

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A ROOT OUT OF A DRY GROUND.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 13TH, 1872, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“A root out of a dry ground.”—Isaiah liii. 2.

THE prophet is speaking of the Messiah. He declares of him, “He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.” It is marvellous that with such plain prophecies concerning the Messiah, the Jews should have made such a fatal mistake in reference to him. They looked for a temporal prince, who would come in splendour, notwithstanding that this and other Scriptures speak of his humiliation in express terms. Every unprejudiced person might have seen from this passage that the Messiah, when he came, was not to be surrounded with pomp, but would come as “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” to be “despised and rejected of men.” Yet, though the truth was written as with a sunbeam, and the Jewish people were pretty generally acquainted with their own Scriptures, so that they had the opportunity of knowing it, yet when the Messiah came unto his own, his own received him not, and though favoured with the clearest prophecies concerning him they rejected his claims, and cried, “Let him be crucified!” Does not this teach us that the plainest instruction, earnestly and forcibly delivered, will not be understood by the unregenerate mind? The carnal mind discerns not spiritual things, its eye is darkened, its ear is heavy. Inspiration itself cannot put a spiritual truth so clearly that men will see it, unless their eyes be opened by the Holy Spirit. Vain is the best light to blind men. Beloved, remember that what was true of the Jews is equally true of the Gentiles. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the simplest thing in the world, but yet no man truly understands it until he is taught of God. There are preachers who labour after simple words, and seek out instructive similitudes, by which to make the gospel clear to every apprehension; but yet of the unregenerate it may be said, “Their foolish heart is darkened.” Sin has brought upon the human race a mental incapacity with regard to spiritual

subjects. They rush on in darkness, though the gospel creates a noon-day around them; they grope for the wall like the blind, though the Sun of Righteousness shines with infinite brightness. Alas! to what has our nature fallen! How is the image of God marred within us! How ardently should we adore the Holy Spirit, that he stoops to us even in this our blindness, and is pleased to remove the scales and pour light into our souls. Whatever we have rightly discerned has been revealed to us by his teaching, for apart from his illumination we should have been as obstinately unbelieving as the Jews, who knew not their King. Dear hearers, how is it with you? Are ye blind also? Though living in the gospel day, it may be you have never seen the Saviour with the eye of faith. Are ye blind also? Oh, if ye be, may he who alone can teach you to profit, instruct you in the faith of Jesus, and in his light may you see light!

Now, turning to the text itself, you will observe that Isaiah describes our Lord Jesus as growing up like "a tender plant," a weak branch, a suckling, a sapling, a plant that very readily might be destroyed. We cannot pass over that comparison without a note or two, though we intend to dwell mainly upon the next clause. Our Lord Jesus Christ in his humiliation appeared in great feebleness; born a helpless babe, he was in his infancy in great danger from the hand of Herod, and though preserved, it was not by a powerful army, but by flight into another land. His early days were not spent amid the martial music of camps, or in the grandeur of courts, but in the retirement of a carpenter's shop,—fit place for "a tender plant." His life was gentleness, he was harmless as a lamb. At any time it seemed easy to destroy both him and his system. When he was nailed to the cross to die, did it not appear as if his whole work had utterly collapsed and his religion would be for ever stamped out? The cross threatened to be the death of Christianity as well as of Christ; but it was not so, for in a few days the power of the divine Spirit came upon the church. At its first setting up, how feeble was the kingdom of our Lord! When Herod stretched out his hand to vex certain of the church, unbelief might have said, "there will be an utter end ere long." When, in after years, the Roman Emperors turned the whole imperial power against the gospel, stretching forth an arm long enough to encompass the entire globe, and uplifting a hand more heavy than an iron hammer, how could it be supposed that the Christian church would still live on? It bowed before the storm like a tender shoot, but it was not uprooted by the tempest; it survives to this day; and although we do not rejoice at this moment in all the success which we could desire, yet still that tender shoot is full of vitality, we perceive the blossoms of hope upon it, and expect soon to gather goodly clusters of success.

