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SERMON LIX.

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WHAT WILL NOT AVAIL IN A SINNER'S SALVATION.

GAL. 6:15.—*For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*

It is a question of some interest, whether the millenium will entirely destroy all differences of religious opinion. From the nature and extent of certain promises some infer that all shall think alike on those points, which now are matters of frequent discussion. But when we duly consider the great weakness of the human mind and the unfathomable depth in the great things of God, we will be apt to conclude differently. The improvements of the millenium will consist not so much in any advancements in cold speculative theology, as in preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, in more earnest attention to the plain, fundamental, and practical parts of religion, and in a great increase of holiness of heart, purity of manners, and ardent zeal. That a most wonderful and unexampled change must take place to bring about entire unity of opinion, is manifest from all church history. Even good men in every age have frequently differed in opinion. It was so in the days of the apostles. Men of corrupt minds too have as yet always existed, who have loved and propagated error. Such in Paul's time were certain Judaizing teachers, who troubled the Christians of Galatia. To oppose the doctrines of such men and bring back a falling church, seems to have been the chief object of this epistle. In prosecuting this object he states, among other things, that "in Christ Jesus"—in the formation and subsistence of a spiritual union with Christ—"neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature:" or, as it might be translated, a new creation.

In treating this subject it is proposed,

- I. To NOTICE SOME THINGS WHICH WILL BE OF NO AVAIL IN A SINNER'S SALVATION.

- II. To SHOW WHAT A NEW CREATION IS, OR WHAT WILL AVAIL IN A SINNER'S SALVATION.

SERMON LX.

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II. WE ARE TO SHOW WHAT THIS NEW CREATION IS.

THERE are several modes of expression found in the sacred Scriptures, all of which will throw light on this subject: such as—circumcision of the heart—a renewal of the Holy Ghost—being born again—born of the Spirit—putting on the new man—a resurrection from the dead—a quickening of those who are dead in trespasses and sins—and a creation in Christ Jesus unto good works.

There are also passages of Scripture which speak of the subject at length, as the following: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh, and I will put my Spirit within you.”* From these and other passages of Scripture we learn, that this new creation is a real and thorough change, in which the soul, being enlightened by saving knowledge and spiritual perceptions, receives a living principle and a gracious habit; and has the law of God and a holy nature implanted in the heart; and that all this is done by the powerful working of the Holy Ghost.

It is proper to state, that in this great change no new faculty is imparted to the soul. Man has, by creation, all the physical powers necessary for serving God perfectly. This change rectifies, regulates, and renders holy the native powers of the mind and heart. Neither is this change confined to any one power of the soul. As all its powers are disordered, so all of them must be subjected to divine operation. In fact, the soul is a simple, indivisible being—a unit, and if the understanding, or will, or affections be wrong, the effect will be manifest on the whole moral man.

The Scriptures represent unregenerate men as “having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.”† This passage is introduced, not for the purpose of entering into any subtle questions on the nature of the mind, but for the purpose of showing the state of unregenerate men, and the extent of the work to be wrought by the Holy Ghost. The first thing we shall notice then in

* Ezekiel 36:26, 27.

† Eph. 4:18.

