When I hear Christians testify that they would be satisfied with the lowest place in heaven if only by the grace of God they are permitted to reach there at all. I reply that their Lord will not be so easily satisfied if they are. He wants them to strive for the highest place, for a seat nearest the throne, and for a crown of the brightest lustre. We must look out that our humility is not indolence with a solemn countenance upon it, the real fact being that we are content with the lowest place in heaven because we have not energy and self-sacrifice enough to make us strive after the highest.

A. J. G.

5. THE THREE ADMONITIONS

Surely I come quickly.—Revelation 22:20.

The startling warning with which the Apocalypse closes is one that resounds through the entire book. From the “Behold he cometh with clouds” in the first chapter to the “Behold I come quickly” in the last, it is the keynote of the entire Revelation and gives solemnity and emphasis to all its exhortations and warnings and hopes. I desire at this time to dwell rather upon the admonitions connected with our Lord’s coming than upon the event itself and to show you what practical duties and attainments are immediately associated with this coming in the book of Revelation.

I. Consecration.

Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments (Revelation 16:15).

You will observe that it is not the soul which we are here warned to be anxious about, but the garments of the soul: which is simply saying that it is our sanctification as well as our salvation with which we should be earnestly occupied—“He that keepeth his garments.” Wearing clothes
is the most serious occupation of a large part of the human race. From the Congo savage clad in dazzling Manchester calico and compassed about with rings of brass to the fashionable belle of New York dressed in the most brilliant silks and satins which Paris can furnish, dress wearing is the chief end and business of innumerable children of men, both Christian and pagan. Therefore Christ struck the sharpest blow He ever dealt at human pride when He said, "Take no thought of what ye shall put on."

But, on the other hand, I remind you from Scripture that there is a clothes-wearing to which it becomes us to be most seriously attentive. Wonderful word is that of the Apostle: "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ?" Not simply the righteousness of our Saviour, not simply the beauty of His holiness or the graces of His character are we to put on as a garment. The Lord Himself is our vesture. Every Christian is not only a Christ-bearer but a Christ-wearer. We are so to enter into Him by communion, to be so endued with His presence, and embued with His Spirit that men shall see Him when they behold us, as they see our garments when they look upon our bodies. It is a sad thing to lose the soul, but is it nothing to lose that exhibition and realization of Christ by which we "show forth the virtues of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light."

What parables of divine things we get from common life. Certain slum sisters in New York are reported to have found a waif with whom they had a singular experience. The little outcast boy had never known the delight of a suit of clean clothes. If he ever possessed such they had probably been pawned from his back by drunken parents. And these angels of mercy brought this lad to their home, washed him and combed his matted hair, and then clothed him with a new suit. When bedtime came they attempted to teach him his first prayer. "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord 'my clothes' to keep," was the response. Then followed teaching on the soul—its value and the importance of its salvation—in order to more intelligent praying. But still the little waif held fast to his original petition, "I pray the Lord my clothes to keep." And who can say that he was not right? Alas, are we not taken up too much with the salvation of our souls and too little occupied with the sanctification of our lives? The careful spiritual discipline by which we become invested with the holiness of Christ: the daily putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man who is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him—this is so supremely important that our daily and constant prayer may well be directed to this end, that so at the last we may "be found in him not having our own righteousness but the righteousness of Christ which is by faith." To our Laodicean age Christ is speaking loudly today upon this point. Saved by grace and justified by faith, we seem to imagine that this is all. Secular lives, worldly fellowships, conformity to the fashion and show of an evil generation—all this is too easily allowed if only in the end our souls may be saved. But above all this worldly living we hear the voice of Jesus Christ saying: "I counsel thee to buy of me white raiment that thou mayest be clothed and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." Ah, yes, the word of Christ plainly translated is: "Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his clothes." And the little lad asked more than he knew when he said, "I pray the Lord my clothes to keep." Oh, Christians, lulled to sleep by worldly fellowships and associations, stupefied by luxury and self-indulgence, answering every appeal to your conscience with "a little sleep, a little
slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," sleep on if you will; but pray as you lie down to sleep, "I pray the Lord 'my clothes' to keep."

II. Recompense.

Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be (Revelation 22:12).

