

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

HIDEOUS DISCOVERY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 25TH, 1886, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”—Mark vii. 20—23.

How weary the Saviour must have been of the idle prattle of the scribes and Pharisees! They are for ever talking about washing hands before meals, and washing pots and cups; and he is all the while occupied with the great griefs and sins of men, and how he can save them from the wrath to come. He must have felt as some true physician feels who looks upon a patient, marks the serious nature of the sickness, and plans a remedy, while some quack is boasting his nostrums or performing ridiculous signs, and passes over the dying man. To serious compassion imposture is provoking; and sincere truthfulness is grieved by the mockeries of pretence. The dear Saviour, knowing the truth about the whole thing, and solemnly concerned about it, is pained with the talk of these pretenders to learning and religion, who, knowing nothing at all about the real mischief, professed to purge away defilement by the washing of water, and outward ceremonies. Truly, I think every spiritual man must have a feeling of disgust every now and then as in these days he reads dissertations upon the cut of a priestly garment, or the position of an altar. Have you never read what is to be done if a little wine be spilt upon the cloth of the holy table, or how the cup used in the mass is to be rinsed again and again, and carefully drained by the person ministering? Have you never heard of arguments concerning the fate of a mouse which was so irreverent as to eat the holy wafer? What trifling it all seems—this serious discussion of garments and vessels with strange names, this exact directory as to when to bow and when to kneel, when to put on a robe, and when to put it off! What waste of time, of learning, and of thought! What exaltation of trifles and forgetfulness of serious realities! Men are diseased to the heart with sin, and ready to die and pass before the judgment-seat to receive the condemnation

which must lie upon those who continue in sin; and meanwhile, the teachers of the people are either busy with vain ceremonies or dreaming over equally vain philosophies. Behold, a pretender to profound thought informs us that Moses was in error, and Paul scarce knew what he wrote about. These philosophic amenders of the gospel are as arrant triflers as the superstitious posture-makers at whom they sneer. The Saviour makes short work of human traditions and authorities. Your meats and your drinks, your fasting thrice in the week, your paying of the tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, your broad phylacteries and fringes; he waves them all away with one motion of his hand, and he comes straight to the real point at issue. He deals with the heart and with the sins which come out of it. He draws up a diagnosis of the disease with fearless truthfulness, and declares that meats do not defile men, that true religion is not a matter of observation or non-observation of washings and outward rites; but that the whole matter is spiritual, and has to do with man's inmost self, with the understanding, the will, the emotions, the conscience, and all else which makes up the heart of man. He tells us that defilement is caused by that which cometh out of the man, not by that which goeth into him. Defilement is of the heart, and not of the hands.

To this teaching our Saviour calls particular attention. Observe that he spoke it to the whole of the people, and not to the scribes and Pharisees only. It is needful for every man to know this truth, and to lay it to heart. When he spoke he added these words—"Hearken unto me, every one of you, and understand"; and then he said yet more—"If any man have ears to hear let him hear." If a man fails to understand more deep and mysterious truths, yet let him understand this; for an error here is an error upon a vital point, and may lead to most serious damage, if not to eternal ruin. We are all of us called upon therefore to hear and to understand this day what the Saviour saith in the words of the text. Let me read them again, that they may sink into your minds. "And he said unto them, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man: for from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man."

I. First, this morning, think, dear brethren, with deep self-abasement, of **THE SWARM OF SINS**. I seem to have broken open a wasp's nest, and the stinging creatures fly out, in number numberless. Here are thirteen words, each one of them teeming with all manner of evils. Matthew, when he condenses the Saviour's utterances, mentions seven of these horrible things, one of which is omitted here; but Mark is more full in this instance, and mentions thirteen items of abomination. I am struck with the legion of foul spirits which are here set free, as if the door of the bottomless pit had been opened. As armies of locusts, or as swarms of the flies of Egypt, so are sins. As the wilderness was full of fiery serpents and scorpions, so is this world full of iniquities. The very names of them are a pain to the ear. Let us bow our heads in sorrow as we read the muster-roll of this legion of terror: "Evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, thefts, murders, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness."

