

## ET MORTUUS ADHUC PER EAM LOQUITUR

### Thomas M'Crie's Last Sermon

#### Editor's Advertisement to the First Edition.

A considerable number of the following Sermons were transcribed by the lamented Author from his notes for the pulpit, some years before his death. Though often solicited to publish them, he was prevented, by other avocations, from completing the proposed volume. The remaining Discourses have been selected from his manuscripts, and the whole has been arranged with as much attention to order as the nature of the subjects would admit. In the task of selection the Editor has been guided chiefly by the state of preparation in which the notes were found, though in some measure also by the earnestly expressed desires of those who heard them delivered. In one or two instances, what occupied two Discourses in the delivery has been put into one. The judicious reader will be prepared to expect, in a series of Discourses on topics nearly allied to each other, and of a strain almost uniformly practical, an occasional coincidence of sentiment and phraseology; and he will understand the feelings which have restrained the Editor from attempting such alterations as might have been expected from the Author.

With regard to the reception of those Sermons which were prepared by the Author's own hand, the Editor has no right to pretend uneasiness. It is, however, with no small degree of anxiety that he presents along with these the other Discourses which fill the volume. Well knowing the extreme care which his late revered father was accustomed to bestow on all his compositions intended for the public eye, he feels as if he had presumed too far on the silence of the grave, by publishing what the Author would never have given to the world, in such an imperfect form, during his lifetime. There is some relief in the reflection, that what it might have been unworthy of the living Author to bequeath as a gift, it may be permitted us to present as a memorial; and to those, at least, who enjoyed his ministrations, the value of these relics of their departed minister may be enhanced by that very absence of finish which may be found to distinguish them from the other Sermons in the volume.

To those who have expressed a wish to see a volume of his father's Lectures printed, the Editor begs to intimate

that they have been left in such a state as might warrant the publication of a select number, and that if they should still be called for, he shall commence the preparation of them for the press as speedily as his other engagements will allow. In closing his present task, it is his humble trust that these Sermons, with all the disadvantages under which they necessarily labour, may be pronounced, as a whole, not unworthy of their Author; and that they may be blessed for leading the reader, under the solemn impression of the mournful event to which they owe their present appearance, to "consider the end of his conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

Thomas M'Crie.  
Clola, By Mintlaw,  
January 1836.

### The Fan in Christ's Hand<sup>1</sup>

MATTHEW 3:12: Whose Fan Is In His Hand, And He Will Thoroughly Purge His Floor, And Gather His Wheat Into The Garner; But He Will Burn Up The Chaff With Unquenchable Fire.

We are accustomed to hear children speak of the Bible and the Testament; and we sometimes find this mode of speaking retained by persons who ought to have put away childish things. The Old and New Testaments form one Bible. They proceed from the same author, testify the same things, possess the same properties, and lead to the same end. In the writings of the Old Testament we have eternal life, and they testify of Christ. And the writings of the New Testament abound with quotations from those of Moses and the prophets. Upwards of four hundred years elapsed between the composing of the last book of the Old Testament, and the first of the New; and yet the current of revelation flows on in an unbroken stream. You would suppose that Matthew had taken the pen from the hand of Malachi, and proceeded immediately to relate the accomplishment of what his predecessor had predicted. *Behold, says Malachi, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me. This Matthew relates as accomplished in John the Baptist. This is he that was spoken of by the prophet saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, says Malachi. This Matthew shows to have been*

1. Note: This was the last discourse delivered by the author, having been preached August 2, 1835, the Sabbath immediately preceding his decease. Sermon XXI in *The Works of Thomas M'Crie, a new edition*, edited by his son Thomas M'Crie, volume 4 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1857), pp. 501-509.

fulfilled in the coming of Christ. And even in their accounts of the manner of this appearance, they harmonize. *But who may abide the day of his coming? exclaims the prophet; and who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap (Mal. 3:2). He shall baptize,* responds the evangelist, *with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Behold the day cometh,* continues the former, *that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch (Mal. 4:1).* This corresponds exactly with the words before us: *Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

