

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

THE CRAPE ON THE DOOR.

By Rev. J. A. R. Dickson, B.D.

On the wide reaches of the American Continent, in every city and town and hamlet, the crape on the door is accepted as the symbol of mourning. It tells the passer-by that death has entered the dwelling, and that the precious dust of the dear one is not yet consigned to its last resting place. Every one respects the symbol; and breathes a sympathetic prayer for the bereaved, that they may be supported in their sore trial, and have the presence of the Comforter to sanctify their affliction, and make it work out for them some spiritual and enduring good. It preaches a practical and powerful sermon, as it droops there, through the live-long, busy day and through the silent watches of the night. It solemnizes the heart, it sobers the mind, it allays in some measure the fever of life, it projects into the midst of its wild delirium quieting thoughts, it lays an arrest on the giddy thoughtlessness in which men are whirled on, heedless of higher considerations than those of gain or glory, it speaks as did the monitor of Philip of Macedonia: "Remember thou art but mortal."

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 Sad as the symbol is, it has sacred uses and salutary effects.

When the crape is on the door it tells us that Christ has come to the home as a visitant. He has "the keys of hell and of death." (Rev. L. 18). His is the power of life and death. No soul takes its flight without the going forth of His command. Whatever the secondary causes may be, His will is revealed in them, and through them, for the removal of the loved one. It is well for us to possess our minds with this thought, Christ Jesus is bearing the symbol of power, "the key," and it is the power of death. Death goes forth, therefore, commissioned by Him to execute His will touching all the sons of men. "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?" "All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come." (Job vii. 1, 14). So Job recognizes the fact that another Will is at work in his life. That Will gave it beginning, and it shall bring it to a close. Who by taking thought can add one day to his age? When our Lord turns the key in the lock of any life its earthly and time-term closes, and its eternity begins. There is no chance in the universe. Law, which is only another name for personal will executing itself, reigns everywhere. All is under our Lord's hand. He is "Head over all things." (Eph. 1, 22). "All power is given unto Him in heaven, and upon earth." (Matt. xxviii. 18). Hence, when the angel with the veiled face comes to call any of our loved ones away, it is the will of Jesus Christ that he is carrying into effect, be the secondary causes at work what they may. There is no mere hap in human life; no chance! Let us assure ourselves of that. Such a thought taking hold of our minds will do much to remove many exceedingly troublesome thoughts, many vexatious regrets, ay, more, many rebellious upliftings of spirit against God. It will prepare us to receive the good, the spiritual gift He intends to impart to us in coming in this way. We need not shut our eyes to the fact that through the ministry of death many blessings come to men. It was the death of Robert M. McCheyne's eldest brother, David, which he regarded as "the event which awoke him from the sleep of nature and brought in the first beam of divine light into his soul." And as Dr. Andrew Bonar truly observes, "By that providence the Lord was calling one soul

to enjoy the treasures of grace, while He took the other into the possession of glory." When Philip Henry lost his eldest son, he took his toes sore to heart; so much so that, like many in the same circumstances, he thought more of his own comfort than of God's will in the matter. Many years after this great affliction, he was wont to say that, at that time, he applied to himself, but too sensibly, that Scripture, Lam. iii. 1, "I am the man that hath seen affliction." And he would say to his friends upon such occasions, "Losers think they may have leave to speak; but they must have a care what they say, lest, speaking amiss to God's dishonor, they make work for repentance, and shed tears that must be wept over again." His prayer under this providence was "Show me, Lord, show me wherefore Thou contendest with me; have I over-boasted, over-loved, over-prized?"

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 Richard Knill passed through the same experience. His diary has in it this record of sanctified affliction, "Rose this morning at five, and repaired to my dearest Julia. After I had kissed her sweet forehead and her clay-cold purple lips, I took her dear hands in mine; and my soul at this moment received unspeakable comfort. For, I thought, this hand will never be lifted up against God, this heart will never indulge a thought contrary to His holy will, this silent tongue will never utter a word of rebellion, nor shall the little feet ever be found in the broad road that leads to death! I cannot describe how happy I felt at the thought of this, while the tears rolled down my cheek with all the tender emotions of a fond father. I thanked God and took courage, and, hastening to my wife, related to her how the Lord had comforted me. She also was greatly consoled; and we prayed together for the Lord to help us through the day."

