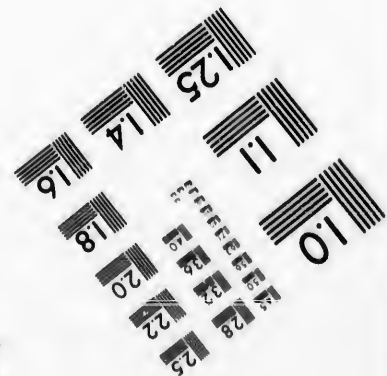
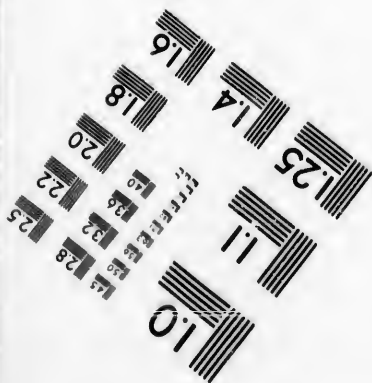
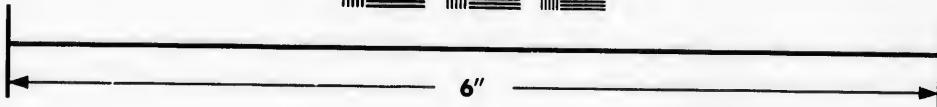
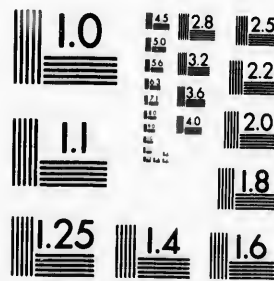


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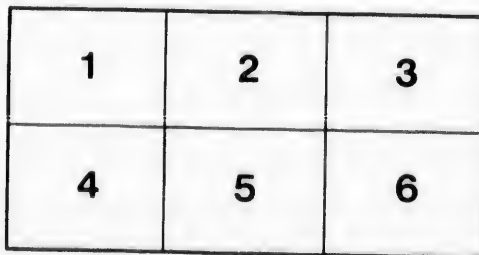
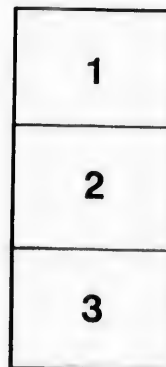
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"GLAD TIDINGS" Sermon and Tract Series, No. 1.

HOLINESS.

PERFECTION IN CHRIST.

SERMON

BY

REV. MARK GUY PEARSE,

Preached in the Centenary Church, Saint John, N. B., Thursday,
June 2nd, 1887.

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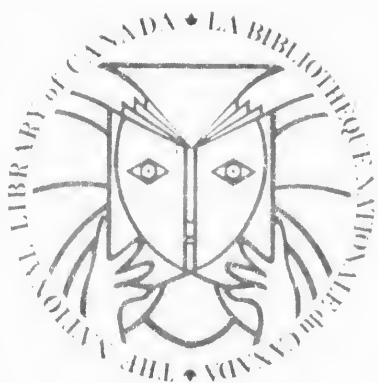


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PERFECTION IN CHRIST.

“Be perfect; be of good comfort.”.—2 Cor. xiii. 11.

I THINK, dear friends, as we look at this text, we shall all feel, after a little reflection, as if it were a very contradictory one. “Be perfect.” Oh, dear! we do not like that. Somebody says: “You know I do not believe in perfection.” Dear friend, what thou believest is very little matter. When God speaks it is of very little use for thee to look up and say: “I do not believe in perfection.” I have no theory about perfection. I am not going to tell thee what this perfection may mean, for I think I shall never, never know; but I do want thee this day to go right up to your God and say: “My God, what this perfection is thou knowest, and I want Thee to give it to me.” Sir, if thou dost not believe in perfection I would have thee end the controversy speedily. Go unto thy God and say: “Oh, my God, save me as far as thou canst, and when Thou canst not save me any more I will stop.” Let that end the controversy. But yet, we must all feel that these words are, as I have said, contradictory. “Be perfect.” Well, that seems to me as if the text took me by the hand and fetched me up some slippery height and said: “That is where you have got to get, and it is very few people who can ever get up there, only very clever mountaineers and Alpine climbers; and many who have got up have not been able to stay up there. They have come falling down again and have talked about it all the days of their life.” “Be perfect.” Ah! most of us look up and