Christianity in our own hearts,—the Christ within us,—is also a "tender plant" In its upspringing it is as the green blade of corn, which any beast that goeth by may tread upon or devour. Oftentimes to our apprehension, it has seemed that our spiritual life would soon die: it was no better than a lily, with a stalk bruised and all but snapped in twain. The mower's scythe of temptation has cut down the outgrowth of our spiritual life, but, blessed be God, he who cometh

down like rain upon the mown grass has restored our verdure and maintained our vigour to this day. Tender as our religion is, it is beyond the power of Satan to destroy it. Weak as we are, we have not utterly fallen, nor shall we; for the feeble shall be victorious and the "lame shall take the prey." Though grace is often like to the hyssop for its weakness, it is ever as the oak for endurance. Man threatens to crush the church, or hopes to uproot true grace from the heart of the timid believers, but it shall not be done: the "tender plant" shall become a goodly cedar, and the weakness of God shall baffle the power of man.

Now let us turn to the similitude which we have selected for our text,—"A root out of a dry ground."

First, we will *explain the meaning of the metaphor*; then, secondly, speak of *our experimental knowledge of its truth*; thirdly, dwell for a while upon *the encouragements which it affords*; and, fourthly, upon *the glory which it displays*.

I. First, then, this morning, our Lord Jesus is said to be "a root out of a dry ground." What is THE HISTORICAL MEANING OF THIS METAPHOR? We believe that it applies to the person of the Lord, and also to his cause and kingdom:—to himself personally and to himself mystically. He is "a root out out of a dry ground."

A root which springs up in a fat and fertile field, owes very much to the soil in which it grows. We do not wonder that some plants thrive abundantly, for the earth in which they are planted is peculiarly congenial to their growth; but if we see a root or a tree luxuriating upon a flinty rock, or in the midst of arid sand, we are astonished and admire the handiwork of God. Our Saviour is a root that derives nothing from the soil in which it grows, but puts everything into the soil. Christ does not live because of his surroundings, but he makes those to live who are around him; and Christianity in this world derives nothing from the world except that which alloys and injures it; but it imparts every blessing to the place where it comes. Note, then, this truth,—that Christ is always "a root out of a dry ground;" he derives nothing from without, but is self-contained and self-sustained in all the strength and excellence which he displays. Let us dwell on that truth.

It is quite certain that our Lord derived nothing whatever from *his natural descent*. He was the Son of David, and lawful heir to the royal dignities of the tribe of Judah; but his family had fallen into obscurity, had lost position, wealth, and repute. Joseph, his nominal father, was only a carpenter; Mary, his mother, but a humble village maiden. The glory had altogether departed from Judah when Shiloh came. No crown was treasured amid the heirlooms of Joseph, and no sceptre was comprehended in the scanty portion of Mary. He who was born king of the Jews inherited nothing from his parents by way of honour and dignity,—his only portion was the danger of being sought out by the cunning and cruelty of Herod. Now, had our Lord been descended from the Pharaohs, had he come into the world as the scion of a long line of Cæsars, or as the heir to a wide-spread monarchy, it would have been said, "Every man respects pedigree and descent, and hence the triumphs of his teaching."

But who shall do otherwise than magnify the Lord alone, when the blessed and only Potentate is born in lowliest poverty.

“ Lo God bedews old Jesse’s root
 With blessings from the skies ;
 He makes the Branch of promise shoot,
 The promised Prince arise.”

Nor did our Lord derive assistance from *his nationality* ; it was no general recommendation to his teaching, that he was of the seed of Abraham. Why, to this day, to many minds, it is almost shameful to mention that our Saviour was a Jew. Though certainly the Jew is of an honourable race, ancient and venerable, as having been chosen of God of old, yet among the sons of men the name of Jew has not yet lost the opprobrium which long ages of cruel oppression and superstitious hate have cast upon it. It is said that there was no nation, immediately after the time of our Saviour, that the Romans ardently hated except the Jews. The Romans were peculiarly tolerant of all religions and customs ; by conquest their empire had absorbed men of all languages and creeds, and they usually left them undisturbed : but the Jewish faith was too peculiar and intolerant to escape derision and hatred. After the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, the Jews were hunted down, and the connection of Christianity with Judaism so far from being an advantage to it became a serious hindrance to its growth. Christianity was confounded with Judaism, and made to share the political obloquy of the Jewish nation as well as its own reproach. Had our Saviour been born in Greece, there is no doubt that as a religious teacher he would have commanded far more attention than as coming forward from Jerusalem or Nazareth. He owed nothing to his Jewish birth, for if anything good could have come out of Israel in former days, behold into what a state it had fallen,—it was dead politically, religiously, and mentally. Look at Phariseism, what shall I say of it, but that it had perverted the noblest into the basest ? Look at Sadduceism, with its profession of superior wisdom, its intense unbelief, and I may add its consequent folly. Whatever power the Jewish Monotheism may have had in the world, had perished beneath the destructive influences of a ritualistic Phariseism and a broad church Sadduceism. Our Saviour, could he have disowned all connection with Israel, might have been rather strengthened than weakened by so doing. He was in this respect “ a root out of a dry ground.” Mentally, among the Jews nothing was left ; no harp resounded with psalms like those of David ; no prophet mourned in plaintive tones like Jeremy, or sang in the rich organ tones of Isaiah ; there remained not even a Jonah to startle, or a Haggai to rebuke. No wise man gave forth his proverbs, nor preacher took up his parable. The nation had mentally reached its dregs, its scribes were dreaming over the letters of Scripture, insensible to its inner sense, and its elders were drivelling forth traditions of the fathers, and so sinking lower and lower in an inane superstition. It was a “ dry ground ” out of which Jesus sprang.

