

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

“NUNC DIMITTIS.”

A Sermon

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“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”—Luke ii. 29, 30.

BLESSED wert thou, O Simeon, for flesh and blood had not revealed this unto thee; neither had it enabled thee so cheerfully to bid the world farewell. The flesh clings to the earth—it is dust, and owns affinity to the ground out of which it was taken; it loathes to part from mother earth. Even old age, with its infirmities, does not make men really willing to depart out of this world. By nature we hold to life with a terrible tenacity; and even when we sigh over the evils of life, and repine concerning its ills, and fancy that we wish ourselves away, it is probable that our readiness to depart lies only upon the surface, but down deep in our hearts we have no will to go. Flesh and blood had not revealed unto Simeon that he saw God's salvation in that babe which he took out of the arms of Mary, and embraced with eager joy. God's grace had taught him that this was the Saviour, and God's grace at the same time loosened the cords which bound him to earth, and made him feel the attractions of the better land. Blessed is that man who has received by grace a meetness for heaven, and a willingness to depart to that better land: let him magnify the Lord who has wrought so great a work in him. As Paul says, “Thanks be unto the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Certainly none of us were meet by nature—not even Simeon; the fitness of the venerable man was all the handiwork of God, and so, also, was his anxiety to obtain the inheritance for which God had prepared him. I trust, brethren, while we consider this morning the preparedness of the saints for heaven, and turn over in our mind those reflections which will make us ready to depart, God's Holy Spirit, sent forth from the Father, may make us also willing to leave these mortal shores, and launch upon the eternal sea at the bidding of our Father, God.

We shall note, this morning, first, that *every believer may be assured of departing in peace*; but that, secondly, *some believers feel a special*

readiness to depart now : "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace;" and, thirdly, that *there are words of encouragement to produce in us the like readiness* : "according to thy word." There are words of Holy Writ which afford richest consolation in prospect of departure.

I. First, then, let us start with the great general principle, which is full of comfort; namely, this, that EVERY BELIEVER MAY BE ASSURED OF ULTIMATELY DEPARTING IN PEACE. This is no privilege peculiar to Simeon, it is common to all the saints, since the grounds upon which this privilege rests are not monopolised by Simeon, but belong to us all.

Observe, first, that *all the saints have seen God's salvation*, therefore, should they all depart in peace. It is true, we cannot take up the infant Christ into our arms, but he is "formed in us, the hope of glory." It is true, we cannot look upon him with these mortal eyes, but we have seen him with those eyes immortal which death cannot dim—the eyes of our own spirit which have been opened by God's Holy Spirit. A sight of Christ with the natural eye is not saving, for thousands saw him and then cried, "Crucify him, crucify him." After all, it was in Simeon's case the spiritual eye that saw, the eye of faith that truly beheld the Christ of God; for there were others in the temple who saw the babe; there was the priest who performed the act of circumcision, and the other officials who gathered round the group; but I do not know that any of them saw God's salvation. They saw the little innocent child that was brought there by its parents, but they saw nothing remarkable in him; perhaps, Simeon and Anna, alone of all those who were in the temple, saw with the inward eye the real Anointed of God revealed as a feeble infant. So, though you and I miss the outward sight of Christ, we need not regret it, it is but secondary as a privilege; if with the inner sight we have seen the Incarnate God, and accepted him as our salvation, we are blessed with holy Simeon. Abraham saw Christ's day before it dawned, and even thus, after it has passed, we see it, and with faithful Abraham we are glad. We have looked unto him, and we are lightened. We have beheld the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. In the "despised and rejected of men" we have seen the anointed Saviour; in the crucified and buried One, who afterwards rose again, and ascended into glory, we have seen salvation, full, free, finished. Why, therefore, should we think ourselves less favoured than Simeon? From like causes like results shall spring: we shall depart in peace, for we have seen God's salvation.

