

T H E

UNION PULPIT.

A COLLECTION OF SERMONS BY MINISTERS
OF DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS.

“In essentials, unity ; in non-essentials, liberty ; in all things, charity.”—*Augustine.*

FIRST EDITION.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

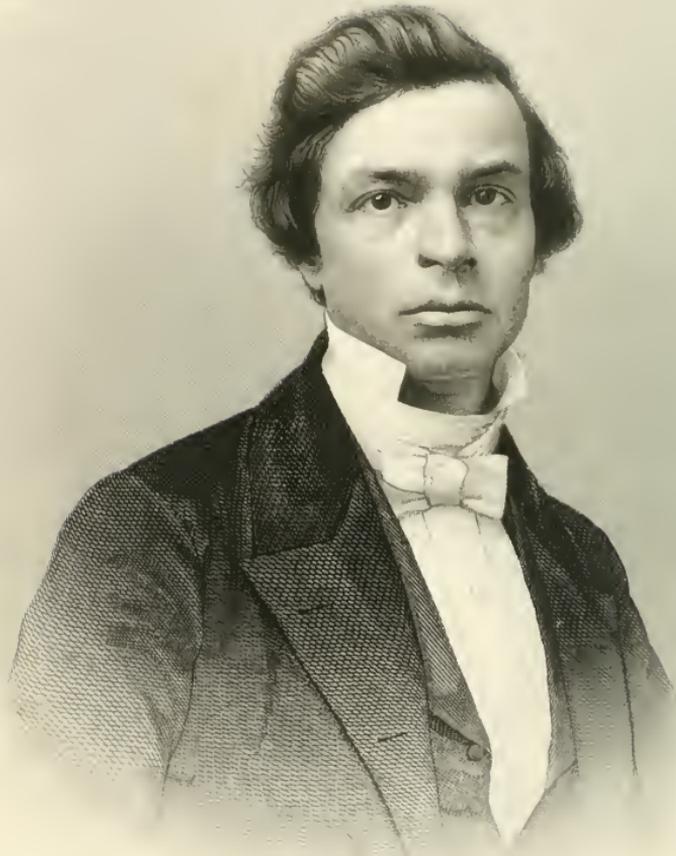
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B. H. Palmer

GRIEVING THE SPIRIT.

BY REV. B. M. PALMER, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW ORLEANS, LA.

And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.—*Ephesians*, iv, 30.

The essence of Christianity is in the fact that it is the religion of a *sinner*. It discloses, indeed, a system of morals which, viewed in its principles or in its aim, is as far superior to that of the academy or of the porch, as the heavens are lifted above the earth. This, however, is wholly incidental. Its main design is to extricate the sinner from the state of ruin in which he is found, and to teach him how to escape the damnation of hell. All ethical systems are but compilations of dry rules, intended simply to regulate the external conduct, and presuppose the ability to comply with the same. However clearly they may state duties and enforce motives, they can never rise above the office of mere instruction. If man's will be averse, they propose no remedy for this fundamental defect, and have no resources by which to rectify the inward nature which is stubborn or impure. Hence, all the beautiful systems of morality which men have devised, have proved inefficient in reforming the vices of mankind.

In like manner, all the systems of false religion upon the globe content themselves with our external relations alone. They propose rites by which to propitiate the divine favor and to pacify the human conscience. Not one suggests the idea of a change of heart, by which the sinner shall become fit for communion with God, or capable of new obedience to His holy law. Their forms of worship are but the incantations of religious magic, by which to break the spell of divine wrath; not acts of spiritual communion with a Being of infinite purity and love. But Christianity—whilst, on the one hand,

it republishes the original law, and adds new and superior sanctions of its own—assumes, on the other hand, that the sinner can never fulfil its commands; and reveals a method by which he may be saved, so as both to love and to obey. It answers the solemn question of Job, “how should man be just with God;” and solves the mighty problem of sin, by showing how “mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other”—how “truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.” Its fundamental teachings must therefore touch two points, *pardon* and *the new birth*, as these expand into the complete justification and sanctification of the sinner. Around these two centres gather all the doctrines of the Gospel. Around the first are collected such facts as the incarnation of the Son of God, His voluntary substitution for us under the law, His expiatory sufferings and death, His perfect and vicarious obedience, His whole priesthood as discharged both on earth and in heaven. Around the second are attracted all the truths which enter into a full exposition of the person and office of the Holy Ghost; as He enlightens the sinner’s mind, arouses the sinner’s conscience, renews the sinner’s heart; and comforts, seals, sanctifies, and glorifies, the believer.

