

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ONE LION : TWO LIONS : NO LION AT ALL.

A Sermon

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“The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.”—
Proverbs xxii. 13.

“The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way ; a lion is in the streets.”—
Proverbs xxvi. 13.

THIS slothful man seems to cherish that one dread of his about the lions as if it were his favourite aversion, and he felt it to be too much trouble to invent another excuse. Perhaps he hugs it to his soul all the more because it is a home-born fear, conjured up by his own imagination ; and as mothers are said to love their weakest children best, so is he fondest of this most imbecile of excuses : at any rate, it serves him for a passable excuse for laziness, and that is what he wants. If you can get the king of beasts to apologize for your idleness there is a sort of royalty about your pretences : he hopes his sloth will appear the less disgraceful if he can paint a *lion rampant* upon its shield.

I am not about to speak of slothful men in general, albeit that when a man does not diligently attend to his business he is committing great wrong to himself and to others. When a man is slothful as a servant he is unjust to his employers, and when he is in business on his own account idleness is usually a wrong to his wife and family. I know one who is the cause of poverty and want to those whom he ought to provide for ; and all because honest labour and himself have long since fallen out. He would not move an inch if he could help it, nor even open his eyes if he could manage to live and sleep all his life away. When a man is thoroughly eaten up with the dry rot of laziness he generally finds some kind of excuse, though his crime is really inexcusable. “There is a lion in the way,” and therefore the man judges it to be quite right that he should keep his bed, or that he should sit leisurely indoors and should not give himself too much trouble or run any risks : but all this is a mere make-up to screen his loathsome vice. No Christian ought to be slothful in his ordinary work : the apostle describes the good man as “not slothful in business”—of whatever kind that business may be. If you have a right to undertake it, if you have a right to continue in it, you have no right to be a sluggard in it. There should be as wide a division as between the poles between the thought of a Christian and the idea of

a sluggard. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily." An idler is a disgrace to himself, and if he professes religion he is a dishonour to it. Paul would starve him, for he says, "If any would not work, neither should he eat," and that is as near starvation as well can be. Popery may create and foster lazzaroni, but the true faith bids every man eat his own bread. I leave worldly sluggards to the moralist: doth not nature itself teach us to labour diligently? Man was not made for an idle life; labour is evidently his proper condition. Even when man was perfect he was placed in the garden, not to admire its flowers, but to keep it and to dress it. If he needed to work when he was perfect, much more does he require the discipline of labour now that he is fallen. Lions or no lions, men must work, or find disease and death in sloth.

But we have many spiritual sluggards, and it is to them that I speak. They are not sceptics, they are not confirmed infidels, they are not opposers of the gospel; perhaps their sluggish nature saves them from anything like energetic opposition to goodness. They claim that they are not averse to the gospel: on the contrary, they are rather friendly to it, and one of these days they intend to be obedient to its great commands, and to yield themselves as servants to Christ; but not just yet, the good time has not fully arrived. They have a very comfortable bed of sloth upon which they lie, and they do not want to rise in a hurry and exert themselves too much. They want to take this matter very leisurely and turn to Christ when it is quite convenient,—when it will not require so much self-denial as at the present moment. "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," is their continual cry; and although God's watchmen disturb them terribly, and cry aloud that they may wake them, yet they sleep so heavily that they just turn over when they are most disturbed and drop into their slumbers again. I want to cry aloud under the window of such sleepers to-night with the hope that peradventure some of them may be wakened. What meanest thou, O sleeper? Wilt thou sleep thy soul away? Wilt thou lose heaven rather than bestir thyself? Wilt thou never lift up thine eyes till hell's torments are hopelessly about thee and within thee?

Our texts speak concerning the sluggard, and you first notice about him that *his tongue is not slothful*:—"The slothful man saith." The man who is lazy all over is generally very busy with his tongue. "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without." In both texts the slothful man is represented as having something to say, and I think that there are no people that have so much to say as those that have little to do. Where nothing is done much is talked about. Their goodness begins and ends in mere lip service. They talk about repentance, but they do not repent. They are willing to hear about faith, and even to speak about it, but they do not believe. They extol zeal and fervour, but they like to see these active graces rather than to feel them. They will talk till midnight, but all ends in smoke. When you sit down to speak with them about the reason that they have not given their hearts to Christ, they are not at all short of reasons and apologies and excuses. Indeed, a man must be desperately hard pushed when he cannot make an excuse. If our first parents made garments of fig-leaves, there is no fear that their descendants will fail to make coverings of some kind or other; and

so the slothful man with his ready tongue declares that there is a lion in the way, and he shall be slain in the streets. He is not idle with his mouth. He has a short hand, but a long tongue.

