

CANADIAN PULPIT.

No. 75.

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(Continued.)

The young enter upon the journey of life with an evil and corrupt nature, it is true, for it must not be forgotten that they are born in sin and shapen in iniquity, yet, so far as actual sin is concerned, comparatively pure and innocent. Through the religious training of pious parents and the faithful preaching of the Gospel, great multitudes of them, doubtless, are brought by the power of saving grace out of the estate of sin and guilt into an estate of real and assured innocence, which, nourished by the same grace that gave it birth, throws around them as they march onward the halo of coming glory. It is too true, however, that many of them whose daily surroundings are of a less favorable character, speedily lose the corporative purity and innocence of their earlier days, yielding to temptation and stepping aside into evil ways ere the life that has been given them for other purposes has been well begun. They have their first fall—perhaps it is a lie that is told. It costs them, it may be, the keenest regret, the bitterest sorrow, and, in the agony of the hour, they record the resolution that as it has been their first it shall be their last great fall. But, unhappily, it is not destined to be their last. In spite of resolutions made again and again, it is repeated in one form or another again and again till the tone of their moral sensibility becomes immeasurably lowered, and till at length the goodness with which they started on life's journey is almost altogether crushed out of existence. Their condition, it is true, though sad is not hopeless. A way of escape is open to them, and doubtless many of them seek and find it, but is it not certain that in the case of not a few, it becomes worse and worse as the years roll by. Conscience ceases to speak with an alarming voice, the remembrance of broken vows, of unheeded counsels and warnings, of neglected means of grace, of misused opportunities gives them no concern, and, worst of all, the Spirit ceases to strive with them. The evil that is inherent in their nature, and to the workings of which they once yielded with many misgivings, at length wins a fatal ascendancy, they roll sin as a sweet morsel under their tongues, and were their ears at all attuned to the music of heavenly things they might now hear the cadence of the retreating footsteps of the Holy Spirit as He takes His departure from them, for He will not always strive with men, and leaves them to the worst of all God's judgments, a judicially blinded understanding and a hardened heart—a heart on which entreaty and warning fall alike in vain.

As the necessary result of the complete overthrow of all the good and the full ascendancy of all the evil that pervades the nature of the sinner and impenitent, there comes to them increasing, ever deepening misery. For if religion's ways be ways of pleasantness and all her paths be paths of peace, most assuredly unreligious ways are ways of restlessness, and all its paths are paths of wretchedness. True, appearances may seem to tell a different tale. Nowhere is the smile brighter or the laughter louder than the smile that mantles the cheek or the laughter that echoes from the lips of the abandoned and profane, but, whatever may be in their hearts, I know on the authority of Him who cannot lie that there is no peace there—"There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." In the very nature of things it cannot be otherwise. Forsaking God in whom alone rest and blessedness can be found; rejecting Jesus, through faith in whom alone the assurance that sheds a holy calm over the soul can be obtained, resisting the strivings of the Holy Spirit, by whose gracious operations alone joy and gladness can find their way into the heart, how can they enjoy peace? No true it is that the wicked shall eat of the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices. As they sow to the flesh, of the flesh they reap corruption. As they are the servants of sin, they never find sin bankrupt, but always prompt to pay the wages it gives—death, utter annihilation of every God-like feeling, of every holy aspiration, of every ennobling desire, of every high endeavor, the complete ascendancy of every base passion, of every debasing appetite, of every un sanctified affection—entire separation from God—nothing but anguish and remorse as they look back upon the past, nothing but terror and dismay as they look forward to the future. This, in greater or lesser measure, is the sad and inevitable doom of all who recklessly persist in walking in evil ways, and we have only to think of this terrible doom as accompanying them into the unseen world—there, unrelevated by a single ray of gladness, a single throb of joy, those, increasing in bitterness as ages roll by, even a worm that never dies, even a fire that is never quenched—to find the hereafter that awaits them.

