

T H E

# UNION PULPIT.

A COLLECTION OF SERMONS BY MINISTERS  
OF DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS.

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“In essentials, unity ; in non-essentials, liberty ; in all things, charity.”—*Augustine.*

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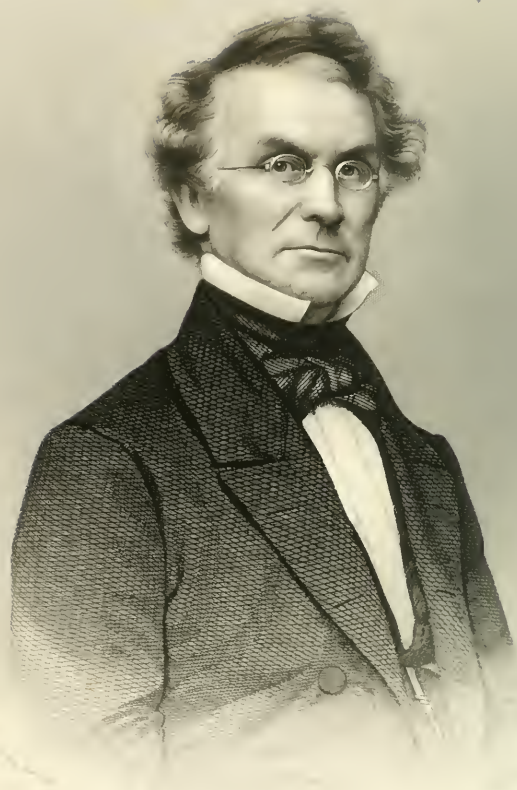
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W. Adams

## EXTERNAL ASSOCIATIONS CONNECTED WITH THE BIBLE.

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Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage forever ; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.—*Psalms*, cxix, 111.

When we set ourselves to investigate the secret of that power which the Bible now exerts, and is destined to exert in larger measure hereafter, we find that there is an influence accompanying the sacred volume, altogether distinct from the truth of its contents. This book is not a novelty, just put into our hands for the first time, so that all the interest it can excite must depend upon the interest of what it contains. It is a monument of antiquity. It is an object related to the history of the world for many centuries. It is a relic of the past, not worn and effete in the lapse of time, for its vigor is increased, not diminished, by age ; still a relic of the past, about which is gathered a wealth of association, which of itself excites affection and veneration. It is an heirloom of the human family, which, coming into our possession, reminds us of those who held it before us ; bringing down to us the wonderful scenes through which it has passed, and by its silent presence and tradition testifying of things and of men that are gone. I speak not now of this Holy Book as inspired of God ; not of the glory of its revelations, nor the sublimity of its doctrines, nor the purity of its precepts, nor the sweetness of its consolations, nor the blessedness of its salvation. I refer you not to the history, the poetry, the beauty, the wisdom, or the power of its contents, but to those historic, domestic, and personal associations, which by this time are connected with the very *exterior* of the Bible, and which, like the halo which old pictures represent around whatever is divine, are in aid of the impression which the

divinity of the book is adapted to produce. We cannot but think that this is one of the many advantages attendant upon that *form* of revelation which God has chosen, above every other, especially oral communication. Here is a *book*, printed and bound, like any other book; a visible, tangible, portable object—to be given, to be sent, to be preserved, to be owned, to be bequeathed, unlike a vision or a voice from heaven, however bright, however distinct, fading straight-way into darkness and silence; a permanent object, about which are collected the most sacred associations of our nature. And if God's wisdom is displayed in this selection, ours surely should not be wanting in due regard to those exterior associations with the Bible, which form no small part of the power which it exerts upon our minds and characters.

There is a principle of our nature thus appealed to, often abused we allow, which never should be disregarded. The friar in Papal countries, about to eulogize a particular saint, begins by exhibiting to his audience a lock of hair once belonging to the man who is the subject of his panegyric. The churches of the old world are full of these pretended relics, and pride themselves more in their possession than in their altars and pulpits; and if you could divest yourself of historic doubt, if the character of the pretensions were not so absurd and impracticable as to make you incredulous even to scorn, you would certainly admit, in your own experience, that there was a power in such objects to awaken profoundest thoughts and emotions, through the aid of association. It is into no domain of credulity, of romance, or of superstition, that we enter, when adverting to the associations which are connected with the sacred *Word of God*.

