

THE
FAMILY TREASURY

OF

SUNDAY READING.

EDITED BY THE

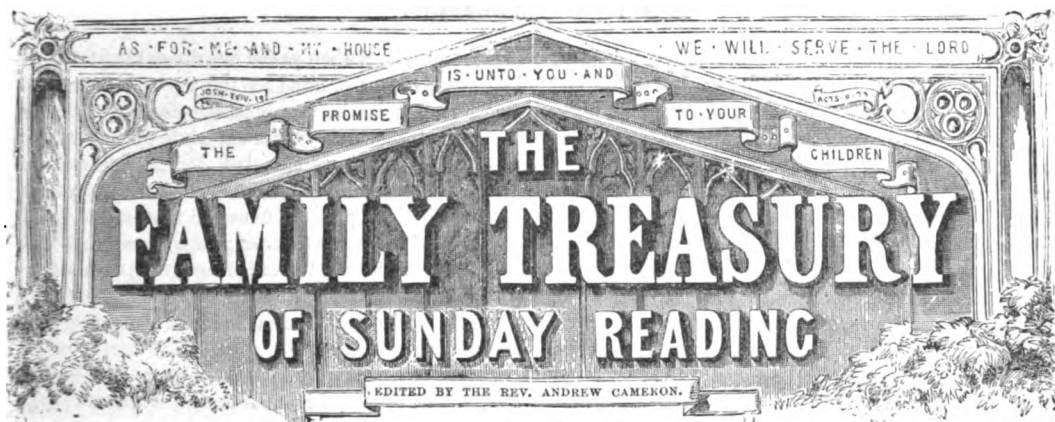
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THE BALANCE STRUCK: A NEW YEAR'S SERMON.

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.

OUR 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,

Two Cambridge men became his associates, along with some native brethren, in working out this plan. By common consent, he became leader of the enterprise. None could deny him the chief place. It seemed natural he should guide. His singleness of eye made his whole body full of light. His one great motive, the honour of his Lord, was so palpable and transparent, that none with a right spirit could refuse to recognise it and bend to it. It was this that broke down any prejudices against his work—its method, or its object. Who could assert claims against one who always took the lowest place, and was first in every arduous service? Or who could be jealous of him who had a bright and keen eye for every virtue, and for everything worthy of praise in the labours of others, though pursued on a different system from his own. He had learned the lesson, "He that is chief among you let him be your minister." If he ruled his band of itinerating missionaries, it was by humility and service. He it was who came to wake them in the morning, who provided for their wants, who tended them in sickness, who rejoiced in their gifts, and, conscious of his defects, delighted to contrast his own slowness of speech with the readiness of his companions, his own frequent embarrassment in the encounter with native subtilty with their apt and quick replies.

The results of his mission were not unappreciable even during his life. Before he committed his work into other hands, he could confidently say that hundreds of the heathens to whom they had preached for three, four, and nearly five years, knew enough of the gospel to save them, were that knowledge only applied to their hearts by the Holy Spirit. An old Tamil associate testified to the fact, that so great had been the progress in intelligence in the district embraced in the *itineracy*, that whereas at his first coming into it five years ago, he found it necessary to employ many illustrations in order to arrest attention and make the truth at all comprehended, he now found that a simple, unadorned statement of Christian facts and doctrines gained the same attention, and was evidently understood. Some fruit was gathered, more was confidently expected, though it was not to be reaped by the hand of the sower. In the midst of his duties, and with scarcely a moment's warning, death came upon him. He had long suffered from weakness of his lungs, yet laboured on. There appeared to be no immediate danger. On the morning of his death he had written his weekly budget for Palmacotta, and had retired to his bath-room, where the rupture of a blood vessel produced the immediate signs of dissolution. His first words on the attack were, "I am in the hands of God;" and uttering earnestly a short prayer, he fell on his cot with a sweet smile on his countenance, and the name of Jesus on his lips. "I should think," says the brother who attended him, "that in two minutes from the time he called me his spirit was with the Saviour."

A little band—one Englishman and a few natives—who owed him much and loved him dearly, with aching

hearts and weeping eyes, committed his body to the ground. It was a dark narrow grave, beneath the tamarind's shade; but there streamed upward a bright pathway to the throne of the righteous Judge, and the crown of glory that fadeth not away. His happy spirit was already with the Lord, and his redeemed body was in safe keeping, awaiting the voice of the archangel and the trump of God.

Scarcely had Ragland rested from his labours when his works followed him in a remarkable revival in Northern Tinnevely, the report of which is now awakening in the British Churches many thanksgivings and prayers. He died on the eve of victory, and was spared its dangers, as he strikingly remarks of Havelock, when he heard of that Christian hero's death: "General Havelock, how happy his lot! to have served his country by the will of God, and then to have fallen asleep, escaping thus one of the greatest trials a Christian man can perhaps be exposed to—popularity. Compare the honour of dining at Windsor, &c., with that of 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'"

FAIR-WEATHER FAITH.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER.

"How did you feel, auntie, while the horses were running down the hill?" "I trusted to Providence till the breechin give way; then I shut my eyes and give up for lost." The good woman in question was not the only Christian whose faith held only by a strap.

