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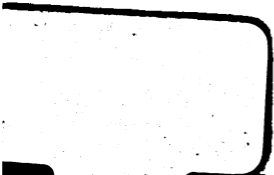
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REPENTANCE:
ITS
NATURE, GROUNDS, NECESSITY,
AND
INFINITE IMPORTANCE.

BY THE
REV. CHARLES G. FINNEY,
OF OBERLIN COLLEGE, U. S.

LONDON:
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—
1851.

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THE following Discourse was delivered in the Tabernacle, on the evening of January 15th, 1851, to an exceedingly crowded audience; and it was certainly the most impressive appeal on the subject to which it was ever the lot of the Writer to listen, either there or elsewhere. Mr. Finney is in no respect a party to its publication: there is reason, indeed, to believe that he never, in a single instance, gave a manuscript for that purpose. His Discourses are unwritten, being delivered from short notes. In fact, he is utterly, perhaps culpably, reckless as to the state or form in which his Discourses may go forth, and the notions which, from imperfect shorthand reports, mankind may be led to form concerning either himself or his ministrations. The present Dis-

course is therefore published from the Notes of an accomplished Shorthand Writer. It will, of course, give but a modified conception of the actual exhibition; but its substantial accuracy in all the main features is indubitable. It will furnish some idea of Mr. Finney's general preaching in his best seasons.

This Note is prefixed at the request of the Publisher, with whom the project solely originates: that gentleman, being an auditor on the occasion, was so convinced of its adaptation to be useful, that he determined, in this respectable form, to issue it. May his benevolent object be realized to the eternal happiness of thousands of perishing men!

J. CAMPBELL.

February 5th, 1851.

A SERMON.

ACTS iii. 19.

“ Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

THERE is nothing I need say explanatory of the connection in which these words occur. They are part of the chapter which I have just read in your hearing. I shall content myself with simply indicating the train of thought which I design to pursue. I shall,—

I INQUIRE, WHAT IS THE TRUE SPIRIT AND MEANING OF THE REQUIREMENT HERE PUT FORTH ?

II. NOTICE SOME THINGS WHICH ARE ASSUMED BY THE APOSTLE.

III. SHOW WHAT IS IMPLIED IN TRULY OBEYING THE REQUIREMENT?

IV. SHOW REASONS WHY IT SHOULD BE OBEYED.

“Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” The term rendered “repent” here means, in its primary signification, “to think again,” or to “reconsider,” and take up the subject anew. It also implies a change of mind,—such a change as would be the result of reconsidering a subject. It implies a taking back of what we have done with reference to a certain subject, and a corresponding change of mind, purpose, and intention.

The word rendered “converted” in this text, refers to the change in the outward life,—that is, the change corresponding with repentance. To repent, reform, and

thoroughly change your course of conduct, is the literal meaning. It also implies a turning of the mind: the fact that the term was added in this connection, shows that it refers to an outward turning as a manifestation of an inward turning; as if he had said, "Repent,—change your whole life;" or, "Turn from your sins." The Apostle did not mean to insinuate that there might be repentance without a change of life. He adds, "and be converted,"— as if reformation followed as a matter of course from repentance; as if there was a natural and invariable connection between them. This is true: the real meaning of the words, is, to turn both heart and life to God. Let this suffice for the spirit and meaning of the text, —I will now notice some things which are plainly assumed by the Apostle in giving this command.

First: he assumed that it is not only our present duty, but that we have the

ability to comply with this requirement. The very fact of the command being given, implies the assumption of our ability to obey it: for we nowhere find the Apostles ordering men to do things which they are unable to do, and the Bible everywhere assumes that man can comply with all God's requirements; and wherever promises are made of Divine aid, it is not to afford the ability, but to induce a willingness to do what he commands them.

Again: the Apostle assumes that they had sufficient conviction,—that they knew they ought to repent, to repent now, and what they ought to repent of. God does not require them to be convicted; he assumes that they knew themselves to be sinners, and that they were as fully convinced of it as they were of the fact of their own existence. There is not a sinner in the universe who does not know himself to be a sinner. The Apostle, therefore, does not say, "Try to be convicted;"

or tell them to "pray to God for conviction, and then for repentance:" there is no such teaching in the Bible. Nor did he tell them to "try to repent:" there is no such thing as "*try*" in connection with these things, in the word of God. He never says "*Try* to believe," "*Try* to repent;" he always comes right out with the assumption of their knowledge of sin, and of the duty of immediate repentance.

