

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

AN OLD-FASHIONED CONVERSION.

A Sermon

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“Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.”—Job xxxiii. 29, 30.*

SOME people are wonderfully enamoured of anything that is old. An old coin, an old picture, an old book, or even a piece of antique rubbish, they will almost worship. The jingle of a rusty medal is music to them, and “auld nick-nackets” are as precious as diamonds. It is wonderful what a little mouldiness and a few worm-holes will do in the way of increasing values. I confess I do not very greatly share in the feeling, at least it is no craze of mine; but, nevertheless, all things being equal, antiquity has its charms. Old, old stories of the days far past, when time was young, have a special interest; they are as windows which permit us to gaze down the dim aisles of ages long gone by—we look through them with mingled curiosity and awe. I am about this morning to speak to you concerning an old conversion. We shall rehearse an ancient story of the renewal and salvation of a soul. In our day we meet with professors who cry down everything of the present, and cry up everything of the former days, which they call the good old times. Such persons talk much about old-fashioned conversions and hold in great admiration the lives of believers of the old school. I shall this morning introduce you to an old-fashioned conversion, and explain the way in which men were brought to God not only hundreds, but thousands of years ago. I suppose that Elihu delivered this description of conversion about the time of Moses, or at the period when Israel was in Egypt, for almost general consent appropriates one of those dates to the Book of Job. The record we shall read this morning, and study carefully, refers to the very very

* The real text is the whole passage from verse fourteen to thirty, and the reader is requested to turn to it before reading the sermon.

oldest times. Let this fact give additional interest to our meditation : and if it does I am sure that we shall not lack for earnest attention, for the subject is of great intrinsic value.

Kindly keep your Bibles open ; we have already read the chapter, but it will be needful to refer to it verse by verse.

I. The matter in hand is to compare an old-fashioned conversion with those of the present time, and the first note we shall strike is this : it is quite certain from the description given in this thirty-third chapter of Job that THE SUBJECTS OF CONVERSION WERE SIMILAR, and men in the far gone ages were precisely like men in these times. The passage tells us nothing about the stature of men's bodies, but as far as they were spiritually concerned the photograph which Elihu took is the portrait of many of those who are brought to Jesus now. Reading the passage over, we find that men in those times needed converting ; for they were deaf to God's voice (verse 14) ; they were obstinate in evil purposes (verse 17), and puffed up with pride. They needed chastening to arouse them to thought, and required sore distress to make them cry out for mercy (verses 19—22). They were very loth to say, "I have sinned," and were not at all inclined to prayer. Nothing but sharp discipline could bring them to their senses, and even then they needed to be born again. Men in those days were sinful and yet proud ; sinful self and righteous self were both in power ; it was one part of conversion to withdraw them from their purposes of sin, and another part of their conversion to "hide pride" from them. Though they were sinful they thought that they were righteous, and though they were condemned by the law of God they still entertained the fond hope that they should by their own merits obtain the favour of the Most High. They were then, as they are now, poor as poverty and yet proud of their wealth, Publicans in sin, and yet Pharisees in boasting.

It appears that in those days God was accustomed to speak to men and to be disregarded by them ; we are told that God spake "once, yea, twice," and men perceived him not. Their presumptuous slumbers were too deep to be broken by the call of love. Samuel said, "Here am I, for thou didst call me," but they slept on in defiance of the Lord. O, how frequently doth the Lord speak now to deaf ears ! He calls, and men refuse, he stretches out his hands, and men do not regard him ; but they are desperately set upon their sins, and sodden in carnal security, therefore they do despite to his grace, and ruin their own souls.

In those ancient times, when a man was converted, the Lord himself must needs turn him, omnipotence itself was necessary to divide man from his folly. God's speaking to the ear was not enough unless he followed it up with a powerful application to the heart. Man was too far gone to be healed by remedies less than divine—he was utterly past hope unless Almighty love would come to the rescue ; verily the case is the same at this day, and each man repeats his fellow. As the fish still bites at the bait, as the bird still flies into the snare, as the beast is still taken in the pit, so is man still the dupe of his sins, and only the Lord can save him. Salvation was only wrought by the gracious influences of God's Spirit in the days of Job, and it is only so accomplished at this present hour. Men were lost then as now ; men thought

they were not lost then, and they are equally conceited now. Into the house of the divine Physician the same class of persons enter as were welcomed and healed by him ages ago ; he has the same blind eyes and deaf ears to open, hearts still require to be transformed from stone to flesh, and leprosy to be exchanged for health by his Sovereign touch. The Spirit from the four winds breathed on a valley covered with dry bones in the days of the fathers, and he comes forth still to work upon the like scene of death. Man has not outgrown his sins. As it was in the beginning it is now, and so it ever will be while that which is born of the flesh is flesh ; as were the sires such are their sons, and such will our sons be in their turn ; so that the process of conversion needs to be the same, and "all these things God worketh oftentimes with man."

