

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GLADNESS FOR SADNESS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 14TH, 1883, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."—Psalm xc. 15—17.

To understand this psalm you must observe its black border. Remember the sorrows of Moses, the man of God, who saw a whole generation die in the wilderness, and was himself denied admission to the promised land. The man Moses was greatly afflicted; I might almost call him, as far as his life in the wilderness was concerned, "A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He digged the desert till it became a cemetery, for he lived amid forty years of funerals. This Ninetieth Psalm is saturated with the griefs of a sentenced generation, by whom it could be truly said, "We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled." We have in our own case as a church and people a double black border to surround our text this morning; for death has despoiled us a second time. We were last Wednesday burying our honoured deacon, William Higgs, and at the moment of our meeting for that solemn purpose another greatly esteemed deacon, William Mills,* was on a sudden stricken down with paralysis, to linger for a few hours and then to breathe out his soul unto God. I shall not trust myself to speak about him, for this double loss has to a great extent unnerved me; but this I must say, that he was an experienced and mature Christian, and withal a quiet, diligent, loving, gracious servant of our common Master, whose care was the poor of the church, to whom he distributed our alms with discretion and tenderness. It was pleasant to hear from him the story of his Christian experience. His was a calm and lowly walk. Of late, being weakly, he was much at home, and there the Psalms of David, and the Morning and Evening Portions were his comfort. He was always a source of strength to his pastor and his brethren, always of great service to the church, far more so

* William Mills, Esq., for many years a beloved deacon of the church in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, was taken to his rest January 12th, 1883, at the age of sixty-two No. 1,701.

than the mass of our people will ever know : but of late he ripened and mellowed into an unusual sweetness and spirituality. My last interview with him gave me a high idea of his thorough composure, and his perfect preparedness to commune with the glorified host above. He is gone—gone happily and safely home. He had no pain or struggle, but gradually melted into life eternal. To us who remain one sorrow has succeeded to another, to keep our wound bleeding and smarting. How well did Moses pray, "Return, O Lord, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants." Oh that our God would no more put his hand into the bitter box, as Herbert calls it, but now change his dispensation and revive the spirit of his contrite ones. On our part, as we are made to sympathise with the man of God in this psalm, so let us imitate his example. Like him in multiplied bereavements, let us be like him in grace and faith.

Observe, that the first word of this painful psalm is, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place"; as if, touched by the rod, the sufferer remembered his Father. Will the hypocrite always call upon God? Nay, but when God dealeth roughly with him he will kick against the pricks. But the child of God when he is smitten turns to the hand that smote him, and cries, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me?" If foxes and wolves are prowling about, and the shepherd's dog appears, they fly hither and thither as far away as they can; but when the dog is sent after the sheep he fetches them back to the shepherd. Trouble drives away the carnal man from his pretended religion; but it gathers the true sheep together, and, being aroused and alarmed, they seek the Good Shepherd. The more of grief we feel the more of grace we need, and the nearer to our Comforter we come. Closer to God! is the cry of the troubled saint.

"Nearer, my God, to thee!
Nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me;
Still all my cry shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee!
Nearer to thee!"

Observe also that this psalm is "a prayer of Moses:" the comfort of a child of God in the darkness is prayer. Adversity, blessed of the Holy Spirit, calls our attention to the promise; the promise quickens our faith; faith betakes itself to prayer; God hears and answers our cry. This is the chain of a tried soul's experience. Brethren, as we suffer the tribulation, as we know the promise, let us immediately exercise faith, and turn in prayer to God; for surely never did a man turn to God but the Lord also turned to him. If we are set a-praying we may depend upon it the Lord is set on blessing. Blessings are on the way from heaven—their shadow falls upon us even now. I desire at this time to stir you up to a joyful expectancy. These clouds mean rich, refreshing showers. These sharp frosts foretell heavy sheaves. The Lord by the divine Spirit make the words of our text to be our prayer this morning! May the Lord Jesus present our supplication to the Father.

The petition seems to me to be, first, for *proportionate gladness*: "Make

us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil." And, secondly, our prayer is for *peculiar gladness*, a gladness which is described in the sixteenth and seventeenth verses: "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

I. First, then, beloved friends, our prayer this morning as a church and people should be for PROPORTIONATE GLADNESS; that our God who has filled one scale with grief would fill the other scale with grace till they balance each other. Inasmuch as he has poured out of his vial certain drops of wormwood, we pray him to measure out the like quantity of the consolation of love, whereby our hearts shall be comforted. May our covenant God, who has chastened us heavily, now revive us graciously.