One of the most obvious of these is borrowed from the domestic history of those who read it. Associations were formed in your mind, with the book of God, long before you were able to read it for yourself. It was a prominent object in your father's dwelling. It was treated with reverence, as if it were the palladium of the house. You remember the shelf on which it lay, or the stand which it occupied by itself, with no company save some volume of sacred song. It contained the record of the day when you were born, and the day when death visited your family circle. And now, as you look upon it, the past comes back with all its power to cheer you in duty if you are right, to recall and warn you if you have gone astray. The scene is before you in its freshness, as every day that sacred book was read

with prayer. A whole household collected together, children ranged along on either side in lessening size, and your father reading out of that volume which you had always regarded with such veneration. You recall the day when some strange affliction befell your household. You could not comprehend it. You knew not yet what was meant by death; but those who were older than you were in tears, and the family were gathered together, and the book of God was brought forth, and your father read from it, as well as he might, through falling tears. Soon your own mind began to catch the sounds which were uttered, and forthwith to weave in your own thoughts with the mystic words which were read. You remember a certain sabbath night, when the reading was going on, the damp wood upon the hearth was sighing and sizzling, as if something of life was there, and your mind was started off to unwind the meaning of those awful words—the “worm which dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched”—or again, when you looked out into the cold, dark night, and you thought of a soul shut out from the kingdom of God, with all its brightness and warmth, and you could not refrain from tears; for you felt that this sacred book was in some way connected with your eternal destiny. Years elapsed, and strange changes occurred—your venerable father died—you remember that during his last illness there was nothing which he so much desired as to have his children read to him, out of the Bible; and among his latest counsels was this, that you should read it and love it. He sleeps in some graveyard, but upon the stone which marks the spot, there is graven some verse, out of that volume, which was his solace and delight when living. You have seen your mother, in widowhood, resorting to the same book for the best comfort she knew—and when her eyes were too dim to read anything beside, reading this, to the last, as something from which she could not be separated. Follow the several members of your household—one dies here, and another there; but the last words which ever they uttered may have been of such a character as to cast new importance on the Bible. It may be that, dying in its hopes, they made use of some of its joyful promises; or, alas! upbraided themselves for their neglect of the Word of God. Look now upon it. Is it the same to you as any other book? I do not ask you whether you have full faith, after personal investigation, in all its contents, but are there no associations with its very *exterior*, which have an amazing power over you? Are not these designed,

like the tendrils of the vine, to attach you to a personal belief and living understanding of the inspired contents of this volume? See what a power there was, in such associations, in the case of Burns, the author of the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, in the midst of all his dissipation; and you may as well untie your heartstrings, and unweave your whole intellectual and social life, as disregard all the memories which are associated with the book of God.

Or the associations of which I speak may be of a more personal and private character, even with the individuals who once owned and read the copy which is now in your possession. Perhaps it was given to you by a parent, on your birthday, or at New Year; or on the day when you were leaving home, for school, or for the city. It contains your name, and it may be some expression of love, as kind as an angel could breathe, in the handwriting of the father or the mother whose love for you was next in strength to the love of your God and Saviour. You remember the request which was made, that you would read it—the promise that you should never be forgotten in affection and in prayer; and your regard to or neglect of that request you have felt was the turning point of your destiny.

Years ago, a boy entered the counting room of an eminent merchant in this city, and asked for employment. He was told that no vacancy existed at the time, and was about to withdraw, greatly disappointed. Happening to mention that he had a letter of commendation from Mr. —, the merchant requested to see it, remarking that he had the greatest regard for that person. The boy fell upon his knees, to unstrap the little valise which he carried in his hand, to find the letter. Taking out, in search of it, one and another of the little articles which maternal love had neatly provided for his use and comfort, a small volume fell out, which caught the eye of the merchant, who was looking on. "What is this?" said he. Oh, "that is my Bible," replied the boy. "And do you read it?" "Always," said he, in artless simplicity—"and when I left home, I promised my mother that I would read two chapters in it every day." The mention of his mother, the thought of his separation from her, and his own disappointment, brought a glistening tear to the boy's eye, which as quickly, by untold sympathy, infected the stern nature of the man who was bending over him. "Well," said the merchant, "I will take you into my employ." And never from that time did he have occasion to distrust the integrity of the boy whom he then received,

and who himself then began a career which ended in affluence and honor. Do you think it strange, that when he became a man, he should cherish with peculiar regard the identical volume with which was associated all his success in the world?

