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→*SERMONS*←

SOURCES OF COMFORT IN THE DEATH-SHADE.

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Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.—PSALMS xxiii., 4.

A SONG of comfort, and, will you notice, in strange place. Comfort springs from the two Latin words, *con*, with, and *fortis*, strong, and so means literally to be strong with one's self, to have a shining courage at the centre of the soul. But there is nothing in the outward circumstance of the singer here to minister to such efficacy of soul. There is everything in outward circumstance to damage and defeat it.

For, in the place he stands, there is no green grass beneath his feet, nor sky of blue above his head, nor wrap of summer air around him, nor plash and sparkle of cool brook for his refreshment. It is a gaunt and gloomy place he stands in; it is the valley of the death-shade.

Amid the rocky fastnesses of Judea such places were often found. They were deep, dangerous, narrow defiles among the mountains. The way fell far down between towering heights on either side. To pass through them required the tasking of every muscle as the foot sought resting-place upon the jagged stones, and an eye alert lest an ambuscading precipice destroy. So far down did the path fall and so loftily on either side did the mountains tower that around the whole circle of the hours the sun could get chance to

for we knew not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. viii., 26). What heart is now too weak to pray? The Spirit, possessed of all power, endowed with all wisdom, crowned with all excellence, enthroned in all majesty, "helpeth our infirmities." It is almost a blessing to be weak to have such transcendent aid. In our ignorance He indites the prayer; in our distance from God He

makes intercessions for us; in our lameness of speech He uses the eloquence of "groanings which cannot be uttered."

With such helps to prayer, there is no task in life so completely done by others, there is no duty so fully assumed by others, there is no expectation so perfectly assured by others. There should be no service more cheerfully or hopefully rendered. Remove the hindrances, accept the helps, and be assured your prayer cannot fail.—*Ch. Index.*

THE PULPIT TREASURY IN THE FAMILY.

Family Religion.

BY MOSES D. HOGE, D.D. (PRESBYTERIAN), RICHMOND, VA.*

The Rev. Mr. Anderson, of Bath, in a discourse characterized by great fervor and unction, remarked that we were educated not so much by the books we studied as by the people with whom we have intercourse; that while much important technical information was derived from books, the potent influences which shaped our characters and guided our lives came from the opinions of the men with whom we held familiar intercourse, and from the example of those with whom we are in constant association. This is a great and solemn truth. We are all sculptors, not like your great Thorwaldsen in shaping blocks of marble into forms of beauty, but in moulding the characters of those with whom we come in contact into those forms which they will wear through this life, and possibly wear forever. But if such is the power of the influences which fashion us in our intercourse with society at large, how much more powerful must the influences be which are daily and hourly exerted in the narrow circle of home; how much more complete the education of both mind and hearts which comes from the precepts and examples of parents in their intimate association with their children, who in the most impressive years of life are looking to these, their

natural teachers and guides, for counsel and direction.

Religion is a power in the world wherever exhibited, but how much more in the household where its daily lessons may be taught under circumstances the most favorable for making the deepest and most enduring impression. I was but seven years old when my father died, and when the funeral services were over, and when the strange, sad silence filled the house which is so impressive after the burial of one beloved, and when the evening of that mournful day drew on, our mother gathered us, her little children, in her chamber, and told us that she meant hereafter to take our father's place, as God might help her, as the head of the household, and would commence that night by conducting family prayers.

Were I to live beyond the age of the venerable President of this Alliance (Dr. Kalkar), I could not forget that scene; could not forget the manner in which she read God's Word, or the low and tremulous tones of the prayer in which she besought strength and comfort, and commended her children to the care and love of the covenant-keeping God. None of you, my English friends of this audience, are unacquainted with the tender lines of one of your own poets, "written on the receipt of his mother's picture," commencing—

"O that those lips had language! life has pass'd
With me but roughly since I saw thee last;"

*An unpremeditated address delivered before the Conference of the Evangelical Alliance Copenhagen.

nor have you forgotten the stanza in which he gratefully embalms the memory of those to whom he owed a debt never to be paid—

"My boast is not that I deduce my birth
From loins enthroned or rulers of the earth,
But higher far my proud pretensions rise,
The child of parents passed into the skies."

And as one quotation suggests another, you, my friends from another land, will allow me to remind you of the hallowed scene depicted by one of the greatest bards, not only of Scotland but of the world—the picture of "The Cotter's Saturday Night," when the family, gathered for the evening worship, formed a circle around the fireside, and when the old patriarch, having read a portion from "the big ha' Bible," and all together having sung a psalm, borne upward by "Dundee's wild warbling notes," or "plaintive Martyrs" or "noble Elgin"—

"Then kneeling down to Heaven's eternal King,
The saint, the husband and the father prays.
Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing,
That thus they all shall meet in future days,
No more to sigh or shed the bitter tear,
Together hymning their Creator's praise,
In such society, yet still more dear,
While circling time moves round in an eternal sphere."

There is a picture of family worship whose outlines will never grow dim, and whose colors will not fade.

Well was it said, "From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs," and as long as piety in the household continues to be the characteristic of the life of the people of any land, it will never be without the patriot soldier to defend its rights, or the patriot bard to sing its glories. Then let family worship open the gates of the morning with praise, and close the portals of the day with peace; let the children grow up under the hallowing influences of household piety, and these salutary impressions will never be effaced. They will sink down in the heart of the child as the dew sinks down in the heart of the flower, giving refreshment and gathering sweetness. The good seed falling on the tender heart softened by grace, will not perish, but will spring up

to bear precious fruits in this life and perchance to flourish beautiful and immortal in the paradise of God.

If there is to be but one pious person in the family, let that one be the mother! She has the earliest and best opportunity with the child—the father's influence comes afterwards. The mother's teaching is remembered longest, and often is the last upon which the blessing of God rests. Were I now to make the appeal, would not hundreds of men rise up in this great assembly, gathered from all lands, and testify, if required, that, under God, they owe their conversion to a mother's tender importunity, or to the silent power of her example and the ever-present influence of her sweet and saintly life? It may be that she no longer lives on earth, but when I pronounce the word *Mother*—it matters not in what language—to some of you it is like a voice from Heaven—it is as if an angel spoke—and you hear it with the listening ear of the heart. And never can you forget the hours of childhood, when each night, before retiring to rest, she made you kneel down at her feet, and, taking your little hands in hers, or laying her soft hand upon your head—you can feel its gentle pressure now—she taught you to say, "Our Father which art in Heaven;" or that other prayer so familiar to all English-speaking people, commencing, "Now I lay me down to sleep"—a good prayer for a child, for a man, for a patriarch!

The Apostle sent his salutation to the "church in the house." So long as there are true apostolic, evangelic churches in households, there will be the same kind of churches in kingdoms, in republics, in all the world. Should the church in the house exist no more, then the church in the city, in the state, in the world will become extinct. But this will never be while Christian life is cherished and perpetuated in the family.

God bless every good mother in Denmark and every pious household represented here to-night in this great gathering of His people from so many nations of the earth!