II. The second note we shall strike is this, that in those olden times THE WORKER OF CONVERSION WAS THE SAME,—"*all these things God worketh.*" The whole process is by Elihu ascribed to God, and every Christian can bear witness that the Lord is the great worker now ; he turns us, and we are turned. We read in verse fourteen, that at first the Lord wrought upon men by speaking to them, once, yea, twice : he also brought truth home to their minds and instructed them ; and so changed their purposes and humbled their hearts. In the same manner the Lord worketh now. Conversion is a change which concerns the mind, the affections, the spirit ; it is not a physical manipulation as some foolish persons fancy, who appear to think that God converts men by force, and turns them over as a man would roll a stone. The Lord operates upon men as men, not as blocks of wood ; God speaks to them, instructs them, reveals truth to them, encourages them to hope, and graciously influences them for good. Man is left free, for "God speaketh once, yea, twice, yet man perceiveth it not," and yet in God's own wise and suitable manner, he is at length led to cry, "I have sinned and perverted that which is right, and it profited me not."

But in those times, as now, it was necessary that God should do more than speak to the outer ear, he therefore came nearer still, and by his Holy Spirit led men really to hear what he spake. He did not leave men to their wills, neither did he trust their conversion to the eloquence of preachers, or to the cogency of arguments, but he himself came and opened men's ears, and pressed the truth home upon their understandings, and made it operative upon their entire nature. Man was so proud that no one else could humble him but God ; and he was so wilful, that no one could withdraw him from his purpose but the Lord alone : but the Lord in condescension did the deed, and made the man obedient and humble. Indeed, the Lord is described in this chapter as the main cause of all the work accomplished. Whereas, a ransom was needed to deliver men from going down to the pit, it is the Lord's voice which cried, "I have found a ransom." Whereas, even when the ransom was found, men did not know it, and would not receive it ; it was God who sent a messenger, one of a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, and to proclaim the great provision made for restoring man to his primeval state. It is the Lord who delivers the soul from the pit, that man's life may see the light.

In this chapter it is God that visits, that speaks, chastens, instructs, enlightens, consoles, renews and saves, from first to last. God worketh all in all. Salvation is of the Lord, it is not of man, neither by man ; neither is it of the will of man, nor of the flesh, nor of blood, nor of birth, but of the will of God. The purpose of God and the power of God work salvation from first to last. What a blessing this is for us, for, if salvation were of ourselves, who among us would be saved ? But he hath "laid help upon one that is mighty ;" God also is our strength and our song, for he himself has become our salvation. He who has begun the good work will carry it on. Christ is the Alpha, and Christ is the Omega, the "author and the finisher of our faith." So we have two points in this ancient conversion in which it was just like our own, the same men to be operated upon, and the same God to work the miracles of grace.

III. The most interesting point to you will probably be the third : THE MEANS USED TO WORK CONVERSION IN THOSE DISTANT AGES WERE VERY MUCH THE SAME AS THOSE EMPLOYED NOW. There were differences in outward agencies, but the inward *modus operandi* was the same. There was a difference in the instruments, but the way of working was the same. Kindly turn to the chapter, at the fifteenth verse ; you find there that God first of all spoke to men, but they regarded him not, and then he spoke to them effectually by means of a dream : "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed." Now, this was an extraordinary means of grace, seldom used now. In this the distant ages differ from the present. A dream, though it be in itself but the phantasm of sleep, may be employed by God to arouse the mind towards eternal things. Dreams of death and judgment to come have frequently had a very alarming effect upon the conscience, while visions of celestial glory have impressed the heart with desires after infinite bliss. As Dryden says of some men—

