

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

MY HOURLY PRAYER.

A Sermon

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“Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.”—Psalm cxix. 117.

“HOLD thou me up.” This is no novelty as a prayer; we have met with it many a time. Another form of it lies hard by. Look at the verse immediately before the text, and see it there in another shape. “Uphold me.” I know of no difference in the two prayers, “Uphold me” and “Hold me up”: they are two notes from the same bell, and they teach us that the Psalmist’s mind was full of the petition, for he was conscious of his need of this upholding—this holding up. We use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, and hence when we have to express the same idea it is natural to the living child of God to couch it in as fresh words as he can: and though it be the same note, yet he changes it somewhat, and first cries, “Uphold me,” and then, “Hold me up.” Of course I am now preaching only from the English text when I note these changes of expression, and I am rather giving illustrations than teaching by authority. Yet this is of authority—that we have need continually to cry for upholding grace.

You notice that in the first prayer, “Uphold me,” it is for very life that he entreats for this upholding. “Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope.” He feels that unless fresh grace shall flow into his soul his spiritual life must utterly fail. Do not forget this: let it give weight to your pleadings. But in the second of the two verses—the one which makes our text—he looks for more than life as the result of upholding; he looks for safety, a life of unsr’lied holiness and consequent restfulness and security. “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe, and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.” Both verses show you the importance of the prayer, and both together will, I hope, enlist your earnest attention to what I may have to say upon it.

It is a very sweet remark that every prayer is an inverted promise. That is to say, God promises us such a blessing, and therefore we pray for it; or, if you please, if God teaches us to pray for any good thing, we may gather by implication the assurance that he means to give it.

If thou feelest in thy Leart a God-inspired desire to ask a certain favour it is because God intends to bestow it upon thee.

A prayer is the shadow of a coming blessing. Therefore do we pray, because the blessing is coming. It is said that prayer cannot alter the purpose of God. Of course it cannot. It does not alter it, but indicate it; and since people are moved to pray this way or that way by the Spirit of God, it is because the Spirit knows the mind of God, and his movement to pray is a revelation of the mind of God to the praying one. Believing supplication is God writing his desires upon the hearts of his own children, with the intent to fulfil them. Is it not written, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart"? It is not that God will give the desires of his heart to every man. No; but to that man whose heart is in such sympathy with God that he delights in God, and consequently desires what God desires. Then, when our heart runs side by side with the mind of God, our prayer is parallel with his purpose, and consequently it is done unto us according to our desire.

Now, I conceive that it is always according to God's mind to hold his servants up. He delights not in their slips or falls;—to suppose such a thing were blasphemous. "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord." God is pleased with the steadfastness of his chosen, he smiles upon the firmness of their standing. God would not have one of his people even dash his foot against a stone, and hence he sets the angels to guard them. If they do trip in their walk he is quick to restore them, for he cannot endure that they should lie in the mire. His joy is that we walk with him in constant holiness; and he is ready to grant us this boon.

This prayer shows in David a great sense of the need of being upheld, a strong conviction that God could uphold him, and an expectation and hope that he would surely do so in answer to his prayer. May we appropriate this prayer with somewhat of David's feeling, deeply conscious of utter helplessness, fully believing that the omnipotent grace of God can meet that helplessness, and confident that he will hear our cry and answer us and uphold us to the end. Let us believe that our heavenly Father will keep us from falling, but let us be well assured that apart from his keeping our soul will fall, and great will be the fall thereof.

First I shall speak of *God's holding us up*, and then of the *two blessings that come out of it*, namely, safety and watchfulness. "I shall be safe," and "I shall have respect unto thy statutes continually."

I. First, then, **UPHOLDING**—God's holding us up. It implies a danger, and that danger takes many forms.

The true description of a believing man's life is, that he walks in his uprightness. The figure is not hard to understand. "God made man upright, though he hath sought out many inventions." The very form and figure of man's body teach us that we are not made to go on "all fours," gazing at the earth from whence we sprang, but erect upon our feet, looking upward to the heaven towards which we tend by God's rich grace. You know what is meant by an upright man, a man who does not lean this way or that, and who is not biassed or inclined to that which is wrong. The upright column is the only one which can stand

alone, and he who is upright is independent, taking his stand, maintaining his place without a buttress to keep him in it. A very pillar of the earth is such a man. He may say, like David, "The earth is dissolved : I bear up the pillars thereof." So have I seen amid vast masses of surrounding ruin a goodly pillar lift its capital aloft as if it laughed at destruction. There is something bright and cheering about the thought of the believer being an upright man, but the danger is that he may not continue upright. Columns, slowly undermined, lean to this side or that, and their fall is near. Unseen earthworms sink the hidden bases of pillars and cast them down, and secret vices have thus brought down full many a noble character.

