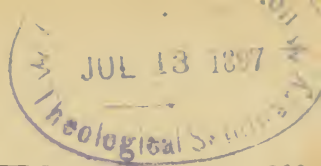


THE



NEW YORK PULPIT 983

IN

THE REVIVAL OF 1858.

A Memorial Volume

OF

S E R M O N S .



NEW YORK:
SHELDON, BLAKEMAN & CO.
CINCINNATI: RICKEY, MALLORY, & CO.

1858.

ENTERED according to Act of Congress, in the year 1858, by

SHELDON, BLAKEMAN & CO.,

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III.

PAST FEELING.

BY REV. THEO. L. CUYLER,

Pastor of the Reformed Dutch Church in Market street, N. Y.

Past feeling.—EPI. iv. 19.

A LITTLE boy is playing by his mother's side. Naturally he is not unfeeling. He is not insensible to generous sentiments. When a rude act wounds his parent's heart, he is smitten with genuine compunction. When he sees an object of distress, he is touched by it. He may, perhaps, give up his spending-money to relieve a beggar; or weep in sorrow for an unguarded blow given to a schoolmate. His heart has some flesh in it. The little fellow has *tears* in his composition; he knows what it is to feel.

Years roll on. His situation changes; and he changes with it. Watchful parents die, or else he is removed far from them. He falls under evil influences. Wicked companions gather about him—restraint slowly decays like a rotting rope—he breaks loose into sin. The calamity befalls him which befell the traveller from Jerusalem to Jericho. He “falls among thieves” who do worse than rob him of his purse; they rob him of

NOTE.—My only reason for consenting to the publication of this discourse is found in the simple fact that God has been pleased to bless its plain unadorned truths to the conversion of several souls during the present revival.

decency, of self-respect, of all reverence for the pure, the honest, the lofty, the sacred, the holy. He grows reckless, and launches his depravity out on the open sea—literally spreading sail for perdition. When on shore he drinks hard, but feels no compunction. His oaths are exploded with a gusto, as if he loved to blaspheme. All regard for man, all fear of God wears away from his heart. His soul begins to petrify. The flesh turns to stone. At length he is ripe for anything.

In an evil hour he plans a mutiny on board the ship, and with his own hand strikes down the officer of the deck, and heaves his crimson corpse out into the sea as coolly as he would throw over a dog! Years pass by—dark, desperate years of rapine and of blood. At length his pirate-cruiser is captured, and he is brought on shore in irons. His soul is in irons too. They try him, they condemn him, they sentence him. But through it all he is perfectly unmoved. They drag him to his cell. He spends the last night before his execution in that living tomb—and *sleeps!* He ascends the fatal scaffold, as callous as a rock. No words of tender exhortation and entreaty from the chaplain by his side can melt him for a moment. His face indicates nothing but the sullen, obstinate hardihood of despair. That adamant heart—that heart once tender, once alive to generous feeling, once soft enough for tears of contrition—that heart is now *past feeling!* It once could feel; nay, it did feel. It feels no longer. Shame crimsons no longer that brazen countenance; the dread of death moves not a muscle of that rigid face; the horrors of hell call forth no last cry for “mercy,” as he swings out into his terrible eternity! He dies as he lived; and among the nettles on his shunned and solitary grave we would plant a stone—not of respect, but of warning—and write on it God’s solemn sentence, “PAST FEELING.”

Now such appalling cases as this I have described are not imaginary. They are extreme cases, I admit. They are about as bad as earth can furnish, or fiends can delight to look upon. We have ourselves seen cases very much like them. The gambler, who sits glued to his roulette-table till the morning sun looks in to reproach him—the burglar, who after years of prison experience still plots his deeds of darkness—the poor outcast child of shame, who vents her vileness on the evening air as she passes us in the streets—the ruffian, who makes merchandise of human sinews and human souls—all these are but melancholy spectacles for men to shudder at, and for pitying angels to weep over. They are the terrific examples of what human depravity can work out when man is simply given up *to himself*. They illustrate fully the callousness of the heart when it has become *past feeling*—feeling for friends, feeling for reputation, feeling for God's word, feeling for life itself or for a dread hereafter.

