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# DECISION.

BY THE

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ETC.



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# DECISION.

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## CHAPTER I.

### IS THIS BOOK FOR ME?

It has often happened to me that I have fallen in with a person, for whose spiritual state I have felt an interest, and I have longed to speak to him on the highest and most important subject. But either there seemed to be no opportunity to get a word in edge-ways, or prudence told me that it would not be well received, or my fears whispered to me that I had best

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be silent. And so, like the Priest and the Levite in the Parable, I have left my brother or my sister, who perhaps needed help, and “passed by on the other side.”

Where living words are wanting, sometimes a written word supplies their place. Therefore I have written this Book, in the hope that it may act the Samaritan’s part, and be of use to some fellow-traveller on the journey of life; and that God may make it a blessing to any who may chance to read it.

Now, my book is not so much intended for those who are altogether thoughtless and indifferent. Neither is it intended for those who are thoroughly in earnest. I should speak somewhat

differently to these. The persons, whom I am now going especially to address, are those to whom religion is no new thing; who have reached a certain point, and there stand still; who loiter, and hesitate, and waver in their course; and who lack, above everything, that which I am going to write about—DECISION.

It seems to me that the prevailing fault of the present day is want of earnestness and decision—not actual unholiness—not opposition to the truth of God, or contempt for it—but that kind of half-heartedness and indolence, which God will not accept.

Perhaps one or other of the following cases may be yours:—

*First Case.*

You have been brought up, like most, with some amount of religious training in your young days. You have kept up certain religious habits, and certain outward observances, which are customary for Christians. You cling to a "form of godliness," but that is all. The truth has never come home to you with saving power; there has been no real conversion of your heart to God. At times, I dare say, you have felt His nearness. He has Himself seemed to speak to your soul. There has been a little momentary moving of your heart towards Him. You heard perhaps a striking sermon, or some book came very home to you. But the preacher's voice,

which lingered in your ear for a while, soon died away ; or the book was put by, and the truth it told you was forgotten. Any good feeling that was stirred up for the moment soon left you. It was only as the blazing up of a little dry wood, or as "the crackling of thorns under a pot." Your heart is now cold, and your course feeble and undecided.

Ah, is it not so? Well, then, my brother or my sister, this Book is for you. And I do trust that it may, by God's blessing, contain something that may be very useful to you.

### *Second Case.*

Or you may perhaps be one who once seemed to be really in earnest.

You were awakened, and felt a concern for your soul. You saw your need of a Saviour, and fled to Him as your one great refuge. You began to lead a religious life, and your face was set heavenward.

But by some means a change for the worse passed over you. Some false friend misled you, and drew you aside from the right path. Or your circumstances were altered: some sudden prosperity came upon you, and it was more than you could bear; or you left a situation, which had been specially favourable to religious growth, for one where temptation came in your way. And the consequence is, that you are not now as you once were. You have gone back, instead of forward; and you have become unsettled and

undecided in your spiritual course. Your peace and enjoyment have left you, and your language now is that of Job, "Oh, that I were as in months past!" And you are ready to exclaim, in the words of the Christian Poet,

"Where is the blessedness I knew,  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!  
How sweet their memory still!  
But they have left an aching void,  
The world can never fill."

I hope that there may be something here which may meet your case, and may prove a timely blessing to you.

For, thank God, no state is beyond His reach, and no one too great a sinner for Him to reclaim.

*Third Case.*

Or, it may be, I am speaking to one who is a Christian indeed, but a very young and timid Christian. You may be young in years; or, at all events, you are young in grace. You have but lately begun to take an interest in holy things. If, however, you have really given your heart to Christ, and have solemnly surrendered yourself to His happy service, I thank God for you. But there is yet much to be done. You have enlisted yourself as a Christian soldier; and now there is a

struggle to be maintained, a battle to be fought, and a victory to be won.

To *you*, again, there may be a word here, beckoning you on to a decided course, and urging you to be ever taking higher and yet higher steps in the Christian ladder.

Whatever your condition may be at this moment, whether hopeful or alarming, I may truly say, that my heart warms towards you, and my one great desire is to do you good.

You see, then, what my motive is in writing this Book; and you may judge if you are likely to find anything in it to suit your case. I only ask you to believe that I am your friend, and that my great wish is to be useful to

you. Remember, too, that nothing I have written can be of any real use to you without God's blessing. Offer then a silent prayer that He may give you His Holy Spirit, whilst you read these pages.

## CHAPTER II.

### DECISION—WHAT IS MEANT BY IT.

By Religious Decision I mean an earnest and determined purpose to serve God with all your heart, and a resolution to win heaven at any cost. But few Christians are thus decided. We meet with many who are well disposed. They approve of religion, and fall in with many of the ways of God's people. Their leaning is on the side of what is right. If they had their choice, they would prefer being under the guidance of a good clergy-

man, rather than of one who is careless and worldly-minded. They would like to have their lot cast among God-fearing people, and where they would be helped, rather than hindered, on their way to heaven. They have a reverence for the things of God, and a respect for His people. They feel that Christ is the only Saviour, and their hope is in Him alone. But here they stop. There is little real devotedness about them ; little that marks them off from ordinary men ; little that stamps them as Christ's true servants.

Such is, I believe, the state of thousands. And what makes it very sad is, that they are quite content with it; for they see most of those around them much in the same condition.

But is God content, think you, with a service of this kind? Is He satisfied with such poor lagging steps? Is there not something which whispers to us, "There is an onward course, a higher path, which our Lord points out to us, and which we must follow if we would be truly His, the children of His kingdom, the heirs of His inheritance?"

We all know that there are many callings in the world. One is a merchant, another a lawyer, or a soldier, or a tradesman, or a servant, or a day-labourer. These callings stand by us through life. We cling to them to the very last. But there is *one* calling far above all these. It is spoken of in Scripture as a "holy calling," a "heavenly calling," "the high call-

ing of God." Now, we embraced this calling at our baptism, and have since pledged ourselves to follow it. We have engaged ourselves as Christ's Servants. If then we are cold in our Master's service, or undecided in our allegiance to our King, we sorely offend Him. We are like those who, having put their hands to the plough, look back, and thereby forfeit all.

Let us remember, then, whose we are, and that our Lord requires of us an earnest and undivided service. We cannot trifle with Him. The name of Christian will do but little for us. The estimate of our fellow-men will avail us nothing. The question,—the great question, is, What are we in God's sight? Are we living to Him? Are our lives the counterpart of the

Gospel ? In short, are we decided for Christ?

It is sad to think how much more wise in their generation the worldly-minded are than many who are called Christians. They are always bent on increasing their wealth—adding house to house, and field to field—gaining first a subsistence, then a competency, and then actual riches, dignity, and power. See here a man in trade : he turns this way and that way to enlarge his traffic year by year. See there, a man of landed property : he is always on the look-out, watching every opportunity to extend his possessions, and enlarge his estate. Oh, that something of this eagerness, but of a holy and heavenly kind—not an eagerness for riches, or pomp, or station—but for

the acquirement of Christian graces, and for the possession of Christ Himself, might be felt by us! Oh, that something of this holy avarice might fill our bosoms! St. Paul bids us not to be content with a little, but to "covet earnestly the best gifts." And St. Peter, speaking of those who have "escaped the corruption that is in the world," says that we must not stop there, but must press on after higher attainments. "Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness charity."