Now, notice first, that this awful catalogue, this horrible list of the unclean birds that find a cage within the human heart, *begins with things that are lightly regarded among men*—"evil thoughts." "We shall not be hanged for our thoughts," cries one. I wish that such idle talkers would remember that they will be damned for their thoughts; and that instead of evil thoughts being less sinful than evil acts, it may sometimes happen that in the thought the man may be worse than in the deed. He may not be able to carry out all the mischief that lurks within his designs, and yet in forming the design he may incur all the guilt. Thoughts are the eggs of words and actions, and within the thoughts lie compacted and condensed all the villany of actual transgressions. If men did but more carefully watch their thoughts, they would not so readily fall into evil habits; but men first indulge the thought of evil, and then the imagination of evil; nor does the process stay there. Picturing it before their mind's eye, they excite their own desires after it; these grow into a thirst and kindle into a passion. Then the deed is speedily forthcoming: it was long in the hatching, but in a moment it comes forth to curse a whole lifetime. Instead of fancying that evil thoughts are mere trifles, let us regard them as the root of bitterness, the still in which the poisonous spirit is manufactured. Our Saviour here puts evil thoughts first in the catalogue of evil things; and he knew well their true nature. If we would be lost we have only to indulge these: if we would be saved we must conquer these. Let us make a conscience of our thoughts: he that doth not so will not long make a conscience of his words or deeds. Let us pray God to purge us in the inward parts, lest haply, by entertaining vain thoughts as lodgers within our hearts, they take up their residence, become masters of our lives, and drive us onward to the outward sins which shall utterly pollute and defile us in the eyes of our fellow-men.

Since this indictment begins with evil thoughts, who among us can plead guiltless? Since evil thoughts are the first of sins, we had better meet the charge with immediate repentance and an instant faith in the only Saviour. These thoughts come into our minds in the house of God, they intrude into our prayers, they defile our psalms, they disturb our meditations. Is there a sacred hill so high, is there a quiet valley so deep, that therein we may be quite clear from these "evil thoughts"? Who can deliver us from this plague but the Lord our God? We need to humble ourselves at the first reading of this list, and cry unto the Lord for mercy.

Carefully notice *the range which this catalogue takes*. It is a very singular one, for it begins with thoughts, and then it runs on until it lands us in utter want of thought, or foolishness. Matthew Henry says, "Ill-thinking is put first, and unthinking is put last." Sin begins with "evil thoughts," but ends in foolishness. The word rendered "evil thoughts" may be translated evil disputings, evil dialogues. Now this is thought by some to be almost a virtue, certainly a manly exercise. To be able to dispute, to be a questioner, a caviller, a perpetual and professional doubter; that, I say, is highly esteemed among men. What is modern thought but evil thought? David says, "I hate vain thoughts"; and all thoughts which run counter to the revelation of God are vain. In this instance I may quote the Psalmist: "The Lord knoweth the

thoughts of men, that they are vanity." Thoughts which are devout and reverent towards the sacred oracles are to be cultivated; but the thoughts which cavil at revealed truth, and would improve upon the infallible declarations of Jehovah, are evil and vain thoughts. All manner of mischief may come out of thinking in opposition to God; hence it is said, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Thinking contrary to God's mind, and disputing with the clear statements of God's own word, may be the first step in a descent which shall end in everlasting destruction.

Rising in evil thought, sin flows through a black country full of varying immoralities, until it falls into the Dead Sea of "foolishness." How often have I heard it said of a vicious life, when it has ripened into horror: "The man must have been mad! He was not only wicked, but what a fool he must have been! The devil himself seems to have forsaken him. He acted craftily enough at one time; but afterwards he went against his own interests, and insured his own destruction." Yes, men begin with the thought that they know better than their Maker, and at last they reach utter thoughtlessness, stolidity of conscience, and stupidity of mind. In the end they refuse to think at all, and nothing can save them from reckless defiance of common prudence. They are given over to judicial senselessness. Though God himself should speak, they have no ears for him: their sin has brought on them the punishment of utter hardness of heart. They have made themselves to be as the adder, which will not hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. This is the way of sin—to begin with fancied wisdom, and end with foolishness. The man who thought himself more than a man, at last ends as a brute beast devoid of reason. What a range, my brethren, there is between these two points! Read the words again, and see what a terrible zig-zag path lies between wrong thought and no thought at all.