A Christian man is a pilgrim, and he makes progress in his march to glory so long as he walks uprightly. But will he keep his uprightness? No ; he is certain not to keep upright unless he be upheld, for *the way is slippery*. Ah, how slippery do some find it ! It is as a hill of ice, and at some points it is more treacherous than usual. Those who have ever gone over the Grimsel Pass will remember that on one side of it, in descending, there is a place they call "Hell Place," because the road is narrow and shelving, and the precipice on that side is exceedingly deep, while the path is singularly smooth. Drippings of rain water, and sometimes considerable runnels, flow over the red rock, and keep it polished as the floor of a royal salon : and though they chip out grips across the road that there may be a foothold, yet most travellers find it best to leave their mules and tread with timid footsteps over the slippery way. I have a lively recollection of that marble floor ; I think they called it porphyry, but it had no charms for me. Most of us have had a "Hell Place" in our journey to heaven. You remember Joseph's slippery way, and how God upheld him, else had he fallen, never to rise. David had the like, and his fall was grievous. I say that there is scarce a man who has not had some glassy bit of road where, at the best, his feet had almost gone, his steps had well-nigh slipped, and he had been down on his face if almighty grace had not interposed. Nor is the best part of the road without its dangers. Believe me, no foot of the way is safe to the careless. I have noticed that more men sin without temptation than with it, and that the heaviest falls occur upon perfectly level road where there does not seem to be a stone to catch the foot. Oh, take heed ! Take heed ! for there is not one point in the journey, from the setting out at the wicket-gate even till you reach the river's brink, which has not dangers in it ; and the prayer is always in season, "Hold thou me up !"

But that is not all. It is *our feet* that *make the danger* as well as the way. A strong, well-footed man can traverse the precipitous mountain side and never think of a slip. Have you not seen the mountaineer go tripping up the rocks with a heavy load upon him, as firmly footed as if he had been climbing the steps of the Royal Exchange ? Have you not seen him come leaping down again with his alpenstock, where you could not have trodden for a minute ? It seemed as if scarce a rabbit or a chamois could have found a pathway, and yet the strong, sure-footed man has almost danced down beneath his burden. How often have I envied the Alpine peasant those legs and feet. It is much the same in spiritual things. Strong men stand on their high places, and leap from crag to crag ; but

as for us, we are not strong or sure-footed. Alas! we have feeble knees, and hands that hang down; and often we are as weak as water. We are children whose tottering footsteps are not as yet familiar with running or climbing. It is as much as we can do to stand when leaning on the Beloved; but to stand upright upon a rough road has not yet come to such feebleness as ours. I speak not of you all, but of far too many. The most of us are poor puny things. Ah! if thou knowest thyself, thou wilt not think that thou canst stand. It will rather be a wonder to thee that thou hast not already fallen; and when thou seest others slip, thy heart will be in thy mouth; for thou wilt say, "I next—I next, unless the grace of God prevent." So, what with the way and our feet, we have need to pray, "Hold thou me up!"

But that is not all, for there are *cunning foes that seek to trip us up*. They lay snares for us: they dig pits: they cast their nets across the way. Perhaps some of you are happily free from tempters in your own households, and possibly some are free from distinct temptation from the world. I congratulate you; but very few of us are in that condition. Our foes compass us about like bees. Some threaten; others flatter. A few would bribe us; more would bully us. The bad would deceive, for they put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; and the best of men, if you follow them too closely, may mislead you. Trust ye not in any brother; neither lay hands upon any human guide. There is One that can conduct you safely, but if you do not follow *him* you will soon slip with your feet. Many watch for our halting; and if they could find us tripping they would report it with glee to all the sons of Belial. Therefore have we good need to say, "Hold thou me up." Specially is there such need to those of you who work in shops where ungodliness is in the ascendant so that religion is held in ridicule. Great need is there in the cases of children of ungodly parents with a father who will, if he can find you doing a little amiss, make a great deal of it. Equal necessity is there to you young men who meet with conceited coxcombs who talk philosophy and rail at our old-fashioned faith. You should pray, "Lord, hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

