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THE TALKING BOOK.

A Sermon

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“When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.”—Proverbs vi. 22.

It is a very happy circumstance when the commandment of our father and the law of our mother are also the commandment of God and the law of the Lord. Happy are they who have a double force to draw them to the right—the bonds of nature, and the cords of grace. They sin with a vengeance who sin both against a father on earth and the great Father in heaven, and they exhibit a virulence and a violence of sin who do despite to the tender obligations of childhood, as well as to the demands of conscience and God. Solomon, in the passage before us, evidently speaks of those who find in the parents' law and in God's law the same thing, and he admonishes such to bind the law of God about their heart, and to tie it about their neck; by which he intends inward affection and open avowal. The law of God should be so dear to us, that it should be bound about the most vital organ of our being, braided about our heart. That which a man carries in his hand he may forget and lose, that which he wears upon his person may be torn from him, but that which is bound about his heart will remain there as long as life remains. We are to love the word of God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; with the full force of our nature we are to embrace it; all our warmest affections are to be bound up with it. When the wise man tells us, also, to wear it about our necks, he means that we are never to be ashamed of it. No blush is to mantle our cheek when we are called Christians; we are never to speak with bated breath in any company concerning the things of God. Manfully must we take up the cross of Christ; cheerfully must we avow ourselves to belong to those who have respect unto the divine testimonies. Let us count true religion to be our highest ornament; and, as magistrates put upon them their gold chains, and think themselves adorned thereby, so let us tie about our neck the commands and the gospel of the Lord our God.

In order that we may be persuaded so to do, Solomon gives us three telling reasons. He says that God's law, by which I understand the whole run of Scripture, and, especially the gospel of Jesus Christ, will
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be a guide to us :—"When thou goest, it shall lead thee." It will be a guardian to us : "When thou sleepest"—when thou art defenceless and off thy guard—"it shall keep thee." And it shall also be a dear companion to us : "When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." Any-one of these three arguments might surely suffice to make us seek a nearer acquaintance with the sacred word. We all need a *guide*, for "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Left to our own w we soon excel in folly. There are dilemmas in all lives where a guide is more precious than a wedge of gold. The word of God, as an infallible director for human life, should be sought unto by us, and it will lead us in the highway of safety. Equally powerful is the second reason : the word of God will become the *guardian* of our days ; whoso hearkeneth unto it shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. Unguarded moments there may be ; times, inevitable to our imperfection, there will be, when, unless some other power protect us, we shall fall into the hands of the foe. Blessed is he who has God's law so written on his heart, and wears it so about his neck as armour of proof, that at all times he is invulnerable, kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

But I prefer, this morning, to keep to the third reason for loving God's word. It is this, that it becomes *our sweet companion* : "When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." The inspired law of God, which David in the hundred and nineteenth Psalm calls God's testimonies, precepts, statutes, and the like, is the friend of the righteous. Its essence and marrow is the gospel of Jesus, the law-fulfiller, and this also is the special solace of believers. Of the whole sacred volume it may be said, "When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." I gather four or five thoughts from this expression, and upon these we will speak.

I. We perceive here that **THE WORD IS LIVING**. How else could it be said : "It shall talk with thee" ? A dead book cannot talk, nor can a dumb book speak. It is clearly a living book, then, and a speaking book : "The word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." How many of us have found this to be most certainly true ! A large proportion of human books are long ago dead, and even shrivelled like Egyptian mummies ; the mere course of years has rendered them worthless, their teaching is disproved, and they have no life for us. Entomb them in your public libraries if you will, but, henceforth, they will stir no man's pulse and warm no man's heart. But this thrice blessed book of God, though it has been extant among us these many hundreds of years, is immortal in its life, unwithering in its strength : the dew of its youth is still upon it ; its speech still drops as the rain fresh from heaven ; its truths are overflowing fountains of ever fresh consolation. Never book spake like this book ; its voice, like the voice of God, is powerful and full of majesty.

