

THE DIVINE CONSTANCY.

A SERMON

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"For He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"—
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A FEW words, first of all, on the promise itself. How great are its contents! For it is not, obviously, though we think it is, a promise of the mere presence of God with His people; that need not be a subject of promise. God surely, from the necessity of His nature, must be always present with His people—must be always present with all men. The promises of a gracious presence are not of a gracious presence only, but of a gracious activity of presence. It is a promise of the continuous care of His providence—a promise of the continual supply of His grace in illuminating, in sanctifying, and saving His people: it is, in fact, the promise of Jesus Christ, primarily addressed to the Apostles, but extended to all His disciples: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." This is the promise: Christ, God in Christ, is saying that he will never withdraw His gracious presence, never withdraw His holy influence from His servants. To every one of them He is saying, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Just look for a moment upon the contrast which this promise furnishes between the Divine good and all merely created and earthly good. All God's outward and earthly gifts are temporal; they are all subject to the law of change. They are changing by their own character, and they are ever changing in the owners of them, even when they themselves to a large extent remain the same. The persons and things we value, and which are dear to us, and which, as we think, are necessary to us in this life, all leave us and forsake us. If we could look forward a little way into the future we should see ourselves abandoned by them all; and even now we can see that many of them are on the wing. The beauty, is it not really fading? The health, is it not failing? The strength, is it not declining? The life, is it not sensibly ebbing away? The friends whom we have, are they not, one after another, either changing in their feeling towards us, or in relation to us, or, by a change of the world, going away from us? When we look at them on their sick bed, or when we observe them in their daily life, and mark the change that is taking place in look or form and action, is it not that they are going away from us, leaving us and forsaking us? All that is lovely and grand in this outward world, everything, is leaving us. If indeed we could only give a voice to all God's outward and earthly gifts, and suppose that voice to be uttering their very nature to us, this is what they would be saying—this is what we should hear them all saying—"I will leave thee, and forsake thee." The silver and the gold saying, "I will leave thee, and forsake thee." The beauty in face and form, the strength in the arm, the life in the frame, saying, "I will leave thee, and forsake thee." The friend most dear saying, "I will leave thee, and forsake thee." Every light in the heaven, every flower on the earth, saying, "I will leave thee, and forsake thee." It is no great effort of fancy, just to suppose that every outward gift has become vocal, and is just giving utterance to what is in its own nature; and if we do but just imagine this, this is what we hear—every person and every thing saying to us, "I will leave thee, I will forsake thee." But the nature of God is quite other from that of His external gifts. If His nature were to give utterance in voice, this is what it would say: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." God has indeed spoken; He has spoken by holy men, He has spoken by the lips of Jesus. He is speaking still by the ever-living Spirit of Jesus: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Just consider for a little while how faith—the faith that corresponds with this providence—should operate, and must operate, according to its reality and strength within us. Believing that in Christ we hear God speaking to us (for it is the same thing), that we hear God speaking to us, and see him dealing with us in Christ; believing that God in Christ will never leave us nor forsake us—will always remain to guide and strengthen, and comfort and sanctify and save, according to our need, what should follow in our experience from that faith? There should follow from it first of all, I observe, peace and confidence when we look forward to

the troubles that may be before us in this life. We do not know what our sorrows will be in their character, or in their number, or in their weight. We do not know into what darkness this path along which we are going may lead, into what depths of sorrow it may descend; and sometimes, when we look forward, it is with some fear and sadness, as our imagination conjures up the possibilities of loss and bereavement, and pain and sorrow, in the future. But, if we believe that Christ will be with us always, that he will never leave us nor forsake us, we are relieved, according to the measure of that faith, from our fear and sadness. What can it matter what the sorrows may be in their nature, or in their number, or in their magnitude? His light with us will be sufficient in every darkness; His consolation will be equal to any time of sorrow; His strength will be sufficient under every burden. If we have this faith in Him, and in the measure that we have this faith, we must be calm and tranquil, and peaceful and hopeful in our anticipation of the future.

And also when we look forward to the possible moral conflicts that may be lying before us. There may be harder duties before us than any we have yet known; there may be temptations stronger than any we have yet contended with; there may be battles—moral battles—fiercer than any in which we have yet been engaged. But we need not be alarmed; we shall not be alarmed, if we have faith in Christ that He will be with us. It will be enough in the face of the hardest duties; it will suffice in the midst of the most fiery temptations; it will be sufficient in the most terrible strifes; we shall be carried safely through, we shall be conquerors at last, if He is with us to minister to our necessities; and we must cease from alarm; we must have peace and confidence as we look forward to the possible conflicts, just according as we put faith in Him, that He will be with us with His light and consolation and power.

And this faith is also fitted to give us hope and confidence, when we look forward to the moral progress which is required of us in the future. How to become wiser and wiser ever; how to get ever purer, how to get ever juster, how to be getting more and more rid of this evil that is cleaving to us; how to be cleansed from every spot that is defiling our nature; how to get more and more in our nature like Christ and like God, so that, at length, we shall attain perfection, and be in our nature and life like the nature and life of God; how, when we have been advancing towards this at so slow a rate through life in the past—and when the way of progress is so uphill and rugged, and there is so much against us, and we are so very weak, how, notwithstanding, to make way onward in this path of progress, which is the path to God and heaven; how to get up to God and heaven, if we are to get there by a way of moral progress;—we may well despair as we think of it, and suppose ourselves to have to effect this progress in any strength of our own. But God can help us onward—God can lift us upward, to that heavenly perfection; Christ can give us more and more light; He can make us more and more pure; He can inspire us with more and more love; He can impress us with His image more and more, "from glory to glory"; "He who hath begun the good work within us" can carry it on even unto perfection. And if we believe this, and believe that He will never leave us nor forsake us, that He will remain within us to effect this progress in our nature and life until we attain to perfection, then we cease to despair or despond; we have peace as we think of the great work to be wrought yet within us, and which is altogether out of our own power; we have peace and hope and assurance in view of all the possible sorrows of the future, in view of all the possible moral strifes in the future, in view of that great progress heavenward which remains to be made. Believing in Christ, trusting ourselves to Him, looking upon the support in sorrow, and the security in the strife, and the great progress to be effected, as His work, as the great business which He has commenced, which He has undertaken, and trusting in Him, putting this faith in Him, we have peace and confidence, and are happy, and are better than happy, we are blessed, as we look forward.

Most of us here this morning need a deeper experience of this peace which comes through faith, of this rest profound which comes from the surrender of ourselves to Christ's care and keeping, of this happiness which is the portion of a Christian man in this life; we all of us need it far more than we have experienced. "Ah! that is our great need," some say, "that is our only need, to have this faith in Christ, that He will always abide with us, and always meet every necessity of our condition and experience; that is all we need."