

The opportuneness of a word has often pointed it for conviction. A striking example is that of an inkeeper among the converts of Mr. Haweis, who, being fond of music, resorted for once to church. To the hymns he listened with delight, but to the prayers he stopped his ears. Heated and agitated, he closed his eyes too, till a fly stinging his nose, he took his hands from the side of his head to punish the trespasser. Just then the preacher gave out the text, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." The impression was irresistible; the man listened; and that Sunday proved to him the beginning of days. He gave up swearing and drinking, and after eighteen years happy walking with God died rejoicing in hope. In another instance, a young woman cherishing a determination to commit suicide was persuaded by a friend to enter Surrey Chapel. The preacher took for his text, "O that they were wise, that they would consider their latter end;" and at the close of his discourse, quite unconscious who were his auditors in so large and crowded a congregation, addressed himself particularly to any one who might have resolved to rush unbidden into the presence of the unseen Judge. That night his miserable listener could not fulfill her resolve; the appointed hour passed; and when the next Sabbath arrived she repaired again to chapel. The text this time was, "The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." She was led to understand how, in her own case, the providence of God might be acting for the accomplishment of his purposes of love and grace, and the result was her conversion. By a peculiar conjuncture of circumstances the All-wise mercifully adds emphasis to truth.

Even the individual's own sinful act, bringing him into sudden and incongruous relation with eternal realities, has not unfrequently been resorted into an occasion of awakening. Many Sauls have been stricken down as they journeyed to Damascus. The mystery of divine mercy was probably never more remarkably illustrated than in the case of Mr. Thorp, formerly a minister in Masborough. At a convivial tavern-meeting he and three of his associates undertook to mimic Mr. Whitefield for the amusement of the company. A wager was agreed upon, to be adjudged to the most adroit performer, and the text was to be the first passage on which his eye fell in opening the Bible. Mr. Thorp's turn came last, and he had scarcely reached the table, exclaiming, "I shall beat you all." But when the Bible was handed him he opened on the words, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke xiii, 3.) And immediately the sharp pangs of conviction seized him, and conscience denounced tremendous vengeance on his soul. His subject expanded before him, and he proceeded to discuss it with great clearness and force. Frequently afterward he declared that "if ever he preached by the assistance of the Spirit of God it was then." The solemnity and evident sincerity of his discourse produced visible depression over his audience, which reacted upon himself, intensifying his feelings. When he left the table a profound silence reigned in the room. Full of the deepest distress, he withdrew. That was his last bacchanalian revel, and this the first of many persuasive sermons. The course also into which the thoughts of men have been carried when they themselves have had least control over associations, has sometimes issued in the regeneration of their lives. In fine, facts like these might be varied, or multiplied, almost indefinitely. They show how.