

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A QUESTION FOR HARD-HEARTED HEARERS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plough there with oxen?”—Amos vi. 12.

THESE expressions are proverbs, probably, taken from the familiar adages of the country, but, anyhow, right worthy to be used as proverbs. The wiser men become the more sententious are their utterances, the more terse and full of meaning are their sayings; and, hence, the wisdom of the wise condenses into proverbs, and the language of prophets is sure to abound in them. But a proverb is generally a sword with two edges, or, if such a metaphor might be tolerated, it has many edges, or is all edge, and hence it may be turned this way and that way, and its back stroke will be as sharp as its direct cut; for every part of it will have force and point. A proverb has often many bearings, and you cannot always tell what was the precise meaning of him who uttered it, except by the connection. Now, I believe that the connection would abundantly tolerate two senses in this place. An ancient commentator asserts that there are seven meanings of it, and that any one of them would be consistent with the context. I cannot deny the assertion, for if it be correct it is only one among many instances of the manifold wisdom of the Word of God. Like those curious carved Chinese balls in which there is one ball within another, so in many a holy text there is sense within sense, teaching within teaching, and each one worthy of the Spirit of God.

The first sense of the text I would say just a word or two upon is this: the prophet is expostulating with ungodly men upon their pursuit of happiness where it never can be found. They were endeavouring to grow rich and great and strong by oppression. The prophet says, “ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock.” They had transformed the judgment seat into a place where justice was bought and sold, and the book of the law was made to be the instrument of chicanery, and high-handed fraud. “Yet,” says the prophet, “there is no gain to be gotten this way—no real profit, no true happiness. As well may horses run upon a rock, and oxen plough

the arid sand: it is a foolish attempt; it is labour in vain." And truly, dear hearers, if there are any of you, and probably there are, who try to content yourselves with this world, and hope to find a heaven in the midst of your business and your family without looking upward for it, you labour in vain. If any of you endeavour to find pleasure in sin, and think that it will go well with you if you despise the law of God, and seek your own pleasure by breaking the natural laws which concern your body, you will find that you have made a great mistake. You might as well seek for roses in the grottoes of the sea, or look for pearls on the bare pavements of the city. You will find what your soul requires nowhere but in God. To seek after happiness in evil deeds is to plough a rock of granite. To labour after true prosperity by dishonest means is as useless as to till the sandy shore. "Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" Young man, you are killing yourself with ambition, and if your object were worthy we might not be so grieved, but your ambition is selfish, you seek only your own honour and emolument, and this is a poor, poor object for an immortal soul. And you too, sir, are wearing out your life with care; your mind and body both fail you in endeavouring to amass riches, as if a man's life consisted in the abundance of the things which he possesses. You are ploughing a rock; your avarice will not bring you joy of heart or content of spirit, but will end in failure. And you, too, who labour to weave a righteousness by your works apart from Christ, and fancy that with the diligent use of outward ceremonies you may be able to do the work of the Holy Spirit upon your own heart, you too are ploughing thankless sand. No harvest will ever repay your self-elected toils. Merit can no more spring from human hands than fruit from an iron rod. The strength of fallen nature exerted at its utmost can never rescue a soul from the storm of wrath which awaits the guilty. You may row hard to bring that galley of yours to shore, but it shall be broken by the fierce tempest. Why, then, attempt the impossible when faith would in a moment calm the sea and bring the ship to shore. Woe unto those who kindle a fire and compass themselves with sparks, and delight themselves in the blaze of their own kindling, for they shall have this of the Lord, that they shall lie down in sorrow.

So far, I believe, I have not misread the text, but have mentioned a very probable meaning of the words as they stand in the context; but, still, another strikes me, which I think equally suitable, and upon it I shall dwell by God's help.

It is just this. God will not always send his prophets to warn people, or employ his ministers to call them to repentance. When it turns out that men's hearts remain obdurate, and they do not and will not repent, then God will not always deal with them in mercy. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." There is a time of ploughing, but when it comes to be quite evident that the heart is wilfully hardened, then wisdom itself suggests to mercy that she should give over her efforts. "Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plough there with oxen?" No, there is a limit to the efforts of kindness, and in fulness of time the labour ceases, and the rock remains a sterile rock, unploughed henceforth and for ever.

