

ry penitent might be turned as a full and conclusive answer to that fearful temptation which Satan whispers secretly into the soul downcast with sin, "I am not worthy of salvation. I have sinned too long, too greatly. I have sinned against light and knowledge. Others may go to Christ with hope but not I." Fearful and dark is this temptation. Myriads have felt and (perhaps after years of conflict) have triumphed over its power, but myriads more, even with the crucified thief before their eyes, have found it an effectual stumbling block to their acceptance of offered mercy. But to all of these the faithful minister or christian friend has ever been able to administer a conclusive answer in the case now before us. To the converted christian it would seem sufficient to point the one cross on which Jesus was crucified in order to put to flight the foulest temptations of the evil one. Yet often has this grand argument for infinite mercy and grace been urged in vain, especially to those who felt most heavily the burden of their sins. Another has come to its aid, this glorious practical illustration of the sufficiency of Christ's merits and atonement and the efficiency of his grace. Is the cross of Christ not sufficient? Behold then by its side another cross—nay, two crosses. On one of these hangs an unbeliever, such as you will be if you resist your present impressions and refuse the now proffered grace. He may have had his moments of remorse. He may at times have enquired in a desultory and indecisive manner whether this Jesus were in reality the Christ who should save his people from their sins, and whether, if he were, he could pardon so great a sinner as he knew himself to be. But he had made up his mind. He had become not merely an unbeliever but a railer, and despite any previous symptoms of repentance we now find him endeavoring, by his avowed scepticism of the character of Jesus, to embitter his dying agonies. Fearful, most fearful, is his situation. His reprobation was voluntary, and he can have no hope of salvation from the undying worm and the quenchless fire.

But see on the other of these two crosses another malefactor whose crimes were probably not less black, whose heart may not have been less burdened by sin and unbelief than those of his companion in guilt. His eyes also are turned toward the central cross, but not with malignity or scorn. He is not even on praying ground and yet he prays. He cannot bend the knee or lift up the hand, and yet he prays. And his indignant rebuke of the scorner, the first fruit of genuine faith, mingles with the humble accents of penitence and prayer as he confesses the magnitude of his sin, acknowledges the justice of his sentence, and implores the forgiveness of his suffering Lord. Look on this scorner who had voluntarily rejected an offered Saviour dying with the mingled howl of malignity and despair and of blasphemy upon his lips! Hear his taunting exclamation, "If thou be the Christ save thyself and us." And then turn to his penitent companion, uttering even in such circumstances the breathings of a penitent and believing soul, "Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!" Wonderful contrast! the sinner's awful warning—the sinner's glorious example!

They were alike guilty, perhaps alike hardened. Yet it pleased God in his infinite wisdom that "one should be taken and the other left"—that one should be by the influence of grace specially vouchsafed in his extremest need, softened, melted, subdued, and his will brought into sweet harmony with the mind of his Redeemer, while the other in precisely the same circumstances was permitted to retain and cherish the obduracy of his heart, his sufferings tending only to increase the malignity of his hatred.