We begin here by noticing that evidently the prayer desires a *gladness of the same origin as the sadness*. The psalm plainly ascribes the sadness to the Lord: "Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men." "We are consumed by *thine* anger, and by *thy* wrath are we troubled." God is seen in bereavements; death comes distinctly at his command; second causes are left behind. Since we have a distinct idea that the sadness comes from God, our text expresses an equally distinct desire that the gladness may come from God. We beg for divine comfort under divine chastening. The words of the prayer are eminently simple and childlike,—*"Make us glad."* They seem to say, "Father! Thou hast made us sad; now make us glad! Thou hast saddened us grievously; now therefore, O Lord, most heartily rejoice us." The prayer as good as cries, "Lord, no one but thyself can make us glad under such affliction, but thou canst bring us up from the lowest deep. The wound goes too near the heart for any human physician to heal us; but thou canst heal us even to the making of us glad!"

The prayer is full of buoyant hope; for it does not merely say, "Comfort us; bear us up; keep our heads above water; prevent us from sinking in despair:" no; but *"Make us glad."* Reverse our state: lift us up from the depths to the heights. *"Make us glad!"* I hear the music of hope drowning the discord of fear; the songs of a joyous faith rising above the mournful dirges of grief.

The appeal is to the Lord alone. Moses entreats Jehovah himself to kindle the lamps of joy within the tabernacles of Israel. It is healthy sadness which the Lord sends, and it is equally safe gladness which God gives. If we make ourselves merry we may be mere mimics of mirth; if outward goods make us merry we may be no better than the rich fool in the parable; but if our God makes us glad we may take our fill of delight, and fear no ill consequences. The wine of the Kingdom cheers, but never intoxicates: the bread of God strengthens, but never surfeits. Neither pride, nor worldliness, nor carelessness comes of feasting at the table of our God. Come, then, let us together breathe this prayer: *"Make us glad!"* Let us paraphrase the expression thus,—*"Lord, thou art the maker of all things, make us glad! By thy word thou didst make the light; make light for us! Thou wilt new-make*

these worn-out skies and much-polluted earth ; come, then, and new-make us, and restore unto us the joy of thy salvation !” The parallel lies much in the source to which both sadness and gladness are ascribed. Lord, make both our summers and our winters, our calms and our storms ; for everything is good which comes from thee, and it is our joy that our times are in thy hand.

But now notice that a *proportion is insisted upon* : “ Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.” This is an original prayer, full of thought and hope. Truly also it is a philosophical prayer ; one which is in accordance with the harmonies of nature, and consonant with all the ways of God. I have been told on the Scotch lakes that the depth of the lake is almost always the same as the height of the surrounding hills ; and I think I have heard that the same is true of the great ocean ; so that the greatest depth is probably the same as the greatest height. Doubtless, the law of equilibrium is manifest in a thousand ways. Take an instance in the adjustment of days and nights. A long night reigns over the north of Norway ; in these wintry months they do not even see the sun : but mark and admire their summer ; then the day banishes the night altogether, and you may read your Bible by the light of the midnight sun. Long wintry nights find compensation in a perpetual summer day. There is a balance about the conditions of the peoples of differing lands : each country has its drawbacks and its advantages. I believe it is so with the life of God’s people : therein also the Lord maintains a balance. “ As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” Some the great Father permits to be little in Israel ; they are none the less dear to him for that. Such are like the minnow which swims a pool proportioned to its size : no great tempest sweeps over the tiny streamlet, its ruffles and its calms suit its little inhabitants. Another of God’s children is made for wide service ; he may be compared to leviathan, for whom ocean is prepared ; with billows, tempests, hurricanes, in due proportion. The great Architect draws everything to scale : while some lives are wisely arranged upon a small scale, others are fashioned for wider spheres and made to do business on the great waters ; these have greater tribulations, but they have also greater consolations. God knoweth how to manage for us all, and we have each one a place in his thoughts. Wisdom allots each one his talent and his work, his strength and his trial. What would a sparrow do with an eagle’s wing ? Given the eagle’s wing and the eagle’s eye, there must be a soaring up above the Alps, a companionship with winds and lightnings. To the tiny humming-bird God appoints no flight into the upper air, but allots it flowers and sunshine nearer the ground. He knows the way of his people, and his love is over all.

