

## Pastor and People.

FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

THE LOOK BACK.

BY REV. J. A. R. DICKSON, D.D., GALT.

Very solemn thoughts come to wise men as they near the end of their earthly pilgrimage. Thoughts that are replete with instruction for us, because they sum up the experiences of a life time. Thoughts to which we do well to give heed. Standing consciously on the margin of time, fronting the infinite reaches of eternity, and looking back over all the brief past—for the longest life when it is done is but a span, a hand-breadth—their thoughts are profoundly serious, judicious and in accordance with truth. Everything is seen in a clear light. The shadows that hung so heavily about things have fallen away, and they stand forth unveiled. All the deceptive influences of earthly relationship, that unduly magnified this, or minimized that, so as to make them more or less regarded, and consequently more or less authoritative than they ought to have been, are now powerless to delude. Everything is looked upon in the light of eternity, and therefore is seen without exaggeration. It is a great advantage to us to look upon it through other eyes than our own, that thereby false estimates may be corrected; low conceptions lifted up; slow and dead thoughts quickened; and the whole nature stimulated. We need every aid that is available to gird up the loins of our mind, and to arouse us to the most diligent effort.

In the life of Dr. Macdonald of Ferintosh we read of McPhail of Resolis being exceedingly restless on his death-bed, and when asked if it were bodily pain or the darkening of any spiritual cloud, he answered that he felt as much assured of being forever with his Saviour as he was of lying on his bed, "but," he continued, "I know not how I can look Him in the face when I think how little I have done for Him." He had not been an idle or careless minister; but the most diligent and painstaking life is very, very poor in the presence of Christ's great love and self-sacrifice. So long as we measure ourselves by ourselves, and compare ourselves among ourselves, we may present a very good appearance, but when we adopt Christ's unspeakable love as our standard, all that is ours dwindles into insignificance. Oh, how poor, miserably poor, it seems then!

As John Brown of Haddington approached his end he often uttered this exhortation, "Oh, labour, labour to win souls to Christ. I will say this for your encouragement, that when the Lord led me to be most earnest in this way, He poured in most comfort into my own heart. So that He gave me my reward in my bosom; and when I have tried to help vacancies He hath repaid me well with glimpses of His glory. Were the Lord to make me young again, I think I would study to devise other means for gaining souls than these which I have used, and prosecute them with more activity than ever I did."

What a retrospective glimpse is here! He had laid Scotland and the world under obligation to him by his Commentary and other Biblical works, and by his professorial labours also he had been a very busy man, yet, looking back, he thought more means for gaining souls might have been devised by him. Think of that! Oh how slack we are in devising means for the good of souls! And when we do strike out in any new path how careful we become of our reputation! Ah me, it is pitiful that we should be so much the sport of these winds that blow over the surface of society; that we should concern ourselves more about the opinions of those who are not worth a single consideration than about the rescuing of immortal souls from everlasting destruction! Let us look through John Brown's eyes, and see the unspeakable value of the immortal spirit, and not be slow to devise means to gain men to God. No means that will attain this end are to be despised. Anything—

EVERYTHING,

that will lead a soul to Jesus Christ may be done. Here, the end will always justify the means.

In the life of Dr. Chalmers we have this statement: When not far from his end, William Paley, D.D., in conversing with some of his family or friends, took a calm review of his several works. He expressed the deep regret and dissatisfaction which at that av-

ful time he felt in the recollection of his "Moral Philosophy." He was happy to believe that his "Natural Theology" and "Evidences of Christianity" were sound and useful works; but the book on which his mind dwelt with the greatest pleasure was his "Horæ Paulinæ."

Had not the "Moral Philosophy" been immensely popular? Had it not been abundantly praised? Had he not had a genuine satisfaction in it in his lifetime? These facts cannot be doubted; but now in the burning light of eternity, as everything is seen again, what is popularity? What is applause? What is a temporary satisfaction? Nothing! nothing! Only that stands the test, which can bear the light of eternity upon it. As John Wesley wisely observes, "the true value of anything is the value it will bear in eternity." But looked at in that light, how many things highly esteemed now change values? How many are decked out in jewels that are only cut crystal, and in gold that is only plated brass, and are all the while imagining them to be real? They are blinded by the god of this world, and the fictitious seems the real. Ah, let them be weighed in the balances of eternity, and they are nothing and much less than nothing.

Duncan Matheson, the celebrated evangelist, whose life was one of intense devotion to the salvation of souls, said to Mr. Sandeman of Springland, in his last days, "It's all love—it's all well. Reality is the great thing—I have always sought reality."

I have served the Lord for two-and-twenty years; I have sought to win souls—it has been my passion—and now I have the fruit of it. One of my spiritual children went the other day as a missionary to China, and many others of them are preaching the Gospel. Well, at least you can say you have seen the vanquished the conqueror."