"In sleep they fearful precipices tread ;
Or, shipwreck'd, labour to some distant shore,"

so others have in their slumbers shivered at the gates of hell, or even been tossed upon its fiery waves, and the thoughts consequent upon such dreams have, by God's grace, occasionally been rendered permanently useful, though I fear it is not often so. In the days of Elihu, however, dreams were much more frequently the way in which God spake, for there were few messengers from God to interpret his mind, no openly declared gospel, and few assemblies for instruction by hearing the word ; and what is more, there was then no written word of God. In those early times they had no inspired books at all, so that, lacking the Bible, and lacking the frequent ministrations of God's servants, the Lord was pleased to supply their deficiencies by speaking to men in the visions of the night. I say again, we must not expect the Lord to return to the general use of so feeble an agency now that he employs others which are far more effectual. It is much more profitable for you to have the word in your houses which you can read at all times, and to have God's ministers to proclaim clearly the gospel of Jesus, than it would be to be dependent upon visions of the night.

The means, therefore, outwardly, may have changed, but still, whether it be by the dream at night, or by the sermon on the Sabbath, the power is just the same : namely, in the word of God. God speaks to men in dreams, if so, he speaks to them all nothing more and nothing different from what he speaks in the written word. If any come to you and say, "I have dreamed this or that," and it be not in the Scriptures, away with their dreams ! If anything should occur in your own mind in vision which is not already revealed in the Book of God, put it away, it is an idle fancy not to be regarded. Woe to that man whose religion is the baseless fabric of dreams, he will one day wake up to find that nothing short of realities could save him. We have the more sure word of testimony, unto which we do well if we take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. Conversions, then, in the old time, used to be by the word of God ; it came in a different way, but it was the same word and the same truth. At this time faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, and at bottom that was precisely the way in which faith came to men in those distant periods.

Now, observe, that in addition to the external coming of the word, it seems from the chapter before us in the sixteenth verse, that men were converted by having their ears opened by God. Alas, men's ears are still stopped up ! An old Puritan has mentioned seven forms of what he calls "ear stoppers," which need to be taken out of the human ear. They are frequently blocked up by ignorance ; they know not the importance and value of the truth, and, therefore they refuse to give earnest heed to it ; judging it to be an idle tale, they go their ways to their farms and to their merchandise. Some ears are stopped up by unbelief ; they have heard the glad tidings of salvation, but they have not received it as an infallible revelation from heaven, a message backed by divine authority. Scepticism and philosophy, falsely so called, barricade Ear-gate against the assaults of Emmanuel's captains, so that even the great battering-rams of the gospel prove powerless to force an entrance. "He could not do many mighty works then because of their unbelief !" Others ears are stopped up by impenitence ; the hardness of the heart causes a deadness of the ear. You may discharge the great cannons of the law in the ears of some men, but they will not stir ; the thunders of God startle the wild beasts of the wood, but impenitence is not moved thereby. The gospel itself soundeth upon such ears with no more effect than upon a marble statue ; the groans of Calvary are nothing to them. Some ears are stopped by prejudice ; they have made up their minds as to what the gospel ought to be, and they will not hear it as it is ; they have set up for themselves a standard of what the truth should be, and that standard is a false one, for they have put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness. Prejudices against the preacher, or against the denomination are but forms of the same evil ; they make men to be as Ulysses was when his ears were sealed with wax, for they are even as deaf men. The entrance into many ears is also effectually barred by the love of sin. He who loves vice will not hear of repentance ; the lover of pleasure detests holy mourning ; the licentious think holiness to be another name for slavery. The man who finds delight in sin is a deaf

adder whom the wisest charmer cannot charm ; the poison of asps is under his tongue, and he cannot renounce his deadly hate of a gospel which rebukes his evil ways. It would be vain to teach cleanliness to the sow which wallows in the mire—it loves uncleanness, and after uncleanness will it go. Some ears are stopped through pride ; the plain, unflattering, humbling gospel of the sinner's Saviour is not to their taste. The gospel for lost sinners, they think, is not addressed to them, for they are almost good enough, and are by no means worthy of any great blame, or in danger of any great punishment. When they acknowledge their sinnership in words they feel it not in their hearts, therefore they hear not the truth in the love of it. If the gospel-pipe could be tuned to notes of flattery, to praise the dignity of man, they would attend to its music, but a gospel for vulgar sinners ! How can their noble souls endure it ? With their fine feathers all ruffled in disdain, they turn away in a rage. Alas ! how many ears are stopped through worldliness ! If you stand in a street where the traffic is abundant—where the constant thunder of rumbling wheels creates a din—it would be difficult to preach so as to command an audience, for the abundant sound would prevent all hearing ; and, to a great extent, the mass of mankind are just in that position as to the joyful sound of the gospel ; the rumbling of the wheels of commerce, the noise of trade and the cries of competition, the whirl of cares and the riot of pleasures—all these drown the persuasive voice of heavenly love, so that men hear no more of it than they would hear a pin fall in the midst of a hurricane at sea. Only when God unstops the ear is the still small voice of truth heard in the chambers of the heart.

