

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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A MEMORABLE MILESTONE.

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## A Sermon

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 29TH, 1904,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON,

*On Thursday Evening, March 25th, 1886;*

The twenty-fifth anniversary of Mr. Spurgeon's first sermon in the Tabernacle.

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"I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation. Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me."—Ps. xl. 9—11.

SOMETIMES, dear friends, we should take a review of life. There are occasions when men feel bound to do so, and the retrospect may be full of profit to themselves. I find that many look back in hours of trouble. A dark cloud brings them to a pause. In prosperity they might have run on with very little thought, but sorrow calls them to a halt. They are driven to God in prayer, and at such times it is not unusual for them, if God has been gracious to them in the past, to recollect his great goodness, and to mention it while they are pleading at the mercy-seat. They say, "He hath dealt well with his servants. The Lord hath helped us hitherto." They look back, and see the Ebenezers which they have raised in past years, and then they cry, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

"And can he have taught me to trust in his name,  
And thus far have brought me to put me to shame?"

Thus they drive their griefs away, and the remembrance of past mercy helps them to snatch faggots from the altars of the bygone years, wherewith to kindle the sacrifice of the present moment.

Men are also accustomed to review their lives when they are brought near to the verge of the grave. It is helpful, when we fear that life is about to end, to begin to add it up, to see what the sum total reaches. If God should say to us, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live," the best way to do it is to remember the past, looking at what we have done, and what God has done; and then to set one against the other, that we may repent of

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the sin, and may hope because of the mercy. Now, albeit that we may not ourselves be brought so near to death's door as that, yet during the past month or so we have, as a people, been continually going to the sepulchre. I think that there were seven notable brethren and sisters who fell asleep last week, so constantly have death's arrows been flying amongst us; therefore, as we are come to the margin of the river and are reminded that we must ourselves shortly put off this tabernacle, let us look back a little, and remember all the way the Lord our God has led us.

There are, however, other occasions apart from those of great sorrow or of apprehended departure, when wise men are fully warranted in considering the period as peculiarly noteworthy. I have come to such a time to-day. Twenty-five years have passed over our heads since I preached my first sermon in this house. The sanctuary was opened with songs of joy; many who were with us then are in glory now, and many of you who are with us to-day were not even born then. To those who were at the opening of the Tabernacle, it must seem almost an old building now. I hear people talk of "the dear old Tabernacle," and well they may, for a quarter of a century is no mean period in the history of a building or of a Church. There has been a great deal done in those twenty-five years, and we have, both personally and as a Church, enjoyed abounding mercy. I did not think it right to let the occasion pass over without offering devout thanksgiving to the Lord for all his lovingkindness to us, and endeavouring to say some words that shall perhaps make us feel more our indebtedness to God, and cause us to determine to be more than ever consecrated to his service.

This text, though it belongs first of all, in the divinest and fullest sense, to our gracious Master, belongs also to David, and through David to those whom God has called to bear testimony to the gospel of his grace. We can say, and we do say, humbly but most earnestly—and I know that there are many brethren here who can join us, each in his own ministry, and many brothers and sisters who, though not in the ministry, can say, at all event in the spirit of the words, after their measure—"I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation."

I. Coming, then, to our text, here is, first, A CONTINUAL TESTIMONY. Many of you have borne testimony for God in your homes, as well as in your lives; some of you have borne the testimony in your classes in the Sunday-school; some in the streets; some in cottage meetings; some in larger assemblies. We, especially, who are called to the public ministry of the Word, have borne this testimony in "the great congregation." But all of us who are the Lord's servants have, I hope, borne our testimony according to our opportunities and abilities.