Moreover, *believers already enjoy peace as much as ever Simeon did*. No man can depart in peace who has not lived in peace; but he who has attained peace in life shall possess peace in death, and an eternity of peace after death. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus has bequeathed us peace, saying, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." "For he is our peace," and "the fruit of the Spirit is peace." We are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son. Whatever peace flowed in the heart of Simeon, I am sure it was not of a diviner nature than that which dwells in the bosom of every true believer. If sin be pardoned, the quarrel is ended; if the atonement is made, then is peace established, a peace covenanted to endure for ever. We are now led in the paths of peace;

we walk the King's highway, of which it is written, “no lion shall be there;” we are led beside the still waters, and made to lie down in green pastures. We feel no slavish fear of God, though he be “a consuming fire” even to us; we tremble no longer to approach into his presence, who deigns to be our Father. The precious blood upon the mercy-seat has made it a safe place for us to resort at all times; boldness has taken the place of trembling. The throne of God is our rejoicing, though once it was our terror.

“Once 'twas a seat of dreadful wrath,
And shot devouring flame;
Our God appear'd ‘consuming fire,’
And vengeance was his name.”

Therefore, brethren, having peace with God, we may be sure that we shall “depart in peace.” We need not fear that the God of all consolation, who has already enriched us in communion with himself, and peace in Christ Jesus, will desert us at the last. He will help us to sing a sweet swan-song, and our tabernacle shall be gently taken down, to be rebuilt more enduringly in the fair country beyond Jordan.

Furthermore, we may rest assured of the same peace as that which Simeon possessed, since we are, if true believers, equally *God's servants*. The text says, “Lord, now lettest thou *thy servant* depart in peace.” But, in this case, one servant cannot claim a privilege above the rest of the household. The same position towards God, the same reward from God. Simeon, a servant; you also, my brother, a servant; he who saith to Simeon, “depart in peace,” will say also the same to you. The Lord is always very considerate towards his old servants, and takes care of them when their strength faileth. The Amalekite of old had a servant who was an Egyptian, and when he fell sick he left him, and he would have perished if David had not had compassion on him; but our God is no Amalekite slave-owner, neither doth he cast off his worn-out servants. “Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” David felt this, for he prayed to God, and said, “Now, also, when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not.” If thou hast been clothed in thy Lord's livery of grace, and taught to obey his will, he will never leave thee, nor forsake thee; he will not sell thee into the hands of thine adversary, nor suffer thy soul to perish. A true master counts it a part of his duty to protect his servants, and our great Lord and Prince will show himself strong on the behalf of the very least of all his followers, and will bring them every one into the rest which remaineth for his people. Do you really serve God? Remember, “his servants ye are to whom ye obey.” Are ye taught of the Spirit to obey the commandments of love? Do you strive to walk in holiness? If so, fear not death; it shall have no terrors to you. All the servants of God shall depart in peace.

There is also another reflection which strengthens our conviction that all believers shall depart in peace, namely, this: that up till now *all things in their experience have been according to God's word*. Simeon's basis of hope for a peaceful departure was “according to thy word;” and, surely, no Scripture is of private interpretation, or is

to be reserved for one believer to the exclusion of the rest? The promises of God, which are "Yea and amen in Christ Jesus," are sure to all the seed: not to some of the children is the promise made, but all the grace-born are heirs. There are not special promises hedged round and set apart for Simeon and a few saints of old time, but with all who are in Christ, their federal head, the covenant is made, and stands "ordered in all things and sure." If, then, Simeon, as a believer in the Lord, had a promise that he should depart in peace, I have also a like promise if I am in Christ. What God hath said in his word Simeon lays hold of, and none can say him nay; but if, with the same grace-given faith, I also grasp it for myself, who shall challenge my right? God will not violate his promise to one of his people any more than to another, and, consequently, when our turn shall come to gather up our feet in the bed and to resign our spirit, some precious passage in sacred writ shall be as a rod and a staff to us that we may fear no evil.

These four considerations, gathered out of the text itself, may give fourfold certainty to the assurance that every believer, at the hour of his departure, shall possess peace.