Nor is this all, though it is quite enough; for sometimes, dear friends, the difficulty of keeping our balance is not caused by the way itself, but by *the height to which God may elevate us*. There are brethren whose position is high, whose brain might long ago have reeled had not infinite mercy held them up. I know those who have not a tenth of their popularity or a hundredth part of their influence, who nevertheless give themselves mighty airs. These lofty-minded gentlemen are in the greatest danger. Let me speak of these grandees; with all due reverence let me take them at their own value for once, though I should be sorry to be forced to complete the purchase. My dear friend, when you are getting on in the world and prospering, something whispers, "You are a clever fellow," and when you have won respect by your talent, then again a voice sweetly sings, "You are a highly superior person." At such times you are in serious peril. It happens to most of us at times to have done so well as to have won the approbation of our little circle; and then the temptation is quite great enough—though it comes not from thousands, or even from hundreds, but from half-dozens—for us

to feel that we are somebody; then the brain grows dizzy, and the danger is great. Anything which leads to self-esteem leads to the utmost jeopardy. If you have a lowly opinion of yourself, I congratulate you; for this is a main element of safety.

The prayer is all the more needful for one other reason, namely, that *the most of people do not keep upright*. Go forth into the world to-morrow, and see how men are acting? Borrow the lantern of Diogenes, and try if you can find an honest man. You will succeed, but when you have done so, take security for his keeping so. On the exchange, in the market, almost everywhere, the bulk of men are not upright, they are down on all fours. There is a great gold scramble, and they are clutching at it with all their might. Get money. Get money. Is not that the world's own favourite teaching,—get it honestly if you can; but, if you cannot get it in that way, get it how you can. Puff; lie; cheat; do anything; only make a fortune. He is the cleverest fellow who can grab the most gold. That is the picture of the business world—a nursery floor of grown-up children scrambling on all fours. But you say—they do not lie. No, no: only white lies. No, they do not cheat; only it is “the custom of the trade,” you know. “Now, do not talk,” they say to me, “what do you know about it?” More than you think, perhaps, for lookers on see more than players. “But, sir, business is business.” I know it is, and business has no business to be such business as it often is. Woe to the man whose business will destroy his soul. Woe, double woe to the man whose business destroys the bodies and souls of drunkards! Woe three times over to the wretch who fattens on the iniquities of his fellow men, and gets rich by their damnation, and yet pretends to religion! But I am wandering: it is because so many people lean this way, or that way, or go altogether on all fours, that it is not the easiest thing in this world for a man to stand bolt upright. He ought to say, “If the world's fate hung on a lie, and I by speaking the lie could save it, I would speak the truth.” If our life depended upon doing what God would not approve, we ought rather to die than sin. Such should be the resolve of the believer, and he should ask for grace to carry it out. Lord, hold thou me up: keep me upright. Whatever happens, do not let me be any other than an upright, downright, perpendicular man, knowing the right thing, speaking the right thing, doing the right thing, by thy grace, even to the end. But you see the danger: the text suggests it to me. To my ear there is a sharp sound in it. It is almost a cry of sudden alarm. It is as if one felt himself falling, and cried aloud, “Hold me up.” The deep descent yawns before him, the earth glides from under him, he cannot regain his footing, and piteously he implores, “Hold thou me up.” It has come to this pass, that there is an end of the man unless a power beyond his own shall uphold him. O Lord, see thou to it.

Now, how does God keep his people upright? He has many ways of doing it; and hence you may pray very hopefully. He can preserve you by angels: “They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” How many stones you and I might have dashed our feet against if it had not been that we have received mysterious intimations which have put us on our guard. Often and

often have I been inwardly admonished, and so preserved from evil. We never knew where it came from, but perhaps the Lord sent the singular intimation by an angel, whose noiseless wing came and went, and we knew not of the messenger though we felt the message. God works mightily this way with many who are obedient to his will.

