be the head of another covenant – an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. God’s glory had to be vindicated; the law magnified and made honourable; the loved ones saved from death, and kept while left in the world; made the salt of the earth; the light of the world; witnesses for God; good soldiers in the fight of faith; and all brought to glory, perfected in holiness, without a spot or wrinkle. Being sinners and transgressors, there was no way in which they could be made free from condemnation but by getting a substitute for them; and as no mere creature was sufficient for this work, which a surety would have to do, it was arranged that the Son should take or assume their nature, unite it to His Person, and in this nature so united to Him take their law room, or, in the language of the Scripture, be made under the law. Though He knew no sin, yet was He made sin; He was made a curse. The transaction spoken of here refers to His taking their room in their nature, the Father laying on him all their iniquity, and He submitting to this being done. “I have laid help on a mighty one,” saith the Father. “I give myself for my sheep,” saith the Son. These the Father gave Him and He accepted them as given, and so submitted to bear their iniquities. The Father laid their iniquities on Him first by imputation, which imputation had no effect on Him, as Adam’s first sin imputed to his posterity has on them, because He was God-man, and also because they were not His surety, but He theirs. He stood in their room all His life-time on earth, even from His conception. We know not when, as a man, He became conscious of this, but He must have come to know it sometime during His days in the flesh, in which He grew up in knowledge and wisdom; and this knowledge, together with other circumstances, must be taken as the explanation of His being a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

But, again, He laid their iniquities on Him by inflicting on Him the punishment due to sin. Punishment is inflicted not to benefit the guilty, but to vindicate the law and satisfy the claims of justice. This may be seen in the case of one condemned to die: his crime is so aggravated that nothing less than his death is judged an adequate satisfaction to the laws of his country and of God. Here the improvement and benefit of the guilty is not taken into consideration at all; on the contrary, the maintenance of justice is looked upon as a far more paramount consideration than the life of a criminal. Christ’s sufferings, then, must be looked upon as punishment. In the case of a criminal of the character stated above, all means are taken to prevent his escape from the sentence passed: strongly built prisons are built, prisons whose cells are secured by massive doors, having bolts of iron to keep them shut; and mounted guards to watch over all. There is no heed given to prayers or petitions for reprieve or change of sentence. The time passes: the day arrives: the officers are in attendance: resistance on the part of the criminal is of no avail: he must submit to be bound and led away to the place of execution, and there suffer death in some violent way or other. This is punishment in the highest degree, and is inflicted, not under the impulse of passion nor from a spirit of revenge and malice, but from a sense of justice that is exercised in a calm, but resolute, dignified, and authoritative manner. Of this nature was the death of Christ. Sins deserving death eternal were laid to His charge, or laid on Him, and therefore He had to die. He gave Himself willingly. There was no need of prisons, or of doors, or of guards to secure and keep Him in hand till the day appointed. He was kept, however, by different forces, even by the Father’s commandment, by the obligation of the most solemn covenant engagements, by unquenchable zeal for His Father’s glory, and by a love for His people that passes all knowledge, and which the deep floods that came into His soul could not drown. Therefore, when the hour drew nigh, though He was in Galilee, yet knowing that it was at hand, and knowing the place appointed and the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God regarding all He had to do and suffer, and the outward form these were to assume, He set His face to go up to Jerusalem. He kept the Passover with His disciples, though He knew that, at