The text, it will be perceived, falls into the latter of these two divisions. It is a remarkable fact, that most of the references in Scripture to the Holy Ghost occur in connection with His work upon the hearts of the professed people of God. With the exception of a limited number of passages, some of which are of doubtful interpretation—and with the exception always of that fearful denunciation, in the twelfth chapter of Matthew, of the sin against the Holy Ghost—the instructions, exhortations, promises, and warnings, of the Bible, in regard to this person of the Godhead, are addressed primarily to the church, rather than to the aliens without her pale. The text furnishes an illustration of this. Those whom it urges not to grieve the Holy Spirit are, beyond question, such as have already professed faith in Jesus Christ. In preceding verses they are discriminated from other Gentiles who walk in vanity; they are described as persons who have “learned Christ,” “have put off the old man,” and “put on the new man;” and as “renewed in the spirit of their mind.” The exhortation of the text occurs in the midst of others which imply the desire of the Christian to conform his life to the Gospel standard. And the great motive by which this exhorta-

tion is enforced, the sealing of the Spirit, refers not to His first influence upon the hearts of the impenitent, but presupposes union with Christ and the existence of true faith; as this apostle elsewhere testifies, "in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." If it were prudent to offer an explanation of this striking fact, it might be suggested, that as the later and more full operations of the Spirit within the Christian presuppose and involve His earlier influences upon the sinner, both classes are compendiously embraced in the references which seem to be addressed only to one. By a natural and even necessary deduction, we carry over these expostulations from the church to the world, from the Christian to the unconverted sinner, as being by necessary implication embraced. Since none come to Christ save those who are effectually called, at every step of the sinner's return to God he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, by whom this call is mediated; who may therefore as well be resisted and grieved in the first stage, when He convinces of sin, as at the last stage of our sanctification, when we are made meet for the saints' inheritance in light. But whatever explanation may be offered, there is no difficulty in the widest extension of the language of the text. Since, from first to last, we must feel the power of the Holy Ghost, at any stage from first to last of our career, we are in danger of grieving Him; and the exhortation is quite as pointed to the sinner as to the saint.

In this large application, then, of the text to all classes of men with whom this Spirit may be dealing, I propose to *consider the reasons why none should permit themselves to grieve Him.*

I. *Because of the solemnity of so personal and recognised a contact with God.*

We are at all times in contact with God, and surrounded with His presence. There is no hiding place within the universe, which is not penetrated by the eye of His omniscience, and covered by the hand of His protection. "Whither shall we go from His Spirit, or whither shall we flee from His presence? If we ascend into heaven, He is there; if we make our bed in hell, behold, He is there. If we take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall His hand lead us, and His right hand shall uphold us; even the night shall be light about us; the darkness and the light are both alike to Him." Yet is this dreadful truth not always so discovered to us as to enlist the devotional senti-