It was, to such persons—to those whom with a sad significance we style “abandoned” persons—that the apostle referred in the passage before us. He had just been exhorting the Ephesian church to purity of heart and life. As a warning, he points to the profligacy of heathenism about them. He makes a beacon of the godless Gentiles who “walked in the vanity of their mind,” whose “understandings were darkened,” who were alienated from the life of God. Those men had debauched their own moral sense. Their consciences were made drunk. They had given themselves over to the tyranny of lust to “work all uncleanness with greediness.” Until at length they had become so insensible to their guilt, that Paul brands them with the fatal epithet, “*past feeling*.”

Now I do earnestly hope that this sense of my text is not, and never will be, applicable to any one in this as

sembly. I trust that on no brow here will ever be affixed a brand to which the guilty wearer shall be indifferent—a brand seen and read of all men, except the man himself. If God shall lengthen out my life among you, may I never behold the harrowing spectacle of any young man in this audience so sunk, so dead to all regard for himself, regard for society, regard for the God of Heaven, that he shall not even feel a glow of shame upon his cheek when he meets the mother who bore him, or the pastor who tried to save him. Never, never come that day when any of you, my beloved young friends, shall have become so *dead* to the claims of God and the voice of conscience, that having grown “past feeling,” we must be constrained to abandon you as past all hope!

There is, however, a sense in which the solemn words of my text may apply to some of you. I fear it will yet apply. Perhaps it does already. I refer to that *insensibility to religious truth* which marks those who have often grieved the Holy Spirit. This is a most tremendous calamity. It is all the worse from the fact that its victim is insensible to his own insensibility. He does not feel how fearful it is *not to feel*. There are many here whom I could startle at once by telling them, on good medical authority, that a deadly disease was beginning its stealthy work upon their frames; or if I should tell them that a burglar had designs upon their house and life to-night; or that a treacherous friend would betray the secret to-morrow which shall blast their character. But when I come and tell you plainly that you are in danger of being *lost forever*, you scarcely open your ears to listen. What care you for it? “What’s that to me.”

My impenitent friend! it has not been *always* so with thee. Open the leaves of your heart’s diary. Recall your past. Bring up memory to the witness-box. She

will remind you of a time when your conscience was tender, and sensitive to gospel influence. As the words of warning sounded from a pastor's lips, on some past Sabbath, you listened to them, and listened with solemn awe. The truth fell like the small rain on the tender herb. You were melted. You were subdued. You were struck through with conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It was your own sin that haunted you. The spectre would not

“Down at your bidding!”

You were sore troubled. You wept. With red eyes, and the tear still undried upon your cheek, you left the sanctuary. The trifling of the triflers, as they came out of church to laugh, to gossip, or to criticise, astonished you, and grieved you. Feeling so much yourself, you wondered how they could be so apparently “past feeling.” Perhaps you prayed, and for a time went “softly.” Your long closed Bible was opened. Some faithful friend was sought for religious counsel. And all that time the infinite Spirit of God was striving with you. Have you ever thought of the magnitude and the wonderful mercy of that phrase, “*striving?*” Just think of it. God striving with a sinner! It bespeaks strait and struggle. It bespeaks the anxiety of God himself to save His own wicked child. It is as if the ineffable Redeemer went down upon His knees before the willful, disobedient one, and *besought* him not to commit the eternal suicide!

So the Divine spirit strove with you. And under those strong pressures of truth, and uprisings of conscience and wooings of the Holy Ghost, you were “almost persuaded” to become a Christian. But alas! how is it with you now? Do you feel to-night as you felt then? Does the word *sin* smite you as then? Does the word

hell strike you through with dread? Does the word *duty* arouse you as then? Does the mention of that blessed word "SAVIOUR" stir the fount of tears within you, as it used to do in those days gone by? Can you weep now as you wept then? Can you pray as you prayed then? Or on the other hand, do you not regard the very appeal I am making now to you, as a merely professional thing that I am employed to make twice every week, and in which you have no personal concern? Have you deliberately made up your mind, that in spite of warnings and entreaties, that through sick chambers and dying beds, and yawning graves, that over the very cross of Jesus, planted in your guilty path, you will press your way onward to the gates of hell?

