

THE DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN

HOLDING OUT.

By Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D.

Those that study John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" (which is the best book in the English language after the Bible) must have noticed how many of his characters were at some time on the road to the Celestial City, and yet never got there. Poor Pliable retreats after one flounder in the Slough of Despond; Timorous is frightened back at the sight of the lions; and Demas gets engulfed in the pit under the hill Lucra. These characters have their counterparts in our churches in these days. I need not waste any words on such persons, for they were only sham Christians from the start; the vast number of beginners, who are in sincere earnest, I wish to remind of the solemn truth, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." There is no assurance that any others will be saved.

Since endurance to the end is essential to usefulness here and heaven hereafter, the vital questions are: On what ground can any beginner in the Christian life hope to hold out to the end? What shall he do to insure his holding out? The charm of novelty soon wears off, and temptations assail every one that sets foot on the straight and narrow path. Hindrances are encountered at every step, and hills of difficulty have to be clambered. The world gives him no help, except the help of its indifference or its open opposition; this last may do him good if he is of the right metal, for head winds fan the furnace of his engine. Inward lusts of some sort are to be encountered. Then, too, each individual has some hindrances and obstacles that are peculiar to himself, such as unsympathetic associates, or fickleness of disposition, or social snare, or temptations in business, or the lack of spiritual surroundings and Christian privileges. The prevailing currents in this world do not set Godward; a resolute Christian has to swim up stream. Here, then, is the problem for every one of us: I must hold out to the end, or I am lost. To take one step toward heaven does not bring me there unless I go over the whole road. He that endureth to the end is the man that is saved; yes, and saves other souls, also.

It may be said that we must have solid principle at the bottom, as Nathan Hale had the principle of patriotism when he went to the gallows as a martyr for his country, and Livingstone had the principle of holy zeal for souls when he went to die as a missionary in mid-Africa. All very true; but whence comes the principle? How is it to be maintained? When the novelty has died out, and when sharp temptations assail, and the load gets heavy and the road steep and rough, what power can keep you moving? Conversion is not the ground of Christian perseverance. Conversion is only a single step, a single process. A great, decisive step, indeed, and a vital process. But conversion does not insure continuous growth and final victory, any more than enlistment in an army insures success in standing tough marches or stern encounters with the enemy. It insures no man's final salvation. The heart that is converted must be kept right, kept strong, kept faithful; the inward citadel over which floats Christ's ensign has got to be garrisoned and guarded. Who shall do this? The Christian must watch, you say. True enough; our Master has said, "I say unto all, Watch." Again he has commanded, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Yet all the watching in the world and all the praying and all the working cannot save you as long as you rely on them for salvation.

John Bunyan in his immortal allegory give a fine figurative answer to the

problem before us. He tells us that when his pilgrim was in the Interpreter's house, he was led into a room where a fire was burning against a wall. A man stood by it, pouring water on the fire; yet it burned up higher and hotter. Christian asks an explanation of the mystery. The Interpreter explains to him that the fire is the work of grace wrought in the soul; that the one that casts on the water is the devil, and yet the flame is only increased under the devil's trenchings. Christian is taken around to the other side of the wall, and there he discovers a person with a vessel of oil in his hand, who is constantly feeding the flame. "This person," says the Interpreter, "is Jesus Christ, who continually with the oil of his grace maintains the work already begun in the heart, so that, notwithstanding all that the devil can do, the souls of Christ's people prove gracious still."

A beautiful solution this; it is the same that Paul reached when he said that the Lord whom he had believed was able to keep that soul which he had committed to him. It is the same solution that Peter discovered when he declared that "we are kept by the power of God through faith, unto salvation." The power of God is the only source of your strength, and the only basis for your endurance to the end. This does not nullify free agency; and this gives you no pretext for saying, "If Jesus Christ takes care of me, I need have no care for myself." That is the devil's caricature of the doctrine of assurance. Observe that vital condition, "through faith." It is about equivalent to saying that God sends victory to a righteous cause through good generalship and hard fighting. Faith is more than a sentiment in this glorious text; it is an act. It is your soul's grip on your Saviour. Unless this fact is shown by good works and strenuous deeds of duty, and by godly living, then the faith is but a pious sham. The apostle of common sense, James, pungently says, "Faith without works is dead." The two together, faith and activity, are the parents whence spring all true and noble and fruitful lives. A blessed and beautiful partnership is this, my friend, between you and Jesus, you holding fast to Jesus, and Jesus upholding you by his mighty arm.