The Apostle, also, plainly assumes that whatever of Divine influence was requisite to these results was, in such a sense, present, and at their disposal; and that, therefore, they need not wait for it a moment;—present in such a sense that he never once thinks it necessary even to suggest the idea that they needed any more Divine influence than they already possessed. How remarkable are the teachings of God to men! How different from the teachings we often hear! The Bible everywhere assumes that the sinner, in-

stead of needing to wait for Divine influence, has all that he needs to render him not only able, but infinitely to blame if he does not instantly repent. The Bible represents the Spirit as already striving with man, and man as resisting. God charges men with continually resisting his Spirit; and, instead of telling them they must wait for some Divine influence, and try to move God by something they can do towards their conversion, it rebukes that whole train of thinking as strongly and emphatically as possible. It represents the sinner as resisting the very influence which he is so often called upon to pray for: "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye." (Acts vii. 51.) Not called upon in the Bible, but from pulpits—the very last place in which such a thing should be heard.

Again: the Apostle in this commandment assumes that repentance is a condition of forgiveness. He assumes this, though

he does not say it. He says, "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,"—which is assuming that they cannot be blotted out without repentance, and a change of life; nay, he assumes that they understand this themselves. He simply comes right out, and requires them to repent, assuming that this was a condition of their being forgiven.

I shall now notice some things which are implied in obeying this command. Many persons, from imperfect views of this subject, almost universally endeavour to work themselves up into such a state of *feeling*—to excite such emotions of *sorrow* for sin—they set to work to force themselves into a state of feeling which they suppose to be repentance. They try to feel very sorry; and when they find they cannot force these feelings into existence by a direct act of their will, they say, they "cannot repent." This arises out of the fact that they misconceive what re-

pentance is; they do not understand that it is an act of the will—an act as free and as voluntary as they ever performed in their lives. In fact, with a sinner, it is the first rational act of his whole existence. While in sin he acts madly; and to repent is simply to renounce the false and wicked ways to which he has committed himself,—to cease to live only to please and indulge himself, and living to please and obey his Maker. Now, sinners should understand that their sin consists in this very state of committal to their own interests and gratification, which is the great end of their lives, and to this they cleave with the grasp of death: the whole of their lives is devoted to securing something for themselves.

God is engaged in the great work of promoting the interests of his kingdom—in securing the salvation of the world. He calls on sinners to renounce their selfish ways, and sympathize and unite with him.

in promoting his great object; assuring them that, by so doing, they will at the same time secure their own interests. To abandon his present course, which he himself knows to be unreasonable, is what God requires him to do; and this is the first thing implied in obeying this command—consecration to God, the abandonment of the spirit of self-pleasing, yielding the mind up to God at once, and devotion to pleasing and obeying him. It implies, also, going over to God's side, taking part with him against our own and everybody's sin, renouncing all excuses for not doing just as God requires us to do, renouncing the spirit of procrastination and all dishonesty of mind towards God, coming into a spirit of justice, and being willing to do what is just to our neighbour, and to consider his good as well as our own.

Faith in God is also implied; for, observe, where persons look at Christ, and understand what he has done, the plan of sal-

vation, turning or repentance, implies a reconsideration of the subject, and the renunciation of self-seeking, and the committal of themselves to Christ and to God. It also implies love to God; a universal reformation of life; confession, and, as far as possible, restitution to those whom we have injured,—not to a priest, according to the Roman Catholic idea, in the confessional,—but confessing all to God, and so much as they have a right to know to those whom we have wronged. As repentance implies coming into a state of justice, it implies the confession of all our sins to God, as it is he, above all, whom we have injured; and to men, as I have said, as far as they are concerned.

But my principal object, is, to insist on reasons for obeying this requirement.

First: it is right to do so. How remarkable it is, that sinners have so little regard to what is right as to need commanding to repent! They make it a mere

matter of loss and gain. "What will be the consequence," say they, "if I do? and what will be the result if I do not? I shall lose my soul if I do not, and be forgiven if I do." They argue in this way, instead of renouncing their present course for the mere intrinsic propriety and rightness of doing so. Suppose some individual had greatly injured you, and persisted in injuring you, and you expostulated with him for persisting, and you found that he did not regard at all the intrinsic wickedness of his conduct, and had no disposition to cease from it because of the intrinsic rightness of ceasing, but set himself to ask whether you had the power and were likely to injure him by way of reprisals, or what you would give him for ceasing to abuse you? so that it was evident to all that the affair was entirely a question of gain? Why, you would say, "He's a wretch!" That's what you would say. Now, apply this to yourself, and fancy any one treating

you as you are treating God, sinner! Find a man with whom the intrinsic wickedness of wrong-doing has no weight,—who confesses that he ought not to do it, but cares not about the right, calculating only as to the profit or loss of consenting or refusing. Now, I do insist upon it that sinners ought always to put themselves in God's position, and try and fancy any one treating them so.