ment of the soul. But if our sensibilities be not utterly blunted, and conscience entirely seared, there are seasons when we must feel solemnly impressed as God draws more nearly and personally in contact with us. In times of sickness, when our couch is watered with tears, and the strong man is bowed down with pain and "brought into the dust of death;" in seasons of bereavement, when God "darkens the earth in the clear day," and death comes in at the window, and we are shut up to solitary communion with our own sad and bitter thoughts; in the pestilence, when the angel of death flaps his black wing over the city, and the mourners go about the streets, and there is not a house which does not weep for its dead; in the famine, when "the seven ears are withered, thin, and blasted" on the stalk, and want, like a grim and ghastly spectre, strides over the land, snatching the black crust from the mouths of crying babes; when war, with his bloody heel, treads upon the whitening bones of his slaughtered victims, and the widow's wail mingles with the orphan's cry in a concert of anguish; in the storm and tempest, when hoarse thunders roll down the pavement of the sky, or startling peals discharge in one volley the whole artillery of heaven, and the sharp lightnings cleave the clouds like the flashing swords of angry cherubim: who, then, does not stand in silent awe, and tremble before these symbols of the divine majesty and presence? We speak not here of that slavish terror which quails before the mere thought of Almighty force; but of that holy dread, which may fill the bosom even of a seraph, as he looks uncovered upon the face of Jehovah's throne. Yet not in one nor all of these does God come so nigh or make such disclosures of His presence, as when by His Holy Spirit He enters within the sanctuary of the human breast. In all these acts of providence, however near God may be, and with whatsoever closeness of pressure, He is still *without* us; but through His Spirit the shadow of His awful presence is cast within the veil, and meets us alone in the sacred chambers of the soul. He lays His holy hand upon our very thoughts, turns the current of our affections into new channels, and makes the heart beat with the pulse of a new and strange life.

Shall we not exclaim, with the prophet, when he saw the skirts of the divine glory filling the temple, "woe is me! for I am undone; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" We may therefore endorse this, "the argument of reverence;" and store it in the heart, that we may "not grieve the Holy Spirit of God."

II. *Because He draws near to us only to bring home to our hearts the overtures of God's infinite love.**

Have you ever considered the fact that the Holy Ghost is the only person of the Godhead whose name is not associated with offices of terror and of wrath? The Father, as first in the order of thought, is the original fountain of all authority. By Him the Son is sent into the world, and the seal of His commission gives validity to all the Mediator's acts. To Him the glory of all Christ's miracles, and the wisdom of all His doctrines, are continually referred. The whole work which He finished upon earth was the work which the Father gave Him to do. As the sacred three, in the language of Erskine, "sat together around the council board of redemption," in the distribution of offices there made, the Father assumed to be the representative of the Godhead, to hold in His hands the divine law, and the reins of universal empire. It belongs officially to Him to "reveal from heaven the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;" to execute the penalty upon the sinner, or else upon his substitute; and to pass the judicial decree, by which the one and the other are justified and declared righteous together. Of course, it is impossible to think of Him but as clothed with "terrible majesty." "Clouds and darkness are round about Him; justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne." "When He is wroth, the earth trembles," and "the perpetual hills do bow." "When He thundereth in the heavens, and the Highest giveth His voice, hailstones and coals of fire pass before Him." "At the blast of the breath of His nostrils, the channels of waters are seen, the foundations of the earth are discovered." Under this gorgeous imagery, in which the whole frame of nature is seen dissolving at His presence, do the Scriptures represent the awful majesty of God, and the supremacy of His jurisdiction as a lawgiver and a judge.

In like manner, the Son, though He is the author of grace, has another revelation of Himself as full of terror as that is of mercy. He is not only the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, but also the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who shall rend the wicked in His fury. Over His Cross may indeed be read the inscription, "God so loved the world;" yet beyond and against that Cross may be seen the throne of His power, beneath which all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, are seen to be

put. "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son;" "for He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead." In the last great assize, all nations shall be gathered before Him; He shall come in the clouds of heaven, with His own glory and with the glory of His Father, and "all the tribes of the earth shall mourn," as He shall sit upon the great white throne, and pronounce the sentences of destiny. Amidst the terrors of a burning world, when the heavens are rolled together as a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the wicked are represented with awful significance as calling upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them from "the wrath of the Lamb." Paradoxical as the expression may seem, there is no phrase in all the Scriptures more full of woe or pregnant with despair than this, "the wrath of the Lamb." Certainly, no one can go around the circle of Christ's offices without solemn dread of the commission He is hereafter to execute as the Judge of quick and dead.