*It has been imperfect, but it has been sincere.* In looking back upon our testimony for God, we could almost wish to obliterate it because of its imperfections; but we can truthfully say that it has been

sincerely borne up to the measure of the capacity given to us. It has been borne without a doubt, without any mental reservation, with intensity of spirit—borne because it could not be silenced. I have preached the gospel to you, my brethren and sisters, because I have believed it, and if what I have preached to you is not true I am a lost man. For me there is no joy in life and no hope in death except in that gospel which I have continually expounded here. It is not to me a theory. I would scarcely stop at saying that it is a belief. It has become matter of absolute fact to me. It is interwoven with my consciousness. It is part of my being. Every day makes it dearer to me; my joys bind me to it, my griefs drive me to it. All that is behind me, all that is before me, all that is above me, all that is beneath me, everything compels me to say that my testimony has been borne with my heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; and I am grateful to God that I can say this, putting it as the text puts it, "O Lord, thou knowest." If others do not know the truth of the matter, I rejoice that my Master knows my heart.

I feel grateful to God that I can say this because of *the subjects of the testimony*. The first subject of the psalmist's testimony had been God's "righteousness." That is the main point to be noticed in all testimony for God,—God's positive righteousness in himself; God's way of righteousness by which he justifies the ungodly; God's method of spreading righteousness in the world by the power and energy of his Holy Spirit. I, for one, believe in a God who punishes sin. I have never flattered you with the idea that sin is a trifle, and that in some future age it may expiate itself. Nay, the righteousness of God has seemed to me to be a dark background upon which to draw the bright lines of his everlasting love in Christ Jesus. In the expiation of Christ, the righteousness of God is vindicated to the full. He is "just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." I ask for no pardon to be given to me unrighteously. My conscience could not be satisfied with a forgiveness that came to me unjustly, for the glory of God would be dishonoured thereby. There would be a blot upon the heavenly statute-book if sin were pardoned without atonement. But we have preached the righteousness of God; and we feel that, in doing so, we lay a sure foundation, upon which to build the comfort and hope of the believer in Christ Jesus.

In addition to the righteousness of God, the psalmist had preached his "faithfulness." The Lord keeps all his promises. He is the Faithful Promiser, what he promises he performs. There is no lie in him, nor change, nor shadow of a turning. "Hath he said, and shall he not do?" Which of his promises ever failed? Has he drawn back even in the least degree from his covenant, or altered the word which has gone forth out of his lips? Our testimony has not been borne to a fickle God, and a feeble salvation, which saves for a time, and after all does not really save, but suffers saints to fall away, and perish everlastingly. Nay, we have given unflinching utterance to that declaration of our Lord, "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." We believe in everlasting love, in an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; and therefore righteousness

and faithfulness have been the two foundations of our ministry, upon which we have tried to build a gospel worth our preaching and worth your having.

Then the psalmist says that he had borne testimony to two things in conjunction with each other: "Thy lovingkindness and thy truth." Oh, brothers and sisters, what a theme is here! "Thy lovingkindness!" God's generous mercy, his overflowing love, his kinness, his kindness, to his chosen, whom he has made to be a people near unto himself, to whom he manifests his very soul. That word "loving," added to the word "kindness," makes it a gem doubly precious. Where is there among words any other equal to this,— "lovingkindness"? I have exulted to preach to you the lovingkindness of the Lord. I needed not to be driven to this happy task. I have almost needed sometimes to be stopped when I have passed the hour, and my theme has carried me away. Oh, the lovingkindness of the Lord to those that put their trust under the shadow of his wings! That is a subject on which one might preach for ever, and yet not exhaust its treasures.

