



The
Saint
and
His
Saviour

The work of the Spirit in the life of the Christian

C. H. SPURGEON

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I

THE DESPISED FRIEND

'We esteemed him not' – Isa. 53 v.3.



It would not be easy for some of us to recall the hour when we first heard the name of Jesus. In very infancy that sweet sound was as familiar to our ear as the hush of lullaby. Our earliest recollections are associated with the house of God, the family altar, the Holy Bible, the sacred song, and the fervent prayer. Like young Samuels, we were lighted to our rest by the lamps of the sanctuary, and were awakened by the sound of the morning hymn. Many a time has the man of God, whom a parent's hospitality has entertained, implored a blessing on our head, desiring in all sincerity that we might early call the Redeemer blessed; and to his petition a mother's earnest 'Amen' has solemnly responded. Ours were happy portions and goodly heritages; but nevertheless, being 'born in sin, and shapen in iniquity', these heavenly privileges did not of themselves avail to give us love to Jesus and pardon by his blood.

We are often compelled to weep over sins aggravated by light as clear as noonday, ordinances undervalued from their very





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frequency, warnings despised, although accompanied with tears from a parent's eye, and loathings felt in the heart, if not expressed by the lips, to those very blessings which were the rich benisons of heaven. In our own persons we are witnesses to the fact of innate depravity, the birth-plague of man; and we can testify to the doctrine that grace, and grace alone, can change the heart. The words of Isaiah are ours with an emphasis, notwithstanding all the hallowed influences which surrounded us; and in uttering the confession, 'We esteemed him not', the haunts of our childhood, the companions of our youth, and the sins of our manhood, unanimously confirm our truthfulness.

Starting, then, with our own experience, we are led to infer that those who were denied our advantages will certainly be compelled to adopt the same humble language. If the child of pious parents, who by divine power was in youth brought to know the Lord, feels constrained to acknowledge that once he did not esteem the Saviour, shall the man whose education was irreligion, whose childhood was riot, whose youth was license, and whose maturity was crime, be able to adopt language less humiliating? No; we believe that all men of this class, who are now redeemed from the hand of the enemy, will readily acknowledge that they were the blind neglecters of the beauties of our glorious Emmanuel. Aye, more, we venture to challenge the 'Church of the first-born' to produce a single saint who did not once pass by the cross with indifference, if not contempt.

Whether we review the 'noble army of martyrs,' 'the goodly fellowship of the prophets,' 'the glorious company of the apostles,' or 'the holy Church throughout all the world,' we shall not discover a single lover of the adorable Redeemer who will not join the general confession, 'We esteemed him not.'

Pause, attentive reader, and ask thyself whether thou dost esteem him *now*; for possibly it may happen that thou hast not as yet seen in him any 'beauty that thou shouldest desire him,' nor canst thou subscribe to the exclamation of the spouse, 'Yea, he is altogether lovely.' Should this be thine unhappy condition,





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a meditation thereon may, under the Holy Spirit's influence, be of much use to thee; and I beseech thee, while we unfold the secrets of what was once our prison-house, be thou intensely anxious that by any means thou also mayest escape a bondage which deprives thee of joy here, and will shut thee out from bliss hereafter.

We propose to endeavour first of all to bring the fact of our light estimation of Jesus vividly before our eye; then, secondly, we will discuss the causes of this folly; and, thirdly, seek to excite emotions proper to such a mournful contemplation.

I. Let us go to the potter's house, and view the unshapen clay which we once were; let us remember 'the rock whence we were hewn', and the 'hole of the pit from which we were digged', that we may with deeper feeling repeat the text, 'We esteemed him not.' Let us here seriously peruse the diary of memory, for there the witnesses of our guilt have faithfully recorded their names.

We pause, and consider first *our overt acts of sin*, for these lie like immense boulders on the sides of the hill of life, sure testifiers to the rock within.

Few men would dare to read their own autobiography, if all their deeds were recorded in it; few can look back upon their entire career without a blush. 'We have all sinned, and come short of his glory', None of us can lay claim to perfection. True, at times a forgetful self-complacency bids us exult in the virtue of our lives; but when faithful memory awakes, how instantly she dispels the illusion! She waves her magic wand, and in the king's palaces frogs arise in multitudes; the pure rivers at her glance become blood; the whole land is creeping with loathsomeness. Where we imagined purity, lo, imperfection ariseth. The snow-wreath of satisfaction melts before the sun of truth; the nectared bowl of gratulation is embittered by sad remembrances; while, under the glass of honesty, the deformities and irregularities of a life apparently correct are rendered, alas! too visible.