If, however, we turn from these to the person of the Holy Ghost, He sustains, in the economy of grace, no office but that of tenderness and love. Though equal with the Father and the Son, He descends upon no "mount that may be touched," surrounds Himself with no "blackness and darkness and tempest," speaks not to us "with the sound of trumpet" nor with "the voice of words." No symbols of dreadful majesty strike through the soul with terror when He makes His advent. With quiet yet resistless power, He gently slides into the breast, and speaks the words of love by which the stubborn sinner is so sweetly persuaded. May the pulpit ever be restrained from uttering a sentence which shall abate our conceptions of the Saviour's infinite compassion and grace! It was surely a "love which passeth knowledge" that brought Him from the bosom of the Father, to "endure the contradiction of sinners against Himself." The extent of His condescension cannot be measured, unless we could penetrate the fellowship of the Godhead, and know the wealth of the Father's love eternally lavished upon Him. Nor, unless we could estimate the recoil of His holy nature from all sin, can we appreciate the compassion which led Him to bear the dishonor and shame of our sin, and to cry out, in His anguish, "Reproach hath broken My heart."

But let us not, on the other hand, disparage the equal condescension of the Eternal Spirit, when He descends into the heart, which is as "a cage of unclean birds," and brings His purity into contact with all the taint and defilement of our nature. This is the love of the Son, that He "became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him;" and this is the love of the Spirit, that no uncleanness ever shuts Him out from the soul He would purge and render fit for communion with God. The very name by which His official work is defined describes His compassion; He is the Comforter. Though He "reproves the world of sin" "and of judgment to come," it is by the exhibition between the two of that righteousness by which the one is covered and the other is stripped of its terrors; and through Him the promise is fulfilled to the mourner, that he shall be comforted. He is therefore pre-eminently the expounder of God's love, bringing it home to us in the hour of despair, and making it the hope and joy of the soul forever. We may therefore endorse this, "the argument of gratitude;" and lay it up in the memory, that we may "not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom we are sealed unto the day of redemption." Our affections yield to the voice of human kindness, as the strings of the Æolian harp give responsive music to the soft breath of summer. Shall not this argument, appealing to "the memory of the heart," touch every sentiment that is noble and generous within us? And what damning proof of the sinner's enmity against God is given, when he is not subdued by this argument of love!

III. *Because, if ever saved, it must be through this very influence of the Spirit which we are here exhorted to recognise.*

Nothing is more common than to parry the warnings and expostulations of the Bible by the flippant excuse, "I do not know that I am chosen to salvation." Does the sinner know with any more certainty, on the other hand, that he is appointed to destruction? Can he ascertain either except by the result? Does anything remain to him but to "make his own calling and election sure"—"working out his own salvation with fear and trembling," knowing that "it is God which worketh in him to will and to do of His good pleasure?" And will he permit us to say, with all possible affection, yet with as much frankness, that this language is on his lips as foolish as it is wicked, as absurd as it is profane? The secret purposes of God can never be to him a rule of action, simply because they *are* secret;

and for the same reason, they can never be the motive by which he is constrained on the one hand to receive Christ, nor upon the other to reject Him. By the very constitution of our nature, that cannot be to us a controlling law nor an operative motive, which is to us totally unknown. It is therefore in accordance not only with the modesty of true piety, but also with the maxims of sound philosophy, when the Scriptures say that "secret things belong to God, but the things which are revealed belong to us and to our children." Not only ought the sinner to act only under the influence of the latter, but it is simply impossible that he *can* act under the influence of the former. He who supposes his decision to be affected in the one direction or in the other by the undiscovered purposes of God, passes upon his understanding a most singular delusion. Undoubtedly, the sinner may resent the fact that God has purposes which He chooses not to disclose, and, with a peevishness that would be ludicrous if it were not fraught with consequences so terrible, may continue to resist the divine supremacy, to his own everlasting discomfiture. But these purposes themselves, so long as they are closely veiled from his view, can never constitute the reasons of his choice. It is one thing to be angry with God because He *has* purposes, and another thing to be determined, in this direction or in that, by the discovery of what these purposes are. If they be wholly unknown, they afford no reason by which the judgment can be influenced; and to suppose a decision resting upon them, is to suppose an effect without a cause. If it be said the sinner's embarrassment proceeds from this very suspense arising out of his ignorance of God's will in regard to him, this assumes that God's will, if ascertained, would be a controlling motive to obedience. But God's will is known in what He actually reveals. He "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Jesus Christ is sincerely offered, with the assurance that whosoever believeth shall be saved; and, with this promise, the Holy Spirit is freely given, that the sinner may both believe and repent. Why should not this suffice, if the discovery of God's will be only wanting as the sufficient motive to determine the choice? We submit that the sinner's reasoning should be precisely the reverse of what is implied in the flippant language which we now rebuke. Let him argue thus: I read in the record that none are saved but those who come to Christ; that none come to Christ but those whom the Father draws; that none are drawn but by the power of the Holy Ghost.