For a moment, review attentively the words of the aged saint: they have much instruction in them. Every believer shall in death *depart* in the same sense as Simeon did. The word here used is suggestive and encouraging: it may be applied either to escape from confinement, or to deliverance from toil. The Christian man in the present state is like a bird in a cage: his body imprisons his soul. His spirit, it is true, ranges heaven and earth, and laughs at the limits of matter, space, and time; but for all that, the flesh is a poor scabbard unworthy of the glittering soul, a mean cottage unfit for a princely spirit, a clog, a burden, and a fetter. When we would watch and pray, we find full often that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. "We that are in this body do groan." The fact is, we are caged birds; but the day cometh when the great Master shall open the cage door, and release his prisoners. We need not dread the act of unfastening the door, for it will give to our soul the liberty for which it inly pines, and then, with the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and its feathers with yellow gold, though aforesaid it had lien among the pots, it will soar into its native air, singing all the way with a rapture beyond imagination. Simeon looked upon dying as a mode of being let loose—a deliverance out of durance vile, an escape from captivity, a release from bondage. The like redemption shall be dealt unto us. How often does my soul feel like an unhatched chick, shut up within a narrow shell, in darkness and discomfort! The life within labours hard to chip and break the shell, to know a little more of the great universe of truth, and see in clearer light the infinite of divine love. Oh, happy day, when the shell shall be broken, and the soul, complete in the image of Christ, shall enter into the freedom for which she is preparing! We look for that, and we shall have it. God, who gave us to aspire to holiness and spirituality and to likeness to himself, never implanted those aspirations in us out of mockery. He meant to gratify these holy longings, or, else, he would not have excited them. Ere long we, like Simeon, shall depart—that is, we shall be set free to go in peace.

I said that the word meant also a release from toil. It is as though Simeon had been standing at the table of his Master like a servant waiting on his Lord. You know the parable in which Christ says that the master does not first bid his servant sit down and eat bread, but commands him thus, “Gird thyself and serve me.” See, then, Simeon stands yonder, girt and serving his Master; but by-and-by, when the Master sees fit, he turns round and says to Simeon, “Now thou mayest depart, and take thine own meat, thy work is done.” Or, we may use another simile, and picture Simeon sitting at the King’s gate, like Mordecai, ready for any errand which may be appointed him, but at length his time of attendance expires, and the great monarch bids him depart in peace. Or, yet again, we may view him as a reaper toiling amid the harvest beneath a burning sun, parched with thirst and wearied with labour, and lo! the great Boaz came into the field, and, having saluted his servant, says to him, “Thou hast fulfilled like an hireling thy day: take thou thy wage, and depart in peace.” The like shall happen to all true servants of Christ; they shall rest from their labours where no weariness shall vex them, “neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.” They shall enter into the joy of their Lord, and enjoy the rest which remaineth for them. There is much of comfortable thought if we meditate upon this.

But, note the words again. You perceive that the departure of the child of God is *appointed* of the Lord. “Now *lettest thou* thy servant depart.” The servant must not depart from his labour without his Master’s permission, else would he be a runaway, dishonest to his position. The good servant dares not stir till his Master says, “Depart in peace.” Simeon was content to wait till he received permission to depart, and it becomes us all to acquiesce cheerfully in the Lord’s appointment, whether he lengthens or shortens our life. It is certain that without the Lord’s will no power can remove us. No wind from the wilderness shall drive our souls into the land of darkness, no fiends with horrid clamour can drag us down to the abyss beneath, no destruction that wasting at noonday, or pestilence walking in darkness can cut short our mortal career. We shall not die till God shall say to us, “My child, depart from the field of service, and the straitness of this thy tabernacle, and enter into rest.” Till God commands us we cannot die, and when he bids us go it shall be sweet for us to leave this world.

Note, further, that the words before us clearly show that the believer’s departure is attended with *a renewal of the divine benediction*. “Depart in peace,” saith God. It is a farewell, such as we give to a friend: it is a benediction, such as Aaron, the priest of God, might pronounce over a suppliant whose sacrifice was accepted. Eli said unto Hannah, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.” Around the sinner’s death-bed the tempest thickens, and he hears the rumblings of the eternal storm: his soul is driven away, either amid the thunderings of curses loud and deep, or else in the dread calm which evermore forebodes the hurricane. “Depart, ye cursed,” is the horrible sound which is in his ears. But, not so the righteous. He feels the Father’s hand of benediction on his head, and underneath him are the everlasting arms. The best wine with him is kept to the last. At eventide it is light; and, as his sun is

going down, it grows more glorious, and lights up all the surroundings with a celestial glow, whereat bystanders wonder, and exclaim "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." That pilgrim sets out upon a happy journey to whom Jehovah saith, "Depart in peace." This is a soft finger laid upon the closing eyelid by a tender father, and it ensures a happy waking, where eyes are never wet with tears.