Let me now help you to examine

yourself, and see how you stand before God; whether there is that Christian Decision about you, which He looks for, and the necessity of which I so earnestly desire to press upon you.

1. As to your *Tastes*. Are they heavenly? Do you love those things which God loves, and hate what He hates? Is prayer your delight, or is it a forced and unwelcome task? Is God's Word dear to you, and "more than your necessary food?" Of course, as we are but fallen creatures, it would be too much to say that any of us can *at all times* enjoy prayer; or that we have *always* a keen appetite for the bread of life. But I would ask, Is prayer *in the main* a comfort, and Holy Scripture welcome, to you?

Are there times when you can say with David, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth after thee; my flesh longeth for thee?" and again, "Oh, how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day." Is holiness the thing you long for, and strive after? Is the bent of your mind heavenward?

2. As to your *Conversation*. Is it Christ-like? It is not to be expected, nor is it desirable, that you should be always speaking on religious subjects. You must needs mix with the world; and there are many things of an earthly nature which may well interest you. To force the subject of religion, and to bring it in at all times,

is unnatural. Again, to have holy words upon your lips, when they have no place in the heart, must be very displeasing to God. But an earnest and decided Christian will have his mind so fixed on heavenly things, that he will be ever ready to turn to them, and they will always be the one theme on which his heart and tongue love to dwell. We know what topics are most welcome to a man of pleasure, and what is uppermost in the mind of one who is greedy of gain. You cannot be long in their company without hearing them speak on their favourite subject in some shape or other. And so we shall surely find, that when the heart is given to God, and the affection set on things above, that person will naturally speak, and de-

light to speak, of those matters which savour of Christ and of His kingdom. “Where our treasure is, there will our heart”—and, consequently, our conversation—“be also.”

3. As to your *Life*. Is it holy? Here, again, in our imperfect state the best of us come far short of what we ought to be. There are sad shortcomings even in the best of us. But are we *following after* holiness, and do we long to attain it? Is it our aim and our desire to be holy, even as God is holy? Is there a consistency in our conduct, which stamps us as God’s children?

We ought to be living near to God, to endeavour in every act to seek His glory, to be anxious to do His

will, and to please Him, in all things. But you may perhaps be saying to yourself, How can I do this? So sinful as I am, how can I ever become holy? Perhaps you feel as St. Paul did, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; for the will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

If, then, God has shown you your sin and your weakness, cast yourself upon Him. Ask Him to give you His

Holy Spirit to take possession of your soul, and make you altogether His. Ask Christ to strengthen you. Cling closely to Him. Let your prayer be, " Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe ;" work a change in me; sanctify me wholly; make me pure within.

The goodness of a Tree is known by the fruit it bears, not by its leaves; and we should be ever bearing fruit unto God. He is but a poor Christian who is content to pass muster before men, or who is merely anxious to ensure his own salvation. We should be laying ourselves out for God's service. We should be "letting our light shine." We should be doing some work for God, or for the good of our brethren. We should be trying, by God's help, to lead a blame-

less, holy, and useful life ; and that so decidedly, that all may see that we are thoroughly in earnest.

Truly the time is very short with all of us. Life's little day has but few hours in it. Oh, let us make the most of them. Let us "live whilst we live." Let us live, not unto ourselves, but unto God; not for the world, but for Christ; not for time, but for eternity. Let us "work the works of Him that sent us, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE NECESSITY OF DECISION.

I SPOKE in my last chapter of some of our various earthly callings. And is there any condition in life in which the need of *Decision* is not felt? Do we not all know that a man must be earnest and decided in his profession, if he would succeed in it?

The *Soldier*, who fights his country's battles, needs Decision. If he is faint-hearted, he will do but little. If he does not show an unshaken trust in his Leader ; or if he wavers

as to whether he shall stand his ground, or desert to the enemy's ranks, he will prove to be but a poor soldier.

A *Physician* again should be a man of Decision. There must be no doubting or wavering as to how he shall act. His patient is in danger. Hesitation may perhaps be fatal. Strong measures must be taken, and that instantly. It is of great importance that he should be clear-sighted, prompt, and determined.

A *Statesman* must be decided, or the affairs of his country will suffer. Having satisfied his mind which is the right course to take, he must go boldly forward. If there is any hesitation in his actions, he will immediately forfeit the confidence of the

public. If he would rise to eminence, his character must be marked by boldness, single-mindedness, and decision.

Or, to take another example, when a Traveller passes through a difficult and unknown country, it is often necessary that he should have a *Guide* to point out the way to him, and to help him in any great emergency. Sometimes his course may lie through a rugged and dangerous mountain-pass, where there is scarcely any path to tread; and perhaps on either side there may be a precipice of many hundred feet, where to take one false step would be fatal. In such cases much depends on the skill of the guide. And circumstances may arise, in which boldness and decision are of immense importance.

And if Decision is needful for those whom I have just been speaking of, much more is it for the Christian. He, of all men, should be decided. The state of his soul is critical. His eternal interests are at stake. He has a heaven to win. He then who loiters or wavers in his course, who hesitates whether to stand still or to go forward, who is wanting in courage, who is careless as to whom he serves, who is disloyal to the Sovereign to whom he has sworn allegiance—such an one can neither be safe nor happy here, nor be fit for a place in the kingdom hereafter.

But if we still doubt as to the necessity of Decision for the Christian, let us look into the Bible and see what is written there. Our Lord, if

you remember, on one occasion put a very severe test to a Young Ruler, who expressed a willingness to become His disciple, "Sell all that thou hast, and come follow me." On another occasion He said, "He that is not with me (altogether with me) is against me;" and again, "He that will come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." St. Paul declares, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press towards the mark." St. James says, "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven of the wind, and tossed: let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." And St. John, in the Book of Revelation,

gives a special warning from his Master to the half-hearted members of the Laodicean Church; “I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

The whole voice of Scripture warns us against indifference and half measures, urging us to an ever-advancing course, and to the decided surrender of our whole selves to God.

## CHAPTER IV.

## INSTANCES OF DECISION.

AT the close of the last chapter I showed you that the word of God declares plainly *the necessity* of Decision. Now, you may naturally ask, Are there any instances of it to be found among the holy men of old, whose lives are given there for us to copy? Certainly there are; but it is difficult to make a selection where these instances are so abundant. We will take one from each of the various parts of Scripture.

Very early in the Bible history we have the example of *Abel*. There can be no doubt about his character. It was no uncertain one. He was decided for God. He was an earnest and devoted servant of the Lord. And it was this earnestness and decision, that made him the object of Cain's hatred, and awakened such intense jealousy in his heart. It was "because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

*Enoch* is another instance. It is true but little is told us about him ; but that little is sufficient at once to show us how nobly and unmistakably his character came out, in the midst of much indifference and ungodliness.

There was much decision in *Abra-*

*ham's character.* God made two great calls upon him ; and he at once, without hesitation, responded to both. The first was to leave the land of his birth, and go to an unknown country at the Lord's bidding. This was an act that required an unusual measure of faith, and much boldness and fixedness of purpose. But the other still more so. It was to put his own child to death, offering him up as a sacrifice to God. In each case he acted with remarkable decision. There was no wavering, no halting, no "conferring with flesh and blood." His course was clear. God pointed out the way, and he felt that he had only to walk in it.