Nor did the Saviour owe anything to *his followers*. He might have selected, had he pleased, certain eminent persons as his first converts.

Casting his eye upon the reigning Cæsar and his royal subordinates, he might have turned their hearts to serve him, and so have surrounded himself with a discipleship culled from men of renown; but he did not so, else would men have said, "His religion might well spread with such powerful men at its head." The man chosen out of the people passed by the noble and elected the base. He might have journeyed at once to Athens, and have collected from the remnant of the old philosophic schools the choice thinkers of the age. There still survived the sects of the Stoics and the Epicureans, and the old learning of Socrates and Plato was not quite forgotten; he might have called to his feet the leaders in the more potent schools of thought; but he did not so, else they would have said that Christianity might well triumph with such master minds to propagate it. He might have gone to the Forum at Rome, and there have selected men of mighty eloquence; he might have converted the orators of the tribune, or the persuasive speakers of the senate, and have set such men to lead the van of the new faith; but he did not so, else they would have said that rhetoric achieved the victory, and eloquence with her charms had spell-bound the world. See ye not how he hastens to the fisher boats on the Lake of Gennesaret, and calls men of the roughest exterior and the least cultured intellect. Shall a world-subduing religion be disseminated by peasants and mariners? So did he ordain it. He selected men commonly known to be unlearned and ignorant, and made them apostles of the faith. Whatever they became in after life, he made them that. Peter did not make Christianity, but Christianity made Peter what he was. Paul brought nothing to Christ, but Christ gave everything to Paul. I admit that the apostles became great men; they were eloquent and learned in the truest sense of the term, being taught of God, but Jesus, as "the root," bore them, not they the root. This wondrous root fertilised the soil in which it grew; it derived nothing from the men, but gave the men all they possessed. But we will pass on.

Our Saviour is "a root out of a dry ground" as to *the means which he chose for the propagation of his faith*. Nobody wonders that Mahometanism spread. After the Arab prophet had for a little while himself personally borne the brunt of persecution, he gathered to his side certain brave spirits who were ready to fight for him at all odds. You marvel not that the sharp arguments of scimitars made many converts. Any religion will win assent when the alternative is conversion or instant death. Give a man a strong right hand and a sharp sabre, and he is a fit missionary of Mahomet's doctrine. Our Saviour gave to his soldiers neither spears nor swords, but said, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." He asked no aid from governments, he disowned the temporal arm altogether as his ally. Had our Saviour been a State-churchman, and not, as he was, the grandest of nonconformists, it would have been said that under the wings of the State his church was fostered into power. If Cæsar had said, "I will gather thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings," it would not have been surprising if the brood of Christians had multiplied indefinitely. But our Saviour sought no succour from potentates, and rested not upon an arm of flesh.

The people would have made him a king, but he hid himself, for his kingdom was not of this world, therefore did not his servants fight.