this change is the removal of this darkness by spiritual illumination. When God would make a world, he said, "let there be light;" so also does he begin the new creation by diffusing divine light through the soul. "If the things of religion are rightly *understood* they will affect the heart. The reason why men are not affected by such infinitely great, important, and glorious things as they often hear and read of in the word of God is undoubtedly because they are spiritually blind."* A blind man may be able to speak correctly of light and colors, of their different effects and powers, and of the laws by which they are governed; yet no one imagines he has a real perception of their true nature. One of the best books ever written on the subject of light was written by a man blind from very early infancy; yet any child ten years of age, who is blessed with vision, has a better and more correct perception of the true nature of light, than had that great man. So unrenewed men may be able to discourse intelligently about spiritual matters, but until the Holy Ghost enlightens the mind, there is no correct perception of spiritual things; for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned:" The image of God consists in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness; but that whole image is lost. Of course, when restored, knowledge is restored also. Unrenewed men continually misapprehend and misapply truth, and they will continue to do so until born from above. These views correspond precisely with the experience of every soul that has passed from death unto life. Every such soul did find, when first drawn towards God, how foolish, and ignorant, and erroneous, were all its conceptions of divine things, previous to the entrance of light from God's Spirit. This enlightening operation extends to the whole of revealed truth. New views are imparted respecting God—respecting his holiness, justice, goodness, love, majesty, power, and indeed the whole of his nature. New views are entertained respecting the person and offices of Jesus Christ. Once he was regarded as a root out of a dry ground—without form or comeliness—having no beauty why we should desire him. But when the understanding is illuminated, the fixed and deliberate judgment of the mind is, that He is the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely—possessed of unparalleled charms and excellencies. The unrenewed soul sees no necessity for a mediator, or if it sees the necessity of one, it sees no suitability in the character of Christ as Mediator, but no sooner is divine knowledge communicated by God's Spirit, than the necessity of a Mediator, and the suitability of Jesus as a Mediator, are both fully admitted. The law, too, is adjudged to be holy, just, and good, and receives the most full assent of the understanding. Sin is looked upon as deformed and loathsome, ruinous and abominable, involving in it a turpitude, a baseness not to be described. In this enlightening operation, the views of the comparative importance of time and eternity—of this life and the next—of present and future happiness and mis-

* Edwards.

ry, are very much changed. Heaven and hell—life and death—sin and misery—holiness and happiness, are held up in strong contrast, and the mind forms its judgment accordingly. The things that are seen are found to be *temporal*, and the things that are not seen are found to be *eternal*. Without continuing this process of detail further, it may be remarked, in general, that by this enlightening the whole system of truth assumes a new aspect, and is clothed with pleasant solemnity and simple majesty. All this flood of light is poured into the soul in a manner the most easy and natural. The soul is not aware of any violence done to it, because no violence has been done to it. Accordingly in regeneration these two things take place: 1. The soul is filled with wonder that it did not see these things in this way all its life-time. They are so plain, that it supposes itself to have been exceedingly stupid, and blind, and ignorant. Nor is it erroneous in this supposition. 2. Divine truth seems so clear and so plain, that young converts ordinarily have a pretty firm conviction, that if they might be permitted to address their impenitent fellow-men, they could make all things appear before them as if written in a sun-beam; and could thus compel a belief and acceptance of the truth. Melancthon, after his conversion, thought it impossible for his hearers to resist such views as he could present respecting the gospel; but soon after he complained that old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon. Such forget the author of their discoveries, and the deep depravity of all men, in the rapture occasioned by them. All such views are frequently referred to in the sacred Scriptures. For such the Psalmist prayed when he said, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." "The entrance of thy law giveth light—The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." By the word "eyes" we are evidently referred to the understanding; and truth being the object of the understanding, we ask the same thing in both these petitions—"Open thou mine eyes—"Lead me into all truth." An excitement of the affections, without this illumination, can at best but amount to superstition. Knowledge always carries the lamps full of oil, trimmed and brightly burning, when the heart is truly wedded to the Savior.

But there are not only new perceptions of truth, but there is a new apprehension of it, and that apprehension of it is by genuine faith. This faith credits the divine testimony in all points, and receives the truths of God as they are plainly stated in his word. And while this faith believes as entirely on Christ for salvation, as if it did not work at all, it works as diligently as if salvation depended on human merit. The true genuine faith of the gospel purifies the heart, works by love, and overcomes the world. No system of belief or practice—no austerity—in short, no device of man has ever been able to destroy one sinful propensity. The faith of the gospel, and that faith only, can wage a successful war against the raging lusts and appetites of human nature. Bunyan calls faith, Mr. Greatheart, because of his valor and success in holy war.