The decision of *Moses* too was very remarkable. He gave up, when

young, the easy life which he might have continued to lead in Pharaoh's palace, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." At God's command he faced the wrath of the king, and perseveringly pleaded the cause of his afflicted brethren. At God's command too he encountered the dangers of the wilderness, and led His people safely through it towards the Promised Land.

*Caleb* and *Joshua* were bright instances of this decision for God; for whilst many of their brethren were faithless and unbelieving, there was no hesitation or shadow of turning about

them. Theirs was a plain, straightforward, fearless course of obedience. And it is written concerning them, that they “followed the Lord wholly.”

*David* again was one who devoted himself heartily and decidedly to the Lord’s service. We know that at one time he fell into grievous sin; but this was a most bitter grief to him. And ever after, having obtained forgiveness, he gave himself up to a holy and devoted life. His determination was, “I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.”

In the history of *Ruth* we see a woman acting with a holy determination under very trying circumstances. Whilst her sister Orpah showed that worldly motives were too

strong for her, and after a little hesitation deliberately preferred to take up her abode in the heathen land of Moab, Ruth chose the better part, and at once cast in her lot with her pious mother-in-law and the people of God.

How much true decision did *Daniel* and his *Three Companions* show, when they were captives in Babylon! They made a bold and determined stand for God, and were not ashamed to confess Him in a land of strangers. They showed themselves to be men of prayer, by fearlessly obeying the Lord, when most men would have shrunk from doing so from fear of the consequences.

But we shall perhaps find the brightest instances of decision in the

*New Testament.* The Apostles and early Christians showed the utmost boldness and determination in serving their Lord. There could be no doubt whose servants they were, and in whose cause their hearts were interested. They were ready to put aside everything which stood in the way of their obedience to Christ; and when death stared them in the face, they still were faithful. The flame of holy love burnt brightly in their souls, and their desire was to follow their Master whithersoever He led them.

Look at *St. Paul*. How zealously he worked for Christ, “in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.” Thrice was he beaten with rods, once stoned, thrice shipwrecked, in

journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his countrymen, by the heathen, in the city, in the wilderness, on the sea. See how patiently he suffered for Christ! His was a life of weariness, and painfulness, and watchings, hunger, thirst, fastings, cold, nakedness. See how anxiously concerned he was about his own salvation, and how alarmed “lest he himself should be a castaway!” And then at length, see him quite ready to die for his Master’s sake.

We have sometimes watched a ship entering the harbour with masts sprung, sails torn, seams yawning, bulwarks stove in; bearing all the marks of having battled with storms, and of having encountered many a peril. On

the deck is a crew of worn and weather-beaten men, rejoicing that they have reached the port in safety. Such was the plight in which many believers of old reached the haven of rest. They met with dangers, and encountered difficulties. But if their course was toilsome, their end was happy. It was their joy to labour and suffer for their Lord's sake, and they are now sharing His kingdom and His glory.

Here were men willing to risk all, that they might win the crown. Life with them was no holiday : it was a race, a struggle, a battle, to the very end.

And are there any such in the present day? Yes, I believe there are; but they are rare. Most Christians

are content with very small attainments. They take for themselves a low level, and never rise above it. Their light does not shine before men, and God is not glorified. And the consequence is, that we seldom see that holy boldness and joyousness about them—that soaring above the world—that longing to be with their Lord—which we so much admire in the first Christians.

It has been said, that the Church of Christ now is full of dim tapers, not of bright and shining stars. Is it any wonder then, that so few can use the language of confidence and assurance in speaking of their own state ; or that the death-beds of modern Christians are so little brightened with that holy hope, which shed its light

on the closing hours of the early believers?

How is this? Were the Christians of old of a different nature from ourselves? No, they were weak as we are, tempted as we are, living in the midst of an unbelieving world, as we are. By the grace of God they were what they were; and that same grace is offered to us, to make us all that God would have us to be. Thank God, there are here and there true, and faithful, and decided Christians to be found now, adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour, living holy and devoted lives, and ready to leave this world with peaceful and happy submission to the will of God.

And will not you, my dear brother

or sister, “follow them who thus through faith and patience have inherited the promises?” Will you not join their glorious ranks, fighting the same fight of faith, and laying hold of the same eternal life, which they have attained? When you read of such Christians in days gone by, or when you meet with such now, do you not feel how much you yourself lack of their energy and earnestness? Do you not desire that the same all-powerful grace may enable you from this time to be faithful also?

May God work in your heart by His Holy Spirit! And may the love of the Saviour constrain you to be not only almost, but altogether, such as they were!

## CHAPTER V.

### HINDRANCES TO DECISION.

It is easy enough to show the reasonableness and need of decision. But it is not so easy to persuade you forthwith to quit the path which you have so long been content to follow, and to enter upon a decidedly religious course. I well know how many impediments there are in the way, how many hindrances that meet us at every step.

Let us inquire what some of those impediments are. What is it that

hinders us from giving our whole hearts to Christ?

1. *Sin* is the chief hindrance. What! you will perhaps say, Surely I am not living a sinful life. I am not conscious of any known act of wickedness. No; I can quite believe that you would shrink back with horror from anything like outward or open sin. You would not wilfully and deliberately commit any known transgression; nor would you choose for your companions those who are the enemies of God. But there is such a thing as *secret sin*, which it is possible for a person to allow, almost without being conscious of it.

You may be one who wishes to be religious, not to be *thought* so

merely, but to *be* so. You are in the habit of reading your Bible. You pray. You make a practice perhaps of attending God's house, and feel some degree of pleasure in being there. You do not shun religious conversation, but even court it. And yet you are making no growth in grace. Your constant complaint is, that you do not get on ; that your prayers are hindered ; that the word of God is not so sweet to you as it is to many. You are for ever mourning over the coldness and deadness of your heart, your want of faith and love.

And what is the cause ? Those who are living in the closest intercourse with you may detect nothing wrong. The evil may be hidden : it may be too deep for any one to dis-

cover its hiding-place. And yet there it is, checking and hindering your onward course.

It has sometimes happened, that when a large ship has been on the point of being launched into the sea; when all has been ready, and the last wedge has been moved away by the blow of the hammer, the lookers-on have been surprised to see the vessel remain stationary, instead of gliding into the water. At once every eye seeks for the unknown cause; and at length a mere pebble is discovered under the keel, which, small as it is, was quite enough to stop the motion of that noble ship.

Just so it may be with you. All may seem to be right, all blameless as regards your outer life. And yet,

all the while, there may be some darling sin, some bosom sin, which no eye has ever reached but the all-seeing eye of God ; some hidden ulcer festering below the surface. It may be a little sin, too small for the world to take any note of, but still a sin in God's sight. It may be some habit of deceit or falsehood, or some practice bordering upon dishonesty, or some wrong desire not resisted ; in short, some forbidden thing encouraged and cherished, rather than at once cast out. Some “ Babylonish garment ” laid up in the tent, which has caused the curse to rest upon it.

Ah, here is the plague-spot, the poison that infects the whole man. And as truly as it is there, as long as it keeps its place ever in a corner

of the heart, your onward course is checked, and there can be no launching out of the soul towards God, no growth in grace, no holiness, no happiness.

