

THE  
FAMILY TREASURY

OF

SUNDAY READING.

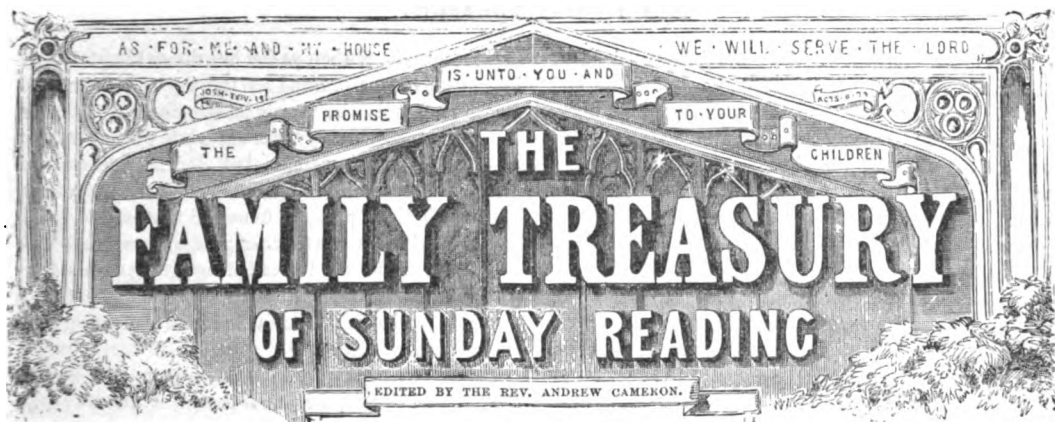
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## THE BALANCE STRUCK: A NEW YEAR'S SERMON.

BY THOMAS GUTHRIE, D.D.

"I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do."—Eccles. ii. 11.

**O**UR Lord pronounced the children of this world wise in their generation; and who can doubt that thousands who are lost would be saved, did they bring the same prudence, and diligence, and energy to their eternal, as they do to their temporal interests? In how many people do we see consummate wisdom joined to the greatest folly! They are wise enough to gain the world, and fools enough to lose their souls.

Convince a man that the only way to save his life is to lose his limb, and he does not hesitate an instant between living with one limb and being buried with two. Borne in, pale, yet resolute, he bares the diseased member to the knife—and how does that bleeding, fainting, groaning sufferer teach us to part with our sins rather than with our Saviour. If a life is better than a limb, how much better is heaven than a sin!

Two years ago a man was called to decide between his life and the gains of his lifetime. He stood on the deck of a ship that, coming from Australian gold fields, had—as some all but reach heaven—all but reached home and her harbour in safety. The exiles had coasted along their native shores; to-morrow, husbands would embrace their wives, children their parents, and not a few would realize their dream of returning to pass the calm evening of their days, envied, and happy amid the loved scenes of their youth. It was never more true, that there is much between the cup and the lip. Night came lowering down; and with the night the storm which wrecked ship, and hopes, and fortunes all together. The dawning light but showed them death staring them in the face. The sea ran mountains high—no boat could live in her. One chance remained. Pale women, weeping children, feeble and timid men, must die; but a stout, brave swimmer, with trust in God, and disencumbered of all impediments, might reach the

shore—where hundreds stood ready to dash into the surf, and, seizing, save him. One man was observed to go below. He bound around him a heavy belt, filled with gold, the hard gains of his life, and returned to the deck. One after another, he saw his fellows leap overboard; a brief struggle, and head after head went down—sunk by the gold they had fought hard to gain, and were loath to lose. Slowly he was seen to unbuckle his belt. His hopes had been bound up in it. It was to buy him land; it was the reward of long years of labour and weary exile. What he had endured for it! The sweat of his brow, the hopes of day and the dreams of night, were there. If he parts with it, he is a beggar; but if he keeps it he dies. He poised it in his grasp. Balancing it for a while, his fate trembling in the balance, with one strong desperate effort he flings it into the sea. It sinks with a sullen plunge; and now he follows it—not to sink, but, disencumbered of its weight, to swim, to beat the billows manfully, and, riding on the foaming surge, to reach the shore. Well done! Ay, well done, well chosen; but if a man, as the devil said, who for once spoke God's truth, will give all that he hath for his life, how much more should he give all he hath for his soul. Better to part with gold than with God; to bear a heavy cross than miss a heavenly crown.