Suppose, now, you had a child whom you greatly loved, and that you expostulated with him with regard to his conduct. Suppose he admits the wrong,—for he would belie his own conscience, and shame his own face to blushing, should he deny it,—but, if you insist on his ceasing from his rebellion, he casts about to know whether he is likely to be disinherited or not. Perhaps he asks his brothers, or sisters, “Does father say anything about disinheriting me?” He inquires among the servants, “What does the old man say? Does he hint anything about disinheriting

me, if I don't change my conduct?" Perhaps he gets his brothers or sisters to suggest to the father the propriety of giving him some extra allowance if he will reform.

Now, suppose yourself in that position! You have none of you, however, such a claim on your children as God has on you; and yet you are pursuing just the same course! See that aged father! His large, hard, crippled hands show how long he has wrought. He has risen early, sat up late, and eaten the bread of carefulness. He he has wrought days and hours when you were asleep. How his hands are worn! He cannot straighten his fingers; they are stiffened by toiling to make his children comfortable! His back is bowed down: his hair is whitened by the frosts of seventy winters! See that son, spending his money as fast as he can get it, setting his father's commands at nought. He knows his conduct is wrong; but he does not care whether it is right or wrong: his only anxiety

is, "Shall I lose my inheritance if I do not repent?" Now, suppose yourself in that condition,—what would you think? Would it not deeply grieve you? And have you never thought how deeply you are grieving Him? Christ has done more for you. He has given his hands to the nails, and his soul to death, for your sins; and yet, when he asks you to repent, "What can you gain by it?" you want to know! Now, sinner, if there were not any other reason in the universe, you ought to be ashamed to refuse; for it is unutterable injustice. I bring no railing accusation against you: every impenitent sinner amongst you treats God in the manner which I have represented. Ought you to ask for any other reason, when you are so powerfully convinced that it is right? If you had a right spirit, you ought not even to ask whether he would forgive you or not. Whichever it may be, it is right for you to repent.

An individual once told me, when I visited him in sickness, that he thought it was now "too late" for him to repent.

"Too late! why?"

"God won't forgive me."

"Well, what of that? Do you think God wants to punish you for his own gratification?"

"No."

"Then if he sees that he cannot forgive you consistently with the highest good of the universe, but finds himself obliged to punish you for your past sins, he does you no injustice; and is this a reason why you should continue to abuse him, and not repent?"

Then God will forgive you, if he sees he can forgive you consistently with the arrangements of his government. How, therefore, can you urge that as an excuse for not repenting? Even if you were in hell, although it would be then too late to be forgiven, it would still be intrinsical-

right for you to repent. Has God done you any injustice? No, indeed! Can it then be right for you to sin against him? No; it can never be right. But shall you continue to abuse God, even when you have placed yourself in such a position that he cannot forgive you? It is clear, therefore, that when sinners demand any other reason than that it is right, they manifest unutterable wickedness.

Another reason for repentance, is, that God commands it. This is not an arbitrary command: the sinner is bound in nature and reason to do it, and God can never discharge the sinner from this obligation: the sinner's repentance and submission is God's intrinsic and eternal right. There is a controversy between the sinner and God. God is not wrong,—he cannot repent; and this controversy ought not to exist. God commands the sinner to cease; and the sinner must cease, for God cannot yield his rights: if, however, it were proper

for him to yield, he is great-hearted enough to do so; nay, he would never need to be exhorted to do it, if he were in the wrong. But he is infinitely right, and the sinner is infinitely wrong; and, therefore, what he commands, he must insist on being performed, or punish the offenders.

Sinners ought to repent now, because to neglect it is to refuse to do it. It should always be understood that there is no neutral ground in religion; there is not an inch of it in all God's government. If the sinner holds on to his course of sin, what is this but refusing to repent? And to refuse to repent is to set God at defiance; virtually to say, "I won't repent." I know that sinners feel shocked to hear the language of their conduct thus put into words; they deem it blasphemy. But whose is the blasphemy—those who speak it by actions, or to those who put the language of such conduct into words? You tell your child to do something; he goes

away, and does not do it: he does not tell you in words that he will not do it, but you understand his conduct as meaning that. You tell him, if he does not do so and so, you will be obliged to punish him; but he goes away, and does not do it. Now, what is this but defying you, and virtually saying, "You may punish me if you can, and if you dare?" How horrible, then, is it for the sinner to act thus towards God! Suppose, sinner, you should meet the Lord Jesus Christ, and he should tell you to your face to repent,—dare you reply, "I won't?" Yet your lives say this.