Or the copy now in your possession was once the property of some esteemed friend, who has now gone from the earth. It may be a memorial, sent to you from his sick chamber, with some kind message, intended to turn your thoughts to its more frequent perusal; or, accidentally, as we say, it has fallen into your hand, when laid aside by him who needs it no more. Casting your eye along its pages, you perceive that many of its verses have been marked by its former owner. Forthwith you begin to imagine what must have been the reflections which these verses excited, at the time they were thus designated as matters of special interest. The eye which now is closed in death once glanced along these very characters. Here is a place where it rested with a special attention; perhaps a tear of penitence fell upon this very page, and here a ray of joy was kindled in the eye which is now rayless forever. Here are promises which were of great comfort during a long illness and the weariness of a sick room. It is not necessary for me to ask whether they are illusion or truth; the fact is, they were regarded as substantial truth by the individual who read them, and were an actual support to him in life and in death. In the faith of these he died. Do they not address me, therefore, with a special force? Whither has the spirit departed? With what emotions does he now look back to those very thoughts and dispositions which were nurtured by the Bible? What is eternity? What is death? How near may the departed spirit be to me, the moment that I now read? I look upon a blind person, and perceive that by the loss of a single sense he is shut out from all perception of surrounding objects; or a deaf person, who by the loss of one faculty is ever after insensible to the sounds so distinct to all others. And I am startled to think how near the realities of the spiritual world may be to me; just as near as the sights and sounds of this world are to the blind and deaf, and yet I do not now perceive them, for want of the proper faculty. But shall I infer that those objects do not exist, and that other beings are incapable of perceiving them, and holding intercourse with them? Is there not in fact an intercourse, through memory, and through love, of our souls, with the departed? We know that it would have given them



pleasure, could they have anticipated, that when we look into the volume which was once theirs, and upon the passages which once conveyed special instruction to them, our remembrance of them would “infuse a more touching significance” into these very words—thus “retaining them, though invisibly, and without their actual presence, in the exercise of a beneficent influence.”\* Is it nothing to us, when our eye rests on the copy of the Bible, in aid of its effectual impression, that memory recalls the friend with whom it is associated, and imagination apprehends him, when now, under a mightier manifestation of truth, as still animated with a spirit which would, if that were consistent with the laws of the higher economy, convey to me yet again the same testimony and injunctions? Is all influential relation dissolved by the withdrawal from mutual intercourse; so that let my friends die, and I am as loose of their hold upon me as if they had ceased to exist, or never had existed? The supposition is inadmissible. The voice of many a departed friend seems to address us, from the very *exterior* of the Bible, not to slight the truths which are so sacredly associated with their memory.

And from these personal recollections, the mind glances to associations yet more general. The *history* of the Bible is associated with every mention of its divine claims. It has not been monopolized by a few individuals or families. It has had a long and eventful history. No book has been so often translated, into so many languages, and of none have so many impressions been made. Its home has been the world. It has been domesticated in the distant East, and travelled on the wave of life to the West. What untold millions of the human race have seen it, and handled it, and been more or less affected by it. We cannot divest ourselves of the remembrance of the multitudes who have believed it. What we have seen it accomplish in our domestic observation, that we know it has accomplished in the case of millions beside. We have heard, we have read of thousands, who valued it beyond gold, who lived in its light, and died in its hope. It bears with it the testimony of ten thousand times ten thousand. Whenever we think of it, we think of the great muster roll of the saints, in all ages, and in all lands. It is perfumed by the fragrance of their piety. It is illuminated by the glory of their ascension. It is borne down into our hands along with

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\* John Foster.

the accumulated memories of the world, and associated with the experience of the multitudes, whom no man can number in heaven, whose testimony in its advocacy is as the sound of many waters.