His imagination also is not idle. There were no lions in the streets. One does not expect to find lions there. They may be in the desert ; they may be in the jungle ; they may be in the forest ; but who expects to find lions in the streets of Jerusalem or the lanes of London ? Laziness is a great lion-maker. He who does little dreams much. His imagination could create not only a lion but a whole menagerie of wild beasts ; and if some mighty hunter could hunt down all the lions that his imagination has let loose, he would soon distribute herds more of the terrible animals, with wolves and bears and tigers to match. An idler will never be short of difficulties as long as he has no heart for work. As they say that any stick will do to beat a dog with, so any excuse will do to ruin your soul with ; for this man's objection, after all, was not to lions in the way : he objected to the way itself, and he was glad to place a lion there, so that he might be excused from going into the street. He did not want to get to his work, and therefore there was a lion in the way to obstruct him. The lion was his friend. He had invented him on purpose to be the ally of his idleness. Yes, men will have their tongues busy and their imaginations busy, even though their hearts be idle and their hands are covered over with idle dirt.

This man, using both his imagination and his tongue, gives me the opportunity of saying that *he took great pains to escape from pains.* He had to use his inventive ability to get himself excused from doing his duty. It is an old proverb, that lazy people generally take the most trouble, and so they do ; and when men are unwilling to come to Christ it is very wonderful what trouble they will take to keep away from him. Hear how they argue. Mark their ingenuity in avoiding the narrow way. Oh, if they were to argue half as well upon the question why they should be saved as they do upon the question why they should *not* be saved, their logic would be put to a much more useful purpose. When we have talked with them we have seen them invent all kinds of difficulties and doubts, disputes and dilemmas. They are ever ready with hard doctrines, and texts that are hard to be understood. They seem as if they raked heaven and earth and hell to find reasons why they should be lost, and yet the only reason that they have for this is, that they do not want to give up their sins ; they do not want to give up their self-righteousness ; they do not want to come to Jesus and be washed in his blood, and owe everything to the charity of God through the Redeemer. They cannot be troubled with repenting and so they leave that doleful business, as they call it. They do not like to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, and so they invent the lions. They do not care for faith, they do not delight in Christ ; and so they invent difficulties, and take a world of trouble to avoid trouble ; storing up for themselves hereafter a heap of misery in order to escape from the blessedness of being found in Christ both now and at the last great day.

Now, in dealing with sluggishness and its vain excuse, my divisions to-night will be such that every child can take them home and recollect them. The first head will be *a lion* ; the second will be *two*

lions; and the third will be *no lions at all*. Those three headings will surely abide in everybody's memory, and they are fairly derived from the two texts.

I. The first is "A LION." "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." That is to say, it is time for him to get to the vineyard to work, but he does not get up, and he pretends that he is best in bed, for there is a lion outside the door. Would you have him risk his precious life, so valuable to himself, at any rate, if to nobody else? He turns over upon his bed to sleep again; for this is far more comfortable than to be meeting a lion, and falling a prey to his teeth.

He means, I think, that there is a great difficulty—a terrible difficulty, quite too much of a difficulty for him to overcome. He has heard of lion-tamers and lion-killers, but he is not one. He has not the strength and the vigour to attack this dreadful enemy; he will even confess that he has not sufficient courage for such an encounter. The terrible difficulty which he foresees is more than he can face: it is a lion, and he is neither Samson, nor David, nor Daniel, and therefore he had rather leave the monster alone. Are there not many here who say much the same? "Oh," they say to the preacher, "you do not know our position, or the peculiar circumstances and special trials under which we labour. We would gladly be saved, but we cannot live as Christian men: our trade is a difficulty, our poverty is a difficulty, our want of education is a difficulty, and the whole put together make up an impossibility; there is a lion in the way."