Now, if you would become a true and decided Christian, be honest with yourself. Look well into your own heart, and if you discover any wound there, be not afraid to probe it to the very quick ; for it is better to suffer pain than to go on offending God, and endangering your soul. However dear your sin may be to you, and however much it may cost you to part with it—though it be like the cutting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right eye—it must be done, and that at once, or you will forfeit your peace now and heaven

hereafter. “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

Suppose you were running a race, what hope could you have of winning the prize if you had heavy clothes encumbering you, or anything else that hindered you from exercising your limbs? So is it in the Christian race. You must “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset you;” for until this is done, you cannot “run with patience the race that is set before you.”

2. The *World* is another hindrance in the way of a decided service of Christ. Its calls are so pressing, and its enticements so strong, that we are oftentimes kept back when we feel that we ought to be going forward.

You have a strong conviction perhaps that God ought to be served, and that it must be your highest happiness to serve Him. You feel your debt of gratitude to Christ, and your heart is often stirred with love—with real love—towards Him. But still you hesitate to surrender yourself to His blessed service. Your soul is now and then aroused for a moment, and you are ready to exclaim, “Christ shall be mine; He shall have my hearty and undivided service.” But it frequently happens that this feeling does not last. It grows fainter and fainter, and at length fairly dies out. And then the world comes in, and presses its claims more strongly than ever.

So matters go on. Sometimes

God's voice arrests your ear, and at other times the world's call is more attractive. The Holy Spirit draws you one way, and the world forcibly drags you the other. You are in a strait betwixt two ; you long to enjoy the world, and yet you dare not lose your hope of heaven. Like Lot's wife, you halt by the way, unwilling to leave once and for ever the city of destruction. Like Israel in the wilderness, whilst your face is set towards the Promised Land, you are for ever sighing after the flesh-pots of Egypt. You cannot bring yourself to break off your friendship with the world. You love it too well to put it away, and thus you risk the loss of God's friendship. Instead of pressing forward in the Divine life, you

are constantly halting, and wavering, and doubting whom you will serve — God or the world. Ah, and you have often tried to combine the service of both ; but it cannot be, for one or the other must have our whole hearts.

3. Another hindrance in the way of a decidedly religious life is the feeling of *Shame*. Strange that we should ever be ashamed of our high calling as Christ's people ! The man of the world is not ashamed of his pedigree, or of his high standing among men. The lawyer is not ashamed of his profession, or the servant of his master, or the Englishman of his country. The child does not blush to acknowledge his father. But we are too often shy of being branded

as Christ's followers. A feeling steals over us like that of St. Peter when taunted with being one of the Saviour's disciples ; and we also are ready to exclaim, "I know not the man."

But surely it ought not to be so. We should rather glory in our high rank, as "kings and priests unto God," in our pedigree, as "the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." We should be proud of being the servants of Christ, of having Him for our Master ; and such a Master too ! so full of love and tenderness !

The world has a religion of its own, which it is quite willing to tolerate. It pares the Christian down, takes from him all his warmth and earnestness, and then lets him pass. But the Christian of the Gospel,

formed according to the Bible mould, is counted as an enthusiast and a madman. Such Christianity is folly in the world's eyes, and its disciples are quite sure to be scorned and spoken against.

My Friend, if you are a true disciple of Christ, and are faithful to your Lord ; if you are trying to lead a devoted life ; you must and will encounter opposition from those who love Him not. Be prepared for this. Be not surprised when it comes. And instead of shrinking back, bear it patiently, meekly, joyfully. "Blessed are ye (said our Lord) when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your re-

ward in heaven." Think what a noble cause is yours. Remember too that your Lord Himself was persecuted ; and if the Master suffered, shall the servant expect to escape ?

Let not the feeling of shame keep you from being really in earnest. Make up your mind to lose caste among your worldly friends and companions ; for better is it to forfeit their good opinion, than to lose the favour of God, and the happiness of His service.

4. There is yet one more hindrance that I will mention, namely, *Indolence*. We can without much trouble serve God *a little*. It is easy in these days to make a certain religious profession. It is easy to go far enough to satisfy

the requirements of men. But this is not the discipleship that Christ demands of us. "My son, give me thy heart," is His claim, and He will be satisfied with nothing less. He calls upon us to be ready to exercise self-denial, and to follow Him through good report and evil report. He requires us not merely to swim with the stream as it flows smoothly along, but to be willing to meet the tide when it sets in against us, to breast the opposing wave, to fight the good fight, and to be faithful even unto death.

Whenever a love of ease creeps over you, resist it. It must be overcome, if you would win heaven. Else what is the meaning of such passages as these—"Strive (or agonize) to enter in at the strait gate;" "*Work out*

you own salvation with *fear and trembling* ;” “ Woe to them that are *at ease* in Zion ;” “ The kingdom of heaven suffereth *violence*, and the *violent* take it by force ”—that is, the earnest are they that win it. The Soldier, who would gain the battle, must “ *endure hardness*.” The Wrestler, who would earn the prize, must “ *strive*,” and that “ *lawfully*.” The Husbandman, who would reap the fruit, must be one “ *that laboureth*.”

To shake off our bad habits, which have perhaps become a second nature to us; to tear up by the root some deeply-embedded sin; to give up the world that is dear to us; to believe in an unseen Saviour; and to live a life of faith, “ *as seeing Him that is invisible* ”—this does indeed require

an effort, a vigorous effort, a sustained, and often repeated effort.

Perhaps you shrink from the idea of leading a stricter life than you have been accustomed to. Perhaps the thought of giving up certain amusements, certain pleasures, certain companions, alarms you. And the prospect of taking a new line, and one that your worldly friends will not approve of, is something that you are not quite prepared for. But remember, such a course is what your Lord positively requires of you ; and if by becoming religious you therefore lose one class of joys, and one source of happiness, you enter upon others which are ten-fold more real and more lasting.

Take leave then of that soft and easy life, which most people are lead-

ing. If heaven is your aim, O seek it with all your heart. Let your motto be, "Onward, upward, heavenward!" Ask God to give you the zeal and earnestness which He gave to His servants of old. Never flag or grow weary, till the battle is fought out, and the victory won. "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself, as he that putteth it off."

Some people excuse themselves by saying, "It is of no use to try, unless the Holy Spirit helps me." True ; but if you make a believing and prayerful effort, the Holy Spirit *will* help you. You remember reading of the man with the withered or paralysed hand, whom our Lord healed. The Saviour said to him, "Stretch forth thine hand." How could he do this, for it

hung powerless by his side? But he made an effort to obey Christ, and *in the effort* power was given him. So will it be with you. And be assured, your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.

Yes, an effort must be made—an earnest, eager, hearty effort; or rather a succession of efforts; else we shall never surmount our difficulties, and make much advance on the way to heaven.

I have now told you, my dear Christian reader, what your *Hindrances* are. Look them fairly in the face, and with God's help struggle manfully against them. You are weak, utterly and hopelessly weak, in yourself; but there is abundant power in Him.

He can bear you up. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles: they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

It is well to know your difficulties. And it is well also to know where your strength lies. It is well if you have learnt this lesson; "When I am weak, then am I strong." When I feel my weakness, I look up for strength.