that sacred feast, Satan would enter Judas Iscariot and prompt him to betray Him. From thence He went into the garden of Gethsemane, though He knew what agony awaited Him there, what cup of sorrow He had there to drink; sorrow which He Himself describes in these words: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." And the remarkable indications of its overwhelming nature were sweat in great drops of blood, and an angel sent from Heaven to strengthen Him. He went to meet those who came to apprehend Him, and permitted Himself to be led by them, first, to the hall of the high priest, and then to Pilate and Herod; in all which removals He behaved as a lamb brought unto the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers; He was dumb. And then came the hour that He should be led forth to Calvary. A cross, the instrument of an accursed death, is prepared, and He made to bear it until it was seen He could not carry it, when one, Simon of Cyrene, was compelled to bear it after Him. He travailed under another burden – the imputed iniquities of all His people – in bearing which He had none to help, none to become His surety. And when they came to Calvary, there they crucified Him between two thieves. There He surrendered Himself, not only to men, but to the sword that was awakened against Him, which sword could be nothing else than the curse of the law or the wrath of God producing effects on His holy soul analogous to wounds inflicted by a sword on the body. The wrath of man or of Satan could not affect Him, could not overwhelm him; but the wrath of His Father, like a flood of waters in which there is no standing, came into His soul, which was the immediate cause of His death, or, at least, the bitterest ingredient in His sufferings unto death. But in this flood He did not sink so as to rise no more. When sinking in its depths and its billows He trusted in the Father and did not despair. And O, who can comprehend that exercise of perfect trust in God when smiting and bruising Him until He poured out His soul as waters, and in the exercise of which He gave up the Ghost, saying: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" – and doing it when the deepest darkness intervened between Him and His gracious countenance! There was an exercise of trust and love that reflected the greatest glory on the Godhead, as an object of trust to His intelligent creatures, and which sinful man refused to repose in Him.

In bearing their iniquities in the manner stated above, then He gave Himself for them. He loved God and never staggered in His trust; never despaired, nor felt inclined to such a state of mind; never murmured; never entertained a hard thought of His Father. He willingly and readily obeyed unto death, the death of the cross. He endured the penalty of their forsaking God and transgressing His law, of their disobedience, their enmity and hostility, their unbelief and rebellion. And this penalty was death. His holiness, His love, faith, trust, obedience, faithfulness, and zeal were not, without His death, sufficient to take away their sins, to purge their guilt and save them from death. Here, then, is the great High Priest, who is made perfect for ever, presented to us offering the one complete sacrifice by which all who are sanctified are for ever made perfect. Perfect freedom from condemnation, perfect title to eternal life, and an infallible certainty of its possession by everyone that believeth, to the praise of the glorious grace of Him who is the living and true God.

III. – Let us consider the confession made here by the Church, which has respect to the two doctrines treated of, namely, man's fall and Christ's substitution for His people. Though it is true that all have gone astray, yet it is not true that all are convinced of sin, that all can honestly say, "All we have gone astray." It is the believer who is really convinced of sin; for to convince of sin so as to have a true sense thereof is the work of God's Spirit, and forms an element in effectual calling. He convinces of sinning and coming short of God's glory in all things, of there being no good dwelling in them, of being defiled and corrupt, and exposed to the righteous judgment of God. And when this process is gone through, there is no hesitation on their part to make this confession their own. We read of the Psalmist doing it, and also of Peter in one of his epistles. In this part of the confession there is no comfort, and, so far as

they are concerned, no hope, and could they not take up the other part thereof there would never be hope.

In coming to know Christ as spoken of, the Spirit's work and teaching are as necessary as in convincing of sin. For we read that when He comes He convinces of righteousness; that He leads into the truth and shows the things that are Christ's; that they believe by the faith which is of the mighty operation of the Spirit of God. He leads one to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God; that He came to save sinners; that He does this first by laying down His life as a ransom, and then by applying the redemption thus purchased; that in His blood or death there is infinite value, for the sake of which God can justly pardon sinners and bestow on them everlasting life, and when He, as dead and risen, is thus believed in and rested on for salvation, he who thus believes may say, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," himself being one of the "all." Thus he looks on Him whom he had pierced, and mourns for Him, seeing at the same time the infinite evil of sin and the love of Christ that passeth knowledge. Then he must feel the evil of his own sins, be filled with shame and confusion, and ready to say, "Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and gave His Son for us." And in one convinced of sin thus beholding Christ, not only is salvation from sin possible, but it is also realised, and this mingles the contrition of heart and sorrow for sin with some degree of that feeling described in the Word as joy unspeakable and full of glory.

