

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

DAGON'S UPS AND DOWNS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

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“When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.”—
Samuel v. 2—4.

THE ark of the Lord was captured by the Philistines though it was guarded by all the men of arms that Israel could muster for the battle. It came to no hurt when it was surrounded by unarmed priests: although the times were exceedingly disturbed and perilous all through the dreary period of the Judges, yet never was the ark a captive till it was protected by the carnal weapon. When those whom God had ordained to take care of the ark of the covenant had it in charge it was safe enough; but when the proud banners of the State and the warlike array of the nation formed the body-guard of the sacred shrine the ark of God was taken. When the civil power was joined with the spiritual, and the arm of flesh came in to patronise and to take into connection with itself the arm of God's strength, then it was that the ark was borne away in triumph by its foes. All through human history you will find the explanation of this instructive fact: let God's truth alone, and it will take care of itself without the aid of kings and princes, laws or establishments, endowments or privileges. Only state the pure truth of revelation and it will force its own way, but garnish and adorn it by your eloquent language, or protect and guard it by your carnal wisdom and prudence, and the truth goes into captivity. Leave the church alone, O ye kings and princes, or persecute it if ye will, for it will laugh your opposition to scorn; but pretend not to propagate its doctrines by the civil power, for this is the worst curse that can befall it. Take it under your patronage, and the mere touch of your royal hands will create
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disease within it. Almost to the death has the so-called "church" come down when her ministers, like Hophni and Phineas, have allied themselves with the temporal power; for God will do his work by his own instruments, and in his own way; he will not be indebted to the might of the flesh, but will defend his own glory by his own mysterious power. He uses for his instruments his consecrated ones who wear the white linen, which is the righteousness of saints, and not the blood-stained men of war arrayed in coat of mail and glittering breastplate of steel.

Another lesson may be learned from the incident before us. When the Philistines had beaten the Israelites in battle, and captured the sacred chest called the ark, they boasted and gloried as though they had defeated God himself. They evidently regarded the golden casket as the very choicest part of the spoil, and they placed it as a trophy in the chief temple of their god Dagon, to show that he was mightier than the God Jehovah, who was unable, as they thought, to protect his people. This touched at once the honour of Jehovah, and because he is a jealous God this boded good for Israel. The fact that God is a jealous God has often a terrible side to us, for it leads to our chastisement when we grieve him: this, indeed, led to the defeat of Israel. But it has also a bright side towards us, for his jealousy flames against his foes even more terribly than against his friends; and when his name is blasphemed, and honours that are due to him are ascribed to a mere idol, or he is declared to have been defeated by a false god, then his jealousy burns like coals of juniper, and he makes bare his right arm to smite his adversaries, as he did on this occasion. He thinks it meet to punish his offending people, but when Philistia saith, "Dagon has defeated Jehovah," then the Lord will no longer suffer Philistia to triumph. Jehovah's answer to his foes was Dagon broken to shivers before his ark, and the Philistines plagued with emerods till, in their desperate pain and dire disgrace, they set free the ark, being no longer able to endure its presence in any of their towns; so that the Jews ever afterwards used to exasperate the Philistines by reminding them of the disease which so sorely tried them; and there is a dash of this in the psalm which saith of the Lord, "He smote his enemies in the hinder part; he put them to a perpetual reproach." Never did a boastful nation undergo a deeper dishonour in the eyes of their neighbours, to whom they became a laughing-stock, and never did an image suffer a worse disgrace than that which befell their god Dagon.

Now, then, whenever at any time infidelity or superstition shall so prevail as to discourage your minds, take you comfort out of this—that in all these God's honour is compromised. Have they blasphemed his name? Then he will protect that name. Have they gone further than they used to do in foul utterances against him? Then they will provoke him, and he will make bare his holy arm. I pray that they may so provoke him! All his church will say "Amen!" to that, so that he may arise and perform the glorious works of his strength and of his love among the sons of men, and put the adversary to confusion by proving that he is still with his people, and still the same mighty God as he was in the days of yore. Say you to yourselves, then, "Our Lord will not always endure this idolatrous popery, which is multiplying its priests

within our national church. His people cannot bear it; much less will he. He will not always tolerate these blasphemous theories, by which self-conceited, learned men and vainglorious sceptics seek to get rid of God out of the world. They will provoke him. He will bestir himself; he will show himself strong on the behalf of his truth, he will roll back the waves of sin, and let the ages know that he is still the great I AM, the victorious God over all, blessed for ever." Those two truths seem to me to lie upon the surface of this passage.

