

THE NEW YEAR.

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“This year thou shalt die.”—Jeremiah xxviii. 16.

JEREMIAH, who had been accustomed to utter startling things, uttered these words to Hananiah. They proved true. In sixty days Hananiah was dead.

We stand in the first Sabbath of the new year. It is a time for review and contemplation. He is a genius at stupidity who does not think now. The old year died in giving birth to this: as the life of Jane Seymour, the English Queen, departed when that of her son, Edward VI., dawned. The old year was a queen; this is a king. The grave of the one and the cradle of the other are side by side. We cannot tell what the child will be, since it is now but seven days old. I prophesy for it an eventful future. It will be a year of mirth and a year of sadness, a year of prayer and supplication. It will laugh, sing, weep, grow, and die. The festivities have passed by, congratulations have been given, the Christmas trees have been taken down or have cast all their fruit, vacations are over, the children have returned to school, the friends that came to spend the holidays have gone in the rail train, and while we stand looking at a year of intense activity, the text comes like a bursting thundercloud, “This year thou shalt die.”

All who have passed thirty years have passed the average of life; the note is due, and it is only by sufferance that it is not collected. The average of life has altered. The world began with an average of nine hundred years, and the first youth who disappointed the hopes of his parents in that respect lived to be seven hundred and seventy-seven. The lost arts must have been greater than the known arts. If men now make great achievements, what could they do in a life nine hundred years long? During the years before the Flood the human race multiplied till the population was probably as large as it is now. The Flood was perhaps the drowning of a thousand million of men. It was as if now the Atlantic should give a lurch and drown one hemisphere, and the Pacific give another lurch and drown the other. At length, from the average life of man, there was hewed away fifty years, then a hundred, and again another hundred, till in the time of a certain census of the Roman Empire, there were only one hundred and twenty-five who had reached a hundred years, and but three or four who had reached one hundred and forty. Now if a man lives to be a hundred years old, we go miles to see him. There is but one apple where there are five blossoms. In the country the sexton rings the bell merrily at first, but at last he tolls it. So with some

of you—it comes to toll; the probabilities of the text are augmented—augmented.

Men, in these days, undergo sapping and great wear and tear of brain and physical powers. Not one in a hundred of the brain-workers of our country use any moderation; the stout incline to apoplexy, the thin and spare to consumption or paralysis. Of printers not one in a hundred live to fifty. The watchmaker shortens his own life as he measures the hours and minutes for others; the chemist breathes in death; the shoemaker wears out his life at the last; the foundry man breathes in filings; the miller breathes in dust as he toils at the grist; the mason digs his own grave with a trowel. The probabilities of our text are increased by the rapid changes of climate, the sharp blast cuts through our thin apparel. The wheel, the hoof, the assassin, only wait their chance to put upon us a quietus. It is an impossibility that the next three hundred and sixty-five days will leave us all as we are here to-night.

I advise you to look after your worldly affairs. Get your receipts posted, your letters filed, your books balanced, and all your trust-funds rightly attended to. Don't let widows and children scratch on your tomb, “This man cheated me.” Men have left property that has been all divided up between lawyers, surrogates and courts, and their families been beggared.

Be very busy in Christian work. Divide the weeks of the year by two. In twenty-six Sundays what can I do for God, in my Sabbath-school class, in binding up broken hearts, and inviting men to hear the Gospel? Don't go into heaven with the disgrace on your soul of going alone. Many a Sunday-school teacher has taken twenty souls to heaven, tract distributors fifty, Daniel Baker hundreds, Philip Doddridge a thousand, St. Paul a hundred million. Our last hour is hastening toward us like an eagle to its prey. What you do, do quickly; “for this year thou shalt die.”

You have no time to discuss whether the book of Jonah is true or whether Melchisedec lived. If you are drowning and a plank is thrown to you, you have no time to ask what saw-mill it came from, or who throws it, but you clutch it. You have only time to lay hold of the Lord God Almighty and get rid of your sins. If you have no great transgressions in your life, don't be too sure you are safe. The flakes of snow drop on the Alps one by one, so light there is no weight to them as they touch your finger; they come on, till after awhile the traveller's foot strikes the slide, and down comes the avalanche. So the sins of youth keep packing up till they become a mountain of sin, and after awhile start the indignation of the Lord Almighty.

A man took up a gun to shoot a wolf; the wolf howled, and a pack of wolves came instantly to the