





## 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,

of judgment—in the eye and reckoning of man a suffering, in its most aggravated form, of a sentence of condemnation; and as such—what it also behoved to be—the visible sign and reflex of the character it bore, on other accounts, in the reckoning of Heaven. Christ died; he *must* have died as a curse, because of the guilt that lay on him; and the very form and manner of his death must render it patent to all, that so, and no otherwise, did he finish his course on earth. Finally, as the Roman power bore sway over the world, and Christ's death had an aspect for the world of mankind, it was meet that the earthly, which was to reflect the heavenly judgment, should bear on it the impress of Rome's universality; that, as she was wont to lift up on a cross her vilest criminals as a spectacle of ignominy, and shame, and cursing, so the Redeemer of the sinful world should be lifted up, in visible token of what *its* sinfulness deserved, and what he endured to have that sinfulness blotted out.

These reasons, at least, we can easily discern, whatever others may have conspired with them, to render the death of Christ by crucifixion necessary,—in the same sense in which anything is necessary, that is fitted, in one specific form rather than another, to suit the design, and work out the purposes, of God. But such being the case, it was in this particular form the choice of Christ himself; Jews and Romans were but the instruments—the *unconscious* instruments, as regards its real object—of bringing it about. Christ voluntarily laid down his life,—no man could take it from him; and while he suffered himself to be dragged as a sheep to the slaughter, he in reality went to the cross with the full consent of his mind, to drink the cup of sorrow that was due to human guilt, and, as on heaven's high altar, to pour out his life-blood for the redemption of men. Here grace and truth met together in their highest exercise; here the Father was glorified with a perfect glory,—divine righteousness performing its greatest work, divine love giving its noblest sacrifice, that the well-spring of life might be again opened for a justly condemned and perishing world. In a spiritual respect, therefore, the real elevation was here; and so it was viewed by our Lord and his like-minded apostle. The subsequent and formal elevation to the right hand of the Father was but the sequel of that which was attained on the cross of Calvary, and is here comparatively disregarded. It was on the cross that the mighty conflict for the world's redemption was fought and won. It was there that the principalities and powers, which triumphed over man's fall, were for ever spoiled. And there, as on "a high mountain and eminent"—morally the world's noblest elevation—the Lord planted for eternal ages the branch of his own providing, which was destined to grow, and bear fruit, till it received the homage of every tree of the field, and gathered under its boughs fowl of every wing (Ezek. xvii. 23).

Contemplated thus, as it appears to the truly spiritual eye, viewed in necessary connection with the higher

purposes of God, as the chosen arena for his more peculiar work, the lifting up on the cross is no longer little; it has a height and a grandeur above all besides, and is at once the ground and the prelude of the glory that was to follow. Hence it is through this appearance and action on the cross, that even the risen power of Jesus, flowing down from the heavenly places, exerts its attractive force upon the souls of men; his Spirit works, through the drawing influence of the cross. Hence, also, even in the midst of his heavenly glory, Christ presents himself to the eye of his apostle as a lamb that had been slain—as if the elevation of Calvary had reached up to heaven, and was still perpetuating itself there (Rev. v. 6). Nor was the evangelist John singular in thus contemplating it. The same aspect substantially is presented by St. Paul when he exclaims, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ;" and when he speaks of Christ crucified as "the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation." Nor can there be a surer and better mark in any one of a spiritual mind than his disposition and capacity to see in the work upon the cross the peculiar manifestation of Messiah's glory,—seeing in it externally, indeed, the deepest humiliation, but spiritually also discerning the grandest conceivable display of whatever is attractive, and holy, and good.

#### SPIRITUAL DYSPEPTICS.

BY THE REV. T. L. CUYLER.

THERE is a class of weak-handed and feeble-kneed professors in Christ's Church who are self-made invalids. Their spiritual debility is the direct result of their own sins and shortcomings. In their case, as in the physical hygiene, disease is the inevitable punishment of transgression against the laws of health.

Is not the inebriate's bloated and poisoned frame the immediate legacy of his bottle? Is not a shattered nervous system the tormenting bequest which a high-pressure career of sensuality leaves to the transgressor? The indolence which never earns its daily bread, cannot earn the appetite to enjoy it; the gluttony which gorges the stomach is but fattening an early banquet for the worms. *Dyspepsia is only God's appointed health-officer, stationed at the gateway of excess*, to warn off all who approach it, and to punish those who will persist in entering the forbidden ground. In like manner spiritual disease is the inevitable result of committed sin, or of neglect of religious duty. It requires no profound skill to detect the cause of Mr. A—'s dyspepsia, or Deacon B—'s spiritual palsy, or of poor Mr. C—'s leprosy. How can a Christian be healthy who never works? How can a man's faith be strong who never enters his closet? How can a man's benevolence be warm who never gives? A want of appetite for giving always brings on a lean visage in the Church; but I do like to hear my neighbour M— pray at the monthly

concert, for the fluency of his devotion is quickened by his fluency of purse. He *dares* to ask God's help in the salvation of sinners, for he is doing his own utmost too. And I have known one resolute, sagacious, Christ-loving woman to do in a mission-school what Florence Nightingale did in the hospitals of Scutari,—that is, teach the nurses how to cure, as well as the sick how to recover.