A young man of my acquaintance, some years since, of great talents—in fact, of the greatest ability I ever saw in so young a man—was terribly convicted of sin, in a revival of religion which commenced in the city. He was pursuing his studies at a college some few miles from his home, but had returned on a visit. He was much disturbed by the influence of the

revival, and went back to college with his mind by no means at ease on the subject, although he was greatly opposed to it. Now, before this period his disposition had been remarkably amiable. He lived with an old aunt, who hoped that when he left college he would become a minister. He used to pray in her family; but the enmity of his heart became greatly stirred up. After he had been back a few days, they sent for him home again, hoping that he would be converted. His college companion had been converted before he came back. But this young man, before he went home, called several of the students together, and informed them that he was going home,—that there was a revival there, and requested them to see if he was not proof against its influences.

He went back, and the Lord laid hold of him. I cannot enter into the details,—it would take me too long: I shall therefore come at once to the point. After returning

from meeting one evening, his aunt asked him, as usual, to pray in the family, hoping that it would do him good; but his heart was full of bitterness, and his prayer was full of blasphemy. He went to such lengths that his aunt was compelled to beg him to desist, but he would not; and, at last, he jumped up and ran away to his bedroom, and, casting himself down, declared he would not repent. He walked the room, writhing in terrible agony, till at length the morning dawned, and the sun arose and shone through the window which looked towards the east. He seemed to realize the actual and personal presence of the Almighty, as if a living voice addressing him thus,—“Young man, the sun rises on you, and you are indebted to God for every ray of light you possess.” Such was his anguish now, that he felt so stubborn that he would sooner go to hell than be indebted to God for anything! God seemed to appeal to him to repent, and he

fell down overcome with emotion. His aunt, as the morning drew on, finding that he did not come down to breakfast, went up to his room, and found him on the floor, calling himself ten thousand fools and wretches for his past enmity against God, and yet praising God for having spared him in spite of all his resistance.

This is a remarkable instance of the boiling over of the carnal mind. But, mark; every sinner, although not so impetuously and recklessly, but coolly and deliberately says in his heart and life, "*I will not repent!*" You see what a horribly wicked young man that was; yet he had been the admiration of the whole place in which he lived. He had for a long time felt deeply on the subject, but had said silently with himself, "I won't repent;" but when the power of God roused him up, as he could no longer be silent, he did not hesitate to blaspheme. But was this the *first* time he had bl-

phemed? With all his praying, he had hitherto refused to repent up to that hour; it was not, therefore, his first blasphemy. I know that sinners are much shocked when a man says right out, what they act right out every day. And whose is the blasphemy? you who act it out in your lives, or those who tell you in words what your actions mean? It is yours, not mine: I only put your lives into words. Sinners should repent immediately, and be converted, because to refuse to do so is to wrong God. Shall a man absolutely make up his mind to do the greatest wrong to his Maker? Is it not enough that men should wrong one another?—will they wrong God too?

Once more: sinners should repent, because they do their own souls the greatest injury. You are as far from doing justice to yourself, as you are from doing justice to God,—as far from considering your own best interests, as from considering his claims.

You injure everybody else. All the universe has a right to expect that you will act according to the law of God. You have no right to refuse to do so, and set up yourself and your interests against the whole universe. No man has a right to live in sin for a moment: he wrongs the whole world; because, instead of contributing his part to the well-being of society, and the universe at large, what does he do? He sets up his own interests, opposes the whole of them, and lives to himself. Has any man a right to do this? Let me ask, is not the whole of your Government injured, if a single individual refuses to pay his share of the taxes? He wrongs the entire state of so much good. If a man refuses to obey the laws, he rebels, not only against the Government, but against every man in the state. "His hand is against every man, and every man's hand is against his." This is so in a much higher sense under the

government of God. Every sinner who persists in his sins is wronging not only himself and the Almighty, but every creature of God: every moral agent has a right to complain of him, rebuke him, and ask him, if he is not ashamed thus to injure the government of God, and rebel against his Maker?

Again: sinners should repent, because every man has some influence in society; and the greatest influence he possesses is the influence of his example. Perhaps he uses all his influence against repentance. Suppose he is a moral man, what then? Why, it is all the worse: for by how much the more moral he is, in the common acceptation of the term, by so much the more influence he will have in society; and, therefore, if he refuses to repent, he exerts a greater influence to prevent repentance, than if he were an open profligate.