In this list you have *a wonderful variety of sins*. The list is not complete, and was not intended to be. It would be very difficult in words to compose a full roll, though it were written within and without, which should comprise all kinds of evils. But you have here "deceit" which seems to dread the judgment of men, and therefore would delude it; and then you have "pride," which defies all mortal condemnation, and lifts itself above its fellows. You have here different forms of the lust which seeketh after pleasure, at any expense, in the form of "fornications" and "adulteries"; and then you have the "covetousness" which clings to its gold, and will consent to no outlay which it can avoid. Sin is a contradictory thing which blows hot and cold; it hurries men, like fitful winds, this way and that, yet never in the right direction. "We have turned every one to his own way," but all to the wrong way. Virtue is one, as truth is one, and holiness is one; but vice is abnormal and monstrous. Sin is ten thousand evils conglomerated in dread confusion. God keep us from ever navigating the dangerous sea of iniquity where currents run in one way, and under-currents in another, and where oftentimes sensual desires develop into whirlpools of abominable passions, which suck men down into the depths of infamy and perdition!

In this list you will notice *certain sins which may be regarded as*

somewhat singular. It is remarkable that "evil thoughts" should be placed so near to atrocious acts of crime. It is singular also to find "an evil eye" mentioned just in this connection. What can it mean? May the very use of the eye become a sin worthy to be ranked with theft and murder? Yes; when that evil eye means envy, it proceeds to a high degree of wickedness, and borders upon the worst of wrongs. When we look upon another man and regard him with malignity; when his prosperity makes us grieve; when in his very sorrows we take an inhuman delight, and gloat over his misery, his sin, his degradation, we then sin most heinously, and are prepared for any horror. This sin of envy, and that other of blasphemy, would appear to be a wanton superfluity of naughtiness, ministering no appearance of benefit to men. Some sins have a winning witchery with them; but there are old hags of sins which ought to attract no man in his senses: and yet they hold men enslaved. Among these sins I rank envy, blasphemy, and pride. This last I mention because it reads like a grim sarcasm, that sinners should be proud. What have such creatures to be proud of? What! adulteries, murders, thefts, and yet pride? One would have said that such sins would have forbidden pride. What a misalliance! A being infamous, and yet puffed up. Alas! the worse a man becomes the more is he filled with a sort of vain glory, by the force of which he justifies his own iniquities, and refuses to see his own vileness. This enables men to set darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. What an assemblage of banditti of every nationality range themselves under the banner of evil! Lord, save us from them!

Note, also, that of sins *there are many of each sort.* Especially in the original it is observable that the first seven of these evil things are all in the plural. It is not "evil thought," but "evil thoughts;" not "adultery," but "adulteries," fornications, murders, thefts; the translation should also be covetousnesses and wickednesses: these are all in the plural; for in any one sin there lurks a multitude of sins. One crime is built up of many: in any one form of sin there is a tangle and conglomerate of many evils. There are myriads of evil thoughts. In the crime of uncleanness there are stages: the thought, the word, the deed; all these are varieties of the same species, but they are all sins, and they are each one worthy of the generic name, though they do not take the same form. If the varieties of each sin are so many, and if all sins must be spoken of as a plurality under each variety, how innumerable must be the sins of men! O Lord, thou alone knowest our iniquities! Who could set them in order before us but thine own omniscient self? What must they appear to thy perfect vision! Brethren, if we were once to see sin in its true colours, and were then to see it in its innumerable hosts, we should sink into despair if any sort of conscience remained in us. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "All these evil things," said our Lord, as he summed them up in that one solemn phrase. As we read that word it sounds the knell of all human glorying. I hear it yet again. "All these evil things." How like the Old Testament declaration—"The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone

aside ; they are all together become filthy : there is none that doeth good ; no, not one" !

How evil, my brethren, each one of these sins may be it is not possible for us to know ; but *there is no one of them that is defensible*. They are each one of them vile before God, and some of them are mischievous towards men. Evil thoughts mainly blacken the man's own mind, but when he expresses them in disputations they destroy the love of truth in others : adulteries, as violations of the marriage vow, shake the very foundations of family life : fornications, which to-day are winked at as though they were scarcely offences, defile two persons at once in body and in soul. Actual murders follow frequently upon unbridled passion ; but forget not that the command, "Thou shalt not kill," may be broken by anger, hate, malice, and the desire for revenge. Many a murderer in heart may be among us this day, being angry at his brother without a cause. He that conceiveth and hideth malice in his soul is a murderer before God. This form of evil breeds all manner of harm to society. Thefts in all their shapes are also injurious to the commonweal. By this we mean not only robberies, but all taking from others unjustly, such as the oppression of the poor in their wages, the taking of undue advantage in trading, the incurring of debts without hope of being able to pay, and the like—these are varied forms of dishonesty, and are full of injury to others. Covetousness—the greed to get, and the greed to keep, the adding field to field until the man seems eager to be left alone in the earth ; the grasping of excessive riches, and the creation of poverty in others by crushing their humbler enterprises : all this is evil, though some applaud it as business sharpness.