If this brief paragraph falls under the eye of any spiritual dyspeptic, let us offer to him two or three familiar counsels. My friend, your disease and debility are your own fault, not your misfortune. It is not a "visitation of God," but a visitation of the devil that has laid you on your back, and made you well-nigh useless in the Church, in the Sabbath-school, and in every enterprise of Christian charity. Having brought on your own malady, you must be your own restorer, by the help of the divine Physician. You are not only useless to your pastor, but uncomfortable to yourself. You must get well. Let us tell you how.

1. You need a wholesome diet. Instead of the surfeit of daily newspapers and political journals, or the spiced stimulants of fiction, give your hungry soul the *bread of life*. Your moral powers are weak for want of nourishment. There has been a starvation of *Bible-truth*, of sound experimental works, of inspiring religious biography, of "books that are books." Nothing will give sinew and bone to your piety like the thorough reading and thorough digestion of the Bible. All the giants in the history of the Church have been large and hungry feeders on the Bible.

2. You want exercise. God has given you powers, and faculties, and affections to serve him with. But for want of use, those limbs of the soul are as powerless as the bodily limbs of a fever patient who has not left his couch for a fortnight. Never will you recover your appetite for the word and the ordinances, never will the flush of spiritual joy mantle your countenance until you have laid hold of hard, self-denying work. Nothing will impart such earnestness to your prayers as to spend an hour before them by the bedside of the sick, or in close conversation with an inquirer for salvation; nothing will excite a better appetite for a Sabbath sermon than a morning spent in *business-like* devotion to your Sabbath-school class; and a little uphill work in behalf of some unpopular discouraging movement of reform, will harden your muscle amazingly. Oberlin, Wilberforce, Elizabeth Fry never knew the meaning of "dyspepsia." You are dying from confinement and indolence. There is but one cure for spiritual laziness, and that is—work; but one cure for selfishness, and that is—sacrifice; but one cure for timidity, and that is to plunge into a disagreeable duty before the shiver has time to come on. Some Christians are paralyzed for life by the monomania of fear. They remind us of an invalid who was afflicted by the delusion that he was made of pipe-clay, and if violently struck against any object, he would snap into fragments! He was only

cured by a friend who drove him into a meadow and managed to upset the vehicle in the right place. The poor monomaniac shrieked frightfully as the carriage went over; but he rose from the ground sound in *mind* as well as in body. Would it not be well for those who have trembled for years at the bare thought of a prayer in public, to force themselves into an utterance? They will be amazed to find how one resolute trial, in the strength of God, will break the tyrannous spell for ever. Try! my friend! Lay hold of any dreaded or disagreeable duty and try. God never leaves his child to fail when in the path of obedience; for if the Christian does not succeed in pleasing himself by the method of his performance, he yet pleases God by the sincerity of his good endeavours. And the very attempt to discharge duty will give you strength. When the duty is fairly achieved, the sense of *having done it* will send an exquisite thrill of satisfaction through the soul, and will be a source of one of the purest joys that you can know this side of heaven. I question whether we ever realize a sweeter delight than when we stand beside some heaven-directed undertaking fairly accomplished, or some painful task nobly wrought out—some trying testimony manfully borne, or some bitter persecution fairly weathered out into the repose and sunshine of victory. Such joys the half-hearted, cowardly, dyspeptic Christian never experiences. The "weak hand" plucks no such chaplet. The "feeble knees" reach no such goal of triumph. They are awarded only to the vigorous of spiritual sinew, to the Bible-reader, and the Bible-worker too! Dyspeptic brother! we commend to you the double remedy—*Bible-diet* and *Bible-duty*; if these do not restore you, we fear your case is past all medication.

#### THROWING AND TOUCHING.

"SOMEBODY *hath* touched me." He knew the difference; He distinguished at once, as by a divine instinct, that believing *one* from the unbelieving many. There was that in her which put her in connection with the grace, the strength, the healing power which were in Him. Do you ask me what this was? It was faith; it was her faith. She came expecting a blessing, believing a blessing, and so finding the blessing which she expected and believed; she came saying, as we just now heard, "If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole." But that careless multitude who thronged the Lord, only eager to gratify their curiosity, and to see what new wonder he would next do, as they desired nothing, expected nothing from him, so they obtained nothing. Empty they came, and empty they went away. It may very well have happened that among that crowd there were more than one sick and suffering, holden with some painful infirmity or inveterate disease; but there went forth no virtue from the Lord to them. And why not? Because they thronged him, and did not touch