IV. – Conclusion. Here, then, we have the way of salvation set before us. Christ, the Lamb of God, set before us as the one atoning sacrifice. Has your conscience been awakened, and you, as a sinner, led to transact with God? How has that transaction come to a termination? Has it been by saying to Him, "Have patience with me and I will pay thee all"? And have you been since trying, as you think, to discharge your debt by your own good works? Well, you must yet come to judgment, and rest assured that you cannot stand therein, but be as chaff driven by the wind. Or was it by throwing away all your filthy rags of self-righteousness and submitting to the righteousness of Christ, submitting to be saved of free and sovereign grace? If so, yours is a safe state. It may not be felt so by you, or you, notwithstanding your safe state, may feel often without peace or comfort. To look again is the way to recover these, and to live a life of faith in Christ is the only way to sustain you in the peace and hope you need. "I try to trust in Christ, but still I have little peace, little comfort and joy, which makes me think that I never believed and do not now believe." Do you think that these should be perfectly enjoyed here? If not, how can you conclude from the imperfection of peace and hope and joy that you have no interest in Christ? Instead of casting away your confidence, endeavour to exercise trust. Now, be more anxious to attain anew to the exercise of faith, than to ascertain the genuineness of a past exercise. This is the way taught in the Word to get above doubts and fears as to one's interest in Christ. Are you in darkness? The way, according to Scripture, is to trust in God and to listen to the voice of His servant Job, who affords an example of what it is to trust in darkness, when he says, "Though he kill me yet will I trust in him." Is there anyone here whose conscience is ill at ease and who is ready to despair? Look unto Him on whom iniquity was laid. Any here who make light of sin? Look at the solemn transaction on Mount Calvary, and in the garden where the beloved Son was not spared, but made for the time a vessel of consuming wrath. Are you indifferent to all these things? You cannot be long in this state of mind. In a short time all, on which your heart now is, will appear as loss and dung to you. The world and all its cares, callings, pursuits, and pleasures shall pass away from you, never more to return; but you shall live and have to do with God, who is a consuming fire. Remember, however careless you are, that you have a soul that is immortal, and that that soul is endowed with the imperishable faculties – memory and conscience – which, however dormant they may be now, will yet as

sealed books be opened, and all done by you in the body be brought to the light. The truths now read in the Bible, or heard in the pulpit, and that seem to be forgotten as soon as heard; the vain thoughts entertained and the words spoken, and forgotten too – all shall appear on the tablets of memory and conscience; and your conscience then will accuse you, gnaw you, and sting you, when no balm shall be applied to heal, no blood sprinkled to pacify. By the fact of your lost state as sinners, by the value of your soul, by the truth of a great and free salvation being prepared, brought near, and offered you, and by the realities of the great and terrible day of the Lord, and by the eternity that stretches beyond, I would persuade you this day to consider and lay to heart your best interests, and ask yourself what are you meaning to do with the renewed offer of a crucified Redeemer, till now despised and rejected.

[February 1909]

Notes of a Sermon.

By the late REV. LACHLAN MACPHERSON, Ontario.

Dated 31st May, 1846.

[We understand that these “Notes” are taken from Mr. MacPherson’s own manuscript. – ED.]

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought thee forth that bare thee” – Song 8:5.

The question put in the beginning of the verse is put by the daughters of Jerusalem. The person about whom the inquiry is made is the Church, the bride or spouse of Christ, and the other person on whom she is leaning, called her Beloved, is Christ. In the foregoing verse the Church is giving utterance to her longings after her Beloved, and is here interrupted by a significant hint, in the form of a question, suited to remind her that she was evidently very near to and in close communion with the object of her ardent desires, notwithstanding how far off she might suppose herself to be from Him. Longing desires after Christ are a sure sign that He is not far off.

