OVERCOMING OR OVERCOME.

BY A. J. GORDON. Romans 12:2.

Conqueror or conquered; victor or vanquished every one must be. There is no discharge in this warfare and there is no neutrality. Overcome evil, or you will be overcome of evil. You may display a flag of truce, and say, "I do not wish to fight;" but your request will not be heeded. You are in the battle, and overcome or overcome, which shall it be?

1. The secret of being overcome, "Be not overcome of evil." The apostle has just been warning us against wrong states of mind, anger, malice and revenge. These are to be repressed he says, lest we be overcome with evil. The mind is the man himself, and if you are in a bad state of mind, you are most defeated when outwardly most victorious. Let a Christian whose calling it is to resist not evil, get angry and knock a man down, and really he is himself the one who has been knocked down. The victim of his passion may rise to his feet in a minute or two, but if the Christian gets upon his feet within a week, or a month or year, he may count himself fortunate; for the one man has lost his foothold, and the other has lost his character with men, and his communion with God.

It is your own heart that is your greatest foe, O, Christian! If that goes wrong, you are defeated, though outwardly you are the most prosperous and victorious man in the world. Therefore hear the word of the Lord: "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." That is to say, our conduct and character in the world proceed from ourselves as truly as the motion of the watch's hands proceed from the spring which is coiled up within. Temptation cannot hurt us very much from without, unless the heart throws the key out of the window and bids it unlock the doors and come in. Look over your lives and ask how it was that you were overcome with evil at this point and that, and see if it was not the case your treacherous heart opened the doors and invited the enemy to enter.

Jesus Christ was a great teacher on this point. When he saw men all taken up with the business of regulating the externals of life, he exclaimed: "Do you not understand that it is what cometh out of the heart that defileth the man? You may clean the outside of the cup and platter, while within they are full of extortion and excess." As well try to cure a poisoned well by whitewashing the pump through which the water is drawn, as to imagine that one's life can be made right by moral improvement when the heart is unregenerate and unchanged. "Keep your heart with all diligence. Yes: but you cannot do even that much alone. Pray much if you would be safe. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts." Oh wonderful words! "The peace of God shall govern your hearts," the words mean literally. God's holy peace standing as sentinel at the door of every sense; guarding every advance of approach through which temptation might steal in; keeping watch on the tower of hope, until the day dawn and the Lord return to end the battle. This is our confidence and this is our promise. Therefore let us pray daily, "Oh, Lord keep my heart for I cannot keep it for thee—deliver me from the Evil One for I cannot deliver myself?"

Heart-conditions have most to do with our lives. Hence the constant warning of Scripture against such sins as covetousness and worldly lust. If these passions have their way they will determine the life, in spite of all preaching and all practice of a contrary sort. Strong affections determine character.

I was passing the humble cottage of a market gardener some years since, and to my surprise I saw him at work cutting down a
most beautiful and luxuriant elm, which grew just on the edge of his land. I remonstrated at such wanton destruction, and he replied: "Yes, I am sorry to do it, sir; but you see I depend upon my garden for a living. And this great tree has been sending out its roots under my little farm and reaching farther and farther and striking deeper and deeper each year, till now it sucks all the life out of the soil, and leaves nothing for my vegetables; and so I must cut it down, sorry as I am to do so. I must sacrifice a shade tree or give up gardening." What a parable is here!

The love of money gets possession of some Christian men's heart. It roots itself deeper and more deeply every year in the affections; absorbs more and more of the richest life of the heart, till at length it overtops everything—religion, charity, faith, compassion, hope. These become stunted under its shadow. And some day the Saviour passing that way is as grieved as he was over the barren fig-tree, and exclaims sorrowfully: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven." Good has been overcome of evil: one master-passion has subdued and dried up the sweetest graces and holiest charities of the Christian life. This is a most vital matter for consideration. Never in all her history has the church of Christ been so rich as today; nowhere has she ever been so rich as in America. Piles of money mean perils unspeakable to the faith, the humility and unworldliness of Christian life. Look to it every one, whether rich or poor, that ye be not thus overcome and may God give you grace to say: And now the axe is laid at the root of this tree.