Need I mention the ills which come of wickedness, deceit, and lasciviousness? These are poisons in the air deadly to all who breathe them. I sicken as I think how man has plagued his fellow-men by his sins. But I will not go through the list, nor need I: the devil has preached upon this text this week, and few have been able to escape the horrible exposition. A foul exhalation has entered into every house in this great city, polluting the very atmosphere, and spreading moral infection. Oh for a hurricane to sweep away the pestilent vapour! Within a narrow space a multitude of iniquities have gathered like vultures upon a mass of carrion. What a collection of sins may meet in a single story! How soon doth one transgression call to its fellows, till "a little one has become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation" ! Alas, alas for the multitudes of sins !

II. Now, secondly, I want to indicate THE NEST FROM WHICH THEY COME. Now that we have seen these evil beasts, we will go and look at their den. Let us make a journey thither. No, you need not feel for your money to pay your fare ; I am not going to take you very far ; I do not ask you to quit your homes, or even your pews. There is not even need for you to stretch out your hand to feel for this foul nest of unclean birds : you can keep your hand upon your bosom, and it will not be far off from the lair wherein these evil things are lurking, ready to leap forth whenever occasion offers. Our Lord Jesus Christ says, "All these evil things come from within." "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts." The source from which these rivers of pollution proceed is the natural heart of man. Sin is not

a splash of mud upon man's exterior, it is a filth generated within himself.

Now this is a very different story from that which we sometimes hear from thoughtless people. "Oh, yes, he used to swear, he was unkind to his wife and family; no doubt he took too much drink; but he was a good-hearted fellow." What an awful lie! His heart could have been no better than that which came out of it. Yet how common it is to say, when a man dies, "Well, poor man, he is gone! There was no fear of God or man about him; he was a passionate, drunken man, and so full of vice that no one was safe near him; but he was good at bottom." A likely story, is it not? The water which came up in the bucket was black and putrid; but no doubt at the bottom of the well it is clear as crystal! Do you believe it? If men bring to market baskets of fruit which upon the top are rotten, they will not be believed if they say that they are "good at bottom." If the goods in the window are worthless, the stock in the warehouse is not much better. You can only judge of a tree by its fruits; and if I gather sour crabs from a tree I shall not believe that it is a golden pippin. If grapes when fully ripe are sour, we cannot believe that the vine which bears them is a sweet one. Our Saviour makes short work of the lie that the life may be impure, and yet the heart be good.

Another fine theory of modern times is disproved by our text. According to this evolution doctrine, as applied to theology, the new birth is a development of that which is naturally within the heart. I hope we may be spared such births and evolutions. According to this theory we have had some fine specimens of regenerate people of late; for we have heard of evolutions or developments which have brought out from within evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, and wickednesses of more than average proportions. God save us from all development of the sin which dwells in man! Philosophically the dogma of evolution is a dream, a theory without a vestige of proof. Within fifty years children in the school will read of extraordinary popular delusions, and this will be mentioned as one of the most absurd of them. Many a merry jest will be uttered bearing upon the follies of science in the nineteenth century. In its bearing upon religion this vain notion is, however, no theme for mirth, for it is not only deceptive, but it threatens to be mischievous in a high degree. There is not a hair of truth upon this dog from its head to its tail; but it rends and tears the simple ones. In all its bearings upon scriptural truth the evolution theory is in direct opposition to it. If God's word be true, evolution is a lie. I will not mince the matter: this is not the time for soft speaking.