What a cheering strain is this. He is entering into his labours. The past devotion, in its whole-heartedness and joy, is just now coming to its harvest. The rich and glorious reward of faithful labour is being possessed. And what joy is like that? His life was full of the noblest self-sacrifice, and now he is reaping as he sowed. He looks back without any regret. He has honestly done his best. Christ has been the centre and source of all his activity, and from that as a firm standing-ground he does not move. He need not move, for He is the Rock of Ages—the unchanging and unchangeable One. Who can express the sweet satisfaction that comes to a man who, looking back upon the past, finds his life like a garden full of beautiful flowers and rich plants? And who can tell out the bitterness of heart that must be his who, in reviewing his bygone years, sees them lie behind him like an arid desert? The look back in some measure anticipates the verdict of the judgment. In it conscience utters itself with unmistakable clearness. It may have been smothered and stifled through years of engrossing care and pressing business, but now it comes out in a voice, ringing like a bell, trembling with agony. Like the pendulum of the clock it may sway to the right and to the left, but at length it must rest in the centre. The voice of the conscience never errs, and at length, freed from every deadening force, it speaks out its judgment in a way not to be misunderstood. All past yesterdays make up to-day. All the light of the foregone days is focussed in the present. No man can rid himself of his record.

How grandly do Paul's words spring out of his condition, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." His eye sweeps the field of his life since Christ apprehended him, since he was born again—all the rest is void. He is conscious of a sterling integrity, of a faithfulness to Jesus that cannot be questioned, and so he utters his thoughts as he does. And the words that follow, while they point forward, they also have a retrospective aspect. "Henceforward there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them also that love His appearing." What comfort Paul had in looking back! Such as enabled him to look forward with confidence and perfect contentment. He had no darkness resting on him, all was bright, sweet, gladdening and light.

The Rev. Richard Cecil had a principle on which he acted, which is worthy of universal adoption. It is expressed in this way: "Let me ask every day what

reference it has to the day of judgment, and cultivate a disposition to be reminded of that day."

When we live in the light of the judgment seat of Christ, everything we do is ennobled and purified. We act as to the Lord, and not as to man. And there comes to us not only a large liberty, but also a generous independence of spirit, which will brook no earth-born consideration. We are free. We live to the Lord. His thought guides us and His will governs us. No master can be superior to Him, and no wisdom can be compared to His. A life passed under His eye is one that will bear looking back upon: one, too, that will bring the richest satisfaction and the sweetest comforts to the soul—a life without any shade or regret or any touch of lasting sorrow.

### ALONE WITH THEE.

Into my closet, fleeing as the dove  
Doth homeward flee,  
I have away to ponder o'er Thy love,  
Alone with Thee.

In the dim woods, by human ear unheard,  
Joyous and free,  
Lord, I adore Thee, feasting on Thy Word,  
Alone with Thee.

Amid the busy city, thronged and gay,  
But One I see;  
Tasting sweet peace as unobserved I pray,  
Alone with Thee.

O, sweetest life—life hid with Christ in God.

So making me,  
At home, and by the wayside and abroad,  
Alone with Thee! —Elizabeth Prentiss.

### THE GRACE OF GIVING.

A minister says: "There are many who could as easily write a cheque for £100 for God as they could eat their breakfast; but they have so many critical considerations about it that they never do it. In not many points do the Churches need a revival of Christian life more than in this of giving. A good deacon called on a man for a donation, but he did not get it, because he lost so much on his Brighton shares. The man died; and in spite of the depreciation in Brightons, he left nearly a million of money behind him." In striking contrast to this unfaithful steward, read the facts a Chinese missionary writes: "One of the women who gives so liberally is one of the former pupils of our boarding school. She gives from three to four thousand 'cash' a year, and this she makes by doing odd jobs for her neighbours. Another poor woman gives in the same proportion. Apparently, she has not enough to sustain her; yet she manages to give more to the Lord than many who have enough. One of the elders of our Ningpo Church is also a cheerful giver. He said: 'In former years I gave according to the amount of money I had gained during the year. (He is a carpenter.) Sometimes I had a larger and sometimes a smaller sum to give to the Lord's work. But as I came to know more of the Lord's goodness, I began to give a certain sum. Last year I had no assurance of work; indeed, I knew there would be no large jobs, so I began to look where I could cut down my expenses. But when I came to my annual offering to the Lord's work, I could not deny myself the pleasure of giving the usual sum; and, do you know, in one way or another, I have had work. The Lord prospered me in ways unexpected.'" —The Message.

### YOUR DUTY.

Let us measure your duty in giving. What shall be the measuring rod?

1. Your capacity. "She hath done what she could."
2. Your opportunity. "As ye have opportunity do good unto all men."
3. Your convictions. "That servant which knew his Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes."
4. The necessities of others. "If a brother or sister be naked or destitute of daily food," etc.
5. Thy providence. "Let every man lay by him in store as God hath prospered him."
6. Symmetry of character. "Abound in this grace also."
7. Your own happiness. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."
8. God's glory. "Honour God with your substance."