The good Lord measures out the dark and the light in due proportions, and the result is life sad enough to be safe, and glad enough to be desirable. I do not believe that our mortal life is fitly set forth by the Thane’s parable, when he said to the Saxon king, “ Hast thou marked, O king, when thou art sitting in thy hall, and the fires are lit, and the lamps are burning, how the sparrow comes flying out of the thick darkness, passes through the window, glides into the bright and

cheerful light, and then flits out again into the darkness? Such is our life,—an interval of light amidst a long darkness.” It is not so. If a believer flits out of the light he glides into the light again; if we traverse a stretch of darkness we may expect an equal breadth of brightness. If to-day we sail a stormy main we may hope to-morrow that the sea will be as glass. We have our changes, but the preponderance of life is not to misery. Rainy days are many, and yet in the long run they are outnumbered by the seasons of fair weather. God makes us glad according to the days wherein he has afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. It may not be said of God’s children that we are a wretched company. Though truly, if in this life only we had hope we should be of all men most miserable; yet since that hope is sure we are of all men the most happy! We shall not say when life is ended here below that it was an evil thing to have lived. We have the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come. “Happy art thou, O Israel,” is for the present as well as for the future. God has blessed us, and we are blessed; and it is not for us to speak as if the blessing were in vain.

Now, if it be so, that our gladness and our sadness are balanced, let us accept them by turns with gratitude. Let us notice, further, that *sorrow is the herald of joy*. Did I not tell you but a few Sabbath-days ago how I sat in health and strength and joy in the olive-gardens, and said to my friend,—

“We should expect some danger nigh
When we perceive too much delight.”

The apprehension was soon justified, as it has often been: but let us not forget the other side of this truth,—we may expect some mercy nigh when we are bowed with heaviest grief. Among the ashes of sorrow we shall find live coals of joy. Grief is God’s usher of the black rod, sent to intimate that in the majesty of his grace the Lord is drawing near to us. There will be first to us, even as there was to Israel, the sound of Egypt’s chariot-wheels and the cry of her horsemen, and a descent into the depths of the sea: and then shall come the far-resounding, never-forgotten shout of victory. The rage of Pharaoh, and the darkness of the night, and the march through the Red Sea must prepare the way for Miriam’s timbrel and the loud refrain, “Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.” Israel must make bricks without straw before Moses shall come. If I had been a little child among the Israelites I think I should have known, when father set the bitter herbs upon the table, that the lamb was roasting somewhere, and would be set out too. “With bitter herbs shall ye eat it”—and so, if there be bitter herbs, the dainty dish is near. Job did not know, and he could not guess it; but in the light of Job’s book we ought to know that the preparation for making a man twice as rich as he was before is to take away all that he has. Oftentimes, in building a bigger house, it is the way of wisdom to clear away the old building altogether. Keeping up the old structure is often an expensive economy; it is better to demolish it. Even so do I believe that the adversities of the saints are to their lasting profit, by removing that which would hinder greater prosperity.

Troubles come clothed in black; but to the eye of faith they carry silver trumpets, and they proclaim the approach of great mercies. God is hastening in the richness of his favour to bless his children: sorrow is the outrider of joy.