## CHAPTER VI.

## RELIGIOUS GROWTH.

RELIGION is a plant of God's own planting. It does not spring up in us naturally, but the first beginnings of it must come from above, and God must support and nurture it by His almighty grace. "He that hath begun a good work in you (saith the Apostle) will perform it until the day of Christ." He is "the Author and Finisher of our faith," the Beginner and the Completer of every work of grace.

Now, there can be no religious

*Decision without Growth.* It may be a rapid growth, or it may be gradual ; but still, where there is a new life, there will be *Growth*.

The Christian is often compared in Scripture to *a Tree* ; not to a dwarfed and stunted tree, but to a *growing Tree*. David says, in Psalm xcii., “The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree ; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.” And in Hosea xiv., the Lord says, “I will be as the dew unto Israel : he shall *grow* as the lily : his branches shall spread as the olive-tree.”

He is also compared to a *sacred Building*, which rises higher and higher, till it is completed. St. Paul says, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, “Ye are built upon the apostles and

prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together *groweth* into an holy temple in the Lord."

If we see a Building begun, we expect to see it increasing in size until it is completed. And if not—if it remains unfinished and imperfect—we conclude that something is wrong; either the Building is unsound, or the Builder has failed.

And so will it ever be with the Christian. Where there is spiritual life, there will be growth. He will rise higher and higher ; he will grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have said that this growth is sometimes *rapid*. A person may be

suddenly awakened. He may start up, as one who has been long slumbering, and may at once set his face determinedly towards heaven. He may run vigorously in the Christian race, outstripping some who started for the prize before him.

But even in this case will there not be *steps* in his course? Will he not advance from one degree to another? If he is really a child of God, his faith will grow, his love will expand, his humility will increase, his submission to God's will will become more and more decided.

But usually the Christian's growth is more *gradual*. As it is with nature, so it is with grace. Not only does almost everything in nature grow, but its growth is *gradual*. Nature seldom

moves abruptly and by starts, but quietly and surely.

For instance, *the Dawn of day* does not burst forth with a flash of light. Our eyes are not dazzled by a sudden blaze ; but the sky brightens by degrees, and the early streaks of morning gradually spread over a waking world.

In spring, the *Trees* do not come into full leaf, nor the *Flowers* into perfect beauty, all at once. The *Corn* rises up by degrees ; “first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.” The *Seasons* advance with a steady march, by slow and measured steps.

The same too with our *Bodies*. The little child outgrows its narrow cradle. Its lisping tongue after a while speaks

plainly. The feeble arms, which can scarce clasp a mother's neck, in time grow strong enough for labour.

Our *Minds* also grow. They expand like a flower-bed ; they get stronger year by year, until we arrive at manhood.

And so it is with our *Spiritual Life*. If God's work has been begun within us—if we have been born again from above—we must not suppose that all is completed at once. No ; we are, first of all, “babes in Christ;” we are young in grace. And often it is long before we attain to “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

Ask yourself, “Am I growing ? Am I steadily advancing ? Am I becoming day by day more decided for Christ?”

If so, you may well rejoice and be thankful. But if not, then have you cause indeed to be alarmed. How sad that you should be standing still, instead of pressing on ! How sad that when you look back a year or so, it seems as if you have scarcely made a step forward, but are where you were, or even have gone back in your Christian journey !

In this case no time is to be lost. Go and humble yourself before God. Ask Him to revive His work in you, to pour down the shower of His grace upon you, to stir you up by His Holy Spirit, so that you may live and grow in His sight.

But perhaps you may be one who needs encouragement. You may be really growing, but you may yourself

be dissatisfied with your advance. Then let what I have said in this chapter encourage you. You see others apparently hastening on with quicker strides than yourself. But it is he who “runs with *patience*” that wins the prize. The Sapling that grows the quickest and tallest seldom becomes the giant of the forest. Jonah’s gourd “came up in a night,” but also “perished in a night.” The noblest buildings in our land were not run up in a few months, but took years for their completion. And it rarely happens that that man is the soundest and most genuine Christian, who a few weeks ago was living in sin, and now makes a high profession of attachment to Christ.

We cannot be too earnest, or too

decided. But let not our lips and our feelings outstrip our hearts and lives. “As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him, *rooted and built up in Him*, and *established in the faith*.” “Then shall we know, if we *follow on* to know the Lord.”

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE ADVANTAGES OF DECISION.

I HAVE said that it is not easy to give to God a hearty and decided service ; and I have pointed out to you some of the *Hindrances* which lie in your way. But though, on the one hand, your course may be difficult, and there may be much to hinder you ; on the other hand, the blessings and advantages of such a course are great indeed.

You will thus be *honouring God* ; for He would have His people heartily devoted to Him. If our Queen were

to require us to show our allegiance to her, and we were to give it grudgingly and with a divided heart, would she not doubt our loyalty ? Or if we had a Friend, who had done much for us, and our conduct towards him was cold and time-serving, would he not have reason to question our friendship altogether ? And has not our heavenly King a claim upon our best services ? Is there not One who loves us better than our dearest friend, and who asks us to love Him in return ? It is when Christ sees us thoroughly in earnest, self-denying, and faithful, counting His service our highest joy, and doing His will in all things—when our whole hearts, our warmest affections, and our best strength, are given to Him—then “ He rejoices over us as a bridegroom

rejoiceth over his bride :" " He sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied."

A decided course too is, in one sense, the *easiest* course. An undecided Christian is always in doubt how to act. He is ever seeing difficulties, and exclaiming, " There is a lion in the way!" He is afraid of going too far for the world's approval, and not far enough for God's. He is trying to " serve two masters," and our Lord tells us that this is impossible.

But when we have once surrendered our entire hearts to Christ—when the bold step has been taken, and we have had courage to break off our alliance with the world and with sin, and to acknowledge Him as our only Lord and Master—from that moment many

of our difficulties cease. Then our course is plain; there are no turnings in it. The way is narrow, and the hill perhaps somewhat steep, but the path is clearly marked out, and no earnest seeker can fail to find it.

And further, a decided course is the only *safe and happy* course. Who is the person who feels day by day that God is his Father and his Friend, and can look up to Him with childlike love and confidence? Who is it that enjoys a bright hope, a humble assurance, that all is well with him for time and for eternity? Who is it that can accept prosperity as from the hand of One who loves him; and can bear affliction with resignation, and even with cheerfulness? Who is it that can look upon death without fear,

and welcome it as the admission gate into his Lord's presence? Who, but the devoted, decided, established Christian?

The undecided Christian is of all men the most miserable. The world does not give him happiness; it cannot, for he knows its emptiness. He cannot sin without remorse, for in so doing his conscience feels too keen a pang. A thoroughly worldly man is in a certain measure happy. The present life has many charms for him, and he troubles himself not about a future life. But it is not so with the Christian who knows and feels the importance of heavenly things, but seeks them with a *divided* heart.

No, my dear friend, the only way of peace is the way of holiness. True

happiness can only be found in a hearty, earnest, loving surrender of ourselves to God.

May He give you grace, without a moment's delay, to press into His kingdom; for "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation!" If God is indeed calling you, beware of refusing Him. If He has been speaking to you in these pages, and has touched your heart by His grace, O do not hesitate, but yield yourself unto Him at once. While He may be found, seek Him. While He is near, call upon Him. Don't talk of being more in earnest tomorrow. Tomorrow may never come. *Tomorrow* is the fool's hope: *today* is the wise man's maxim. The time is short; the prize is great; and the way, thank God, is open to you.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## MEANS OF PROMOTING DECISION.