In speaking from these words, let us notice –

- I. – The place where the Church is said to be;
- II. – The nature of the progress she is making;

III. – The particular posture in which she is represented during her progress.

I. – The place in which we here find the Church is “*the wilderness.*” This may represent her spiritual state. Sin has changed the soul, which was once like a well-watered and fruitful garden, into a wilderness – a dry, parched, and barren waste – from which condition, although renewed by grace, she is only escaping. It may also represent her local position, as sin has changed this world into a moral wilderness. The soul of the unconverted sinner is a wilderness – a desolate, hard, and barren place – and the souls of all such constitute the great wilderness of this world – “*the world that lieth in the wicked one.*” It was in this wilderness that Christ found His spouse. All were wandering in a dry and parched land, having forsaken God – a pathless desert in which they lost their way, and were continually going farther off from safety and rest, and without the slightest prospect of ever finding any path to lead them out of their deplorable condition. Such is the spiritual state of the sinner! His soul has become a barren waste – a howling wilderness – where nothing useful grows, nothing but thorns and briars. There is no true spiritual beauty, but everything bearing the impress of sin. His understanding is darkened; his conscience is defiled with guilt and dead works; his will is depraved and only moving against God. His mind is carnal, and enmity against God. His affections are wholly placed on earthly things. There is no fruit brought forth but the fruits of the flesh – no fruit to God – no love, no obedience; but instead of this, the thorns and briars of disobedience and rebellion – things that are not only useless, but hurtful and troublesome and fit only for the fire. There is no trace of that spiritual character which he once had; everything shows the desolation that sin has caused in his soul. This is the state of every individual sinner. What, then, must all sinners put together be? What must the unconverted mass be but a vast wilderness – a cheerless, dreary waste? But, alas! the unconverted world do not view it so. True, indeed, they feel many of the evils which sin has occasioned, and groan under them. They are uneasy, dissatisfied, and continually seeking rest, but find it not. They have no desire to leave the wilderness; they have no proper conception of a better place. Born and brought up in the wilderness, they have no desire to leave it. It is to the Church alone that it appears truly a wilderness. To her there is nothing in it but thorns and briars, which tear and annoy at every step; no water to quench her thirst; no spiritual food to satisfy and nourish her soul, for in the wilderness nothing of this kind grows. Nor is there any part better than another, for all is but one continued waste. There is no real friendship or sympathy from the world, for all are thieves and robbers, and hate and injure her as much as possible. She is as the lily among thorns – like a single lily among a great wilderness of thorns – struggling through them, pricked and wounded on every side. The thorns are strong and many, and allow her as little room to grow in as possible, but still she maintains her existence – still she grows and thrives. She is the only lovely object in all the wilderness! What a wonder it is that she should be found there at all!

Christ found all His people in this wilderness; it was here that He espoused them to Himself. He is called Wonderful, and how wonderful that Christ should go forth to the wilderness in search of a spouse! He left heaven with this object in view; He went into the wilderness in search of her, where she lay in common with all others, lost and miserable. The Good Shepherd went into the wilderness to seek the lost sheep, and there He found it, and laid it upon His shoulders, and brought it into the fold. He found His spouse, the object of His love, wandering in a pathless desert. There He offered Himself to her; there He wooed her, and won her heart, and married her to Himself, and having done so, caused her to follow Him to a better country. No sooner is the soul married to Christ than it immediately sets out for that better country of which her Lord is the King.

II. – The nature of the progress she is making. (1) Coming *up*, (2) from the wilderness. The Church is in the wilderness, but is continually progressing. She is not satisfied in the

wilderness, but is escaping from it. Although in the world, yet she is not of the world, for Christ, her husband, hath chosen her out of the world. At the moment of the soul's union to Christ a spiritual progress commences. The soul then sets out; she "forgets her own people and her father's house" (Psalm 45:10). Like Rebekah, she must not tarry any longer with her own people – not a day, nor a moment. Her journey is through the wilderness, but it is a *coming up*. The unconverted sinner is *going down* into the wilderness to perish there. This was her course also in her unconverted state. The sinner in his natural state has no thought of leaving the wilderness. His affections are not set on the things that are above, where Christ is, but on things on the earth. The sinner's back is turned upon God; he is continually penetrating deeper and deeper into the wilderness – going farther off every day from God and safety. His soul inclines *downward*, and consequently his progress is downward. The men of the world cannot lift up their affections even for a moment to heaven, but, like Bunyan's man who was raking the straws and had his eyes always on the earth although a crown was suspended over his head – an object more worthy of his affections than his straws – their whole soul is intent on earthly objects. There is no advance made upward, however great their outward privileges may be. But the renewed soul is born from above, and therefore his affections are towards his own country. His country, his Lord, and his people are above, and he is continually progressing towards them – upwards.