In a certain town in America, where I once was preaching, during a series of

revival services, there was in the congregation a simple, moral business man, who was one of the most influential persons in the place. I found, in visiting the people, and conversing with them, that a great many of the young men would point to this individual as the best man in the town. "Now," they said, "here's Deacon W—— considered so excellent by the Church, and we venture to say Mr. B—— is as good a man as he is; yet Mr. B—— is not converted, and does not pretend to have been." Indeed, I was astonished to find this man was considered quite as good as the deacon of the Church. He was set up as an example; and, therefore, because he did not repent, they could not see that repentance was necessary. At length, I went to Mr. B——, and entered into conversation with him on the subject. I asked him, if he was aware of the character and extent of the influence he was exerting? showing him that he was quite a stum-

bling-block in the way of many. "What! am I doing harm?" said he,—“Why, I did not know that.” He gave as much money as the deacon, was regular at the means of grace,—so moral, industrious, and steady in every respect; in fact, he was such a man, outwardly, that the young men who were impenitent were almost universally of opinion, that it was quite unnecessary that they should be any better than Mr. B——. I told him this, and asked him, “Mr. B——, how good are you? Are you not an impenitent sinner? Are you not, in fact, a Pharisee?” He was too sensible a man to deny what I said. He became quite shocked to see the position he sustained; for the people actually sometimes went so far as to say, “Ah! well, let us be as good as Mr. B——, and we’ll risk it.” He knew himself that he needed to repent; for, although he had regularly contributed liberally, he had been all the while shaking his purse, as it were, in the face of Christ,

saying, virtually, "Here's the money," while he kept back his heart.

Great numbers of sinners are thus not only neglecting their own souls, but using all their influence to keep their families from being converted. They do not say, "Don't repent," in words; but they say it clearly enough in their lives. "Ah!" said a little girl to her father one day, "Father, why don't you pray? How is it we don't have family prayer?" She had been staying on a visit a few days in a house where the family altar was erected: this prompted her inquiry why her father did not pray. What did he say? I have frequently known such questions from children to be instrumental in the conversion of parents. It is no use for a parent to say "Go!" to his child, if he does not go himself: for, in most cases, they follow his example, and not his advice; and if they don't, no thanks to him. If you yourselves go on in your sins—if you don't drag them

down to hell with you,—no thanks to you; and you will be held responsible for all the evil influence you have exerted in the way of hindrance to them. As far as sinners themselves are concerned, if universal damnation is not the result of their daring rebellion against God's government, no thanks to them. As far as they exert any influence, it is all against Christ. He is trying to save them; and they are scattering abroad firebrands, arrows, and death. "He that is not with me," saith the Lord, "is against me." The sinner says, he is "not opposed to religion. He goes to meeting." Suppose you do. So did Mr. B——. The people all said, he was "a good man." (I should have said, that Mr. B—— did not hesitate at once to remove the stumbling-block out of the way of the community; indeed, he seemed quite astonished, grieved, and frightened, that so many should be hiding behind him.) There is probably not a sinner in all this

house who is not thus standing in some one's way. "Who are you?" No matter who you are, you have some acquaintances—some who sympathize with you—some who, if you were out of the way, would, in all probability, at once take the alarm, and lay hold on eternal life.

I can recollect very well when this thought oppressed me. The circumstance is curious. The Church, in the neighbourhood in which I then resided, held a church meeting, at which the question was brought up as to what measures should be adopted to secure a revival of religion among them. At the time this was quite unknown to me,—some proposed one thing, and others another. At length they came to the conclusion, that it would be best to pray for the conversion of certain individuals. Several persons were named whom it was thought desirable for them first to pray for, and I was among the number. But the minister ventured to

suggest that it would be of little use to pray for me, as he had no faith, seeing that he had so often conversed with me; and he remarked that he had never known a young man, knowing so much about religion, who was so hardened. Now, I had led the singing in that church for a considerable time before I was converted; and he told them that he did not believe they could reach the young people,—for if anything were said to offend me, I should sit below, and that the rest would not sing without me. There it was. I was doubtless a great obstacle in the way of reaching those young people; but, as the Lord would have it, I was the first among them on whom he laid his hand. “Repent,” said the Spirit of the Lord to my soul; and when that was done, it was found that the young people actually were under my influence as much as the minister had supposed,—for the whole mass of them rose up, and inquired what they should do to be saved.

I do not make this a matter of boast. It is to me a matter of unutterable shame that I should have stood in the way of their conversion so long. I used to teach them music, was with them a great deal, and exerted that kind of influence over them which was a snare of death to their souls! It was wonderful, indeed, that God did not take my life, and hurl me to the depths of hell, for exerting an influence so pernicious. How is it, sinner, with you? Perhaps you can look right round you, and behold a number who are more or less under your influence in this way,—individuals of whom, you feel convinced, that if you repent, they will follow you.