Whence comes it that the word of God is living ? Is it not, first, because *it is pure truth* ? Error is death, truth is life. No matter how well established an error may be by philosophy, or by force of arms, or the current of human thought, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all untruth shall be as stubble before the fire. The tooth of time devours all lies. Falsehoods are soon cut down, and they wither as the green herb. Truth never dies, it dates its origin from the

immortals. Kindled at the source of light, its flame cannot be quenched; if by persecution it be for a time covered, it shall blaze forth anew to take reprisals upon its adversaries. Many a once venerated system of error now rots in the dead past among the tombs of the forgotten; but the truth as it is in Jesus knows no sepulchre, and fears no funeral; it lives on, and must live while the Eternal fills his throne.

The word of God is living, because *it is the utterance of an immutable, self-existing God*. God doth not speak to-day what he meant not yesterday, neither will he to-morrow blot out what he records to-day. When I read a promise spoken three thousand years ago, it is as fresh as though it fell from the eternal lips to-day. There are, indeed, no dates to the Divine promises; they are not of private interpretation, nor to be monopolised by any generation. I say again, as fresh to-day the eternal word drops from the Almighty's lips as when he uttered it to Moses, or to Elias, or spake it by the tongue of Esaias or Jeremiah. The word is always sure, steadfast, and full of power. It is never out of date. Scripture bubbles up evermore with good matters, it is an eternal Geyser, a spiritual Niagara of grace, for ever falling, flashing, and flowing on; it is never stagnant, never brackish or defiled, but always clear, crystal, fresh, and refreshing; so, therefore, ever living.

The word lives, again, because *it enshrines the living heart of Christ*. The heart of Christ is the most living of all existences. It was once pierced with a spear, but it lives on, and yearns towards sinners, and is as tender and compassionate as in the days of the Redeemer's flesh. Jesus, the Sinner's Friend, walks in the avenues of Scripture as once he traversed the plains and hills of Palestine: you can see him still, if you have opened eyes, in the ancient prophecies; you can behold him more clearly in the devout evangelists; he opens and lays bare his inmost soul to you in the epistles, and makes you hear the footsteps of his approaching advent in the symbols of the Apocalypse. The living Christ is in the book; you behold his face almost in every page; and, consequently, it is a book that can talk. The Christ of the mount of benedictions speaks in it still; the God who said, "Let there be light," gives forth from its pages the same divine fiat; while the incorruptible truth, which saturated every line and syllable of it when first it was penned abides therein in full force, and preserves it from the finger of decay. "The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever."

Over and above all this, *the Holy Spirit has a peculiar connection with the word of God*. I know that he works in the ministries of all his servants whom he hath ordained to preach; but for the most part, I have remarked that the work of the Spirit of God in men's hearts is rather in connection with the texts we quote than with our explanations of them. "Depend upon it," says a deeply spiritual writer, "it is God's word, not man's comment on it, which saves souls." God does save souls by our comment, but still it is true that the majority of conversions have been wrought by the agency of a text of Scripture. It is the word of God that is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. There must be life in it, for by it men are born again. As for believers, the Holy Spirit often sets the word on a blaze while they are studying it. The letters were at one time before us as

mere letters, but the Holy Ghost suddenly came upon them, and they spake with tongues. The chapter is lowly as the bush at Horeb, but the Spirit descends upon it, and lo ! it glows with celestial splendour, God appearing in the words, so that we feel like Moses when he put off his shoes from his feet, because the place whereon he stood was holy ground. It is true, the mass of readers understand not this, and look upon the Bible as a common book ; but if they understand it not, at least let them allow the truthfulness of our assertion, when we declare that hundreds of times we have as surely felt the presence of God in the page of Scripture as ever Elijah did when he heard the Lord speaking in a still small voice. The Bible has often appeared to us as a temple God, and the posts of its doors have moved at the voice of him that crieth, whose train also has filled the temple. We have been constrained adoringly to cry, with the seraphim, " Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of Hosts." The Jews place as a frontispiece to their great Bible the text, " Surely God is in this place ; it is none other than the house of God, and the very gate of heaven." And they say well. It is, indeed, a spiritual temple, a most holy house, garnished with precious stones for beauty, and overlaid within and without with pure gold, having for its chief glory the presence of the Lord, so gloriously revealed, that, oftentimes, the priests of the Lord cannot stand to minister, by reason of the glory of the Lord which fills the house. God the Holy Spirit vivifies the letter with his presence, and then it is to us a living word indeed.