At other times God holds up his people by the ministry of the word. I have often been told that, when you have come in here, I, not knowing anything of your case, have nevertheless spoken to it exactly; and you have had the admonition, or the encouragement, and direction, which you needed at this point and that. To many of you my voice has been as the oracle of God, and that in the verse of a hymn, or in the chapter chosen, or in a pointed remark in the sermon. Is it not so? Could not many of you bear testimony to it? God's word wherever it is faithfully spoken is a wall of fire round about God's people. It protects them from lurking foes of whose existence they were not aware. A gracious promise supplies them with just that stimulus which they need in the hour of fainting, or a stern rebuke acts as the restraint which they require in the moment of temptation. And have you not found it so, too, by the reading of the word in your own homes? The promise or the precept has come in exactly to fit your case, and you have heard from the Scriptures a voice that said, "This is the way: walk ye in it"; and you have also been gently made willing to walk in it, and so you have been kept in your integrity. Were professors more familiar with their Bibles they would be less in danger from the common evils of the times. Oh that the Holy Spirit may give us all a deeper love to the word, that so we may be upheld that no iniquity may have dominion over us.

Often God keeps his people upright, and holds them firmly, by chastisement. When roughly smitten you feel as though you were a child falling over a precipice, half dazed by his terror; and think that your father has taken hold of you, and, by severely shaking you, has awoke you and saved you. I have seen a driver give a horse a flip because he was getting sleepy and had stumbled; that cut woke up the creature, and he went with a sure foot afterwards. The Lord has often saved us from a sad fall by a sharp chastisement. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." At times the chastisement has been rather of the spirit than of anything outward. All things have gone well externally, but you have been depressed and despondent; and that drooping has been ordained of God that you might endure your prosperity and truly prosper in it. Lest your high places of success should cause you to slip, you have been kept low in spirit, that you might be kept up in holy living to God's glory. You have been laid down that you might not fall down. God sometimes humbles his people that they may not need to be humbled; for to be humbled is terrible, but to be made humble by his grace is exceedingly sweet.

It is clear that our gracious Lord can hold us up by many methods; we are very far from having hinted at the tithe of them. I have known him preserve his people by giving them great aspirations, high ideals, noble desires. With his eye on the stars the sailor boy is steady at the masthead. I have known him hold up his servants by giving them plenty to do—by putting them into the Sunday-school and interesting them with the children; or drafting them into the Loan Tract Society,

and keeping them there. It is a grand way of keeping us right—never to let us have an idle ten minutes, nor a spare napkin to wrap a talent in.

The supreme power which upholds us is the Holy Spirit, who, dwelling in us, warns us against evil, sets us on our watch-tower against temptation, and incites us to all manner of good things, and so helps us to stand in the evil day. How much we owe to the love of the Spirit! He keepeth the feet of the saints. When they are tried he quickens them, and by gaining more life they surmount temptation; when they are likely to be deceived he enlightens them, and so that evil one toucheth them not. By sanctification, by helping our infirmities, by teaching us the divine will, and by his divine comfort he holds us up; and to him be glory evermore.

Thus have I shown you the danger, and how it can be prevented. Oh, how sweetly can the Lord prevent it, and how he *has* prevented it in many of his dear people. In order to prove this, I could point you to biographies of godly men. Perhaps that might be better than giving you even a hint about those who are yet alive, though there are many such, and such among ourselves. As to the departed ones upon whom my mind is now resting, their Lord did not allow them to slip at any time, but their garments were always white. They had many dangers and perils, but they walked uprightly all their days. So far from their having slipped, there seemed to be nothing in them but what we could hold up for admiration, giving to God's grace all the praise. Blessed are those men of faith who are never allowed to fall, in whom you see no grovelling, whose noble lives are free from selfishness, and far above the aims of carnal men. In them was no bending, no stooping from uprightness, but a rising, a growing elevation, till even here, among the sons of men, they had a dignity and presence as of another world.

Thus have I set before you the upholding.