Then I do not say that you are "*past feeling.*" I dare not say that. God only knows your future. But most frankly and solemnly, I declare to you, that there *have been* cases in which men have so steeled themselves against conviction, that they were left, like "Lot's wife," monuments of wrath! I do not know that this is your case; but I fear it. I cannot bear to write this awful epitaph over your soul, dead in its trespasses and sin—"Past Feeling." The very thought is a dagger to my soul. Is that a dreadful moment to you, in which you are compelled to enter the chamber of a sick friend, and break to him the fatal truth, that his physician has given him up as past recovery? You would give your right hand to avoid that duty, but fidelity requires it. And I should be an unfaithful watchman for souls, if I did not proclaim to-night, my fears, that there are some now here, who have grieved away God's Spirit forever, and have already passed

———"that mysterious bourne,
By which our path is crossed,
Beyond which God himself has sworn,
That he who goes is lost!"

Occasionally a person is found who will frankly confess his total insensibility to all that is most precious to a saint, to all that is most startling to a sinner. A faithful pastor in a neighboring State, relates an instance so important, as a proof of our position, that I shall introduce it, in spite of certain antiquated prejudices against personal narratives in the pulpit. My Bible is full of personal history; and I am never afraid to introduce an anecdote, or relate an incident which makes a page in the great book of God's providence.

"I once entered a farm-house," said this pastor, "on a chilly November evening, and spent an hour in personal religious conversation with its inmates. The aged father of the family—a most kind and amiable man—followed me to the door, and stopped me on the porch. He took me by the hand, and most deliberately said: 'I thank you for this visit, and hope it will not be the last. As you have just commenced your labors among us, I wish to give you a word of advice, based on my own experience. *Let us old people alone*, and devote your labors to the youth of your flock. Forty years ago, I was greatly anxious about my soul; many were then converted, but I was not one of them. During the ministry of Mr. M——, many more were converted, but I was not one of them. And now for years, I have not *had a single feeling* on the subject! I know that I am a lost sinner; I know that I can only be saved through Jesus Christ; I feel persuaded that when I die, *I am lost!* I believe all you preach, but I feel it no more than if I were a block of marble. I expect to live and die just as I am. So leave us to ourselves, and our sins, and give your strength to the work of saving the young.'

"I remembered that incident, and watched the progress of that man. His seat was rarely vacant in the sanctuary; but he was a true prophet of his own fate. He lived as he predicted; and so he died. We laid him

down at last in his hopeless grave, in the midst of a congregation over whom God had so often opened windows in heaven." He was joined to his idols; God let him alone!

I would fain leave you, my hearers, to withdraw with the tremulous tones of that old man's voice, still ringing in your ears. I would prefer that you should go home to ponder the honest confession and the fate of one who was "past feeling" anything but his own indifference. Yet I cannot dismiss you without a few words of affectionate counsel to those who are not "past feeling"—who feel now—who cannot but feel under the touch of God's Spirit. Yonder anxious faces are the dial-plates of anxious hearts. In this silent, hushed assembly, we seem to overhear the very throb of those hearts, palpitating with the great question—"what shall I do to be saved?"

My friend! bear away with you from this house four solemn practical suggestions drawn from the text before us.

I. You feel now; but *do not be content with mere feeling*. Tears never saved a sinner; hell is vocal with the wails of the weepers. *Faith is better than feeling*. Your Bible does not say—feel and be saved. It says, "Believe and be saved." And faith is not enough without action. "The devils believe." There are no atheists in the dungeons of the damned. But lost spirits do not love God, do not *obey* Him. You must obey as well as believe. Act out your feelings. Obey God in self-denying duty. Crystallize your feeling into faith, and prove your faith by your works. "Faith without works is dead." Faith in Jesus is the invisible *root* of religion concealed within the soul; but deeds of holy duty are the glorious outgrowth with stalwart trunk, and branches broad, and luxuriant masses of foliage

lifted into the airs of heaven. And amid these goodly boughs are found the *fruits* of godliness shining—as quaint Andrew Marvell said of the Bermuda oranges—

“Like golden lamps in a deep green night.”

