

SAVIOUR'S TEARS OVER THE
SINNER'S LOSS.

BY THE EDITOR.

"And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes." Luke 19: 41, 42.

TWICE and twice only in our Lord's earthly ministry do we read of his weeping; and in neither instance was it because of a personal affliction. The Man of Sorrows borrowed his grief, even as he borrowed his sin from the world which he had come to save. Therein the Son of Man differed from all the sons of men, that while they shed their bitterest tears over their own griefs, he shed his only tears over the griefs of others. He wept at the grave of Lazarus because he stood face to face with the greatest woe of the world, that of death: he wept over Jerusalem because he was contemplating the greatest sin of the world—the rejection of the Son of God. And because this last sorrow is clearly related to our day and destiny, I ask you to consider it this morning.

I. Christ's tears over our forfeited opportunity. "If thou hadst known in this thy day." Do you not remember the singular answer which Jesus gave his disciples when they warned him of the Jew's intention to stone him? "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" he replied. "If a man walk in the day he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world." As though he had said: "My opportunity is sacred and secure. Nothing can harm me while the time allotted me by my Father lasts; but if I let the time slip by unimproved, then I have no assurance of safety. If a man walketh in the night he stumbleth." In another saying of Jesus recorded by John, he expounds this parable about the day, and applies it to himself. "Yet a little while is the Light with you," he says. "Walk in the light while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for

he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have the light believe in the light that ye may be the children of light." You see from this that it was the presence and ministry of Christ that constituted the day of the Jews. For three years and a half he stretched forth his hands unto them with offers of grace. His importunity was their opportunity, open arms was their open door: his shepherd call, "Come unto me" was their salvation chance: "and ye shall find rest to your souls." But because they knew not the time of their visitation, they rejected and put to death the only One who could have brooded them under his wings, and the Roman eagles whom his prophetic eye saw poised above them, ere long swooped down in awful doom upon them and their devoted city.

And because Christ is in the world acting in grace toward men by his Holy Spirit, the present is our day, just as that was Israel's day. "Now is the accepted time," cries the Scripture: and I contend that the teaching of human consciousness harmonizes upon this point with that of the Word. Whence originated that enchanting dream of the Fountain of Youth? And whence the impulse which has led men to make distant voyages over sea and land in hope of discovering this fountain? Faithful Christians and fruitful saints, look forward, not backward: they seek not the fountain but for the ocean, longing for the day when they shall come into the harbor of Jerusalem the Golden. But there are so many that have idled through life's spring-time, without sowing any good seed for eternity, that they are almost frantic over their loss. They long to turn back the wheel of the rolling seasons; they want to unravel the web of life that they may pick up the dropped stitches; they thirst to drink once more of the Fountain of Youth that they may retrieve their squandered opportunity. But have you learned that any one has discovered the Fountain

of Youth? Tell me if you have, and I will bring him scores of men and women who will give their thousands for a drink. No! But here is a Fountain of Life; and here is Jesus standing by and calling: "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." Our life's journey is taking us rapidly past this fountain, and I cannot promise you that there is any second probation; any renewed opportunity of grace for those who have lost their chance here. Our "Now" is the bulb of time from which our Eternity is to blossom; and if it be a "Now" of faith and self-denial, it will bear an eternity of blessed fruition. Our present tense will determine our future state.

But I do not speak of opportunities of grace alone, but of opportunity for service. We are wont to say that man's extremity is God's opportunity. What if we invert the saying, and say reverently that God's extremity is man's opportunity? And such is the day in which we are living. God's affairs have reached a crisis, and the consummation of the ages is upon us. Has not speed quickened a hundred-fold in our century? Let the telegraph and the lightning express answer. And think you that God does not keep up with men? That he alone is willing to move slowly while all the world is making haste? I profess to know something of what is going on in the religious world, and I venture to say that there was never a time since the Christian era dawned, when the chariot of the Lord moved with such speed as now. It moves rapidly because it is getting near the end of its course. Well has a wise man said, 'Opportunity is but another name for the nineteenth century.'

