

LAUGHING AND CRYING IN CHURCH.

A good old American doctor of divinity went to hear a preacher who always woke up the people. The doctor, determined to maintain his standard of ministerial dignity, would neither laugh nor cry, not he. He listened for a time with his face in his hands, looking as if he was asleep. By and bye he ventured to raise his dignified head, and cast his eyes over the audience, but before he knew it he caught the prevailing sympathy, and both laughed and cried; for which he became so displeased with himself that he would not go to hear that preacher again.

The doctor was a very good man, and a good friend of the said preacher; but such were his ideas of the solemn decorum befitting the house of the Lord, that he could hardly forgive himself for giving way to his feelings, and would not again risk his ministerial dignity under the preaching of that man.

A minister who had led the van to many a battle, in which hundreds of souls were rescued from the power of the prince of darkness, preached on one occasion to a very large audience with good effect; but, because some of the auditors smiled during the sermon, one of the church members accosted the preacher, as he was passing down the aisle, thus, "I'll never go to hear you preach again, sir. You make the people laugh, and I can't stand such a thing in the house of God. I hope you will never preach here any more," and on he went abusing the strange minister in the presence of the dispersing multitude, in a loud, angry tone, till some of his brethren commanded him to be quiet.

"Smiles and tears," says Mr. Taylor, "are both alike liable to misuse and abuse. Many persons waste their tears over a novel or a farce, just as many laugh at things trifling and silly. Many, too, on occasions worthy these spontaneous expressions of the soul, laugh or cry to excess. Levity in the house of God is execrable, but the risible emotions excited by the appositeness of a happy illustration of truth, and serving to swell the sails that bear the soul heavenward, or that arise from religious joy in the soul, are just as appropriate in divine worship as tears. This last is an assertion so questionable with many persons, that I will stop a moment to examine the law and the testimony on the subject."

HOW FAITH SAVES, OR THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER—II.

A Sermon Preached by the Rev. A. J. Bray.

ACTS vi., 25-34.

I return to the subject of the Philippian jailer's conversion, on which I spoke last Sunday night. I dwelt then on the first part only, or the jailer's question to Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" I suggested that the sentence needed filling up and drawing out. As it stands here it is but a hint of the soul's most pressing need. To be saved from what? delivered from what? and each man must supply the answer according to the nature of his sin and danger. I said, also, that in the moment of surprise the soul utters the immortal truths that lie in the depths of its consciousness. The jailer supplies a striking illustration. Suddenly seized and over-mastered by a vague sense of danger; the fires of remorse which fear had kindled burning in the soul with consuming fierceness; and believing that Paul and Silas could direct, if not deliver, the question that breaks from him is not prompted by calm thought and reasonings logically carried to an issue, but by sudden and uncontrollable impulse. "What must I do to be saved?" Power and prerogative to do is sign of man's manhood, and makes him heir to the eternities.

Let us dwell on the second part to-night: the Apostle's answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." And that answer, I take it, bears out what I have said,—man must do if he would find salvation. I know how it is often interpreted now. A man in a cool and thoughtful moment is brought face to face with ruin; or has been aroused to interest himself in the concerns of his soul and eternity by meditating on the mysteries of life and death, here and hereafter; or by domestic affliction; or by the solemnities of a death-bed; or by the voice of a preacher; or by the sudden swoop of temporal calamity; is aroused by one of these to put the question, "What must I do to be saved?" and the answer often given (I have heard it a hundred times) is this, "Do? oh, my dear friend, you must do nothing, Christ has done all for you; just believe that and you are saved." Just reduce that to ordinary language a moment, and try it by the standard of common sense, and see what it amounts to. Of course it goes upon the assumption that there is a common receptacle for all sinners, called hell, where all shall suffer equal tortures from hissing flame and biting worm; and that salvation means rescue from that. That is all, and that is the highest thing, to be saved from—the torments of hell. But how does that doctrine look when applied to the cases of individual men. A man comes who for years and years has been altogether vile, vile in thought, vile in word, vile in deed. In the sacred name of friendship he has practised infernal deceptions; in the great name of justice he has lent at usury and spoiled his neighbour; he has betrayed virtue and bought immunity with gold; scarce a villainy, perhaps, that he has not committed. The appetite at last glutted or quite worn out, he begins to think of his past in its relation to the future. He knows that a day of terrible reckoning awaits him, a day of judgment and reward. Stung with remorse, tormented with fear, he cries, "What must I do to be saved?" And the answer is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." He says, "I believe." Is he therefore saved? Are the gates of hell closed and the gates of heaven opened for him? With all his bad passions in him; not an evil undone; not a single restitution made; not a blush of shame dyeing the cheek; not a tear of real penitence trembling in the eye, but only a fear of sin's consequences burning in mind and heart, he is yet saved, signed and sealed for a place among the saints. No; he is not saved. But he believes, and he has faith? Yes; "the devils believe," and with good reason, "they also tremble."