Our Saviour as he used no force, so neither did he use any means which might enlist man's lower nature on his side. When I have heard of large congregations gathered together by the music of a fine choir, I have remembered that the same thing is done at the opera-house and the music-hall, and I have felt no joy. When we have heard of crowds enchanted by the sublime music of the pealing organ, I have seen in the fact rather a glorification of St. Cecilia than of Jesus Christ. Our Lord trusted in no measure or degree to the charms of music for the establishing his throne. He has not given to his disciples the slightest intimation that they are to employ the attractions of the concert room to promote the kingdom of heaven. I find no rubric in Scripture commanding Paul to clothe himself in robes of blue, scarlet, or violet; neither do I find Peter commanded to wear a surplice, an alb, or a chasuble. The Holy Spirit has not cared even to hint at a surpliced choir, or at banners, processions, and processional hymns. Now, if our Lord had arranged a religion of fine shows, and pompous ceremonies, and gorgeous architecture, and enchanting music, and bewitching incense, and the like, we could have comprehended its growth; but he is "a root out of a dry ground," for he owes nothing to any of these. Christianity has been infinitely hindered by the musical, the æsthetic, and the ceremonial devices of men, but it has never been advantaged by them, no, not a jot. The sensuous delights of sound and sight have always been enlisted on the side of error, but Christ has employed nobler and more spiritual agencies. Things which fascinate the senses are left to be the chosen instruments of Antichrist, but the gospel, disdaining Saul's armour, goes forth in the natural simplicity of its own might, like David, with sling and stone. Our holy religion owes nothing whatever to any carnal means; so far as they are concerned, it is "a root out of a dry ground."

Neither did the Saviour owe anything to *the times in which he lived*. Christianity, it is said by some, came upon the field at a time when it was likely to succeed. I utterly deny it: it was born at a period of history when the world by wisdom knew not God, and men were most effectually alienated from him. The more thinking part of the world's inhabitants at the time of Christ's coming were atheistic, and made ridicule of the gods, while the masses blindly worshipped whatever was set before them. The whole set and current of thought at the advent of our Lord was in direct opposition to such a religion as he came to inculcate. It was an age of luxury—Rome was full of wealth and the desire for self-indulgence. Wherever Romans settled, they built magnificent villas, and used all the arts for the gratification of the flesh: was this a preparation for the doctrines of the cross? It was an age of universal vice. It is a great mercy that most of the ancient cities have been destroyed, and their works of art dashed to shivers, for many of them were unutterably vicious, and such as remain are doing not a little to degrade humanity. Vices which now we dare not speak of were then perpetrated in public; things that are now detested were performed as a part of

sacred worship. The world was rotten through and through. If darkness be a preparation for light, I grant you the world did prepare itself for Christ. If an Augean stable, pestilential with a putridity which supersedes all common rottenness, be in readiness for the coming of him who shall cleanse it, the world was prepared for Jesus, but not else. I deny that he owed anything to his times. He came when the times could not help him in any degree whatever, and his religion was "a root out of a dry ground."

Neither, again, let me say, did the religion of Jesus owe anything to *human nature*? It is sometimes said that it commends itself to human nature. It is false: the religion of Jesus opposes unrenewed human nature. In Christ's day revenge was one of the most glorious things known; it was sung of, it was preached upon, it was the joy of men; and what religion but Christianity ever taught men never to retaliate? Christ said, "Love your enemies, and pray for them that despitefully use you." Is this in human nature? Is there anything in the commands of Christ that at all flatters pride or conciliates lust? He judges our thoughts as well as our actions. "He that looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Is that agreeable to human nature? Does that run in the same vein as our passions, think you? Mahomet prospered because his religion pandered to human weakness; but there is in the religion of Christ no yielding to what are called the natural passions, no providing for sensual desires. "Take up," saith he, "not thy scimitar but thy cross." He says not, "Increase thine harem." No, but "Crucify the flesh." Is there any glorification of human intellect in the religion of Jesus? Is not its invariable command, "Believe, and live." If Christianity spreads, it spreads in opposition to human nature, by changing human nature, by making it what it never was and never could have been, had not the incorruptible truth of God been planted in it like "a root in a dry ground."

Thus much, and perhaps too much, upon the historical meaning of the metaphor.

II. Now, briefly, but earnestly, OUR KNOWLEDGE OF ITS TRUTH EXPERIMENTALLY. Beloved, you remember your own conversion. When Jesus Christ came to you to save you, did he find any fertile soil in your heart for the growth of his grace? I must bear witness that to convince me of sin and humble me, he had need of all the mighty hammers of his power to break my rocky heart. Conviction of sin was no natural product of my mind. Repentance was a plant of the Lord's right hand planting, and not a native of the soil. Remorse we might have had by nature, but repentance never. And brethren, if now we have believed in Christ Jesus, and are resting in him, I am sure we must own that faith never sprang up naturally in the garden of our hearts: the Holy Spirit taught us how to believe in Jesus, and led us to look unto him that we might be saved. So far from helping Christ, my whole soul was opposed to him. If now I bow before his feet, and delight to call him my Master and my Lord, it is because I am subdued by his power, not because I have educated myself to it, or was at all inclined thereto. Religion, true religion, in the heart at conversion is "a root out of a dry ground."