How can we become decided Christians? One who has hitherto served Christ with a divided heart, and has not risen above the level of most professing Christians, cannot be a devoted follower of Christ without a great change being wrought in him. He must become indeed a very altered man. It is in fact living a new life, serving a new Master, and travelling by a new road. How can we do this? Thank God, the power will be

given us. He will not withhold the help we need.

1. *Prayer* is a great and important means of helping us on our way.

Hitherto, I daresay you have said your prayers, and that regularly. Perhaps you never missed, morning and evening, to kneel down for five or ten minutes, and repeat something to God on your knees. Had you neglected doing this, you would have felt you had left an important business of the day undone.

But what did this amount to? It was but a poor, cold service. There was little or no life in it. Your lips spoke, but not your heart. Do you not feel that Prayer has been a mere formal offering to God, instead of a

real loving approach to Him? It has been more of a task to be gone through, than a delightful service of the heart.

But now I hope you will begin really to pray, to pour out your soul before God, to confess your sins to Him, to entreat His pardon, and to tell Him of all your wants which day by day crowd in afresh upon you.

Come to God as to a *Friend* who loves you, and a *Father* who cares for you. Spread your case before Him. Tell Him not merely of your great wants and your great sins, but tell Him of every need you have, and of everything you have done amiss.

Make Him your *Counsellor* too. Ask Him to guide you in every step you take; and especially to direct

you as to where He would have you go, and how He would have you act.

Apply to Him also as your *Teacher*. You have more need to learn than you fancy; and, as you get on, the more you will discover your ignorance. But God will teach you by His Holy Spirit; and we are assured that this Holy Spirit will be bestowed on every one who desires the gift, and earnestly seeks for it. Hear the Saviour's gracious promise—"If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask it." Say to Him, "What I know not, teach Thou me."

If thus you come to God, Prayer

will soon become quite a new thing to you, and He will pour out His gifts upon you freely and without stint.

A real Christian *cannot but* pray. Prayer is the very life of a new-born soul. He has a thousand wants, and he cannot keep them to himself. He feels that he is all emptiness, and that God is all fulness. He knows that he is poor and needy, but that his heavenly Father can bestow upon him every gift that his soul requires. And under a feeling of sinfulness, and weakness, and misery, he is constantly looking upwards for help and grace. Yes, he prays, not merely because he has been taught to offer up prayer, but because he positively feels that he cannot live without having intercourse

with his heavenly Father, without speaking to Christ his almighty Friend and Helper.

Pray more, and then you will grow more. Go oftener to the throne of grace, and you will find larger blessings coming down upon you. And be very strict in your prayers, wrestling, as it were, with God, and saying, "I will not let thee go, except thou help me."

I would advise you not to be content with two stated seasons for prayer during each day. A *mid-day* prayer is of great value, if it is only to ask God to guide and keep you, and to bless you with the comfort of His abiding presence.

But does not the Apostle bid us "pray without ceasing." Certainly

He does; but still we should have our fixed hours for Prayer. By the expression, "without ceasing," He does not mean that we should be all day long upon our knees: but what He does mean is that we should be always in a prayerful spirit, ready at all times to look up to God, and speak to Him.

I would strongly recommend the use of *Ejulatory Prayer*. The habit (for it is a habit that may be acquired) of darting up to heaven little short sentences, to express now and then our wants and feelings, you will find very serviceable. Sentences of this kind for instance, "O God, be with me;" "Help me in what I am doing;" "O Lord, strengthen me," &c. By offering from time to time short broken petitions like these we keep up

our intercourse with God, and call Him to our side. It is like constantly sending up little messengers to heaven; and they will come back to you laden with blessings.

If we desire to sustain and increase the spiritual life of our souls, to walk with God, and to enjoy much of His presence, we shall find that this can only be done by holding much communion with Him in prayer, and by drawing near to Him constantly during each day.

Another great help will be *the Reading of God's Word*. Hitherto, I have no doubt, you have been accustomed occasionally to read your Bible; and perhaps daily, and with some regularity. But how profitless

is the Bible-reading of many! They read their Scripture portion as they would take their meal; but, alas! not with the same appetite, or with the same anxious expectation of being nourished thereby. I want you now to take up your Bible in a different spirit. Let it be your close companion. Ask God to make you love the Book which He has given you; and whenever you open it, bear in mind that it is not the word of man, but of God. Try and feel that He has some message in it for you—a message full of mercy and love, if you have only a heart to receive it.

Read the Bible *devotionally* and *prayerfully*, asking God to teach you, by His Holy Spirit, and to make it a living word to you. Read it *devoutly*.

Holy Scripture (says a Christian writer) is not a science of the intellect, but of the heart. He who would understand the Bible must revere the Bible, and love the Bible. He must not treat it as a common book; he must regard it with holy awe; he must read it as though God were speaking to him; he must pray over it. What God said to Moses, He seems to say to us as we open our Bibles; “Take off thy shoes from off thy feet; the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” Every page of that Book is as the burning bush: God is there.

I would specially counsel you to begin each day with Prayer and the Reading of Holy Scripture. Thus you will get the start of the world, and you will be beforehand with Satan.

You will also be giving to God your earliest, your best, and your freshest thoughts.

Let nothing interfere with this morning exercise of devotion. Let nothing tempt you to curtail it. You may sometimes be unusually busy; you may have a work to do that requires your early attention; or there may be some expedition of pleasure, which you are anxious not to miss. But never hurry over your Prayers, or your Scripture-reading, on that account; else you will be robbing God of His due, and your soul will most assuredly suffer loss:

Do not suppose that I am urging you to duties which are too hard for you, or that God lays upon His servants burdens too heavy for them to

bear. He is not a hard Master. No, He is a most kind and loving Master. The yoke He requires His people to submit to will never gall them: the burden He bids them bear is not burdensome. But then He is a jealous God, and will have our best and heartiest service.

*Religious books*, too, will be of great service to you. They will give you many useful hints, and help you through many difficulties. And they will also stir up your poor sluggish heart, when it is inclined to flag and to grow weary. But never let any book, however good, take the place of God's Book. That is all gold, whilst other books are of an inferior metal. Our books should be chosen with much

care; for some of them will only mislead you, and teach you a spurious kind of religion. A really good book however is like a religious friend; it is almost invaluable.

And this leads me to speak of the immense importance of *Religious Companionship*. If you are wishing to become a decided Christian, choose at once the friendship of some one who will encourage you on your newly-chosen way. A Christian friend and brother will be an amazing help to you; for “as iron sharpeneth iron, so sharpeneth a man the countenance of his friend.” His example will be good for you. His influence will act powerfully upon you. His conversation will quicken you. And, above

all, his support will encourage and strengthen you. "Two are better than one;" and God intends that we should be helpmates to one another on the journey of life.

Whilst then we have a kindly feeling towards all, and are careful not to indulge in anything like a morose and exclusive spirit, let us choose the companionship of those who, like ourselves, are bent on "seeking first the kingdom of God."