Mr. Knill preached her funeral sermon from the words, "Be ye also ready," desiring in his heart that some one might be led to say: "From the death of Julia Knill I date my spiritual life." This was on March 15, 1825. On August 10, of the same year, we have this entry: "My prayer has been answered; dear M. H. has told me this day that this sermon was blessed to her soul, and brought her to give herself up to the Lord. Thus, my God and Father has given me another daughter." Another entry is made on September 23, 1827. "Mr. D. told me he also was also impressed by this sermon. How good are all His ways!"

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 Does not death bring us into the presence of the Divine in a very sensible way? Then we feel deeply that One who is mighty, in whose hand our life is, is revealing Himself to us, and speaking to us, and causing us to know that His hand is upon us.

Then the clouds are withdrawn that hide the unseen from us, and it is given to us to look into the spiritual world for a little. Then we see the nearness of eternity, and in its light the emptiness of all earthly glory. Then we learn the preciousness, the exceeding preciousness, of spiritual knowledge, spiritual life, spiritual things. Then, too, our faith in God's bare word of promise is tested as it never was before. It is so hard to rise above the loved form that we look upon to the spirit that we cannot see, and think of it apart from its fleshly garment. Then, too, we hear with fuller meaning the words of the Master, "Occupy till I come." Ah, in the valley of the shadow

we are like those who go down into deep, dark pits and looking up, see the stars, even though it be broad daylight upon the earth. It is given to us to learn much in these circumstances. Is he not a stock or a stone to whom no serious, solemn, searching thought comes at such a time? Then the heart is broken, and the thoughts diverted into new channels, and a new influence poured into the life—a transforming influence—one that makes all the future life more devoted or more debased, as it lifts it up to strength or lowers it to hardness and rebellious thoughts.

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 One of the weightiest responsibilities any good man has is to speak a suitable word at such a time. What wisdom it needs, what grace it demands! There is a beautiful incident in the life of Dr. Chalmers which illustrates this. Mr. Edie wrote to Mr. Paterson with reference to a brother who died after Dr. Chalmers' removal from Kilmarnock, "You recollect my brother David's lengthened illness, and the great kindness Dr. Chalmers showed him on his deathbed, often conversing and praying with him. One day, after visiting him, I walked out with Dr. Chalmers, still talking of my brother's spiritual state, he made a sudden halt, and, holding up his staff in his hand, said with warmth: "How consoling the thought that your brother will be a monument of divine grace to all eternity!" There is no looseness in such utterance, no fluent, flippant cant. It is a grand thought to cast into the depths of a sorrowing heart—although that will act like the branch cast into the waters of Marah. It will sweeten the soul and gladden the life—making both strong with a clear, Christian idea.

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 If it is difficult to speak a word to the bereaved, what shall we say of writing a letter—something that endures. That is a far more trying task. Yet some have succeeded in it far beyond others. Take Dr. Claudius Buchanan as an instance. His letters to the bereaved are singularly appropriate and excellent. He had a special gift for that ministry. I can only give a sentence or two from some of his letters, yet they will show his gracious tact. "I had no thoughts of writing to you at this time; but I have news for you from heaven. Your beloved E. has fought the good fight; he has finished his course, and kept the faith. His spirit took its flight at twelve o'clock. . . . Such, my dear madam, has been the happy death of your son. You are a happy mother to have had such a son. He has left a noble testimony to the Gospel in this place; and his memory will be long cherished by many," etc.

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 "You will rejoice to hear that, when she was preparing to leave India, she considered herself as preparing for another and better country than England." It is worth much to be able to comfort the bereaved, and it needs a heart thoroughly in sympathy with the graciousness of Christ, and filled with the revelation of God. At such a time character tells, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.
 Galt, Ontario

The churches and other places of worship in London can accommodate nearly a million and a half people at the same time.

Ecclesiasticism is cold, but warm are the heart and hands of the servant of the King.