"And about the eleventh hour," i. e., near sunset, says Jesus, the husbandman "went out and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, 'why stand ye here all the day idle?' They say, 'because no man hath hired us.' He said unto them, 'go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right ye shall receive.'" Who were these

eleventh hour workmen? We are accustomed to them as idlers who are so slow in getting around that they only reached the vineyard at the last moment. But this is not said. "No man has hired us" is their story. But now at sundown they are set to work. What a picture of the eventide of the time in which we are living. The Lord is hiring in those who have not before been set to work. Laymen and laywomen, mechanics and ploughmen, converted drunkards and pugilists, Salvation Army lads and lassies, unlettered gospellers and plain Bible readers. We do hear them speak in their own tongue the wonderful Gospel of the Son of God. The church has been slow to employ such, but in the hurry of the final ingathering, the Lord has set them to work. It is because the crisis of the battle is coming on, that God is calling out the recruits.

So my word to you is that of Scripture: "Brethren the time is short." Therefore responsibility presses a hundred pounds to the square inch, where formerly it pressed one. The heart must beat faster for Christ to-day than ever before; the blood must bound quicker. It is now heart-throbs for a perishing world, or it is spiritual apoplexy. The veins and arteries of the church cannot stand the pressure of the stagnant blood of religious inertia much longer. She must do or die. I speak the truth and lie not. Ecclesiastical corpses lie all about us. The caskets in which they repose are lined with satin; they are decorated with solid silver handles and abundant flowers; and like other caskets, they are just large enough for their occupants, with no room for strangers. These churches have died of respectability and been embalmed in self-complacency. If by the grace of God this church is alive, be warned to use your opportunity, or the feet of them that buried thy sisters will be at the door, and will carry thee out. "If thou hadst known." Do you know your opportunity, my brother? Oh, if you would only open your eyes to

see what your Lord sees! You would crowd about him asking, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" For myself, my daily cry to heaven is, O Lord, give what thou wilt, or withhold what thou wilt, but do not suffer me to be blind to my "day," and so people my grave with the haunting spectres of forfeited opportunity.

2. Christ's tears over our forfeited peace. "Oh, that thou hadst known . . . the things that belong to thy peace." "Duty done is the soul's fireside," says Joseph Cook. The quiet rest, the homelike contentment which come from the sense of having been faithful to our opportunity, is beyond all price. "What did you get for your trouble?" asked a companion of George Whitfield, after the latter had risen one night at an inn, to rebuke a profane swearer, against the advice of his friend. "What did you get for your trouble?" "A soft pillow for my head to-night," replied the great preacher. An approving conscience makes the soft pillows known. Those who depend upon the upholstery of luxury and self-indulgence to make them an easy couch, never find it. The self-loving, the worldly, the luxurious, the pampered sons of fashion — thousands of them sleep on hard beds, beds matted with discontent and self-condemnation. Be faithful to the claims of God, and the motions of conscience, if you would be at peace with yourself. How then can we miss the peace which is appointed for us?

By not knowing our duty when we might have known it. I shall meet you again in the life beyond, my brother, and then you will say, "Why did you not tell me?" And I shall reply, "I did tell you." The hearer becomes deadened by constant hearing; his ear-drum is turned into a wall of defence instead of a means of communication; so that having ears, he hears not. You are a Christian, and that means that you are to be a man of prayer, a man of charity, a man of the Cross. It will not do for you to be just as worldly, just as de-

voted to pleasure, and just as covetous as your next door neighbour who makes no claim to be a Christian. If you are, the Lord will say to you, "I never knew you," when the time of reckoning comes. And in the surprise of a sudden waking to your condition, you will say, "Why did you not tell me so?" I did, a hundred times, and you heard it, and yet did not hear it. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life," says Jesus. And when you stand before the judgment-seat, and are sent away into outer darkness, you will say, "Why did you not tell me so?" I did a thousand times, in a thousand sermons, but you would not hear.