All are moving in one direction or another – either upwards from the wilderness, or downwards. There is no such thing as standing still. The soul must either be drawing nearer to God or going farther from Him – either growing in grace or growing in sin. The upward course is the more difficult of the two. Sinners take the easier, that which is most natural, the downward course.

"*Coming up*" reminds us of several important things.

(1) That there is a strong desire for objects above itself, viz., God, heaven, holiness. In the renewed soul there is a hungering and a thirsting after righteousness. Strong desires going forth after Christ, the object of its affections, after holiness, deliverance from sin, conformity to His image, fellowship with Christ, a desire to glorify Christ – in all these things the soul is leaving the world and rising far above it in its principles, aims, and desires. These desires are moving in a contrary direction to those of the world; they are upwards. Where there is no desire of this kind, it is evident the person is not in a safe state.

One may feel very languid and feeble in his desires. He may feel overcome by worldliness of mind, and have, experimentally, but little fellowship with Christ, but even then, like her, he is mourning an absent Lord. His desires are towards Him and the remembrance of His name. The language of his soul is, "O that I knew where I might find him." And he is continually inquiring, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" But the soul that is dead has no desire, and therefore makes no effort – no desire after anything above. He cannot desire things which he dislikes – does not like God – feels no need of a Saviour. He cannot desire holiness nor deliverance from sin because he likes it.

(2) *Coming up* implies growth in grace. Each step, as it advances, it comes nearer to God and that rest which awaits it when it reaches home. She is coming up, continually advancing, growing in holiness, humility, deadness to the world and regard for the wilderness. She is growing in her love to the Saviour – her spouse. It is a bad sign when we see people, instead of coming up in this respect, going backwards; returning again, as it were, into the wilderness which they once appeared to leave – when we see people growing more worldly – less zealous – less diligent in the use of means. When it can be said of an individual, that once his affections seemed warm and his love ardent; that once he greatly delighted in the society of Christians and would on no account miss an opportunity; that once he was watchful, humble, suspicious of himself, and tender in conscience with regard to sin and duty; but now that he seems to have lost his first love, that he can take more pleasure now

in the society of the world than then, that he is not so watchful, not so tender, and less frequent in his attendance on spiritual duties – these things are sad appearances of decay, if not proofs that the work was only superficial from the beginning. “Grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Saviour, Jesus Christ,” is the injunction of Scripture.

The Church is not said to be coming up a certain distance in the wilderness, where she is to stop as having come far enough, but she is spoken of as coming up *from* the wilderness – her aim is to come *out* of it altogether, and she is putting forth every effort to gain her point. She is never satisfied until she reaches her destination. “Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

This was the practice of Paul, and it was also the practice of the Church at all times. It is not said that she *has come up* a certain distance, but that she *is coming up*. The measure to which the soul has attained today won't suffice for to-morrow. Neither is there such a thing as moving at all, however slowly, and not coming nearer the “mark of the prize, etc.” When the soul is first espoused to Christ, it is then but in its infancy, it must not remain so always, but it must be coming up. It must grow daily until it arrives at the stature of a perfect man in Christ.

3. *Coming up* also implies that the spiritual progress of the believer is attended with difficulty – it is uphill travelling – it is in the face of much opposition. The Christian's course is compared in Scripture to a warfare (Isaiah 4; 1 Corinthians 9:7; 2 Corinthians 10:4). “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal” (1 Timothy 1:18). It is going against wind and tide – opposition from every quarter, from within, from the devil, and from the world without. The Christian's path is one beset on every side with dangers and difficulties, and none of these more formidable, and constant in their opposition than the enemies within himself. His own soul is the seat of the greatest part of the warfare. There is an unremitting struggle there between two rival nations – two rival principles, the one urging him forward, the other dragging him backwards. Many severe conflicts are maintained here without its being apparent to the world that there is any emotion. The remains of corruption make it very difficult for the Christian to advance – these are continually warring against the law of his mind and bringing him into bondage as much as possible. His unbelief, pride, lusts of the flesh, worldly-mindedness, and other inward foes are great hindrances, and make his progress much slower than he could wish.

