

The Days That are No More, or Glimpses at the Past With Lessons for the Present.

III.
DEAD-MAN'S LANE

No; there was really nothing dreadful or dismal in its appearance: far otherwise, indeed. It was like hundreds of other lanes in the rural parts of Great Britain: a narrow way, too wide to be termed a path and not wide enough to be designated a road. On each side of it were banks of soil upon which grew thick hedges—in spring and summer beautiful and fragrant with wild-flowers. Here and there was an oak or elm tree whose branches spread from one hedge to the other; forming a shade from the heat of sun or a shelter from an April shower. Below, in season, could be found a tuft of primroses, or, their presence only to be detected by their sweetness, a cluster of shy violets. There could be no more congenial spot in which to dream away a golden afternoon in summer. The world—with its madding crowds, its strife of tongues, its fierce competitions, its sin, shame, envy, hate, joy, and sorrow—seemed far away. Sitting still, one might watch the birds as they built their nests, sought their food, wheeled their aerial flight, and sung their artless songs. From overhead would sometimes come the rapturous song of the sky-soaring lark. Looking over the hedge one might contemplate in the adjacent field the ploughman driving his furrow or scattering his seed. One's meditation or reverie would be seldom disturbed: if for a moment it was broken by the passing of an infrequent pedestrian or horse-man, such an interruption only served to give an added zest to the quickly returning solitude and silence.

Yet, this lively retirement, with all its charms, was shunned at night. Not one of us boys would have gone through it alone after dark for all the money in the bank of England. As we passed along it to school in the morning we travelled in leisurely fashion; but on our homeward way, especially on a short, dull day in winter, we quickened our steps lest twilight should overtake us.

Why, the reader will ask, was that lane regarded with such feelings of fear—had any dark crime been committed there under cover of night? No; it had no associations of that nature. Whence, then, its name? Local tradition affirmed that it was one of the burial-places of soldiers who fell in the days of Cromwell. There is much probability of truth in the idea that hasty graves may there have been dug for fallen warriors; so far authentic history chronicles great battles as being fought not far from that neighborhood in the stormy days gone by. There, as in many other districts, relics of the great conflict were found up to a few years ago.

One might wonder, however, that a place where the dead had been interred more than 200 years (I date from the days of my childhood) should still occasion fear. And more so when we consider that in England a scene of former burial is not uncommon; for there we might adopt Campbell's words, and say that almost every turf beneath our feet has been a soldier's sepulchre. In a country of comparatively limited area, with a history so long, and a population so large—it is likely that in many a familiar spot men have died or been buried. There the living often tread upon the dust of the departed. The very homes of the present rest upon the graves of the past. Why, then, should one place of olden sepulchre have been dreaded more than another? My own opinion is that it all arose from the name. There is a great deal in a name; Shakespeare's dictum about the rose, notwithstanding. The adage says, as well hang a dog as give him a bad name. And that piece of proverbial philosophy applies with equal force to localities. If the pretty thoroughfare of which I write had been called "Lover's Lane" no one would have been afraid of it, unless it were the most hardened of old bachelors or the most relentless of maiden ladies. Had it been called "Primrose Lane", it would have proved an attractive resort for budding poets and lovers of nature. Had it even been called "Pudding Lane" (as is actually the case with a short street in the British Metropolis) every boy would have felt instinctively drawn to it. But "Dead-man's Lane" is suggestive of the horrors of a charnel house; the very name sounds damp, clammy, and repulsive. It is said that an enterprising individual in London does quite a lucrative business in buying up houses where murders have been committed. Such premises are generally shunned, and are often left untenanted for years. This man gets hold of such property at a very low rate; he then remodels it and bestows upon it an entirely new name. Afterwards he has no difficulty in letting it at a remunerative rent, and thus makes a large return upon his investment.

So there is something after all in a name. If it calls up tragic or shameful memories, it will act as a powerful deterrent, whereas, if awakens agreeable thoughts, it will prove no mean attraction. Thank God that he has transformed by his Grace, scenes of death and desolation until they have become like the garden of Eden. Yea, some of us who were once dead men, have been made alive, and are now new creatures with new hearts, new songs and new names, to us the promise has been verified: "Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name." I

any of my readers are in a state of unregeneracy they are abiding in Dead-man's Lane. Oh, that they may hear the quickening voice of the Son of God, came forth from their graves and henceforth live in New-man's Lane.