Let me ask you who look into your own hearts, how have you found them since? Has there been anything in your natural humanity congenial with the new life which grace has begotten within you? You have the higher life in your souls, has it found sustenance in your flesh? Ah, it is sadly the reverse. Christ's life has come into us like Israel into the wilderness, and it finds in us no food; if manna do not drop from heaven, and water leap from the smitten rock, it must die in the desert of our soul. "In me, that is, in my flesh," said the apostle, "there dwelleth no good thing." Our carnal nature is still as evil as ever it was: "The carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not reconciled to God, neither indeed can it be." If you have grace in your hearts to-day, beloved, you have been made to feel that it is "a root out of a dry ground."

I bless the Lord that we have felt this at peculiar seasons. When you have had great joy in God, great exhilaration and delight, has it not usually been at times when you might least have expected it? When the body is gradually pining away with sickness, we have seen the spirit more triumphant than it was in health, deriving none of its joy from the strength of nature, but flourishing upon a secret provender of which the world knows nothing: it has been "a root out of a dry ground." Sometimes we have been desponding in spirit, our animal spirits as they are called, have been quite dried up, and yet or ever we were aware, our souls have been made like the chariots of Amminadib, and we have flashed and glowed with sacred delight. "A root out of a dry ground" again. Children have died, and perhaps a beloved wife has been taken away; possibly business has been against us, trials have multiplied, and yet at that very season we have walked nearer to God than ever we did before, and had more delight in his company, and have known more of the power of the Holy Spirit in our souls, than ever we did in days of prosperity;—all to show us that the grace within us lives by its own inward vigour and by supernatural help, and owes nothing to bodily health, nothing to outward circumstances, but is still a root flourishing best in a dry ground. There is much that is painful about this experience of the dryness of the ground, but there is something delightful in the experience of the growing of the root under such circumstances; for then all the glory is given to the Lord alone, and we dare not touch it, nay, not so much as with one of our fingers.

III. But I will pass on. This whole subject appears to me to afford much ENCOURAGEMENT to many.

And first, let me speak as earnestly as I can a word to those of you who are seeking after the Saviour, but are very conscious of your own sinfulness. You are depressed under a sense of being unworthy to be saved, and what is perhaps worse, you feel that though the gospel be preached to you you are unable to receive it of yourself. Deadness and powerlessness are the main thoughts upon your mind. Now, beloved, let this console you. Christ Jesus, when he saves a sinner, borrows no help whatever from the sinner himself. "It pleased the Father that in *him* should all fulness dwell." If there be all fulness in *him*, he does not need any contribution from us, and, blessed be his name, he never waits for any. We can give none, and he will receive none. Christ is all—does not that cheer you? Do you say, "I want

power"? In him is strength. "I want wisdom" say you:—he is "made of God unto us wisdom." "I want a tender heart";—who can give it you but Christ? "But, ah, I want to repent":—is he not "exalted on high to give repentance"? "But I long for faith." Well, and have you never read, "it is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"? He is "a root out of a dry ground," and your ground is very, very dry, but he will come and put fertility into it; he does not first want fertility in you. Poor, helpless, hopeless, stripped, and emptied one, thou needst not look for nor desire anything in thyself to prepare thee for Jesus; he delights to come into empty hearts to fill them with his love, into cold hearts to warm them with his sacred flame, and into dead hearts to give them life.

Now, the same thought which may thus comfort the seeker, and I pray it may, ought also to encourage any Christian who has been making discoveries of his own barrenness. It is not every child of God that knows himself thoroughly. We may go on a long time after our first conversion without any very deep understanding of what poor things we are. Have you begun to see yourself in the looking-glass of the word, and does the sight alarm and distress you? Are you crying, "My barrenness! my barrenness!" Beloved brother, Christ "is a root out of a dry ground," and though thou be thus barren now, thou art not one whit more barren than thou always hast been: thy sin alarms thee, but it was always there; thy natural death disgusts thee, but it is no new thing. "Oh, but I seem to be less than I was!" You never were anything, and it you had begun by understanding you were nothing, you would have begun in a wiser and happier way than you have done. Whenever the child of God says, "I find my total of natural strength is getting smaller," he is only approximating to the truth, for his strength is "perfect weakness." Beloved, when we get to realise the lesson taught us in our baptism, we are drawing near to truth. What is that? say you. Why, it is the burial of the creature in Christ's tomb. Circumcision signifies the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but baptism teaches us the burial of it altogether, as an incorrigible and utterly corrupt thing, not to be reformed and mended, but to be reckoned as dead and buried. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." Be nothing at all, and let Jesus be all in all. When at any time you are cast down by a sense of your nothingness, remember that your Lord is "a root out of a dry ground."