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Let the Christian, whose hair is whitened by the sunlight of heaven, tell his lifelong story. He may have been one of the most upright and moral, but there will be one dark spot in his history, upon which he will shed the tear of penitence, because then he knew not the fear of the Lord. Let you heroic warrior of Jesus recount his deeds; but he too points to deep scars, the offspring of wounds received in the service of the Evil One. Some amongst our chosen men, in their days of unregeneracy, were notorious for guilt, and could well write with Bunyan¹— ‘As for my own natural life, for the time that I was without God in the world, it was, indeed, according to the course of this world and the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2 vs. 2, 3). It was my delight to be taken captive by the devil at his will (2 Tim. 2. v. 26), being filled with all unrighteousness; the which did also so strongly work, both in my heart and life, that I had but few equals, both for cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God.’ Suffice it, however, that by each of us open sins have been committed, which manifest that ‘we esteemed him not.’

Could we have rebelled against our Father with so high a hand, if his Son had been the object of our love? Should we have so perpetually trampled on the commands of a venerated Jesus? Could we have done such despite to his authority, if our hearts had been knit to his adorable person? Could we have sinned so terribly, if Calvary had been dear to us? Nay; surely our clouds of transgressions testify our former want of love to him. Had we esteemed the God-man, should we so entirely have neglected his claims? Could we have wholly forgotten his loving words of command? Do men insult the persons they admire? Will they commit high treason against a king they love? Will they slight the person they esteem, or wantonly make sport of him they venerate? And yet we have done all this, and more; whereby the least word of flattery concerning any natural love to Christ is rendered to our now honest hearts as hateful as the serpent’s hiss.

1. Grace Abounding





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These iniquities might not so sternly prove us to have despised our Lord had they been accompanied by some little service to him. Even now, when we do love his name, we are oft unfaithful, but *now* our affection helps us ‘to creep in service where we cannot go;’ but *before* our acts were none of them seasoned with the salt of sincere affection, but were all full of the gall of bitterness. O beloved, let us not seek to avoid the weight of this evidence, but let us own that our gracious Lord has much to lay to our charge, since we chose to obey Satan rather than the Captain of salvation, and preferred sin to holiness.

Let the self-conceited Pharisee boast that he was born free – we see on our wrists the red marks of the iron; let him glory that he was never blind – our eyes can yet remember the darkness of Egypt, in which we discerned not the morning star. Others may desire the honour of a merited salvation – we know that our highest ambition can only hope for pardon and acceptance by grace alone; and well we remember the hour when the only channel of that grace was despised or neglected by us.

The Book of Truth shall next witness against us. The time is not yet erased from memory when this sacred fount of living water was unopened by us, our evil hearts placed a stone over the mouth of the well, which even conscience could not remove. Bible dust once defiled our fingers; the blessed volume was the least sought after of all the books in the library.

Though now we can truly say that His Word is ‘a matchless temple where we delight to be, to contemplate the beauty, the symmetry, and the magnificence of the structure, to increase our awe, and excite our devotion to the Deity there preached and adored’²; yet at one sad period of our lives we refused to tread the jewelled floor of the temple, or when from custom’s sake we entered it, we paced it with hurried tread, unmindful of its sanctity, heedless of its beauty, ignorant of its glories, and unsubdued by its majesty.

2. Boyle



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Now we can appreciate Herbert's rapturous affection expressed in his poem:

*'Oh book! infinite sweetness: let my heart
Suck every letter, and a honey gain,
Precious for any grief in any part:
To clear the breast, to mollify all pain.'*

But *then* every ephemeral poem or trifling novel could move our hearts a thousand times more easily than this 'book of stars', 'this god of books'. Ah! Well doth this neglected Bible prove us to have esteemed Jesus but lightly. Verily, had we been full of affection to him, we should have sought him in His Word. Here he doth unrobe himself, showing his inmost heart. Here each page is stained with drops of his blood, or emblazoned with rays of his glory. At every turn we see him, as divine and human, as dying and yet alive, as buried but now risen, as the victim and the Priest, as the Prince and Saviour, and in all those various offices, relationships and conditions, each of which render him dear to his people and precious to his saints. Oh let us kneel before the Lord, and own that 'we esteemed him not', or else we should have walked with him in the fields of Scripture, and held communion with him in the spice-beds of inspiration.

The Throne of Grace, so long unvisited by us, equally proclaims our former guilt. Seldom were our cries heard in heaven; our petitions were formal and lifeless, dying on the lip which carelessly pronounced them. Oh sad state of crime, when the holy offices of adoration were unfulfilled, the censer of praise smoked not with a savour acceptable unto the Lord, nor were the vials of prayer fragrant with precious odours!