sigh: "Yes, I very much wish I could be a better man than I am, but I cannot climb." When I went to Switzerland once I went as most people do, I suppose, to see the Matterhorn; and as I stood and looked at the sheer mass of rock rising up from the snowy mountain I said to the guide: "Well, I suppose there are some people who climb that?" "Yes," said he "a few." I looked at him and said: "When do you think I shall climb it?" and he looked at me and smiled. I am afraid he thought I was not a very likely subject. I said: "Well, I will tell you when I shall get to the top of that—when I can fly." That is how most people think about being perfect, they look at the top of that slippery height and say: "Yes, when I can fly." When we have done with things on earth then there will be some hopes for us, and our heart sinks down within us and we sigh and turn back again: "Be perfect; be of good comfort." Oh, that seems to say: "Take it easy! what do you want to go fretting yourselves for?" If you are not as good as some people, never mind; you are not as bad as some are. You must take the average and you will pass very well in the crowd. "Be of good comfort." Now, my brethren, what we want to do is to put these two things together and ask ourselves earnestly and honestly this question: How can you join these two? "Be perfect." Take it right in. Let your ideal in Christ be as lofty and sublime as God's ideal is and yet do not fret, do not worry, do not agonize. "Be of good comfort." The glory of Christ's religion is that it joins these two. I can find in other religions, "Be perfect." There is many a heathen religion that has its ideal "Be perfect," but it is by agony, it is by torture. Here are the two hands of our God; the right hand of His righteousness that saith "Be perfect," the left hand of His love that doth press us to His heart as he saith: "Be of good comfort."

Now many people lose both because they put them in the wrong order; they put "Be of good comfort" first, and "Be perfect" on behind. The Lord puts "Be perfect" first, and "Be of good comfort" afterwards. Let us look at them.

Now this is a religion, and a very common religion, and a very mischievous religion, in which the whole aim is first of all "Be of good comfort"—a religion in which, when a man is converted, he is accustomed to say he is made happy. The religion, mark you, is true enough, right enough, until you push it to an extreme. You will find generally that a man's evil is a virtue pushed too far. Pride begins, perhaps, only in manly confidence, or self-confidence, which is good. Fear may only be an exaggerated humility, and so this, which is the strength of all living and earnest churches; this experience, this feeling, if you like to call it so, becomes a peril when you push it just too far, and make it the end, and purpose, and ideal, and aim of our religion. We sing about it in our hymn:

'Tis religion, that must give,
Sweetest pleasures while we live.

You ask people, "Are you saved?" "Oh, yes, bless the Lord." "How do you know?" "Oh, I feel it." Why there are thousands of young people in our churches and chapels who come home on a Sunday night and say: "Well, I think I'm saved, you know, I feel a little bit happy to-night," and on a Monday morning they get up and say: "I do not know, I do not think I feel much happier than I did on Saturday," and they think they are lost again. Now, I just want you, dear friends, to look this matter full in the face. Is the idea of our religion and the aim and purpose of it, first of all, to make us feel happy? Then, if it is, I don't want religion. If the

great thing for which Jesus Christ has come into this world is just to make me feel happy I can find a loftier idea of life outside religion altogether. Come with me here into Westminster Abbey, let us stroll round about the place and look at the monuments. Here are buried heroes, travellers, explorers; read here the name of this man who went away up into some bleak Arctic region, who defied death in a thousand shapes, and went through all sorts of perils and agonies. What cared he for feeling? He just flung his feeling to the winds, and said: "There that is where I have got to get, and that is where I shall go," and nothing daunted, nothing turned him away, he went and reached the ice; he came back and men said: "A hero!" Look here at the record of the warriors—men who just flung feeling happy to the winds altogether, "What have we got to do with that?" Perhaps they never stopped even to say as much as that, but, all forgetful of themselves, said: "There, that is what we have got to do," and they went and faced again a thousand perils, and men cried: "A hero!" And here you get a very highly respectable tombstone, gilt, magnificent. Will you read the inscription? "Here lies a man who felt happy." Why, I say, if the end and purpose of my religion is nothing more than that which is to make me feel happy, I can find a loftier ideal in the army, in the navy, amongst those brave fishermen who have gone forth during those bleak storms, amongst those whose memories to-day we cherish at once with such pride and such sorrow,—amongst those for whose widows and orphans this day we do most earnestly pray the comfort and consolation of our heavenly Father. I say amongst these I can find a loftier ideal of life shown in religion if the one end and purpose of my religion is to make me feel happy.