And now, though it would be very wrong to make out the word of God to be a mere set of allegories, and so to deny that it records facts—and this, I trust, we shall never do—yet, as the apostle Paul has shown us that many of the events in the Old Testament are an allegory, and as, indeed, these things are evidently types, and must be regarded as emblems and patterns of things that still occur—we shall use this passage in a spiritual way, and make it the channel of experimental teaching. Where the living God comes into the soul, Dagon, or the idol god of sin and worldliness, must go down. This is the one thought which we shall hammer out at this time.

I. To begin, then: THE COMING OF THE ARK INTO DAGON'S TEMPLE WAS AN APT SIMILE OF THE COMING OF CHRIST INTO THE SOUL.

Dagon, according to the best information, was the fish-god of Philistia; perhaps borrowed from the Sidonians and men of Tyre, whose main business was upon the sea, and who therefore invented a marine deity. The upper part of Dagon was a man or woman, and the lower part of the idol was carved like a fish. We get a very good idea of it from the common notion of the fictitious, fabulous creature called a mermaid. Dagon was just a merman or mermaid; only, of course, there was no pretence of his being alive. He was a carved image, like that which the papists worship and call the Blessed Virgin, or Saint Peter, or Saint Remy. The temple at Ashdod was, perhaps, the cathedral of Dagon, the chief shrine of his worship; and there he sat erect upon the high altar with pompous surroundings. The ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts was a small wooden box overlaid with gold, by no means a very cumbersome or bulky matter, but nevertheless very sacred, because it had a representative character, and symbolized the covenant of God: its capture was grievous indeed to pious Israelites, for they felt that the glory was departed when the ark was taken. The sacred chest was carried in triumph by the Philistines, and brought into the temple where Dagon stood. In your mind's eye you can see the fish-god high upon his throne, and the incense burning before him as the priests gather around, and the princes of Philistia with triumphant banners bow before his shrine. We hear the shouts of the Philistine lords as they bring in the golden coffer with the golden staves, and set it down at the foot of Dagon, and sing their exultant songs. Hear them as they sound their trumpets and chant their blasphemous hymns: "Glory be unto thee, O Dagon! thou hast triumphed this day, O mighty god of the land and the sea! Glorious fish-god, thou hast vanquished those who vanquished the Canaanites; and though their God slew the Egyptians of old, thou hast smitten them by their thousands. Glory be unto thee, thou mighty god!" Thus would they

extol their deity and pour contempt upon the captured ark, which they placed at the foot of the image. Then, when the service was over, and they had worshipped Dagon to their heart's content, they shut up the temple, and there was darkness in the holy place, or unholy place—which shall I call it? Not long did the ark remain where it was, with Dagon still supreme, but the mere incoming of the ark *into the idol temple was a fair picture of the introduction of the grace of God into the human heart.* The Philistines brought in the ark of the Lord, but only an act of divine power can bring the grace of God into the soul. By divers instrumentalities the truth as it is in Jesus is read, is heard, is brought to the recollection, is seen printed in the lives of men, and so enters into the temple of the inner manhood. When it first comes into the heart it finds sin enthroned there; and the Prince of Darkness reigning supreme. The first grace that enters into the soul finds it in darkness and in death, under the dominion of sin. Brethren, we have not to deliver ourselves from sin and death and darkness, and then obtain grace; but, while we are yet dead, grace visits us; while we are yet slaves the liberator comes; on our blackest midnight the sun of righteousness arises. While the Dagon of sin sits firmly on his throne, as if he never could be stirred, and his horrid form is alone to be seen lording it over all the thoughts and imaginations of the heart, even then it is that “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins,” sends his almighty grace to dwell within us. When that grace enters the soul it comes not with observation, and sin at the first does not know any more about the incoming of grace than Dagon knew about the ark. The grace, the light, the truth, the love of God come into the soul, and the man does not know as yet what the Lord has done for him. He is only conscious of some impression, of a thoughtfulness he had never known before, of a calm frame of mind, of a desire to consider eternal things; and that is all that he perceives of the Lord's work within him. His Dagon seems to be there in as supreme a majesty as ever, only something strange is also within the mind, the man knows not what it is. It is the beginning of the end—of a blessed and glorious end.