I saw a pilgrim journeying through an unknown country, in search of a city, the name whereof is "Peace." And as he traveled on, I saw one come out and warn him saying: "This is the way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death;" and he thanked his informant with a smile, and kept on. A little farther another stopped him and said: "Turn back, turn back, for this is the way whose steps take hold on death," and again he thanked him and said: "Your words are eloquent, and charm me, as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument," and so he journeyed on as before. A hundred times he was thus accosted, and a hundred times he bowed politely and pursued his way. And at last when he came into the land of darkness and despair, he looked around with astonishment and asked, "Why did no one tell me?" And as though from a thousand voices breaking forth all the way along, I heard the reply, "He that being often reproved, and hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be cut off and that without remedy." Not to know when you have been told a multitude of times, — this is the sorest of all condemnations.

By knowing and not doing we may miss the peace which has been provided for us. "To him that knoweth to do good and do-

eth it not, to him it is sin." Photographs are made by means of negatives; and so our wrong-doings are produced by means of our not-doings. Men have invented a distinction between sins, dividing them into "sins of omission" and "sins of commission." But God has made no such fine distinction. "Sin is the transgression of the law," is his definition. What difference is there in his sight, whether when he says, "thou shalt not," I answer, "I will," or when he says "thou shalt," I say "I will not." In either case there is disobedience and by disobedience is condemnation. But you reply, "I have never said, I will not." But you have acted it. And action is the loudest and most emphatic form of utterance. Not to believe is to believe not. Not to obey the Gospel is to disobey it.

What wonder that our Lord should grieve over our forfeiture of peace? To lose our peace is to lose our power; to lose our peace is to lose our privilege of blessing the world. It is a great thing surely to be in harmony with God, to be assured that the quarrel of sin has been settled, and that "being justified by faith we have peace with God." But how great the honor of being peace-makers with men on God's behalf; to carry joy and comfort and hope to a lost world! What wonder that the prospect of losing such an opportunity should draw tears from the Redeemer's eyes. His sigh was but an echo of one that was heard very anciently: "Oh, that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea;" like a river which purifies and sweetens the towns and cities along which it flows, which makes green and fertile all the banks which it waters; and which takes up the great ships upon its bosom and bears them out upon the deep. True picture is this of a Christian reconciled to God, and reconciling men to God — enriching, blessing and beautifying a lost world. What wonder we ask again, that our Lord should sigh over

the possibility of our losing such a peace and all the gracious opportunities of blessing flowing out from it.

3. Christ's tears over our self-inflicted blindness. He said, "but now they are hid from thine eyes." Sight becomes quenched through long disuse. As the eyeless fishes in Mammoth Cave are believed to have had organs of sight originally, and to have lost them by dwelling in perpetual darkness, so our faculty of spiritual discernment may be destroyed through want of exercise. This is one of the most unquestionable facts of human experience. Therefore let us remember that the excuse, "I did not know," will be absolutely worthless at the judgment seat, if it be merely the expression of wilful ignorance. Better be a pagan at the last day, who can say, "I did not know because I could not know" than a Christian who must say, "I did not know because I would not know."

My appeal to you is; know what you may before it is too late. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." To know God is the surest and only way of knowing yourself." In his holiness you discover your sins; in his truth you discover your error; in his commandments you discern your duty. But if you neglect to obey God, you will become more and more insensible of his claims upon you.

How Christ sorrows over blind sinners, whose blindness is self-inflicted! The sublime vision of glory, honor, immortality and eternal life, which is ever before his eyes, is utterly unknown to them, because their eyes are holden of unbelief and disobedience.

My readers let the tears of Jesus fall upon your sightless eyes this morning! Call upon him now, "Lord that I may receive my sight!" Believe on the Son of God: accept him now as your Saviour and Lord, that hereafter you may see him as the "King in his beauty."