That blessed agency, which is so indispensable, is now experienced by me. Instead, therefore, of pausing to pry into the deep things of God, which are reserved for the disclosures of the great day, I am encouraged, by this collation of facts, to yield myself freely to that mysterious power which can alone conduct me to the feet of Jesus. Let the sinner take, further, the testimony of all the redeemed. Let him summon the thousand witnesses for Christ now upon the earth, and then the ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, whom John saw before the throne, and, without dissent, they will all testify, that by just such power as he now begins to feel, were they brought into a state of salvation. They, just as he, were roused from apathy, and were made to feel the powers of the world to come; they, just as he must, were led to "loathe and abhor themselves," and to "cast themselves upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus." Then, by all that he now feels, may he hope that a good work is begun within him, which will be carried on till the day of Christ. The true deduction leads not to despondency and cavil, but to hope and joyful trust; for he can be saved only through those influences which are now consciously experienced, and which he is exhorted to cherish. We may, then, endorse this, "the argument of interest;" and let it restrain the sinner from foolishly perilling his salvation by grieving now away the Holy Spirit of God.

IV. *Because the Scriptures hedge about the office and work of the Holy Ghost with very solemn and peculiar sanctions.*

It has been already said that He is the only person of the Godhead who sustains no office of wrath, and is attended by no symbols of terrible majesty. This, however, is one of those partial truths which might mislead, unless qualified by the statements now to be made. Perhaps, for this reason, His person and office are guarded by the most fearful warning found within the Bible. "Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men; and whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." It thus appears, "there is a sin unto death"—one form of transgression which is excepted from all hope of pardon, which the infinite goodness of God refuses to cover, and for which the prayer of intercession may not be offered; *and that sin*

can only be committed against the person of the Holy Ghost. It may be irreverent to inquire into the reasons of this remarkable limitation. Perhaps it is because the Holy Spirit is the third and last person of the adorable Trinity, so that he who sins finally and fatally against Him has sinned past the entire Godhead. He that transgresseth against the person and law of the Father may yet be forgiven through the infinite merits and prevalent intercessions of the Son; and he that sins against the person and office of the Son, may yet be overtaken by the resistless might and grace of the Spirit; but when the Spirit is grieved away, there remains behind no other person who may gather up the resources of the Godhead, and bring them to the sinner's rescue. Or, perhaps it is because to the Holy Ghost is assigned the office of applying the scheme of redemption; so that he who sins against Him finally has sinned against the Gospel in its last stage, just where it is intended to bear upon human destiny; and having sinned past the scheme of grace, "there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries." Or, it may be in compensation for the lowliness of the Spirit's condescension; because, in discharging the office of Comforter, He must come with a gentleness that shall not alarm the timid soul, and descend into contact with the lowest impurity of the sinner's heart; because he must stand thus seemingly defenceless before the sinner, and submit to all the outrage of the sinner's resistance and scorn, therefore He must bear this solemn seal of the Father and the Son, who throw around his person the sanctions of their own official greatness and severity. But without pausing, with prurient curiosity, to pry into the reasons of this awful warning, the fact itself, in its fearful solemnity, is sufficient for us. Trifle not with this person of the Trinity, since the one sin which God will never forgive is, and can be, perpetrated only against Him. Nor is it essential to the import of this warning, that we should define precisely the nature of this sin. That it is special, and does not involve every act of resistance, is evident; since, otherwise, the whole human race would be cut off from the hope of salvation. Which one of all the redeemed, on earth or in heaven, but consciously has, at some stage in his career, resisted and grieved the Holy Spirit? This dreadful offence, therefore, described under the strong term of blasphemy, must import something more than the ordinary resistance of the unrenewed will.

