

## UTTERS A WARNING

JEREMIAH, LAMENTING, PLEADS WITH HIS COUNTRYMEN.

## TO RETURN TO THE OLD PATHS

Uses Homely Similes to Point Out the Way to the Throne of God, in the Ordinary Country Paths or Rough Roadways Over Which Eastern Caravans Traveled.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1903, by William Bailey, of Toronto, at the Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Chicago, Sept. 27.—Amid the distractions and temptations of modern life this sermon utters a warning cry, a timely call for a return to the simple ways and upright, honorable, Christian lives. The text is Jeremiah vi. 3, "Ask for the old paths, its simplicity gives it a homely beauty. It has in it the aroma of the woods. It is one of those simple similes of country life that bring back to the weary city dweller, whose feet have been long accustomed to the hard paving stones of the city sidewalks, the memory of the footpaths over turf covered hills and the narrow lanes between the hedges jeweled with sweet wild flowers that he used to walk in his childhood days. The old paths—we can never forget them. It will do us good if we think of them this morning and see if there are any moral lessons we can learn from them. Jeremiah, among the greatest of the prophets, lamenting that his countrymen had deserted their God and disobeyed his laws, pleads with them to avert the impending punishment by returning to him, and he employs this simple figure to portray their condition. He describes them as travelers lost upon the mountains of sin, hunting for a path which will lead them out of their moral difficulties. He represents God as telling them to "ask for the old paths, which is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk therein.'"

Jeremiah points the right path leading to the throne of God by using the homely simile of the ordinary country paths or rough roadways in common use at the time, over which the eastern caravans have traveled and the cows have come home for the evening milking and over which have passed tired men and women when, with daily tasks well done, they have sought the home firesides for physical refreshment and for blessed sleep. Like Jeremiah, I would to-day carry your thoughts back to the remembrance of the country and from the sweet, fresh flowers of the village hedgerows pluck blossoms which will remind you of old time associations and resolves. The greatest of horticulturists is not the gardener who fashions his beds in the "many colors" of a Joseph's coat, or a grand mother's crazy quilt. It is he who makes his floral designs simple—very simple. One bed looks as though it were a bit of Alpine lake among the crowded regiments of flowers. It is planted entirely with violets. Another bed looks like a great collection of leaping flames. It is planted only in roses. It is very simple. It is as simple in colors as a cardinal's robe. Another bed has the jaundiced look of a Malay's skin. It is only planted in golden glows. Another will be an azalea bed, another a dahlia, another planted in white lilies, another in geraniums. The horticultural genius thrives best in the simplicity of colors. From this sermon bed I would pluck only the sweet forget-me-nots of tender memories. Like Jeremiah the prophet I would try to lead you over some of the old paths which your feet have trodden in the past, and in the leading I would lead you to the foot of the cross.

The old path which wound its way toward the old homestead is the first one I would bid you to seek. That path by the side of which was once built your father's and mother's nursery is to-day in all probability covered up with underbrush. Here it is blocked by the rotting trunk of a tree which has fallen sideways. There it has been scooped out by a freshet and yonder covered up with a landslide. It looks a great deal like one of those old deserted log roads which once wound their way through the woods toward the town. After the new highway or pike was opened the farmers and the farmers' wives always went the other way to market. The result is that the small bushes and the weeds have begun to grow over that path which led to your mother's nursery. It has long been untrodden by any human foot. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty years! What? What? Have your mother and father been dead as long as that? My, my, how time does go! No wonder you have forgotten a great deal about your mother and her ways.

But, come, let us take our axes to-day and clear away some of that rubbish. Let us explore the old path which once led up to the old homestead. When the first settlers entered the Michigan woods they used to "blaze" the trees. That means that with their axes they would chop a notch out of this tree and that and the other tree as they went along. Thus, if they could not find the right place to settle in one direction, they would retrace their steps by these notches and start out in the woods from another direction. Well, these old paths which once led up to the homes of our childhood may not have been used for a quarter of a century, but they can be easily followed. Our parents "blazed" them all the way along.

As I follow these "blazes" I find they were morally straight paths. They were as straight as a die. You father may not have had much money in all probability you, as a farmer's boy, remember him for the most part clothed in overalls and a woollen shirt. But under that rough exterior there beat a heart as true as honesty itself.