The temptations of the devil also do much to hinder him. The great adversary is very subtle, and lays his plans with great skill, in order to turn the soul from following Christ. Satan, the father of lies, slanders Christ and the path in which He leads His church. He insinuates much to the dishonour of Christ in order to withdraw the affections of His spouse from Him. He slanders the way of holiness, and endeavours to raise as many dark suspicions in the soul as possible. In spiritual prosperity when things go well with the soul, he will endeavour to sap the foundations of its hope by raising suspicions that all is a delusion and that the soul was only deceiving itself, or he will try to make the soul feel secure and satisfied with what it has done. He will endeavour to awaken feelings of pride, self-sufficiency and self-complacency: and so diminish its vigilance, and that by this means the soul may be either lulled into carnal security, or hurried to the commission of sin. If Satan succeeds here, he then tempts the soul to despair and tells him there is no hope for him. Satan never grudges the time and pains spent in tempting: he is always at the work and spares no pains to make it succeed.

But the world without – the inhabitants of the wilderness through which the Christian is passing – are continually opposing his progress. Sometimes with open violence, laying hands upon him, sometimes by its temptations; sometimes it mocks and tries to put him out of countenance – “What is thy beloved more than the beloved of another?” It will call him fool, hypocrite, proud, self-conceited, unsocial, and such like. It will endeavour to throw

stumbling-blocks in his way and turn him away from his purpose: and their evil example is continually before his eyes. They and he are going in different directions. He is coming up, they are all going down, and if at any time he prevails upon some of them to accompany him, they soon grow tired of the way and his company, and seldom go far when they return to their own people, like Pliable who followed Christian a short distance, but returned as soon as the first difficulty occurred to try his spirit.

It is very difficult for the Christian to make progress in some cases. Sometimes he is so situated that he seldom sees anything but the worst example; perhaps destitute of the means of grace and Christian fellowship, and those with whom he is immediately connected, strangers to Christ. In such circumstances he finds it peculiarly difficult to advance. But though the path of the spouse is thus beset with difficulties, there is one circumstance which must not be lost sight of, and that is they are difficulties which are *overcome*. He is still *coming* up. They do not prevent him from going forward. Let no one suppose that it will excuse him that the opposition which he had to encounter, and which stopped his progress, was great. No, it is through much tribulation that the Christian must enter the kingdom of heaven. None get there without trial. They are said to be *conquerors*, which shows that they had to fight, but they are conquerors only through Him that loved them and gave Himself for them.

“*From the wilderness.*” – This is descriptive of her own views regarding her situation. She felt that the place was a wilderness. None feel this like the Christian. Natural men do not see their real condition as it is – they are contented with it as a whole. Coming up from the wilderness is also descriptive of her prospects. “Come out from among them therefore, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, etc.” Once she was as satisfied with the wilderness as others, but now she is not satisfied there. She will never rest until she has left it altogether. It would not do to come to the skirts of the wilderness; no, but her aim is to leave it altogether.

The soul, therefore, that is united to Christ must turn its back on its former objects of delight – it must come out *from* them. It must forget its former sources of delight, its affinity with them must be broken. It must have no sympathy with the practices, prospects, and pursuits of the world – its people must no longer be their people, and its god must no longer be their God. All the spouse leaves behind is but a dreary wilderness. She can see nothing around her that could tempt her to stay.

Let professing Christians look to themselves and see how does the conduct of the spouse and theirs agree. Have they turned their backs on the wilderness in which by nature they are wandering, and have they turned their backs on this world, having obtained the promise of a better country? Are they conformed to this world, or are they transformed?