I. Taking that sense we shall speak upon it and remark, first, that **MINISTERS LABOUR TO BREAK UP MEN'S HEARTS**: this is the first effort of the wise preacher. The servant of Christ who teaches the gospel, whatever he may be called, is a sower of seed; and though it may appear useless to sow seed upon rocks, we are bound while acting as evangelists to sow our seed everywhere. Broadcast is our Master's rule: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Hence in our Lord's parable a handful fell upon the highway where the birds devoured it; and another handful fell upon the rocky soil, where it sprung up, but to-morrow perished because it had not depth of earth. It was no business of the sower to select the soil. He was to sow as he went along, for so his Master bade him. But methinks he would not be blamed, but commended if he threw double handfuls over there where the soil was evidently rich and well prepared. As a sower he was to sow broadcast, and leave the seed to fall where it might, under the guardian care of him who sent him to sow; but when he became a husbandman, he would have further duties, and among the rest that of breaking up the fallow ground that he might no longer sow among thorns. We have so often sown on the rock, and have been so frequently disappointed because of the hardness of the unrenewed heart, that much time must be spent by the pastor as a lover of men's souls in trying by the power of the Holy Ghost to break up the hard earthen-pan, to make it so that it will be receptive of the seed, and ready to nurture the living grain after it has fallen there.

There are many truths which are used in this ploughing, and driven in like sharp ploughshares to break up the heart. Men must be made to feel that they have sinned, and they must be led to repent of sin. They must receive Christ, not with the head only but with the heart; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness. There must be emotion; we must cut into the heart with the ploughshare of the law. A farmer who is too tender-hearted to tear up and harrow the land will never see a harvest. Here is the failing of certain divines, they are afraid of hurting anyone's feelings, and so they keep clear of all the truths which are likely to excite fear or grief. They have not a sharp ploughshare on their premises, and are never likely to have a stack in their rickyard. They angle without hooks for fear of hurting the fish, and fire without bullets out of respect to the feelings of the birds. This kind of love is real cruelty to men's souls. It is much the same as if a surgeon should permit a patient to die because he would not pain him with the lancet, or by the necessary removal of a limb. It is a terrible tenderness which leaves men to sink into hell rather than distress their minds. It is a diabolical love which denies the eternal danger which assuredly exists and argues the soul into presumption, because it thinks it a pity to excite terror, and so much more pleasant to prophesy smooth things. Is this the spirit of Christ? Did he conceal the sinner's peril? Did he cast doubts upon the unquenchable fire and the undying worm? Did he lull souls into slumber by dulcet notes of flattery? Nay, but with honest love and anxious concern he warned men of the wrath to come, and bade them repent or perish. Let the servant of the Lord Jesus in this thing follow his Master, and plough deep with a sharp ploughshare, which will not be

balked by the hardest clods. This we must school ourselves to do. It may be contrary to our impulses, and painful to our feelings; but it must not be left undone to gratify our love of ease, and our desire to please our hearers. If we really love the souls of men, let us prove it by honest speech which costs us pain, by earnest warning which it is more grievous to us to utter than to others to hear; for this part of our work is essential to man's welfare, and can by no means be omitted. The hard heart must be broken, or it will still refuse the Saviour whose glory lies very much in his being sent to bind up the broken-hearted. There are some things which men may or may not have, and yet may be saved; but those things which go with the ploughing of the heart are indispensable, and therefore men must have them or perish hopelessly. The heart must be broken up: there must be a holy fear and a humble trembling before God. There must be an acknowledgment of offences committed, and a penitent petition for mercy. There must, in a word, be a thorough ploughing of the soul before we can expect that the seed should bring forth fruit.