A secure people need a severe minister; and it is a good sign that a people have been aroused from their security, when they are reconciled to the severity of the preacher. Such a preacher was John the Baptist, who warned a hypocritical nation to flee from the wrath to come, preaching the baptism of repentance. His ministry occupied a middle place, as it were, between the law and the gospel. He stood between the prophets and Christ. He was honored above the former, because he was permitted to point out the Messiah with the finger, and to say, *Behold the Lamb of God.* It was his work to testify of Christ as just about to appear, and to conduct and deliver over his disciples to his and their common master. In speaking of him, though he cheerfully admits his own inferiority, he at the same time asserts the harmony of their design, and warns his hearers against expecting to find under the administration of Him that was to come, any covert for their hypocrisy and other vices. *Now also,* says he in a preceding verse, *the axe is laid unto the root of the tree: therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire.* What more calculated to awaken unprofitable members of the church than this description? The unfruitful tree is marked out by the gardener, who has long dressed and pruned it in vain; the ground is cleared around it, the axe is laid at its root, and nothing remains but for the lord of the garden, when he comes in to survey it, to give the command, *Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?* Similar is the description in the succeeding verse. Water will remove the external filth which cleaves to any object, but the operation of fire is severer and more effectual—it melts the hardest metals, and burns up the dross. John baptized with water; but Christ shall *baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire.*

The description is varied in our text, while the subject is still the same. The work of purifying the church, and clearing it of all that is foreign, incongruous or offensive, is likened to the operation of winnowing grain. This process, in ancient times, consisted of different operations. The corn after being

thrashed, was laid out on a floor and exposed to a gentle wind which scattered the straw and chaff. It was then beaten by the hoofs of oxen, next passed through a sieve, and lastly subjected to the hand-fan, a species of shovel, by which it was thoroughly cleansed. Similar to this is the purification of the church; and Christ, who superintends the whole process, and reserves for himself the last and crowning part of it, is here compared to the husbandman, who stood with the fan in his hand, with which he, for the last time, turned up the grain, that the wind might separate and bear away every remaining particle of chaff and refuse, and that nothing might rest behind but what was pure and substantial. It is one part of the work of Christ to purify his church; and he will not do this work superficially, or leave it unfinished. He will *thoroughly purge his floor;* he will make a complete separation, at last, between the chaff and the wheat; the latter he will deposit in his heavenly garner, and the former he will burn up with unquenchable fire. The devil has a fan of his own, which he uses for the purposes of temptation. *Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat.* But Christ will not give up his fan to Satan. He still holds it in his hand, and brings individual believers, as well as his church, under its operation, that he may thoroughly cleanse his floor.

My intention, at present, is to name some of those means which the Lord Jesus Christ employs to fan or purify his church.

It may be premised that the work is twofold. First, it includes a separation of persons. The church in this world is like a barn-floor, which contains a mixture of good grain and refuse. There are hypocrites and nominal or godless professors, as well as genuine saints; and sometimes the number of the former may become so great, that it is difficult to perceive any other. Hence the need of times of reformation, in which Christ comes into his church as a purifier, with his fan in his hand. Secondly, it implies a separation of persons from their corruptions. The husks of sin, the clay of corruption, the chaff of vanity, cleave to the best so long as they are in the body, and hence they need to be sifted and beaten and fanned, in order to cleanse them. In accomplishing these separate objects, our Lord proceeds in a manner somewhat different; but still, in general, the same means serve, in his adorable wisdom, to effect both purposes.

1. Christ accomplishes this work by means of his Word. It is compared to fire, on account of its searching and purifying tendency: to a candle or light, which discovers the hidden things of darkness; to a sharp two-edged sword, which cuts both ways, discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart, and divides between the soul and spirit—making a discrimination between states and characters, not only by

laying down infallible marks of these, but also by applying them convincingly to individuals.