It must imply a confirmed and malignant opposition of the soul to holiness and God, such as can alone admit the wilful and habitual traducing of the Holy Ghost in the fulfilment of His glorious and benign mission. But, even in this view, the warning is not the less significant. It may be presented thus: He that consciously sins against the Spirit, in the face of such a woe here denounced, has no guaranty that he may not be judicially abandoned of God to sin *that sin* which shall never be remitted. This side of the judgment bar, there are awful sanctions by which Jehovah guards both His law and the Gospel of His grace; and the most fearful of these is the withholding of His restraints, and punishing sin by allowing the commission of other sins which are deeper. Your present resistance of the Holy Ghost may not be "*the sin* which is unto death," but it may be the first step in the path of declension which terminates in that fearful abyss. Grieved by ordinary and persistent rejection, this blessed agent, whose commission is sealed by the Father and the Son, may depart; and He that sitteth upon the throne may lift His right hand in the dreadful oath, "My Spirit shall no more strive!" The withering sentence may be pronounced, "Let him alone!" Thus judicially abandoned, with all the restraints of providence and grace withdrawn, the sinner may go on from sin to sin, until the last dreadful act of treason is consummated in the blasphemy against God's Eternal Spirit. We may therefore endorse this, "the argument of warning;" and, by the terrors of the Lord, persuade the sinner not to trifle with the thunders of Jehovah's Word. Rise not up now, in the stubbornness of your pride, and say, "We will not be frightened into submission by the echoes of a penalty like this." Remember that the language of bravado is always the language of cowardice and of falsehood. It is right to be afraid of God, when He speaks to us in the majesty of His law. And when these warnings come as the foreshadowing of His stern retributive justice, and are addressed to our judgment and conscience, rather than to our sense of fear, they can only be disregarded by the recklessness that is blind, or by the folly that is mad. The flaming sword which turneth every way guards the person of that Divine Spirit, who comes to the sinner the last exponent of God's infinite love. He who rushes upon that sword dies by the hand of God; while mercy and love, outraged and despised by the sinner, vindicate themselves by echoing the decree which inflexible justice both issues and executes.

But some one may arise here and say, Of all this, we are deeply persuaded; there is no fault more grave, and no calamity more fatal, than to grieve away the Holy Spirit; if we know ourselves, there is no crime from which we shrink with greater dread; tell us how we may be saved from an offence of such awful magnitude. The demand is reasonable, for doubtless there are many who would not designedly do despite to the Spirit of Grace, who nevertheless, in their blindness, pursue a course which leads to this dreadful issue. It is of immense concern to such, to know the principal ways in which this may inadvertently be done.

I. *Many grieve the Spirit by their unwillingness to own that they are under His influence and feel His power.*

Those who are called to deal with awakened souls are aware how studiously these religious exercises are screened from the view of others. Nor have we the right to complain of this, so far as it springs from that natural reserve which God has cast, as a veil of concealment, over all the sacred and tender affections of the soul. It is never easy to speak out the sentiments even of natural affection into the ears of a stranger; and we speedily lose respect for those who can babble forth all their inner feelings in the shambles and in the market place, which should be reserved for self-communion, or at least for the confidential disclosures of intimate friendship. That veil of secrecy should not be rudely drawn aside or rent, which a true and instinctive delicacy draws around the heart; and which, as a principle of our nature, God has implanted, that we may be protected from the profane and intrusive gaze of our fellow men. It is not of this we complain, that anxious sinners are reluctant to make us the depositaries of their religious secret. However we may regret that want of confidence which renders unavailing our wisdom and experience, an unquestioned right alone is exercised, which no one may lawfully challenge. But the indisposition to acknowledge, even to themselves, the source and nature of their distress, is what we censure. How many are peevish and fretful when no adequate cause exists without them for this disquietude, who would discover, if they would institute an inquiry, that it is God Himself by whom they are troubled. He has "stirred up their nest," and therefore they are ill at ease! To live day by day in this discomposure of soul, and never ask wherefore they droop; not to cease the din and clatter of life long enough to ask who it is that knocketh at the door of the heart,