We have now Dagon and the ark in the same temple, sin and grace in the same heart, *but this state of things cannot long abide.* No man can serve two masters, and even if he could then two masters would not agree to be so served. The two great principles of sin and grace will not abide in peace with each other, they are as opposite as fire and water. There will be a conflict and a victory, and we know which will conquer, for as surely as ever the grace of God comes into the soul sin receives notice to quit. That night, when the Philistines had finished their exalting ceremonies, they thought they had left Dagon robed in glory, reigning and triumphing over the ark of the Lord. They had scarcely shut the doors and gone before Dagon fell on his face to the ground before the ark. Down he went. He did not lean over, but *he fell*, nor did he drop upon his side, but he was made to do obeisance before the ark, for he fell *on his face*; and he did not fall part of the way merely, but fell on his face *to the ground* before the ark: a change of positions very significant to his worshippers! The ark was set at the foot of Dagon, and now Dagon lies before the ark as if he were

prostrating himself in worship before the great and mighty God. Even thus grace in the soul is not long before it overthrows sin. What a turning of things upside down grace always makes! The watchword is, "Overturn, overturn, overturn." The Breaker is come up, and the images of man's invention must be dashed to shivers.

Very likely your Dagon is in the shape of *self-righteousness*. I shall call it Dagon, for it is nothing better: one of the worst idols in the whole world is the idol of self. The self-righteous man boasts that he is as good as other people, if not rather better, although he is not a Christian. He does not know that he has ever done anything very wrong, and he feels that in him there is a great deal that is very good and excellent, and therefore he expects that things will go well with him at last. He has a very fine figure-head for his god, and though there may be a rather "fishy" tail to his character, he keeps that as much out of sight as possible, and conceals it with excuses. The god of his self-confidence is a very pretty thing, take it for all in all; it is beautiful as a mermaid, and he is fascinated with its beauty. He bows before his idol and sings before it that ancient canticle of the Philistines—I mean the Pharisees—which begins, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are!" When grace enters the soul the dominion of self-confidence comes to an end, down goes the fish-god on its face to the ground before the ark of the Lord, and the man discovers that he has no such righteousness as that wherein he trusted. He begins to bemoan his sins and to lament his shortcomings. A perfect change of feeling has come over him. He loathes himself as much as he once admired himself; and now, instead of taking the highest seat in the synagogue, he is willing to be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord. "Ah, me!" says he, "what a sinner I am! how vile in the sight of God!" See you not how this brave Dagon has gone down on his face to the ground before the ark.

Perhaps the man never had much of this vainglorious self-righteousness, but he served the Dagon of *besetting and beloved sin*. The man was a drunkard, Bacchus ruled him: but as soon as the grace of God is brought into his soul he has done with the drink-god. The horrible Dagon of drunkenness is hurled from its throne by grace. The man cannot bear to think that he should have so disgraced himself as to be fond of wantonness, and chambering, and surfeiting, and drunkenness, and such-like abominable sins, which bring manhood below the level of the beast. He who is truly penitent hates the very name of these filthy sins. If a man has been guilty of using bad language and profane swearing, the grace of God generally cures him of that at once. I have heard men who had lived in the practice of swearing for many years say that, from the time they were converted, they never had a temptation to it; that black sin went off bag and baggage at once. Some sins are slow in dying, but profanity generally gives up the ghost without a struggle. John Bunyan says that a stone from the battering-ram slew Mr. Profane by cracking his skull, so that he died early in the siege of Mansoul; it were well if more deceptive sins did the like. The grosser outward offences, like Dagon, are soon down before the ark.

Sin of every sort is bowed low before triumphant grace. Yea, and the man who receives the grace of God feels that the love of any and every

sin is cast out of its place in his heart. Now he desires to be quit of it all, and anxiously cries, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" He will no more go and live in sin, as he did before, than Paul will continue to be a persecutor after the Lord, even Jesus, has appeared to him by the way. What a Dagon-fall there was in the apostle's pride just outside the Damascus gate! Such a fall takes place in the heart of every man to whom the grace of God comes with power.

Now the parallel may be run a little further. *This fall of Dagon very soon began to be perceived*, for "When they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen on his face to the earth." Very soon after the entrance of grace this sign follows, and ere long it is seen and known. Let no man conceive that there is grace in his soul if Dagon sits on the throne still. This is one of the earliest tokens of the entrance of the life of God into the soul—that sin falls down from its high place, and is no more had in honour.