The fatal curse that works so much mischief in our churches and mission work and reform movements is the want of hold-on-iveness. Some teachers drop out of Sunday school, and Endeavorers out of their society, as soon as the novelty is off, or as soon as the pull grows heavy. Some ministers petition us to help them into another field; their present one is a "hard field;" they are trying to run when God is about to send the shower of his Spirit. It is the hard field that needs the plow and the harrow. A vast deal of the Christian work in our land ends in a spasmodic spurt of short-lived enthusiasm, and the cause of all this fitfulness in feeling and failure in Christian effort is the lack of Jesus Christ in the core of the heart as the one almighty, all-enduring, and perpetual staying power to the end of the race. The runner that holds out has Christ's strength in his sinews; the soldier whose faith in Christ stands fire to the last shot is the one that wins the victor's crown.

Brooklyn, N.Y.

O Son of God, who lovest me,
I will be thine alone,
And all I have, and all I am
Shall henceforth be thine own.

No plan humbly and earnestly made, in observance of the Father's will, can fail of final success. The man's proposal is finite; God's wisdom is infinite.

GRATITUDE.*

Some Bible Hints.

Thanksgiving requires all that is within us, all high qualities; not only speech, but thought and memory and reason and affection and earnestness (v. 1).

Simply remembering God's kindnesses is enough; gratitude is sure to follow. But do we often enough review them? (v. 2.)

Let us be grateful for what God has not done as well as for what He has done, for the deserved punishments that He withholds (v. 10).

Nature praises God; so do joyous little children, and wise old men, and the great hosts of heaven; but these praises do not avail for me (v. 22).

Suggestive Thoughts.

To express our gratitude in another's words—David's, Whittier's—is better than not to express it at all; but we can at least say that they are our thoughts.

Much gratitude may be expressed in song; but how seldom we think of what we are singing!

It is well to think at the end of every day of the kindness done you for which you have not expressed your gratitude.

Gratitude may become a habit, and then happiness becomes a habit.

A Few Illustrations.

Gratitude unexpressed is like a photographic plate undeveloped.

If we say "Thank you!" every time the bread is passed to us at table, why not every time we receive a blessing from God?

In writing a letter to an earthly friend who has sent us a fine present we use our best words; why not use them in thanking God for His best of all gifts?

What if each of our common blessings, such as sight, came to us each day as a separate package or a check on some bank! We might then remember to be grateful.

To Think About.

How do I show my gratitude to men?
How do I show my gratitude to God?
Am I becoming more happy, or more discontented?

A Cluster of Quotations.

From David learn to give thanks in everything. Every furrow in the book of Psalms is sown with seeds of thanksgiving.—Jeremy Taylor.

A single grateful thought towards heaven is the most perfect prayer.—Lessing.

Gratitude is the mother of virtues.—Cicero.

Gratitude is a duty none can be excused from, because it is always at our own disposal.—Charron.

DAILY READINGS.

M., Nov. 16—Gratitude of the heavenly beings. Rev. 4: 8-11.

T., Nov. 17—Gratitude required of us. Ps. 50: 14-23.

W., Nov. 18—Gratitude in public. Ps. 35: 18-27.

T., Nov. 19—Thanksgiving in private. Ps. 57: 7-11.

F., Nov. 20—Thanksgiving before meals. John 6: 10, 11.

S., Nov. 21—Gratitude for converts. Eph. 1: 16-23.

Sun., Nov. 22—Topic: Songs of the Heart. XII. Gratitude, and how to express it. Ps. 103. (Thanksgiving Day meeting.)

Wealth is often a cloak in which men hide their compassion for their fellow men until the time comes to make a will or the angel of death raps on the door.

*Y. P. Topic 22nd Nov.—Gratitude and How to Express it.—Ps. 103.