The very sight of it recalls the forms of those who were reputed to be its authors. Never before did such a conclave of worthies people the halls of our imagination. Never did such sanctity and awe surround the legislators and heroes of the world, as invest the names of those who are associated with the authorship of the Bible. Moses is before us, the shepherd amid the sublime solitudes of Horeb, and the deliverer of a nation out of bondage; admitted to an audience with God on the curtained top of Sinai, the leader of a host in march, in battle, in worship, and in peace; and at length, disappearing from human view, after the vision from the summit of Nebo—uniting in his person the qualities of legislator, soldier, historian, poet, beyond any other the world has seen. And Samuel passes along in the train, in whose ear at midnight, when yet a child, the voice of God was heard, startling the silence of the night, the stern old judge, the anointer of kings, the awe-struck seer. David follows on, now a stripling, working deliverance for his country's armies, from the host of the Philistines, challenging a mighty giant to mortal combat, and bringing back, he a ruddy boy, the huge head of the fallen foe; now a king in Zion, the leader of the worshippers in those jubilant songs which filled the courts of the temple, and now waking the echoes of the night, in the composition of those odes which were designed to be universal and immortal. And his youthful son is not forgotten. With wisdom when a youth surpassing the oldest sage, enthroned amid wealth and glory such as imagination never had conceived, recording in sententious form that knowledge which his own experience had discovered. And Isaiah, and Jeremy, and Daniel, and all the choir of the prophets—robed in mystery, yet luminous with awful sanctity—uttering the deep things of God, and from the high places, to which they were led, announcing to the world beneath the events of future and distant ages. Then there breaks upon our view the company of the apostles, the reputed authors of the later portions of the book. We stop not to decide, or even to inquire, whether indeed they were moved by the Holy Ghost to write what was ascribed to their authorship, for our minds are filled with the remembrance of their tragic deaths, as gathered from history, which imparts a sort of fascination to the words which are said

to have proceeded from their pens. Matthew suffering martyrdom in Ethiopia—Mark in Egypt—John exiled by Domitian—James precipitated from the temple at Jerusalem—Peter requesting to be crucified with his head downwards—and Paul beheaded in Nero's reign at Rome, flinching not from danger, doing all things, daring all things, and giving the best and mightiest confirmation of what they wrote, by a cheerful martyrdom. All these associations are in advance of any scrutiny of their several arguments, and surround the Scriptures themselves with a power of impression from which it is difficult, if not impossible, to divest ourselves.

Then there sweeps before our vision the great army of the martyrs, whose attachment to this book was stronger than the love of life. It was with them in the cells where they were imprisoned. They carried it in their bosoms, and next to their hearts, when on their way to the scaffold. It kindled up that strange gladness which outshone the flames which consumed them, and inspired them with that heroism which incites and captivates us without our choice. Nor can we forget the efforts which have been made to exterminate this book from the earth. Kings have leagued together to destroy it. They have ransacked the dwellings of those who had been suspected of possessing it. The world has been convulsed with wars and battles over and around this single volume. But, lo! it has emerged from them all, like a veteran unscarred from a thousand fields, and laden with the spoils of its bloodless victories. What conquests has it won, over those who have ridiculed, and argued, and despised, and hated, and attacked it. Men of all climes have been proud to do it homage. The Littletons and the Rochesters, who once made it the theme of profane wit, came at length to receive it with faith and gladness. What testimonies to its truth were extorted from the Rousseaus and Voltaires, whose life-long opposition had left it unharmed. Calm and uninjured, it emerges from the floods which have swept over it, the fires which have been kindled upon it, and the blood which has flowed around it, and passes into our hands, with all these glorious recollections of its history,

"The milk-white hind, immortal and unchanged."

Then, again, we remember that it is associated with the best minds and with the best men of whom our species can boast. The golden-mouthed Chrysostom preached from it at Antioch and Constantino-ple; so did Ambrose at Milan; Gregory Nazianzen; and Jerome, at

Rome. The eloquence of Massillon was inspired by it, and the sublime genius of Pascal fed upon it. It is the very book out of which the daughters of Milton read to the blind old prophet, and by whose inspiration he was borne up,

“Above the Aonian Mount,”

— “to the height of his great argument.”