II. But the text indicates to us that AT TIMES MINISTERS LABOUR IN VAIN. "Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plough there with oxen?" There are some hearts, there are some in this house tonight, there are some who are always here, who are very hard soil. When the ploughman ploughs he soon discovers what he is at work upon. I do not suppose that anybody but a minister with considerable experience will understand what I say when I declare that there is a sympathy between the preacher of the gospel and his hearers of a very intimate kind, even as there is a mutual action between the soil and the ploughman. Though our hearers are silent they probably speak more to the preacher than he does to them. In a short time a ploughman feels whether the plough will go or not, and so does the minister. He may use the very same words in one place which he has used in another, or they may seem to him to be so, but he feels in the one place great joy and hopefulness in preaching, while with another audience he has heavy work, and little hope mingles with it. The plough in the last case seems to jump out of the furrow; and a bit of the share is broken off every now and then. He says to himself, "I do not know how it is, but I do not get on at this," and he becomes conscious that his Master has sent him to work upon a particularly heavy soil. The people were so far attentive that nobody was asleep; they seemed to drink in every word, and yet they were as unmoved as so many statues. They did not feel, and did not appear as if they *could* feel anything. The preacher was ready to stop and burst into tears to see how utterly unfeeling his audience had become; but that did not alter them. He hoped it was no vain regard for his own reputation which distressed him, but that a sincere desire for their good and for the honour of the truth moved him to holy jealousy; but he felt a kind of heart-breaking coming over him because he could make no headway. He was doing his best. The very same that he had done in other places with abounding success and with a sense of joyous ease, he was now doing in heaviness of spirit, conscious that he was wasting effort, and that his pleadings were lost upon the people. All labourers for Christ know that this is occasionally the case. You must have found

it so in a Sunday-school class. You must have known it to be so in a cottage meeting or in any other gathering where you have tried to teach and preach Jesus. You have said to yourself every now and then, "Now I am ploughing a rock. Before, I turned up rich mould which a yoke of oxen might plough with ease, and a horse might even run at the work; but now the horse may tug, and the oxen may wearily toil till they gall their shoulders, but they cannot cut a furrow; the rock is stubborn to the last degree."

There are such hearers in all congregations. They are as iron, and yet they are side by side with a fine plot of ground. Their sister, their brother, their son, their daughter, all these have readily felt the power of the gospel, but *they* do not feel it. They hear it, respectfully hear it; and they so far allow it free course that they permit it to go in at one ear and out at the other, but they will have nothing more to do with it. They would not like to be Sabbath breakers and stop away from worship; they, therefore, do the gospel the questionable compliment of coming where it is preached and then refusing to regard it. They are hard, hard, hard bits of rock, the plough does not furrow them.

Many, on the other hand, are equally hard; but it is in another way. The plough seems to touch them when they hear the word of God preached, but it is in seeming only; the impression is not deep or permanent. They receive it with joy, but retain it not. They listen, apparently, with deep attention, and they are ready enough to go to a place of worship as often as ever you like, but then it never comes to practice with them. They will hear about repentance, but they never repent. They hear about faith, but they never believe. If we were to preach anything other than the truth they would be indignant, for they are very good judges of what the gospel is; but they have never accepted the gospel. They will not eat, but still they insist that good bread shall be put on the table. They will not wash, but they will have the bath continually open before them. They are great sticklers for the very things which they personally reject. They are moved to feeling; they shed tears occasionally. A sentimental tale would make them weep fast enough, and sometimes the pathos of the preacher stirs them in the same manner for a time; but still their hearts are not really broken up by the word. They go their way, and forget what manner of men they are. Their transient feeling is rather an illustration of their hardness than an instance of true emotion. They are hard, hard, hard, rocky-hearted through and through. They are stony-souled enough to mock the word by feeling, and yet not feeling; by the imitation of a sensibility which never amounts to spiritual sensation. We have such in this congregation; the Lord have mercy upon them. While I am speaking, I hope the description will come home to them, and that each one of them may listen for himself, and feel the ploughshare tearing its rough but useful way.