And as the truth is received by faith, so is the heart melted into contrition by the truth. Repentance is necessarily connected with faith. Indeed, perhaps the best popular definition of repentance is, that "it is the tear which stands in the eye of faith, when that eye of faith is looking at Christ." This seems to correspond with the Bible account of the matter—"They shall look [by faith] on him whom they have pierced, and mourn and be in bitterness." This sorrow of soul is something very different from the mere meltings of nature. There is a gracious character attached to it, which is most pleasing. The language of the true penitent is—"Oh! how could I be so ungrateful and perverse as to continue in sin after all God's mercies to me, especially after the sufferings of Christ to save me from sin and ruin." How can a widow look with any other emotion than that of abhorrence and dread upon the sword that took her husband's life? How can a believer look with any thing like complacency on the sins that made the Savior bleed? The sight of Cæsar's bloody robes incensed the Romans against those that slew him. So when believers behold him that cometh from Bozra with dyed garments, red in his apparel, and remember that their sins caused his death, they resolve on a war that shall not end till sin be exterminated. Every renewed soul exclaims:

"Yes, my Redeemer, they shall die,
My heart hath so decreed;
Nor will I spare the guilty things
That made my Savior bleed."

The knowledge, and faith, and repentance, of which we have spoken, are essentially connected with love. Indeed, he must possess a remarkably constructed mind, who can imagine one perceiving loveliness, and yet not loving, or a being exercising the confidence of faith in one for whom he has no affection, or a being filled with contrition for actions committed against one in whose character there is no delight. This love, produced in the new creation, regards the whole character of God. God's holiness is a source of enjoyment to such a soul. One created anew in Christ is glad that God is holy—that no impurity can attach to him—and that although other beings may be conceived of as changing from holiness to sinfulness, yet God is unchangeably pure. In like manner, his power—his wisdom—his knowledge—his majesty—his omniscience—his truth and faithfulness, his love and mercy, are objects of the good man's love. Even the justice of God is an attribute, without which a good man could find few pleasant reflections. The same general remarks apply to the whole word of God—Law and Gospel. "Oh!" says the believer, "how I love thy law; it is my meditation day and night. Thy precepts are more to be desired than honey and the honeycomb—than gold, yea much fine gold. I live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

And who can tell how cordial and hearty is the love of a new-born soul towards the blessed Jesus. There appears in all his character

such dignity and love, such glory and condescension, such ability and willingness to save, that the soul is drawn with the cords of love, and its language is, Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee. Bring me to thy banqueting-house, and let the banner over me be love.

This love extends to divine ordinances. Once the soul said of holy time, "What a weariness is it"—and "O that the Sabbath were gone, that I might buy, and sell, and get gain;" but when renewed it says, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem."* The renewed soul calls "the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord and honorable."

In the new creation a principle of love to the brethren is established in the soul. Hypocrites are like poisonous serpents, which cast their coats, but retain all their venom. But God's own people love the followers of Jesus. An unrenewed man, too, may have a high respect for God's people—nay, he may have a love for them, because they treat him kindly, or seem interested in his welfare. But Christians love Christians, because they bear the image of Jesus. Here permit a little explanation to be offered. Suppose that a family of children, whose father was dead, had a little brother, who, in appearance and countenance, much resembled their father now in his grave. Well, because this little child was little, and because he was their brother, they would feel tenderly towards him. But suppose when they looked at him, they could all say in truth, "Why, he is the very image of his our father," how ardently and tenderly would they love him. Just so it is with God's people, when they behold the image—the moral likeness of their Father above, in any, even the youngest of his children. It is the likeness of God which is the peculiar object of brotherly love. How different, then, is true brotherly love from that affection, called love, which some have for those, and only those, who are of their party in religion. Besides, if we have stated the matter correctly, then it follows, that those who exhibit the image of Christ most fully, do receive the greatest amount of love from their brother. Suppose you were travelling, and should fall in company with one who seemed intelligent, and courteous, and social, you would of course be pleased. But suppose, that after travelling with him one or two days, he should give you substantial proofs that he loved the Savior, would you love him, and instantly make room for him in your heart? But suppose, in a day or two after he should try to say Shibboleth, and instead of that should say Sibboleth; or, in other words, should let you know that he preferred a mode of worship, or a form of government in the church, different from those you were accustomed to, would you still love him as heartily as ever? If you would not, your love is spurious. This love to God is warm, and generous, and liberal, and counts not its labors. Jacob for fourteen years forgot toil and labor for the love he bore to Rachel.

