

"TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE."

WHAT wouldst thou do? His praises sing,
To Him in gladsome worship bring
Earth's purest lays—earth's sweetest songs
To Whom all harmony belongs.

What wouldst thou do? Go, speak His name,
His wondrous love and grace proclaim;
Till hundreds, thousands, prostrate fall,
And own Him Saviour, Lord of all.

What wouldst thou do? Go, work for Him
In fevered haunt, or alley dim;
Succour the poor, support the faint,
And cheer each sick and suffering saint.

What wouldst thou do? Go forth and fight,
Strong in His strength, His power my might;
Victorious then, my trophies lay
Down at His feet at close of day.

What wouldst thou do? Die for His sake
Who died for me; Oh! let Him take
My life, my all, and let me be,
My Saviour, always, all for Thee.

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He asks not these. He saith, "Obey
My voice and sit at home to-day;
I have a task for thee to learn,
If thou a meed of praise wouldst earn."

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"Stay here, sit still, do nought for Thee,
My heart, that bounded forth so free,
Is now like some poor caged bird,
Since I Thy grave command have heard."

Obedience is a harder thing
 Than anthems on the air to fling,
 Than eloquence more arduous far,
 Harder than labour or than war.

Thou canst not do one deed aright,
 Not one act pleasing in His sight,
 Except thou have His sure command,
 Take all thy orders from His hand.

If He says, "Fight My battles here,"
 Thou mayest go forth without a fear ;
 If He bid sing, or speak, or do,
 No matter what, He'll bring thee through.

But wouldst thou run, untaught, unsent,
 Thy life itself were vainly spent ;
 Rather thy soul with patience nerve,
 Until He saith, "Arise and serve."

Better than sacrifice is this,
 Herein and here alone is bliss,
 To catch His smile, to hear Him say,
 "Thou hast fulfilled My will to-day."



TO BE DOING AND NOT TO BE DOING.

"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."—Rom. xiv. 23.

All the teachers who merit the name of Christians, are agreed upon the point that there is nothing of greater practical worth than *Christian diligence* in those who are redeemed.

The shades of difference found among them chiefly consist in the manner of stimulating the

children of God thereto, and in the nature and motive power of the action in question.

We know that there are in the redeemed, here below, two principles of action which are opposed one to the other ; that of the flesh and that of the spirit of adoption. The flesh never willingly keeps quiet, even if the body itself is at rest. And yet there is such a thing as rest according to the Spirit. It is never without danger that the Christian follows the thoughts of the flesh, either in getting into action or in keeping still ; but the danger is infinitely enhanced when he does either the one or the other, induced thereto by thoughts which have the sanction of religion. It is always well for the energy of the Spirit of God to subject the flesh, and to oblige it to keep still. Then only is it that faith acts in love and according to the will of God, that is, according to Scripture.

The heart of the wise discerns the times, and knows what is right. The spirit of adoption seeks the will of God in retirement, by prayer and in the study of the word. He is sure to find and to recognize what the will of God is, who has the sincere desire to do it, and desires nothing but it. But in seeking that will, we often find that faith and spirituality are more largely taxed by the study *to be quiet*, than by having somewhat *to do*.

For them that are spiritual, there is a time to be doing and a time of cessation from doing—of rest and hope. But the flesh cannot bear the latter, for it has neither the will nor the ability to subject

itself to the will of God. There is a time to act and a time to think—"a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together" (Eccles. iii. 5). The Holy Spirit leads us as well to rest, to prayer, and to meditation, as to action. The Christian is a stranger and pilgrim, who, passing through the world, stays not, save at the resting-places which the Lord has prepared for him. And herein he only accomplishes the will of the good Shepherd who conducts him and guides, nourishes, refreshes, and tenderly cares for him. "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety" (Ps. iv. 8).

The only real happiness of the children of God consists in doing the will of the Father. If, at least, the heart is under the control of the spirit of adoption, Jesus incessantly provides them with occasions, means and strength to do that will, even as by the Spirit. He inspires them with the desire to do it. But if the Christian is deficient in intelligence, he will hourly run the risk, whether he is in action or at rest, of only following his own notions. That which we, above all things, need is a filial and spiritual apprehension of grace.

If it is said to me, "We must do, do, do," no principle of action connected with faith or love in me is awakened. It is but a law which stimulates the flesh, and thus encourages me to sow to the flesh. The reaping will, naturally, be of corruption.