At the same time, observe that Dagon was not broken. He had fallen on his face, but that was all; so that the next day his foolish worshippers could set him up again. Sometimes at the first entrance of grace there is a downfall of sin, but nothing like such a breaking and destroying of sin in the soul as there will be afterwards. When the divine life has entered sin is dethroned, it no longer sits up there in the place of God; but yet, for all that, there is an awful power remaining in the corrupt nature, a deadly tendency to sin, a powerful law in the members bringing the soul into captivity. Still, down the idol goes, even if it be not broken: it cannot reign, though it may remain to trouble us.

Now, what happened on the night mentioned in the text? *Dagon fell before the ark when it was all quiet and still in the temple.* While the worshippers were there, during the day, there was noise, and shouting, the false god sat aloft and you could not tell that there was any mysterious power about the ark. It was in the quiet of the night that this deed was done, and thus often in the hearing of the word grace is introduced into the heart, but you would not know that any change was wrought, for it is only when the man gets away from the world's business—gets alone and begins to consider—that a divinely-mysterious might is displayed by the inward grace, so as to sink sin, and lay the power of evil low. Would to God our hearers took more opportunities for quietly considering the word of God! How much more blessing might often be gotten out of sermons and books if there were more meditation! You get the grapes, but you do not tread them in the wine-vat. There is more trouble taken to collect the sheaves of the sermon than is afterwards expended in threshing them out. The power which smote Dagon was displayed in the quiet of the night; and when the grace of God has entered into your souls it is probable that the downcoming of sin will be better effected in times of quiet thought and searching of heart than at any other period. Thought is the channel of immense benefit to the soul. Shut the temple doors and let all be still, and then will the Holy Ghost work wonders in the soul.

II. Now, secondly, THE SETTING UP OF DAGON THE SECOND TIME, AND HIS SECOND FALL, VERY WELL REPRESENT THE BATTLE GOING ON IN THE SOUL BETWEEN SIN AND GRACE.

What fools these Philistines were to continue worshipping a god

which when it tumbled down could not get up again. To worship a god which fell on its face was bad enough, but to worship one that could not rise when he fell, but needed to be set in his place by human hands, was certainly vile infatuation : but they took up their precious deity, and they put him in his place again, and no doubt sang a special "high mass" to him, and then went their way quietly to their homes, little dreaming that their pretty fish-god would want their help again so soon. Even thus *Satan and the flesh come into our souls and try to set our fallen Dagon up again, with some measure of success.* It often happens that in young converts there comes a period when it looks as if they had altogether apostatized and gone back to their former ways. It seems as if the work of God were not real in their souls, and grace was not triumphant. Do you wonder at it? I have ceased to wonder. The gospel is preached, and the man accepts it, and there is a marvellous difference in him ; but when he goes among his old companions, although he is resolved not to fall into his former sins, they try him very severely. He is assailed in a thousand ways! Some of our young people, if they were to tell their story, would harrow up your feelings by mentioning the way in which all sorts of jests, and insinuations, and taunts are hurled at them, and that by influential persons—their parents, their elder brothers and sisters, and those who oversee their work ; they are beset behind and before, so that if they do not transgress in one way, it is very likely that the devil craftily trips them up in another. I have known a man when he has been tempted to go into evil company refuse again, and again, and again. His tempters have laughed at him, and he has borne it all, but at last he has lost his temper ; and as soon as the enemies have seen his passion boiling up they have cried out, "Ah, there you are! We have got you." At such a time as that the poor man is apt to cry, "Alas, I cannot be a believer, or else I should not have done this." Now, all this is a violent attempt of Satan and the flesh to set Dagon up again. They know that the Lord has thrown him down and they cannot bear it, but would fain set the fish-god again on his throne. Sometimes they do for a time set Dagon up again and cause great sorrow in the soul. I have known a poor lost lamb to be found and brought into the fold ; but it has miserably wandered for a time, and the devil has thought that, surely, he had got that lamb, and would tear him into pieces, and yet he has been deceived after all. Dagon was only set up for a time, and he had to come down again ; and so it happens wherever grace enters the heart. The wanderers have come back, weeping and sighing, to own that they have dishonoured their profession : and what has been the result in the long run? Why, they have had more humility, more tenderness of heart, more love to Christ, more gratitude, than they had before ; and I have been glad (not glad that they wandered, but glad) that the grace of God, when he has brought them back again more fully, has given them a deeper conversion and a more lasting and substantial work of grace, so that afterwards they have continued by the grace of God honourable, useful Christians even to the end. Often and often is that the case, and I speak at this time to my young convert who can say in his heart, "O sir, I do love the Lord, but I have been such a backslider. I do trust Jesus. I wish to be a Christian, but I have been overthrown by enemies, I fear I must

not join a Christian church, because if I could not resist temptation for six weeks how could I expect to stand fast all my life? I am such a poor, weak creature, so apt to be led astray, what is to become of me?" Dear friend, grieve to think you were so foolish, but do not doubt the power of God's Holy Spirit to help you, and to break in pieces the enemy, who seems to have resumed his power over you.