Again worldly tastes and inclinations get possession of some Christian. He goes in for fashion and gaiety and pleasure-seeking. Ask him what he is doing, and he will say that he is "making the most of both worlds." But soon the wide spreading tree obtains such swing and development, that it is evident that instead of making the best of both worlds, one world is getting the best of him. Faith, hope and charity wither and die within him, and once more you hear the great alternative repeated: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Now there is no cure but one—repression and uprooting. "Every plant which my Father hath not planted," says Jesus, "shall be rooted up." Therefore let us look well to what is planted. There is an exotic called charity. Jesus brought it with him from heaven when he came. An eminent church historian declares that he has searched in vain among the heathen to find any trace of this attribute—Love—pure, unselfish, love, coming from the heart of God, and going out without requital to the heart of man. No wonder that Paul in preaching it said, "The greatest of these is charity." This is the plant which our heavenly Father planted. Death cannot pluck it up, the grave cannot chill its roots. It came from heaven to be planted in human lives, and it can be carried back to heaven, developed enlarged and ripened. Live in Christ by daily prayer and communion, and this will live in you.

But there is another exotic named selfishness. A weed, a tare shall I call it rather? Ask how it first came to be planted in human hearts, and the reply must be, "an enemy hath done it." It was brought from beneath as the other was from above. It is the root of all evil; for all selfishness is sin and all sin is selfishness. Let alone your heart and it will overspread its entire domain. You need not cultivate it; weeds do not require to be nourished or watered. Allow human nature to have its way and this evil principle will overpower all charity, choke all sympathy, shock the life out of kindness and goodness. Let yourself alone, or be let alone of God, and the good in you will be overcome by evil. God forbid that it should be so with any of us.

2. The secret of overcoming, like the
secret of being overcome, lies wholly within. I give it in the words of Scripture: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." I John 5:4. Human nature is not sufficient of itself. A drowning man may grasp his left hand with his right hand, but after all it is self laying hold of self, and both will go to the bottom. What is wanted, is a stronger hand from above, to draw one out of the floods of great waters. And this is what regeneration is; it is the divine laying hold of the human.

In the story of Peter's attempt at walking on the sea, we have a perfect parable of redemption. He saw his Lord walking on the water, and asked permission to try it himself. The Lord said unto Simon, "Come:" and the presumptuous disciple stepped out upon the waves and started to walk to the Lord. But as the wind began to be boisterous, he found himself sinking, Peter's self-sufficiency, now gives way to self-despair. He cried out, "Lord save me." And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him and said, "Ohi thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?" This is exactly what men are always trying to do; to walk on the water with feet adapted only for the earth; i.e., to do supernatural things with only natural powers; to follow Christ in his divine activity, with only human faculties with which to act. We try it and fail. We get to the end of self and then are saved by Christ.

How beautifully the idea is brought out in the epistle to the Hebrews. "For verily, he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." It is the same Greek word which is used in the story of Peter. "He took hold of the seed of Abraham." He caught our human nature. When it was sinking in the flood of its own perdition, Christ reached out his hand and seized it. His incarnation was a laying hold of our humanity; and our regeneration is a laying hold of his divinity. This is the secret of our rescue. As Peter says: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great promises that by them ye might be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption which was in the world through lust, etc., the flood of perdition, the stream of corruption that was started from Adam's lust and sin in the garden and has been flowing through the world ever since. You are in it; you were sinking beneath it; but by Christ partaking of your nature, you may be lifted out and saved.

"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." Put your finger on this text; hang your confidence upon it as upon a nail fastened in a sure place. Your Adam birth can never save you from the sins of your Adam nature. Only that which is born of God can lift up that which has fallen through sin.