Unwhitened by devotion, the days of the calendar were black with sin; unimpeded by our supplication, the angel of judgment speeded his way to our destruction. At the thought of those days of sinful silence, our minds are humbled in the dust; and never can we visit the mercy-seat without adoring the grace which affords despisers a ready welcome.





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But why went not 'our heart in pilgrimage'? Why sung we not that 'tune which all things hear and fear'? Why fed we not at 'the Church's banquet', on this 'exalted manna'? What answer can we give more full and complete than this – 'We esteemed him not'? Our little regard of Jesus kept us from his throne: for true affection would have availed itself of the ready access which prayer affords to the secret chamber of Jesus, and would thereby have taken her fill of loves. Can we now forsake the throne? No; our happiest moments are spent upon our knees, for there Jesus manifests himself to us. We prize the society of this best of friends, for his divine countenance 'giveth such an inward decking to the house where he lodgeth, that proudest palaces have cause to envy the gilding'. We delight to frequent the shades of secrecy, for there our Saviour allows us to unbosom our joys and sorrows, and roll them alike on him.

O Lamb of God! Our prayerlessness bids us confess that once we considered thee to have neither form nor comeliness.

Furthermore, our *avoidance of the people of God* confirms the humiliating truth. We who now stand in the 'sacramental host of God's elect', glorying in the brotherhood of the righteous, were once 'strangers and foreigners'. The language of Canaan was to our ear either an unmeaning babble at which we scoffed, a harsh jargon which we sought not to imitate, or an 'unknown tongue' above our powers of interpretation. The heirs of life were either despised as 'earthen pitchers', the work of the hands of the potter, or we removed from their society, conscious that we were not fit compeers for 'the precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold.' Many have been the weary looks which we cast upon the time-piece when, in pious company, the theme has been too spiritual for our grovelling understanding; full often have we preferred the friendship of the laughing worldling to that of the more serious believer.

Need we ask the source of this dislike? The bitter stream is not like the river of Egypt, silent as to its source: it proclaims its own origin plainly enough; and the ear of self-partiality cannot



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be deaf to the truthful sound – ‘Ye loved not the servants, because ye esteemed not their master; ye dwelt not amid the brethren, for ye had no friendship towards the firstborn of the family.’

One of the plainest evidences of alienation from God is a want of attachment to his people. In a greater or less degree this once existed in each of us. True, there were some Christians whose presence always afforded us pleasure; but we must be aware that our delight in their company was occasioned more by the affability of their manners, or the winning style of their address than by the fact of their intrinsic excellence. We valued the gem for its setting, but a common pebble in the same ring would have equally engrossed our attention. The saints, *as saints*, were not our chosen friends, nor could we say, ‘I am a companion of *all those* that fear thee.’ All hail, thou leader of the host! We boldly own that from the moment when we first loved thy person, all thy followers have been dear to us, there’s not a lamb amongst thy flock we would disdain to feed; thy servants may be mocked by contempt, persecuted by cruelty, branded with infamy, oppressed by power, humbled by poverty, and forgotten by fame; but to us they are the ‘excellent of the earth’, and we are not ashamed to call them brethren.

Such sentiments are the finest products of esteem for the Redeemer, and their former absence is conclusive evidence that we then ‘esteemed him not’. We have no further need of aid in this self-condemnation.

Broken Sabbaths start like warrior clansmen from the wild heath of neglected time; they point to *the deserted sanctuary*, for which they would execute a dread revenge did not the shield of Jesus cover us; for, lo! their bows are stringed with *neglected ordinances*, and their arrows are *despised messages of mercy*.

But wherefore these accusers? *Conscience* the ranger of the soul, hath seen enough. He will affirm that he hath beheld the ear closed to the wooing voice of the friend of sinners; that full often the eyes have been averted from the cross when Jesus himself was visibly set forth. Let him give in his own evidence. Hear him. He



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saith: I have witnessed the barring of the heart to the entrance of Jesus; I have seen the whole man in arms to repair the breaches which a powerful minister had caused; I have been present when the struggle against the Saviour has been as fierce as the ravening wolf. In vain the sprinkled blood to rivet the attention – heedless of Calvary or Gethsemane, this mad soul refused to see the beauties of the Prince of life, but rather spurned him from the heart which was his lawful throne. The sum and substance of my declaration is, ‘We esteemed him not.’