Regeneration is much more than reformation, or the development of natural goodness. It is described in Scripture as a new creation, and as a resurrection from the dead. It is not the cleansing of the carnal mind, but the implantation of a spiritual nature. It is not a shaping, and feeding, and washing, and purging of what is already in fallen man: it is a putting into us of a life which was never there before. It is a supernatural work of God the Holy Ghost: it is a miracle of grace, a work of God alone. Out of the heart, if the volcano be permitted to pour forth its lava, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, and

such like. The Saviour compels us to see how bad the natural heart must be in itself, since that which comes out of it is so vile. Who could bring such unclean things out of a clean heart? The source must be foul if the streams are so filthy. These evils must be within, or else they could not come from within.

Our Saviour is not speaking of a single man, or a certain set of men; but of man generally, of man as a race. We are all very much alike by nature. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." Friend, you are of the same race as those whose sins you censure. Though out of your heart there may never proceed actual fornications and adulteries—God grant they may not!—yet the seeds of such evils are there, and you will be foolish if you think that they can never grow into acts. If any man saith that no such evil lurks in his heart, I lay to his charge the two last sins in the list, namely, pride and foolishness. No man should dare to think that he is incapable of a sin into which another man has fallen. We may never have suffered from fever, or cholera, or diphtheria; but we may not, therefore, conclude that we are not liable to such diseases; nor may an unregenerate man, however excellent or moral he may be, conclude that he is invulnerable to the arrows of moral disease. Put the man in certain circumstances, tempt him in certain ways, and there is a terrible possibility that he will fall into those very actions which he now so righteously denounces in others. I am a man, and therefore liable to all the faults of human nature. Self-righteousness may induce us to say with Hazeel, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" but we shall be wise to forego so proud a question; for we may rest assured that we are dog enough for anything if the grace of God be withdrawn from us. It is certainly true that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders," and so forth.

But what is meant here, do you think, by "the heart"? Is it not intended to indicate the man himself—the man's most real self? Sin is sin for the most part because it is of the heart and the will. If the man's heart had nothing to do with it, I do not see how it would be sin. If a man had no will in the matter, where would be his responsibility? It is because we willingly do evil that we sin. The essence of the sin lies in the will to do it, and the full consent of the heart therein. The heart is the centre of life, the core of being, the place where manhood maintains its throne; and what a terrible statement this is, that out of the very centre of life there proceed from man "evil thoughts, wickedness, blasphemy," and the like!

The heart is the spring of action: the heart suggests, resolves, designs and sets the whole train of life in motion; the heart gives the impulse and the force; and yet out of the heart thus initiating and working proceedeth all this mischief of sin. By the heart is meant mainly the affections, but it often includes the understanding and the will; it is, in fact, the man's vital self. Sin is not a thing *ab extra* that comes to us and afflicts us like robbers breaking into our house at night; but it is a tenant of the soul, dwelling within us as in its own house. This evil worm has penetrated into the kernel of our being, and there it abides. Sin has intertwined itself with the warp and woof of our

nature; and none can remove it but the Lord God himself. As long as the heart remains unchanged, out of it will proceed that which is sinful. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually."

If it be so, that the nest in which sin is born and nurtured is the heart itself, we always carry about with us by nature that which will surely be the cause of sin unless we look well to it, and cry daily for grace to conquer it. This evil nature of ours is an always present danger: it is a powder magazine which at any moment may explode. Oh for grace to keep our hearts with all diligence!

How clearly sin comes from within, and not from without! How truly it is born in the heart! Oftentimes we see men commit sins against conscience: they know they are doing wrong, for they will lie and even swear hard in order to conceal their folly. A man must know that he does wrong, for he labours to deny it when it is charged upon him. Now, if a man sins against light and conscience, it shows that his heart must be radically bad.

Sin must be within us naturally, since the best training does not prevent it. Children secluded from the sight or hearing of evil, kept as it were within a glass case, yet run to it when the restraint is removed. As the young duck which has been reared in a dry place yet takes to the water as soon as it sees a pond, so do many hasten to evil at the first opportunity. How often it happens that those young persons who have been most shut out from the world have become the readiest victims of temptation when the time has come for them to quit the parental roof! It must be in them, or it could not thus come out of them. In many cases evil cannot be the result of mistaken education nor of ill example, and yet there it is: the seed is in the soil, and needs no sowing.