The Scriptures evince their discriminating power, by touching both the consciences and the corruptions of men; and by either softening and subduing them, or by irritating and hardening them. To some the gospel proves the savor of life; to others, the savor of death; to them that are saved, it is the power of God; to them that perish, a stumbling-block and foolishness. *Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed (Luke 2:34)*. So it was foretold by Simeon to the mother of our Lord; and the history of his personal ministry is a commentary on that text.

When he preached first in his native city of Nazareth, we are told that, after he had read out his text, *the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him*. This was a favorable commencement. After he had proceeded so far in his sermon, it is said, *All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth*. This was still more flattering. When it is added, *They said, is not this Joseph's son?* the question is suspicious; but still it might only mean that they were the more struck with astonishment at his wisdom when they recollected that he was the son of one of their poor townsmen. But Jesus proceeded to address them in a style that was more plain than pleasant, telling them that a prophet was seldom accepted in his own country, and reminding them that though there were many widows in Israel during the famine in the days of Elias, that prophet was sent to relieve only a single widow who lived in Sarepta, a city of Sidon; and though there were many lepers in Israel, the only one whom Elisha cured was Naaman, a Syrian. This doctrine of the divine sovereignty instantly changed their admiration into resentment. *All they in the synagogue when they heard these things were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong (Luke 4:20-29)*.

His subsequent history presents numerous examples of the same nature. After having miraculously fed the multitude on one occasion, they exclaimed, *This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world*; and they would have taken him by force to make him a king. When he withdrew from them, they eagerly followed, and sought him out. But by means of the fan of his word, he soon freed himself of these light-minded, carnal followers. *How can this man give us his flesh to eat? This is a hard saying: who can hear it? From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him (John 6:14-66)*. On one occasion we are informed, *the common people heard him gladly (Mark 12:37)*; but why? Because his discourse had on that occasion

been directed against the scribes and Pharisees, and they were pleased to see their superiors mortified; but when their own turn came, and he began to reprove their vices, by and by they were offended also. On another occasion, he dispersed a whole congregation, except one, by that single saying, *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even to the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst (John 8:7, 9)*.

Similar instances might be mentioned of the power of Christ's word in distinguishing the characters of particular individuals. What a contrast between the effects which it produced on the Syrophenician woman, and the rich young man! The former persevered in her suit, even after being repelled, and classed with the dogs: *Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table*. The latter is blown away with a single word: *He went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions (Mat. 15:27; 19:22)*. *What thou doest, do quickly*, said our Lord to Judas. And stirred by this fan, Satan carried away the unsound disciple to the conclave of the enemies of Jesus. When the word of God crosses our inclinations, discovers our idols, demands the sacrifice of our corruptions—it raises a storm within, and arms the whole soul against it. *I hate him*, said Ahab of Micaiah, *because he always prophesies evil of me*. And what else could a faithful prophet say of a wicked man, even though that man was a king?

2. Christ cleanses his house by means of the fan of church-discipline. There are persons on whom the word has no effect either one way or another: it neither converts nor convinces them—neither reclaims them from their sins, nor drives them from the society of the faithful. They are like the ancient Jews, who did steal, murder, commit adultery, and yet came and stood before the Lord in his house, saying, *We are delivered to do all these abominations (Jer. 7:9)*. Are these persons to be admitted to the privileges of the kingdom of heaven, or having been admitted to them before their conduct became openly immoral and profane, must they be permitted to enjoy them without any control? No: Christ has not left his spiritual kingdom so defenceless, nor obliged his servants to give that which is holy unto the dogs. He has committed to them *the keys of the kingdom of heaven*, and among these is the key of discipline, and the power of binding and loosing by censures; and when these are exercised agreeably to the rule of his word, he approves of and ratifies them in heaven. The purity of the church's communion is to be maintained by excluding the unworthy from its pale, by admonishing and rebuking the scandalous, by suspending from sealing ordinances the irregular and disorderly, and by excommunicating the obstinate and