I think there is a tendency among Protestants to deprecate the preaching of rewards for service as though it gave a commercial character to Christianity and made a gain of grace. But nothing could be farther from the doctrine of Scripture. As universally as the Bible teaches us that we are redeemed for naught so does it teach that we are rewarded according to our works. The school of grace is a common school, but it is the greatest possible mistake to conclude that because its tuition is free, therefore all pupils belong to the same class and will graduate with the same degree. And when I hear Christians testify that they would be satisfied with the lowest place in heaven if only by the grace of God they are permitted to reach there at all, I reply that their Lord will not be so easily satisfied if they are. He wants them to strive for the highest place, for a seat nearest the throne, and for a crown of the brightest lustre. We must look out that our humility is not indolence with a solemn countenance upon it, the real face being that we are content with the lowest place in heaven because we have not energy and self-sacrifice enough to make us strive after the highest. And if they say that it is selfish to seek after rewards in the service of Christ, we urge them to try it and they will find that it is self-sacrificing instead of self-seeking. The martyrs spoken of in Hebrews were not selfish who were "tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection"—that first resurrection wherein they should become sharers with Christ in His deathless life. No, the rewards of heaven are valuable as the credentials of our cross-bearing on earth. Christ delights in those who stand ready to suffer with Him now that they may be glorified with Him hereafter. Be a happy Christian here, if that is your principal aim: collect the interest on your spiritual investments every day: cut the coupons from the bonds of the everlasting covenant as fast as they become due and thus realize your hundredfold in this life, according to the promise, in love, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. But the Christian who foregoes all this for Christ's sake is the one that most pleases his Lord. In a word, the future rewards which our coming Saviour has to bestow are most precious for what they indicate concerning our present earthly life. The photographer must have a negative, as he calls it, in order to furnish you with a picture. Now, the earthly cross is the negative from which the heavenly crown is to be made, the suffering and sorrow of the present time determining the glory, honor, and immortality of the life to come. Christ cannot give us the recompense of reward except we have fashioned the counterpart thereof in our patient endurance of the cross for His name's sake. "To give to every man according as his work shall be"—there is the measure of our reward. We are saved by grace. Mix in good works and merit, and grace is no more grace. We are rewarded according to our works. Mix in grace and faith, and reward is no more reward.

We should strive for high rewards, not because it is pleasant for us to attain them, but because it will rejoice our Saviour's heart to bestow them, since they will constitute the crown and credential of our fidelity in His service.
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The century plant which blooms once in a hundred years could not have bloomed if the growth and increase of any single year had been wanting. And the “well done” which Jesus will pronounce upon His faithful servants at the end of the age will be possible only as the result and consummation of all the years of well-doing and cross-bearing in which we served our Master. Therefore, my brethren, see what a practical subject we have in hand.

Rejoice in a free salvation: exult in that doctrine of unmerited grace by which you have been accepted and justified. But remember that only work can grasp reward. Then visit the sick, feed the hungry, bear the burdens of the oppressed, suffer and sacrifice for the poor and preach the Gospel to the perishing, that your Lord when He sits upon the throne of glory may say, “Inasmuch as ye—believed? No! He is not talking about salvation now but service. “Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of those ye did it unto me.” See Jesus our Brother and Leader standing at the right hand of God. The nail-pierced hands which He lifted up in prevailing intercession with God He also stretches out in importunate pleading with us. He pleads for the dark continents for which He died; with their thousand millions of yet unevangelized souls; He pleads for the great shivering hungry multitude in our cities who lack bread and shelter; He pleads for the innumerable company of sin-defiled, heart-broken sufferers with which the world is filled. “Go to them, sympathize with them, suffer for them, minister to them,” He says. And if you, with that mercantile spirit so engrained in human nature, ask, “And what reward shall I have?” He will answer: “They cannot recompense thee: but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.” That is enough for me. I had rather have Christ’s gold than the world’s copper. I had rather wait a thousand years for Christ’s “well done, good and faithful servant,” than to have the immediate felicity of man’s “well done, great and successful servant.”

III. Steadfastness.

Behold I come quickly. Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown (Revelation 3:11-15).