Yes, I know, that is what your relative said many years ago, and as long as there is any of your family left there always will be lions about: and you, being a true descendant of the slothful one—to speak honestly to you—can hear the lion roar under your window just as your great-grandfather's grandfather did in Solomon's time. I am persuaded that your sons and daughters, if they have the same mind as you have—that is, a mind unwilling to come to Christ—will hear the voice of the lions too; wonderful difficulties will be in their way, as they are in yours. The ancient order of the Donomores and the fruitful family of the Easys will keep their beds and their posts till the last trump shall sound. Though the promise is, "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet," they have no heart for the conflict and therefore never win a victory.

Yes, but in this sluggard's case it was a very fierce lion. The Hebrew of the second text implies that it was a mighty lion that was in the street. His imagination pictured a very extraordinary monster, much larger than usual. And so, my dear friends, you have some difficulty much greater than anybody else ever had; at least, you talk as if this were the case. True, the martyrs swam through seas of blood to win the crown; and thousands were burnt to ashes at the stake that they might be found faithful to Christ: but it would seem from your talk that those lions were nothing compared with your lion, which is of huge dimensions and extraordinary ferocity. What can this lion be? Perhaps if I were to examine a little closely it might come out that you are a great coward, and the lion a wretched cur not worth noticing. Your lion is a mere mouse: where is your manliness to tremble at so insignificant a trial? Perhaps

you have an acquaintance who would be parted from you if you became a Christian. Is this your lion? It is a very young one. Or else you are following a bad trade, and a bad business, and you know that you would have to give them up. Is this all? Your shop would have to be shut on Sunday,—is this the secret of the matter? You know that the tricks that you now practise, and that you find so profitable, you cannot practise if you become a Christian. Perhaps that is your lion. I should not wonder, though you try to make others believe that it is so terrible, that you really cannot tell what it is; and yet you fondly dream that it quite excuses you for being what you are—an idle lie-abed, sleeping when the light of the gospel is shining full in your face, and declining to decide for God and for Christ, though you know what the Lord requires of you. I wish that Elijah were here to-night that he might cry, as he did on Carmel, “If God be God, serve him. If Baal be God, serve him. How long halt ye between two opinions?”

“Wake, ye sleepers, wake! What mean you?

Sin besets you round about,

Up and search the foes within you;

Slay or chase the traitor out.”

Still you halt, because this lion is such a terrible lion that there never was the like of it. In all the woods, in all the forests, never was such a roaring beast as this. So you say, if you are wide awake enough to say as much as that. I tell you that you are trying to make yourself believe a lie, for your difficulties are no greater than many of us have surmounted by God's grace. Your difficulties are not half as great as were those of Paul, and of those who lived in his day, who had to carry their lives in their hands, and seemed every day given over to death for Jesus Christ's sake, and yet bravely followed their Lord's will notwithstanding all.

Observe, again, that this sluggard said that there was a lion without, and he should be slain in the streets. It is rather a novel thing for people to be killed by lions in the streets. It has not occurred within my recollection, and I do not think that it is ever likely to occur; but still this man professed that he expected to be slain in the streets. In an age of liberty like this he is afraid to be a Christian because of persecution, for persecution would be the death of him. Oh, dear! In a time like this, when to be honest, to be upright, is, for certain, the best thing for this world as well as for the world to come, yet men still tell us that they would lose by being Christians; it would ruin their business, they could never make a living; they would be slain in the streets. If you had lived in Madagascar years ago, when to be a Christian involved your being hurled down a precipice or being speared, I could see something in the excuse; but in a land like this the persecutions which are endured may be bitter, and the losses which are incurred may be heavy, but they are hardly worth mentioning as compared with the sufferings of the first ages. I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the sufferings of the past times, and much less with the glory that shall be revealed in us. It will not do for you to talk so. It is idle talk; you do not believe it yourself though you whine like a coward. “I shall be

slain in the streets." If you were half a man you would never fear the streets, or think it at all probable that a wild beast would pounce upon you there.