Another reason why you should repent, is, that the day is coming when, if you draw off these souls to the bottomless pit, they will surround you, and require at your hands an account of why you have done this unutterable injury to them. Take, for example, the case of a parent

living in sin,—perhaps neither a praying father, nor a praying mother,—doing nothing, effectually, to secure their conversion. As you float along the stream of life, the curtain of eternity hangs just before you, and its lowermost verge sweeps the surface of the dark waters on which you float. At length you bow, pass under, disappear. Your children follow you,—and where are you then? Oh! where are you then?

Here is a father, or a mother, coming up to the judgment-seat of Christ: but, instead of saying, “Here are the children thou hast given us, Lord; we have trained them up to fear thy name;”—what do they do? They hang down their heads, the father, or mother, or both; and the children follow them,—and depart with them to eternal torments, in consequence of the fatal influence of their ungodly example! Oh! look around on your children, parents! Can you look them in the face? To be sure, they will be punished for their own sins;

but you have laid before them a stumbling-block. Can you bear that look, mothers? Can you bear to see your child lift up its dying blood-shot eye, and say, "Oh, mother! mother! mother! why have you not repented, and led me to Christ? Oh! my destroyer! my destroyer! the murderess of my soul! why have you thus been standing in my way?"

Is it not reasonable to believe, that where families find themselves thus ruined, they will regard themselves as the greatest enemies of each other? "You who had the greatest influence over me, more than all the world beside, what did you do? You neglected to repent, and thereby preached to me, 'Let repentance alone!' You neglected it yourself, and were consequently a stumbling-block in my way. I saw you go on in sin, and I followed your example, and now my soul is lost! The family is lost!" Oh, sinner! ought not this consideration to

shock you? Are you a parent? Are your children here? Where are they? Have you a friend? Where is he? Have you not some one whose eye is on you? Although your influence may be small, it is enough, perhaps, to shut the gate against somebody, who might otherwise be persuaded to lay hold on eternal life,—they are waiting for you.

But, once more: another reason for repentance, is, the infinite goodness of God to you. Notwithstanding all your abuse of him, he is still benevolent towards you. He returns love for your opposition; and though you continue to oppose him, he perseveres in endeavouring to overcome your evil with his good, that he may lead you to repentance.

Now, let me suppose the case of some individual who is very kind to you, heaping favours upon you; in fact, you are entirely dependent upon him. Is not this a good reason why you should cease to abuse him,

or in any way displease him? If it is not a sufficient reason, there cannot be one at all; and ought this not to affect you? But, mark, he offers to forgive you; but, if he would not, it would still be your duty to repent.

This, however, is not all. How much has it cost him to put himself and the universe in a position in which he *can* make you this offer?—in which he *can* forgive you consistently with his relation to the rest of the universe? He has given his “only-begotten Son” to die for you, that he might be just to all his creatures, and yet make you an offer of pardon; and is *this* no reason why you should give up your sins? One would think that the very thought of sin having murdered Christ would make you avoid it, as you would avoid the fate of hell.

It is essential to your own happiness that you repent; and until you do, you are standing out, before the whole universe,

right in the way of the Car of Salvation. God is disposed to spare you, and continues to do so, notwithstanding the evil influence you are exerting. But, mark; by and by, sinner, you will come into some relation in which God will see that to spare you any longer will do so much more hurt than good, that he will not spare you any longer. Whenever this comes to pass, he must remove you; for if he did not, it would be unjust to the universe. Where forbearance would do an injury to others, greater than the good done to you, be assured you must not expect it; you have brought God into a position in which he must act. Ah! if we foreknew the revelations of the judgment-seat, how many sudden deaths would be explained on this principle?—they have come into such relation with God, and with their fellow-men, that he must wipe them off. It is the very goodness of God that induces him, for the sake of others, to cut them down.

Again: another reason why sinners should repent, is, that then repentance may be of more importance to the universe than the salvation of your soul itself. Your soul is of great importance; but suppose you should repent, and, by that means, influence multitudes of others to repent,—who does not see that your repentance might be of more value to the universe than your soul? I have spoken of the circumstances under which God converted me, and the effect of it on my companions. Scores of them were converted. Now, mark, was not my repentance, as an instrument in the government of God, of more value than my soul? Yes, indeed! How much more the repentance of Paul was worth to the Church of God than his individual soul! Is not this a good reason why you should repent? Have you no desire to benefit others? Have you no desire to cease to be a stumbling-block in their way? Would you just as soon

they should stumble over you into hell, as not? Do you say, "I am not to blame?" Yes, you *are* to blame; you have no right to be a stumbling-block, and do them harm.