You remember how earnestly the Apostle exhorts us in the Epistle to the Hebrews to “take heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip.” Here is the contrast. Holding fast or letting slip, which shall it be? You have some days of life remaining, you know not how many. Hold fast to them: load them with some blessing for men and some obedience to God before they have gone from you forever,

Hours are golden links, God’s token,
Reaching heaven, one by one.
Seize them lest the chain be broken
Ere thy pilgrimage be done.

Well may the wisdom of the world repeat its maxim in our ears, “Time is money.” To those that know that they have souls to be saved or to be lost it is vastly more than this. Time is eternity in the making. Every man carries his own heaven or hell with him into the other world. The hours of this present life are the ages in embryo of the life to come. The blessedness of heaven is not a hothouse plant suddenly bursting into bloom under the light of the New Jerusalem. Neither in time nor in eternity can one be greater than he is, or happier than he is capable of being. Heaven is the summary of earth: all that you are in faith
and holiness now, all that you do in service and self-denial now, all that you believe in trust and confidence in God now—this summed up at last and relived in the presence of God will constitute your glory and crown of rejoicing. Therefore, our Lord makes His coming possible every day, that He may incite us to use every day as though it were our last, and to fill every day with sterling sacrifice and service. Therefore, spiritual indolence is not only a dreadful sin but a dreadful loss. It robs God of His service and it robs us of our crown.

I know that the best and truest doctrines are likely to be abused. The doctrine of good works has been perverted by the Catholic Church into salvation by penance and merit alone; but so has the doctrine of justification by faith been perverted by Protestants into salvation by conversion and faith alone. Both are extreme views and therefore to be deplored. Saved by grace, indeed! All praise to God that He has chosen to accept us on such gratuitous terms when we had nothing to pay. But there is such a thing as a meager and stinted salvation. Forget it not all you who hear me: you are called to serve as well as to believe, to good works as well as to faith. Every idle hour will be taken out of your wages when the pay day comes: every not-done will be subtracted from your “well-done” when the books are balanced. If you are trying that nineteenth century scheme of making the best of both worlds, be sure that at the end you will find that all you had gained from this has been lost out of that. Therefore, be diligent: toil, pray, watch, preach, give, and go. The time is short: the Lord is at hand: let no man take thy crown. I long to see more ambitious Christians. And when I say ambitious, I use a word that occurs in Scripture several times. “I exhort you brethren that ye be ambitious to be quiet and to do your

own business” (1 Thessalonians 4:11,12). Fitting words considering our high calling! Make your religion a business, not a by-play. Put capital into it instead of seeking only to draw interest out of it: strive for a heavenly crown instead of seeking for earthly comfort. How the Apostle Paul seeks to provoke us to emulation on this aim, by pointing to the combatants for earthly prizes. How they deny themselves and endure hardship to toughen their muscles. “They do it for a corruptible crown,” he adds, “but we for an incorruptible.” Therefore, our diligence should be a hundred times greater than theirs. Alas, is it not too often a hundred times less? You have heard the oft-told tale of the artist who had succeeded after long diplomacy in getting an engagement with the queen to sit for a picture. His fortune was considered assured by this lucky stroke. He made all his preparations, had his room all ready, his tools all adjusted for his work. But, alas, by an unhappy blunder he was out when the queen called. She could not wait, and he missed his chance. “Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”

Our only security is in being always prepared. There is a very striking exhortation in that very ancient Greek document which was recently discovered, called “The Teaching of the Twelve.” It reads thus: “Watch for your life’s sake. Let not your lamps go out nor your loins be ungirt, but be ready, for ye know not the hour in which your Lord cometh. Assemble oft, seeking the things pertaining to your souls, for the whole time of your faith will not avail unless you be perfected in the last time.”

I beseech you, therefore, consider whether you are ready to meet the Lord. No lamps, however elaborate their construction or however burnished and brilliant, will suffice to gain you admittance to the marriage supper unless you
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have oil in them. The life of God in your soul—have you obtained it by believing on His Son? The Holy Spirit in your heart, have you secured the blessing by a prayerful and watchful waiting upon God? Then I beg you do not trifle. When once the Master of the house has risen up and hath shut to the door it will be too late. You have the Gospel. I have spoken it plainly in your ears. You have the promise, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” You have the gift of eternal life within your reach. Then lay hold on eternal life. Let no man take thy crown.