Now it is clear to every thoughtful person that all these ear-stoppers existed in the olden times as well as now, and therefore the same work of opening the passage to the heart was necessarily performed. Dreams did not convert sinners of the patriarchal age, however vivid they might be, nor did prophetic warnings by themselves arouse them,—the hand of him who created the ear was needed to cleanse and circumcise it, ere the truth could find admission.

Note the next sentence, he “sealeth their instruction.” That was the means of conversion in the olden times. God brought the truth down upon the soul as you press a seal upon the wax : you bear upon the seal to make the impress, and even thus the power of God pressed home the word. Truth is heard by men, but they forget it unless the Holy Spirit takes the truth and puts it home, and lays his force upon it, and then it makes a stamp upon the conscience, upon the memory, and upon the entire manhood. Perhaps, also, by sealing here is meant confirming. A thing is sealed when it is established by testimony and witness : under hand and seal as we say. Now the Holy Spirit has a way of making truth to become manifest to men, and cogent upon their minds by bearing his witness with it ; so that they cannot help feeling that it is true. He sets it in such a light, that they cannot dispute it, but yield full consent to it, their conscience being overwhelmingly convinced.

Dear friends, I pray God the Holy Spirit in this sense to seal home the word we speak to each one of you, that from hearers you may grow into believers. I know you will remain hearers only unless that

sacred sealing shall take place ; but let that come upon you and your soul will bear the gospel stamped into its very texture, never more to be effaced. If the Spirit of God thus seals you, you will be sealed indeed.

By sealing is also sometimes meant preserving and setting apart, as we seal up documents or treasures of great value, that they may be secure. In this sense the gospel needs sealing up in our hearts. We forget what we hear till God the Holy Ghost seals it in the soul, and then it is pondered and treasured up in the heart : it becomes to us a goodly pearl, a divine secret, a peculiar heritage. This sealing is a main point in conversion. What thousands of sermons many of you have heard, but the instruction has never been sealed to you, and, therefore, you remain unsaved. I cannot bear to think of your unhappy case, and I beseech those who love the Lord to pray that our discourses, or the sermons of some one else, or the Bible itself, may be sealed of the Lord upon these my unhappy hearers, that they may be converted and saved. O for the Lord's sealing hand upon men's hearts ! Send, Lord, by whomsoever thou wilt send, and by thy servant also. Give the hearing ear, and then engrave thy gospel upon an understanding heart. Thou art able to do this, and in faith we seek it at thy hands, O Lord God of our salvation. In this manner men were converted in the olden times : ears were opened and hearts were sealed.

It appears, also, that the Lord, in those days, employed providence as a help towards conversion—and that providence was often of a very gentle kind, for it preserved men from death. Read the eighteenth verse :—"He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword." Many a man has had the current of his life entirely changed by an escape from imminent peril ; solemn thoughts have taken possession of his formerly careless mind, and he has said to himself, "Has God preserved me from this danger, then let me be grateful to him. He must have had a purpose in my preservation, let me find out what it is, and thankfully endeavour to answer to it." Have any of you, my hearers, escaped from shipwreck ? Is there one here who has escaped from accident upon the iron way ? Are you one of a handful who were snatched from between the very jaws of death ? Have you risen up from a fever which laid you very low ? Are you now almost the only survivor of a family, all the members of which, except yourself, have been taken away by consumption, or some other hereditary disease ? Are you a remarkable monument of sparing mercy ? Then, I pray you, let the long-suffering of God lead you to repentance, for it has led many before you, and it is intended that it should do the like for you. Yield to the gentle pressure of lovingkindness, even as the flowers yield their perfumes to the sunshine : do not need to be crushed and bruised like Oriental spice beneath the pestle. Tenderly doth the Lord call you to himself, and say, "I have spared thee from the grave, I have also kept thy guilty soul from going down to hell, I have placed thee to-day under the sound of the gospel ; I am, by my servant, calling upon thee to turn unto me and live. Wilt thou not hear me ? Thou art still on praying ground and pleading terms with me—wilt thou not consider all this ?" Thus God speaketh now by actions, which speak more loudly than words, and it seems that in the same way

he was wont to speak to men in the days gone by, so that providential circumstances were often the means of conversion.