And now, dear brethren, if these things be so—and our experience certifies them—let us take care how we trifle with a book which is so instinct with life. Might not many of you remember your faults this day were we to ask you whether you are habitual students of holy writ ? Readers of it I believe you are ; but are you searchers ; for the promise is not to those who merely read, but to those who delight in the law of the Lord, and meditate therein both day and night. Are you sitting at the feet of Jesus, with his word as your school-book ? If not, remember, though you may be saved, you lack very much of the blessing which otherwise you might enjoy. Have you been backsliding ? Refresh your soul by meditating in the divine statutes, and you will say, with David, " Thy word hath quickened me." Are you faint and weary ? Go and talk with this living book : it will give you back your energy, and you shall mount again as with the wings of eagles. But are you unconverted altogether ? Then I cannot direct you to Bible-reading as being the way of salvation, nor speak of it as though it had any merit in it ; but I would, nevertheless, urge upon you unconverted people great reverence for Scripture, an intimate acquaintance with its contents, and a frequent perusal of its pages, for it has occurred ten thousand times over that when men have been studying the word of life, the word has brought life to them. " The entrance of thy word giveth light." Like Elijah and the dead child, the word has stretched itself upon them, and their dead souls have been made to live. One of the likeliest places in which to find Christ is in the garden of the Scriptures, for there he delights to walk. As of old, the blind men were wont to sit by the wayside begging, so that, if Jesus passed by, they might cry to him, so would I have you sit down by the wayside of the Holy Scrip-

tures. Hear the promises, listen to their gracious words; they are the footsteps of the Saviour; and, as you hear them, may you be led to cry, "Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!" Attend most those ministries which preach God's word most. Do not select those that are fullest of fine speaking, and that dazzle you with expressions which are rather ornamental than edifying; but get to a ministry that is full of God's own word, and, above all, learn God's word itself. Read it with a desire to know its meaning, and I am persuaded that, thereby, many of you who are now far from God will be brought near to him, and led to a saving faith in Jesus, for "the word of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

II. If the text says, "When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee," then it is clear THE WORD IS PERSONAL. "It shall talk with *thee*." It is not written, "It shall speak to the air, and thou shalt hear its voice," but, "It shall talk with *thee*." You know exactly what the expression means. I am not exactly talking with any one of you this morning; there are too many of you, and I am but one; but, when you are on the road home, each one will talk with his fellow: then it is truly talk when man speaks to man. Now, the word of God has the condescending habit of talking to men, speaking personally to them; and, herein, I desire to commend the word of God to your love. Oh! that you might esteem it very precious for this reason!