I can well laugh to-day at my boyish fears; for in later life I have beheld many places that might more truly have been denominated Dead-man's Lane than that to which I have referred. In some cities I have seen rows of houses given up to shame. As I have noted at the windows the sirens of sin with their bold eyes and false smiles, beckoning to the passerby and beguiling the unwary, I have thought, surely I am walking through Dead-man's Lane. And the words of the wise man have come into my mind: "Her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead." I have also remembered how he warned the simple of such death traps:—"Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths, for she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death."

Again, I have seen saloons crowded together in some neighborhoods and I have reflected upon the ruin there wrought to character, health, happiness, life, and immortal souls, I have exclaimed: "Here is another Dead-man's lane."

In other places there are gambling halls, and though some of them may be like palaces in size and splendour, surrounded by magnificent gardens, as at Monte Carlo, they are verily situated on Dead-man's lane. This is often true literally, for many a gambler ends as a suicide and from the gaming table passes to the grave.

Of all such ways of death we should warn the young. Their only safety lies in keeping far away from these downward paths. To them may be addressed the words of holy writ: "enter not into the paths of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."

Often in London, and other great centres of population, I have gazed with sorrow upon the godless masses. I have walked through streets from which I knew too well, hardly a person would ever pass to a house of prayer. On Sundays I have seen the drunk sodden men smoking their dirty pipes as they have lounged away the day of rest, I have seen the dishevelled women pursuing their housework regardless of sacred things, and I have seen the neglected children, early habituated to evil, playing their ungladful games. And it appeared to me that I was going through another Dead-man's lane. The truth of scriptural descriptions concerning those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death has come home to me. While I have recognized the necessity for applying social remedies, while I continue to believe that the problems of over-crowding must be solved in some way by municipalities or states, yet I have never once doubted that the one ultimate and only effective cure for all these ills is found in the gospel of Christ. For the wonderful results already achieved by that Gospel, under the most discouraging conditions and circumstances, we have reason for profound gratitude. To those who are living and administering that gospel amid our sunken fellow-creatures, we yield the honor due to Christ-like service and sacrifice. May we in this young country do all we can to prevent the creation of some of these sad conditions which perplex alike, statesmen and Christian workers in older lands.

Sometimes there is a Dead-man's lane in our spiritual experience. John Bunyan tells of one which comes down from Broadway Gate. It was here that Little-Faith fell asleep and was sat upon, robbed and well-nigh murdered by three sturdy rogues called Faint-heart, Mistrust, and Guilt. They certainly would have made an end of the poor pilgrim, had it not been that hearing some one upon the road, they thought it was Great Grace the king's champion, and fearing his prowess they took to their heels. Though they got most of Little-Faith's spending money, they could not take his jewels.

Since there are such dangers on the journey to heaven we must go well armed, we must never give way to spiritual sloth, we must pray for an increase of faith, and require the king to grant us continually the presence and assistance of Great Grace. For without these safe guards, though we can never be robbed of that which is essential to salvation we may lose much of present comfort and enjoyment in religion.

I like to think of that fair country where there is no more curse, there is found no Dead-man's lane. Instead thereof there flows the river of the water of life, upon whose banks grows the tree of life. There no grave is dug for slain soldiers, but all are forever victorious, and each one is crowned with immortality. Those we mourned below we shall meet with rapture above. Yonder shall be no more physical death, for all are clad with incorruption, there shall be no more mental death, for all know as they are known; there shall be no more social death, for all are happy members of a perfect community; there shall be no more moral death, for all stand without fault before the throne; there shall be no more spiritual death, for all are eternally alive with God.

And the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The Glory of God in Human Lives.

Notes of a sermon preached in Halifax, Nov. 17, 1904.

John 15:8.