II. Briefly, I desire to show the TWO BLESSED THINGS THAT COME OUT OF THIS HOLDING UP.

If God uphold us, then, according to the text, we shall be *safe*. "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." It is a great point to be safe; though there are some who prefer to be sharp. Some men are always trying little dodges by which they would take advantage of their neighbours. "A sharp fellow, that," cries one. "A desperately clever man," says another. "Hardly know where to find him," hints a third. "Rather sharper than honest," mutters a fourth. Just so. Now, if God hold you up, I do not say that you will be clever, but you will be what is a deal better: you will be safe.

"Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe:" that is, you will be safe from all real harm. Suppose that you should meet with great troubles in business, you will still be safe if God upholds you, so that you do not lose your integrity. So long as we do not lose a good conscience we have not lost much if we have lost all beside. He that damages his character has sustained the worst damage a mortal man can know; but he that is held up—kept upright—has been kept safely. It may be that he shall be slandered; but if he knows that before God he has walked uprightly he shall be "safe": God will light his candle in due time and his light shall shine as the sun at noonday. Only if thou hold fast thy integrity, and will not let it go—and God's grace can help thee

to do that—thou shalt be safe in calamity, peaceful in panic, happy in poverty, brave under slander, in fact “safe” in all senses of the term. Like the lighthouse on the lone rock, buffeted of the storm, you shall stand out above all tempests **SAFE**.

You shall be safe, too, from descending into grievous sin. The man who is held upright shall not insensibly sink lower and lower, as some do. Alas, I have seen the godly man put forth his hand unto iniquity. At first he seemed excused. No one could blame him. It was an hour of dire necessity, and that he was overcome and did a questionable thing was not much to be marvelled at, though it was enough to make an angel weep that such a man as he should stoop to it. After once doing the questionable thing, he had spoiled the chastity of his conscience, and he was open to a grosser ill, and he fell into that grosser ill, yet still it was not such a fault as the world would much condemn. A little farther and but a little farther, and he committed a crime that made the godly cast him off and the wicked exult over him. “Howl, fir-tree; for the cedar is fallen!” For you and for me there is no safety in any degree of bending. We must stand upright or we cannot stand at all. “Hold thou me up”—*up, up*—“and I shall be safe.” But if I begin to incline downward in any way I am not safe. He that leans will fall; but the upright will stand, for God is able to make him stand even unto the end.

I believe that when David said that by being held up he should be safe, he meant also that he should know that he was safe, and should enjoy great restfulness of heart. Dear brothers and sisters, I know that you are very much tried in this world, and often tempted to do that which is not right. But, if God keeps you from evil, how happy you are, because you are “safe”! You have a light pocket, but a light heart too. Some have a heavy purse, and a heavy heart to go with it. It is better for you to be in poverty and to be holy, than it would be to be unholy and to roll in wealth. May God give you things convenient for you: so would I pray; but I would not ask him to give you even a needful meal as the result of an ill deed, much less to succeed you in a dishonest transaction; for nothing can be worse than to do wrong and prosper in it. If you are a child of God, there is no prosperity for you except by doing that which is right. Others may hoard the wages of unrighteousness; they would melt like hoarfrost in your hands. May you be prospered in all your works, and may your substance increase. If God ordains it, so will it be. And if it be not so, what a mercy it is to carry in your heart that little bird which sings, “All is well! All is well!” He that can pick a bit of heartsease from within his bosom and wear it in his button-hole, need not envy my lord his stars and garters; for that herb called heartsease is more precious than all else that grows beneath the moon, and God makes it bloom in the garden of the man who walks uprightly.

The man that walks uprightly, and is kept in God’s way, is “safe”; and I venture to give another meaning to that word “safe,”—namely, that he becomes a safe man in his dealings with others. If you catch a man playing the double-shuffle at any time, let him play it for himself, and not for you. Never link yourself in business with a person who is capable of doing an unrighteous action. Sink or swim for yourself, but

never set foot on board such a coffin ship. Sooner or later it will go to the bottom. May God make you to be upright, that you may be a safe man, true and trustworthy; for men delight to trust in men when once they find them "safe." If you would possess the best of human friends, you will be happy should you meet with the man who in youth was an ardent Christian and has continued so throughout a generation. In times of stress and trial when others fell he stood upright and incorruptible. Under slander he has smarted, but he has outlived the reproach, and disproved every false report. To-day his name is the guarantee of truth, the watchword of honour. Where he leads others feel it safe to follow; they wait till he speaks, his judgment rules the board. Because the Lord kept him upright he grew to be safe in the esteem of his neighbours, and now he is as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the storm. A truly good man is a haven in trouble, a harbour for those who are tossed with tempest, the sons of Adam in distress fly to him in his degree as they do to his Master. If he swears to his own hurt he changes not, but stands to the truth at all hazards; men admire this, and they trust him, if not with untold gold, yet with secrets which, to all other hearts, remain untold. May God make you such a man. The way to such honour lies by that prayer, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