Now, notice that *although they again set Dagon up, he had to go down again with a worse fall.* I have no doubt it took them a long pull and a great heave to haul the uncomely lump of marble into its place again. Many strong limbs were tired, and muscles strained, to lift up the huge god, and set him on his pedestal; but it was no trouble to the Lord to upset the ugly stone. No rope was wanted, and no straining or pulling, "Bel boweth down and Nebo stoopeth" when Jehovah uplifts himself. Only shut the temple gates, and leave the ark and Dagon to have it out between them, and Dagon gets the worst of it. Only, mark this, Dagon has not gained much by being reinstated, for this time, when he comes down, behold he was fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of Jehovah, "and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold." The idol's *head* was gone, and even so the reigning power of sin is utterly broken and destroyed, its beauty, its cunning, its glory are all dashed to atoms. This is the result of the grace of God, and the sure result of it, if it once comes into the soul, however long the conflict may continue, and however desperate the efforts of Satan to regain his empire. O believer, sin may trouble thee, but it shall not tyrannize over thee. "Sin shall not have dominion over you," saith the Holy Spirit, "for ye are not under the law, but under grace." If the power of evil be set up for awhile it shall only come down with the greater force, and its head shall be cut off.

Then, too, the *hands* of Dagon were broken off, and even thus the active power, the working power of sin is taken away. Both the palms of the idol's hands were cut off upon the threshold, so that he had not a hand left. Neither right-handed sin nor left-handed sin shall remain in the believer when God's sanctifying grace fetches Dagon down. The secret reigning power is broken, and so is the manifest working power. The Christian is kept from putting forth his hand into iniquity. He is crucified with Christ, and so both hands are nailed to the cross and fastened up from performing those deeds of ill towards which the lustings of the flesh would urge him.

This happened, too, if you notice, very speedily; for we are told a second time that, when they arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face. It does not take grace long, when it is once in the soul, to overturn the reigning power and the active energy of sin, when these for a while appear to get the upper hand. Brothers and sisters, I hope you know this. I hope that the Spirit of God which is in you, and the love of Christ which reigns in you, have destroyed the power which sin once had in your souls. If it be not so, then question yourselves whether the Spirit of God be in you at all. It is not possible that the ark should be in the temple and that Dagon should be standing there unbroken. Not till the morrow morning shall evil remain unchallenged and unmoved upon the throne. It is not possible that you, dear friend, could live and delight in sin, and yet be a child of God.

If your heart is set upon iniquity, where your heart is there your treasure is, and if sin be your treasure you are no heir of heaven. That which governs your heart is your lord and your god; what your heart loves, by that you shall be judged, and if you love evil you shall be condemned. We may sin—ah, would God we did not!—but to love in is not in the believer. There is a deadly antagonism between grace and sin; and where the gracious life comes the evil life must fall. There cannot be an alliance between Dagon and the ark, between God and the world, or between Christ and sin.

III. And now, thirdly, the parallel still holds good in one more point, namely, that **THOUGH THE FISH-GOD WAS THUS MAIMED AND BROKEN, YET THE STUMP OF DAGON WAS LEFT TO HIM.**

The original Hebrew is, "Only Dagon was left to him," or "only the fish": only the fishy part remained. The head and the upper portions were broken away, there remained only the fishy tail of Dagon, and that was all; but that was not broken. Now, *this is the business which brings us so much sorrow*—that the stump of Dagon is left to him. I wish it were not. I have heard some say that they have no sin remaining in them. Well, dear brother, the Lord convert you! I shall say no more than that, for if there were in you enough light for you to perceive your darkness, it were better than to talk as you do. Every child of God who knows anything about himself and the experience of a real believer, knows that there is indwelling sin in him, and that to a most fearful extent, so as to make his very soul cry out in agony, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" I could not go the length of singing, with Ralph Waldo Emerson, as a description of myself, the lines written by him in his "Believer's Sonnets"—

"To good and evil equal bent,—
And both a devil and a saint."