And then look at the base conclusion,—“There is a lion without, *I* shall be slain in the streets,” as if the lion would be sure to look for him if it did not meddle with anybody else, as if he was the only man in the street, and not one among hundreds equally in danger, if such danger there really were. The lion, for certain, would kill him, he was quite sure of it; “*I* shall be slain in the streets.” This is how sluggards talk, as if all the troubles and trials that ever fell upon men that are decided for Christ would fall upon them; and whereas many of God’s Daniels have lived in dens of lions and have been none the worse for it, they cannot look to Daniel’s God, and they do not expect Daniel’s rescue. They are sure that they shall be torn in pieces, though there be but one lion and that lion in the streets, where there would be protection near and shelter at hand. If I did meet a lion at all I should best like to meet his roaring majesty in the streets, because there would probably be plenty of people at hand to help me. This consideration puts the case in a most ridiculous light. “Slain in the streets,” when there will be others there more courageous than himself who will rush to the rescue. Now, look ye, you that talk about the difficulties of being Christians. Are there no other Christians besides you? Will you be the only believers? When you are converted to God will you be all alone? Will there be none to help you? Is there no Christian brotherhood left among us? Are there no advanced saints who will help you as a young man to struggle against your doubts, and against the temptations that are in the way? Why, you know that you will not be alone in the streets of the Jerusalem of God. Once get into the city of God, which is his church, and you will be safe, for “no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, but the redeemed of the Lord shall walk there”; and thus you shall be in the blessed company. You shall be in the place of safety when once you get into the streets of the city of our God. Still, it is after such manner that idle people talk. They imagine perils. Then are they in fear where no fear is, frightened at their own shadows, troubled with imaginary ills.

The real lion after all is sluggishness itself, aversion to the things of God. Oh, how many we have in the Tabernacle whom I have looked to see coming forward to profess their faith in Christ, but they have not come, and, for all that I can see, they are just where they were ten, twelve, twenty years ago. The real difficulty lies in this—that their heart is not right towards God. They have not yet humbly acknowledged their need of Jesus: it is too much trouble to confess their sins. They have not yet accepted the Lord Jesus as God presents him, as the propitiation for sin. Oh, if they were in earnest about these things,—if their hearts were really anxious to find Christ, they would not see this lion in the way. I am quite sure that the monster would soon disappear.

Dear friends, one very common species of lion is the plea of many that they cannot understand the way of salvation. Is that true? Then remember the text of last Sunday morning—“If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded their minds.” It is an awful thing, then, to say, “I cannot understand

it," for it proves that you are under the power of the devil. Another man says, "I cannot believe it." That is an equally dreadful thing to say. What is it? No. *Who* is it that you cannot believe? Can you not believe God? Is he a liar? Remember how John puts it, and he is the most loving of all spirits,—“He that believeth not hath made God a liar, because he hath not believed on his Son.” It is a dreadful thing to say—“I cannot believe,” when God, who cannot lie, is the object of the remark. If you make such an observation to your fellow man you disgrace him; but if you say it to God, oh, how you dishonour him! That excuse will not do. If Jesus speaks the truth, why do you not believe him? The gospel is plain to the understanding of those who wish to know the truth, and it carries such evidence with it that it ought to be at once received without a cavil. Can you deny this? Then where is your lion?

But says one, “If I did come to Christ, I am persuaded that after a little while I should fall back.” Be not so sure of that. If you give your heart to Christ, has he not promised to keep you? Is it not written, “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand”? Do you think that you are to keep yourself from falling? If so, read this doxology, and try to sing it—“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence with exceeding joy,—unto him be glory both now and ever.”

“Oh,” says another, “but I know that a great many Christians are hypocrites.” This is your lion, is it? Well, if there are so many hypocrites it is time that there should be one honest man; and why should not you be that one? Besides, what have you to do to call God’s people hypocrites? You know that they are not. “Oh, but,” you say, “they are full of faults: all of them are false.” You do not dare say that, do you? If they all were false, nobody would want to be thought a Christian. How is it that a bad sovereign will pass? Why, because there are so many good ones, and because good sovereigns are worth having; and the reason why a hypocrite passes through society is because there are so many genuine Christians to make him go down, and it is so good a thing to be a Christian. Instead of judging others, it is time that you sat and judged yourself, and that lion would soon be dead.