Another reason why you should repent, is, that your procrastination renders the work daily more difficult. You are continually "grieving the Spirit of God," and stupifying conscience, which becomes seared, and less sensitive. Perhaps you can remember when your conscience was very tender,—how is it now? You can remember the time when a sermon would make you feel deeply,—how is it now? You can remember the time when you felt pressed to attend to the subject,—how is it now? Oh, sinner! you are making matters worse. You are hedging up your way to return, and actually going away from God. You are involving yourselves in matters of which you will not be able to repent, without exposing yourself to punishment by human govern-

ment. You are getting property, perhaps, in such a way as to prevent you from ever making restitution, without exposing yourself to the law of the land, or doing something which hedges up your path to repentance. How many sinners here to-night are in this position?

Once more: you are in danger of dying in your sins every moment; and if you do not die in your sins, you are in danger of sinning away your day of grace. There is such a thing as selling your birthright. Recollect the case of Esau. "Take heed," said the Apostle, "lest there be among you a profane person as Esau, who for a morsel of meat sold his birthright; for ye know, that when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, although he sought it carefully and with tears" Yes, he found no "space for repentance." What was this designed to teach? Some do not admit there is such a thing as sinning away the day of grace; but what else

could the Apostle mean? Ah, sinner! God says to you, "*Now* repent, that your sins may be blotted out;" but, mark me, if you say, "I will not," you must take the consequences.

You have no right to ask God to forgive you, until you *do* repent; and your delay tempts God, and virtually tells him, that because he is so forbearing, you will tempt him a little longer. He has spared you a great while; and because he has done so, you think you will venture to abuse him still. You care nothing for the "right" of the matter: you are only anxious to secure the salvation of your own soul, which you mean to attend to before you die; but you mean to consult your own convenience as to time. You mean to set about it when you have accomplished all your schemes, worn yourself out with sin; and the mere smoking wick of the expiring lamp of life you will throw in the face of your Maker, and leap over the crater of

hell, and get into heaven! That is it, you think. The blasphemy, if any, is yours, and not mine.

What do you intend to do? Do you think of getting into heaven in spite of your sins? You have not made up your mind to go to hell. Not you. You do not expect to go there. If now, while I speak, it should be revealed to you, that you were appointed to damnation, you would wail out like a fiend in a moment. As I saw a man on one occasion, who, before the sermon, contended that all men would be saved; and who, although I knew it not, had put a pistol into his pocket, and came with the intention of shooting me: but the truth was so impressed upon him that he fell from his seat, and, with a voice like a lion, roared out, at the top of his voice, that he was "sinking into hell." It broke up the meeting, and he was carried home in the greatest agony. Now, do you think, sinner, your nerves are strong enough to

prevent this, if God should speak to you in a like manner? You mean to be saved at last; but you mean, for the present, to continue in sin. You virtually say to God, "Lord, I know that thou art infinitely gracious and merciful, and therefore I will venture to continue to abuse thee."

A few remarks must conclude what I have to say; and the first remark is this,—Sinners need not wait to use means to make God willing to forgive them. All that is necessary is willingness on your part to give up your sins. God is already willing to forgive you,—infinitely willing, slow to anger, and of great mercy,—unwilling that any should perish. Sinner, will you hear? There is nothing wanting on God's part: his great gushing heart stands open wide to receive you,—and its pulsations of life are beating and throbbing, trying to drive its tides of life into your soul; but you shut yourself up, and hold on to your sins, and then pretend that there

must be something done to make God merciful. But, oh sinner! God *is* merciful, and never, never can be more so. He is only waiting to gain your consent to give up your sins.

Again: sinners are often disposed—and, strange to tell, professors of religion sometimes seem to encourage them—to account for their present impenitence by reason of the sovereignty of God. God has made man free and responsible, and will not overrule his will by force. He uses means to try to save you; it is *he* who is using means with *you*, and not *you* with *him*. God has made man in such a sense free, that every sinner stands upon the awful responsibility of rejecting offered mercy. The Apostle said, “Repent, every one of you, that your sins may be blotted out,” &c. The text presumes that all who will turn may be saved, and all upon the same conditions.

From what has been said, you will see how it is that sinners on their death-beds

often find no access to God. I have often found, as I entered a sick room, that death seemed to be there in more senses than one. A poet has finely observed,—

“The chamber where the good man meets his fate,
Is privileg'd beyond the common walk
Of virtuous life—quite on the verge of heaven.”

Young.