Away then, O pride! We know that ‘without the sovereign influence of God’s extraordinary and immediate grace, men do very rarely put off all thy trappings, till they who are about them put on their winding-sheet³; but if aught can lay thee in the grave, the retrospect of our treatment of our loving Lord might avail to do it. Pause then, O Christian, and thus soliloquise: ‘I once scorned him who loved me with an everlasting love, I once esteemed him as a root out of a dry ground. I served him not, I cared not for his blood, his cross, or his crown; and yet I am now become one of his own children. Verily, to grace I will for ever sing:-

*Great God of wonders! All thy ways
Are matchless, godlike, and divine,
But the fair glories of thy face
More godlike and unrivalled shine:
Who is a pardoning God like thee:
Or who hath grace so rich and free?*

II. We now enter upon an examination of the latent causes of this sin. When the disease is removed, it may be useful to learn its origin, that we may serve others and benefit ourselves.

Our coldness towards the Saviour resulted primarily from *the natural evil of our hearts*. We can plainly discern why the dissolute and reprobate entertain but little affection for purity and

3. Clarendon



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excellence: the self-same reason may be given for our disregard of the incarnation of virtue in the person of our Lord Jesus. Sin is a madness, disqualifying the mind for sober judgment; a blindness, rendering the soul incapable of appreciating moral beauty; it is in fact such a perversion of all the faculties, that under its terrible influence men will 'call evil good, and good evil; they will put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter'⁴. To us in our fallen condition fiends often appear more fair than angels, we mistake the gates of hell for the portals of bliss, and prefer the garnished lies of Satan to the eternal verities of the Most High. Revenge, lust, ambition, pride, and self-will, are too often exalted as the gods of man's idolatry; while holiness, peace, contentment, and humility, are viewed as unworthy of a serious thought. O sin, what hast thou done! Or rather, what hast thou undone! Thou hast not been content to rob humanity of its crown, to drive it from its happy kingdom, to mar its royal garments, and despoil its treasure; but thou hast done more than this! It sufficed not to degrade and dishonour; thou hast even wounded thy victim; thou hast blinded his eyes, stopped his ears, intoxicated his judgment, and gagged his conscience; yea, the poison of thy venom shaft hath poured death into the *fountain*. Thy malice hath pierced the *heart* of manhood, and thereby hast thou filled his veins with corruption and his bones with depravity. Yea, O monster, thou hast become a murderer, for thou hast made us *dead* in trespasses and sins!

This last word opens up the entire mystery; for if we are spiritually dead, it is of course impossible for us to know and reverence the Prince of glory. Can the dead be moved to ecstasies, or corpses excited to rapture? Exercise your skill on yonder lifeless body. It has not yet become a carnival for worms. The frame is still complete, though lifeless. Bring hither lute and harp; let melodies most sweet, and harmonies unequalled, attempt to move the man to pleasure: he smileth not at the swelling strain,

4. Isa. 5 v.20



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he weepeth not at the plaintive cadence; yea, could the orchestra of the redeemed pour forth their music, he would be deaf to the celestial charm.

Will you assault the city by another gate? Place then before those eyes the choicest flowers that e'er were grown since Eden's plants were blasted. Doth he regard the loveliness of the rose or the whiteness of the lily? Nay, the man knoweth no more of their sweetness than doth the water of Nilus of the lotus which it beareth on its bosom. Come, ye gales of Araby, and winds laden with the spicy odours of Ceylon; let the incense of fragrant gums, of frankincense and myrrh, smoke before him; yet, motionless as a statue, the nostril is not distended, nor doth pleasure sit upon the lip. Aye, and ye may bring to your aid more powerful means. Ye may combine the crash of the avalanche, the roar of the cataract, the fury of the ocean, the howling of the winds, the rumbling of the earthquake, and the roll of the thunder: but these sounds, united into one God-like shout, could not arouse the slumberer from his fatal couch. *He is dead*, doth in one word solve the mystery. So also are we, though quickened by the Holy Ghost, were once dead in sin, and hence 'we esteemed him not'. Here is the root of all our misdeeds, the source of all our iniquity.

When we are asked to point out the parent of light, we turn our finger to the sun above; and if the question be proposed, Whence cometh evil? We point within us to an evil heart of unbelief which departeth from the living God.

The secondary causes of the folly which we once committed lie very near the surface, and may repay a moment's observation. *Self-esteem* had much to do with our ill-treatment of 'the sinner's Friend'. Conceit of our own deserts made us indifferent to the claims of one who had procured for us a perfect righteousness. 'The whole need not a physician'; and we felt insulted by the language of a gospel which spoke to us as undeserving beings. The cross can have little power where pride conceals the necessity of a pardon; a sacrifice is little valued when we are unconscious of our need thereof. In our own opinion we were once most noble



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creatures; the Pharisee's oration would have sincerely enough emanated from us. A few little trifles there might be which were not quite correct, but in the main we thought ourselves 'rich and increased in goods'; and even when under the powerful voice of law we were made to discern our poverty, we yet hoped by future obedience to reverse the sentence, and were utterly unwilling to accept a salvation which required a renunciation of all merit and simple trust on the crucified Redeemer. Never until all the work of our hands had been unravelled, and our fingers themselves had become powerless, would we cease from our own labour, and leaving the spider's web of man's doings, array ourselves in the garment of free justification. No man will ever think much of Christ till he thinks little of himself. The lower our own views of ourselves become, the higher will our thoughts of Jesus be raised; and only when self-annihilation is complete will the Son of God be our 'all in all'.