But if, contrariwise, the love of God and my Father, or the grace and privileges of my heavenly

calling in Christ Jesus be recalled to my soul—liberty is given to me to desire, to think, to love, and to act according to God, or if it be so, to be still according to God. It is the love of God toward us which is the sole spring of faith and the circumstance which gives to faith its activity. Touch this spring, originate a movement there, if you desire to awaken in the Lord's people divine or truly spiritual action. It is thus that we find exhortation set forth in the word by the Lord, and we have but to follow it, if we desire to be indeed His disciples. All the exhortations of the New Testament flow from the love of God, who has loved us and given us redemption, adoption and glory. How could we live, progress, and run toward the goal of our heavenly calling, if we were not nourished, abundantly and incessantly, with the grace of God, in Jesus Christ which is to us-ward.

The Lord Jesus Himself has said, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you : for Him hath God the Father sealed" (John vi. 27). Here the chief point in question is His flesh, given for the life of the world. That is, faith in the love of God is the sole true source, the only point to set out from, and alone the circle in which Christian activity unfolds itself. The work of faith, and labour of love consist, at bottom, in believing in the Son and in abiding in Him. In believing, I

work for the nourishment which is unto eternal life. Whether I eat or whether I drink, whether I am in active service, or whether I am in repose—from the moment that I am in communion with the Author and Finisher of faith, I labour for the nourishment which is unto eternal life. Without Him we can do nothing, however laudable, in appearance, our activity may be. It is the Spirit which quickens; the flesh profits nothing. Moreover, constant mention is made of the fruit of the Spirit, and of the reaping of the Spirit, because, by our union with the Lord Jesus, "we have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Rom. vi.).

Now I will suppose that the father of a Christian family, thinking to act according to the Lord, devotes himself to the teaching of his children the best means of gaining gold and silver, or that he instructs them in the works of art, of the sciences, and of the fantasies of man's imagination. Such a father may, perhaps, do much, and acts through a lengthened period, with intentions most praiseworthy according to the world. But what fruit will be thence gathered, by himself and his children, in this life or in the life to come? We have no need to make the essay. Solomon, the wisest and the most successful of men, made the trial, and, after possessing all that a heart in nature could desire, he tells us:

"And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept
"not from them, I withheld not my heart

"from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all
 "my labour; and this was my portion of all
 "my labour. Then I looked on all the works that
 "my hands had wrought, and on the labour that
 "I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity
 "and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit
 "under the sun" (Ecc. ii. 10, 11). What a sad
 admission for an old man, who yet knew the Lord.
 "The words of the Preacher, the Son of David,
 "King in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith
 "the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.
 "What profit hath a man of all his labour which
 "he taketh under the sun? One generation pass-
 "eth away, and another generation cometh: but
 "the earth abideth forever. The sun also ariseth,
 "and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his
 "place where he arose. The wind goeth toward
 "the south, and turneth about unto the north; it
 "whirleth about continually, and the wind return-
 "eth again according to his circuits. All the
 "rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full;
 "unto the place from whence the rivers come,
 "thither they return again. All things are full of
 "labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not
 "satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with
 "hearing. The thing that hath been, it is that
 "which shall be; and that which is done is that
 "which shall be done: and there is no new thing
 "under the sun. Is there anything whereof it
 "may be said, See, this is new? it hath been
 "already of old time, which was before us. There
 "is no remembrance of former things; neither
 "shall there be any remembrance of things that
 "are to come with those that shall come after. I
 "the Preacher was King over Israel in Jerusalem.
 "And I gave my heart to seek and search out by
 "wisdom concerning all things that are done under

"heaven : this sore travail hath God given to the
 "sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have
 "seen all the works that are done under the sun,
 "and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.
 "That which is crooked cannot be made straight,
 "and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.
 "I communed with mine own heart, saying, 'Lo,
 "I am come to great estate, and have gotten
 "more wisdom than all they that have been before
 "me in Jerusalem : ' yea, my heart had great ex-
 "perience of wisdom and knowledge. And I
 "gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know
 "madness and folly : I perceived that this also is
 "vexation of spirit." (Ecc. i. 1-17.)

Let us reckon carefully. Put aside from among
 all the fruits of our activity here below such as are
 really fruits of the Spirit, that is to say, those only
 which will abide unto eternal life and which will
 be reckoned to us before the judgment-seat of
 Christ. How many a loss shall we not then sus-
 tain? Our best intentions, our strongest resolves,
 our most boasted enterprises, our greatest efforts
 to attain these will be all mowed down as stubble.
 If these fruits grew not in the garden of faith, they
 will not endure the trial by fire ; it will consume
 them. Yet, shall we see in that day, some souls
 who were, perchance, simple and of no repute
 here below, crowned there on high, with the abid-
 ing fruits of the Spirit. Many a thousand fine
 sermons will be burnt up ; and poor, pitiful
 prayers, by tens, will then glitter like the stars for-
 ever. God recognizes and rewards only blessings
 apprehended and realised by faith in Christ Jesus.