* Psalm 122:1, 2.

“ While duty portions out the debt it owes
 With scrupulous precision and nice justice;
 Love never measures, but profusely gives,
 Gives like a thoughtless prodigal, its all,
 And trembles *then*, lest it has done too little.”

We should be presenting a quite imperfect view of what is done in the new creation, if we were to omit mentioning *hope*. As the hope of earthly happiness was once the prime-mover of action, so now the hope of unfading glory and everlasting blessedness impels to activity. This hope is sure and steadfast, and looks to that within the veil. This hope is an anchor to the soul, cast not on the earth but in heaven; and when the waves of affliction and the billows of adversity roll mountain high, and with angry foam dash and break about the soul, it can remain in some good degree, calm, and steady, and fixed.

“ Hope looks beyond the bounds of time,
 When what we now deplore”

shall receive the eclairsissement of a holy and omniscient God; and thus the heart will praise God for the darkest nights—the most mysterious dispensations it ever passed through on earth. The Christian in adversity, with the light of hope, is like the mountain whose bosom is darkened and beaten by the tempest, shaken with thunder, and rived by lightning; but whose head is radiant with the unobscured rays of a summer’s sun.

And as a man has a new set of hopes, so has he of fears. Once he was afraid he would not be great, or honorable, or learned, or wealthy, or popular, or healthy. But when renewed he is afraid he will not be learned in the mysteries of the kingdom, or rich towards God in faith and good works, or that his soul will not have health and prosper. He is afraid of sin—more afraid of sin than of the sufferings of hell.

Joy, too, is an important item in estimating Christian character. There are carnal joys which are sinful—there are innocent joys which are confined to earth—such as the joys of friends when they meet. But there are pure and holy joys that shall last for ever. To such we are exhorted when the apostle says, “ Rejoice, and again I say rejoice.” Peter, speaking of Christ, says, that “ in him, though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy *unspeakable and full of glory*.”

That these remarks be not misunderstood, it is proper to state that there is nothing of levity, or giddiness, or dissipation of mind, accompanying “ joy in the Holy Ghost.” All the substantial joys of human life are sober, serious joys—much more are all such religious joys, as make the heart better. A tendency to laughter or merriment, under the influence of religious joys, shows that the soul has lost its balance. Religion is too grave a matter to be laughed at, even joyously. It is much to be lamented, however, and one among many evidences of the low state of piety in our day, that there is so much

dejection of heart and depression of spirit among professors, and so little of that joy and gladness, of which the first Christians were so bountiful partakers. Christ commanded his disciples to rejoice and be exceeding glad, even when reproached, and slandered, and persecuted, and cruelly tormented, and they obeyed him. Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God at midnight, when in the inmost prison with their feet made fast in the stocks; and the prisoners heard them. So mighty is the principle of truth in furnishing "*strong consolation.*"

In like manner, *every affection of the heart* is renewed and regulated, in such manner as to correspond and harmonize with what has been previously expatiated upon. Esteem and disesteem, desire and aversion, fondness and hatred, are all different in their objects and nature, inasmuch as divine authority possesses uncontrolled dominion. Every sentiment of dislike is fixedly set against sin, while sentiments of attachment are directed towards God, and Christ, and heaven. So far as the friendship of the soul is concerned, the heart is like the needle of the compass, which always settles in one direction. Sometimes, like the magnetic needle, the heart, as by base metals, is drawn aside. Sometimes sin and Satan do great violence to it, and divert it from its heaven-ward direction, but when thus drawn aside it never settles, but always trembles. The heart of a true child of God is never so fastened to the world or selfishness, as is the sinner's. It is not more natural for smoke to ascend, than for holy desires and gracious affections to proceed from a renewed soul towards God.