The same comfort avails for every Christian worker. You who work for Jesus in the pulpit, or in the Sunday school, or elsewhere, I am quite sure if God blesses you you do not always feel alike. Those machines that preach regularly in the same way accomplish very little. God means to use *men*, and while men are men they will be sensitive and changeable. Flesh and blood are not like marble,—they change, and God means to use the feelings of his ministers and his servants for divine ends and purposes. If God ever honours a man in public, he will whip him every now and then behind the door, and make him cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Now, brother, when you feel you are barren, do not fret or despair about it, but rather say, "Lord, here is a dry tree, come and make it bear fruit,

and then I shall joyfully confess "from thee is my fruit found." Lord, I am a withered branch by nature, come and put sap into me, and make me bud and blossom like Aaron's rod; so shall men see a miracle of grace and thou shalt have all the praise of it. Do not think that your unfitness to be used is really a disqualification with God. The last thing a man might choose to fight with would be the jaw bone of an ass, and yet Samson found it handy enough, and it made his victory the more famous. The last instrument God might choose to use might be yourself, and yet if he pleases there is a fitness in your unfitness, and a qualification in your disqualification. A man's conceit that he is well prepared for God to use him, will prove fatal to him. If a man be possessed of polished diction, very learned, a man of high family, a man of great repute, and so on, the likelihood is that he will be esteemed by his fellows so much that the Lord will say, "I cannot use this man lest men glorify him" Therefore God often uses young men, because people know they are fools; he honours illiterate men, that people may know that it is not by their learning. He chooses home-spun people, who speak without the polish which others have gained, and he uses them because the world says, "He is an unlearned man, and a rough vulgar fellow." Do you not see that thus all the glory goes to God. The man's disqualifications are his fitness. "The rather, therefore," saith the Apostle, "will I glory in infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Go on, dear worker, for Jesus is "a root out of a dry ground," and in your dryness he will flourish.

Do you not think that this also ought to comfort all of us with regard to the times in which we live? They are said to be very horrible times,—they always were ever since I have known anything of the world, and I suppose they always were in our fathers' time. We are always at a crisis according to some people. I am not about to defend the times, they are, no doubt, very bad, for the innumerable spirits of evil are bold and active, while good men seem to have lost their courage. We find amalgamations and compromises *ad infinitum*, and the precious truth of God is trodden as the mire of the streets. What about all this? Are we discouraged? Far from it. Bad times are famous times for Christ. When Wycliffe came, the times were dark enough in England, and therefore the morning star was the more welcome. When Luther came into the world, the times were almost as black as they could be and therefore good times for reformation! The times were dead enough when Wesley and Whitfield came: but they proved glorious days for the Lord to work in! And if you discern now that there is not much prayerfulness, nor much spirituality, nor much truthful doctrine, nor much zeal, do not fret; it is thoroughly dry soil, and now the root of grace will grow. John Bunyan once said that when he heard the young fellows swear so profanely in his parish, he used to think what men God would make of them when he converted them! Let us think of that. Suppose he saves those wretched priests who are trying to swallow down England, suppose he converts these profane rationalists, who almost deny God's existence,—what penitent sinners they will make when he once breaks their hearts, and what preachers of the word they will be when he renews them.

Let us have good hope. Our faith does not rise when people say the times are improving, nor do we despond when men denounce the times as bad. Eternity is the life time of God, and he will work out his purposes. Time may ebb and flow, God is in no hurry; but if the world goes on for a million of years God, will triumph in the end, and the poem of human history will not wind up with a dirge, but will end with a triumphant hymn after all. Let us be of good courage about that.

And thus we may be encouraged concerning any particularly wicked place. Do not say, "It is useless to preach down there, or to send missionaries to that uncivilized country." How do you know? Is it very dry ground? Ah, well, that is hopeful soil; Christ is a "root out of a dry ground," and the more there is to discourage the more you should be encouraged. Read it the other way. Is it dark? Then all is fair for a grand show of light; the light will never seem so bright as when the night is very very dark. Come with the salt of Christ where there is most putridity. Where is the scene for the triumph of the physician but where disease has reigned supreme? Go with Christ's gospel in your hands where it is most required.

