

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATIONS.

A Sermon

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“Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”—Isaiah iv. 13.

FOR many centuries, the Holy Land has been covered with thorns and briars. Travellers tell us it is so exceedingly barren, that, except upon the dreary desert of Sahara, you cannot find a more absolute sterility than in many parts of Judæa and Israel. But the land will not remain for ever thus unproductive. Even now, in spots where it can be cultivated, it flows with milk and honey; and the day is coming when the chosen people shall return to their own land, which God has given to them and to their fathers by a covenant of salt, and when again they shall begin to irrigate the hills, and to plant the vales, and to cultivate the vineyards, and to scatter the seed broadcast into the well-ploughed furrows. The Holy Land will again blossom: “Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree.” When this is done, the whole world will ring with the fame thereof. They will say, “Is this the Zion whom no man sought after? Is this the land which was called desolate? Is this the city whose name was FORSAKEN?” Then shall mount Zion again be “beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth;” and then shall the whole land flow with fertility, “and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

But the spiritual meaning of our text, to which we draw more immediate attention to-night, is this,—God, by his grace, is able to work moral and spiritual transformations. Men, comparable to thorns and briars, are, by the sovereign grace of God, changed and renewed, so that they may then be compared to fir trees and to myrtles. This wonderful transformation is to the glory of God, and is to him “an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” Let us talk a little with one another, first, *concerning these transforma-*

tions; secondly, concerning how they are wrought; and, thirdly, let us contemplate their happy result: they "shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

I. Let us talk CONCERNING THESE TRANSFORMATIONS.

It appears, from our text, that there are some men who may fitly be compared to thorns and briars. *The similitude may be applied to their original.* Here we must all take our share. The thorn is the child of the curse; the brier is the offspring of the Fall. There were no thorns and briars to cause the sweat to flow from Adam's face until after he had sinned. Then did the Lord say to him, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life, thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." And we, too, are the offspring of the curse. What says David? "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." We are born under sin; we are subject to it from our very earliest moments, and we go astray, not merely by the imitation of bad example, but from the force of a corrupt nature. It may be that there are some here, this evening, who feel that they are under the curse. You cannot look back upon your original without discovering this. It may be, my friends, that your parents taught you to sin; you cannot remember ever having been instructed in the way of God. It may be that, this very moment, you can recollect some of the earliest training that you received, and you remember that it was such as might fit you for the service of Satan, but could not lead you to the cross of Christ. You feel that you are under the curse, and you have met with such afflictions, and your own heart is so heavy, that, if I were to write anyone down as a child of the curse, you would boldly say, "Put my name in the list. Indeed, I am of a traitor born, and I feel in my blood the taint of his sin." There is comfort for us, however, even though this is true of us. We are thorns, but the Lord can transform us into myrtles. Jehovah knows how to remove the curse of the first Adam by the blessing of the second Adam. He can tear up by the roots everything that is vile, and sinful, and accursed, and can plant, in the stead thereof, everything that is lovely and of good repute, and so we shall inherit his blessing. So, be of good comfort; though thou art under the curse just now, the Lord Jesus, who was made a curse for us, is able yet to pronounce thee blessed.

Again, *the thorn is the true image of the sinner because it is of no sort of service.* I suppose almost everything has its use, but I do not know that there has been discovered any use for the thorn and the brier. So has it been with many of us, and it is so with some of you to-night. What have you done for God? Twenty years, young man, have brought you to maturity, but what quit-rent has the Almighty ever received from you? Perhaps forty years have ripened your manhood; but, hitherto, what songs of praise have gone up to heaven from you? What acceptable fruits have you laid upon God's altar? You are his vineyard: what ripe grapes have ever come to him from you? He has digged about you, protected you by the wall of his providence, and watched over you with tenderest care. How is it that, when he looks for grapes, you

bring forth only wild grapes? When he expects to have some return for the talent which he has committed to your care, how is it that you have wrapped it in a napkin, and have hidden your Lord's money? You have been useless: not exactly so to your fellow-men; your children have received your care; you have been, perhaps, some help to your neighbours and to your friends; but, as far as God is concerned, the natural man is perfectly useless; he brings no harvest to the great Owner of the ground. Did I say, just now, you were forty years old? What if there should be, in this place, some unconverted person of sixty, seventy, or even eighty? And, all these years, in vain has the light of heaven shone for you; in vain has the divine longsuffering said, "Spare him yet another year;" in vain the preaching of God's Word to you, and all the ordinances of his house; you are still bare, leafless, fruitless. You have only lived unto yourself, and you have in nowise glorified your Creator and your Preserver. You are a thorn and a brier. Yet be of good comfort; if you have a heart for better things, God can make you into the fir tree and the myrtle, that yield genial shade, and gladden the gardens of the Lord. He can yet transform your uselessness into true service, and take you from amongst the idlers in the market to go and work actively and with success in his vineyard.