But, lastly, when a man knows that he is "safe" by God's grace, does he then become idle and careless, and think he may do as he likes? No, listen: "I shall be safe, and *I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.*" Watchfulness attends such sacred safety, and is at once its fruit and its sign.

A holy man—a man made holy by God's grace—has great respect to every command of God. Before he moves he looks round him to see whether he shall transgress by his proposed movement. You have heard of the child whose mother said, "John, you have broken one of the commandments," and he answered, "Mother, those commandments are awfully easy to break." With such natures as ours sin is a very easy thing. You break the law before you know it; and unless a man has respect unto all the commandments he will soon be trespassing and getting into mischief. We ought in our daily life to walk as one that has to tread among eggs or delicate china. Heedless and Too-bold soon rush into sin; but the genuine believer feareth always. "You are very jealous of how you act," said one to a saint of God. "Yes," he replied, "I serve a jealous God." "You are too precise," said another. "That is a crime," said he, "that God will never charge any of his children with." A conscience tender as the apple of an eye is what we want. To be alarmed even at the distant approach of sin is the safeguard of a child of God. Those who dally with vice will rue such dalliance when it cannot be undone. If somebody told me that there was a cobra at the far end of my room, I should look round me for the door: I think such venomous creatures are near enough if they remain in their native jungles; I do not desire their interesting society. So should it be with sin. We should flee from it at once, avoiding its first appearance, hating it in thought and word before it hatches into act, abhorring even the garment spotted by the flesh.

This holy jealousy to do the Lord's will must last continually. "I will have respect unto thy statutes continually." I will always try to obey. I

will always endeavour to avoid any transgression of the law. Now, dear friends, you see, this safety comes, and this special tenderness towards God's law comes of God's holding us up, for he holds us up so that we never go down. Under his incessant upholding we shall be "safe," and we shall be conscientious, but not otherwise. A few minutes' folly may ruin years of character. The man that is not held up goes down, and rolls in the mire, and he never is a conscientious man or a "safe" man, perhaps, for the rest of his life. I know some that I hope are God's people, but they have not been upheld so as to be always complete in their integrity, and consequently they are not "safe." They are people that we have to watch over with great care, for we are afraid of them. We could not trust them to lead, for their example is a lame one. Moreover, they are not keenly, sensitively conscientious. They can go to much greater lengths than the Lord Jesus would approve, and yet they are members of the church, and pretty talkative members too. May God improve them and mend them. They need it, but God alone can do it, for they do not take their minister's plain hints. These people have no clear and sharp discrimination of what is right and wrong according to God's way, but they go as far as they can towards the world, to enjoy the pleasures of the ungodly, and yet they would keep in with Christians. They are Jacks-of-both-sides. They run with the hare and yet hold with the hounds, and they will be glad to have a mouthful when the hounds catch the hare. This is poor work; this produces a sorry sort of Christian. Under such double influences we shall be unsafe, and rather a curse to others than a blessing to them. If our integrity is always maintained by God, we shall become safe men, the pillars of the church; we shall have a tender conscience that will warn us of the approach of evil, and we shall be such as God can honour and make useful to the brethren.

So I close by commending to you, my dearly beloved in Christ, the prayer of the text, "Hold thou me up." Every morning before you see the face of men register this prayer in heaven, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe, and I shall have respect unto thy statutes continually." Are you going down stairs without that prayer? Then you may fall into sin at the breakfast table. You may lose your temper, and a trifle not worth noticing may put you off the tram lines for the day. Therefore pray ere the car moves. You have taken your hat and your gloves, and you are going off to the City. Does it happen that there you meet careless, godless men? Are you tempted there? Then as you get into your train, or as you trudge along the pavement, breathe the prayer, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." You can meet the worst of men without fear. You have your shield on your arm, and the two-edged sword of God at your side. You are prepared for all hazards now that the upholding prayer has been breathed before the Most High. Did you say that you are not going to the City to-day? It is a day's excursion, is it? You are going into the country to see friends, or you are to make holiday with a few companions? All well and good. You may have such recreations very properly; but now is a special time for the prayer, "Hold thou me up." Your friends will not be all saints, probably, and when they go a little way in mirth perchance they will run a little too far. Therefore,