impenitent. Our Lord's parables of the wheat and tares, and of the net in which were enclosed good and bad fishes, teach us that we are not to expect that the church on earth will ever consist of godly persons exclusively, and that the office-bearers of the church are not to presume to judge of the states of men. But the words of Christ are not to be interpreted so as to contradict themselves; and does he not say of the person who neglects to hear the church, *Let him be unto you as an heathen man and a publican?* and has not his Spirit said by the Apostle, *Put away from among yourselves that wicked person* (1 Cor. 5:13)? Such censures have a twofold good effect: they remove contagion from the church; and they often have the effect of removing corruption from the offending individual. They are *delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus* (1 Cor. 5:5).

3. Christ purifies his church and people by the fan of affliction. I scruple not, my brethren, to call afflictions an ordinance of God; they are sent to try his people—they are trials of their faith, love, humility, patience, and submission. The heavy trial at Ziklag brought forth at once David's graces, and the people's corruptions. *David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God* (1 Sam. 30:6). Satan, well aware of the tendency of affliction, when it bereaves men of their chief enjoyments, to excite their corruptions, anticipated this effect in the case of Job: *Put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.* And Job's wife seconded the temptation: *Doſt thou ſtill retain thine integrity? Curſe God, and die.* But what was his exercise under all this? *What! ſhall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and ſhall we not receive evil? In all this Job ſinned not, nor charged God fooliſhly.* Elisha asks the Shunamite, in her deep diſtreſs, *Is it well with thy huſband? is it well with the child: And ſhe ſaid, It is well.* How very different is it with others, who, when they are under the rod, ſpurn at it, like a bullock unaccuſtomed to the yoke; who, like Pharaoh, proudly ask, *Who is the Lord that I ſhould obey him?* or as the impatient king of Iſrael, *Behold this evil is of the Lord: why ſhould I wait for the Lord any longer* (2 Kings 6:33)? What, my brethren, let me ask, has been the effect of affliction upon you?

4. The Lord Jesus sometimes employs in this work the fan of persecution and public calamity. It is said of the stony-ground hearers of the word, that they *dure only for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by they are offended.* The fear of these deter some from joining the church of Christ; but others will join without counting the cost. In the prophecies of Daniel, Antiochus, that great persecutor, is said to *have intelligence*

*with them that forsake the holy covenant. And some of them that have understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end* (Dan. 11:30, 35). Of all the crowds that flocked to our Lord during his earthly ministry, how few continued with him during his last sufferings. Yea, even those who had continued with him in his temptations, were blown away for a time, so that he trode the wine-press alone. Peter, the boldest and most strenuous of his adherents, denied him; and the rest, in violation of their solemn engagement, forsook him and fled. And who were left to own him? The thief, who was nailed with him to the cross, and the centurion of the band which guarded the scene of his crucifixion!

When the church becomes very corrupt, public judgments become necessary to vindicate the character of God, and maintain the credit of religion. It is sometimes necessary to let in a whirlwind, *a full wind*, as it is called, on the floor, which sweeps it completely, and carries all away to a great distance. There is a fanning in wrath. *I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land: I will bereave them of children, I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways* (Jer. 15:7). At first view, this may appear to be ruinous, instead of purifying, to the church. Hence that expression, *A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to fan, nor to cleanse* (Jer. 4:11). The Chaldeans are there compared to that destructive wind which blows from the deserts of Arabia, burning up and destroying all before it, called the Simoom. For a time it appeared that the church of God was ruined—good as well as bad were swept away. Accordingly it follows, *Behold he shall come up as a whirlwind. Wo unto us! for we are spoiled.* But the good were preserved—they were *sown among the people*; and restored to their own land. *I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; and they shall be as though I had not cast them off* (Zech. 10:6, 9).

