

## 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. 16, "Ask for the old paths."

Most simple in the text's figure. 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 banks bejeweled 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 grandmother'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 color 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 builded 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? Who? 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. Your 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." There 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 always 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 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 unstrap their burdens and lay them at the feet of the image of Christ and then they 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 head, 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.

I go a little farther along this Christian path of your dead mother. I find also the place where she laid at Christ's feet the burden of her anxiety for the salvation of her children. Some people love to think of their mother, first by picturing her sitting and sewing for their advent. It is a beautiful sight to see the young wife, by the evening lamp with her needle in her hand, making the little white garments for the stranger soon to come. Our mothers thought and planned for the cradle and the little wardrobe weeks before we were born. They did it so that when they should lie down upon a bed of suffering all might be well for the little one's welcome. That is a beautiful vision. But, oh, to me it is a far more beautiful sight to see a young wife upon her knees in prayer, her hands clasped in prayer, her face turned to God that her unborn child might grow up to be a good man, a good woman. And you, my friend sitting before me, from that moment when your mother first prayed for you until her death she never left that altar before which she was continually beseeching God for the salvation of your soul. Along that Christian pathway she first led you to the baby prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep." In that Christian path she gave you her dying benediction. Will you not seek the old path, the Christian path of your glorified and sainted mother? It is a path covered with wild flowers and fragrant with perfume. Those flowers and that pathway have been watered with your mother's tears.

But there is another path to which I would call your attention to-day. It is that which you once traveled when going to Sunday school and to the church of your childhood. If that church was in the country, then there was poetry in your going. When the call of the village bell rang those notes would press their way through the atmosphere like bubbles of air working their way up from the bottom of a stream. They would come nearer and nearer to your ear, as the bubbles come nearer and nearer to the surface of the waters. Then with a happy laugh they would seem to burst. You would first hear those notes when you would be riding toward the town. Father and mother, brothers and sisters would all be crowded together in the one carriage. My, there was a big load of you who used to travel that road!

If the path which you first traveled to Sunday school was along the sidewalk of a city, then in all probability you walked. You walked by the side of your father or mother, because you were the youngest. But as you rode or walked to that Sunday school and to your first church

services a great change came over your family party. 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 yourself 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. I want their Saviour to be mine. 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 salutations of some which line this path. The silver bells are those which once played Mendelssohn's "Wedding March." Where did that path which ended at the marriage altar first lead you? "Oh," you answer, "it led me first among the briars and over the stony grounds. My courtship days were not all sunshine. For a long time I did not know whether I could win the hand of my heart love. In the first place, I was not socially her equal. Then I was penniless and had nothing to offer but my two hands and a willing heart. Then, my life was not what it ought to have been. But she had faith in me. I promised her to reform. I gave up drinking, and I promised her I would surrender my heart to Christ. And, do you know, the night she gave herself to me she made me kneel with her and we both made a prayer that God would hear and help me keep my vows." Ah, yes, my brother, I know just how you feel when you think of that old path which led up to your marriage altar! When you are tempted by the hand of that young girl in your youth truly felt that you wanted to be good. You promised God, then and there, for her sake as well as your own, to live a good, true, pure, noble, Christian life. Have you kept your vow? Are you willing to go to church with her now as you did when you were engaged to her? Are you helping her to set the right example before your children—your children and hers? Remember, man, you made a promise to her and to God on the night of your wedding. Will you seek the old path of consecrated love, which wound through the days of your courtship and ended on the night you took your heart love as bride from her father's home?

Besides that, my brother, have you also tried to follow out from these paths for many years. You are lost, completely lost. You will never find your way out from the mountains of sin unless you have a divine guide. The importance of a guide to one lost in the mountains of earth or of sin can never be overestimated. To-day, ye lost and weary sinners, Christ is ready to be your guide. He will lead you out from the mountains of sin. He will lead you to the old paths which are all converging into the one Christian path that leads to the foot of the heavenly throne. Will you let him lead you? Will you let him pardon you? Will you let Jesus save you?

May the old paths of Christian love to-day become to you the new paths of Christian service. We have read that, in 1892, a party of men were encamped upon the battlefield of Pea Ridge, in northern Arkansas. While they were cooking their supper by the camp fire they exploded a buried twelve pound Parrot cannon shell which had been fired there out of a Federal gun on June 12, 1862, thirty years before. Would that this sermon, like that buried shell, might have an explosive power. May it awaken all the sweet and holy memories of the past—memories twenty, thirty, forty and even fifty years old—and start each one into a new Christian life. "Stand in the way and see and ask for the old paths! The old paths!"

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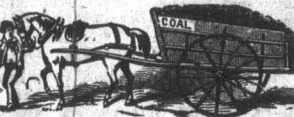
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