"It shall talk *with thee*," that is to say, *God's word talks about men, and about modern men*; it speaks of ourselves, and of these latter days, as precisely as if it had only appeared this last week. Some go to the word of God with the idea that they shall find historical information about the ancient ages, and so they will, but that is not the object of the word. Others look for facts upon geology, and great attempts have been made either to bring geology round to Scripture, or Scripture to geology. We may always rest assured that truth never contradicts itself; but, as nobody knows anything yet about geology—for its theory is a dream and an imagination altogether—we will wait till the philosophers settle their own private matters, being confident that when they find out the truth, it will be quite consistent with what God has revealed. At any rate, we may leave that. The main teachings of Holy Scripture are about men, about the Paradise of unfallen manhood, the fall, the degeneracy of the race, and the means of its redemption. The book speaks of victims and sacrifices, priests and washings, and so points us to the divine plan by which man can be elevated from the fall and be reconciled to God. Read Scripture through, and you shall find that its great subject is that which concerns the race as to their most important interests, and concerns the race, not as Jews or as Gentiles, but as men; not as Barbarians, or Scythians, or Greek, or bond, or free, but as men; and he does not read the word of God aright, who does not hear it talking to him about things which intimately concern both himself and his fellows. It is a book that talks, talks personally, for it deals with things not in the moon, nor in the planet Jupiter, nor in the distant ages long gone by, nor does it say much of the periods yet to come, but it deals with *us*, with the business of to-day; how sin may be to-day forgiven, and our souls brought at once into union with Christ.

Moreover, this book is so personal, that *it speaks to men in all states and conditions before God*. How it talks to sinners—talks, I say, for it puts it thus: “Come, now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as snow.” It has many very tender expostulations for sinners. It stoops to their condition and position. If they will not stoop to God, it makes, as it were, eternal mercy stoop to them. It talks of feasts of fat things, of fat things full of marrow; and the book, as it talks, reasons with men’s hunger, and bids them eat and be satisfied. It speaks of garments woven in the loom of infinite wisdom and love, and so it talks to man’s nakedness, and entreats him to be arrayed in the divine righteousness. There is no sinner, in any condition, who dare say there is nothing in the word of God to suit his case. If thou hast been a persecutor, Saul’s history talks to thee: if thou hadst shed innocent blood very much, Manasseh would speak with thee; if thou hast been a harlot, or a thief, it has special passages to meet thee. In all conditions into which the sinner can be cast, there is a word that precisely meets his condition.

And, certainly, when we become the children of God the book talks with us wondrously. In the family of heaven it is the child’s own book. We no sooner know our Father than this dear book comes at once as a love letter from the far-off country, signed with our own Father’s hand, and perfumed with our Father’s love. If we grow in grace, or if we backslide, in either case Scripture still talks with us. Whatever our position before the eternal God, the book seems to be written on purpose to meet that position. It talks to you as you are, not only as you should be, or as others have been, but with you, with you personally, about your present condition.

Have you never noticed how personal the book is as *to all your states of mind*, in reference to sadness or to joy? There was a time with some of us when we were very gloomy and sore depressed, and then the book of Job mourned to the same dolorous tune. I have turned over the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and thought that I could have written just what Jeremiah wrote. It mourns unto us when we lament. On the other hand, when the soul gets up to the exceeding high mountains, to the top of Amana and Lebanon, when we behold visions of glory, and see our Beloved face to face, lo! the word is at our side, and in the delightful language of the Psalms, or in the yet sweeter expressions of the Song of Solomon, it tells us all that is in our heart, and talks to us as a living thing that has been in the deeps, and has been on the heights, that has known the overwhelmings of affliction, and has rejoiced in the triumphs of delight. The word of God is to me my own book: I have no doubt, brother, it is the same to you. There could not be a Bible that suited me better: it seems written on purpose for me. Dear sister, have not you often felt as you have put your finger on a promise, “Ah, that is my promise; if there be no other soul whose tearful eyes can bedew that page and say, ‘It is mine,’ yet I, a poor afflicted one, can do so!” Oh, yes; the book is very personal, for it goes into all the details of our case, let our state be what it may.

And, *how very faithful it always is*. You never find the word of God

keeping back that which is profitable to you. Like Nathan it cries, "Thou art the man." It never allows our sins to go unrebuked, nor our backslidings to escape notice till they grow into overt sin. It gives us timely notice; it cries to us as soon as we begin to go aside, "Awake thou that sleepest," "Watch and pray," "Keep thine heart with all diligence," and a thousand other words of warning does it address personally to each one of us.