How beautiful! Did you ever stand and see the good man die, and that the end of that man was peace? Oh, how often have I been reminded of these words when standing by the bedside of the dying saint! “Glory to God,” said one of these, “I am coming, I am coming” (*coming*, not *going*, mark). He seemed to have a bright glimpse of the eternal world. Let a man go and pray with such a person; the very air seems breathing prayer. Life is there, though death is present. What do you see there? A struggling, agonizing, dissolving, material body, with a ray of eternal life peering through that languid dying eye. See the smile playing on those

dying features! If they can speak, they will inquire, "Do you hear that music? What music! Don't you hear it? I hear music. Ah! what do I see? Are these angels here? Oh! how lovely, how lovely, how lovely! You can always pray in such a chamber. The Spirit seems to fan you. You are "quite on the verge of heaven."

But, ah! go across the way to that ungodly sinner in the pangs of death. Instead of the sweet calm smile on the face, oh, what agony! The brow is knit, and he turns and writhes in a dreadful way. The moment you enter, if you are a spiritually-minded man or woman, you feel that death is there, and in more senses than one. Death is dragging that struggling victim to the grave. But there is another death which awaits it, more dreadful than that,—the second death. You attempt to pray; but you cannot do it. You kneel down to pray; and what does the man say? He turns his head right away. "Oh! what

shocking noise is that? What creatures are those? Oh, take them away! take them away! Oh, take away that horrid fiend!"

Dr. Nelson, an acquaintance of mine, who is a converted infidel, mentions some curious and interesting facts with respect to the contrasts of this kind, which came under his own observation while an infidel. The dying saints saw angels, while the perishing sinners exclaimed, "Oh, take that fiend away!" He said, he was satisfied, before his conversion, that there was a point in the process of dying in which the mind had a glimpse of both worlds; it could see the spirit-world on the one hand, and the material-world on the other. This, however, was only when death was actually doing its work. All the dreams of the saint were visions of angels, surrounding him, and smiling on him; while, on the other hand, the sinner held back, struggling hard, groaning, unable to pray.

You see why this is. I tell you, sinner,

you are in danger of bringing yourself into such a position as to compel God to commit himself against you. Did you ever think of that? God's conduct is public,—the whole universe must know it; and when sinners tempt God, presuming on his mercy, calculating to go on in sin, and finally be saved,—making God wait their convenience,—they often bring themselves into such a relation, that the whole universe are looking to see what notice he will take of it. Now, do you not see that there is a good reason why God should shut the door in your face, before all the universe, and say, "I'll see whether you will have 'sin and heaven too,' which is your intention, as the language of your conduct so plainly indicates." This it is that renders it necessary for God to take this step. He represents himself as the master of the house, and as having risen up and shut to the door, while you are without, crying, "Lord, Lord, open unto

us;" but he will answer, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity!"

Now, sinner, are you not afraid to go on in your sins? If you put it off to-night, to-morrow evening you will not be at the prayer-meeting, but somewhere else; and next Sunday, perhaps, you will not go to a place of worship at all. A father once, in writing to his son about a certain habit which he had contracted, after expostulating with him at some length, broke suddenly off,—“But enough, enough,—I know I shall not ask you in vain; and I will therefore urge the matter no further, lest my doing so should appear a want of confidence in your love.” And shall God appeal to you in vain? Where is your sense of right? of honour? or of duty? Oh, sinner! I am ashamed to be obliged to present so many considerations! Am I surrounded by reasonable beings who know the relations to God? and am I standing here for an hour and a half to

persuade you, by an array of motives which would sweep away everything but a rock, to lead you to repentance? Might I not blush that I am a man, if I have thus to plead with you, or, in fact, to suggest any other motive for your repentance beyond the fact that your not doing so is an infinite wrong to the Almighty? Come to Christ, and say, "Oh, Jesus! thou hast bought me,—I will be thine. Thou hast died for me, and purchased my life; and shall the life which thou hast redeemed be given to Satan? No! no! as I am a man. No! as I have an immortal soul. No! as I belong to the government of God. No! as I hope for salvation. No! I dread to displease God, and desire to please my Saviour. Heaven beareth witness that I renounce my sins; and let God write it in heaven." Are you not ready? Why not? Make up your minds now and for ever, right here on the spot, in the house of God where the angels wait to tell the

story, where the Holy Spirit breathes upon the people. What say you, sinner,—are you willing to come over from Satan to God? You must decide *now*, one way or the other; and if we could see what infinite consequences, in respect to persons here, are turning on that decision, methinks the congregation would wail out with agony to see what destinies are trembling on this momentous point! See that needle, trembling on its pivot! It must, when it settles, point either one way or the other—to heaven or to hell. Sinner! such is your destiny. What do you say?

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