A step further, and we have it thus, *sorrow often prepares for joy*. It might not be safe, dear brother, that you should enjoy worldly prosperity at the outset of life. Your adversities in business are meant to teach you the worthlessness of earthly things, so that when you have them you may not be tempted to make idols of them. I am persuaded that many men have been ruined by rising suddenly to fame and power: had they at first been abused and trodden down like mire in the streets, their spirits might have been hardened to endure that sharpest of all tests, namely, human honour; for "as the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise." You are not ready yet, dear brethren, to bear the weight of an elevated superstructure: you must be dug out first, and a deep foundation must be laid to bear a lofty building. In the spiritual life God does not run us up with glittering virtues all of a sudden; but deep prostration of spirit and thorough humiliation prepare the under-courses; and then, afterwards, stone upon stone, as with rows of jewels, we are built up to be a palace for the indwelling of God. Sorrow furnishes the house for joy. The preparation for an eternal heaven is temporary affliction. Jesus has gone to prepare heaven for us; but he has left his cross behind him that the Holy Spirit may by its means prepare us for heaven. You could not enjoy the rest of Paradise if you had not first known the labours of pilgrimage; you could not understand the boundless felicity of heaven if your hearts had not been enlarged by the endurance of tribulation. Let not this be forgotten, then,—that our troubles build a house and spread a table for our joys. Did you ever read of a Roman triumph? Have you ever stood upon the Via Sacra which led up to the Capitol? There, when the glad day was come, the people crowded all along the road: every house-roof was loaded, the very chimney-tops bore each a man, while along the sacred way the conqueror rode, drawn by white horses, amid the blast of trumpets, and the thundering acclamations of myriads. What glory! What renown! Rome's millions did their best to crown their hero. But there had been to him full many a battle before that hour of pride. Victory needs conflict as its preface. The conqueror's scars are his truest decorations, his wounds his best certificates of valour. Because he had been smothered with the dust and defiled with the blood of battle, therefore the hero stood erect, and all men paid him reverence. It must be so in the present condition of things; no man can wear the garland till he has first contended for it.

"Sure we must fight if we would reign;
Increase our courage, Lord."

The way to the crown is by the cross: the palm branch cometh not to the idle hand.

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the place where sorrow is unknown."

Once again, let me say to you, dear friends, there is such a connection between sorrow and joy that *no saint ever has a sorrow but what*

it has a joy wrapped up in it. It is a rough oyster, but a pearl lies within those shells if you will but look for it. Do not think I mock at grief by saying that it is the husk of joy : far from it, I would console grief by asserting solemnly that within the black envelope of affliction there is a precious love-token from God : be sure of that. We find the treasure of communion with Christ in the earthen vessel of sorrow. We ask to have fellowship with Jesus in his sufferings ; and we cannot do so except we suffer. It is a joy to remember in our woe that by these things we are made like unto our Lord, and conformed unto his image. If there were only this comfort it might suffice to sweeten every suffering.

Beside this, there is generally with sorrow a manifestation of the Lord amid our weakness. I have known many forms of happiness ; but I think, upon the whole, I do consider the purest and sweetest to be that of fainting in weakness upon the breast of Jesus and dying into his life. " Oh to be nothing, nothing, only to lie at his feet ! " To be as a lily broken off at the stalk, and therefore taken up into his hand. This is unutterable happiness. The Lord's love to his poor and afflicted ones is most choice and tender. " He carrieth the lambs in his bosom." Favoured feebleness to be thus laid in the heaven of Jesus's bosom ! I love to cower down under the divine wings like a chick under the hen, finding myself by losing myself in God. I have found it precious to feel that no more strength is left to suffer with, and therefore I must die away into the divine will. Certain is it that in every tribulation there are consolations, even as every night has its own stars. I am sure, dear brothers and sisters, you that grieve most to-day for the departed possess a joy which outweighs your mourning : it is a great sorrow to lose a father, but it is a greater joy to know that your father is not really lost, but translated to the skies. It is a great grief to part with a true brother and fellow labourer, but it is happiness to know that he is promoted to the peerage of the skies. We might each one say of our departed friend, " Let us go, that we may die with him." These good men have the start of us : they are preferred before us : they have first seen the King in his beauty. One of them at least has reached his reward before his spiritual father : he who is my joy and crown is in heaven before me. Verily, there are first that shall be last. Our hold on the invisible is strengthened by the departure of our brethren. We have more in heaven to love, more fraternal meetings to anticipate ; and so we have new links with the eternal. Said I not truly that every sorrow contains a joy ?

Once more, *the day will come when all the sorrows of God's sending will be looked upon as joys.* Hear ye this ! By some strange alchemy, known only to " the King eternal, immortal, invisible," our sorrows shall be turned into joys. Ye see this in your own homes,—I quote it because it is the Lord's own metaphor,—a woman when she is in travail hath sorrow because her hour is come ; but soon she remembereth no more her travail, for joy that a man is born into the world. Our troubles and travails are sharp, but they will all be forgotten in the joy that will come of them. Before we enter heaven we shall thank God for most of our sorrow ; and when we are once in glory we shall thank him for it all. Perhaps in heaven, among all the things which have happened to us that will excite our wonder and delight, our furnace experience, and the

hammer and the file, will take the lead. Sorrow will contribute rich stanzas to our everlasting psalm. Wherefore comfort one another with these words, and breathe the prayer each one to-day, "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil." In each case may divine love weigh out the ingredients of a sanctified life according to the art of the apothecary, each one in due proportion.