But, further, it seems that, as Elihu puts it, sickness was a yet more effectual awakener in the common run of cases. Observe the nineteenth verse, "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain : so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat." Severe pain destroyed appetite and brought on extreme lassitude and distaste of life : but all this was sent in mercy to fetch the wanderer home. Yes, men get space for thought when they are shut up in the chamber of sickness. While the mill-wheel went on and on and on, they could not hear God speak, but when its hum is hushed the warning voice sounds forth clearly. There in silence the patient tosses on the bed, wakeful at night, and fearful by day, and then conscience lifts up its clamour and will be heard : then, too, the Spirit of God seizes the opportunity to speak to an awakened conscience, and he convinces the man of sin. How much some of us owe to a bed of sickness ! I do not desire for any unconverted person here that he should be ill, but if that would be the way to make him think, repent, and believe, I could earnestly pray for it. I believe the Lord has often preached to men in hospitals who never heard him in churches or chapels ; fever and cholera have been heard by those whom ministers could not reach. If we could banish pain and sickness from the world, it may be we should be robbing righteousness of two of her most impressive evangelists. What Jonah was to Nineveh, sickness has been to many a man. Like Elijah also, it has cried in the soul, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Disease has been a grim orator for God, and with an eloquence not to be resisted, it has made the hearts of men to bow before its message. If there are any here who have lately been thus afflicted, I would ask them whether God has blessed it to their souls. I earnestly pray that they may not be hardened by it, for in that case there is fear that God will say, "Why should ye be smitten any more, ye will revolt more and more !" and he may add, "I will let them alone, they are given unto idols. I have smitten them till their whole head is sick, and their whole heart is faint. I have made them to be so near death's door, that from the crown of the head even to the foot they are all wounds and bruises through the chastenings of my rod. I will give them up, and no more will I deal with them in a way of grace." Great God have pity still, and make thy chastisements effectual to their souls. Now, note well that we do not assert that all persons who are saved are awakened by sickness ; far from it, all that we are now taught is that many are so aroused, and that such was the case in the instance described by Elihu.

In addition to this sickness, the person whom God saved was even brought to be apprehensive of death—"Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers." When a man is made to lie upon his bed on the brink of hell and look into another world, that sight may be sacredly blessed to him. O, it is no small thing to peer into eternity, and to make out, amid the horrid gloom, no shapes of hope but ghastly forms of hideous woe. To have behind one the memory of a mis-spent life, to have above one an angry God, to have within

one the aches of the body and the pangs of remorse, and to have beneath one the bottomless pit, yawning with its lurid fires! What can be worse? This side of hell, what can be worse than the tortures of an awakened conscience? This has sometimes made men wake up from a life-slumber and compelled them to cry, "What must we do to be saved?" I could wish that every man here, who has remained unmoved by gentler means, might have some such an experience. It were better for you to be saved so, as by fire, than not to be saved at all.

But, now, notice that all this did not lead the person into comfort; although he was impressed by the dream and sickness, and so on, yet the ministry of some God-sent ambassador was wanted. "If there be a messenger with him," that is a man sent of God—"an interpreter," one who can open up obscure things and translate God's mind into man's language—"one among a thousand," for a true preacher, expert in dealing with souls, is a rare person "to show unto man his uprightness, then he is gracious unto him." God could save souls without ministers, but he does not often do it; he could bring men to Jesus without the call from the lip of his sent servants, but as a general rule conversion in the older times needed the messenger and the interpreter, and it needs them still: "How shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent." I pray that many of you, dear brethren, who know the Lord, may become preachers to others; that you may be such successful messengers of mercy to poor broken hearts, that you may be to them picked and choice men like one out of a thousand. I entreat you to pray for me also, that I may have a share, and a large share, in this blessed employment, and that to many God may say through me, "Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom."