All this is a matter of spiritual intelligence and of communion with God.

The word speaks to us of "*fruit of the Spirit*," contrasting such with "*works of the flesh*" (Gal. v.). Provided that he who sows and he who reaps does so only in the Spirit, he shall receive a reward, and shall gather fruit unto eternal life. All else will be burned up.

Christ has chosen us, even us also, as I judge, that we may bring forth fruit, and that our fruit may *abide*. But Jesus is not the vine whence grow our speculations, our resolutions, or our plans for campaigns here below. These thoughts of the natural man have no relationship with the branches of the true Vine, which draw from Christ alone their sap, their leaves, buds, flowers and fruit.

Lastly, "the day" which draweth near will make known what the work of each is. It is therefore well and suitable, that we should mutually exhort one another unto love and good works, but only to those "which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. ii.) Nothing can enable me to discern those works, save intimate communion, by the Spirit, with Him who has prepared them. If I see before me works which have not been prepared by God, faith will not give me any impulse thereto. If they have been prepared of God, BUT *not for me*, faith and the Spirit will both engage me to remain still. And He who is my Judge in all these things is the Lord, to whose

glory I desire to live and to die, to be occupied and to be still while I wait upon Him and await His return. I count continually upon the High priesthood of Jesus as to all my faults and failings in this precious service. For if I see that good works are those only which are *wrought in God*, I see also that the flesh is wily enough to make me miss my opportunities, either by acting after my own thoughts, or by abstaining from entering upon the path which God has prepared for me to walk in.

The last chapter of John's gospel gives us, briefly, various kinds of Christian activity, which were seen in the presence of the Risen Head of the church. John and Peter especially strike me in this point of view. The former remained quietly in the bosom of Jesus, when Peter would lay down his life for Him, *who was* to die for him. The crucifixion of the flesh is in practise a thing hard to find. Before the crucifixion, Peter had come *towards* Jesus in the flesh, and then had followed Him. But this Peter, with the best intention in the world, denied Jesus thrice. A flesh weak in itself without strength as to that which is good, and a natural mind, that is to say, one which is always ready to undertake the will of the flesh—was all that law itself could set in movement in man. And therefore also the law condemns the man who is subject to its rule.

But on the other side of the cross, and on the border of the Land of Promise, the calm, yet ener-

getic spirituality of John, recognized at a distance the Lord. Would Peter have cast himself into the sea, if he had not *heard* John say, "*It is the Lord*"? John continues at work all the while he is going to meet Jesus. His spirituality is indeed the cause, or at least, the occasion, of Peter's activity, and yet (while everything here is exactly in its right place), John acts as much as Peter, and in a sense, he acts even more usefully. Yet the moment the Lord bids bring of the produce of the fishing, it is Simon Peter who, already refreshed and restored by the contemplation of the risen Jesus, boards the boat and puts the finishing stroke to the work of power.

Before the crucifixion, Peter was not able to follow Jesus, although, with his whole soul he was willing to pledge himself thereto. But the knowledge of the cross has, *now*, given to Peter the power of following Jesus with joy, even whither Peter had no will to go. The power to mortify their members which are upon the earth, and the spirit of child-like obedience are now, in grace, given to the redeemed, such being set apart to the obedience of Jesus Christ as well as to the sprinkling of His blood.

John followed Jesus without needing an order to do so. His happiness was to keep close to his Master. The Lord on His part, knowing how this faithful disciple counted upon His love, manifests His confidence in him in this very thing, that He gives not to him, as to Peter, an order to fol-

low Him. Peter, on the contrary, just barely recovered from his fall, had need of all the visible proofs of the tender vigilance of Jesus; and the good Shepherd withholds them not from him.

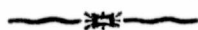
In John we see the confidence and the simplicity of love. Though he makes little noise, he always follows Jesus. He incessantly expects Him, and thus he recognizes Him even before the most zealous disciple: it is only his intimate acquaintance with Jesus which gives him this advantage. Love is calm, and finds its enjoyment in its object. John passes through few painful experiences like those of Peter. The perfect love of Jesus banishes all fear from His disciple; it restrains also the activity of the flesh.

John is neither jealous of Peter nor restless about his brother, who is on his way to death. Peter, on the contrary, disquiets himself about John, who, the meanwhile, is occupied solely about Jesus, and remains perfectly calm and at rest, even while following the Master, whom it was his habit to listen to and gaze upon.