II. Bear with me while I come to the second part of my subject, which I desire to make eminently practical. The gladness desired is also described : it is **PECULIAR GLADNESS**. The Psalmist wishes for a fourfold gladness :—the first is *gladness at the sight of God's work*.

Notice ; "**THY work**." There is always something cheering in God's work. Have you never felt it so ? I think you must have done so. When Mungo Park was cheered by that little bit of moss which he picked up in the wilderness, he was but comforted as many of us have been. The flowers of the garden, the wild beauties of the wood, the chance tufts by the roadside, are all God's work, and, therefore, breathe consolation to God's servants. Nature is kindly ; her stars speak light to our hearts ; her winds chase away our gloom ; and her waves flash with health for us. Nature is a fond foster-mother to the Lord's children, because she is like ourselves, the work of the Lord. When we are in deep tribulation it is a sweet quietus to survey the handiwork of our Father in Heaven. His work in providence, also, is often a consolation to us. Let us but see what God has done for his people and for ourselves in years past, and we are cheered. Trouble itself, when we see it to be God's work, has lost its terror. A certain Persian nobleman found himself surrounded by soldiers, who sought to take him prisoner ; he drew his sword and fought right valiantly, and might have escaped had not one of the company said, "The king has sent us to convey you to himself." He sheathed his sword at once. Yes, we can contend against what we call a misfortune ; but when we learn that the Lord hath done it, our contest is ended, for we joy and rejoice in what the Lord doeth ; or, if we cannot get the length of rejoicing in it, we acquiesce in his will. This is our song :—

"I would not contend with thy will,
Whatever that will may decree ;
But oh, may each trial I feel
Unite me more fondly to thee."

Brethren, the great comfort which this church wants now is to see God's work in the midst of her revived and glorified. If the Lord will but come among us and save men, and if he will build up and edify his people, and give them help to accomplish their holy service—this will be our richest possible comfort : "Let thy work appear unto thy servants." Lord, our brethren fade away, they go into the shadow land, we see them no more ; but, oh, if we can see thy hand at work among us we shall not be discouraged ! We mourn the loss of our brother's work ; but we will not be disheartened if we see thy work. May the Lord make you to see his work on your own hearts, dear brethren and sisters ; may he make you to see his work in the congregation, in the Sunday-school, and everywhere throughout the world, bringing men to himself ; and you will find therein a sovereign balm for all your wounds.

The next consolation is also a very rich one—*gladness at the revelation of God to our children*;—"and thy glory unto their children." If our God will but make his glory to be seen by our children, what more can we ask? "I have no greater joy than this, that my children walk in the truth." No better comfort can be found for bereaved mothers than to see their sons and daughters converted. There is a sorrow for those who have departed; but I could almost say, "Weep not for the dead, neither bewail them,"—for there is a sharper grief by far, and that is our anxiety for those who survive, and yet are dead unto God. Did you ever see a chain-gang of convicts marching to their labour? I could wish never to see the sad scene again. Suppose that among those convicts there was a boy of yours! Ah me! Ah me! it were better for you that he had never been born. But think of those who are prisoners in the chains of sin. Is there a boy or girl of yours in such bonds? Oh, then, I am sure you will pray the Lord to rescue you from so sharp a trial, and to set your sons and daughters free from the fetters of iniquity. Pray ye each one fervently, "O Lord, let thy glory as their emancipator appear to my children, and then do what thou wilt." Did you ever visit a condemned cell? To peep through the gate and to see a man sitting there condemned to die is enough to make one faint. Suppose it were your boy! Suppose it were your husband! Suppose it were your brother! But listen: "He that believeth not is condemned already." Pardon us, dear unconverted relatives, if we say that we feel more sorrow for you living than we do for our gracious ones who are dead; for yours is a terrible plight, to be even now sitting in the condemned cell, doomed to be taken out to execution before long unless infinite mercy shall grant a free pardon. What dreadful sights must meet the eye upon a battle-field. If I see a man bleeding by a common cut my heart is in my mouth, and I cannot bear the sight: but what must it be to see men dismembered, disembowelled, writhing to and fro in the last agonies of death! What horror to walk among mounds of dead bodies, and stumble at each step over a human corpse! Yet, what is natural death compared with spiritual death? What terror to dwell in the same house with relatives who are dead while they live,—dead unto God. The thought is full of anguish. If God will quicken our spiritually dead; if he will give life to those who are "free among the slain, as they that go down into the pit," what a consolation we shall find therein! Did you see that alarming fire the other day? Did you hear of the hotel in flames, wherein there were many guests, and they were in the upper story, and the flames had grasped the whole edifice, so that numbers perished? It must be dreadful to see persons at the upper windows of a burning house, and to be powerless to rescue them. But if your child were there, your boy, your girl, or if your husband or your wife were there, or even if anyone you knew were there, your grief would have a double sting about it, and you would cry, "Lord, do what thou wilt with me, but do save those precious lives." Remember, then, that your ungodly friends are in a like condition, and what greater mercy can God bestow upon you than for him to make his glory to be seen by your children in their eternal salvation?

