

THE
FAMILY TREASURY

OF

SUNDAY READING.

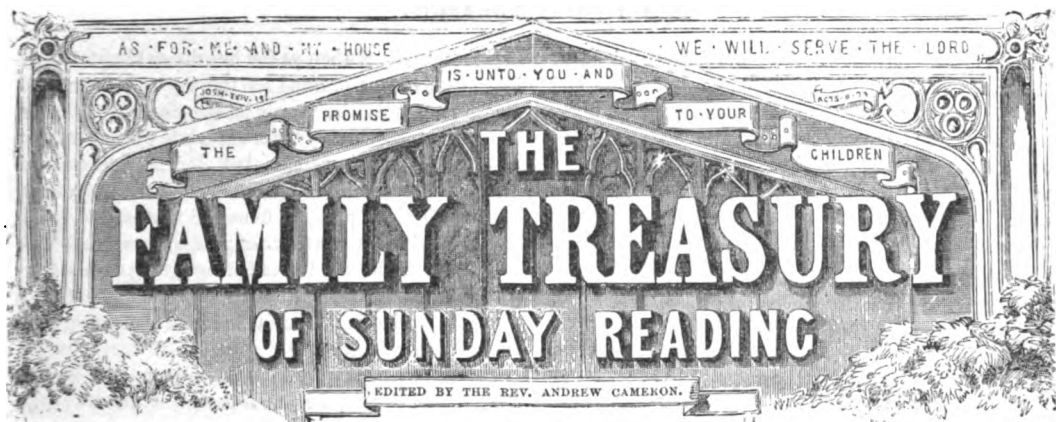
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LONDON:
THOMAS NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW;
EDINBURGH; AND NEW YORK.

MDCCLXI.



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,

Will,—a comprehensive review of the history of the world in its bearings on the great central event of all time, the crucifixion, under the title of the "*History of Redemption*,"—a searching examination into the nature and phenomena of spiritual religion in his "Religious Affections,"—and many sermons and other minor works, in which an effort is made to grapple with all the more pressing difficulties which trouble thoughtful and earnest minds.

N. L. W.

WORDS TO SEEKERS.

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER.

A FORMER article, addressed to the seeker after Christ, has called forth many kind and frank responses from various quarters. One of our correspondents writes to us out of the very blackness of darkness. Evidently an honest inquirer after elementary Christian truth, he proposes some very simple questions, which he says he "does not find intelligently answered" by those from whom he seeks spiritual guidance. As he states that "thousands of others" are as much in the dark as himself, we will try to reply to him and to them through the same column.

1. His first question is, "What is it to believe in Christ? As the devils are said to believe, how am I to believe differently from them?"

My friend, you want to know what faith is. It is simply taking God at his word. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." When the camp of Israel was in peril of death from the fatal bite of the fiery serpent, the command of God was to look at a *brazen serpent* on a pole which Moses set up in sight of all the people. That was a simple process surely—merely the looking toward an emblem of brass. The dying Israelite might sweep the horizon with his languid eye, and all to no purpose; but the moment that he fixed his eye on the serpent of brass, he was cured. Now there was faith in its simplest simplicity. He took God at his word. He trusted what God said, and relied on it. The restoration of the bitten Jew was made to depend on trusting in God's appointed method of relief. And your soul's salvation will depend on your obedience to God's command to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."

You will perhaps understand faith in Christ somewhat better if you separate the idea into its three component parts. In the first place it implies *knowledge*. You know (from the teachings of the Bible) that such a being exists as Jesus Christ, and that he made an atonement for sin upon the cross. In the second place it implies *assent*. You acknowledge, with all the heart, the truth of this atonement, and the sufficiency of it; and this you do in reliance on God's veracity. But knowledge is not enough, nor is assent enough. They are both matters of the understanding. You must also *trust*. This is the third element of faith, and so vital is it that there can be no saving faith without trust.

While assent is somewhat a speculative thing, trust is a real and a practical work of the will and of the affections too. The will makes choice of Christ as a Saviour, and the affections cling to him. He is entirely and thoroughly relied on as having atoned for our sins, as having taught us how to live by his own spotless example, as having provided for us a complete salvation. To him you are to submit. To him you are to give up your heart; you are to love Christ more than you love your gold and your silver, more than you love your wife or child, more than you love your own life. Whatever Christ bids you do in his word, that you are to do cheerfully. No matter how severely it may tax your selfishness, or try your patience; no matter what loss of time or fortune or friends it may cost you. Obedience is the test of faith. If you are not willing to take up a cross and follow in the path which Christ and your conscience direct, you cannot claim to be a Christian. You are not a *true believer*. For while the devils in the pit know of Christ, and assent to the claims of his divine power and majesty, they do not trust in Christ, nor do they love him. Here is the answer to the second part of your question. The devils have a speculative faith in Jesus, but their wills do not submit to him, and their affections do not cling to him; instead of that their whole souls boil with hatred and malignity toward him.