It was with Bunyan in jail at Bedford, and suggested and informed that wonderful allegory which for its inventive genius will ever be held the second uninspired book in our language. It was the very book which Newton studied more than he studied those other Scriptures, the stars of heaven; which Bacon and Boyle and Locke believed with unfaltering faith. Raphael and Guido and Rubens drew from it the inspiration of their art. The ripest scholars of the world have passed their lives in unfolding its import. It was eulogized by Sir William Jones, Sir Matthew Hale, and Sir Samuel Romilly. The gravest judges, the wisest legislators, have honored it, and it spreads itself out, and rolls down, like another Paeolus, with its sands of gold, through all forms and departments of literature, informing our language, tinging our books, and leaving its impression on everything which it touches.

Nor can we forget that this very volume, whatever are its contents and its claims, is historically related to all the great movements and reforms of the world, especially with all the advances of civil and religious liberty. It is the good old book which Wickliffe studied in the cloisters of Merton College; out of which John Huss preached so eloquently in Bethlehem chapel, at Prague. It is the book which was the sole armory of Luther, and with which, like a lever, he pried up fifty millions of people to liberty of thought and life. The very same which Calvin and Beza and Melanethou, and their accomplished coadjutors in France and Switzerland, employed in the revival of letters and the reformation of religion. It was this from which John Knox thundered out his denunciations of despotism, from the windows of the Canongate. This is associated with the martyrdom of Cranmer and Ridley, at Oxford. It is this very book, a part of which Alfred the Great translated into the English tongue, and in which he found the seeds of all good and wise culture—the book from which patriotism and liberty have drawn all their inspiration. Here was it that Algernon Sidney found his best arguments in defence of what he called on the

scaffold, "the good old cause." It lay beneath the head of Argyle, when sleeping in his cell the sweet sleep of infancy, within an hour of his execution. It was quilted into the doublet of John Hampden, and saturated with his blood, when, throwing his arms around the neck of his faithful horse, he was borne from the battle-field to die. "Sire," said Lady Rachel Russell to Charles II, "I shall never forgive myself for having knelt to your Majesty. My noble husband is too good a man to live in your Majesty's domains. I will hasten to the tower and prepare him for the kingdom of God;" and this was the book out of which that heroic woman read to her husband, the night before he was beheaded. It was out of this that Cromwell read aloud, at the head of his troops, before the battle of Naseby. It came over in the *Mayflower*. The first compact of constitutional liberty in that ship was written upon its cover. It had a place in every cabin which our fathers reared in the wilderness. The soldiers of the revolution carried it in their knapsacks. The First Congress of the United States took measures to increase its circulation. It was the book on which Washington laid his honest hand when taking his solemn oath of office. It lies in every court of justice, to secure the sanctity of oaths; and to-day, a whole nation is instructed in its precepts.

And all these associations are connected with the mere *exterior* of the Bible. They are distinct from all faith in the origin and authority of its contents. They are the light which flickers about the very covers of this wonderful book—a light like the luminous atmosphere which, according to mythology, encircles whatever is celestial. And you will observe that the associations of which I have spoken are not superstitions or prejudices, but the offspring of historical realities. They are the shadows of actual facts; and though they are external and incidental, yet are they as real to us as any matters which belong to our existence. The Bible is not to us the same as any other book. There is no other book with which are connected such memories and such varied associations. Say that these associations do not amount to a demonstration of the truth of the Bible. We admit it, but they exist; there is power in them. They enter into the very structure of our minds and hearts. We cannot divest ourselves of them. They were designed to aid the impression of all which the Bible contains. They are prepossessions in favor of its authority. They are feelings which prepare us to listen to its oracular voices.

Much has been written, in our days, as to the desirableness of a *new* translation of the Scriptures. After all which has been said of the changes of words, after all admissions as to the result of severe criticisms, we confess ourselves impatient of all proposals for what may be called a *new* version of the Bible. We like not this modernizing of what is ancient—this association of the *new* with what is old and venerable, and which, in these our times, cannot be changed without disturbing the landmarks of centuries, the very standard and anchorage of our language. We should as soon think of changing the portraits of our ancestors, putting them into a modern dress, or cutting down the old oaks about the homestead, and substituting poplars and willows. And we trust, for reasons not at all allied to superstition or defective scholarship, that the light of the last day may shine on the very book which to-day, wherever the English tongue is spoken, reflects the light of God, in our homes and in our churches.