And then his "truth"—God's truth; the truth of his Word; the truth of his Son; the truth of the great doctrines which are given to us in the gospel. I have not preached to you any sort of speculation. I have never sought to invent new forms of truth. It shall be seen one day whose thoughts shall stand, God's thoughts or man's; and it shall be seen which is the true ministry, that which takes up God's Word, and echoes it, or that which boils it down until the very life is extracted from it. I have no sympathy with the preaching which degrades God's truth into a hobby-horse for its own thought, and only looks upon Scripture as a kind of pulpit from which it may thunder out its own opinions. Nay, if I have gone beyond what that Book has taught, may God blot out everything that I have said! I beseech you, never believe me if I go an atom beyond what is plainly taught there. I am content to live and to die as the mere repeater of Scriptural teaching; as a person who has thought out nothing, and invented nothing; as one who never thought invention to be any part of his calling; but who concluded that he was to take the message from the lips of God to the best of his ability, and simply to be a mouth for God to the people, mourning much that anything of his own should come between, but never thinking that he was somehow to refine the message or to adapt it to the brilliance of this wonderful century, and then to hand it out as being so much his own that he might take some share of the glory of it. Nay, nay; we have aimed at nothing of the kind. "I have declared *thy* faithfulness and *thy* salvation: I have not concealed *thy* lovingkindness and *thy* truth from the great congregation." Nothing have we preached as our own. If there has been anything of our own, we do bitterly take back those words, and eat them, and repent that ever we should have been guilty of the sin and folly of uttering them. The things which we have learned of God our Father, and of his Son Jesus Christ, by his Holy Spirit, we have sought to speak unto you.

Now, dear friends, let me say, next, that this text describes *a work which has been done under great difficulties*. It may seem a very easy

thing simply to have a message and to tell it. Yes, it appears so; but it is not so easy as it looks at first sight. I do not suppose that you always find your servants deliver your messages accurately. Did you ever sit round a table, and tell one person a story, and ask him to tell it to his neighbour? Let each one whisper it; and by the time it gets to the end of the table you will scarcely recognize your tale; it will have been altered so much. There is a tendency in the minds of all of us to alter what we tell, and it is a struggle to keep to the exact truth. Besides, this is an age which likes pretty things, —something fresh and new; and it is not easy always to swim upstream, and to go against the tendency of the time, and the spirit of the age. We have no particular desire to be thought fools any more than anybody else; and we know where all the wisdom is; at least, we ought to know, for we hear often enough about it. Ask the brethren of the "modern thought" school if they have not all the wisdom that is to be had nowadays. If they do not say that they have, many of them act as if they thought they had. No, friends, it is not so easy, after all, just to keep to the plain truth. There is a brother who has struck out something wonderfully fresh. We read his book; shall we not at least go with him a little way? You will find, brethren, that if you determine to hold fast the faith once for all delivered to the saints, you will have a battle to fight, in which you will be beaten unless you rely upon God for strength. If you are willing to let truth go, you have but to seek to please man, and it is soon done; and then you will be greeted with, "Hail fellow! Well met." But if you mean to declare God's truth, you will need the help of the Most High in the struggle.

But, although this testimony has been borne under difficulties, *it has been attended with unutterable pleasure.* Oh, the delight of preaching the gospel! I often say to young men who apply for admission to the College, "Do not become a minister if you can help it." But if you cannot help it, if a divine destiny drives you on, thank God that it is so! You are a happier man, if you are able to preach the gospel, than if you had been elected to a throne. There is no business like it under heaven. I have heard some say that our professional study of the Word of God may be a hindrance to our growth in the divine life. I know what they mean, and there is some truth in their words; but to me, the preaching of the gospel has been a continual means of grace, and I can say with the Apostle Paul, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this *grace* given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." It really is a grace to be permitted to preach the gospel; it brings grace with it. Brethren in the ministry, have you not read the Bible much more because you have had to preach the blessed truths revealed in it? Have you not been driven to your knees much more because you have had to deal with anxious souls, and to lead the people of God? I am sure that it is so; and I thank God for giving me a calling which does not take me away from the mercy-seat, but drives me to it. I am grateful that I have a message which I am glad to tell, glad to tell anywhere, a message which never needs to be concealed, but which brings joy to us in telling it, and salvation to our

hearers in listening to it. Blessed be God that we have such a story to proclaim!

I could say much more about this first point, but I must not, for our time is so short. This must suffice upon the subject of our continual testimony.