“Yes, but I have tried,” says one. Oh that is your lion, is it? But how did you try? You tried in your own strength, I ween; and we do not invite you to do that any more, for your strength is perfect weakness. Had you committed yourself to the keeping of Christ you would have another tale to tell and another song to sing, for he is faithful, and he keeps those that are in his hand. If that is your lion, God grant that you may never hear it roar again. You are not asked to save yourself, or keep yourself, but to submit yourself to the grace of God, and surely that is able to keep you unto the end.

I have this to say to you before I pass to my second head. If there is a lion without, is there no lion within? That is to say, if you come to Christ and perish, you will most surely perish if you do not come to him. If you live as you are, what must become of you? If you die as you are, what must be your lot? Without a Saviour to wash you from sin, and a Mediator to plead for you before God, what must be

your eternal portion? Why, it would be better to go out among a thousand lions than to stay within and to perish in your sins. The lion within doors in your case will certainly destroy you; therefore up and away. Escape as a bird out of the snare of the fowler: that fowler is Satan and his nets are the deceitfulness of sin.

And what if there be a lion without? Can you not fight it? If you ask the Lord to go with you, can you not contend with the lion and destroy him, even as David did? Saints of old have overcome through the blood of the Lamb. None of those who are in heaven came there riding upon beds of ease, but—

“They wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins, and doubts, and fears.”

Do you expect to be carried into heaven on a golden palanquin? You will be mightily mistaken. Did Jesus die on a cross, and are you to be crowned with roses?

“Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease;
While others fought to win the prize,
And sail’d through bloody seas?”

No, my friend, there is no dainty road to glory. If you are afraid of difficulty and self-denial you judge yourself unworthy of the kingdom. Remember, among the condemned, the fearful and unbelieving lead the van! Up, and slay the lion, if lion there be, and it shall be your joy to find honey in his carcase before long.

If you do not feel that you can contend with the enemy—and certainly you cannot, without divine help—can you not cry for help? Our God hears and answers prayer; why not cry to the strong One for deliverance? Your lion is in the way. Shout, then, for a friend to come and help you; and within call there stands One who is a wonderful lion-killer. There is the Son of David. Did he not destroy the works of the devil when he was here? Still he shows himself strong for the defence of all them that put their trust in him. Call to him, “My Jesus, deliver me from the lion,” and he will be with you, and take the lion by the beard and slay him. Therefore, sluggard, your excuses will not do. They are broken vessels that hold no water. God help you to be weary of them.

II. We leave our friend, the sluggard, for a little while in the twenty-second chapter of Proverbs, and we turn on three or four pages, till we come to the twenty-sixth chapter, at the thirteenth verse, and there we find the gentleman again. The slothful man is still talking, and he says, “There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.” Is there any difference between this verse and the first one that I took for my text? Yes, I think there is this difference—that there are TWO LIONS here instead of one.

He has waited because of that one lion, and now he fancies that there are two lions. He has made a bad bargain of his delay. He said that he would have a more convenient season, but where is it? It was inconvenient then because there was a lion. Is it more convenient now? Not at all, for now there are two lions. “There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the street.” That is always the result of waiting: procrastination never profits; difficulties are doubled, dangers thicken. The

