

Such persons listen to the word of God, when read, without interest, because they have heard it so often. They criticise the sermon, perhaps, to themselves and others, and even apply those parts which are of personal application to such of their acquaintance as they think they may best suit. At times, probably, their own consciences are somewhat pricked; but the effect vanishes generally during the walk and conversation which succeed the service.

Unhappy men! whose hearts are so hardened by carelessness and habit, that they can be compared to nothing so well as to a beaten road, where, should the good seed perchance fall, it lies idly on the hard and barren surface, to be picked up by the fowls of heaven, or trodden under foot by the passing passenger. And know ye not, ye careless hearers, that there is one who is ever on the watch for souls, and goeth about seeking whom he may devour—who is eager to take away the word out of your hearts, if by any means it seem to be fixing there, by stifling conscience, diverting the attention, suggesting some trifle to the fancy, or some object to the senses, lest you should believe and be saved. And thus you are blinded, and led about by Satan at his will, even on the verge of eternity.

The cause of this sad result is evident. You did not listen with any sincere purpose of doing what you hear. You do not meditate on what you have heard with prayer, and steady resolutions, with God's grace, to perform His will. You are, at the best, but one of those hearers and not doers whom St. James describes, and are "like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."* Oh! listen seriously to the words of the preacher, as he endeavours to sow the seed of the word in your hearts—as he testifies to you that the wages of sin is death; that you are not only born in sin, but that you have broken God's law and your own promises; that therefore you are condemned, and may be called at any moment to receive the punishment; and yet that God has given His only begotten Son for you; that Jesus Christ has atoned for your transgressions on the Cross; that if you will turn from your carelessness and sin, and with a hearty faith receive Him, and serve Him as your Saviour, your sins shall be blotted out for ever, and strength given you to live henceforward to His glory, and to show your love in the sincerity of your obedience. Meditate, I beseech you, on these truths; pray over them, not to-day or to-morrow merely, but day after day, in patience and reliance on God; and thus the dew of God's blessing will descend upon the hard and barren soil, and Satan be disappointed of his prey; and the seed remain, and take root and flourish, and bear in God's good time a plentiful harvest.

But the parable adds, That some seed "*fell upon a rock; and as soon as it sprung up it withered away, because it lacked moisture.*" "*They on the rock,*" that is, "*are they which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.*" What minister has not

* St. James i. 23, 24.