IV. Fourthly, and with too much brevity, THE OBJECTS AIMED AT IN THE OLD CONVERSIONS WERE JUST THE SAME as those that are aimed at now-a-days. Will you kindly look at the seventeenth verse. The first thing that God had to do with the man was to withdraw him from his purpose. He finds him set upon sin, upon rebellion, upon carnal pleasure, upon everything that is selfish and worldly; and conversion turns him away from such evil purposes: it was so then, it is so now. This turning of an obstinate will towards God and holiness is, however, no easy matter: to stay the sun in his course, or reverse the marches of the moon, would not be a harder task.

The next object of the divine work was to hide pride from man, for man will stick to self-righteousness as long as he can. Never does limpet adhere to its rock more firmly than a sinner to his own merits, although indeed he has none. Like the old Greek hero in the mythology, the natural man sits down upon the stone of self-esteem, and Hercules himself cannot tear him from it. When he is even in outward character vile, he still fancies that there is some good thing in him, and to that fancy he will tenaciously cling; so that it is a work of divine power, an effort of the august omnipotence of heaven, to get a man away from his innate and desperate pride.

Beloved, another great object of conversion is to lead man to a confession of his sin. Hence we find it said in the twenty-seventh verse,

"He looketh upon man, and if any say I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not, he will deliver his soul from going into the pit." Man hates confession to his God, I mean humble, personal, hearty confession. He will go to a priest and answer all his filthy questions, but he will not confess to the Lord. He will gabble over words which he calls a "general confession," but true, heart-felt confession he shrinks from—he will not come to the publican's cry if he can help it. He will not say, frankly from his heart, "I have sinned." He will not own or confess the perverseness of his nature and say, "I have perverted that which is right;" nor can you get him to own the folly and stupidity of his sin, so as to say, "it profited me not." But conversion brings him to his knees, conversion pulls up the sluices of his soul, and makes him pour out his confessions before the Most High; and when this is done, then salvation has come to the man's soul, for God desires man to put himself into the place of condemnation in order that he may be able to say to him, "I forgive thee freely." The Lord shuts us up to hopelessness and helplessness in order that he may come, as a God of grace, and display his abounding mercy. All our hope lies in him, and all other hopes are delusions. The great work in conversion is not to make people better, so that they may come to God on a good footing, it is to strip them completely and lay them low, so that God may come to them when they are on a bad footing, or rather on no footing at all, but down in the dust at his feet. The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost, but it wants God himself to convince men that they are lost; and the Spirit's work of soul-humbling is just this,—to get man to feel so diseased that he will accept the physician; to get him to feel so poor that he will accept the charity of heaven; to get him to know that he is so stripped, that he will no longer be proud of his fig leaves, but will be willing to take the robe of righteousness which Christ has wrought out. Conviction is sent to kill the man, to break him in pieces, to bury him, to let him know his own corruption; and all this as a preliminary to his quickening and restoration. We must see the bones in the valley to be dead and dry, or we shall not hear the voice out of the excellent glory, saying, "Thus saith the Lord, 'Ye dry bones live!'" May God in his mercy teach us what all this means; and may we all experience an old-fashioned conversion.

V. Fifthly, the process of conversion in days of yore exactly resembled that which is wrought in us now as to ITS SHADES. The shadowy side wore the same sombre hues as now. First of all, the man refused to hear; God spake once, yea twice, and man regarded him not: here was obstinate rebellion. His heart was as an adamant stone. How true is that to-day! Then came the chastening till the man's bones were made to ache, and he was full of misery. It is often the same now. I acknowledge that I was brought to God by agony of soul. I have often said from this pulpit that no man ever steers his barque towards the port of peace till he is driven there by stress of weather. We never come to Christ till we feel we cannot do without him. We must feel our poverty before we shall ever come and beg at the door of his mercy for help. The shades are the same, for the same imminence of danger which Elihu spoke of comes upon every sinner's consciousness, more or less

before he resorts to Jesus for refuge. The same bitter sense of sin comes over men still, and the same wonder at their own folly in having continued in it. The same darkness still covers the sinner's pathway, and the same inability to procure the light for himself; the same need of light from above, the same need of help from him who is mighty to save. If any of you are passing just now through great darkness of soul, because you have not yet come to the light, but God is revealing yourselves to yourselves, be comforted, for the same dark road has been traversed by many of the saints before you, and it is a safe pathway, leading to comfort in Jesus Christ.