Vain glory and self-esteem are fruitful parents of evil. Chrysostom calls self-love one of the devil's three great nets; and Bernard styles it 'an arrow which pierceth the soul through, and slays it; a sly, insensible enemy, not perceived'. Under the sad influence of this power we commonly love him best who does us the most harm; for the flatterer who feeds our vanity with pleasing cries of 'Peace, peace', is far more regarded than that sincere friend, the blessed Jesus, who earnestly warns us of our ill estate. But when self-confidence is removed – when the soul is stripped by conviction – when the light of the spirit reveals the loathsome state of the heart – when the power of the creature fails, how precious is Jesus! As the drowning mariner clutches the floating spar – as the dying man looks to some great physician – as the criminal values his pardon, so we do then esteem the deliverer of our souls as the Prince of the kings of the earth. Self-loathing begets an ardent passion for the gracious 'lover of our souls', but self-complacency hides his glories from us.

Love of the world has also its share in using this dear friend so ill. When he knocked at the door we refused him admittance,





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because another had already entered. We had each chosen another husband to whom we basely gave away our hearts. 'Give me wealth,' said one. Jesus replied, 'Here am I; I am better than the riches of Egypt, and my reproach is more to be desired than hidden treasures.' The answer was, 'Thou art not the wealth that I seek for; I pant not for an airy wealth like thine, O Jesus! I do not care for a wealth above in the future – I desire a wealth here in the present; I want a treasure that I can grasp *now*; I want gold that will buy me a house, a farm, and estate; I long for the sparkling jewel that will adorn my fingers; I ask thee not for that which is hereafter; I will seek for that when years have passed away.'

Another of us cried, 'I ask for health, for I am sick.' The best Physician appears, and gently promises, 'I will heal thy soul, take away thy leprosy, and make thee whole.' 'Nay, nay,' we answered, 'I ask not for that, O Jesus! I ask to have a *body* that is strong, that I may run like Asahel or wrestle like an Hercules; I long to be freed from pain of body, but I do not ask for health of soul, that is not what I require.' A third implored for happiness. 'Listen to me,' said Jesus, 'my ways are ways of pleasantness, and all my paths are peace.' 'Not the joy for which I sigh,' we hastily replied; 'I ask the cup filled to the brim, that I may drink it merrily; I love the jovial evening, and the joyous day; I want the dance, the revelry, and other fair delights of this world; give your hereafter to those who are enthusiasts – let them live on hope; I prefer this world and the present.'

Thus did we each in a different fashion set our affection on things below, and despise the things above. Surely he was no ill painter who thus sketched us to the life with his graphic pencil: 'The interpreter took them apart again, and had them into a room where was a man that could look no-ways but downwards, with a muckrake in his hand; there stood also one over his head with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffered him that crown for his muckrake; but the man did neither look up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws and dust of the floor.'



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While we love the world, 'the love of the Father is not in us'⁵; nor the love of Jesus the Son. Two masters we cannot serve. The world and Jesus never will agree. We must be able to sing the first portion of Madame Guion's stanza before we can truly join in its concluding words:

*Adieu! Ye vain delights of earth,
Insipid sports, and childish mirth,
I taste no sweets in you;
Unknown delights are in the Cross
All joy beside to me is dross;
And Jesus thought so too.*

It would be a great omission did we not observe that our *ignorance of Christ* was a main cause of our want of love towards him. We now see that to know Christ is to love him. It is impossible to have a vision of his face, to behold his person, or understand his offices, without feeling our souls warmed towards him. Such is the beauty of our blessed Lord, that all men, save the spiritually blind, pay willing homage to him. It needs no eloquence to set forth Christ to those who see him by faith, for in truth he is his own orator; his glory speaks, his condescension speaks; and what these utter without sound, the heart receiveth willingly.

Jesus is 'curtained from the sight of the gross world' by the wilful unbelief of mankind, or else the sight of him would have begotten veneration for him. Men know not the gold which lies in the mine of Christ Jesus, or surely they would dig in it night and day. They have not yet discovered the pearl of great price, or they would have sold their all to buy the field wherein it lies. The person of Christ strikes eloquence dumb when it would describe him; it palsies the artist's arm when with fair colours he would portray him; it would o'er-match the sculptor to carve his image even were it possible to chisel it in a massive block of diamond.