III. – “Leaning upon her beloved.” – It might occur to one on hearing of the opposition offered to her – of the difficulties with which she had to encounter, that it was truly strange how a poor weak woman could succeed in making any progress whatever, and especially that she could continue successful in her progress for any length of time. But, my friends, the true secret of her coming up is to be found in what is here related to us – namely, her leaning on her Beloved. It was He that first laid hold upon her, and ever since He first laid hold on her He continued His hold, and none could pluck her out of His hand. In herself she had no strength for a single step of the journey, but all her strength and safety were from Him; and He caused her to lean upon Him – lay all her weight upon Him and feel secure from every assault. There is implied in this leaning two things –

- (1) felt weakness in herself, and
- (2) strength in Christ her beloved.

(1) Believers are, in themselves, all weakness. They are only children – babes in Christ – helpless creatures. Not even strong enough to lay hold on Him, they can only lean. They are

unable, of themselves, even to think one good thought. Besides, their enemies are strong and crafty and numerous. A woman, also, is naturally timid and easily disheartened. If the Lord had not been on their side when men rose against them, believers would be swallowed up of them. It is good for the Christian to feel his weakness, that he may the more readily and constantly make use of Christ; and the cause of the many falls and backslidings of Christians is no other than their trusting to their own strength. "When I am weak, then am I strong." "I live, yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me."

(2) Strength in Christ. The spouse experienced this. He was mighty to save. "His legs are as pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold" (Song 5:15). He is "the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle" (Psalm 24:8). His strength was tried when, on His mighty shoulders, He bore up the elect and kept them from sinking into hell, when He bore our sins upon the Cross and made atonement for our guilt. He also triumphed over Satan and all the host of hell. He spoiled principalities, made a show of them openly, and triumphed over them in His death. He also triumphed over the world. No arm can withstand Him, for He is God omnipotent. The Church also experienced His strength in subduing her to Himself, and her confidence in His strength is such that she can, without doubt or hesitation, lean upon Him and feel secure. But let us attend a little more closely to what is meant by leaning upon Christ, or in what way may she be said to lean upon Him.

"Leaning upon her beloved" means the exercise of faith upon Him, both in respect of what He has done for her, and what He promises yet to do.

(1) Leaning to His atonement. By this her guilt is atoned for and the wrath of God turned away from her. In Him she has a righteousness in which she need not be afraid to stand in the presence of God; it is a spotless righteousness and an everlasting righteousness. It is when thus trusting to Christ for pardon through His blood that the soul comes to enjoy peace (Romans 5:1). And the reason why some find so much difficulty in their progress is their want of confidence in Christ for righteousness; they look for something from themselves; they are trying to mix up part at least of their own righteousness with that of Christ. They have not entirely renounced their own filthy rags, but when the soul comes to renounce these, she can feel secure, resting her whole weight upon her Beloved.

(2) Leaning to Him as her Head of spiritual influence – life from the dead. "Because I live, ye shall live also." He gave Himself for the life of the world. He is a living head, and they who are in Him live through Him. Sinners are dead spiritually, and through Christ they are brought alive and made partakers of eternal life. From Him she derives her spiritual character – holiness, heavenly mindedness, meetness for heaven, a new nature. She is conformed to His image; His beauty makes her comely, and fit to appear in the court of the Most High.

(3) Leaning to Him for food – daily food – to support the new life. The Israelites in the wilderness were made wholly to depend upon their God and Saviour for their food and water; their food came from heaven without their labour in procuring it. He fed them with manna, which came down every day in sufficient quantities for the wants of the day, and He gave them water from the rock. In the wilderness nothing would grow; besides, they were wandering from place to place, and had no means of procuring it in the ordinary way.

(4) Leaning upon Christ as the source of all true knowledge. He is made of God to them wisdom, etc. Left not to their own understanding. He not only communicates wisdom, but He is Himself infinitely wise, and He is their prophet, to teach them.

(5) Leaning upon Him for protection from all dangers.

(6) Leaning upon Him for strength to perform duties; to overcome in spiritual warfare.

(7) Leaning to His promises – His faithfulness.