Looking back over the long years, you remember him traveling that "straight path." You cannot think of one act your father ever did which was dishonorable. Ah, that old father of yours may have worn shabby clothes and may have been poor in pocket, but he was rich in character. The path he traveled to and from the old homestead was always a "straight path." Though the "last will and testament" which he signed made provision for a few trinkets, a Bible and a gold headed cane, and perhaps a snuffbox, that father left you the grandest legacy a boy ever received. He left to you an untarnished name, the example of a father's life well and honestly lived. Even as I speak now and talk about his past life a blush mantles your cheek. When you contrast his pure life with yours and you remember some of the mean, sneaking things you are accustomed to do in your dealings with your fellow men, you say: "I wish I had always followed in the footsteps of my father. I wish I had always followed in his straight path." Why don't you, my brother? Why don't you now? Are the thickets too strong about you? Are the jungles of sin too dense? God is telling you to-day to seek the old paths. Ask for the old path, the straight path, the honest path, which your father once trod. Seek it now!

Then, again, I further study the "blazing" marks along the paths which led up to the home of our childhood. I find out that these paths were Christian paths and all ways led toward the throne of God. How do I know? Simple enough. Let me illustrate: When I go to Europe as far as possible I live there among the natives, and for the most part among the common people. Now, again and again, when I have turned my back upon European cities and climbed the unfrequented paths which lead over the mountains, I have been startled with finding here crosses and there an altar. I would find these crosses and altars far, far away from any house or church. Then, as I have concealed myself among the trees and waited, I have seen weary peasants come along with great big packs strapped to their shoulders. Then I have seen them stop and look around to see if any one was watching. Then I have seen them strap their burdens and lay them at the feet of the image of Christ and then and there kneel in prayer. Well, my friend, in going along the pathway which was "blazed" by your mother's bread knife and knitting needle, I come upon altars everywhere. I find that there was hardly a step that she took in life but she had a place where she could stop and kneel in prayer. And at every altar I find indications in the rocks where she laid her burdens at the Saviour's feet.

And, oh, my friend, what a lot of burdens she had to lay upon her Saviour's breast in her journey of life! There was that awful burden of physical sickness. I do not know how you may remember your mother, but most of us think of mother when she was physically sick. She seemed to be so long dying. Now it was the pain in the back now it was the disordered nerves. Then it was that long, long time, when we had a trained nurse. "How is mother to-day?" the younger children would ask, and we would answer, "Not very well, my dear; not very well." Yet for the most part, our mothers lost their physical health by living and doing for us.

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services a great change came over your family property. One of your sisters or brothers left your side and went up to the church altar. One by one they there gave their hearts to Christ and publicly confessed him at the communion table. After awhile your turn came. You can see your self now as you came before the church session. You remember how the old minister wiped his glasses. He put his hand upon your shoulder and said: "My boy, why do you want to join the church? Do you love Jesus? Will you promise to live for him and give your life to his service?" Then you remember the great big lump that stuck in your throat. You remember how between your sobs you said: "The reason I want to be a Christian is because my father and mother and brothers and sisters are all Christians. As we have a united family here I want an unbroken family circle in heaven." Aged, gray haired men, that was a beautiful path over which you went to church for the first time. That was a holy drive you took on the morning you went to take your first communion. You did not speak much that morning, but your thoughts were very deep and very high. They were as deep as your sins, as high as and as great as the forgiveness of God. Oh, why have you not always kept walking in that path? Christ walked with you there twenty years ago. Jesus as guide is ready to lead you back to that path and walk with you there now. Will you seek the old path—the path over which you went for the first time to the communion table of the Lord?

"There is still another path which you once trod. This path is fragrant with blossoms. It is the path which once led up to your marriage altar. It is the path over which the fallen rice is strewn and where the merry laughter of the bridemaids is trying to drown the joyful protestations were very deep and very high. They were as deep as your sins, as high as and as great as the forgiveness of God. Oh, why have you not always kept walking in that path? Christ walked with you there twenty years ago. Jesus as guide is ready to lead you back to that path and walk with you there now. Will you seek the old path—the path over which you went for the first time to the communion table of the Lord?"

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