The same is true of individual men, you should never say, "Well, such a man as that will never be converted." You parents do not say, "Now, there is Mary, she has a sweet temper, I expect to see her brought to Christ, and there is John, an open-hearted lad, seems very attentive in the house of God, I expect to see him saved; but, as for Tom, he is such a wild dare-devil fellow, I shall never see him saved." I should not wonder that he is just the very one whom God will bring to himself, and make him to be the joy and gladness of your old age. Who are you that you should set up to elect God's people? He has done that years ago, and he has often elected the very ones whom you would have cast out. Seek the conversion of all persons, and all classes, all men, and all your relatives, and all your children, and you do not know whether any shall be saved, this or that. He is "a root out of a dry ground." Look for the dry ground, and rather rejoice when you see it is dry ground, with the comfortable hope that the root will spring up there.

IV. I must close with a few words upon THE GLORY WHICH ALL THIS DISPLAYS. Christ's laurels, beloved, at this day are none of them borrowed. When he shall come in his glory there will be none among his friends who will say, "O King, thou owest that jewel in thy crown to me." None will whisper among themselves, that if the honour be given to the Captain yet it was a soldiers' battle after all. No, but everyone will own that he was the author and the finisher of the whole work, and therefore he must have all the glory of it, since we who were with him were dry ground, and he gave life to us but borrowed nothing from us. In the end of the world it will be seen how Christ has sedulously shaken off from him everything that could have marred his victory. This is most prominent in history. The church of God went on gloriously and subdued the nations, till that unbaptised heathen Constantine thought, as a piece of state policy, that he would get the Christians on his side to secure for him a throne which else he would have lost; and that old sinner made Christianity a national religion, and from that day it was pure Christianity no more. You could not

find pure religion then, except you went to the valleys of Piedmont, amongst the persecuted Waldenses, where it was maintained. Religion, as far as real, true, pure holiness was concerned, almost ceased to exist from the day when the royal hand inflicted a spiritual scrofula upon the church by its touch. The dark ages were a chastisement to the church for leaning upon an arm of flesh. Then came the Reformation, and as long as men preached the gospel, and depended upon spiritual power only, even persecution made it spread; but those sinners, Henry the Eighth and Elizabeth, must needs extend the royal wing over it, and it sickened almost to death. The despised Puritans became the representatives of the crucified Lord. And then there came a time when these Puritans were multiplied, and they erred, and they took the sword (and if Puritans take the sword they can fight, mark you), and they got the upper hand by the arm of flesh, and then down went the spirituality of Puritanism, because whoever it is that thinks to bring glory to God in that way, God will have nothing to do with him. And now, at this day the Lord may bless his dissenting people in this country: but if they seek political power, and lean upon the education of their ministers, or any other earthly thing, God will cast them off as he has all the others. History shows that Christ blesses a humble, believing, trustful, spiritually minded people; but when they cringe before the king, or use sword or bayonet, from that moment the Master puts them down, and begins again at the first foundation, for it is "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." And so it shall be. When at the last the entire church shall rise in all its splendour, not a single stone shall bear the mark of the carver's tool of human workmanship: from basement to pinnacle there shall be no token of human masonry; no king shall be able to say, "I gave that glorious window of chrysolite," no prince shall say, "I contributed that pinnacle of sapphire or chrysoprasus"; no minister shall be able to say, "My eloquence made yonder gate of agate, and opened those windows of carbuncle." No angel even shall be able to say, "I spread the sacred pavement of transparent gold like unto pure glass," but it shall be to God, to God, to God alone;—the foundations laid in the divine decree, the stones cemented with the fair vermilion of the Saviour's atoning blood, each gem fashioned and placed by the mysterious Spirit of the living God, and the whole temple fitly framed together;—glowing with the glory of God, bright with the presence of God, from foundation to pinnacle, it shall speak of God, God, God alone. When that palace shall be complete, then from the ends of the earth shall be heard the shout, "Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" Hushed be every other acclamation! this anthem drowns them all. Let it in our hearts drown them all. The Lord, the Lord alone, shall be exalted in that day, for he is God, and beside him there is none else!" Amen and Amen.