Now I would suggest, before I leave this point, a little self-examination as healthful for each of us. Does the word of God after this fashion speak to my soul? Then it is a gross folly to lose by generalisations that precious thing which can only be realised by a personal grasp. How sayest thou, dear hearer? dost thou read the book for thyself, and does the book speak to thee? Has it ever condemned thee, and hast thou trembled before the word of God? Has it ever pointed thee to Christ, and hast thou looked to Jesus the incarnate Saviour? Does the book now seal, as with the witness of the Spirit, the witness of thine own spirit that thou art born of God? Art thou in the habit of going to the book to know thine own condition, to see thine own face as in a glass? Is it thy family medicine? Is it thy test and tell-tale to let thee know thy spiritual condition? Oh, do not treat the book otherwise than this, for if thou dost thus unto it, and takest it to be thy personal friend, happy art thou, since God will dwell with the man that trembles at his word; but, if you treat it as anybody's book rather than your own, then beware, lest you be numbered with the wicked who despise God's statutes.

III. From the text we learn that HOLY SCRIPTURE IS VERY FAMILIAR. "When thou awakest, it shall *talk with* thee. To talk signifies fellowship, communion, familiarity. It does not say, "It shall preach to thee." Many persons have a high esteem for the book, but they look upon it as though it were some very elevated teacher speaking to them from a lofty tribunal, while they stand far below. I will not altogether condemn that reverence, but it were far better if they would understand the familiarity of God's word; it does not so much preach to us as *talk* to us. It is not, "When thou awakest, it shall lecture thee," or, "it shall scold thee;" no, no, "it shall *talk with* thee." We sit at its feet, or rather at the feet of Jesus, in the word, and it comes down to us; it is familiar with us, as a man talketh to his friend. And here let me remind you of the delightful familiarity of Scripture in this respect, that *it speaks the language of men*. If God had written us a book in his own language, we could not have comprehended it, or what little we understood would have so alarmed us, that we should have besought that those words should not be spoken to us any more; but the Lord, in his word, often uses language which, though it be infallibly true in its meaning, is not after the knowledge of God, but according to the manner of man. I mean this, that the word uses similes and analogies of which we may say that they speak humanly, and not according to the absolute truth as God himself sees it. As men conversing with babes use their broken speech, so doth the condescending word. It is not written in the celestial tongue, but in the *patois* of this lowland country, condescending to men of low estate. It feeds us on bread broken down to our capacity, "food convenient for us." It speaks of

God's arm, his hand, his finger, his wings, and even of his feathers. Now, all this is familiar picturing, to meet our childish capacities ; for the Infinite One is not to be conceived of as though such similitudes were literal facts. It is an amazing instance of divine love, that he puts those things so that we may be helped to grasp sublime truths. Let us thank the Lord of the word for this.

How tenderly Scripture *comes down to simplicity*. Suppose the sacred volume had all been like the book of the prophet Ezekiel, small would have been its service to the generality of mankind. Imagine that the entire volume had been as mysterious as the Book of Revelation : it might have been our duty to study it, but if its benefit depended upon our understanding it, we should have failed to attain it. But how simple are the gospels, how plain these words, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved;" how deliciously clear those parables about the lost piece of money, the lost sheep, and the prodigal son. Wherever the word touches upon vital points, it is as bright as a sunbeam. Mysteries there are, and profound doctrines, deeps where Leviathan can swim ; but, where it has to do immediately with what concerns us for eternity, it is so plain that the babe in grace may safely wade in its refreshing streams. In the gospel narrative the wayfar- ing man, though a fool, need not err. It is familiar talk ; it is God's great mind brought down to our littleness, that it may lift us up.