Take the teaching in another way. A man finds himself in the strong grasp of an evil habit; it has been growing upon him long, and almost unconsciously he has been going under to it. He drifted and drifted, and it seemed pleasant and safe, till he was caught by the eddies and sucked down by the black, swirling, deadly waters. He is a drunkard, or a profligate, or a man

given up to greed. In despair he cries with the jailer, "What must I do to be saved?" and the answer is, "Believe—that is all. Do nothing but believe that Christ is the Son of God and your Saviour, and you are saved." Saved? how? Will that sentiment in the mind quench the fire in the heart? Will the cracked and spotted skin fall from the leper as soon as he is convinced that Christ is the Son of God? Saved? how?—in his sin, and not from his sin! condemned, but plucked from the hand of justice? Oh no; it is not so; men are not saved that way. But that is what much of the teaching we have heard really amounts to. "Do nothing, only believe, and you are saved." It seems to me about as wise and reasonable and true as this: A young man comes to me and says, "I am anxious to be rich; I want very much to be a man of great wealth, how am I to get it?" and I say to him, "You want to be rich? good. You believe there is such a thing as wealth?" "Yes, I do." "And you believe that a man may get it by striving for it?" "Yes, I do, if he can only tell how to strive." "Well, look here; you believe there is wealth; you believe a man may get it; you believe you may get it; now, all you have got to do is to believe that you have got it, that you are rich, and you will be." What think you of such teaching, sirs? Can you get rich by an exercise of faith? Try it, and report results twelve months hence.

Or this way: A man wants to go to Europe, and I say to him, "You believe there is such a continent as Europe?" "I am sure of it," he answers. "And you want to go to Europe?" "Yes, I want to go there." "Then just do nothing more, but only believe that you are there, that is all." You think I am talking absurdities; of course I am, but one absurdity which is harmless will I hope dissipate the greater absurdity which is full of harm. I want to convince you of the danger to morals and to life; I want to convince you of the folly and falseness of regarding faith as a mere sentiment in the mind, and that Christ saves in sin, not from sin.

Let me put this in yet another way before I leave it altogether. A man is told that he is in danger of hell, of torment fierce and eternal, damnation for ever and for ever. His faith is the sole condition of his salvation from that. If he will but believe, God will interpose and rescue him from the fearful doom. See. My child is in danger; he has wandered from my side in spite of my many warnings and injunctions. But I love him, always loved him and always shall; for is he not my child? Drawn on by tempting sights and sounds, he wandered further and further away, forgetful of home and me. I follow his track for many weary miles. I see him trying to escape from me—in folly fleeing from my love. At last I draw near. I am startled as a wild, piercing cry cleaves the air. I run with kindling blood and throbbing brain. There he is. He came suddenly on a precipice; his foot slipped, and now he grasps convulsively at the long grass, and swings helpless over destruction. Hundreds of feet sheer down are rocks and sand and death. As my shadow falls upon him, the white and frightened face turns up, a look of hot horror in the eyes, the lips in agony pressed together; but at sight of me a flash of hope kindles in the eyes, and the lips part, and the cry breaks forth, "Father, save!" And this my answer, "Boy, you wandered from home and me, spurned my counsel and my love; this is what you have found. Look down; measure again the depths of doom. Do you repent? Do you believe that I am able to reach out my hand and rescue you? Do you believe that I will? Do you believe that you are rescued? Have faith, I cannot save you else." Tell me, friends, do you admire my paternal mode of loving? Do you applaud my justice? No; you say, "Out, monster, with your cold questionings; reach forth your hand and save the boy." And yet that is what men would have us believe about God. A man, a child of the Eternal Father, has wandered in sin; he is in danger; poised on the edge of damnation everlasting; any moment he may be compelled to unloose his grasp upon life, and be launched into fiery torture and endless wailing; and the Father stands saying: Accept certain dogmas of faith; subscribe to this and that article of belief; receive certain sentiments in the mind; give way to certain emotions, and you shall be plucked from danger. Oh cruel, cruel, and false as it is cruel, thus to speak of the tender Father in his dealings with his child. For God is love—ever and always love.

But what follows? Why, this—that the salvation which Jesus Christ brings to man is of another kind; and that the faith of the glorious gospel of the blessed God is not a mere sentiment or conviction of the mind. Let us calmly inquire what Paul meant by salvation. "Thou shalt be saved." What did he mean by that?

I beg you will remember that Paul had no Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John from which to draw his lessons. Those Gospels were not written. He may have heard the Sermon on the Mount. He must have heard the Apostles speak again and again with passionate earnestness of their Master's word and work. The inspiration was in his heart and mind; but he had no New Testament as a parchment protocol of the Holy Ghost, enclosing the finished and final truth on which Christendom shall live for ever. What was salvation, then, in the mind of Paul? What was this supreme good which had come from God to man by Jesus Christ. It is not a legal justification, as some have imagined and taught. They have said, The law must be satisfied—or the penalties must be satisfied—else there can be no deliverance, no salvation for any man, for God's government and justice must be upheld. Christ, therefore, has contributed in penal suffering what exactly compensates the law, or evens the score of justice; so that he who believes may be legally justified and saved from all the consequences of his sins. Suffering has been given for suffering; the innocent has paid the price for the ransom of the guilty; and the sinner is free. I will only say in answer to that that if it be true there is no need for faith in any man. If the ransom price has been paid and stern justice has no longer a claim upon me, then open the prison door and let me out; never mind my faith. If my ransom demand my faith and love before he will pay the price, that is another thing. But when he has paid it down, and justice is satisfied, justice will be false to its own great name if it hold me in bondage a moment longer. Paul taught salvation by other means than that. Nor did he teach that men were saved by having Christ's righteousness imputed to them; His goodness, love, truth, mercy put to their account; not that. But he taught that the only salvation for man is personal righteousness—righteousness of character, leading to righteousness of conduct. Deliverance, not from sin's consequences, but from sin's power and bondage by the indwelling of the Spirit of Truth. Victorious over the world, the flesh and the devil; a life in harmony