And now, with minds crowded with these lively and affectionate memories—these manifold associations by which the Bible connects itself with our personal history, and with everything good, and great, and hopeful, in the history of the world—we open its pages, and examine its contents; and here we find the secret of all that power which is inseparable from the sacred volume. It is the Word of God. It is a gift of light from the glory of the throne, to guide the lost, and relieve the perplexities of the human soul. It contains the legislation of the Most High for the universe. It promulgates a law, addressed to the *heart* of every man. It reveals the only way in which apostate men may be reclaimed, the life of God in their souls be rekindled, and, conscious of guilt as they are, may be saved. Proceeding from God, it is *truth*; and herein lies its essential power—its unmixed and everlasting truth. The words which God has spoken are spirit and life. As a fire and as a hammer are they, to break the rock in pieces. There is no power like that which divine truth is capable of exerting on the mind and heart of man. The great forces of nature, fire and frost, lightning and earthquake, are but analogies to illustrate that greater power which the Word of God has exerted, and will exert, upon the human soul. Enforced by the Holy Spirit, it becomes the exceeding greatness of God's power. It accomplishes an entire conversion in the interior dispositions of the individual man, according to the working of the mighty power of God, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him

from the dead. And the change which it works in the individual is the pledge and promise of the changes it will work in the world. There is no abuse which can outlive its power—no mountains of ice that can stand before its heat. It is the wisdom of God, and the power of God, unto salvation. Slowly and gradually, it may make its way in time to come, as in time past. But the spirit of God is in the wheels. There is no going back to the sun and the seasons. The year is brought about, and the harvests will be ripened and gathered. The roots of the great tree, in which the fowls of heaven build their nests and sing, strike deeper, and spread themselves out wider, feeling about the foundations of vast evils, working into every little crevice, and growing slowly and silently, loosening the foundation stones, and overturning them at last, as by the secret power of God. Nor is there one good to be desired for man, whether for this life or the life to come, which follows not in the train of that book, which contains the wisdom, the truth, and the love, of God.

Two things, therefore, primarily should engage our attention. First of all, receive the Word of God yourself, in a manner becoming its authorship—not as the word of man, but as it is, in truth, the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. Disregard not those memories which have been graven into your heart, and break not away from those unnumbered associations by which the God of the Bible would draw you to a personal faith in its inspired contents. Think how those recollections will haunt you, exasperating the stings of remorse, if you should despise what God has written, and, with the light so clear, and the voice of God so distinct, you should perish through neglect of that which was designed to save you. Honor the Word of God. Love it. Believe it. Search it. Bind it to your heart. Let it dwell in you richly in all wisdom. Live by its light, and let your head be pillowed upon its supports when you are called to die.

What is of value to you, impart to others. *Show* your value of the Bible by your disposition to distribute it. Flame is not extinguished by kindling another. Who can frame an objection to the universal circulation of the Word of God? It is the cheapest, surest, and most compendious mode of accomplishing every good, and remedying every evil, which ever came within the desires or notice of philanthropy and piety. It is the inspiration of liberty, the fountain of knowledge, the stability of justice, the cement of society, the reform of mischief, the

impulse to progress, the restraint from excess, the focus of all light and love, the solution of doubt, the remedy for sin, the source of hope, the security of the soul, and the written charter of heavenly citizenship. Give it, then, to all who will receive it; and when the history of life shall be unwound, in the day of Revelation, it may be disclosed what the book which goes forth as your gift shall accomplish in the world. Perhaps it goes into some school-house in a distant settlement, and there trains a group of children in their nobility and duty as citizens. Perhaps it goes into some prison, and there inspires the last hope that God does not forsake even the most guilty; or to some alms-house, to comfort some sick and aged victim of want with the thought of his father's house, with bread enough and to spare; or to the fore-castle of some ship, to preach to the mariner amid the solitude of the seas; or into the hands of the immigrant—the first gift which Christian freedom dispenses, at the entering in of the gates; or it crosses the ocean, and, within a few weeks, the missionary will distribute its varied translations in Constantinople, in Ceylon, in Canton, in Africa, and in all the islands of the sea. And long after you are dead, immortal minds will be weaving around this very volume those memories and associations which now encircle your own Bible, investing them with sanctity, with love, and with power—minds which, sanctified by truth and saved by grace, you will meet hereafter, amid the glories of your Father's Kingdom.