I cannot detain you longer over these words: suffice it to add, that whatever belonged to Simeon in this benediction must not be regarded as peculiar to him alone, but as, in their measure, the possession of all believers. "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."

II. But now, secondly, we remind you, that **SOME BELIEVERS ARE CONSCIOUS OF A SPECIAL READINESS TO DEPART IN PEACE.**

When do they feel this? Answer: first, *when their graces are vigorous.* All the graces are in all Christians, but they are not all there in the same proportion, nor are they at all times in the same degree of strength. In certain believers *faith* is strong and active. Now, when faith becomes "the evidence of things not seen," and "the substance of things hoped for," then the soul is sure to say, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." Faith brings the clusters of Eschol into the desert, and makes the tribes long for the land that floweth with milk and honey. When the old Gauls had drunk of the wines of Italy, they said, "Let us cross the Alps, and take possession of the vineyards, which yield such generous draughts." So, when faith makes us realize the joys of heaven, then it is that our soul stands waiting on the wing, watching for the signal from the glory-land.

The same is true of the grace of *hope*, for hope peers into the things invisible. She brings near to us the golden gates of the Eternal City. Like Moses, our hope climbs to the top of Pisgah, and beholds the Canaan of the true Israel. Moses had a delightful vision of the promised land when he gazed from Nebo's brow, and saw it all from Dan to Beersheba: so also hope drinks in the charming prospect of the goodly land and Lebanon, and then she exclaims exultingly, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." Heaven realised and anticipated by hope renders the thought of departure most precious to the heart.

And the like, also, is the effect of the grace of *love* upon us. Love puts the heart, like a sacrifice, on the altar, and then she fetches heavenly fire, and kindles it; and, as soon as ever the heart begins to burn and glow like a sacrifice, what is the consequence? Why, it ascends like pillars of smoke up to the throne of God. It is the very instinct of love to draw us nearer to the person whom we love; and, when love towards God pervades the soul, then the spirit cries, "Make haste, my beloved, be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of separation." Perfect love, casting out all fear, cries, "Up, and away."

"Let me be with thee, where thou art,
My Saviour, my eternal rest!
Then only will this longing heart
Be fully and for ever blest."

I might thus mention all the graces, but suffer one of them to suffice, one which is often overlooked, but is priceless as the gold of Ophir—it is the grace of *humility*. Is it strange that the lower a man sinks in his own esteem the higher does he rise before his God? Is it not written, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven?” Simeon had no conceit of his own importance in the world; else he would have said, “Lord, let me stay, and be an apostle. Surely I shall be needed at this juncture to lend my aid in the auspicious era which has just commenced?” But no, he felt himself so little, so inconsiderable, that now that he had attained his heart’s wish and seen God’s salvation, he was willing to depart in peace. Humility by making us lie low helps us to think highly of God, and, consequently, to desire much to be with God. O to have our graces always flourishing, for then shall we always be ready to depart, and willing to be offered up. Lack of grace entangles us, but to abound in grace is to live in the suburbs of the New Jerusalem.

Another time, when believers are thus ready to go, is *when their assurance is clear*. It is not always so with even the most mature Christians, and some true saints have not yet attained to assurance; they are truly saved, and possess a genuine faith, but as assurance is the cream of faith, the milk has not stood long enough to produce the cream; they have not yet come to the flower of assurance, for their faith is but a tender plant. Give a man assurance of heaven and he will be eager to enjoy it. While he doubts his own security, he wants to linger here. He is like the Psalmist when he asked that God would permit him to recover his strength before he went hence, and was no more. Some things were not yet in order with David, and he would stay awhile till they were. But, when the ship is all loaded, the crew on board, and the anchor heaved, the favouring breeze is desired that the barque may speed on its voyage. When a man is prepared for his journey, ready to depart, he does not care to linger long in these misty valleys, but pants for the sunny summits of the mount of God, whereon standeth the palace of the Great King. Let a man know that he is resting upon the precious blood of Christ, let him by diligent self-examination perceive in himself the marks of regeneration, and by the witness of his own spirit, and by the infallible witness of the Holy Ghost bearing witness with his own spirit, let him be certified that he is born of God, and the natural consequence will be that he will say, “Now let me loose from all things here below and let me enter into the rest which is assuredly my own.” O you that have lost your assurance by negligent living, by falling into sin, or by some other form of back-sliding, I do not wonder that you hug the world, for you are afraid you have no other portion; but with those who read their titles clear to mansions in the skies it will be otherwise. They will not ask to linger in this place of banishment, but will sing in their hearts, as we did just now:

“Jerusalem my happy home,
 Name ever dear to me;
 When shall my labours have an end,
 In joy and peace and thee?”

Beloved, furthermore, saints feel most their readiness to go when

their communion with Christ is near and sweet; when Christ hides himself we are afraid to talk of dying, or of heaven; but, when he only shows himself through the lattices, and we can see those eyes which are "as the eyes of doves by the rivers of water, washed with milk and fitly set;" when our own soul melteth even at that hazy sight of him, as through a glass darkly, Oh then we fain would be at home, and our soul crieth out for the day when her eyes shall see the King in his beauty, in the land that is very far off. Have you never felt the heavenly homesickness? Have you never pined for the home-bringing? Surely, when your heart has been full of the Bridegroom's beauty, and your soul has been ravished with his dear and ever precious love, you have said: "When shall the day break, and the shadows flee away? Why are his chariots so long in coming?" You have swooned, as it were, with love-sickness for your precious Saviour, thirsting to see him as he is, and to be like him. The world is black when Christ is fair; it is a poor heap of ashes when he is altogether lovely to us. When a precious Christ is manifested to our spirits, we feel that we could see Jesus and die. Put out these eyes, there is nothing more for them to see when they have seen *him*. "Black sun," said Rutherford, "black moon, black stars, but inconceivably bright and glorious Lord Jesus." How often did that devout man write words of this sort: "Oh if I had to swim through seven hells to reach him, if he would but say to me, like Peter, 'Come unto me,' I would go unto him not only on the sea, but on the boiling floods of hell, if I might but reach him, and come to him." I will pause here and give you his own words: "I profess to you I have no rest, I have no ease, till I be over head and ears in love's ocean. If Christ's love (that fountain of delight) were laid as open to me as I would wish, Oh, how I would drink, and drink abundantly! I half call his absence cruel; and the mask and veil on Christ's face a cruel covering, that hideth such a fair, fair face from a sick soul. I dare not upbraid him, but his absence is a mountain of iron upon my heavy heart. Oh, when shall we meet? Oh, how long is it to the dawning of the marriage day? O sweet Lord Jesus, take wide steps; O my Lord, come over the mountains at one stride! O my Beloved, be like a roe, or a young hart, on the mountains of separation. Oh, if he would fold the heavens together like an old cloak, and shovel time and days out of the way, and make ready in haste the Lamb's wife for her Husband! Since he looked upon me my heart is not mine; he hath run away to heaven with it." When these strong throes, these ardent pangs of insatiable desire come upon a soul that is fully saturated with Christ's love, through having been made to lean its head upon his bosom, and to receive the kisses of his mouth, then is the time when the soul saith, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

So again, beloved, saints have drawn their anchor up and spread their sails, when they have been *made to hold loose by all there is in this world*; and that is generally when they hold fastest by the world to come. To many this world is very sweet, very fair, but God puts bitters into the cup of his children; when their nest is soft, he fills it with thorns to make them long to fly. Alas, that it should be so, but some of God's servants seem as if they had made up their minds to find a rest beneath the moon. They are moon-struck who hope to do so.

All the houses in this plague-stricken land are worm-eaten and let in the rain and wind: my soul longeth to find a rest among the ivory palaces of thy land, O Immanuel.

Brethren, it often happens that the loss of dear friends, or the treachery of those we trusted, or bodily sickness, or depression of spirit, may help to unloose the holdfasts which enchain us to this life; and then we are enabled to say with David in one of the most precious little Psalms in the whole Book, the 131st, "I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother, my soul is even as a weaned child." I have often thought that if David had said, "my soul is even as a weaning child," it would have been far more like most of God's people. But to be weaned, quite weaned from the world, to turn away from her consolations altogether, this it is which makes us cry, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." Even as the psalmist when he said, "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee."