The grapevine grew luxuriously in Palestine. The spies sent by Moses returned carrying between two a cluster of grapes as sufficient evidence of the fertilizing of the soil. Perhaps on account of this the grapevine became the symbol of the Jewish nation. Rosenmuller tells us that "in the temple, above and around a gate of 70 cubits high, which led from the porch to the holy place, a richly carved vine was extended as a border and a decoration. The branches, tendrils, and leaves were of the finest gold, the stalks of the branches were of the length of the human form and the bunches hanging from them were of costly jewels. King Herod first placed it there; rich and patriotic Jews from time to time added to its embellishment, one contributing a new grape, another a leaf, and a third even a bunch of the same precious materials."

Perhaps it was the remembrance or sight of this golden vine, the symbol of Israel, that led our Lord to use the figure, "I am the true or real vine, in contrast with Israel that had proved to be an empty vine" or one that "had brought forth wild grapes." The text teaches us—How God may be glorified. "Herein is my Father, etc."

(1) "I am the husbandman honoured by the fruit of his toil. Illus. A pretty sight to see the fruit trees in June covered with the fragrant blossoms; but the husbandman is not glorified in that. It is not what he has laboured for; but the same trees in autumn laden with the ripened fruit is his glory. So God is glorified not by profession that is but the blossom. Necessary but not the end. "Herein is my Father glorified, etc." Again the text suggests (2) That God as a Father may be glorified in the character of his children. A Christian father or mother may have a pleasure in the appearance of their children but it is their actions, the fruit of their lives that honor the parents.

II. The fruit of righteousness is possible only when humanity has its life from Christ, the vine, "as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine no more can ye, etc." A few things need to be said first that some difficulties may be removed. (1) All humanity has its being in Christ or in God. It is true of all, whether Christian or not "in him we live, move and are" Acts 17:28. Jesus was not only the creator of all things but "in him was life and the life was the light of men," John 1:4. It will be noticed that this agrees with verse 2 of the context, all whether bearing fruit or not are in him. This has the advantage of the support of modern philosophy, that God "is in all and over all his works."

(2) A second fact taught in the context is that one, though in Christ may be bearing no fruits of righteousness. There is a natural connection but not a spiritual. They are like branches united to the vine, but—dead. Read carefully verse 5. It is not our life that beareth spiritual fruit but the life of Christ in us. We need then to be spiritually united by faith in Christ.

(3) A third fact of this teaching, the fruitless branches in Christ will be taken away and cast forth as withered branches, verses 2 and 6. This is not the failure of God's grace; not the rejection of a Christian, but of one who rejects the life of Christ.

(4) Humanity differs from the branches of the vine in one essential thing, they have the power of choice whether they will abide in the vine, and whether they will receive the life of the vine. In verse 4 "Abide in me and I in you," i. e. allow me to abide in you. One of the strange things in the Bible is God asking permission to come into human life and waiting outside till he is admitted.

(5) Verse 5 is in strict harmony with what we have been saying. We might expect Jesus to say, "If ye abide in me and I abide in you; but you will notice that the connection is even closer, "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you." That can only be by vitalizing faith in the teaching of Jesus, and he who has that has the life of Christ and the mind of Christ so that he will ask for things only that belong to the kingdom.

This then we have learned that humanity has a natural union with Christ, and does not bear the fruits of righteousness, that it also has the power of entering into a spiritual union, that if it fail to do so it will be cast forth as a fruitless branch to be burned, but if it enter into that vitalizing union with Christ it will bear much fruit to the glory of God.

III. The Husbandman's part in the fruit bearing. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it, etc." It is a two fold work to care for the fruit-bearing branches and remove the others that they might not hinder the life first. The word "purgeth" does not tell the whole work of the Husbandman, neither can the non-sentient branches fully illustrate the human branches of the true vine, but it helps.

In the cultivation of the earthly vine the husbandman will have respect to the soil and its cultivation, to the cultivation of the branches and to the atmosphere, for the vine cannot bear its best fruit in all kinds of climate. Notice (1) That the fruit, whether of the vine or any other fruit tree, will be effected both regards quality and quantity by the cultivation. Let two branches be grafted into the same vine or two trees planted in the same soil with equal