We are never adequately filled with the conviction that *we* are nothing, and that *Jesus* is all. And hence we commonly resemble scholars who display an immense diligence in tracing a quantity of lines, among which the master's eye will, with difficulty, accept two or three passably good uprights. Thus the beginning of the end is always in casting all the copy books aside, whereas *by more attentively considering* the model we should undertake

fewer lines and fewer pages, but we should do more honour to the copy and to the teacher.

“When thou saidst, ‘Seek ye my face;’ my heart said unto thee, ‘Thy face, Lord, will I seek’’ (Ps. xxvii. 8). “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee” (Ps. lxxiii. 25).



“LUST.”

“Lust” is the stretching forth the hand to take something for *self*. If God say, “Take,” it is no lust to take. But, if the very crown prepared by God for you were there, and you took it unbidden by Him, it would be lust. God has sheltered us in Christ; “Walk in the Spirit,” then, “and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” Lust is the very essence of the world. “Lo, I come to do *Thy* will, O God,” was Christ’s way. Wherever there is a “Thus saith the Lord,” though it be even going to the stake, you will find a joy, a calmness, which you will never find in stolen waters taken for yourself. A path utterly unblameable may be pursued, and yet God may say, *I* did not put you there; and this comes in to interfere with the sustainment of quiet peace in the heart. Is it with me, “Lord, what wouldest *Thou* have me to do?” “Lo I come to do *Thy* will?” recognizing obedience to God as the *one great thing?*

USEFULNESS.

A question often arises about usefulness. Satan often beguiles by it. He may have suggested to John that he would be more useful if he were to compromise a little, and keep out of trouble for the sake of being free for his service to saints. Useful to whom? To God or to men? God may be able to show out more of His glory by laying men aside. The eyes of God rested on Paul a prisoner, seemingly useless (not even always allowed to write), as the field for the display of some of the greatest privileges of truth. The very point when your weakness seems to make you useless is often the very way in which God shows forth His glory. People think it strange that old Christians, useless ones, etc., etc., should be left, and young, active ones taken. Do not you be trying to settle God's house for Him; do not say, "What a pity for John to get to Patmos." The Lord wanted him there to communicate something that might serve His people to the end of time. A person may be in difficult circumstances, and you may have it in your power to get him out of them in the power of human nature. And you may do it, and find out that God would have had him in them, because then he could have borne testimony; and you ought not to have measured things by your love for him and your comfort, but by the light of God. We often act on a set of thoughts of which the cord is bound to our own humanity instead of God's glory.

WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH.

2 COR. XII. 1-10.

Immediately upon redemption weakness comes in—"He was crucified through weakness." "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." He could have gone up to heaven as the Son of David, but then He would have had no one with Him.

If the Spirit were given where atonement was not known it could only produce fearful conflict in the soul. There was no such thing as redemption, bringing back, except by the humiliation of His Son. If He had not become Man, He could not have gone to death, He could not have been the Head of the Gentiles, He could not have been the One amongst men meeting every need. He came down to measure out everything in His own personal presence in grace. He did not stay in heaven and do the work ; He said (as it were), "I choose to recognize Satan's power, but I will go down and worst him on his own ground." But He was not only crucified through weakness ; the great point is, He was raised from the dead—Himself the Resurrection and the Life ; and we can look into the grave and say, "I know Him as the resurrection and the life." How does this power work ? It is resurrection from the dead ; when known it brings in the taste of death into everything connected with ourselves. Look at

Saul of Tarsus ; he had everything planned in his own mind for his service, and the Lord Jesus speaks to him from heaven. His first word, "Who art *Thou*, Lord?" shows that he was conscious of the entire end of everything connected with self. Then the next thing was, "What wilt *Thou* have me to do?" You will not find until Christ really looks into you that you will look at Him as the revelation of the glory of God. Then you say, "There is a Man up there in heaven raised from the dead, the One in whose face all the glory of God shines. If I want to know anything connected with God, I must learn it from that Man; the answer to every question, above, around, within, is found in the face of that One. God centralizes all in that Person!"

We often think of this passage as the experience of the apostle. True, it was so ; but in it we get the principle of Christ's dealing with a soul. God shows me the Man in the glory, but after that I look up and see that One bearing me on His heart before God, and that He never forgets me. We get here the principle of God's dealing with a man down here. There is more than one principle on which the apostle was quite willing to have the fare of a pilgrim down here ; but this is one, "My grace is sufficient for thee." If it be a question of service, of suffering, of any power at all, where do I get it? In Christ.