5. 1 John 2 v.15





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There is nought in nature comparable to him. Before his radiance the brilliance of the sun is dimmed; yea, nothing can compete with him, and heaven itself blushes at its own plainness of countenance when his 'altogether lovely' person is beheld. Ah, ye who pass him by without regard, it is well said by Rutherford, 'Oh if ye knew him, and saw his beauty, your love, your heart, your desires, would close with him and cleave to him. Love, by nature, when it seeth, cannot but cast out its spirit and strength upon amiable objects, and good things, and things love-worthy; and what fairer thing is there than Christ?' The Jewish world crucified him because they knew not their King; and we rejected him because we had seen his adaptation to our wants, and believed not the love he bore to our souls. We can all thus soliloquise with Augustine: 'There was a great dark cloud of vanity before mine eyes, so that I could not see the sun of justice and the light of truth; I, being the son of darkness, was involved in darkness; I loved my darkness, because I knew not thy light; I was blind, and loved my blindness, and did walk from darkness to darkness; but Lord, thou art my God, who hast led me from darkness and the shadow of death; hast called me into this glorious light, and behold I see.' Those days of soul-eclipse are gone, but never can we too much bewail them. Sad were those hours when the morning star shone not, when the cross had no charms, and the glorious Redeemer no esteem; could tears obliterate them from the annals of the past, our eyes should empty their cisterns ere our cheeks should be dry – could prayers recall them, we would besiege the throne with incessant supplications. They are gone, alas! beyond the arm of even omnipotence to restore them; but we rejoice to see their iniquity blotted out and their sin entirely covered.



The river of sinful neglect of Jesus has doubtless other tributary sources which we cannot now tarry to notice. Contemplation need not here wander in a maze, she hath a path laid straight before her; unchain her feet and bid her conduct you over the field of memory, that with her you may count the other rills which fed this noxious stream.

III. We come now to the practical part of our meditation, and consider the emotions which ought to be excited by it.

First, then, we think *deep penitential sorrow* will well become us. As tears are the fit moisture for the grave, as ashes are a fit crown for the head of mourning, so are penitential feelings the proper mementoes of conduct now forsaken and abhorred. We cannot understand the Christianity of those men who can narrate their past history with a kind of self-congratulation. We have met with some who will recount their former crimes with as much gusto as the old soldier tells his feats in arms. Such men will even blacken themselves to render their case more worthy of regard, and glory in their past sins as if they were ornaments to their new life. To such we say, Not thus thought Paul; when speaking to the Romans, he said, 'whereof ye are now ashamed'. There are times when it is proper, beneficial, and praise-worthy for a converted man to tell the sad tale of his former life; free grace is thus glorified, and divine power extolled, and such a story of experience may serve to bring about faith in others who think themselves too vile; but then let it be done in a right spirit, with expressions of unfeigned regret and repentance. We object not to the narration of the deeds of our unregenerate condition, but to the mode in which it is too often done. Let sin have its moment, but let it be a heap of stones cast by the hands of execration – not a mausoleum erected by the hands of affection. Give it the burial of Absalom – let it not sleep in the sepulchre of the kings.

Can we, beloved, enter the dark vault of our former ignorance without a feeling of oppressive gloom? Can we traverse the ruins of our mis-spent years without sighs of regret? Can we behold the havoc of our guilt, and smile at the destruction? Nay. It is ours to bewail what we cannot efface, and abhor what we cannot retract.

O fellow-heir of the kingdom, let us go together to the throne of Jesus, that our tears may bathe his feet; that, like Mary, we may make our grief a worshipper of his person. Let us seek some alabaster-box of very precious ointment wherewith to anoint



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him, or at any rate let our eyes supply a tribute of true gratitude. We approach his sacred person, and on his feet we see the impress of his love deep-cut by the piercing nails. Come now, my heart! bewail that wound, for thou didst make it; the soldier was but the cruel act was thine. Note well his hands which firmly grasp thee; they too have their scars; and weep at the remembrance that these were made for thee. For thee he bore the ignominy of the cross, the pain of crucifixion. Turn not thine eyes away until the hole of the side has been well pondered. See there that frightful gash, deep mine which reacheth to his heart. And this, my soul, was done for thee! Dost thou not love the sufferer? Yea, thou dost, with a love as deep and bottomless as the ocean; but forget not that once thou didst despise him. Many a time hast thou slighted this gracious friend; thy husband was once hated by thee; thy beloved has often received contumely and scorn from thee. Not long ago thou didst mock, despise, and insult him. Hard words hast thou spoken of him, and ill deeds hast thou done to him. His wooings thou didst disregard, the tender offerings of love thou didst trample under foot, and the deep anguish which he endured for thee was in thine ears an idle tale. What! are the fountains dry? When will thy sorrow find better cause for coining itself in tears? Canst thou afford a silly story of a love-sick maid a tear or two, and shall not this – thyself and Jesus – move thy soul? He loved, and thou didst hate; he died, yet thou didst scoff his agonies; he saved thee, and yet thou didst refuse to be his child. O base ingratitude! Clouds might be fit mourners to weep thee away in showers; but yet we are oft hard as the granite rock, and cold as the mountain which storeth up its snow, which it might well afford to lavish forth in rivers. We should long to feel the sweet pleasure of repentance, for indeed it is no common delight. Howe has excellently described the joy of penitential grief in his ‘Delight in God’: –

