

Pastor and People.

WHAT PLEASES GOD.

"Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places."—Psalm cxxxv. 6.

What God decrees, child of His love,
Take patiently, though it may prove
The storm that wrecks thy treasure here,
Be comforted! thou needst not fear
What pleases God.

The wisest will is God's own will;
Rest on this anchor, and be still;
For peace around thy path shall flow,
When only wishing here below
What pleases God.

The truest heart is God's own heart,
Which bids thy grief and fear depart;
Protecting, guiding, day and night,
The soul that welcomes here aright
What pleases God.

Then let the crowd around thee seize
The joys that for a season please,
But willingly their paths forsake,
And for thy blessed portion take
What pleases God.

Thy heritage is safe in heaven:
There, shall the crown of joy be given;
There, shalt thou hear, and see, and know,
As thou couldst never here below
What pleases God.

—Gerhardt.

THE GODLESS LIFE A DREAM.

BY THE LATE REV. JOHN KER, D.D.

(Concluded.)

3. A godless life is a dream because it contributes nothing to the soul's proper life. We know how little the dreams of a man at night help his work for the day. It is only the waking life that can send forward its contribution to the time of waking. The man may have a long journey before him, but all his travelling in his sleep does not advance him a step in the morning. He may have a heavy task to perform, but the burdens he lifts in his dreams will not take away any portion of it. It may happen that, if the dream is vivid and unnatural, away from anything in real life, he shall awake bewildered, and less fitted for any sudden emergency. An evil dream projects its shadow into the day, and clouds the peace of it.

Now, man has a life of the soul that is not met by the supply of his animal wants, nor of his intellectual tastes. There is something in his own nature which tells him this, though God had not spoken directly to assure us of it. The true life of the soul is found in connection with God—in knowing and loving Him, and doing His will—not separating God's service from the work of the world; but also not separating the work of the world from the service of God. The soul's life is to take the duties of the world and put the will of God into them, so that each act may be a step in the way to life eternal. This is the only rational account of our present existence, that it should be put in a line with a coming state, leading the way up to it, and beginning ways of thinking and feeling and acting, that are to be carried out there. But if a man passes all his life without any thought of this, and confines his view to little temporary interests and gratifications, what is it but to make his life a dream, that has no bearing on the great world to which he must at last awake! Even if there were no guilt in it, it is to make of his life an irrational, meaningless fragment, that has no proper plan and end, and that is building up nothing which can last and live. You will hear people say—let us spend this life as we may, and attend to the next life when it comes. But what if that life is to come out of the present, and take its character from it? and if there be a future life at all it must do so; then you enter it without that preparation which it needs. If a man had any high work to do in this life, any emergency to face, any scene of enjoyment that required capacity for it, would he reason after such a manner? And why should the greatest scene of all be that to which a man may go dreaming of all but of what he has to meet? Even now there is a power within us by which we can tell whether we are making of our life a dream or not,—whether we are spending it for things that pass away like night fancies, or putting into our soul's nature something that will endure, something that gives to the soul a life which its deepest conviction assures it is the life that was meant for it. There are times when in a dream we seem to feel that it is a dream,—when the mind, in a strange, vague way, retreats from its own fancies, and asks doubtfully, Can this be waking reality? And there are such seasons in the most worldly life—the experience of the melancholy saying of the great poet (Goethe): "Alas, that what's yonder never comes here!" The emptiness of those earthly pleasures that break the word of promise to the hope. But in our waking moments we know that we are awake; and such a "sober certainty" there is also about some possessions of the soul, about the truth and goodness and grace of God, when they form us in any way after their own image. We feel that these are real—that "it is not a vain thing, for it is our life." Ask yourselves if your way of living is putting into your soul's nature such possessions with which to advance into the future—not in any proud trust in the merit of them, but in the humble hope that they are God's own work, begun and carried on through Christ. If

not, this life is a dream to you. It is a dream to think that you can mind only earthly things and wake up at once to take a delight in the heavenly; that you can put away all thought of a God while living, and then immediately at death rejoice in happy fellowship with Him. If your life be a godless, selfish life, it is taking you constantly farther from this. It is making you more out of keeping with the time of awakening. It is one of those unnatural dreams that leave the man bewildered and unnerved. Mis-spent time, despised warnings, unholy lives and impure thoughts, will rise like shadows from the past:—

Shadows that strike more terror to the soul,
Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers.