We get another ground in Philippians iii. There his heart was so entranced with Christ, that he

wanted in everything to be like Him ; because Christ suffered, he wants to bear the marks of suffering too ; to be like Him in every possible way, in moral character, in suffering, even in " being made conformable unto His death." Christ was down here as a pilgrim and a stranger, and so he wanted to have the marks of one of His disciples, in being conformed to His sufferings ; and why ? Because, " the love of Christ constraineth."

But here it is another thing, " My grace is sufficient for thee," etc. I mean to conform you as My disciple to that principle of death and resurrection that was made good in Me before you got any blessing from it, that in everyday life you may have My strength. Look at the bearing of this on a person down here, the light it casts on his face. It was not only a question of the danger Christ saw, but He used Satan. People lose much when they forget that Christ uses Satan to guard them from sin ; he is one of the powers by which He works. Satan gave Paul the thorn in the flesh. Christ's purpose is to perfect His strength in His servant's weakness. The whole scene down here is under His hand ; and not only are the difficulties here for us to get through, but they are arranged by Christ that He may glorify Himself by taking you through them. Who made the wilderness ? God. And had He any special purpose in making it as it was ? Why did He not make it like Canaan ? Because He wanted a place for His people where He would have to supply their need

every day. The secret of quietness and peace of heart is not to look at things and say, I have got to face them ; but Christ has prepared all things as they are that I may not be able to get along a single day without Himself. Have I no bread? no work? Am I sick? Where is Christ? All the things are not only overruled, but *used* by Him that we may learn His strength of love that cripples *us* that He may be able to say, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

As I go along and see in my path a large rock, what do I think? How can *I* ever get over it? No; Christ has allowed it. He has put it in my path to try my faith, and somehow or other He will get me over it. You cannot say in ease and prosperity, "There is Christ"; but directly the storm begins, the weakness is felt, the sickness comes, we can certainly count on Christ. An extremity never takes Him by surprise, though often it may be an extremity entirely opposed to His moral character. If He leaves a person to himself, it is not that He gives him up, but to prove his heart. If He see a man full of himself, even though his face may be beaming with the glory, He must leave him to himself a little. If the heart will not bow to Christ it must be left to itself. If we do not learn in the quiet of the sanctuary, we shall find ourselves outside to learn what poor things we are. Christ would rather let His name be dishonoured and Peter brought low, than have him "making a fair show in the flesh."

Look at John in Rev. i. There, an exile in Patmos, he might have thought his apostleship ended ; but Christ comes and gives him a book to write, unfolding things of deep moment to the church in all ages. What should we do without the Revelation ? We get another instance in Rom. viii. I know not what to ask, but the Spirit makes intercession with groanings, and He that searcheth the heart knoweth it. Do I know what I want ? No ; but we present our desires before Him, often unable to form them into sentences, but Christ is up there, He knows what the Spirit wants for us. It is only an instance of redemption, working through Almighty power, connecting God, Christ in heaven, with *me*, a little insignificant individual down here. That God is so occupied with me that He brings me into desires after spiritual things connected with the glory of Christ. I present the desire, Christ understands (take the figure in Psalm cvii ; the sailors at their wits' end, then they learn the poverty of nature). I am brought to a sense of weakness by this character of communion, by His "strength made perfect in weakness." A great deal of the defective Christianity nowadays is owing to the Lord's people coming short in seeing that. Do we understand that the whole wilderness is to be a book of death and resurrection to us ? Very often sorrow is taken up from love to Christ ; but *here* it is my lifetime all developed by Christ, and He acting upon all to develope the principle of death

and resurrection, and that to let me know "My grace is sufficient." If you look at *Satan* as one of the powers by which God works, at *the wilderness* as the place prepared by Christ, where the tokens of His love are shown out, and at *yourselves*, crippled by Christ in order that you may have no strength but His to act on, you will find sweetness and refreshing of soul.

THE RIVERS OF LIVING WATER.

JOHN VII. 37-39.

When the water revives the wilderness itself, when the Son of man actually takes the world as His inheritance, and the Spirit is poured out, shall it not then be glad, and rejoice, and blossom? Well, it fills the heart of God's people, of him that believeth in Jesus, now, and does so *because he is in the wilderness*: and shall he not rejoice and blossom? Yea, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water; and though often the heartless sand may drink it in and give no return, but be parched, and arid, and fruitless as before, yet wherever the earth of God's hand and the seeds of God's planting are, there shall they also be refreshed and spring up through it. I feel it very important to remark here the individual character noticed before, because it is the saving principle in the midst of desolations and evil, whatever common good it may produce. It is not, *They* shall drink of the river from the rock, or drink of some common river, but, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water;" it is the personal possession and indwelling of the Holy Ghost. (*Extract.*)