How familiar the book is too—I speak now as to my own feelings—as to *all that concerns us*. It talks about my flesh, and my corruptions, and my sins, as only one that knew me could speak. It talks of my trials in the wisest way ; some, I dare not tell, it knows all about. It talks about my difficulties ; some would sneer at them and laugh, but this book sympathises with them, knows my tremblings, and my fears, and my doubts, and all the storm that rages within the little world of my nature. The book has been through all my experience ; somehow or other it maps it all out, and talks with me as if it were a fellow-pilgrim. It does not speak to me unpractically, and scold me, and look down upon me from an awful height of stern perfection, as if it were an angel, and could not sympathise with fallen men ; but like the Lord whom it reveals, the book seems as if it were touched with a feeling of my infirmities, and had been tempted in all points as I am. Have you not often wondered at the human utterances of the divine word : it thunders like God and yet weeps like man. It seems impossible that anything should be too little for the word of God to notice, or too bitter, or even too sinful for that book to overlook. It touches humanity at all points. Everywhere it is a personal, familiar acquaintance, and seems to say to itself, " Shall I hide this thing from Abraham my friend ?"

And, how often the book has *answered enquiries* ! I have been amazed in times of difficulties to see how plain the oracle is. You have asked friends, and they could not advise you ; but you have gone to your knees, and God has told you. You have questioned, and you have puzzled, and you have tried to elucidate the problem, and, lo ! in the chapter read at morning prayer, or in a passage of Scripture that lay open before you, the direction has been given. Have we not seen a text, as it were, plume its wings, and fly from the word like a seraph, and touch our lips with a live altar coal ? It lay like a slumbering

angel amidst the beds of spices of the sacred word, but it received a divine mission, and brought consolation and instruction to your heart.

The word of God, then, talks with us in the sense of being familiar with us. Do we understand this? I will close this point by another word of application. Who, then, that finds God's word so dear and kind a friend would spurn or neglect it? If any of you have despised it, what shall I say to you? If it were a dreary book, written within and without with curses and lamentations, whose every letter flashed with declarations of vengeance, I might see some reason why we should not read it; but, O precious, priceless companion, dear friend of all my sorrows, making my bed in my sickness, the light of my darkness, and the joy of my soul, how can I forget thee—how can I forsake thee? I have heard of one who said that the dust on some men's Bibles lay there so thick and long that you might write "*Damnation*" on it. I am afraid that such is the case with some of you. Mr. Rogers, of Dedham, on one occasion, after preaching about the preciousness of the Bible, took it away from the front of the pulpit, and, putting it down behind him, pictured God as saying, "You do not read the book: you do not care about it; I will take it back—you shall not be wearied with it any more." And then he portrayed the grief of wise men's hearts when they found the blessed revelation withdrawn from men; and how they would besiege the throne of grace, day and night, to ask it back. I am sure he spoke the truth. Though we too much neglect it, yet ought we to prize it beyond all price, for, if it were taken from us, we should have lost our kindest comforter in the hour of need. God grant us to love the Scriptures more!

IV. Fourthly, and with brevity, our text evidently shows that THE WORD IS RESPONSIVE. "When thou awakest, it shall talk *with* thee," not *to* thee. Now, talk with a man is not all on one side. To talk with a man needs answering talk from him. You have both of you something to say when you talk together. It is a conversation to which each one contributes his part. Now, Scripture is a marvellously conversational book; it talks, and makes men talk. It is ever ready to respond to us. Suppose you go to the Scriptures in a certain state of spiritual life: you must have noticed, I think, that the word answers to that state. If you are dark and gloomy, it will appear as though it had put itself in mourning, so that it might lament with you. When you are on the dunghill, there sits Scripture, with dust and ashes on its head, weeping side by side with you, and not upbraiding like Job's miserable comforters. But suppose you come to the book with gleaming eyes of joy, you will hear it laugh; it will sing and play to you as with psaltery and harp, it will bring forth the high-sounding cymbals. Enter its goodly land in a happy state, and you shall go forth with joy and be led forth with peace, its mountains and its hills shall break before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. As in water the face is reflected, so in the living stream of revealed truth a man sees his own image.