and seeks admission—this is to grieve the Spirit of God, by sad inattention to the signs of His presence, and by slothful disregard to the calls of His love. An earthly friend, however dear, would turn away from our door at such rebuffs, nor could he be pacified without acknowledgment and sorrow for the wrong. Is it strange that the Holy Ghost should suspend His importunate solicitations, and leave the sinner that is deaf to all his entreaties to reap the fruit of his folly in bitter disappointment and sorrow?

II. *Others grieve the Holy Ghost by laboring to extinguish their convictions, and escape present distress, without repentance and confession.*

Transparent candor is due to all earnest searchers after truth—the same candor exhibited by our blessed Lord, when He said, “Who-soever will not take up his cross and follow Me, cannot be My disciple.” So we are bound to say to all who would press into His Kingdom, it is through sorrow and pain this entrance must be gained; for the gate is strait, and none enter but through striving. The agonies of the second birth, like the pains of the first, must be felt by all who would see the light. It is impossible, in the nature of things, that a man should wake up to the fact that he is vile before God, and that in him dwelleth no good thing, without torture of soul. The misfortune and guilt of multitudes is, that they will not undergo that distress which is antecedent to all relief. They desire to be comforted, without the mourning to which the promise of comfort is annexed. Hence the effort, at every hazard, to throw off the sense of pain. Hence the lamentation of God, “My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” In the very crisis of their fate, instead of “repenting in dust and ashes”—instead of “being in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his first born”—they plunge with frantic haste into anything that will for the time hush the upbraidings of conscience, or extract the sting of remorse. They addict themselves to business, and steep themselves in care; they mingle in society, and drown the voice of the monitor within amid scenes of pleasure; they lock up the heart in a cold and stony stoicism; anything but listen to the Spirit’s reproof, when He “convinces of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come.” What is this but mad resistance of the Holy Ghost, by which all His blessed influences are quenched, perhaps forever?

III. *Others still grieve the Spirit by too sedulous cultivation of the emotions, till they evaporate in mere sentiment and feeling.*

The universal complaint of men, when pressed with the duty of faith in Christ, is, that they do not *feel enough*. Even where the sad blunder is not committed of supposing this mental anguish to be in some sort expiatory and atoning for the past, the fatal delusion exists, that from this agony, as a preparatory discipline, it will be easier to pass into the peace which the Saviour gives. Instead, therefore, of turning at once to Him under the guidance and blessing of the Holy Spirit, they turn back upon themselves, and press the law with all its sharp points in upon the conscience, that they may bleed at every pore. To their utter dismay, they come by this process at last not to feel at all. Yet, no one acquainted with the laws of our nature, but could predict the result. By the very constitution of the human soul, these emotions are not to be produced by efforts expended directly upon the emotions themselves. They are in their nature so subtle as to escape in the very act of handling; like those volatile essences which preserve their life only when confined, these emotions evaporate as soon as they are drawn forth to be discussed and strengthened. What living man ever succeeded in producing the sentiment of the beautiful, or of the sublime, by putting himself through a logical process to show that he *ought* thus to feel? The argument shall be convincing; but the heart will remain as insensible as the iceberg under a polar moon. The Scriptures, with a far more accurate knowledge of man's nature, recognise the triple powers with which he is endowed, and address him as a being capable of thought, feeling, and action. They reveal God glorious in holiness, and man sunk in sin, that his thoughts may be stirred within him. Inasmuch as, by the relation subsisting between these faculties, thought tends to elicit feeling, the Holy Ghost deepens these reflections into conviction and mourning. But He does not now draw a charmed circle around the man, or throw the heart back upon itself, that it may be lashed into frenzy. The Bible nowhere presents a graduated scale of feeling, that the sinner may watch and wait until the mercury rises in the tube to the boiling point. It recognises, on the contrary, the great principle that feeling should at once take concrete form, and embody itself in corresponding action—and that emotion, which is not allowed thus to shape itself outwardly in the appropriate act, dies within itself. It comes therefore at once with its great com-