VI. But now, sixthly and very briefly, again, THE LIGHTS ARE THE SAME, even as the shades were the same. You will note in Elihu's description, that the great source of all the light was this :—"Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom." There is not a gleam of light in the case till you come to that divine word,—and is it not so now? Did you ever get any comfort for your troubled souls till you were led to see the ransom found by God in Jesus Christ? Did you ever know the value of the ransom for yourselves till God spoke it home to you—"Deliver *him* from going down to the pit, for *I* have found a ransom!" This is the central point of the sinner's hope—a bleeding Saviour paying our ransom price in drops of blood, the dying Son of God achieving our redemption by his own death. Oh, dear souls, who are in the dark, if you want light, there is light nowhere but at the cross. Do not look within for light; the only benefit of looking within is to be more and more convinced that all is dark as midnight apart from Jesus. Look within if you want to despair, but if you wish for hope, look yonder to Calvary's mountain, where the Son of God lays down his life that sinners may not die. Hear you from heaven the voice which saith, "I have found a ransom." That is the only reason why God delivers you, not because he has seen any good thing in you, but because he has found a ransom for you. Look where God looks, and your comfort will begin.

Then this precious gospel being announced to the sinner, the comfort of it enters his soul in the exercise of prayer :—"He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him." O, you can pray when you get to the cross; our prayers, before we see Christ, are poor poor things, but when we get to Calvary, and see the utmost ransom paid, and the full atonement made, then prayer becomes the utterance of a child to a father, and we feel quite sure it will speed.

Next, it appears, that the soul obtains comfort because God gave it his righteousness—"for he will render unto man his righteousness." That righteousness which God expected God bestows; that righteousness which man ought to have wrought out but could not, Christ works out; and God treats the believing man as if he were righteous, making him righteous in the righteousness of Christ. Here is another source of joy.

And then the man being led to a full confession of his sin in the twenty-seventh verse, the last cloud upon his spirit is blown away and he is at perfect peace. God was gracious to the man described by Elihu. God himself became his light and his salvation, and he came forth into joy and liberty. There is nothing more full of

freshness and surprise than the joy of a new convert. Though thousands have felt it, yet each one as he feels it is himself amazed. I did really think when God forgave me that I was the most extraordinary instance of his Sovereign love that ever lived, and that I should be bound even in heaven itself to tell to others how God's infinite mercy had pardoned in my case the biggest sinner that ever was forgiven. Now, every saved soul is led to feel just that, and to exult and rejoice, and magnify the Lord with extreme surprise, because of his goodness. It seems it was so in Job's day, and it is so now; the old conversions are the conversions of the period: the shades are the same and the lights are the same.

VII. And last of all, which is the seventh point, **THE RESULTS ARE THE SAME**, for I think I hardly know a better description of the result of regeneration than that which is given in the twenty-fifth verse: "His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth." He who was an old wrinkled man in sin, and looked yet older through his sorrow, becomes born again, starts upon a new career with a new life within him; the health which had departed from his soul comes back, the spring of spiritual juvenility wells up in him, because God has begotten him afresh and made him a new creature: "Old things have passed away, behold all things are become new!"

And with this change comes back joy. See the twenty-sixth verse: "He shall see his face with joy; for he will render unto man his righteousness;" and the thirtieth verse: "To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living." So that the new spirit finds itself in a new world, in which it goeth forth with joy and is led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills break forth before it into singing, and all the trees of the wood do clap their hands. It was so then; it is just the same now. O that the same blessed thing may happen to many here present at this time!

I have endeavoured to give a description of conversion, that you may see what it is to be renewed in heart, but I shall have failed of my intention unless many a knee shall be bent to God with this prayer, "O Spirit of God, renew my nature, change my heart: make my flesh to be fresher than a child's, make me a new creature in Christ Jesus." Time is passing: we are getting now almost one-fourth through another year, and the year itself will soon fly away. I would speak to careless and thoughtless ones again, and ask them will it never be time to think upon these things? Will it never be time to consider your ways? Will it never be time to seek unto the Lord? Ye know not how near ye are to the grave's brink. Do consider, I beseech you, and remember that the Lord waiteth to be gracious, that he delighteth in mercy, and if you seek him he will be found of you; and this great conversion and regeneration, of which we have spoken at such length, shall be yours, and you shall see the face of God with joy even as they did of old. The Lord grant it to you for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xxxii.;
Job xxxiii. 14—30.