II. Now, secondly, the text mentions A REMARKABLE AUDIENCE. The psalmist says, twice over, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation;" and yet again, "I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation."

It is *astonishing to the preacher* that there should be a great congregation to hear the gospel. I do not know how you think of it, but if anybody had been set here to speak so many times a week upon politics, I wonder whether he would have had a crowded congregation at the end of twenty-five years. My friend Mr. Varley speaks right mightily; but if he had been preaching upon total abstinence for twenty-five years, I am sure that some would have totally abstained from coming to hear him. If I had had to preach here upon—well, what topic shall I say?—the object that the Liberation Society has in view, for instance, I am afraid that I should have liberated many of you from attendance long before this. All other subjects are exhaustible; but give us that Book, and give us the Holy Ghost, and we may preach on for ever. We shall never get to the end of it. I have heard of two infidels, one of whom said to his fellow, "If you had to go to jail for twelve months, and you could only have one book, what book would you choose?" He was very surprised when his companion said, "Oh, I should take the Bible!" The first one said, "But you do not believe in it; I wonder that you should choose that." "Oh! but," rejoined his friend, "it is no end of a book." His record is true, it is "no end of a book." Jerome used to say, "I adore the infinity of Holy Scripture;" and well he might. I would like you to look at my Bible at home, which is marked with all the texts I have preached from. There are thirty-one completed volumes of my sermons; and the thirty-second is in the making.\* Of course, in addition to the thirty-two volumes in the regular weekly series, there are many more volumes printed, and I have all the texts marked from which I have preached. I sometimes make the outline of a sermon, and then, when I turn to my Bible, I find that I have preached from that text, and the sermon has been published, and I say, "That will not do for a Sunday morning." I do not want to have the same subject again oftener than I can help. Sometimes, however, I find that the same text may be taken, and a new sermon readily enough made from it, for there is a springing well in Holy Scripture, never exhausted, and the great congregation wants continually to come to hear repetitions of the same great truth, though it is ever the preacher's duty to seek for acceptable words in presenting it. Young

\* This discourse begins the fifty-first volume of Spurgeon's Sermons. How little the preacher thought, when he praised God for twenty-five years' ministry in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, that he should continue to declare God's faithfulness and salvation week by week to the great company of Sermon readers for so many years after he had put off the tabernacle of the body. The supply of manuscripts is not yet nearly exhausted.

man, just beginning to preach, do not be afraid to stick to your texts; that is the best way to get variety in your discourses. Saturate your sermons with Bibline, the essence of Bible truth, and you will always have something new to say.

But when I think of the great congregation, *how encouraging it is!* It is always good fishing where there are plenty of fish. We are bound to go and angle for a single soul, wherever there is one to be found, and some do great service for the Master who take the fish one by one. But what a delight it is to have the great seine net of the gospel, and throw it into such a lake as this, God guiding the hand of the fisherman the while! Surely he should be a happy man!

But then, dear friends, when we think of this great congregation, *what solemn thoughts come over our mind!* I come down to this platform sometimes, and when I get another look at this great congregation, I am staggered. Time after time I have felt as if I could run away sooner than face this tremendous throng again, and speak to them once more. O sirs, to think of all these being dying men and dying women, and to think that this gospel that I preach is needed by them all, and may be refused by many with awful consequences, and may be accepted by some (it will be, thank God) with consequences of unutterable joy! To think that we shall have to give an account of how we have preached, and how you have heard! To think that we shall all meet again at the judgment-seat, to give an account of every Sunday and every Thursday service! If Xerxes could not restrain a tear at the thought of his myriads of men passing away, who can look at congregations like this without being moved with compassion? Yes, yes; it is not easy to preach to a great congregation so as to be able to say at the last, "I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

The sight of this great congregation gathered to-night *suggests many memories.* I recollect some dear ones that used to sit here, and there, and there, and there. I can almost see them now; some dear old saints with grey heads, that used to be our glory, who are now with God; some young and ardent spirits, that were taken away before they reached their prime. You sit where sat some who loved your Master well, and served him faithfully. Worthily occupy their places, beloved friends.