Again, saints are willing to depart *when their work is almost done*. This will not be the case with many here present, perhaps, but it was so with Simeon. Good old man! He had been very constant in his devotions, but on this occasion he came into the temple, and there, it is said, he took the child in his arms, and blessed God. Once more he delivered his soul of its adoration—once more he blended his praise with the songs of angels. When he had done that, he openly confessed his faith: another important work of every believer—for he said, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." He bore public testimony to the child Jesus, and declared that he should be "a light to lighten the Gentiles." Having done that, he bestowed his fatherly benediction upon the child's parents, Joseph and his mother; he blessed them, and said unto Mary, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." Now, we read that David, after he had served his generation, fell on sleep; it is time for man to sleep when his life's work is finished. Simeon felt he had done all: he had blessed God; he had declared his faith; he had borne testimony to Christ; he had bestowed his benediction upon godly people; and so he said, "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." Ah, Christian people, you will never be willing to go if you are idle. You lazy lie-a-beds, who do little or nothing for Christ, you sluggish servants, whose garden is overgrown with weeds, no wonder that you do not want to see your master! Your sluggishness accuses you, and makes you cowards. Only he who has put out his talents to good interest will be willing to render an account of his stewardship. But when a man feels, without claiming any merit, that he has fought a good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith, then will he rejoice in the crown which is laid up for him in heaven, and he will long to wear it. Throw your strength into the Lord's work, dear brethren—all your strength; spare none of your powers: let body, soul, and spirit be entirely consecrated to God, and used at their utmost stretch. Get through your day's work, for the sooner you complete it, and have fulfilled like an hireling your day, the more near and sweet shall be the time when the shadows lengthen, and God shall say to you, as a faithful servant, "Depart in peace!"

One other matter, I think, helps to make saints willing to go, and that is *when they see or foresee the prosperity of the church of God*. Good old Simeon saw that Christ was to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of his people Israel; and, therefore, he said, "Lord, lettest now thy servant depart in peace." I have known many a godly deacon who has seen a church wither and decay, its ministry become unprofitable, and its membership become divided; the dear old man has poured out his soul in agony before God, and when at last the Lord has sent a man to seek the good of Israel, and the church has been built up, he has been overjoyed, and he has said, "now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." It must have reconciled John Knox to die when he had seen the reformation safely planted throughout all Scotland. It made dear old Latimer, as he stood on the fagot, feel happy when he could say, "Courage, brother, we shall this day light such a candle in England as shall never be blown out." "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," Ay, that we do, and we vehemently desire her prosperity, and if we can see Christ glorified, error defeated, truth established, sinners saved, and saints sanctified, our spirit feels she has all she wishes. Like dying David, when we have said, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory," we can fall back upon the pillows and die, for our prayers like those of David the son of Jesse are ended. Let us pray for this peace and this prosperity, and when we see it come, it shall bring calm and rest to our spirits, so that we shall be willing to depart in peace.

III. I shall call your attention now, for a little while, to the third point, that **THERE ARE WORDS TO ENCOURAGE US TO THE LIKE READINESS TO DEPART**. "*According to thy word.*" Now let us go to the Bible, and take from it seven choice words all calculated to cheer our hearts in the prospect of departure, and the first is Psalm xxiii. 4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." "We walk"—the Christian does not quicken his pace when he dies; he walked before, and he is not afraid of death, so he calmly walks on. It is a walk through a "shadow." There is no substance in death, it is only a shade. Who needs fear a shadow? It is not a lonely walk—"Thou art with me." Neither is it a walk that need cause us terror; "I will fear no evil:" not only is there no evil, but no fear shall cloud my dying hours. It shall be a departure full of comfort: "Thy rod and thy staff"—a duplicate means shall give us a fullness of consolation. "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Take another text, and so follow the direction, "According to thy word." Psalm xxxvii. 37: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." If we are perfect, that is sincere; if we are upright, that is honest in heart; our end shall assuredly be peace.