And as the understanding, will, and affections are changed, so is the practice. The churl becomes liberal—the heart that was once locked up in selfishness is opened—the profane man becomes reverent—the blasphemer prays—the mouth, once full of cursing and bitterness, pours blessings on the name and followers of Jesus—the lion puts on the nature of the lamb—the serpent assumes the innocence of the dove—the formalist heeds the "weighty matters" of the law. In short, the whole life is fashioned after the model of the gospel. Phil. 4:8.

This new creation communicates a living principle. Before this change, spiritual death reigned, but when the Spirit of the Almighty breathed into it, it received a principle of life. Sometimes this principle seems to be very weak, and so it often is. Sometimes it seems to be extinct, but on closer examination, it is found still to exist. The spiritual pulse beats though feebly and slowly. This vital principle is to spiritual life in the soul what the soul is to animal life and activity in the body of man. So long as the soul is in the body there is life.

And as God at first gave life so He supports it, feeding the holy principle continually. When "Christian" saw the fire burning continually, notwithstanding the vast quantities of water thrown upon it, he could not understand it, until he was led into the secret by being shown one who was privately feeding the flame with abundance of oil. He received from the "Interpreter" the following explanation—That fire is the gracious principle in the soul—the water thrown on it is the temptations of Satan—the oil is divine grace—and he that supplies it is

the Holy Ghost, who secretly nourishes and supports divine life in the soul.

This new creation has an abiding influence. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."* That is, he does not make a trade of sin—he does not allowedly commit sin—he does not *work* iniquity, and for this plain reason, the abiding gracious principle "*remaineth* in him." The new nature which he has received, is opposed to all sin as much as his former nature was in love with it. So that when a good man is in any way entangled or defiled by sin, he is restless until he escapes the pollution. It is agreeable to the nature of swine to wallow in the mire, but if you see a sheep in the mire, you may conclude that something is wrong—that it is and will continue to be uncomfortable, until freed from its unpleasant situation. So it is the nature of a sinner to commit sin—"The wicked shall do wickedly"—but if a regenerate person be overcome, he says "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."† Thus there is permanency; for "the anointing which ye have received of him, abideth in you."‡

These are some of the effects of this new creation; but we have not time even to allude to all the particular ways in which it manifests itself—influencing, as it does, all the habits of life—all the modes of thought and speech—begetting a spirit of benevolence, charity, modesty, self-denial, compassion for dying men, forgiveness of those who injure us, reparation to those whom we may have injured, &c. If such be the change wrought, you doubtless are ready to assent to the truth that it is a *great* change—that it is a great thing to be religious. And although this change be so great, yet it is necessary, if man is ever to be admitted into the holy exercises of heaven—a change, too, that brightly displays the power of him who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean—can fill dry bones with marrow—clothe them with flesh and command them into life. This change will "*avail*." God loves his own image, and shall for ever love it; therefore he does now, and shall for ever love his people. To deny his people would be to deny his image—his hand-writing—his seal.

Let us, my dear brethren, improve this subject—

1. By inquiring earnestly whether we have ever been new-created. An error here is fatal. If any man be in Christ [in a state of salvation] he is a new creature. There are in the church, at this day, two extremes with regard to the evidences of piety. One is that which requires a kind and amount of evidence, which the Bible does not require, and which no honest man can give. This is a species of fanaticism; and if its demands were gratified, a state of the utmost confusion and disorder would certainly ensue.

The other extreme is by far more common, but not less dangerous. It reduces the standard of evidence so low that there are few persons of moral character, who may not claim fellowship with Christ and his

* 1 John 3:9.

† Psalm 51:2.

‡ 1 John 2:27.

church. Thus souls are deluded, carnal hopes gain possession, false peace enters, sin is indulged and the soul is undone. Many live as they list, and when they die, look for the resurrection of the just, as a pleasing prospect, but when it shall come they will have no part in it.