countryman who had to cross the river foolishly determined to wait until the water had all gone past, for, at the rate it was going, he was quite sure that it must run dry; but when he had waited long, to his surprise he found that a flood had come down from the upland country, and the river was much deeper than it had been before: the river was not dried, but swollen. Those who think, when they are young, that it will be so much more easy to seek and to find the Saviour when they reach manhood are greatly deceived. Those who think that they will wait till their family has grown up, or till they retire from business, for then they will be able to attend to it so much more easily, may live to discover that hardness of heart has come upon them as the result of delay. Life is like an evening; the longer you wait the darker it becomes. Delay bristles with danger, and the best fruit it can possibly bear is regret. When those who lingered are at length brought to Jesus, how much they wish that the precious years that have been wasted could come back to them. How heartily do they love that promise, "I will restore unto you the years which the locust hath eaten"! I said last Sunday evening what I am sure is true—that our dear Saviour knew the best time for the soul to come to him. And what does the Spirit say is the best time? He says, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." It is now that he gives the invitation, because now is the best time that is likely to come to us. You see in the second text there were two lions, and, according to the Hebrew, they were quite as bad as the other lion, for one of them was a young lion. "There is a young lion in the way." And the second Hebrew word implies a great lion. "A strong lion is in the streets." So now there were two active enemies—two unconquerable difficulties—instead of one; and, as an old Puritan observes, the first time when the sluggard looked down the street, and saw a lion lurking on the left, he could have gone the other way; but now when he looked out there was a lion to the right as well as to the left, and he could not go either way without facing a foe. With a lion at the front door and a lion at the back, there seemed to be no way of escape for him, and this was the wretched result of waiting. And do not some of you who, years ago, hesitated over the difficulties of being a Christian find more difficulties now instead of less? When you were one-and-twenty you were deeply impressed, and conscience was aroused; only you said, "No, not just now. It will be easier soon." Certain cords of sin held you. But now you are forty. Well, what about it? Are those cords weaker? I believe that now they are like cart-ropes to bind you, and, whereas sin once chastised you with whips, it is now chastising you with scorpions. You are getting farther away from the melting power of the gospel, hardening to your own destruction. You can hear a sermon now, and hear it without prickings of conscience. The tears used to flow in years gone by, and you have gone out of this place feeling as if you never dared come into it again, for the preacher had cut and torn you to pieces. He tries to preach just the same, and he hopes that he does, but his words have not the same effect upon you now as in other days. You are gospel-hardened, and that is the worst kind of hardening. You have heard the gospel so long that there is no novelty in it; and you know the excuses so well that you have got to be one of the devil's old

soldiers, a veteran inured to war. You know how to get over the gospel somehow; like an old fox, you know all the traps, and cannot be caught in them. You are sticking to the old trick about the lions; but now there are two lions, so you say. Thus you have a double-barrelled excuse. How can I be so unreasonable as to expect you to come out often to a week-night service? You have three or four shops. How can you come out of a Sunday evening, some of you? You have half-a-dozen children. How is it possible that you should give much time to prayer? You are here, and there, and everywhere in your worldly calling! "Oh!" say you, "do not talk to us. Years ago it might have been possible for us to be Christians, but now, how can it be?" Therefore, I say to you young people, hasten to be blest. I beseech you do not delay. An old man took a little child up into his arms, and put his fingers into the abundant curls of his sunny hair, and he said, "Oh! dear child, while your mother sings to you, and tells you about Jesus, think of him, and trust him." "Grandpa," said the little boy, "don't you trust him?" "No, dear," he said, "I might have done so years ago, but my old heart has got so hard now, nothing ever touches me now." And the old man dropped a tear as he said it. "I wish," said he, "that I had a curly head like yours, and was beginning life like you." Oh! old man, are you here to-night? Let me tell you a secret. You may become a boy again. I am sure you may, for you may be born again; and he that is born again is but an infant, and starts on a new life with freshly given strength. He shall have softer feelings than nature lends to manhood. He shall have the feelings which grace alone can produce. In a spiritual sense his flesh shall come again unto him like that of a little child, though he cannot grow young again as to his bodily frame. The Holy Spirit can make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. But do not delay! Do not delay, you that are yet young. I am sure that Watts is right when he says—

"Tis easier work when we begin
To serve the Lord betimes."

It is assuredly so. Although grace can bring in a person of any age, yet God delights to be found of them that seek him early. It matters not who he may be: if any man comes to Jesus he shall be received; but yet there is a susceptibility which pertains to the young which has often gone from those who year after year have heard the gospel, and yet have not yielded to its demands.

Oh! I should like you who have two lions to frighten you to cry out to the Lord to-night to help you to go out and slay them both.

"I am very old," say you. Well, that is one of the lions; but the grace of God can make a sinner who is a hundred years old into a babe in Christ. "Oh! but I have formed such bad habits." Yes, those are horrible lions; but those habits can be broken by divine power. "Ah! but my heart is so hard." Lay it asoak in the fountain filled with blood, and that will soften it. The Spirit of God—

"Can take the flint away
That would not be refined,
And, from the riches of his grace,
Bestow a softer mind."

He can take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. Let us have done with the lions, whether there be two or two hundred, for the Lord will help us. Oh ! for a grand lion-hunt to-night. Drive away the one, and drive away the two. But that can never be, while sluggards still are sluggards. The Lord quicken them, and wake them up to real earnestness.