Such lessons the children of this world teach the children of the kingdom, and among these, not the least important lesson, the duty of careful self-examination. Was there ever a successful merchant who did not balance his books year by year? I have often noticed, in reading the details of Courts of Bankruptcy, that fortunes are as surely wrecked by carelessness as by wild speculations, or by boundless extravagance. Here is an honest trader bankrupt. Sober, industrious,

under foot!" Then she thought of her early days, her first approach to a communion table,—how happy she had then felt in her Lord, and vowed to be faithful to him in life and death. How much of love and faithfulness had she since received from him, how many gracious warnings and knocks in providence at the door of her heart! And now? Her own heart condemned her, and passed the sentence of *guilty* over all. "Thou art a child of wrath," sounded in her soul. She felt as if the Lord with eyes of fire were looking through her whole past life, all she had done or neglected to do, her thoughts, words, and deeds of sin.

She lay prostrate till the break of day; her "soul was among lions," the waves and billows went over her head, but at length the Morning Star arose. With the whole burden of her sins she ventured to approach Golgotha. She looked up to a crucified Redeemer, she heard his words of mercy, his blood seemed to drop like balm on her wounded conscience. She could say at last with Jacob, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved," and with David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

The children were still sleeping. The mother left her house once more. She hastened to Isaac to reclaim her Bible, and this time did not fail.

As she entered, she found the Jew in the same place where she had seen him the night before. The Bible lay open before him, his hands covered his face, and he was weeping bitterly.

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Frau Linner took possession of her Bible again. But Isaac purchased another, and read and searched it day and night, and read it with his family and friends, while what he found there became to him more precious than gold or silver.

And peace and blessing returned to the habitation of the widow, for now she had found a Saviour, now she knew how to pray. She was still poor, and yet rich. She laboured hard, with diligence and prayer, and the Lord blessed her industry. By degrees she was able to buy back her furniture, and she led a quiet, tranquil life with her God and her Bible, bringing up her children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

One bright Sabbath morning the bells rang for worship, and the church was already filled. Then Isaac, the Jew, and his family, walked slowly up to the altar. Then he witnessed a good confession before many witnesses, and acknowledged with a clear voice that Jesus Christ was the true Son of God, his own Messiah and Saviour, his only hope and confidence for time and eternity.

As the pastor laid his hands upon that grey head, and an expression of indescribable joy came over the Jew's countenance, many a Christian heart felt ready to respond with deep thankfulness, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." "O Lord, arise,

have mercy upon Zion! Our eyes wait for thy salvation."

"O God of Israel, view their race,  
Back to thy fold the wanderers bring,  
Teach them to seek thy slighted grace,  
To view in Christ their promised king.

Haste, glorious day, expected long,  
When Jew and Greek one prayer shall raise,  
With eager feet one temple throng,  
One God with grateful rapture praise."

*Translation from the German.—C. C.*

### CROSS-BEARING FOR CHRIST.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER.

THERE are some passages in the Bible that cut like a razor. One of the most incisive is this, "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

Its keen edge cleaves right through all the excuses of selfishness, all the plausible pretexts by which men would justify their derelictions of duty. Christ offers no compromise. His simple alternative is—Follow me and live, or forsake me and die. Either take up the cross for me, or let it alone. But do not step over it. Do not steal slyly around it. Do not lay it quietly to one side. Do not waste life in shivering and trembling at the sight of it, and in conjuring some device to make it sit easy on the shoulder. Crosses were made to be hard and heavy. He who is not willing to bear one for me shall never wear the crown. This is the substance of the Bible teaching in regard to cross-bearing.

Every man has his cross. Some are called to bear a peculiar burden at one time, and a very different one at another. What is a cross to you, may not be to me any labour or reproach; it may not cost me the slightest inconvenience. It would be very arbitrary to specify any one act or duty or service as the adequate measure of devotion to the Saviour. The service must involve some sacrifice of selfishness, and cost some privation, or it is no cross.

In apostolic days the bare recognition of Jesus Christ as a divine object of worship was visited with odium the most intolerant, and malignity the most furious. Simply to say, "I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," meant confiscation of goods, stripes beyond measure, dungeons like the dungeons of Philippi, and a baptism of blood like that of Paul's nigh the gates of Rome. But in our day many a Christian professor whose orthodoxy is unimpeachable, and who really believes that he would rather go to the stake than abandon his loyalty to the Redeemer, is yet totally unwilling to be found at a prayer-meeting. He considers it "not genteel." So would he regard the removal of the wine-bottle from his dinner-table, even though his own sons were sipping a fatal love for the poison. Anything that infringes on *gentility*, is gall and wormwood to him. Religion to be attractive to him must be "genteel;" and he would almost be content to lose a place in heaven if he thought

that he would be obliged to recognise there those "vulgar people" whom he now passes every day in the street. Pride is his pet sin. Refinement is his idol. To keep on the sunny side of fashion is his morning and evening anxiety. And a sneer is to him what the scourge of thongs was to Paul and Silas—what the red-hot pincers were to the martyrs of the Inquisition. He is ready to follow his Master, provided that Master will lead him into no associations with "vulgar people," and into no place where foul odours will come between the wind and his gentility.