If you come to Holy Scripture with growth in grace, and with aspirations for yet higher attainments, the book grows with you,

grows upon you. It is ever beyond you, and cheerily cries, "Higher yet ; Excelsior !" Many books in my library are now behind and beneath me ; I read them years ago, with considerable pleasure ; I have read them since, with disappointment ; I shall never read them again, for they are of no service to me. They were good in their way once, and so were the clothes I wore when I was ten years old ; but I have outgrown them, I know more than these books know, and know wherein they are faulty. Nobody ever outgrows Scripture ; the book widens and deepens with our years. It is true, it cannot really grow, for it is perfect ; but it does so to our apprehension. The deeper you dig into Scripture, the more you find that it is a great abyss of truth. The beginner learns four or five points of orthodoxy, and says, "I understand the gospel, I have grasped all the Bible." Wait a bit, and when his soul grows and knows more of Christ, he will confess, "Thy commandment is exceeding broad, I have only begun to understand it."

There is one thing about God's word which shows its responsiveness to us, and that is when you reveal your heart to it, it reveals its heart to you. If, as you read the word, you say, "O blessed truth, thou art indeed realised in my experience ; come thou still further into my heart. I give up my prejudices, I assign myself, like the wax, to be stamped with thy seal,"—when you do that, and open your heart to Scripture, Scripture will open its heart to you ; for it has secrets which it does not tell to the casual reader, it has precious things of the everlasting hills which can only be discovered by miners who know how to dig and open the secret places, and penetrate great veins of everlasting riches. Give thyself up to the Bible, and the Bible will give itself up to thee. Be candid with it, and honest with thy soul, and the Scripture will take down its golden key, and open one door after another, and show to thy astonished gaze ingots of silver which thou couldst not weigh, and heaps of gold which thou couldst not measure. Happy is that man who, in talking with the Bible, tells it all his heart, and learns the secret of the Lord which is with them that fear him.

And how, too, if you love the Bible and talk out your love to it, the Bible will love you ! Its wisdom says, "I love them that love me." Embrace the word of God, and the word of God embraces you at once. When you prize its every letter, then it smiles upon you graciously, greets you with many welcomes, and treats you as an honoured guest. I am always sorry to be on bad terms with the Bible, for then I must be on bad terms with God. Whenever my creed does not square with God's word, I think it is time to mould my creed into another form. As for God's words, they must not be touched with hammer or axe. Oh, the chiselling, and cutting, and hammering in certain commentaries to make God's Bible orthodox and systematic ! How much better to leave it alone ! The word is right, and we are wrong, wherein we agree not with it. The teachings of God's word are infallible, and must be revered as such. Now, when you love it so well that you would not touch a single line of it, and prize it so much that you would even die for the defence of one of its truths, then, as it is dear to you, you will be dear to it, and it will grasp you and unfold itself to you as it does not to the world.

Dear brethren and sisters, I must leave this point, but it shall be

with this remark—Do you talk to God? Does God talk to you? Does your heart go up to heaven, and does his word come fresh from heaven to your soul? If not, you do not know the experience of the living child of God, and I can earnestly pray you may. May you this day be brought to see Christ Jesus in the word, to see a crucified Saviour there, and to put your trust in him, and then, from this day forward, the word will echo to your heart—it will respond to your emotions.

V. Lastly, SCRIPTURE IS INFLUENTIAL. That I gather from the fact that Solomon says, "When thou wakest, it shall talk with thee;" and follows it up with the remark that it keeps man from the strange woman, and from other sins which he goes on to mention. When the word of God talks with us, it influences us. All talk influences more or less. I believe there is more done in this world for good or bad by talk than there is by preaching; indeed, the preacher preaches best when he talks; there is no oratory in the world that is equal to simple talk: it is the model of eloquence; and all your rhetorician's action and verbiage are so much rubbish. The most efficient way of preaching is simply talking; the man permitting his heart to run over at his lips into other men's hearts. Now, this book, as it talks with us, influences us, and it does so in many ways.