But yet, taken with a large lump of salt, there is a good deal of truth even in that unguarded expression. There is the old corruption within us, and there is no use denying it, because denying it will put us off our guard, will make many of the puzzles of life to be quite unanswerable, and often bring upon us great confusion of soul. The other law is within us as well as the law of grace. Canst thou draw near to God, my brother, and not see that he can justly charge thee with folly? Canst thou stand in his presence, as Job did, and behold his glory, and not say, "I abhor myself in dust and ashes"? Canst thou have dealings with perfection, and not perceive thy faultiness? Canst thou come near unto the innermost court of the temple, and stand in that excessive light of fellowship which is the portion of the Lord's chosen, and not see within thyself spots and wrinkles, yea, thousands of them, so as to make thee cover thy face for shame, and adore the amazing grace which loves thee still? Canst thou not see in thy daily life enough to condemn thee, and cast thee into hell, were it not that God still sees thee in Christ, and imputes not thy iniquity to thee, but accepts thee in the Beloved? Oh, it is so—it is so, indeed! The stump of Dagon is still left; and because it is left, dear friends, *it is a thing to be watched against*, for though that stony stump of Dagon would not grow in the

Philistine temple; yet they would make a new image, and exalt it again, and bow before it as before. Alas, the stump of sin within us is not a slab of stone, but full of vitality, like the tree cut down, of which Job said, "At the scent of water it will bud." Leave the sin that is in you to itself, and let temptation come in the way, and you shall see that which will blind your eyes with weeping. It is a good thing to look at your face in a glass, but your face is not yourself; no mirror can show you yourself. There is a certain temptation which has an affinity to the evil within you; and should Satan bring that temptation near you will see yourself to your horror and shame. There shall then look out of the window of your countenance a man whom you did not see when you looked in the glass, for you only saw the house he lived in. So ugly is he that he makes the very house he lives in look horrible. When the angry man comes up, and is visible to the naked eye, how he deforms the countenance! When obstinate old Adam comes to the window, what a dark forbidding face he wears! When that envious spirit comes up, what an evil glance there is in the eye! When the unbelieving spirit peers through the lattice, what a miserable countenance he shows compared with the face of faith and childlike confidence in God! There is nobody in this world, dear brother, that you have so much cause to be afraid of as yourself. Augustine used to pray, "Lord, deliver me from that evil man, myself." A very appropriate prayer for a woman, too—"Lord, save me from myself." If you are saved from yourself you will be saved from the devil; for what can the devil do unless self joins hands with him in unholy league? But, oh, what watchfulness it will need! Here is room for faith indeed! Faith does not decline the conflict, nor puff us up with the notion that the fight is over; on the contrary, it takes to itself the whole armour of God, because it sees the battle to be still raging. Faith is wanted to be the shield to keep off the fiery darts, and the sword with which to smite the foe. Here is the sphere in which faith is to work; it does not talk of ended warfare, but carries on the life-long campaign to ultimate victory. Faith does not say, "I have ceased the conflict": she knows better: faith says, "I am in the midst of it, warring with a thousand foes, and looking for the victory through Jesus Christ my Lord." O brothers and sisters, be strong in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit, for you have need to be so, since the stump of Dagon still remaineth. The lasting of the flesh abideth still in the regenerate.

Look at this matter again. That stump of Dagon which remained was a vile thing: it was a piece of an idol, a fragment of a monstrous image which had been worshipped instead of God. Now, the sin which dwelleth in you is never to be regarded by you as anything else than a horrible, loathsome, and detestable thing. That after such love as you and I have known there should be in us even the power to be ungrateful ought to shock us; that after such proof of his truth as God has shown to us, after such faithfulness and such abundant evidences of faithfulness, we should still be capable of unbelief ought to be a sorrow to us. Oh, I wish I could never sin again throughout time or eternity. Oh, that every particle of the tinder of depravity into which the devil could let a spark fall was gone from my nature. It is a