Now, all this is the worse, because certain of these people, these rocky-hearted people have been ploughed for years, and they become harder instead of softer. Once or twice ploughing, and a broken share or two, and a disappointed ploughman or two, we might not mind, if they would yield at last; but these have since their childhood known the gospel and never given way before its power. It is a good while since

their childhood now with some of them. Their hair is turning grey, and they themselves are getting feeble with years. I am addressing those who have heard the word preached in sincerity and earnestness now scores and hundreds of times. You have heard waggon-loads of sermons. You have been entreated and persuaded times beyond number. You have had invitations and exhortations multiplied *ad infinitum*. Yes, and you have been prayed over and wept over, but your hearts are rocky still; labour has been lost upon you. In fact, you used to feel the word, in a certain fashion, far more years ago than you do now. The sun which softens wax, hardens clay, and the same gospel which has brought others to tenderness and repentance has exercised a contrary effect upon you, and made you more thoughtless, more hardened, more worldly, and more contemptuous of divine things than you were in your youth. We knew it would be so, we told you so years ago; for though we are always unto God a sweet savour, we are among men a savour of death unto death as well as of life unto life: and I fear that this sad result is being illustrated in your case.

Why are certain men so extremely rocky? Some are so from a peculiar stolidity of nature. There are many people in the world whom you cannot very well move. You would have to put a piece of dynamite under them before you could alarm them much, they are so very quiet and cool about everything. They are the same in business: there is nothing sanguine about them, no excitability, no possibility of stir or emotion. They have a great deal of granite in their constitution, and are more nearly related to Mr. Obstinate than to Mr. Pliable. Now, I do not think very badly of these people, because one knows what it is to preach to an excitable people and to get them all stirred, and to know that at the end they are none the better, but relapse into inaction; whereas some of the more stolid and immovable people when they are moved are moved indeed; when they do feel they feel intensely, and they retain any impression that is made. A little chip made in granite by very hard blows will abide there, while the lashing of water, which is easy enough, will leave no trace even for a moment. It is a grand thing to get hold of a fine piece of rock and to exercise faith about it. The Lord's own hammer has mighty power to break, and in the breaking great glory comes to the Most High.

Worse still, certain men are hard because of their infidelity—not heart-infidelity all of it, but an infidelity which springs out of a desire not to believe, which has assisted itself by manufacturing doubts and discovering difficulties; which difficulties exist, and were meant to exist, for there were no room for faith if everything were as plain as the nose on one's face. These people have gradually come to doubt, or to think that they doubt essential truths, and this renders them impervious to the gospel of Christ—another sad means of hardening the heart till it rivals adamant.

A much more numerous body are very orthodox people, but very hard-hearted people for all that. Worldliness hardens a man in every way. It often dries up all his charity to the poor, because he must make money, and he thinks that the poor-rates are quite sufficient excuse for neglecting the offices of charity. How comfortable poor people are when they are attended to by relieving officers! He pretends

to believe that our union houses are perfectly palatial establishments, and that it would be wicked to give away a penny, because he might be helping an imposter and encouraging idleness. At any rate, it is better for him to take care of his worthy self, and give the penny to number one! Worldliness hardens him in that way, and so it does with regard to other things. He has no time to think of the next world; he must spend all his thoughts upon the present one. Money is tight, and therefore he must hold it tight; and when money brings in little interest he finds therein a reason for being the more niggardly. He has no opportunity for prayer, he must get down to the counting-house. He has no time for reading his Bible, his ledger wants him. It is of no avail to speak to him about things eternal, for he is thoroughly engrossed with the affairs of time. You may knock at his door, but his heart is not at home; it never is at home, it is always in the counting-house; therein he lives and moves and has his being. His god is his gold, his bliss is his business, his all in all is himself. What is the use of preaching to him? As well may horses run upon a rock, or oxen drag the plough across a field sheeted with iron a mile thick.

With some, too, there is a hardness, produced by what I might almost call the opposite of stern worldliness, namely, a general levity. Some are naturally butterflies—they never think, or want to think. Half a thought exhausts them, and they must needs be diverted or their feeble minds will utterly weary. They live in a round of pleasure and amusement. Their chief delight is giggling; it does not amount to laughter, for it is downright earnest men that laugh, but these are too silly, too frivolous for anything but mere childish giggling. They go through the world as if it were a stage, and all the men and women only players. It is very little use preaching to them; there is no depth of earth in their superficial nature; beneath a sprinkling of shifting, worthless sand lies an impenetrable rock of utter stupidity and senselessness. I might thus multiply reasons why some are harder than others, but it is a well-assured fact that they are so, and there I leave it to notice a third point.