Therefore I turn your thoughts to that prayer. May you breathe

it now, and may the Lord, for Christ's sake, answer it right speedily,—
 “Let thy glory appear unto our children.”

The third consolation which Moses here describes is *gladness at beauty bestowed*—“Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.” Sorrow mars the countenance and clothes the body with sackcloth; but if the Lord will come to us and adorn us with his beauty, then the stains of mourning will speedily disappear. Brethren, what a beauty is this which the Lord giveth—“the beauty of the Lord our God!” This comeliness is the beauty of his grace; for our covenant God is the God of all grace. If the Lord makes us to know that we are his our faces shine. If he fills us with his life and love, then brightness flashes from the eyes, and there is a grace about every movement.

This “beauty” means holiness; for holiness is the beauty of God. If the Holy Spirit works in you the beauty of holiness, you will rise superior to your afflictions. If this church shall be made the holier by its bereavements, we shall gain much by our losses.

This beauty of the Lord must surely mean his presence with us. As the sun beautifies all things, so does God's presence. When we know that Jesus is with us, when we feel that he is our helper, when we bask in his love, when he abides with us in power, this is the beauty of the saints. If we have Christ in us, Christ with us, we can bear any amount of trouble.

“I can do all things, or can bear
 All suffering if my Lord be there.”

This beauty gives to the believer an attractiveness in the eyes of men: they perceive that we have been with Jesus, and they behold our faces shining like the faces of angels. It is a great thing when a Christian is so happy, so holy, and so heavenly that he attracts others to Christ, and people seek his company because they perceive that he has been in the company of the blessed Lord. God give you this, and if you have it, dear friend, you may forget your sorrows: they are transfigured into joy.

The last comfort that Moses speaks of is *gladness at our own work being established*—“Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.” Do you notice the wonderful blending in the fifteenth and seventeenth verses: there it is, “Let *thy* work appear unto thy servant;” here it is “Let *our* work be established.” Alas, I have heard divines rightly say that salvation is God's work, and then they have harshly added that, in our preaching of the gospel, we make it out to be our own work. Thus they speak hard things against us, and their speech is not after the Lord's mind. Others, again, make out this work to be so much man's work that God is forgotten. Neither of these is correct: we must blend the two: to build up the church and win souls for Jesus is first of all God's work, and then our work. Why should a Christian work to win souls? Answer: because God works in him to win souls. Remember the verses,—“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Why? “For it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.” God works to set us working: our work is the result of his work.

Our work is often a very effectual means of comfort to us. On the

battle-field of Gettysburg there had been a terrible fight, and among the wounded lay a certain chaplain of the name of Eastman who had been seriously injured in the back by his horse falling upon him. The dark and dreary night came on, and as he lay there in intense pain, unable to rise, he heard a voice at a little distance cry, "O God!" His interest was excited, and he rolled himself over and over through pools of blood, and among the slain, till he reached the side of the dying man, and there lay, talking of Jesus and his free salvation. The man expired in hope, and just then two soldiers came and told Eastman that a captain was dying a little further down the field, and they must carry him there: so he was borne in anguish upon the work of mercy, and while the night wore on he spoke of Jesus to many dying men. Could he have had a surer relief from his pain? I think not. Why, it seems to me that to lie there on his back with nothing to do but moan and groan would have been horrible: but in all his pain and anguish to be carried about to proclaim mercy to dying men made the anguish of an injured back endurable! So is it when you miss a friend, or have lost property, or are heavy in spirit, you shall find your surest comfort in serving God with all your might.