5. Christ employs for this purpose the fan of temptations. Afflictions and persecutions because of the word operate as temptations, and are so denominated in Scripture, because they try the character of professed Christians, discover the unsoundness of some, and the integrity of others. But temptations are more extensive. Prosperity, as well as affliction, is a sore trial to the constancy of professors. By it, to use the language of Job, they are *lifted up to the wind* (Job 30:22). How hard is it for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven! And how hard for any man to withstand the influence even of a little breath of worldly prosperity! I refer, at present, however, to temptations strictly so called.

We know that God *tempteth no man*; he does not seduce us by persuasion, or by any operation on our hearts, into sin. But, for wise and holy ends, he permits men to be

tempted, to be exposed to the enticements of sinners, and to those circumstances which have a tendency to draw out their corrupt inclinations. Hence we are directed to pray, *Lead us not into temptation*. And there is a deep and awful dispensation of Providence in this respect, towards unprofitable and ungodly professors of religion, which, while it demands from us humble adoration, ought to fill us with holy dread. *Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved, God also sent them strong delusions that they should believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:10)*.

Satan is at the head of the sinful agents of temptation. Though he acts chiefly by means of external objects addressed to the senses, yet that he had direct access to the soul there can be little reason to doubt, from his own nature as an unembodied spirit, or the account given of his operations in Scripture. He is called *the Spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience*. And again, *Whom the god of this world hath blinded*. Christ as the purifier of his church, permits him to come into it, though he stands by him to restrain and curb him. Though he will not commit his fan into the hands of this destroyer, yet he permits him to use his own fan. Satan has his subaltern agents whom he employs as instruments in seduction. And as he spoke at first by the mouth of the serpent, which was *more subtle than any of the beasts of the field*, so he speaks still by the mouths of those who are most plausible, or who exert the greatest influence over us. He knows well how to *entice thee secretly by thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul (Deut. 13:6)*. If Peter had recollected the reproof of his master, *Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of man*, he would not have been so ignorant of the devices of the Tempter, as to suppose that he could not speak to him by the mouth of a maid-servant.

The wind of error and false doctrine carries away multitudes of giddy and unsound professors, who are *tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine*. There arose of old false prophets and false christi, and under such specious appearances did they come, and such plausible language did they employ, that they drew away many disciples, and *if it had been possible would have deceived the very elect*.

6. Lastly, Christ will accomplish this work by the fan of the final judgment. This is the last part of the process; and then will Christ *thoroughly purge his floor*. All the preceding steps are preparative to this, and contribute to the end which it will accomplish. The purgation wrought by them is only partial. None of them, nor all of them together, make a complete separation between the chaff and the wheat. Hypocrites may read the word of God, and sit under the most faithful and searching ministry, and yet hold

fast their hypocrisy, and think they are something, when they are nothing. The discipline of the house of God, even when most conscientiously and scripturally administered, can only remove those whose conduct is openly offensive. There was a Ham in the ark, a Judas in the sacred college of the apostles. We have no ground to think that affliction, or persecution, or temptation, or public calamities, carry away all that are insincere from a profession of religion. Professing Christians may go down to the pit under the influence of a deceived heart, and not know that they carry a lie in their right hand. *Many will say in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Have we not eaten and drunk in thy presence? And when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?* They may go to the judgment-seat under such delusions, indulging presumptuous hopes, but they shall not abide there, far less come from it in that state. *The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment*. In this life, Christ has his fire in Zion and his furnace in Jerusalem, and there he sits as a refiner. But at the last day, *a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him*. Alas! *who shall be able to abide the day of his coming?*

The trial shall be most strict. *We must all appear – be made manifest – before the judgment-seat of Christ*. The Judge is the Omniscient One, and on that day will make all men to know that it is He that tries the reins and searches the heart. When the Lord comes, *he shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts*. Hence it is compared to the severest ordeal – that by fire. Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be tried by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

The complete separation shall be made between the righteous and the wicked. Not one of the righteous shall be found on the left hand of the Judge; and not one of the wicked on his right hand.

And this separation shall be final. No confusion or mixing of the two parties shall then appear. *These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal. He shall gather his wheat into his garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.* ■