now entreat the Keeper of Israel, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe,"—safe at my play as well as at my work. The child of God in his recreation should prove that he has undergone a re-creation, which has made him a new creature in Christ Jesus. Grace should enter into all our enjoyments as well as into all our employments.

No, but that does not happen to be your lot. You are not indulged with a day's pleasure: you are going to perform a service surrounded with difficulty. It tries your brain and frets your heart. It is more than you feel at all able to carry through, and yet you must do it. Now is your peculiar time of need. Now is the hour to pray, "Hold thou me up." I have known young brethren who, when first they have gone to a bank, have been so anxious to have their balances right, and when they have gone round collecting have been so careful to be correct that they have made great errors; not through any dishonesty, but simply through their blundering because they were so excited. In their consuming anxiety to be exact they have confused themselves into errors. Let the gracious young man do right and leave himself with God. Do not be nervous, but be prayerful. Ask the Lord to help you. Ask him to help you about everything—about casting up a column of figures. My Lord Jesus counts the very hairs of his children's heads, and he will help them in their little things as well as in their great things; you may ask that you may have favour in the sight of those that employ you, and God will give it you if it be good for you. Only cry, "Lord, help me to do right; and if I make a mistake let it be a mistake; but do thou hold me up and upright to the end."

Perhaps, dear friends, you have to travel this week over a very unwelcome road, for you have been over it before, and wished that you had never seen it; and yet you have that journey in prospect, and there is no avoiding it. You have to visit those dangerous friends who led you into sore temptation two years ago. You have to undergo the second time an experience which aforetime led you into sin. Then, pray eagerly, "Hold thou me up." Ask for double grace now. You know the danger of the road, and your own feebleness, but you will get over it well enough by God's upholding grace.

But it may be, dear friends, that you are prospering. God is giving you success, and the desire of your heart has come to you. Be sure to pray earnestly, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe" for it is a dangerous thing for a child of God to prosper in this world, and yet it is a danger which many unwisely covet. If you are growing rich and great, pray God to hold you up. Or it may be that you are now going down into adversity. Things have gone wrong with you, as you think. You have to give up that fine house and lovely garden. You are moving into small rooms now. You need have small expenses, for your income has shrunk terribly. You hardly know how you shall support your wife and children. Now pray, "Hold thou me up." Use the prayer of Agur—"Give me neither poverty nor riches." He that kept you when you were rich will not shun you now that you are poor. Ask him to uphold you still; he is able to do it, and as willing as he is able.

Ah, some of you are getting old: I respectfully commend to you this prayer as suitable for the close of life. Young people, you must pray, for your passions are strong, and your wisdom is little. O young

men and maidens, pray each one of you, "Hold thou me up." But, oh, dear aged brethren, excuse me who am so much younger, when I solemnly add, to you is this word of warning sent. Cease not to plead for upholding grace. Horses sometimes fall at the bottom of the hill: the drivers grew careless, and thought there was no further need for caution, and down went the horse. The worst falls I have ever seen in the church of God have happened to elderly men, men of experience and years. All through Scripture we meet with cases of the aged falling into sin. Mind that. They boast their experience and wisdom; and then the devil laughs in his sleeve and makes fools of them. If we were as old as Methuselah and as holy as Enoch we ought still to cry, "Hold thou me up."

And when we get to Jordan's brink, and the chill stream begins to rise to our ankles, what a blessing it is that the Lord will hold us up! "Courage, brother!" said Hopeful to Christian, when he was up to his neck in the stream—"Courage, my brother! I feel the bottom, and it is good." And so they joyfully crossed over and climbed the hill whereon the Celestial City was built. And there, I think, among the songs that we shall sing unto our Well-beloved this will be a peculiarly sweet one,— "When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up." "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxix.
113—128.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—40, 626, 35 (Song I.)