4. A godless life is a dream because it is short and evanescent. A dream, as we can sometimes perceive, occupies only a small part of the time of sleep. We pass through many in a single night. We can see a man fall asleep for a short time, and when he awakes he has passed through the events of a whole lifetime. The most wonderful incidents that seem to fill up months and years—imprisonments and wanderings in foreign lands, hopes and fears that have long lights and shadows, are comprised in a few moments. Those who look on can measure how short the time is; and the man himself, when he turns his eye back, is amazed that the brief compass could ever seem so long. Nothing in the world, that we know of, looks so great and momentous in the middle of its way and is so small at the last as a dream.

There are surely in this, points of resemblance to a godless life. Listen to the judgment of one about it: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." This is true even in the present world. It is expressed by the common judgments of men. If you say, notwithstanding, that the lives of godless men are frequently as long, and their positions as permanent, as those of the best of men; we may grant it, and still this judgment holds good. The life of the humblest man that is built on principle leaves something that endures—it cannot wholly die, even in this world. The life of the greatest man who lives only for self is detested in its hollowness, and passes away without result. Human history has always been holding its session—writing in its own way over against the godless feaster at his table, "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting;" and ever and again there comes some heaven-sent interpreter, that men may read and understand it. And thus men, including the influence with the life, justly judge that "the triumphing of the wicked is short."

We may say, then, that the conscience of the world is, even now, a witness of the shortness of the godless dream; and the time is coming when each individual shall know it for himself. It seems at present as if the barque of life were floating and winding among flowery islands on a smooth and scarcely-moving stream. But the judgment of truth is: "Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep;" and it shall be "as a dream when one awaketh." What language, what conception can help us to realize what a miserable vanity this life of time must appear to the man who has wasted it in wickedness, or trifled it away in folly, till he stands face to face with God's eternity? One of the sorest things of all will be that his conscience will compel him to feel that the folly is all his own, and that, in despising the dream from which he awakes, he must turn his contempt on himself.

5. A godless life is a dream because it is suddenly broken. You must have observed that, in general, we may say almost invariably, a dream is not finished. Some perplexity occurs within, or some disturbance comes from without, and at the very moment when the sleeper was laying his hand on a coveted prize, the whole thing vanishes. A paradise was lying spread out before the enchanted eye, and, as when a stone is thrown into clear water, the vision becomes a broken wreck of fancies, waving through each other, that cannot be gathered together again. Nebuchadnezzar's dream is the type of many more—a great image of silver and brass, and head of dazzling gold; but the weakness of clay is in its feet, and a stone cut out, man sees not how, smites it, till it becomes as the dust of the threshing-floor, and no place is found for it. And it is the type of every godless life, be it great or small, passed on the high places of fame, or led in the obscurest of by-ways. Its foundation is in the dust, and it falls under the test of the divine touchstone.

A life that has been looking to God cannot terminate abruptly, however it may seem so. It finds a happy end, and when the reasons of things are known, it will be seen that it has served a wise purpose. The child dies an hundred years old. But a godless life must always come to an unforeseen close. Its plan of life is to form a world for itself, where everything may go well without a God; and at the moment when it thinks it has succeeded, death draws the curtain at midnight, and breaks the dream. "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou has provided?" These are old truths which need to be constantly repeated, and the record of them comes down to us from wise men like a solemn chime over the graves of a hundred generations. "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him; but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall He prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God" (Eccles. viii. 12).