Look again. If the purpose of my religion is just

to make me feel happy, then it is a failure. It must, in order to make me perfectly happy, do one of two things—it must either change my nature so that all circumstances shall minister to my happiness, or else it must so change my circumstances as that my nature shall find in them always that which makes me happy. Does it? I get the tooth-ache; I find it pains me as much after conversion as before. Our dear and beloved friend, the pastor of this church, is racked with pains and aches—how deeply we sympathize with him,—but do we not see that the grace does not change the bodily nature, nor does it change our circumstances. It does not take the east wind away; it does not take the frost out of the air; it does not bring in the golden sunshine. In this respect, too, it is a failure.

Look again. If the purpose of my religion is first of all to make me happy, then, I dare say boldly, most reverently and yet most confidently, that Jesus Christ has come the wrong way. I will tell you how you can make the most miserable man living. Think if I were some poor outcast on a bleak winter's night, with the cold snow sweeping about me in blinding wreaths. Here I sit, frost-bitten and hungry upon your door-step,—shoeless, homeless, ragged. You come and lay your hand upon my shoulder. "Come, come," you say, "come in; I cannot have you sitting here like this. Sit in my easy chair, warm yourself by my fire, eat my supper, and I will come out and take your place." Do you think I should be such a mean beast as to accept your offer? Do you think your fire would warm me? I tell you it would scorch me; your supper would choke me; your luxuries would be my agony. The whole time should I not think of you outside, until I should be driven to go and lay my hand upon your shoulder and say, "Sir, either you come in and share my pleasure, or else I will come out and share your misery." My Master,

I cannot be made happy like that. I take Thine hand, and I feel the nail-print therein; I rest my head against Thy side, and lo, there is the mark of that cruel spear; I look up into Thy face, and see the mark of that crown of thorns upon Thy brow. I look to it and see how Thy face has been marred and disfigured, and I think of how it was spat upon and how besmeared with dust and blood; how they plucked the hair of Thy cheek. My Master, I can weep, but how can I rejoice? Thou hast come the wrong way; nay, my heart cries, "Oh, let me be crucified together with Thee! Let me hang with Thee upon that very cross; let me, too, be dead and buried with Thee; let me be one with Thee, my Lord." Happiness is forgotten; the cross of Christ has thrust it right out of my thoughts.

Look again; you would not like to deal with your children after that fashion. Try it. The great end and purpose of religion is to make us feel happy. I have got a boy at home, I think the grandest little fellow that ever lived, and I hope you think the same of yours. I do not think he ever told me a lie; but think if he did—think if, one day, he came all red-eyed and sobbing, and he looked into my face and confessed to me: "Father, I have told a lie!" Now, what should I do? Should I look upon him and say: "Well, my boy, I do not want you to feel like this. Run away; fetch out your marbles; have your top; go off to your cricket or football; get your school fellows about you, and laugh and shout—I want you to feel happy?" Not a bit of it. I tell you I would want that boy to feel very miserable indeed, and if my hand was not strong enough to do it, I would take a rod, and if a rod was not enough, I would lock him up in a room, and he should be there for a week on bread and water, if I could some how

or other work in that boy's soul a great, deep, abiding abhorrence of a lie, as a thing loathsome, damning. What to me was it that he should feel happy. O, my brother, I say deliberately, it were better for you and me to have hell fire than the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, if, mark you, hell fire could burn into us a more deep hatred of the thing that was wrong. If Christ has only come to say to me, "Don't you trouble about sin, don't you mind about it, it is all right, I have settled that : now you go off. I want you to feel happy,"—I say I should be a bigger man, a better man, if by all the anguish of the ages, there should be just wrought through and through me a great, deep, abhorrence of the thing that is evil. Oh, I tell you, sir, you have not learned the first lesson of the cross, if you have not seen brought right out and nailed up in the sight of heaven and earth and hell what God thinks about sin, how He hates it, how He loathes it, and must sweep it right away. He says to me on that cross : "Here, that is what I think of sin ; I must nail it to the cross ; I must bury it out of my sight," and, my brethren, that is where we want to get, that is the lesson that we want wrought into us—the great, deep abhorrence of the thing that is evil ; that anything, even crucifixion, even the ragged nails, and the spear, and the crown of thorns, and the hatred and derision of the world, is blessed if it can only make us forever and ever get rid of sin as a loathsome and damnable thing that must be buried down in Christ's grave. Not first "Be of good comfort ;" not first feeling happy ; first—"Be perfect."