But excuse me if I say no more upon this topic. My brain seems in a whirl, as dissolving views pass before my memory in quick succession. If you want to see life and death, stand here. I feel like the captain of a vessel on the bridge. I am looking down on you who are the passengers and crew; but yet, from another point of view, I seem to be looking at great waves that sweep by, and more come, and others follow; ever a succession of changes, nothing abiding. How long shall we remain? How soon shall we, too, also go? Well, it is something to have preached Christ to this great congregation. It is something to believe that those who have not received him are without excuse. It is much better to believe that many have received him, and that we shall meet them in the glory-land, rejoicing in that glorious sacrifice by which they have been cleansed from sin, in that

dear Saviour by whose life and death they have been quickened, and made heirs of eternal glory. Oh, that this faith may be in us all, and that we may all at last join in the general assembly of the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in heaven!

III. I have only a few minutes left, in which to expatiate upon the last of the three points, THE SUGGESTED PRAYER. May I just give you an outline of what I would have said if we could have spared more time? The prayer of the psalmist is,—“Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth”—the things which he had preached—“continually preserve me.”

This prayer is *suitable for the preacher*, and he prays it now. Taking David's words, and making them my own, I pray to the Lord at this moment,—“Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.”

The prayer is also *suitable for every Christian here*. Let me read it, and let every Christian pray it now: “Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.”

With a little alteration, *this prayer may suit you who are not yet saved*, but who desire to be: “Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord.” Are you praying it? Is not this a good time in which to pray that prayer? The signs are all propitious. There is “the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees.” There are tokens for good abroad. There is dew about to-night. Now, therefore, pray this prayer if thou hast never prayed before; and God help thee to claim the answer by appropriating faith!

It seems to me that this prayer was suggested to the psalmist by at least three things.

First, *it was suggested by the great congregation*. David seems to say, “O Lord, there are so many others who need thy care, let me not be lost in the crowd, withhold not thy tender mercies from me.”

“Lord, I hear of showers of blessing  
Thou art scattering, full and free;  
Showers, the thirsty land refreshing;  
Let some droppings fall on me,  
Even me.”

Next, *the subject suggested it*. “Thy truth, thy lovingkindness, O Lord; let these preserve me. I hear of thy goodness; I cannot bear to miss it. I hear of thy truth; I would not be a stranger to it. Lord, bless me, even me!”

Then, again, *the future suggested it*. The psalmist expected to suffer great trials and serious afflictions, and therefore he prayed, “Let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.”

Now, as a congregation, we have completed twenty-five years in this building; but we must not reckon that we have reached the end of our struggles, or even the end of our sins. O brothers and sisters, this is only a part of the way to heaven. I think that I told you, once before, that some friends, when they raise an Ebenezer, sit down on the top of it, and say, “Here we are going to stop.” When

this Tabernacle was opened, I remember that that night I put a sharp iron spike on the top of "the stone of help," that nobody might sit upon it; and I do the same again on the Ebenezer stone I now raise in remembrance of God's goodness. Let none of us sit down at the end of this twenty-fifth year, and say, "We have come so far, and here we are going to stay." Long nights of darkness lie beyond, there are giants to be fought, mountains to be climbed, rivers to be crossed. Who dreams of ease, while he is here in the enemy's country? Out with your sword, man! You have not done with the battle. Awake, thou that sleepest! Thou hast not come yet to the place of resting. This is the place for watching, and praying, and wrestling, and struggling. Therefore do we cry, "Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me." We are getting older; we are getting weaker; we are, perhaps, getting less wise. Who knows that all our years will bring us good news? They may bring us evil if we trust to our past experience. We want God with us now as much as ever we did. Therefore let us cry to him, "From this night do thou bless us more and more."