Such is the doom to which the wicked are exposed, but it is far from being inevitable. He, whose authority they have disregarded,

whose displeasure they have incurred, and under whose righteous government they are made to suffer for their sins, is not willing that they should perish but on the contrary that they should live. He is angry with them, yet He is full of compassion toward them, and were they only to give heed, they might easily hear His voice in the sufferings their sins entail, calling them to turn to Himself and live. As they are slow to hear His voice as He speaks to them in His dealings with them, He calls to them yet more directly in His Word, speaking to them in invitations and promises, in entreaties and exhortations, in threatenings and warnings, giving them the assurance the text conveys, affirming and sealing the affirmation with the solemnity of an oath, that He has no pleasure in their death, nay more, falling down as it were at their feet entreating them to turn to Himself and live, nay, more still, expostulating with them on the folly of persisting in a course that can only end in far worse judgments than those that may already have overtaken them. Could they be favored with a more appropriate, or a more cheering, or a more encouraging message. Those to whom it was originally addressed had come to look upon God only in the justice of His character, to regard Him as an implacable Judge, and to find in the judgments that had overtaken them assured evidence that He had decreed their destruction. In utter forgetfulness of the Divine compassion, and in stolid submission to a doom they held to be inevitable, they cried out, How shall we live? Are there not those among the wicked even now whose attitude of mind toward God is essentially the same—who, pining away in their guilt, and seeing in the sufferings of which their sins are the source evidence only of the divine wrath, are ready in terms of dull despondency or of agonizing apprehension to cry out, God has allowed our destruction, to destruction we must go. Is it not certain, at least, that sinners divinely awakened to a sense of their perishing condition are prone to indulge in a like wail of despair? And can there be a more appropriate or a more encouraging message to all who are ready to indulge in such a hopeless cry, than the message which the text conveys—a message which tells them that justice is not the whole of the divine character—that mercy also belongs to God, and that, in the fulness of His abounding mercy, He is ready to pardon and purify, to sanctify and save every sinner without exception who will but turn to Him from the error of their ways, thus effecting their deliverance from the death that holds them in its fatal embrace, and substituting for its ruinous ascendancy that divine life which, awakening them to a deep and alarming sense of the evil of sin, and enkindling within them an ardent and sanctified longing for holiness, starts them on a career of loyal and loving obedience which, pouring sunshine on all their pathway as they journey Zion-ward, carries them forward from one degree of blessedness to another till at last it ushers them into the unmingled and unending joy of eternity. But whilst the message which the text conveys is of a most hopeful and encouraging character, giving, as it does, assurance that the Almighty has no pleasure in the death of the wicked—an assurance confirmed not merely by the solemnity of an oath, but, if possible, yet more by the repeated entreaty, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways," followed by the expostulation, "Why will ye?" in both of which the voice of a grief-stricken father, keenly alive to the danger that besets the path of a wayward son, and intensely anxious for his safety, may be recognised—it must not be forgotten that justice is an essential and inseparable attribute of the divine nature, that the Almighty hates sin, and cannot but punish it. For, if this great truth be overlooked, if His whole character be reduced to love, and the mind fixed exclusively on His character, so regarded, there arises a danger no less fatal in its tendency than the one to which we have just adverted—the danger of presuming on the divine mercy, of continuing in sin that grace may abound, of presumptuously persisting in evil ways, in the delusive and destructive imagination that the Almighty will not fail in the end, in the compassionate tenderness of His forgiving disposition, to wipe out the record of guilt, to remit freely and fully the penalty of transgression. Need I say that the text gives no countenance to this vain and presumptuous expectation—that it holds out the hope of mercy only to the penitent—that it conditions forgiveness on turning from evil ways, to turn from these, this and this alone is to live, unless those are abandoned there is not, and there never can be life, pardon and peace with God, unless those are abandoned, death is inevitable. And, is it not worthy of notice that it emphasises this great truth, this truth of superlative importance in the economy of grace, in the urgent entreaty repeated again and again, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways," and, if possible yet more, in the impassioned expostulation, "Why will ye die?" To persist in the pursuit of your evil ways, is certainly to bring swift destruction upon yourselves, not till you abandon your evil ways, and turn to Him whose authority you have despised and whose displeasure you have incurred, can the blessing of forgiveness ever be yours, till then there is and can be nothing for you but "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries."

Concluded next week.