And now I want to bring this right home. Friends, what is the purpose of this religion ? let us each one ask himself. Oh, I would sooner break stones in the road and never get paid for it either,

than I would preach this Gospel if it were only getting people to come together to hear what one has to say. Brethren, it is to help us to think more of Jesus and to be more like Him. And so now I want you to just deal with yourselves. Lay hold of this truth, and let the light of it fall in upon your hearts. How do you pray? What is the prayer at the beginning of the day? Analyse it and see what it is. Hark! he prays! "O Lord, bless me, clothe me, feed me, take care of me, prosper me in business, make me more happy, and bring me home to heaven when I die, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen." Well, friend, thou mayest pull that out into three-quarters of an hour, if thou wilt, but what hast thou done? There is thy religion, a fatterer of your selfishness, and, so far as I can see, it is not likely to do much else; thou dost give it to no other purpose; thy selfishness might get fat without much prayer. "Well, but," you say, "does not it say in the Bible: 'Give us this day our daily bread?'" Does it? Where? Wilt thou read the passage? "Give us——" Ay! you have left something out. "What?" Listen: "Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." That is first, sir; not your crust of bread, not your getting on in business, not your being made happy. "Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come"—that first, sir! That is what you are here for, that is why God gives us the crust of bread, that is what the sun in the heavens shines for, that is why He gives us breath and all things. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will," that first, not your will, not God waiting upon you to minister to you, but you waiting upon God to minister to Him. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Then that His name may be hallowed, that His kingdom may come, that His will may be done, "Give me this day

my crust of bread." Thou must not ask for thy bread till thou hast put God in His right place. Thou art not in thy right place until first of all thou has put, not thy being made happy, but first of all thy serving with all thine heart thy Father who is in heaven. Oh, says somebody, does not it say: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you." What! Ah, if thou wouldst search the Scripture instead of borrowing thy quotations from somebody else, thou mightest, perhaps, quote it right. I have often heard that text quoted so, but what does it say: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," that is the word. Oh, if I could I would write one word up over every church and chapel in this land, "Righteousness." If I could I would have it upon every ledger and every cash-book and every wages book, "Righteousness." If I could I would have it stamped upon every article in the kitchen and on every article in the parlor. I would have it stamped upon all the articles that men sell over the counter, if only by stamping the word one could get the thing. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." That is it, rightness, right speaking, right doing, right dealing, right feeling, that is what we want, righteousness running through it all. Oh, that is the want of this nineteenth century: we have got ever so much religion that makes people think they are happy, but would to God we had a religion that made men righteous, clean-handed, pure-tongued, self-denying. Sir, thou wilt lose both if thou dost put them in the wrong order—not first of all feeling happy, first of all be perfect.

First let the aim and longing of thy religion be to be like Christ. Oh, if thou wouldst take His cross up this morning and welcome it to thy heart,

wouldst go forth saying, "Lord, this shall be my aim in everything, whether it pays or whether it does not pay—first, be perfect!" Oh, my brother, think of Christ in our midst this morning. I can think of Him standing here, looking down upon this great crowd; what power and glory will be His if every man and every woman here said this morning, as they went forth: "Now, Lord, whether I feel happy or whether I do not, my life shall be to make the world think well of Thee. My aim shall be first to be perfect." First, set Christ upon His throne wherever thou goest; think "now I have got to glorify Him." Oh, what will it do for the world! How quickly should the church overtake the world when every man made the end of his religion not his own little self, not his own escape to heaven; but that when the whole purpose of himself in everything and everywhere should be to make the world think well of Jesus Christ. Will you accept it, will you pray for it, will you take it right in till it possesses you!

And now, secondly, "Be of good comfort." Now a great many people lose both because they leave out the Lord's part altogether. I think that every Christian man here, somehow or other, has begun to feel, well, that is the truth. Some great impulse seizes you, and you say within yourself: "Yes, that is what I have got to be, and that is what I will be." Take care; take care. Many a conscientious man has gone forth from this Tabernacle stirred by the words he has heard, and it may be he has said: "That is what I will be. I will give up this, I will give up that and the other, and I will be this, and I will be that, and I will be the other;" and how long has it lasted? Monday, Tuesday? Ah, how soon we have said—for I