It soothes our sorrows, and encourages us. Many a warrior has been ready to steal away from God's battle, but the word has laid its hand on him, and said, "Stand on thy feet, be not discouraged, be of good cheer, I will strengthen thee, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Brave saints we have read of, but we little know how often they would have been arrant cowards, only the good word came and strengthened them, and they went back to be stronger than lions and swifter than eagles.

While the book thus soothes and cheers, it has a wonderfully elevating power. Have you never felt it put fresh life-blood into you? You have thought, "How can I continue to live at such a dying rate as I have lived, something nobler must I gain?" Read that part of the word which tells of the agonies of your Master, and you will feel—

"Now for the love I bear his name,
What was my gain I count my loss
My former pride I call my shame,
And nail my glory to his cross."

Read of the glories of heaven which this book reveals, and you will feel that you can run the race with quickened speed, because a crown so bright is glittering in your view. Nothing can so lift a man above the gross considerations of carnal gain or human applause as to have his soul saturated with the spirit of truth. It elevates as well as cheers.

Then, too, how often it warns and restrains. I had gone to the right or to the left if the law of the Lord had not said, "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee."

This book's consecrated talk sanctifies and moulds the mind into the image of Christ. You cannot expect to grow in grace if you do not read the Scriptures. If you are not familiar with the word, you cannot expect to become like him that spake it. Our experience is, as it were, the potter's wheel on which we revolve; and the hand of God is in the

Scriptures to mould us after the fashion and image which he intends to bring us to. Oh, be much with the holy word of God, and you will be holy. Be much with the silly novels of the day, and the foolish trifles of the hour, and you will degenerate into vapid wasters of your time; but be much with the solid teaching of God's word, and you will become solid and substantial men and women: drink them in, and feed upon them, and they shall produce in you a Christ-likeness, at which the world shall stand astonished.

Lastly, let the Scripture talk with you, and it will confirm and settle you. We hear every now and then of apostates from the gospel. They must have been little taught in the truth as it is in Jesus. A great outcry is made, every now and then, about our all being perverted to Rome. I was assured the other day by a good man, with a great deal of alarm, that all England was going over to Popery. I told him I did not know what kind of God he worshipped, but my God was a good deal bigger than the devil, and did not intend to let the devil have his way after all, and that I was not half as much afraid of the Pope at Rome as of the Ritualists at home. But mark it, there is some truth in these fears. There will be a going over to one form of error or another, unless there be in the Christian church a more honest, industrious, and general reading of Holy Scripture. What if I were to say most of you church members do not read your Bibles, should I be slandering you? You hear on the Sabbath day a chapter read, and you perhaps read a passage at family prayer, but a very large number never read the Bible privately for themselves, they take their religion out of the monthly magazine, or accept it from the minister's lips. Oh, for the Berean spirit back again, to search the Scriptures whether these things be so. I would like to see a huge pile of all the books, good and bad that were ever written, prayer-books, and sermons, and hymn-books, and all, smoking like Sodom of old, if the reading of those books keeps you away from the reading of the Bible; for a ton weight of human literature is not worth an ounce of Scripture; one single drop of the essential tincture of the word of God is better than a sea full of our commentings and sermonisings, and the like. The word, the simple, pure, infallible word of God, we must live upon if we are to become strong against error, and tenacious of truth. Brethren, may you be established in the faith, rooted, grounded, built up; but I know you cannot be except ye search the Scriptures continually.

The time is coming when we shall all fall asleep in death. Oh, how blessed it will be to find when we awake that the word of God will talk with us then, and remember its ancient friendship. Then the promise which we loved before shall be fulfilled; the charming intimations of a blessed future shall be all realised, and the face of Christ, whom we saw as through a glass darkly, shall be all uncovered, and he shall shine upon us as the sun in its strength. God grant us to love the word, and feed thereon, and the Lord shall have the glory for ever and ever. Amen and amen.