III. I shall now ask everybody to judge whether this running of horses upon a rock, and this ploughing there with oxen, shall always be continued? I assert that **IT IS UNREASONABLE TO EXPECT THAT GOD'S SERVANTS SHOULD ALWAYS CONTINUE TO LABOUR IN VAIN.** These people have been preached to, taught, instructed, admonished, expostulated with, and advised; shall this unrecompensed work be always performed? We have given them a fair trial; what do reason and prudence say? Shall we be bound to continue till we are worn out by this unsuccessful work? We will ask it of men of business; we will ask it of men who plough their own farms; do they recommend perseverance when failure is certain? Shall horses run upon the rock? Shall one plough there with oxen? Surely not for ever.

I think we shall all agree that labour in vain cannot be continued for ever if we, first of all, think of *the ploughman*. He is not much, and he does not want to be much considered, but still his Master will think of him. See how weary he grows when the work discourages him. He goes to his Master with, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? Why hast thou sent me," says he,

“to a people that have ears but hear not? They sit as thy people sit, and they hear as thy people hear, and then they go their way and they forget every word that is spoken, and they obey not the voice of the Lord by his servant.” See how disappointed the preacher becomes. It is always hard work when you appear to get no forwarder, although you do your utmost. Nobody likes doing work which will not pay, and from which nothing comes. I once looked over a military prison, and I saw the soldiers carrying shot from one end of a yard to the other, and it was remarked to me by the warder that some time ago they made the men pile the shot at one end in a pyramid, and then take it back to the other end of the yard and pile it there; but as that gave them some kind of amusement the work was not thought sufficiently irksome, and so they made the culprits carry a shot to one end of the yard and bring it back, and thus no pile was formed at either end. The growing of the little pyramid, though they knew they would have to move it again, afforded a measure of interest to the prisoners; and as the work was to be a matter of punishment, and not of interest, even that was denied them. How frequently we have felt like those poor soldiers in prison, for we have carried the gospel and brought it back again, seeing no result to our endeavours. With many of you our work has been all wasted, all useless. Now, will God keep his servants to such work? If they were his prisoners in a military prison, it would be natural he should; but they are not: they are his sons, and he loves them. Will he keep them to such weary work as this? Must they always do that which discourages and disappoints them? No man, whoever he may be, likes to be set upon work which appears to be altogether a waste of time and effort. To his own mind it seems to have a touch of the ridiculous about it, and he fears that he will be despised of his fellows for aiming at the impossible. Shall it, then, always be our lot to treat with hard-hearted men and women? Will the great Husbandman bid his ploughmen spill their lives for nought? Must his preachers continue to cast pearls before swine? Shall they continue to speak to deaf ears? Must they always expostulate with stones and prophesy to those who are less sensible than the beasts of the field? If the consecrated workers are so bidden of their Lord they will persevere in their painful task; but their Master is considerate of them, and I ask *you* also to consider whether it is reasonable to expect a zealous heart to be forever occupied with the salvation of those who never respond to its anxiety? Shall the horses always plough upon the rock? Shall the oxen always labour there?

Then think again, there is *the Master* to be considered. The Lord—is he always to be resisted and provoked and yet to continue to have patience? Many of you have had eternal life set before you as to be received by simply believing in Jesus Christ; and you have refused to believe. Now, my Lord might have said to me, “Go home, you have done your duty with them; never set Christ before them again, I am not going to have my Son insulted.” If you offer a beggar in the street a shilling and he demurs, and will not have it, you cheerfully put it into your purse and go your way; you do not stand there begging him to have his wants relieved: but, behold, our God in mercy has been begging sinners to come to him, imploring them to accept his Son. In his

condescension he has even come down to this—to be like a salesman in the market, crying, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price.” In another place he says of himself, “All day long have I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying generation.” Well, if the Lord of mercy has been refused, and the Lord of love has been despised so long in the sight of you who reverence him, does not some indignation mingle with your pity, and while you love sinners and would have them saved, do you not feel in your heart that there must be an end to such insulting behaviour, and such matchless patience? You cannot always be pleading with those who will not be persuaded, for he that refuseth you refuseth him that sent you. I ask those whose hearts are hard to think of the matter in this light, and if they do not respect the ploughman, yet let them have regard to his Master.