It is not half so difficult, as some imagine, to arrive at a correct decision in this matter; and even if it were almost impossible, still it would be wise to make the effort. Especially should we make the effort, because, if our title to heaven be unsound and we can ascertain that fact, there is still room for us in the Savior's heart, and time for us to make peace with God. Have we then been new-created? Have old things passed away and all things become new? Have we spiritual illumination, faith, repentance, love, godly fear, joy, hatred to sin and a holy life, as the foundation of our "rejoicing in ourselves?"

2. If we have experienced this great change, let us give the glory to God, to whom it is due. When Christ came to the grave of Lazarus, and weeping said, "Lazarus, come forth," he, bound and in his grave clothes, came forth. How would this affecting narrative be changed, and how wicked would Lazarus appear in our eyes, if in the close of the story we were told, that Lazarus went about telling his friends that he had reanimated his own body and raised himself from the dead! It is not less inconsistent with truth, and not less dishonorable to God, for those who have received a spiritual resurrection, to say "we did it by our own exertions," or "such an one of our fellow creatures did it by his exertions." People are much disposed to ascribe some of the power to the eloquence, or earnestness, or persuasiveness of their preacher, or to their own poor endeavors. This is all wrong. God is still jealous for his glory, and he will not give it to another. Those who believe are "born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." When the head-stone of the great building—the church—shall be laid, then all the redeemed, as with the voice of one man, shall with shoutings cry grace, grace unto it, and shall unite in harmonious anthems of praise "to the praise of the glory of his grace." Beware, then, lest you give not God the glory, which is due unto his ever-blessed name.

3. At the old creation, the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy; and at the new creation of even one soul, there is joy in the presence of God. And it is not wonderful that there should be. The old creation has by sin been consigned over to the conflagrations of the last day, but the new creation, composed of the ransomed of the Lord, shall never be subjected to the ravages of sin. It is surrounded by impregnable walls of fire and salvation. It is becoming filled with a holy population. They are coming from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and are sitting down in this kingdom of God. Rich and poor, great and small, are finding that the violent can enter it by force. Perhaps not an hour passes, that some believer does not finish his course with joy and commence the unceasing song, "Unto him that loved us and washed us in his own blood." No wonder, then, that there is joy in heaven in

beholding the increase, and triumphs, and glories of this kingdom. Now, unconverted man, if you will still refuse to give joy in heaven, and will still neglect the receiving of a portion in this new world that grace has made, will it not be just, will it not be right, that you should be for ever shut out, where men shall blaspheme the God of heaven, because of their pains, and their plagues, and their woes, and shall find no place of repentance, though they seek it carefully with tears. Perhaps the Savior may this moment be passing by. Then like the blind man cry, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." And if your companions or your sins rebuke you, cry still the more earnestly, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." But let him pass by this time and you may never be near him again. He may be gone and gone for ever. And when you come to die, you may call but he will not answer; you may exclaim, as Queen Elizabeth, "A world of wealth for an inch of time;" or, as the expiring George IV., "Oh! this is not right—this is death—Oh God! *I am dying*"—and the curtain will drop, and you will be pushed out of this world and shoved up into the presence of God,

"Greatly mourning, greatly mourning,
Because you ne'er were born again."

Then the day of grace will be closed for ever, and ever, and ever; and eternity—"Oh! that dreadful word, eternity"—eternity will be your dwelling; and the voice of eternal justice will unceasingly proclaim, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."* O, turn unto the Lord, for "why will you die?"

* Rev. 22: 11.

"O God of mercy, hear my call,
My loads of guilt remove;
Break down this separating wall,
That bars me from thy love.

Give me the presence of thy grace;
Then my rejoicing tongue
Shall speak aloud thy righteousness,
And make thy praise my song.

No blood of goats nor heifers slain,
For sin could e'er atone;
The death of Christ shall still remain
Sufficient and alone.

A soul oppressed with sin's desert
My God will ne'er despise;
An humble groan, a broken heart
Is our best sacrifice."