2. "What a ridiculous and contemptible Christian!" exclaims one of our readers; and yet that very reader is just as sore and as sensitive in regard to his own besetting weakness. I need not say what his especial cross is. If you would find out, just hand him a subscription paper for a benevolent object. His idea has always been to get all he can, and to keep what he has got. Giving money is his cross. He will do anything for you, provided you do not touch his purse. And when such a man does give, he deserves especial honour. For he has shouldered up a cross that is excessively galling upon his darling passion—the love of lucre.

3. To another, money-giving is easy. His purse never grows rusty in the clasps. He will at any time give you a bank-check, if you will excuse him from personal exertions for the kingdom of Christ. *Work* is his cross. Therefore he is glad to commute with his conscience by making liberal donations, on condition that he is not asked to teach in a mission-school, or go out on tract distribution, or embark in any labour that requires time and bodily effort. "You are welcome to my money, but don't ask me to work," is the frank response which he makes to every recruiting officer of Christ who endeavours to draft him into actual service. Now, such a man ought never to be excused. He *needs* to be set at work for his own spiritual good; he wants exercise; his soul's health requires that he should be put to some pretty severe and patience-trying toil. Two hours' teaching every Sabbath afternoon in the ragged-school would give him a grand appetite for his evening exercise and family worship. To dislike a duty is commonly a good reason why it should be undertaken.

4. Kindred to this dread of personal labour is another man's dread of public participation in social worship. That it would be benefit to himself, and a blessing to others, if he would only open his lips in the prayer-meeting, he is ready to admit. But that "cross" he has never yet consented to take up. He says he tried it once, and "broke down." So did Dr. Tyng, when he first undertook extemporaneous preaching; but he persevered until he stands at the head of fluent, off-hand pulpit orators in America. But, my good friend, I beg of you, do not hide away behind the post any longer in the prayer-meeting. The leader has long ago given up the idea that you have any prayer to offer. Suppose that at the next meeting you *volunteer*. It

will send a thrill through the house to hear your unaccustomed voice; and your brethren will go home and say, "Behold he prayeth!"

5. But there is still a fifth who is willing to give, to labour, and to pray, provided that no active opposition is to be encountered. He is a capital seaman in smooth weather. The good brother's weakness is timidity; he nurses his popularity like a sick child; and as he never exposes it to give it strength, he soon has none left to expose. His Christianity is sweet and loveable; but it shuns exciting issues and close encounters with rampant sins. He is an undoubted saint; but he has not a single fibre of Martin Luther or William Wilberforce in him. For his final salvation he meekly trusts to that Saviour who bore the crushing cross up Calvary's mount; but when that persecuted Master calls on him to "take up a cross" of reproach for him, he straightway begins to make excuse. Alas, for us all! We pity him for his weakness; and yet we go away and practise ourselves the same indignity toward that heavenly Friend who says to us in tones so tender, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. *And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me.*" No cross—no crown.

#### THE FIRST CENTURY AND THE NINETEENTH

A GLANCE at the apostolic age and our own in the way of comparison will show a vast extension and multiplication of the facilities and means of doing good. We will suppose a man in the primitive age converted to Christ, and feeling that impulse which awakes universally with the awakening of a new life in the soul—the impulse to do good, to win souls to Christ. What is he to do? To preach the word. To go from street to street, from house to house. If he is a Jew, the synagogue may, under favourable circumstances, be open to some of his first efforts. If he is a Gentile, perhaps some "Tyranus" may concede him the use of his "school" for a lecture or two. But his main dependence must be on speaking the word of life to individuals and groups whom he may chance to meet with. And in doing this he is met by universal opposition; not the inert opposition merely of indifference and contempt, nor yet only the intellectual opposition of logic and ridicule, but an opposition which is backed by the law and wields the police, and has the sanction of all that is venerable in established worship and ancient superstitions, and which, being instigated by the powerful instincts of selfishness, is active and unscrupulous and full of peril to liberty and life itself. It is soon perceived (for what is so keen-sighted as selfishness?) that the free and spiritual ideas of the new system can only succeed by overturning and revolutionizing everything that is established. Among the Jews it must "destroy the holy place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." In the pagan world, every religious