And then, again, there are so many *other people* who are needing the gospel, and who would receive it if they had it, that it does seem as if it would be wise to leave off wearying oneself about these people who will not have it. What did our Lord say? He said that if the mighty things which had been done in Bethsaida and Chorazin had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented. What is more wonderful still, he says that if he had wrought the same miracles in Sodom and Gomorrah which he wrought in Capernaum, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. Well, then, does it not occur to us at once to give the word to those who will have it, and leave the despisers to perish in their own wilfulness? Does not reason say, “Let us send off this medicine for the sick where there are sick people who will value it, for these people refuse it”? There are thousands of people willing to hear the gospel. See how they crowd wherever the preacher goes—how they tread upon one another in their anxiety to listen to him; and if these people who hear him every day will not receive the message of God, “in God’s name,” saith he, “let me go somewhere else where there is a probability of finding soil that can be ploughed.” “Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plough there with oxen?” Must I work always where nothing comes of it? Does not reason say, let the word go to China, to Hindostan, or to the utmost parts of the earth, where they will receive it, for those who have it preached in the corners of their streets despise it, and think it a common thing, if not an utter nuisance.

I shall not lengthen out this argument, but shall just put the question again. Would any one of you continue to pursue an object when it proved to be hopeless? Have you ever attempted to make a child who has been in a pet and fretful happy and good tempered? You have said many kind and gentle things, and you have used a few sharp words too, but as my little lord would not come round you have said to yourself, “Then even let him sulk until he has had it out.” And if the Lord has sent his servants to speak kind, gracious, tender things, and men will not hear, do you wonder if he should say, “Let them alone. They are joined unto their idols. Let them alone.” There is a limit to the patience of men, and we soon arrive at it; and assuredly there is a limit, though it is long before we outrun it, to the

patience of God. "At length," he says, "it is enough. My Spirit shall no longer strive with them. Now will I henceforth let them alone." If the Lord does this, can any of us blame him? Is not this the way of wisdom? Does not prudence itself dictate it? If we put it to any man of thoughtful mind here, he will say, "Ay, ay, it cannot always be that the rock should be ploughed by the oxen."

IV. Fourthly, THERE MUST BE AN ALTERATION, then, and that speedily. Can this be altered? Can the oxen be taken off from the rock? Yes, it can be easily done, and very likely it will happen ere long to some hard hearts now before me. It can be done three ways.

First, the person can be taken away so that the unprofitable hearer shall no more hear the gospel from the lips of his best approved minister. There is a preacher who evidently touches the man a little, and has some sort of power over him, but as he rejects his testimony, and remains impenitent, he shall be removed to another town, he shall hear monotonous discourses which will not touch his conscience, nor disturb his lethargy. He shall go into a lone village, or a foreign land, where he shall be no longer persuaded and entreated; and there he will sleep himself into hell. That may be readily enough done, perhaps some of you are making arrangements even now for your own removal from the house of hope.

Another way is to take away the ploughman. He has done his work as best he could, now call him off from his hopeless task. Let him go home. He is weary: let him go home. The soil would not break up; but he could not help that, let him have his wage. He has broken his plough at the work; let him go home and hear his Lord say, "Well done." He was willing to keep on at the disheartening labour as long as his Master bade him, but it is evidently useless, therefore let him go home, for his work is done. He has been sore sick, let him die, and enter into his rest. This is by no means improbable.

Or, there may happen something else. The Lord may say, "Now, that piece of rock shall never trouble the ploughman any more. I will take it away." And he may take it away in this fashion: the man who has heard the gospel but rejected it will die. I pray my Master that he will not suffer this to happen in the case of any one of you—that you should die in your sins—die impenitent; for then we cannot reach you any more, or indulge the faintest hope for you. No prayers of ours can follow you into eternity. The most ardent lover of your souls cannot hope that there shall be an escape for you after death. There is one name by which you may be saved, and that name is sounded in your ears—the name of Jesus; but if you reject him now, even that name will not save you, for he shall be your terror. From his face you shall flee away and your great cry shall be, "Rocks, hide me! Mountains, fall upon me! Hide me from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne and from the face of the Lamb." You will dread him, and well you may dread him, though at this hour he waits to be gracious to you. I pray you do not destroy your own souls by continuing to be obstinate against almighty love. Oh that the Lord might do for you what we cannot. May he make you willing in the day of his power; for otherwise, as surely as you live, and God lives, if it comes to close quarters with you and your offended God, with no Christ between to be