mercy to have the sparks put out, but it is a pity to have even the tinder left ; and there is plenty of this tinder about us all. Tinder? Ay, gunpowder, so quick is it to take the light which Satan is ever ready to bring. We carry a bomb-shell heart about with us, and we had better keep clear of all the devil's candles lest there should be an explosion of actual sin. These candles are common enough in the form of some plausible but sceptical friend, or in the form of amusements which are questionable. Keep you clear of Lucifer's matches. You have got enough mischief in your heart without going where you will get more. If anybody here feels that he is so very gracious and good that he can safely enter into temptation, I am sure that he is labouring under a very great mistake. I would say to him, Brother, there is devil enough in you without your sending out invitation cards to seven more. Go you to him that casteth out devils. Go you into company where the powers of evil will be held in chains and bound ; but do not go where other devils as wicked as himself will call to the demon who now besets you, and stir him up to work mischief. The stump of Dagon is left. Be careful, watchful, prayerful, and loathe sin with all your soul.

IV. But now, lastly, here is mercy, that **THOUGH THE STUMP OF DAGON WAS NOT TAKEN OUT OF THE PHILISTINE TEMPLE, WE MAY GO BEYOND THE HISTORY AND REJOICE THAT IT WILL BE TAKEN FROM OUR HEARTS.** The day is coming, brother, sister, in which there will be no more inclination in you to sin than there is in an angel. The day is coming in which your nature shall be so established in truth and righteousness and holiness that all the devils in hell will not be able to make you think a wrong thought. "Oh," says one, "I wish that time would come soon." It will come, brother. The Lord will keep you fighting yet and warring yet ; but there will come a day when a messenger will wait at your door, and he will say, "The pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern. Thy flesh must return to the dust, and thy spirit to God that made it," and then your spirit shall open its eyes with glad surprise and find itself delivered from the body, and at the same time delivered from all sin. There shall also come by-and-by the sound of the trumpet of resurrection, and the body shall rise ; and one of the chief characteristics of the risen body will be that as it rises it will be free from the bondage of corruption, and it will have no tendency to lead us into sin. When our perfected spirit shall enter into our perfect body, then our complete manhood, body, soul, and spirit shall have no stain, or spot, or flaw. All its past sin will be washed away—nay, *is* washed away—in the blood of the Lamb, and all its propensities, tendencies and inclinations to sin shall all be gone for ever, and the very possibilities of sinning shall be eternally taken away.

"No cloud those blissful regions know,
For ever bright and fair ;
For sin, the source of mortal woe,
Can never enter there."

John Bunyan represents Mercy as laughing in her sleep. She had a dream, she said ; and she laughed because of the great favours which were yet to be bestowed upon her. Well, if some of you were to dream

to-night that the great thing which I have spoken of had actually happened to you, so that you were completely free from all tendency to sin, would not you also be as them that dream and laugh for very joy. Think of it—no more cause for watchfulness, no more need of weeping over the day's sin before you fall asleep at night ; no more sin to confess, no devil to tempt you, no worldly care, no lusting, no envy, no depression of spirit, no unbelief, nothing of the kind—will not this be a very large part of the joy of heaven? Why, I am ready to cry for joy to think that this will happen to me, unworthy though I be. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name." It will be so, brother, both to you and to me. As surely as we have trusted Christ he will perfect that which concerneth us.

"The feeblest saint shall win the day,
Though death and hell obstruct the way."

The Lord has undertaken our perfect sanctification, and he will accomplish it. He has brought old Dagon down, and broken his head and his hands, and he will break him to shivers ere long. Yea, he will take the ark of the Lord away where Dagon shall never come into contact with it any more. He will take you—the gracious part of you, your truest and best self—away into the glory, to abide with him for ever. Think of this and sing. Yea, brother, sing with all your might, for all this may happen within a week. A week? It may happen within a day. It may happen before you reach home to-night. We are so near to heaven that if we were not very dull, and our ears very heavy, we might at once hear the angels chanting their ceaseless hallelujahs. Some of God's saints—some here, perhaps—have almost got their foot upon the threshold of the eternal city, and do not know it. They are closer than they think to the harp and the palm branch. They would not fret about what they will do next year, they would not be worrying about next quarter-day if they knew that they would be amongst the royalties of heaven by then. They would not even think about to-morrow did they know how soon it will all be over, and how soon the eternal joy will begin.

God bless you, dear friends. May the Lord's grace reign over all in the power of the Holy Ghost ; and even to sinners in whom sin is triumphant may Jesus Christ come, and his grace enter, and then their beloved sins must fall. To the one only living and true God be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans vii.
18—25 ; and Romans viii. 1—14.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—377, 648, 631.