It would not be fitting to close this without a few words as to the way in which God is seeking to bring us to His own great realities. He may have His own manner with some, where it does not befit us to judge—earnest men who go about seeking Him in a confused and dreamlike feeling, and die without seeming to have found Him. What He may do for them in that short space between dreaming and waking we cannot tell. Many thoughts can be passing there, as dreams themselves may teach us; and a soul that has been all through life groping its way darkly to God, may awake with joy in that instant to the vision of Him. God will find some way of keeping His promise, that he that seeketh shall find.

But this is not here the question. It is of those who are turning their back on search, because God is not in all their thoughts, and to whom the sight of His face will not be a glad some, but a guilty surprise—who are not crying for divine light, but burying themselves deeper in godless sleep. Yet God is all the while seeking to awaken them. He does it, if I may so speak, with a divine irony, when He presents their life to them as the folly of a dream—when in troubled half-awakened moments they seem to feel that they are chasing shadows. He does it with divine severity when He presents their life to them as sin, and when, in the stings of conscience and the fearful looking for of judgment, He makes them feel that it cannot be a light thing to meet a God whom they have contemned. And He does it with a divine compassion when He speaks to them of their life as a deep and unutterable loss—wronging their own soul, and loving death when they sin against Him. Above all, it is thus He comes in His Son our Saviour. His life, His death, His resurrection are filled with the truest and grandest realities of God; His infinite pity for us in our wandering, sinful folly, and His desire to make us the sharers of its own eternal life. If a man will but come for a while from that outside world, with its dreams of happiness, into the presence of the life of Christ, he may feel that he begins to breathe a world of reality; and through the grace of God he can be made a partaker of it—of its calm in strife, its peace in trouble, its possessions that endure through all change and loss. The sin, the burden, the weary struggles that have vexed you, He is willing to bear, and if, in trust, you transfer them to Him, you will find the relief of heart a reality. And He is ready to give you strength to take in the divine treasures of God's love and likeness, that become a sure pledge of a higher life before—a life so glorious and wonderful that it seems dreamlike at times to think of it; but that is made ever more true and real to him who has a life hidden with Christ in God!

Alas! that we who speak as Christians should realize these things so little—that we should pass through this world as men but half-awake. We do our work, and seek our pleasure, and only at intervals does the thought of life's great end and the soul's destiny dawn upon us.

We sow the glebe, we reap the corn,
We build the house where we may rest,
And then, at moments, suddenly,
We look up to the great wide sky,
Enquiring wherefore we were born.

Let us strive to make the thoughts of God and eternity penetrate more every part of our earthly life, that the future and heavenly may become constantly more real, the present and earthly more shadowy; or rather, we shall say, that the present and earthly may be real also, as types of the divine, and steps to the eternal; and that finding a true and living God in all things here, we may be convinced that change of worlds will only give us clearer vision. "For now we see through a glass darkly." It is darkly, and through a glass, but still now we see. "But then face to face; now we know in part; but then shall we know even as also we are known."—*United Presbyterian Magazine.*

MARTIN LUTHER'S LAST WILL AND PRAYER.

The last will of Luther is less known than some of the events of his life, and in it the circumstances and character of the man are grandly displayed. It closes thus:—

"O Lord God, I thank Thee that Thou wouldst have me to be poor upon the earth; I have no house, land, possessions or money to leave. Thou hast given me a wife and children; to Thee I leave them; nourish, teach and save them, as hitherto Thou hast me, O Father of the fatherless, and Judge of the widows. O, my Heavenly Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all consolation, I thank Thee that Thou hast revealed Thy Son Jesus Christ to me; on whom I have believed, whom I have professed, whom I have loved, whom I have celebrated; whom the Bishop of Rome and the multitude of the wicked do persecute and reproach. I pray Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, receive my soul. My Heavenly Father, although I am taken out of this life, though I must now lay down this body, yet I certainly know that I shall dwell with Thee forever, neither can I by any be plucked out of Thy hands. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John iii. 16; x. 28; 2 Timothy iv. 6, 7, 8."

THE Rev. Charles Davey, of St. Enochs, has been appointed chaplain to the Presbyterian troops at Belfast, in succession to Dr. Hanna.