‘There is pleasure mingled with such tears, and with those mournings which are not without hope, and which flow naturally and without force from a living principle within, as waters from



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their still freshly-springing fountain. When the soul finds itself unbound and set at liberty, when it can freely pour out itself to God, dissolve kindly and melt before him, it doth it with regret only at what it hath done and been, not at what it is now doing, except that it can do it no more; affecting even to be infinite herein, while it yet sees it must be confined within some bounds. It loves to lie in the dust and abase itself; and is pleased with the humiliation, contrition, and brokenness of heart which repentance towards God includes in it. So that as God is delighted with this sacrifice, so *it* is with the offering of it up to him. Many men apprehend a certain sweetness in revenge; such a one finds it only in this just revenge upon himself. How unexpressible a pleasure accompanies its devoting itself to God, when bemoaning itself, and returning with weeping and supplication, it says, 'Now, lo! I come to thee, thou art the Lord my God, I have brought thee back thine own, what I had sacrilegiously alienated and stolen away, the heart which was gone astray, that hath been so long a vagabond and fugitive from thy blessed presence, service, and communion. Take now the soul which thou hast made; possess thy own right; enter upon it; stamp it with the entire impression of thine own seal, and mark it for thine. Other lords shall no more have dominion. What have I to do any more with the idols wherewith I was wont to provoke thee to jealousy? I will now make mention of thy name, and of thine only. I bind myself to thee in everlasting bonds, in a covenant never to be forgotten'.

Let not a libation of tears be the only offering at the shrine of Jesus; *let us also rejoice with joy unspeakable*. If we have need to lament our sin, how much more to rejoice at our pardon! If our previous state moves us to tears, shall not our new condition cause our hearts to leap for joy? Yes, we must, we will praise the Lord for his sovereign, distinguishing grace. We owe him an eternal song for this change in our position; he has made us to differ, and this from mere unmerited mercy, since we, like others, 'esteemed him not'. He certainly did not elect us to the high dignity of union with himself because of any love we had toward him, for we confess





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the very reverse. It is said of the writer's sainted predecessor, Dr. Rippon, that when asked why God chose his people, he replied, 'Because he chose them'; and when the question was repeated, he answered yet again, 'Because he *did* choose them, and if you ask me a hundred times I can give you no other reason.' Verily it is 'even so Father, because so it seemed good in thy sight'. Let our gratitude for divine grace leap forth in praise; let our whole man be vocal to *his* honour who has elected us in sovereignty, redeemed us by blood, and called us by grace.

Should we not also be moved to *the deepest prostration of spirit* at the remembrance of our guilt? Ought not the subject of our present contemplation to be a stab in the very heart of pride? Come hither, Christian, and though now arrayed in the garments of salvation, behold here thy former nakedness. Boast not of thy riches, remember how sorry a beggar once thou wast. Glory not in thy virtues, they are exotics in thy heart; remember the deadly plants – the native growth of that evil soil. Stoop thyself to the earth, and though thou canst not veil thyself with wings as angels do, let repentance and self-abhorrence serve thee instead thereof. Think not that humility is weakness; it shall supply the marrow of strength to thy bones. Stoop, and conquer; bow thyself, and become invincible. The proud man has no power over his fellows; the beasts of the forest tremble not at the loftiness of the giraffe, but the crouching lion is the monarch of the plain. He who esteems himself but little, stands on a vantage-ground with his fellow-men. Like an Eastern house, the heart has a lowly entrance, and every guest must bow his head ere he can cross the threshold. He who has felt his own ruin will not imagine any to be hopeless; nor will he think them too fallen to be worthy his regard. Though he may be a priest or Levite in the temple of his God, he will not feel degraded if he stain his hands in binding up the wounds of the victims of evil. Like the friend of publicans and sinners, he will seek out the sick who need a physician. Christianity has founded a colony for the outcasts of society. The founder of Rome welcomed to his new-built city the dregs of all



