

"I will uphold thee by the right hand of righteousness." And when the enticements of sin, and the allurements of the world would withdraw you from the path of duty, let the determination of Jephthah engage you to repel their solicitations. Well may you say like him, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back." And if he felt that a vow forbade him to "go back," as he expresses it, or, in other words, to avoid the performance of that to which it bound him, how much greater reason have you to say so, when that you have vowed is so much more to your advantage! Jephthah's vow bound him to give himself of the society and affection of his only child. He must have felt like Abraham, when going up to Mount Moriah, to offer his only son Isaac. Your vow obliges you to sacrifice no genuine pleasure, to abandon real enjoyment. It engages you only to renounce a life of sin, which both is, and must terminate in misery. It binds you to live in the service of God, to walk, to walk in "wisdom's ways, which are ways of pleasantness," and to follow "her paths which lead to peace." You have chosen your portion. The die is cast. "You cannot go back." But this, I am sure, I may also say concerning many of you, that you would not though you could. I appeal to you who have escaped the corruptions of the world, who have tasted the blessedness of that hope that maketh not ashamed, who have known the joy and the peace of believing; and who are, in some degree, emancipated from the slavery of sin and of Satan; would you consent, though you might do it with safety, to go back to your former state, and be again as you once were? No, my friends, you "cannot," and you will not, "go back." You are bound to persevere,—bound by every consideration, of honor, of interest, duty, of gratitude, to hold on your Christian course.

And to those who have known anything of Christian experience, and who have become acquainted, in any degree, with "the plague of their own hearts," I need not say that if they depend upon their own strength and their own good resolutions, they will inevitably fall back. Peter vowed to go with his Master to prison and to death; yet, before the cock-crow of the succeeding morning, he had thrice denied Him. And many have experienced similar relapses. Many have vowed, and yet have gone "back," not because they were sincere, at the time, but because they trusted to their own strength, and looked not to Him who alone can enable them to persevere.

Do I this day speak in the hearing of any who have vowed with their whole hearts to be the Lord's, and who yet have sad cause to lament their failure in performance? Let me import such to examine whether or not their vows have been made under a right sense of their own weakness, and of the necessity of divine help. Perhaps, like Peter, they may be forgotten where their great strength lieth, and, like him, they may have been permitted

to fall, just that they may the better know themselves. Having failed then from self-dependance, trust in it no more; but "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

But we fear there are not a few who not only "open their mouth unto the Lord," and yet "go back," but who actually seem to think that there is nothing sinful in so doing. How many are there, who, season after season, take their places at the table of the Lord, where self-dedication to the service of God is, at least, implied, and who never seem to think that they are guilty of any breach of faith, though they never show that were at all earnest, by a single act of self-denial, or by making a single sacrifice in obedience to the divine authority! What! my friends, is it not enough that you live in habitual disobedience to the Almighty? Will you aggravate your guilt by the basest hypocrisy, and the breach of the most sacred engagements? "Better it were that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay." But a degree of unfaithfulness, and a breach of faith that would make you infamous, if practised towards a fellow man, seems to give you no concern, because practised towards God.

I call upon you all, then, to pay your vows unto the Lord,—the vows which were made for you in baptism, and which I have shown to be binding upon you,—the vows which you have yourself made at a communion table,—the vows you made when you entered this house of prayer, and joined in the ascriptions of gratitude and praise that were offered to the Most High,—the vows that, when rising from a bed of sickness, you uttered with your lips, that your future life should be consecrated to Him who had brought through deep waters, and restored you to health. And whatever inducements may occur to dissuade you, say to them, in the words of Jephthah in our text, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back."

THE BLESSED DAY.

They that profess to make every day a Sabbath, are making void the original purpose of God. God's purpose never was to make every day a Sabbath, and it is mock-sanctity to say so. They who would raise every day to the level of a Sabbath are quite as far from the aim of the divine institution as they who drag down the Sabbath to the level of a common day. During the six days man was to show how he could serve and glorify God in the common duties of life; on the Sabbath he was to show how God was to be served and glorified by acts of direct and unmingled worship. This is the principle of the great Sabbath-institute—a principle which runs through all ages—more so than ever in these last days, when men are either denying religion altogether, or endeavoring to eject it from every-day life, and confine it to a peculiar region of its own.