We are all more or less weak on this very point. It is the easiest thing in the world for us all to exercise *fair-weather faith*. In times of civil quiet, of mercantile prosperity, of health and happiness, it is easy to trust God. When the wind blows favourably into my swelling canvass, and my well-rigged bark flies like the sea-gull over the azure waters, why should I distrust the great Disposer of winds and waves? When my business thrives, why should I tremble for my daily bread! When the health of my household is perfect; when we can all gather around our table, a happy, healthy, hungry group, and do justice to the steaming cakes, redolent of the buckwheat-field and the bee-hive, who of us thinks of the great Physician? We are all believers then (if ever), and our confidence in God, as a most kind, loving, and affectionate Father, is complete. It costs us nothing to trust him. Neither is a prosperous Christian, who walks in the sunshine of God's favour and feels the warmth of a clear assurance beaming in through every window of the soul,—neither is such an one often afflicted with distrust. His danger lies in the opposite quarter. He is in peril of presumption and self-complacency, but not of distrust. We can all trust God in fair weather.

But if the tempest begin to marshal its cloud-squadrons into the skies; if the sun and stars appear not; if the sea lash into foam like an enraged lion; if

great, green, greedy caverns open in the sea to swallow up our trembling bark,—can we trust God then? Will the cheap confidence of the calm *hold* through the hurricane? There is the question; there is the true test of faith.

How often had the disciples gone out with the Master on Galilee's bosom, when the boat swam like a swan before the well-pulled oar, and they felt no whispering of distrust. What faith had they then! But on that memorable night when the white caps came rolling and rioting from under the black cliffs of Gadara, and leaped into the shivering skiff, then the poor panic-stricken creatures began to shake the sleeping Saviour with the whimpering cry, "Carest thou not, Master, that we perish? His rebuke is suited to just such times as these: "Oh! ye fearful ones, *why have ye so little faith?*"

For what is that trust good for that only abides with us in the bright hours of life? It is just as good as a lantern which should only shine when the sun is up, and then go out in the darkness. It is about as good as an anchor which only holds when the idle ship is swinging on the glassy swells of a quiet harbour. It is about as serviceable as the temperance of those men who are very abstinent when no wine "giveth its colour" before their eye; or the patience of those who walk very lightsome when only feather-weights are laid on their shoulders.

The trust we need is a trust in integrity though every bank fail—a trust in God though desolation darken our fireside, and death dig a grave right beneath our couch or our cradle. As Christians we must "trust God though he slay us." The faith we need is a lantern that will gleam the brighter as the night of trouble grows the darker,—a light unto our timid feet, a lamp unto our broken, up-hill pathway. The trust that honours God is a trust through thick and thin, through noon and midnight, through poverty and reproach, through prosperity and convulsions too, through hard words and hard blows, through threats of base men and the violence of evil spirits tormented before their time. What the panic-struck merchant needs to smooth his brow, and relieve his aguish nerves, and steady him through the crisis, is *faith in God*. And you, my poor desponding brother, bruised and broken, hanging your head like the bulrush under spiritual discouragement, you can be restored by only one medicine. You want the simple tonic of TRUST. Nothing else will cure that dyspepsia of the heart, and quicken your appetite for God's word, and send a new glow over the wan cheek of your consumptive courage. You are well-nigh useless now in your closet, in your home circle, in your church. Your faith has gone out. Cry mightily unto your Saviour, "Lord! *increase my faith*." May God hear you, and give you a trust that will lean on HIM though the very earth were removed, and the mountains were cast into the midst of the sea. May you have the all-conquering confidence of him who wrote from a prison cell to his far-away spiritual son, "The Lord stood with

me and strengthened me; and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever!"

He always wins who trusts in God,
To him no trial's lost,
God's will is sweetest to him when
It triumphs at his cost.

Lord! not my will, but thine be done!
My soul—from fear set free,
Shall cast her anchor 'neath thy throne,
And trust alone in thee.

THE WORLD'S CONFESSIONS.

THE world's great men may sometimes tell religion's great truths. Take, for instance, Louis XIV. and Goethe. Each possessed great talent, which was used in each case to build up an artificial great man on the world's pattern. Each inherited much—the first, a royalty of state; the second, a royalty of temper and manner that raised his talents above the talents of other men. Each lived long and lived successfully, and yet each confessed fully how wretched their glory was. The confessions of Louis XIV. were convulsive and wordless—they were the inarticulate shudderings and writhings with which he turned from death to superstition, until superstition led him blindfolded to death. Those of Goethe—equally splendid, though in another field, and equally artificial—are incidentally referred to by Eckermann, one of his idolaters, whose reminiscences we have now before us in the German language:—

"When I look back," said Goethe, speaking in his seventy-fifth year, "on my early and middle life, and see how few remain of those who were young when I was young, I am reminded of a summer residence in a watering-place. When we arrive, we form acquaintances with those who come before us, but who will soon be leaving. The loss is painful, but then comes the second generation, with which we live for a while on terms the most intimate. But then this passes away, and leaves us alone with the third, which arrives soon before our departure, and with which we have but little to do.

"I have often been praised as an especial favourite of fortune; and I will not myself complain. *But at the bottom there has been nothing but trouble and labour; and I can well say that in my whole five and seventy years, I have not had four weeks of real pleasure.* It was the eternal rolling of a stone, that had always to be lifted up again for a new start."

So spoke the great voluptuary poet-idol of Germany, and such is the world's estimate of glory and pleasure from the world's oracle.

What is it but the echo of the words of the Master. "Whoever drinketh of this water *shall thirst again*." Blessed be his name that he added, "But whoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him *shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life*" (John iv. 13, 14).