The Apostle John gives us another key of victory over the world. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." This is one of the strange paradoxes of the Gospel which puts faith for action. When one asked Jesus, "Good Master, what shall I do to work the works of God?" He replies: "This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." When the frightened jailer of Philippi said to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." When John asks the secret of victory, he replies, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." Thus we see that faith does all, conquers all, gains all. But you may with good reason, ask me to explain this saying of John. How does my conviction that Jesus is the Christ, make me a conqueror over the world? Can one put faith against fact? Can one down with the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, by simply confronting them with a theological proposition—that of the deity and Messiahship of Jesus Christ? Well?
Put these two texts together for their true explanation of the matter. Christ says: “Be of good cheer, I have overcome.” John says: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith.” That is because faith links us to Christ, and makes us sharers of all that he is and does. The coupling of the car is a very little thing, and it would seem absurd to say that this coupling makes the train go. But it is so, in precisely the same sense that faith overcomes the world. For by linking the cars to the locomotive, the coupling transfers all the strength and speed of the locomotive to the train. So faith makes me victor over the world, by uniting me with Christ who overcame the world, and makes me partaker of his victory.

Oh, this great enemy self, with its horde of unconquerable lusts and passions—how can I get the victory over it? asks the young man. By faith in Christ, we reply, it is written, “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.” Christ pronounced the doom of these foes on his cross, and though they may still war against us, as certainly as Christ lives, he will make an end of them.

“What matters it,” exclaims Martin Luther, though I overcome the Pope, so long as that great pope, self, lords it over me?” But Christ doomed this pope when he died on Calvary. He pronounced his death warrant; “knowing this” says Paul “that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

**THE LORD’S RETURN.**

The following excellent words from the pen of Principal Rainey of Scotland, are worthy of careful reading. We judge that the author may not belong to the Premillennial School, and the emphasis which he puts forth upon the great hope of the church, is therefore all the more significant.

Strong, true and well-balanced are his words. He says:

Probably there is no feature in which the average Christianity of to-day varies more from that of the early Christians, than in the faint impressions, and the faint influence, experienced by most modern Christians in connection with the expectation of the Lord’s return. The difference seems to arise mainly from a secret failure of faith on this point, due to the impressions made by long ages in which Christ has not come. “Where is the promise of his coming? All things continue as they were.”

The expectation of the coming of Christ out of the world of supreme truth and purity, where God is known and served aright, to fulfill all his promises—this is the Church’s and the believer’s great hope. It is set before us in the New Testament as a motive to every duty, as giving weight to every warning, as determining the attitude and character of all Christian life.

In particular, we cannot deal aright with any of the earthly things committed to us, unless we deal with them in the light of Christ’s expected coming. This expectation is to enter into the heart of every believer, and no one is warranted to overlook or make light of it. His coming, his appearing, the revelation of him, the revelation of his glory, the coming of his day, and so forth are pressed on us continually. In a true waiting for the day of Christ is gathered up the right regard to what he did and bore when he came first, and also a right regard to him as he is now, the pledge and the sustainer of the soul’s life; the one and the other are to pass onward to the hope of his appearing.

This may suggest, however, that influences are recognizable, tending to form, in modern Christians, a habit of thought and feeling less favorable to vivid expectation of Christ’s coming. It does not arise so much in connection with individual experience, but is rather an impression drawn from history and from the common life of men. In the days of Paul general history was simply discouraging to spiritual minds. Darkness, corruption and social wrong continued to mark the scene, and there was little to suggest that prolonged effort might gradually work improvement. Rather it seemed that a rapid dispensation of grace, winning its way by supernatural energy, might well lead on to the winding up of the whole scene, sweeping all away before the advent of a new heavens and a new earth. But, for us nineteen hundred years have well-nigh passed. The Christian Church has been confronted all that time with her great task; and, however imperfect her light and her methods have often been, she has set processes going, and