Again, we frequently find men falling into sins towards which they would seem to have had no temptation. A man is rich, and yet covetous. He has enough to content him if his heart were not evil. Men who have the enjoyment of almost every desirable pleasure, yet too often crave after indulgences altogether unnatural. Does not this show how evil the heart is? Is not this specially striking when you see how men invent new sins, of which ordinary people would never have dreamed?

Moreover, put a man where you may, and seclude him as you please, sin will still break out from him, and therefore the sin must be somewhere within, hidden away. Do we not know this? When we are in associations of the best kind we find evil thoughts and imaginations springing up within our minds. Shut yourself up in a narrow cell, but there will be room in it for troops of sins. Hasten away and dwell alone as a hermit where rumour of pollution and iniquity can never reach you from abroad, and still you will find the cauldron within boiling and bubbling up with evil. A door must be well listed if it is to shut out temptation. Nay, shut the door and hermetically seal it, and sin has already entered with yourself, for it is within you. Until you are delivered from that evil man, yourself, you are not delivered from tendencies to wickedness. The heart of man is the seed-plot of iniquity, and the nursery of transgression. As the multitudes streamed forth

from the hundred gates of Thebes, so do sins proceed from the heart. O Lord, have mercy upon us, and give us new hearts and right spirits!

III. Thirdly, and briefly, let us notice for a minute THE DEFILEMENT WHICH IS CAUSED BY THE COMING OUT OF THESE EVIL THINGS. While they lie within us asleep they are bad enough; but when at last they pour forth into our lives, and buzz abroad in our acts, then they cause grievous defilement, and make us unclean. In some cases they cause a defilement which our fellow-men see, and, seeing, begin to cry out against us, and even to banish us from their society. Where that is not the case, sin always causes defilement to the man himself. He goes from bad to worse, from worse to worst. Sin is like a ladder. Few reach the height of iniquity at once: the most of men climb from one evil to another, and then to a third and a fourth. Sin hardens men to further sin. He who is a moral monster was not always such. By sinning much he learned to sin more. The door of his heart was at first a little ajar; but outgoing sins opened it to its full width. A man is not capable at first of the sins which afterwards are habitual to him. Step by step men descend into the abyss of infamy if their feet are not hindered by restraint, or arrested by almighty grace. Every sin produces a fresh degree of callousness in the heart. Even if sin be speedily repented of, its damage is not readily repaired; if its writing be erased you can see where it used to be. Even the passage of a momentary thought over the mind will leave a stain. See, then, the defiling power of sin.

Here is the main point—the man out of whose heart these evil things proceed is *defiled before God*. I know that many will not think much of this; but that indifference only proves the hardening nature of sin. Only think of it: the sinful man is common and unclean before God. He is not fit to enter the sanctuary of God, nor to come into his holy presence. Sinful man cannot commune with a holy God. You do not mind that, you say. Ah me! how alienated from God are your hearts! If it were not so, we should judge that the most horrible thing in the world is for a man no longer to be able to speak with his Maker, nor his Maker to look favourably upon him. A breach of communion between the creature and the Creator is a kind of hell, a blight, a curse, a death. God cannot comfortably commune with us while our hearts are fountains of defilement, from which iniquity proceeds. By this defilement we become incapable of doing God any service. A defiled priest of old could not offer sacrifice. He that is defiled in heart and life can do nothing for God. God does not accept his person, and therefore he cannot accept anything at his hands. All that a defiled person touches becomes defiled by that very fact: his hymns are defiled, sing them as sweetly as he may; his prayers are defiled, though he may offer them accurately as to their words; his very thoughts are defiled. By-and-by it comes to this, that God cannot bear this defiled one anywhere in his universe, among holy beings, any more than men can bear lepers in common society. The just God is driven to find a place where the wilfully unclean may be placed apart “where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.” At last the great High Priest will look upon the defiled one, and looking at him, and seeing his leprosy of sin still upon him, that priest will say, “Depart! depart!” Oh the terror

of that final word! I dare not dwell upon this awful result of choosing sin and refusing mercy. I the more readily cease from this theme because my last point is that upon which I would dwell as long as possible.

IV. Hear me, then, while I speak of THE ONLY CURE FOR THIS EVIL. O sirs, your hearts must be cured of sin! Not merely the outcome of your heart, but the heart itself must be purged from defilement; for as long as sin comes forth from your heart it shows that the heart is still sinful. The heart must be changed, or you can never meet God with acceptance, nor be found amongst the glorious throng who behold his face and find a heaven in the sight. You must be renewed in the spirit of your minds, or you cannot dwell for ever with God. How is this to be done? I answer, it is impossible—impossible with man. All that we can do towards it must fall short of the mark.