have been one of them—how soon we have said : "Well, it is no good, I cannot?" We could not keep up the strain; we could not keep up the agony. If we cannot find something better to begin with than "I," let us give up. The moment I fetch in "I," I fetch in failure. I have taken myself in more than anybody else ever took me in. Dear friends, you have been the biggest cheat to yourself that yourself has ever known. How often you have been giving away to sin. How many times you have promised yourself a thousand splendid things that have come to nothing; and if we cannot find something better than "I," we will just give the whole thing up in despair. There are some who do actually succeed. I have met here and there with people who have made themselves perfect, and I think of all dreadful people I ever knew, these were the most dreadful, for they have laid hold upon themselves and they have said, "Now, I am going to be perfect," and they have narrowed and concentrated their whole thought upon themselves. They have laid hold on themselves, and they have begun to chip themselves and cut off their corners, and have made a hundred corners in cutting off one. They have sand papered themselves, and sulphuric acided themselves, and at last, after two, three, four, five years of that concentrated agony, and effort, and self consciousness, they have brought out, what? Why, what else could you expect? from five to six feet of polished "I," it is all "I, I, I." If you come with them then you approach a saint, but if you do not agree with them, then you are a hopeless reprobate. Now, if I cannot find something better than that, I will hold my tongue about it for ever and ever. I cannot believe very much in perfection when I look at human nature; I believe in perfection less

still when I look at myself; but when I look at Jesus I cannot help believing in perfection then. "Be of good comfort," because it is not my agony, it is not my straining and sacrificing everything, it is not my laying hold of myself and putting myself in the fire and melting myself and running myself out into a mould in the image and likeness of Christ; it is the getting away from myself, forgetting myself, bringing in a new consciousness. Oh, my brother! I want you to lay right hold of it with all your heart. It is not my climbing the slippery height; it is Jesus Christ coming right down from that height to me, and saying: "Soul, this work is Mine, not thine; and I want thee to let Me come in and do it for you." That is it. "Be perfect;" yes, with such a Saviour. "Be of good comfort"—yes, because it is His work, not mine. It is letting Him come in; it is flinging wide open the door of the heart and saying: "My Lord, Thou shalt do it all." "Be of good comfort."

I have not time to dwell upon the word as I should like. Let us hasten on just to break it in two; look into the very heart of it. "Comfort"—what does it mean? "Co.," that means "company;" "fort," that means "strength"—strengthening by company. That is it. Jesus Christ coming to me and saying: "Soul this work is mine. I am going with thee—all the way with thee, and be thou perfect, because this is what I have come to do for thee." Oh, I tell you you can only spell holiness in five letters—J E S U S. The way to get holiness is to get more of Jesus. Perfection is but letting Jesus have His own way with us in everything—Jesus, a perfect Saviour. My Master would not make an imperfect grass-blade, an imperfect daisy, an imperfect spider, and do you think He is going to let His perfect Son show all these things and that redemp-

tion shall show nothing of it? No, blessed be His name, He cometh to me and thee and He saith: "Son, all I ask of thee is that thou wilt let Me have Mine own way with thee." "Be of good comfort." It is Jesus, Jesus coming right down, Jesus coming all the way with us. Here is an illustration that comes to my mind—forgive the homeliness of it. I remember, one day, when I was a little lad of some seven years, I had gone out to spend the day at a farm house—it was in the happy haytime—some three miles from my home, and now the day was done. A muttering thunderstorm was coming up in the distance. I heard the rumble amongst the hills and saw far off the flit of the lightning flash. I stood against the old farmhouse door, silly little fellow that I was, full of imagination, everything that I had ever heard living before me. Oh, how my heart sank down within me! I did not know the way—three miles! And somehow or other, all the pictures I had ever looked at just came and lived before me. There was the "Pilgrim's Progress." Somewhere along that three miles there was Giant Pope, with his eyes flashing lightnings, biting his nails, waiting for me to come round the corner. There was Apollyon, with fiery dart, ready to spring upon me the moment he should catch sight of me. Foxe's martyrs, I think lay somewhere along those three miles. All the robbers I had ever heard of, and all the murders, and all the ghosts—and there were many ghosts when I was young—they all crowded that three miles. Oh, silly, silly I! How my heart went pit-a-pat, pumping within me! how the knuckles could scarcely keep back the tears that tried to force themselves out at the eyes! And then—oh, joy!—up a little leafy lane there came my father. "Come on, my boy." Bless you, I should like you to have

seen the hero then. I almost wished old Apollyon would peep round the corner, that he might see one who was not a bit afraid of him. I almost wished that Giant Pope would come on, that he might find one more than his match. Oh, how I leaped and crowed, how I grasped that hand, how I looked up into that face, how I joyed in that presence, and when, at last, the great black thunder-clouds gathered and there came the rumbling of the thunder, how good it was to have the long, blue cloak, with its folds about me, to look out and see the flash of the lightning and feel the beat of the rain, and then to think that I had got that hand. What cared I about the way then? What cared I for all the robbers and murderers that ever were—he was there. Ah! dear saint, thou standest this evening, and thou lookest and thou sayest, “My heart sinks down within me, I am so weak, so foolish, and, alas! ten thousand evil things do throng my way. Oh, how they crowd and how they threaten.” Call them all up this morning. Oh, He cometh; would that thou couldst see Him as He cometh. He looketh at thee, He saith, “Come on, My child.” Oh blessed be His name. When little I am beside my glorious Lord then can I defy all my foes. My brother, I want thee to welcome Him, to press up to Him. Holiness is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus always, just that.