(8) Leaning upon Him as the kinsman Redeemer, as God-man, Mediator, Prophet, Priest, and King.

[It is evident that Mr. MacPherson did not fill in these heads in his Notes, but left this until the time of delivery. – ED.]

In leaning thus they have communion with Him and are near to Him.

[March 1909]

A Pleasure-Loving Age. Children at Theatricals.

Remarks by the REV. D. MACFARLANE.

On a recent Sabbath Rev. Mr. Macfarlane preached to his congregation in Dingwall Free Presbyterian Church from the words, “Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night” (Isaiah 21:11-12).

In Old Testament times, he said, the prophets were called watchmen. The Lord said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel.” A watchman’s duties were to watch while others slept, and to give them timely warning should any danger threaten their persons or their interests. If the sentinel neglected his duty, if he slept when he ought to watch, his punishment was death, because he failed to give warning of the enemy’s approach. Truly such would be the fate of all ministers who professed to be watchmen on the walls of Zion, and yet neglected to warn the people of approaching danger. If one of the false prophets of old were asked, “Watchman, what of the night?” his answer would be “Peace, Peace, no danger,” while the enemies were at the very door.

The same held true of most ministers of the present day. Truly the night was not only coming, but had already come. It had come not only on the world, but on the visible church as well, so that in comparatively few pulpits in Scotland was the gospel preached today. A passing reference might be made by ministers to Christ and the gospel, but they failed to declare the whole counsel of God.

Instead of seeking to please God their great aim was to please their congregations, but they would have their reward. Alluding to the various dark nights that overtook the church, the preacher said that the night that succeeded the giving of the first promise in Eden was a dark one, and in particular the generation that immediately preceded the destruction of the old world by the flood was an exceedingly wicked generation. There were none righteous to be found among them but Noah. Instead of worshipping the one and only true God they worshipped false gods, and there was one false god in particular that was the object of their

adoration, viz., what might be termed the Epicurean *god of pleasure*. They were eating and drinking, playing and dancing, and amusing themselves till they were all swept away by the flood. How similar our own age to that!

Most of the people of the present day worshipped at the shrine of that false god of pleasure. The altar of that god was set up in all parts of our land: in towns, in villages, and in country places: yea, in the very House of God, so that ministers, instead of feeding their flocks from the word of God with knowledge and understanding, served them with carnal amusements, and to perpetuate the worship of that false god young children were carefully trained up to it.

One form of pleasure-worship was theatrical plays, and such were practised in their own town. The teachers of those performances and all who countenanced them, would be (though not intentionally) the means of destroying the souls of the performers. As he (the preacher) loved the young, and sought their salvation, he would earnestly beseech them to flee from the destroyers of their souls, and to come to Christ, who said “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

Those who taught theatrical performances to little children forbade them to come to Christ. He felt in duty bound to speak of those matters when answering the question, “What of the night?” He sought to come to the rescue of the rising generation that he might pluck them out of the hands of their destroyers. The teachers of these performances might mean well, but he had no doubt that the effect of their teaching would prove destructive to the precious souls of their pupils, and that the blood of many lost souls would be required of them at the day of judgment! If they did not believe this in a day of mercy, they would have to believe it by terrible experience when it was too late. Parents who allowed their children to frequent such evil institutions showed how devoid they were of true love to their offspring, and how sadly they neglected the solemn vows they came under when they received the ordinance of baptism for their children. The divine injunction to parents and other teachers of the young is: “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay” (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). How many parents in the present day were under the curse of broken vows! They made a noise if they were refused baptism for their children, but as for the solemn vows under which they came, they treated them with perfect indifference, though the neglect of their duty was nothing less than the sin of perjury!

It was one of the signs of the ungodliness of the present generation that ladies and gentlemen of high rank were principal promoters of theatrical entertainments and other amusements, which would have the effect of counteracting the labours of Gospel ministers in instructing the people – young and old – in the things which belonged to their everlasting peace. He (the speaker) would say to those high personages: “Cease from your evil work: allow the Gospel free course that it may be glorified in the salvation of immortal souls.” – *North Star*.

[March 1909]