III. That brings me to my last point, which is NO LION AT ALL. If there be here a man who would have Christ, there is no lion in the way to prevent his having Christ.

"There are a thousand difficulties," says one. If thou desirest Christ truly, there is no effectual difficulty that can really block thee out from coming to him. You notice that Solomon does not say that there were any lions in the way: he only tells us that the sluggard said so. Well, you need not believe a lazy man. The sluggard said it twice; but it did not make it true. Everybody knew what a poor fool he was, and that it was only in his own imagination that there were any lions at all. Do not believe your sluggish self, then, and do not believe the sluggish speeches of others. There are no lions except in your own imagination. John Bunyan pictures lions at the gate of the interpreter's house, and, according to some commentators, he meant the deacons and elders of the church that are outside to watch those who desire to join the church. I am one of those horrible lions; but the happy thought is that the lions are chained. Whenever you wish to join the church, if you will only have courage to come and face us who are the dreadful lions in front of the palace gate, you will find that we are chained; and, what is more, if we were not chained, we would not harm you. We do try to roar at those who are not our Master's children, and we would drive away all who come as thieves and robbers, for it is our duty to do so; but if you have a true heart, and wish to cast in your lot with the Lord's people, you shall not find that we are any terror to you. We shall be glad to say, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord. Wherefore standest thou without?" A believer's duty is to join a Christian church, therefore fear not the face of man.

I believe that some will never come to Christ until another and a real lion shall get at them, and then they will run to Jesus for shelter, lions or no lions. I mean if the lion of their sin should ever wake up and roar upon them terribly, then they will not say that there are lions in the way. I used to be terribly afraid to come to Christ until I came to be more afraid of my sin than of all things else in the world. And Mr. Bunyan, in one of his books, says that he pictured Christ in his own mind as standing with a drawn sword to keep him away, "but at last," says he, "I got so desperately worried by my convictions of sin that if the Lord Jesus had really stood with a pike in his hand, I would have thrown myself upon the point of it, for I felt that I must come at him or perish." Let some such desperate resolve impel you to his feet. Say—

"I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die."

Oh, throw yourself on the very point of the pike, for it is but in seeming

that there is either pike or point. Hasten to Jesus, even though he seem to frown, for there is more love in a frowning Saviour than in all the world beside. He cannot mean it. No sinner comes to him but Christ is more glad to receive him than the sinner is to be received. Nothing charms Jesus like seeing a poor troubled one come to him. He will in no wise cast out one who does so. If you were walking in the fields, and a poor bird should fly into your bosom for shelter from a hawk, would you take it out of your bosom and throw it away, and give it up to its enemies? I know that you would not. You would put your hands about it, and say, "Poor fluttering thing, you are safe enough now. Nobody shall harm you. You have trusted a man that has humanity, and he will take care of you." And if you fly into the bosom of Jesus Christ, he will not give you over to your foe, but he will receive you, and you shall be his for ever. I have heard of a king upon the crown of whose pavilion, when it was pitched, a pair of birds came and built their nests; and he was gentle of heart and truly royal, for he said to his chamberlain, "The tent shall never be taken down till the birds have hatched their young. They have found shelter in a king's pavilion, and they shall not have to rue it." And oh, if you will go like the swallows and the sparrows, and build your nests under the eaves of Christ, who is the temple of God, you shall never have your nest pulled down. Ay, and if you can lay your young there, they shall be safe too. There is no place half so secure for our children as Christ's bosom. All who are in Christ shall be kept in safety, and shall be cherished, and blessed. Oh, come along with you. Come, you that are afraid of lions. There are no lions. The way is clear and open, for Jesus says, "I am the way," and "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Why do you still say that you will come by-and-by? Do not trifle so. I had almost rather that you cried, "I will not come at all"; such perversity might end better than feigned promises and base delays. I pray God to give you a better mind than that, and may you say, "Yes, this very night, please God, I will be saved. The sun has gone down, but there is a little twilight left, and I will yield ere darkness quite sets in, I will now trust my Saviour, and hasten to him, and seek him on my knees in prayer." May the Spirit of God sweetly lead you to do this; and oh, our heart will be so glad of it. The Lord grant it, for his dear name's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xxi. 28—32;
xxii. 1—10.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—45 (Vers. IV.), 512, 520.