The poor psalmist was in great trouble when he prayed this prayer. He says, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about." Therefore he says, "Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me."

He adds, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me." If there is one here whose conscience is accusing him, and who is guilty before his God, let him pray this prayer because of his iniquities.

He goes on to say, "I am not able to look up." If that is your case, if you cannot look up, pray the Lord to look down, and cry to him never to take his mercy from you.

David further says, concerning his iniquities, "They are more than the hairs of my head: therefore my heart faileth me." Well, when our heart does fail us, let us recollect the mercy which has helped us so long, and let us cast ourselves again upon that mercy for all that lies before us.

I am not going to venture upon any prophecy. I attended, on Wednesday, the funeral of our beloved brother Dr. Stanford. You may attend mine before this year is over; or I may attend yours. If you could draw up the curtain that hides the future, you would not wish to do it, would you? Trust the Lord so that, if you live, you are prepared to live; and if you die, you are prepared to die. I think that the best thing you can do is to do the next thing that comes to you, and to do it thoroughly well. I was here last Monday. I had no rest from spiritual work from three in the afternoon till half-past nine at night; and about the middle of it I felt, "Well, I do not know how I shall get through this long, long afternoon of seeing enquirers and candidates for Church-fellowship." So I said to a brother, "How am I to do it all?" However, there was a cup of tea in front of me, and I said, "I think I will drink that tea; that is the next thing to be done." Oftentimes that will be your best course, just do the next thing you can do when you are saying to yourself, "How shall I do if I live to be old?" When you go home to-night, eat your supper, and go to bed to the glory of God; and when you get up in the morning, do not think about what you are going to do at

night. Do what comes to you when you begin the day's work, and keep right straight on. If you can see a step at a time, that is about as far as you need to see. Do not begin prying into the future; but just go straight on from day to day, depending on God for the mercy and grace and strength of the day. That is the way to live, and I am persuaded that is the way to die. Mr. Wesley said, "If I knew that I was to die to-night, and I had an engagement to attend a class-meeting, I should go to it. If I had promised to call and see old Betty So-and-so on the way back, I should call in to see her. I have then to go home, and have family prayer. I would do that. Then I should take my boots off, and I should go to bed, just as I should do if I were not going to die." Oh, do not let death be a sort of addition to the programme, which was not calculated upon; but so live that whenever it comes—if it come while we are sitting here to-night—you will be ready for it. Then yours will be a happy life, a joyful life, a useful life. Secularism teaches us that we ought to look to this world. Christianity teaches us that the best way to prepare for this world is to be fully prepared for the next. Why, it elevates and glorifies the secular duties, which else would trail in the mire, if our conversation, our citizenship, is in heaven, even while we are on the earth. God bless you, beloved! Let us praise his name for all the mercies of the past quarter of a century, and trust his grace for all the future.

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### Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

#### PSALM XL.

These are the words of David: they are the words of all God's tried and believing people; but above all they are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. So complete is the union between Christ and the believer that it is possible to describe them both at the same time. The experience of a child of God, sin alone excepted, is very like the experience of the great Firstborn. But Christ is ever above us, so you will find words in this Psalm which belong to nobody but Jesus in all their fulness. Yet the title of it is "A Psalm of David".

Verse 1. *I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.*

You and I can say that, so could our Divine Master. Oh the wondrous patience of the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer! In that agony in the garden when the bloody sweat showed how great were the wrestlings of his spirit he could then say "I waited patiently for Jehovah, and he inclined unto me and heard my cry."

2. *He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.*

We can say that, too. We remember when we were deep down in the mire, when we found it impossible to rise; for the more we struggled the more we sank. It was clay under us, miry clay: we could not hope for a rescue, but the arm of Jehovah lifted us out of the deep and set us on a rock, and there we stood to sing his praises. Jesus Christ could say the same. He said "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," and he cried "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" What a very different frame of mind he was in a few minutes afterwards when he said