And now, if I may linger on two minutes longer, somebody will say to me: “Must not I do anything? For instance, if I am tempted to sin must not I resist?” Well, I would advise thee not. “Well, but does not it say: ‘Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist?’” I thought it did once, but I looked again, and I found before Peter says a word about that, he says: “Humble

yourself, therefore, under the mighty hand of God." Get right in under God's mighty hand, then turn round and say: "Now, devil, I am not afraid of thee a bit." The first thing you have to do before you resist is to run away. That is the way to get the victory over the devil. Run away to Jesus; press up to Him. You know the story of Robert Hall, how that when he was a little lad he had a fiery and passionate temper, and how he just used to lift his heart and say: "Oh, Lamb of God, calm my mind." And you remember how, as he lay on his bed a dying man, racked with anguish, how he would turn after a paroxysm of pain and say to those who stood about his bedside: "I did not murmur, did I?" Oh, the perfect patience of that poor sufferer! My brothers, that is all we have got to do—to run right away. I have thought about that text, and I believe many people do—"your adversary the devil"—as if it were a mean thing, a little thing to flee from him, and that when he comes you should resist him, calling upon your dignity and your manhood. Well, who are you? Just think of a shepherd who should say to his lamb: "Little lamb, good night; I am going home now. Take care of yourself. Mind, do not be so greedy after buttercups and daisies as to forget to keep a sharp look out. The old lion is about, if he comes you know what to do, don't you?" "No," says the lamb. "Butt him!" says the shepherd. Poor little lamb! Ah, I know that lamb well. I have seen that lamb here in church and chapel, all that I have had anything to do with—poor timid soul, afraid to look at a daisy, afraid to nibble a buttercup. Ah, he cometh! See him, he croucheth, he roars, he springs! O, helpless lamb, one stroke of that paw and all is done! Oh, my brother, that is pretty well a picture of how power-

less you and I are against the old enemy. Blessed be His name, my shepherd never saith "Good night." He saith "Little lamb, I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee. But, little lamb, be not so eager after buttercups and daisies, that thou dost forget to keep a sharp look out, and when the old lion cometh, thou knowest what to do, dost thou not." "No," saith the lamb. "Keep close to my side, press up to me, run under the very shadow of my presence, and when thou art at my right hand no harm can befall thee then." Oh, that is it, it is just Jesus, Jesus always, Jesus everywhere, Jesus in everything, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus only. I would have thee forget all the words I have spoken to thee this evening, if thou wilt but take one word away with thee, and if thou wilt take His presence with thee. It is Jesus all the way, Jesus only. "Be perfect," for that is our calling: "Be of good comfort," because it is the dear and blessed Master who comes to do it all.

Mr. Boardman tells us that one day he was passing through a large city, and having an hour to spare, he called upon an old friend, a shot manufacturer. As they were sitting together his friend asked him, "If he would like to have the world at his feet?" Mr. Boardman understood the suggestion that they should go to the top of the shot-tower, and at once fell in with the proposal. Presently he reached a passage in which he saw a stone staircase going winding up in the darkness, and he began to mount the steps. "No," said the friend, "you are going wrong; it is down here." Mr. Boardman stopped and thought there was some mistake. "We are going up to the top of the tower, are we not?" he asked. "Yes," said his friend, "and you must go down here to get there. That is the old way, dark and dusty and full of

cobwebs. But you would find a door near the top that is nailed up now. You would only knock your head and get covered with dust, and then have to come down again. This is the way," and he pointed to two or three steps that went down.

"Going down is a strange way to get up," he thought.

"Now all you have to do is to sit still."

"But I can never get up by sitting still, surely," said Mr. Boardman.

"Trust me," was the reply, "and you will see."

Instantly they began to rise. They were on a lift; and in two minutes they stepped out high above the city, to find the world under their feet.

This is our victory,—coming down to get up: Trusting in Him, and then sitting still with Him. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."