mand to *believe* in that Saviour whom it reveals. He who wishes to feel more intensely the vileness of sin, must look out upon that holiness of God with which it is in dreadful contrast. He who wishes to feel greater contrition, and more tender sorrow, must look forth with a trustful faith upon that Saviour through whom alone he can be brought to genuine penitence. All these acts of the soul reflect back upon each other. If thought engenders feeling, it is in turn quickened by that very feeling which it produces. If feeling tends to shape itself in the outward act, it is reciprocally intensified by the very energy of its own development. It is precisely here the sinner's great error is committed. Contradicting all the known laws of our spiritual economy, he strives to deepen his emotions by a direct effort upon them, instead of yielding prompt obedience to the great practical command of the Gospel, which rouses him to immediate faith in Christ, and which the Holy Ghost now enforces upon the conscience. What though, within the magic circle in which he has bound his heart with a spell, he should, contrary to known experience, burn and blaze before God with all the ardor of a seraph! It is only that the heart may be consumed in the intensity of its emotions, to fall back at last into its own ashes, a charred and blackened ruin! And what is this but a mad attempt to find salvation within ourselves, to create a Saviour in our own emotions! What is it but to reject and grieve that Holy Spirit of God, who, in accordance with the very laws of our being, would lead us forth from our misery and guilt, to rest upon the bosom of our God in Christ!

IV. *Finally, thousands grieve the Spirit by the postponement of present duty to a future day.*

After a few fitful efforts, the sinner sinks down in sheer exhaustion, and hopes that what seems impossible to-day will be practicable and easy to-morrow. Is it necessary to show how this offends God and grieves the Holy Ghost? Is it nothing to trench upon God's prerogative, who alone has to-morrow in His gift? Put your finger upon your pulse, and remember that life is measured out to us in each single beat, that we may feel our dependence upon the supreme will of Him in whom we live and move. Is it nothing to trifle with God's command, which covers every inch of our time with its own immediate duty? Is it nothing to mock that august person who knocks at the sinner's heart, and make Him bend to our indolence or caprice?

"There's no prerogative in human hours.
 In human hearts what bolder thought can rise,
 Than man's presumption on to-morrow's dawn?
 Where is to-morrow? In another world!
 And yet on this, perhaps,
 This peradventure, infamous for lies,
 As on a rock of adamant, we build
 Our mountain hopes, and spin eternal schemes,
 As we the fatal sisters would outspin,
 And, big with life's futurities, expire."

Every command of God's law binds the present moment, and every offer of the Gospel is made equally in the present. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!" He who uses up his morrow in fruitless resolutions of amendment, then, is like the spendthrift who anticipates his income, and overwhelms his fortune with the debts of the past.

"A man's life is a tower, with a staircase of many steps,
 That, as he toileth upward, crumble successively behind him;
 No going back, the past is an abyss; no stopping, for the present perisheth;
 But ever hasting on, precarious on the foothold of to-day.
 Our cares are all to-day; our joys are all to-day;
 And in one little word, our life, what is it but—to-day?"

Sinner! now be wise. Reflect, that as you cannot, without fraud, anticipate the future which is yet with God, so neither can you recall the past, that has gone beforehand to the judgment bar. On this isthmus of the present alone you stand, with the momentous interests of eternity crowded with you upon its narrow space. This now, which is "ticking from the clock of time," is past, even as you have counted it, speeding along with its truthful testimony against your neglect and sin, if now you grieve the Holy Spirit of God.