“Madness by nature reigns within,
The passions burn and rage;
Till God’s own Son, with skill divine,
The inward fire assuage.”

You may take a thistle and water it carefully, but it will produce no figs; and you may cultivate a thorn through life, but it will yield no grapes. The cub taken from its mother and tamed, will be a leopard still; and the young serpent will still go upon its belly, teach it as you may. It is beyond and above all power of mortal man to change his own heart.

How, then, can we be made fit to dwell with God? Must we despair? Must we die utterly broken-hearted? Listen; for all the defilement that has fallen upon any one here, even though all the defilement of my text should have met upon one single individual, there is cleansing. With God there is plenteous redemption and measureless mercy. For adultery, for murder, for blasphemy, for all manner of sin, there is forgiveness. The Lord rejoices to blot out the transgressions of repenting sinners, for he delighteth in mercy.

Last Sabbath morning it was my privilege to preach of him who knew no sin, but was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. The glorious doctrine of the atoning sacrifice offered upon the cross of Calvary is most charming to those who feel that they are defiled with sin. Upon that blessed truth I could dilate without weariness by the month together; and this terrible theme of this morning, which sinks my heart into the dust, I have only brought forward that I may say afterwards, that the Lord Jesus is able to deliver us from all iniquity, and cleanse us from all sin. Oh, ye who are defiled, whoever you may be, come and wash and be clean. He that believeth in Jesus is justified from all sin, whatever his transgressions may be. The Lord delights in mercy through the great sacrifice of Christ. He is able to say, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” “All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.” Oh, that men would seek pardon through Jesus Christ, who is exalted on high to give repentance and remission!

“Yes,” say you, “but pardon is not all we want.” Most true; it is not all we need. We need to have the inward source of sin taken

away. This also is provided. Do you not know that in the blessed covenant of grace it is written, "A new heart also will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you. I will take away the heart of stone out of their flesh, and I will give them a heart of flesh"? Our divine Saviour turns lions into lambs, and ravens into doves. "With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." There also liveth among us One who came down to earth when Jesus went up to heaven, abiding among us evermore. The Holy Spirit is here to set us free from the bondage of sin. He comes into the heart where evil dwells as a strong man armed, and being mightier than the evil, he drives out the foul spirit that held possession, and he dwells there himself, changing the nature, and creating faith and purity. He makes us love the holiness which aforesaid we neglected, and loathe the sin in which we once indulged. It is possible for us to be born again: glory be to God for that. It is written, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." I do not think we have ever praised God enough for this possibility. To be washed in the blood is a precious thing; but, oh, to be cleansed with the water which flowed with the blood from that dear pierced side is an equal blessing! To be made holy is a heavenly boon. To be sanctified is as great a favour as to be justified. Purity of heart is to be had by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ: is not this good news? Those who receive Jesus receive power to become sons of God; and this means holiness. Those who become children of God are made like the Firstborn, and they grow up into him in all things. Grace reigns in them through righteousness unto eternal life.

Brethren, it may be well to make laws to restrain fornication, theft, and blasphemy; but the only sure cure for all sin is the grace of God in the heart. Are they going to stop dogs from going mad by muzzling them? Dogs will go mad with their muzzles on; and so will men sin despite the restraints of law. So long as hearts are evil, evils will proceed from them. The only physician for sin is the Lord Jesus; and his heavenly surgery lies in the renewing of the heart by grace through the Holy Ghost who works by the gospel. My brethren, keep to the old gospel; keep to the one remedy which has healed so many. No new theories for us; we accept the old and tried everlasting gospel of the blessed God. The truth of God will live and flourish when all the evil thoughts of men have proved their foolishness and are cast to the moles and to the bats, as images of deception, without life or power. Pray for a blessing upon this burden of the Lord which with a heavy heart I have delivered to you.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark vii. 1—23;
Psalm li.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—92, 461, 51.

Attention is called by the preacher to his little book "ALL OF GRACE," published by Messrs. Passmore & Alabaster. Price One Shilling. Its one object is to guide men to Jesus.