But important as Prayer, Bible-reading, and Religious Companionship are, you must be *doing something* for Christ, or your religious feelings will be very apt to evaporate. There must be *Christian actions*, as well as *Christian words* and *Christian feel-*

*ings.* Try and be useful. Try and serve God in your day and generation. You have lived perhaps many years to little purpose. Aye, and it may be you have done many things to the injury of true religion. Endeavour now to do something, be it ever so little, for Christ and His Church. There is some work or other to which God calls us all. We have each our place to fill, and our work to do. One star may differ from another star in size, or in degree of brightness. One member of the body may differ from another in form or strength. But the least star has its place and power: the least member its work and fitness. “As every man hath received the gift, even so let him minister the same one to another.”

None are too mean in God's sight to be useful: none are so low but they may help to lift up others. Every one has an influence for good or ill. He may either be a blight or a blessing.

Ask your clergyman what useful work you can engage in, and he will doubtless point out some way in which you may employ yourself for God's glory and the good of your fellow-creatures. This will be a healthy exercise of your faith and love. And this will teach you many a lesson of humility and self-denial.

But I have more to say on these subjects, which I shall reserve for the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IX.

### FURTHER MEANS OF PROMOTING DECISION.

I SPOKE in my last chapter of the private helps and means of grace which are offered to us. But there are others of a more public nature.

*Church-membership* is one of these. It is good to feel that we are not fighting the battle, each one of us alone and by himself ; but that we are “members one of another,” and that we belong to a great spiritual

body, of which Christ is the Head and Centre. This is a very cheering thought; and the consciousness that others are fighting the selfsame battle, running the same Christian race, and journeying on the same road, as ourselves, will often be a great strength and encouragement to us.

But besides this great and universal brotherhood, we are knit together still more closely as members of a particular Church. As a member of the Church of England, you should feel that she is your Mother, under whose sheltering care you have been brought up; and you should learn to value the privilege of being one of her children.

Be not content with mere outward membership, but endeavour to be a hearty, earnest, living Churchman.

You have hitherto, it may be, been bound rather loosely to your Church. You have belonged to her, you know not why, but chiefly because you happen to have been brought up in her communion. Henceforth let your allegiance to her be more true, your attachment more warm. Take an interest in all that concerns her. Let the welfare of your Church be very near your heart. And whilst you feel the utmost charity and forbearance towards those who belong to other communions, be thankful to God that you have so safe a guide, and so loving a protector, as the Church of England.

The *Public Worship* of God may be, and ought to be, very helpful to your religious growth and welfare. To the

spiritual worshipper it will be so. And if this has not been your character hitherto, I hope it will be so now.

Oftentimes, I dare say, God's worship has been a weariness to you, and His Sabbaths dull and dreary days. But if a more earnest spirit is now yours, and if you are pressing onward with new zeal, you will feel that God's house is indeed a house of prayer; and your happiest seasons will be those which you spend there. You will love to draw near to Him with your brethren. You will exclaim with David, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord;" "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand." The prayers, which were once the mere offering of your lips, will now come from your

heart. That which was only a mere form to you will become a reality. And the words uttered by God's minister will be felt to be a message from God unto you.

Come to church in a humble, earnest, prayerful spirit, looking up to God for His blessing, and I feel sure that you will find Him ready to open the windows of heaven and pour down upon you, whilst in His house, a large shower of blessings.

And what is your feeling about the *Holy Communion*? Perhaps it has been your custom to receive it now and then; or perhaps, at the time of your Confirmation, you received it once, but never since. You may be young, and have felt that it was in-

tended for older persons. Or perhaps you are strong and healthy, and have sometimes pictured to yourself the day when it might be a comfort to you. But is it not *now* that you need it? Are you not one whom the Saviour bids to "do this in remembrance of Him?" Oh, if you wish to be His, if you desire to be a decided and established Christian, if you hope to get strength and life in your soul, come to the Lord's Table, and become a regular Communicant. Christ will certainly give you strength and blessing, if you seek it in His appointed way.

By receiving the Holy Communion we profess our love to the Saviour. We confess Him before men. But this is not all; we also feed upon Him in our hearts by faith, and so obtain

that spiritual life and nourishment which He loves to bestow on His people.

But there is yet another means, which sometimes makes the sluggish soul earnest, and the doubting soul decided, when nothing else seems to have any effect. It is a remedy which none of us would willingly have recourse to, but which God often sees fit to employ for our good. I mean *Affliction*.

Your heavenly Father desires to see you decided. He knows how the world has entwined itself around you, and with how strong a grasp Satan holds you. Ordinary means seems to have little or no effect upon you; and therefore He sends Affliction. He

tries you here, and He tries you there. He chastens you on this side, and on that ; He probes you to the very quick ; He removes, one after another, the objects on which your soul delighted ; He pursues you when you would fain flee from Him ; He shakes to pieces the whole structure that you are building up, and makes you feel how utterly rotten its foundation has been ; till at last you see that all your hopes for time and eternity must be built upon Christ, and Christ alone.

It sometimes happens that when a person is really anxious to become an earnest and decided Christian, when his prayer is that God would make him all that He would have him to be, his heavenly Father sees that the

most effectual way of bringing this to pass is by calling him to pass through some severe discipline or trial. Thus God grants his desire by sending him *Affliction*. He acts the husbandman's part, takes his pruning-knife, cuts off, here and there, some tender branch, and all that His vine may "bring forth more fruit." He answers his prayer, though in a very different way from that which he expected.

I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith, and love, and every grace ;  
Might more of His salvation know,  
And seek more earnestly His grace.

'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,  
And He, I trust, has answered prayer ;  
But it has been in such a way  
As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favoured hour  
At once He'd answer my request;  
And by His love's constraining power  
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel  
The hidden evils of my heart;  
And let the angry powers of hell  
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea more, with His own hand He seemed  
Intent to aggravate my woe;  
Crossed all the pious designs I schemed,  
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

“Lord, why is this?” I trembling cried:  
“Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?”  
“’Tis in this way,” the Lord replied,  
“I answer prayer for grace and faith.”

“These inward trials I employ,  
From self and pride I set thee free;  
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,  
That thou may’st seek thy all in Me.”

Yes, Affliction sometimes does for  
us what nothing else can do. It

brings us to our senses. It leads us to flee for refuge to the Saviour, and seek His help, which we before despised. “Lord, *in trouble* have they visited thee: they poured out a prayer when *thy chastening* was upon them.” And thus, when Affliction has done its work, we sometimes start off with new vigour to run our Christian course.

Many a one, who once was living a sluggish, careless life, taking matters very easily as regards his soul, has been suddenly laid down with sickness, or has been visited with some other trial.

This has made him thoughtful; it has aroused him, and led him to feel concerned about his spiritual state; and he has come out of his affliction

quite another man. It has given decision to his character, and he has become a hearty, earnest, and devoted Christian.

## CHAPTER X.

## PARTING WORDS.

BEFORE taking my leave of you, let me offer you a few words of brotherly counsel. I will suppose that you have gone along with me, and that, as you have read these pages, it has pleased God in His mercy to awaken in you a determination to become a more decided Christian than you have yet been. And if so, let me give you three or four more hints before my book closes.

1. Endeavour to be a *humble* Christian. It has been remarked, that when a person becomes earnestly religious, he is very apt, at first, to be a little high-minded and proud. He speaks harshly of those who see things not as he sees them, and makes little or no allowance for the difficulties under which others may be labouring. But surely, where it is so, there must be something wrong; for the higher any one rises in real holiness, and the closer he walks with God, the more meek and lowly will he be in his Christian character.