Take another word, Psalm cxvi. 15: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." It is no ordinary thing for a saint to die; it is a spectacle which the eyes of God are delighted with. As king's delight in their pearls and diamonds, and count them precious, so the death-beds of the saints are God's precious things.

Take another, Isaiah lvii. 2: "He shall enter into peace: they shall

rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.” Here is an entrance into peace for the saint, rest on his dying bed, rest for his body in the grave, rest for his spirit in the bosom of his Lord, and a walking in his uprightness in the immortality above. “According to thy word.” Oh, what force there is in these few syllables! When you can plead the word of God you must prevail. Nothing has such marrow and fatness in it as a text of Scripture. It has a force of comfort all its own. Consider also 1 Cor. iii. 22: “For all things are your’s: whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your’s.” Now, if death is yours, there can be no sort of reason why you should be afraid of that which is made over to you as a part of your inheritance.

Take the fifteenth chapter and fifty-fourth verse of the same epistle: “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” With such a text we need not fear to depart.

And so that other word, the seventh we shall quote, and in that number seven dwelleth perfection of testimony. Rev. xiv. 13: “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

Now, I dare say, many of you have said, “I wish I had a word from God, just like Simeon had, to cheer me in my dying moments.” You have it before you; here are seven that I have read to you, most sure words of testimony, unto which you do well to take heed, as unto a light shining in a dark place. These promises belong to all believers in our precious Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Fear not, then, be not afraid, but rather say, “Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.”

I have done the sermon, but we must put a rider to it. Just a word or two to those of you who cannot die in peace because you are not believers in Christ: you have never seen God’s salvation, neither are you God’s servants. I must deal with you as I have dealt with the saints. I have given them texts of Scripture, for the text saith, “according to thy word;” and I will give you also two passages of Scripture, which will show you those who may not hope to depart in peace.

The first one is negative: it shows who cannot enter heaven, and, consequently, who cannot depart in peace. 1 Corinthians vi. 9: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” the unjust, the oppressive, cheats, rogues, “the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” I will read these words, I need not explain them, but let every one here who comes under their lash submit to God’s word. “Be not deceived: neither fornicators,”—plenty of them in London—“nor idolaters,”—and ye need not worship a God of wood and stone to be idolaters, worship anything but God, you are an idolater—“nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards,”—

alas, some of these come to this house regularly,—“nor revilers,” that is, backbiters, cavillers, tale-bearers, swearers, and such like, “nor extortioners,”—you fine twenty per cent. gentlemen! You who grind poor borrowers with usurious interest. None of you shall inherit the kingdom of God, not one of you. If you come within this list, except God renew your hearts and change you, the holy gates of heaven are shut in your face.

Now, take another text, of a positive character, from the Book of Revelation xxi. 7: “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful,”—that means the cowardly, those that are ashamed of Christ, those that dare not suffer for Christ’s sake, those who believe everything and nothing, and so deny the truth, because they cannot endure to be persecuted; “the fearful and unbelieving,”—that is, those who do not trust a Saviour—“and the abominable,”—and they are not scarce, some among the poor are abominable, and there are Right Honourables who ought to be called Right Abominables; ay, and greater than that, too, whose vices make them abominable to the nation: and “murderers,”—“he that hateth his brother is a murderer;” and “whoremongers and sorcerers;” those who have or pretend to have dealings with devils and spirits, your spirit-rappers, the whole batch of them; “and idolaters, and all liars,” and these swarm everywhere, they lie in print, and they lie with the voice; “all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Now, these are no words of mine, but the words of God; and if they condemn you, you are condemned; but, if you be condemned, fly to Jesus. Repent and be converted, as saith the gospel, and forgiveness shall be yours, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke i. 46—55;
i. 67—75; ii. 25—35.

Our usual Penny Almanack is now ready, and we hope it will be as much approved of as its predecessors have been. We have also, with no small labour, written an Almanack for the walls, which is called John Ploughman’s Sheet Almanack. Our friends tells us that it will have an unprecedented sale, and we only hope it may, but not to the detriment of the older one. They are quite distinct things, and very different in all respects, except that they are by the same author, cost the same price—one penny, and can be had of the same publishers, Messrs. Passmore and Alabaster.—C. H. S.