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the nations of the earth; so let every Christian believe that Zion's inhabitants are to be gathered from haunts of sin and chambers of vice. How prone are we to forestall the damnation of men! How often do we write in our book of doom the names of many whom we afterwards discover to have been 'ordained unto eternal life'! The astronomer will believe that the most erratic comet will yet accomplish its journey, and revisit our sphere; but we give up those for lost, who have not wandered one-half the distance from the centre of light and life. We find an excuse for inaction in the fancied hopelessness of sinners; while fastidious delicacy, by the fear of pollution, seeks to mask at once our indolence and pride. If we had right views *of ourselves*, we should judge none too base to be reclaimed, and should count it no dishonour to bear upon the shoulders of our sympathy, the most wandering of the flock. We have amongst us too much of the spirit of 'Stand by, for I am holier than thou'. Those whom Jesus would have grasped by the hand, we will scarcely touch with a pair of tongs; such is the pride of many professors, that they need but the name to be recognised at once as the true successors of the ancient Pharisees. If we were more like Christ, we should be more ready to hope for the hopeless, to value the worthless, and to love the depraved. The following anecdote, which the writer received from the lips of an esteemed minister of the Church of England, may perhaps, as a fact, plead more forcibly than words. A clergyman of a parish in Ireland, in the course of his visitations, had called upon every one of his flock with but one exception. This was a woman of most abandoned character, and he feared that by entering her house he might give occasion of offence to gainsayers, and bring dishonour upon his profession. One Sabbath, he observed her among the frequenters of his church, and for weeks after he noticed her attention to the word of life. He thought, too, that amid the sound of the responses he could detect one sweet and earnest voice, solemnly confessing sin, and imploring mercy. The bowels of his pity yearned over this fallen daughter of Eve; he longed to ask her if her heart were indeed broken on account of sin; and





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he intensely desired to speak with her concerning the abounding grace which, he hoped, had plucked her from the burning. Still, the same delicacy of feeling forbade him to enter the house; time after time he passed her door with longing look, anxious for her salvation, but jealous of his own honour. This lasted for a length of time, but at last it ended. One day, she called him to her, and with overflowing tears which well betrayed her bursting heart, she said, *'O sir! If your Master had been in this village half as long as you have, he should have called to see me long ago; for surely I am the chief of sinners, and therefore have most need of his mercy.'* We may conceive the melting of the pastor's heart, when he saw his conduct thus gently condemned by a comparison with his loving Master. From that time forth he resolved to neglect none, but to gather even the 'outcasts of Israel'. Should we, by our meditation, be constrained to do likewise, we shall have derived no little benefit, and possibly some soul may have reason to bless God that our thoughts were directed into such a channel. May the gracious Spirit, who has promised to 'lead us into all truth' by his holy influences, sanctify to our profit this visit to the house of our nativity, exciting in us all those emotions which are congenial to the subject, and leading us to actions in harmony with the grateful retrospect.

TO THE UNCONVERTED READER

My Friend, although this book was written chiefly for the Lord's family, yet it may please the gracious Spirit to bless it to thine own soul. With this desire let me seriously entreat thee well to consider the condition thou art in. Thou art one who esteems not Jesus. This is a state, sad in itself by reason of thy loss of present delight in him; but how much more terrible if thou dost remember the eternal consequences of refusing Christ. He is thine only real hope, and yet thou rejected him. Thy salvation can only come through him, and yet thou dost wilfully remove thyself from him. A few more years will bring thee to the threshold of another world. It will go ill with thee if thou dost still 'neglect this great salvation'. Death will soon loosen thy girdle and break thy strength. What



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wilt thou do in the last hour of extremity without a Saviour? Judgment will follow on the heels of dissolution; and when the insulted Saviour sits upon the judgment-seat, how wilt thou face him? Wilt thou be able to bear the fury of his incensed majesty? As oil, the softest of substances, doth burn the most fiercely, so doth love when it is angered. I bid thee bethink thyself, how thou wilt endure his ire. The eyes which once flowed with tears shall flash lightnings on thee. The hands which were nailed to the cross of redemption shall seize the thunderbolts of vengeance, and the voice which once in melting tones said, 'Come, ye weary', shall pronounce in thundering words the sentence, 'Depart, ye cursed!'

Art thou so besotted as to venture on so hazardous a course as continued rebellion? Dost thou wish to lie down in torment, and make thy bed in hell?

O my brother-immortal! tarry here and ponder thy woeful estate; and may the Spirit now manifest to thee thy lost and helpless condition, that, so stripped of self, thou mayest seek my Master's righteousness. He says: *'I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me.'*