Beware, then, of this temptation, and cultivate a meek and lowly spirit, ready to esteem others better than yourself. None are so sure to find a place in the Saviour's bosom hereafter,

as those who now lie the lowest at His feet ; for “ God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.” Look narrowly into your own heart ; and the more that is lighted up by God’s grace, the more you will see of your own vileness and deficiency. It has often been said, that the bough which bears the most fruit bends the lowest—that the ship which carries the heaviest freight sinks deepest in the water—that the richest pearls are found buried far down in the ocean’s bed. May it be so with you ! And as you advance and ripen in your Christian life, may you become more and more humble in the sight of God and men !

2. Seek to be a *sound* and *estab-*

*lished* Christian. Many good people are all their lives in an unsettled state. They are in earnest, but theirs is a religion of impulse. They seem to have no sure and firm footing. They are "tossed about with every wind of doctrine," and are easily led this way or that.

A person of this kind reads a religious book, and is immediately carried away by the views contained in it, however unscriptural and extreme they may be. Or he falls in with some good man, and is forthwith persuaded by him to follow exactly in the groove which he has got into. His course is an unsteady and an unsettled one, and we never feel sure whither he may be going, or what new phase he may be entering upon.

Now, it is of great importance that you should be sound in the faith, rooted and grounded in the truth. This will contribute greatly to your peace, and make you far more useful to others.

Take God's word for your guide, and receive nothing for truth which is not written there. Ask what God says, rather than what man says. Let the Bible leaven all your views.

As I said before, so I now again repeat, Cling closely and affectionately to your Church. It often happens that when one, who has been a careless Christian all his life, becomes awakened, he immediately begins to think that his Church has been to blame rather than himself. He has felt a coldness and a lack of interest in public worship, and a deadness under the

preaching of the gospel ; and he charges his Church with this, instead of condemning himself and his own slumbering heart.

Look upon the Church as your stay and your guide. She has led others in the path of holiness; and in the road to heaven ; and she can lead you aright. She is not infallible : what church is ? But you will find her a wise and tender guardian, and a safe counsellor. Throw yourself into her system. Enter heartily into her services. Take your stand in her glorious ranks. You will, I believe, serve God better, and grow to a greater ripeness, in her communion than in any other.

### 3. Be a *consistent* Christian. Few

sights are sadder than to see an inconsistent believer, one who speaks well, and seems to be in earnest, but yet is unwatchful in his daily life. God keep you from thus dishonouring Him!

If you boldly resolve to serve God, you will have many eyes upon you. Many will "watch for your halting;" and some will almost be glad if they can see you tripping. Give them no cause for this. And remember too that God's eye is upon you also—a kind and loving eye, but still a jealous eye. He looks for holiness in His people, and the smallest sin grieves Him.

Be not content with talking religiously; but also act religiously. It is easy to have pious words upon our lips; but how useless are they if un-

accompanied by a holy life. Let religion be like a vein of gold running through your whole conduct. Let it be as the leaven, leavening the whole mass. Be not religious merely when with others, but religious also when alone, and when no eye is upon you but the eye of God. Be religious in all your relations of life.

Holiness is acquired by slow degrees. Sinful habits have become so entirely a part of our nature, that they are not given up in a day. It is no easy matter entirely to "put off the old man which is corrupt," and to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." And therefore it is sometimes long before our affections, our desires, our wills, are brought into

complete subjection to God. But if you make holiness your great aim, ere long, with God's help, you will attain it.

Be persuaded that increasing holiness is increasing happiness. It is when our souls are filled with the Holy Spirit, and that Spirit is carrying on His sanctifying work within us, that we enter into the full joy of the Lord. Strive after holiness: it is a mark of God's indwelling presence; and it is a blessed sign that your soul is growing meet for that world, where nothing unclean can enter in.

4. Be an *active, working* Christian ; and not a mere speculating one. There is a great work for us all to do -- a work in the world, a work in the

Church, a work at home, a work abroad. And we are all called to take our part in it. O let us be up and doing! Souls are to be won, afflicted ones to be comforted, the hungry to be fed, the ignorant to be taught.

Truly there is no lack of work, if we have right to engage in it. Say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and a way will doubtless be opened for you, by which you may be employed in your heavenly Master's service. Remember how greatly He has loved you, and try to show your love to Him by a readiness to work for Him, if in ever so humble a way.

Perhaps you may be fully occupied, and may have little or no time to spare. But if you have, offer to help

the clergyman of your parish ; and in most cases he will be very thankful for your aid. It will cheer his heart to think that you are willing to labour with him. And it will be very good for yourself ; it will conduce to your own spiritual health and peace, and will tend to God's glory.

5. Seek to be a *kind* and *loving* Christian. There is a dry, cold, hard type of religion, which we sometimes meet with, but which is not the religion of the Gospel. And such a religion brings no peace to the soul. It reminds us of the man “whose blood never ran warm, whose eye was always glassy, whose touch was always clammy, and whose breath was like an east wind.” Such a re-

ligious frame as this will never do for the foundation of a life of joy in communion with God.

Do we not sometimes meet with people, and religious people too, who are sadly wanting in kindness and gentleness of spirit? There is a sternness about them, which repels rather than attracts us. And they show this especially in their uncharitable judgment of others. One cannot help feeling that such persons have yet much to learn. They have not the mind of Christ. They possess none of His tender, loving spirit.

But where grace is really leavening the soul, there will be a gradual improvement of the heart and character. It is with the growing and advancing Christian, as it is with the ripening

fruit. The fruit at first is hard ; but it gradually swells out, and becomes soft and mellow. At first there is a sharpness and sourness about it, but the sun by degrees sweetens it. It is just so with the man who is ripening for heaven. His temper grows sweeter and softer, and his character more gentle and Christ-like.

Cultivate such a temper ; and let a spirit of holy love stamp all your feelings, words, and actions.

Lastly, ask God to make you a *cheerful* and *happy* Christian. Why should we go sorrowing all our days, when we are bidden to rejoice, and have such abundant grounds for joy ? Why should we hang down our heads like criminals, when we may “go

on our way rejoicing," as God's pardoned and accepted children, as Christ's happy freemen ?

It has been said, that "to be good, and at the same time disagreeable, is high treason against virtue." But I think it may also be said with truth, that "to be good, and at the same time sorrowful, is high treason against the religion of Christ."

We must all have our sorrows, I know: we must "through much tribulation enter the kingdom." The thought of past sin, and present unworthiness, will often pierce us to the quick. The feeling that we have offended a most loving Father, and a gracious Saviour, will often bring a cloud of sadness over us. But still the pardoned and accepted believer

may well feel happy—happy in having obtained mercy through Christ—happy in having a Father ever watching over him and caring for him—happy in having a Saviour ever near him, in whose bosom he can repose his weary soul—happy in his present blessings and his future prospects.

Try then to be happy for the sake of others, as well as for your own sake. Ask Jesus to give you His peace which is true peace; and the closer your walk is with Him, and the more decided your course is, the happier you will be. Let not worldly men have all the joy. We Christians may have it in a tenfold degree; for we have a joy which the world cannot give, and which even death cannot rob us of.

May this happiness be yours! May

you be very happy even here; and may you and I have a place hereafter in His presence, "where there is fulness of joy, and at His right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore!"

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