the mediator, it will go hard with you. "Beware," says he, "ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you." Do not mind anything that I say of my own, but look at the word of God for yourselves, and you shall find that the inspired Scripture has in it terrible threatenings against impenitent sinners; and there is no imagery (though borrowed from the mediæval times, against which our adversaries make so much noise), there is no imagery that at all exaggerates the terror which must actually fall upon every soul that commits suicide by rejecting the Saviour, and spits into the face of God's own Christ by saying, "I would sooner be lost than have him to save me," for that is, virtually, what every unbelieving soul is saying.

God grant that some better thing may happen. I close by saying, is there any alternative to all this? Can nothing else be done? This soil is rock; can we not somehow sow it without breaking it? No, it must be broken. "Ye must be born again." "Except a man receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child he can in no wise enter therein." There must be repentance, for without repentance there is no remission of sin. But is there not a way of saving men somehow without the gospel, and without the grace of God? The Lord Jesus did not say so; he told us to preach as follows, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." He does not hint at a middle course or hold out a "larger hope," but he says, "he that believeth not shall be damned," *and so he must be*. God grant that no soul here may dream that there may, perhaps, be some back door to heaven, for the Lord has provided none. What then? Shall the preacher be permitted to continue his fruitless toil of ploughing? Yes, he is willing. He is willing if there is only half a hope left him, willing to go on and say, "Hear ye deaf, and see ye blind, and look ye dead." He will even so speak this day, for his Master bids him preach the gospel to every creature; but it will be hard work to repeat the word of exhortation for years to those who will not hear it.

Happily, there is one other turn which affairs may take. There is a God in heaven. Let us pray to him to put forth his power. Jesus is at his side, let us invoke his interposition. The Holy Ghost is almighty, let us call for his aid. Brothers who plough, and my brethren and sisters who help us as we plough and long for our success, cry to the Master for help. The horse and the ox evidently fail, but there remains One above who made both ox and horse, and who is able to work great marvels. Did he not once speak to the rock, and turn the flint into a stream of water? Let us pray to him to do the same now.

And, oh, if there is one who feels and mourns that his heart is like a piece of rock, I am so glad he has come so far as feeling it, because he who feels that his heart is a rock gives some evidence that the flint is beginning to be transformed. O rock, instead of smiting thee to-night, as Moses smote the rock in the wilderness and erred therein, I would speak to thee. O rock, wouldest thou become like wax? O rock, wouldest thou dissolve into rivers of repentance? O rock, fall down with that wish; echo to the voice of exhortation! O rock, break with that good desire! O rock, dissolve with that longing for God begins; he is working upon thee now. Who knows but at this very moment thou shalt begin to crumble down. Dost thou feel the power of the

Word? Did the sharp ploughshare touch thee just now, and didst thou begin to break up? Break and break again, till by contrition thou art broken in pieces all asunder, for then will the good seed of the gospel come to thee and thou shalt receive it into thy bosom, and we shall all behold the fruit thereof.

And so I will fling one more handful of good corn, and have done. If thou desirest eternal life, trust Jesus Christ, and thou art saved at once. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth," says Christ, "for I am God, and beside me there is none else." He that believeth in him hath everlasting life. "Like as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

O Lord, break up the rock, and let the seed drop in among its broken substance, and get thou a harvest from the dissolved granite, at this time, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke xiii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—489, 527, 526.

NOTICE.—Possibly some of our readers may not be aware that Mr. Spurgeon issues a Monthly Magazine, which is generally admitted to be remarkable for the vigorous and interesting style of its articles. The various works under Mr. Spurgeon's care here find a permanent record, but the periodical is not limited to such matters; it takes a wide range, and touches upon any subject which concerns combat with sin and labour for the Lord. The magazine is known as *The Sword and the Trowel*, and is published by Messrs. Passmore and Alabaster, price 3d.