The text prays for our work *that it may succeed*: "Establish thou the work of our hands." Oh, if God will but prosper us in our work for him how happy we shall be! One day this week I had a great lift up out of deep distress when I was informed that a captain was here last Sunday morning, and was so impressed that he found the Saviour, and made the fact known at one of the noonday prayer-meetings, asking for himself that he might be kept faithful to his God. This is good. We do not always see our seed grow so quickly as that. It is wet weather just now, the damp of sorrow is on all things, and so the seed sown in tears is speedily reaped in joy. Is not this something to comfort us? Let us pray God to send us more of it, that by conversions our work may prosper.

Then we pray that our *work may be lasting*,—that is the chief point. I look forward to the future of this church with prayerful, hopeful anxiety! I am not old, not very old at any rate; but I am not all that I was in my earlier days, and mistrust whispers that soon things will decline. The other day a certain great preacher said that after a preacher had been for a while in a place all the heroism, all the earnestness, all the fervour which characterizes new efforts would be gone, and the best thing would be to disband the church, and let them begin again under a new leader. That may look like a practical idea; but I do not quite see it; nor does it commend itself to me as sound and true. If a church is man's work it is dependent upon a man, and when he is gone the best thing we can do with it is to let it dissolve; but I desire to see built up on this spot, by God's hand, a church which will endure till the coming of the Lord. Though dear ones, who seemed to be pillars, are taken away, the Lord will find other pillars; and though just now there are breaches in Zion's wall here and there, yet the wall shall again be repaired, and not a broken place shall remain. If we may see this accomplished we shall be abundantly comforted. "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." We belong to an established

church ; established, not by men, but by the Lord. This church will flourish when you and I have passed into our rest. Meanwhile, I beg you to take a deep interest in it, and do all you can for its prosperity. Make it more and more the model of what a church of Christ should be. I long that the truth which I have preached may be established in the earth. They say that Calvinism is at a great discount now : perhaps it is. Yet to me it seems that its free grace spirit is far more spread than ever, and is quietly saturating all true evangelical preaching. If it be so, that the doctrines of grace are now despised, we still hope that we shall live to see them brought to the front again, or, if not, we shall leave behind us such a testimony that in years to come the gospel of the grace of God will be read by thousands.

At this time I beg for the loving help of you all, for the church itself. Our institutions deserve your zeal, and liberality, and prayerfulness ; but do not forget the old house at home, the mother of these efforts. The church itself needs your love, your prayers, your help, your sustenance. I say this to you, my dear friends, who have been with me long—be you this day what you were at first ; be as knit together and as earnest as you were when you had a boy preacher to lead you, and you loved him and helped him to do good service for the Lord. For nearly thirty years God has been with us ; let us begin again from this date and see if we cannot complete the thirty years of blessing, and, if the Lord permits us, let us add another twenty years to it, and make up half-a-century of prosperity. Who knows ? Only let us carefully watch the present and see that nothing declines. Let each one be eager to keep the sacred cause in a healthy condition. God will establish his work upon us from day to day, and this shall be our comfort. Keep everything in the best possible working order. Plead with the Holy Spirit to clothe us with his power. Maintain all forms of holy labour vigorously, and sustain every fund by your spontaneous liberality. Never need pressing, but let each one enquire, “What can I do to keep the church well supplied to God’s glory ?” I believe this is the way to church comfort. God will comfort Zion, he will comfort all her waste places ; but we must each one take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. Close up your ranks. Leave no empty spaces. Let every man stand closer to his fellow : and then “*Forward !*” Forward to a fuller consecration and a braver faith in God. Forward to more grace and higher holiness ; so shall we wipe away our tears, and praise the name of the Lord ; and he will remember us, and by a plentitude of blessing make up to us all that we have lost. A blessing is coming ! Be ready for it ! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xc.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—92 (Part I), 73 (Part III),
71 (Part I).