And now, my good friend, I have tried to tell you, in the most transparent language of which I am possessed, just what it is to believe in Jesus Christ. Whenever you can honestly trust in Jesus, and in Jesus alone, for your salvation—whenever you can shun an attractive object simply because Jesus forbids you to touch it—whenever you can cheerfully do a disagreeable, painful duty, solely because Jesus commands the self-sacrifice—whenever your heart begins to love Christ, and to love men around you as his children, and to love to draw men to Christ,—then may you begin to hope that you are a Bible Christian. You will never reach that state until the Holy Spirit comes to your help; and you must cry for his powerful influences upon your heart. It is a stubborn, wilful, wayward, selfish, wicked heart, that only a divine power can reform. But pray, do not insult the Most High by asking him to make you a better man, while you are lazily drifting along in the current of your own selfish lusts and desires, or else persistently holding to every bad practice you were ever inclined to. There is no such thing as faith without *works*. I have no confidence in the conversion of a tippler who occasionally seeks out his old haunts for his favourite glass. I have no confidence in the conversion of a passionate man if he is still willing to explode the wrathful oath, or to strike the revengeful blow. I have no confidence in the conversion of a miser if it does not unlock his purse, or of the slaveholder, if it does not lead him at once to treat his slave as a man, and not as a chattel, and to apply at once to that slave the golden rule. I have no confidence in any "faith"

that does not make its possessor a better man, a better neighbour, a better citizen, a better child of our heavenly Father. Even a man's cat and dog ought to be the better off for his being a Christian.

I am not surprised to hear you say that you do not understand the nature of faith. Its very simplicity troubled you. You could not realize that the great thing and the one thing you were to do was simply to go to Jesus Christ, and to let him do the saving work for your soul. So in my schoolboy days in the country have I often seen a frightened sheep bewildering itself as to the right fashion of escaping from a pen, although the gate stood wide open. After many frantic dashings of its foolish head against bars and rails, it got the idea at last that it would be easier to pass out through an open gate than through a chestnut fence or a stone wall; and when it had found the right place, it bounded off with high leaps, perfectly overjoyed with its emancipation.

"The way of salvation is perfectly plain to me now," remarked a person once to her pastor. "The darkness is all gone. Everything is clear to me now. I do not know how or why it is so. But you read a hymn the other night, with these words:—

"A gully, weak, and helpless wretch,
On thy kind arms I fall;
Be thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all!"

I saw then at once that I had nothing to do but to trust in Jesus. I sat all the evening just thinking of these lines. I did not hear your prayer, nor your text, nor a word of your sermon. I thought of nothing but those lines then and ever since. I am so contented and happy. Why, sir, don't you think that the reason why we do not get out of our darkness sooner is that we don't believe?" From that evening onward that person had no difficulty with the way of salvation. She found out the right road when she trusted Christ to lead her into it; and having once entered upon it, she found it a path of pleasantness and of peace. My friend, Christ says to you as he did to Jairus, ONLY BELIEVE. "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you." Perhaps the greatest difficulty with you after all is not so much an ignorance of the way of salvation as a refusal to walk in it. The theory of faith may continue to be a theological puzzle to you until you earnestly and prayerfully undertake to carry it into practice. Then you will discover that the right way of learning how a thing is done is *to do it*. May God give you strength equal to your day! He says, "Ye shall seek me and find me when ye search for me *with all your heart*."

SOUND LOGIC.

"Sir," said a pious lad to his pastor one evening, "the fellows in our shop are always picking flaws in Christians, and arguing against the Bible, and I don't know how to answer them."

"The best logic any one can use," answered his pastor, "is what a good man has called the *logic of the life*. Give them that, and they can't gainsay you.

"The logic of the life?" asked the lad, not quite understanding what his pastor meant.

"I will tell you," said he. "There was once employed at a dye-house as ungodly a set of fellows as could well be,—scoffers at religion, despisers of the word of God, swearing, drinking, betting, fighting, gambling. At last one of the number was drawn to a prayer-meeting, when the Spirit of God laid hold of him. Poor John was almost in despair about his sins, which, he said, looked black and blacker. But Jesus Christ came and spoke peace to his soul. Light broke upon him. Old things passed away, and all things became new. John really was 'made over.' He gave up his cups and the companions of his cups. He brought home his wages, set up family prayer, and everything, both within and without, wore an altered and improved look. Two of his fellow-workers, seeing this change for the better, took to John's new ways, reformed, went to meeting with him, and behaved like good Christians. John joined the Church, and from a tiger he became a lamb.

"John's religion was severely put to the proof at the dye-house. The dyers bantered him, ridiculed him, swore at him, and brought all their infidelity hotly to bear against both him and his religion. Tom and Jem tried for a time to stand up for him, and withstand the ungodly storm of their persecuting associates; but after a while they *gave in*, grew ashamed of their religion, deserted John, and went back to their old ways. As for John, much as his temper was tried, he bore himself patiently, watched over his weak points, clung closer to Christ, and stood firm as a rock. Poor John never undertook to *say* much, but his consistent Christian life was a powerful plea in behalf of his principles. One day however, after his fellow-workmen had been boasting what good infidelity would do, and how much harm the Bible had done, John's soul was stirred within him; he turned round, and said feelingly, but firmly, 'Well, let us deal plainly in this matter, my friends, and judge of the tree by the fruit it bears. You call yourselves infidels. Let us see what your principles do. I suppose what they do on a small scale they will do on a large one. Now there are Tom and Jem,' pointing to the two who went with him and then turned back. 'You have tried your principles on them, and know what they have done for them. When they tried to serve Christ they were civil, good-tempered, kind husbands and fathers. They were cheerful, hard-working, and ready to oblige. What have you made them? Look and see. They are cast down and cross; their mouths are full of cursing and filthiness; they are drunk every week, their children half clothed, their wives broken-hearted, their homes wretched. That is what your principles have done.

"Now I have tried Christ and his religion; and what has it done for me? You know well what I used to be. There were none of you that could drink so much,