Aim immediately at fruits. Begin to-night to serve God from principle. Go home and set up your altar. Lay hold of work; the harder it is the better. Paul struck the key-note of his whole religious life when in the gush of his first feeling he cried out, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

II. My second suggestion is, that what you do, you must *do quickly*, for you cannot long remain as you are. For a few brief days in May, the orchards are white with blossoms. They soon turn to fruit, or else float away useless and wasted upon the idle breeze. It will be so with your present feelings. They must be deepened into decision, or be entirely dissipated by delay. You must advance, or be lost. As the result of your present seriousness, you will either become a true child of God, or else a more hardened and unfeeling child of wrath. Dread (as you would dread death itself) the very idea of relapsing into indifference. Cherish conviction. Take your fears to the mercy-seat, and beseech your compassionate Saviour not to permit your awakened soul ever to become “past feeling.”

III. My third suggestion is a brief caution. Do not compare your own feelings with those of other people, or allow yourself to be discouraged because you have not the intense griefs or the lively joys of which they speak. God does not command you to feel like this one or like that. He bids you *repent and believe*; you are to conform to His word and not to your neighbors' varying frames and feelings.

The Holy Spirit deals with no two hearts precisely alike. He opens some hearts by the gentlest touch of love; others He seems to wrench open as with the iron-bar of alarming judgments. Spurgeon happily remarks: "When the lofty palm-tree of Zeilan puts forth its flower, the sheath bursts with a report that shakes the forest; but thousands of other flowers of equal value open in the morning, and the very dew-drops hear no sound; even so many souls do blossom in mercy, and the world hears neither whirlwind nor tempest." Do not question the rightfulness of your own heart-exercises because no one else has had any precisely similar. God will not bear dictation. He is a Sovereign. He will save you just as He chooses. Be thankful that you can be saved at all. See to it that you do not cavil and question and tamper until the Holy Spirit abandon you to become "past feeling."

IV. Finally, let me remind you that in the eternal world no one can be indifferent, no one shall be insensible. Neither in heaven nor in hell can you ever become "past feeling."

The home of the ransomed is a home of rapture. Heaven is alive with emotion. Every heart throbs, every eye kindles, every tongue is praising, every finger strikes a harp-string. Listen with the ear of faith, and you can hear the distant oratorios of the blessed as they swell up in melodies seraphic and celestial! Look yonder with faith's clear eye, and you will see the mighty multitudes before the throne. You will behold the flashing shower of golden crowns flung before the feet of one majestic Being. You will catch one outburst of melody. The burden of the strain will be "unto Him that loved us, and washed us in His blood, be the praise and the dominion forever!" No mortal's name shall be heard of then. Paul shall be lost sight of in

the glory of Paul's Redeemer. Luther will be unseen amid the worship of Luther's Reformer. John Calvin shall sing *None but Christ!* And John Wesley shall shout back *None but Christ!* With one heart and one voice they all roll high the magnificent acclaim: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honor, and power, and glory, and blessing, for ever and ever!"

The world of darkness will be a world of feeling too. "There shall be weeping" there. Not tears of penitence, but tears of despair. The worm shall never die. There will be a fire unquenchable in every sinner's heart that will burn like a seven-times heated furnace. The debauchee will be gnawed by his appetite for sensualities that never can be gratified. The poor drunkard will be possessed with a passion for the poison-bowl, but will find not a single drop to slake the undying thirst. The covetous spirit will writhe in its own selfishness; and the skeptic will be tormented with the constant sight of a Jehovah whom he once denied, and of a heaven which he closed against himself. "*Ye knew your duty and ye did it not,*" will blaze in lurid flame on every wall of that dark prison-house!

Conscience will be fearfully busy then—busy in pointing to the visions of a Saviour offered and a Saviour despised—busy in recalling mercies once contemned, and precious invitations trampled under foot. Dying friend! You may smother conscience here. You may drown serious thought. You may gag your moral sense. But that smothered conscience will rise again. It will arise in the dying hour, startled from slumber by the crash of dissolving humanity. It will awake to new life on that dread morn when the Archangel's trump shall sound. It will be alive with an intensity of torment on that day when the "books are opened;" and it will live amid the agonies of perdition *never again to become* PAST FEELING!