The thorn, too (we have only commenced upon this point), *wastes the genial influences which, falling upon good wheat, would have produced a harvest.* The rain fell to-day, but it fell upon thorns and briars as well as upon the green blades of the wheat. The dews will weep, and they will fall quite as copiously upon the thickly-tangled thistles and matted briars as upon the cottager's well-weeded garden; and when the sun shines out with cheering ray, he will have rays quite as genial for the thistles and for the briars as for the fruit trees and for the barley and the wheat. So it is with you unconverted men and women. You have received God's daily favours in as great abundance as the righteous have. Nay, perhaps you have had even more: you have been sitting, clothed in fine linen, like Dives, while God's own saints have been rotting at your gates, like Lazarus. You have not pined for lack of the outward influences of the means of grace. Some of you are sermon-hearers; you are constantly within God's gates; you frequent the place where the proclamation of mercy is freely made; your Bibles are not unknown to you; and yet all this has been wasted on you. Are you not nigh unto cursing? Visited by daily favour, rebuked by conscience, aroused at times by the natural motion of your own heart, awakened by God's Spirit, awed under his Word, and yet, for all this, you are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel; yet despair not! If your souls seek after better things, God is able to transform these wasteful thorns, these briars that bear no fruit, into fig trees, that shall shower their luscious fruit all around. It was a foolish saying of a certain preacher that the tares would never become wheat; what business had he to strain Christ's parable? This I know,—the brier can become a myrtle, and the thistle can become a fir tree by divine grace. Did the man mean

to deny the possibility of conversion? Did he mean to say that almighty grace could not turn the lion into a lamb, the raven into a dove? If so, he uttered a direct blasphemy, for there is no miracle of grace which God cannot perform. He can take the black lumps of ebony, and make them alabaster. He can cast the tree of the cross into Marah's bitter waters, and make them sweet as the water of the well of Bethlehem for which David thirsted. He can take the poison out of the asp, and the sting out of the cockatrice, and make them serviceable to God and man. The camel can go through the needle's eye. Know, of a surety, that nothing is too hard for the Lord; he can accomplish whatever he pleases.

To continue our remarks upon the thorn, and its transformation into the fir tree,—*Is not the thorn a hurtful thing?* It rends and tears the passers-by. Sometimes, if I would pursue my path straight across to yonder point, I must break through a hedge of briars; and how often has the Christian been tormented and torn by the thorns of the ungodly! Let the age of martyrs tell how God's saints have had their flesh rent from their bones by these thorns and briars; and let a weeping mother tell how her son has broken her heart, and turned her hair prematurely grey; and let a sorrowing wife tell how an ungodly husband has sent her to her chamber with briny tears streaming from her eyes; and let us all tell how sometimes our ungodly relatives have made our hearts beat fast with dread anxiety for them. Lot cannot live in Sodom without being vexed, and David cannot sojourn in Mesech without crying, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" But remember, however much you have persecuted God's saints, however hardly you may have dealt with the followers of Christ, the Lord is able to transform you into one of them. Paul little thought, when he was riding to Damascus, that it would be so with him. He had his precious documents all safe. "I will harry the Nazarenes," he seemed to say; "I will bring them to the whipping post; I will drag them out of the synagogue, and compel them to blaspheme." Little dost thou know, Paul, that thou shalt soon bend the knee to that very Jesus of Nazareth whom thou hatest. A light shines about him, brighter than the noonday sun; he falls from his horse; he hears a voice which says, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Then meekly he asks, "Who art thou, Lord?" and the answer comes, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Ah, sinner, perhaps you do not know that *you are persecuting Jesus*. You think that it is only your child, or your wife, or your mother; but, in persecuting the members of the body of Christ, you persecute the Head. Saul of Tarsus is led by the hand to Damascus; and after his conversion, who is more bold than he? The preacher upon Mars' hill, the witness before Nero, the aged man of God sitting in the dungeon, the child of God with his head upon the block,—this is the man who persecuted the saints of God, but is now full of zeal above all others for the spread of the knowledge of Christ. The thorn is turned into a fir tree, and the brier into a myrtle tree.

Nor have I yet exhausted the figure. *The thorn sows its own seed*; and when the winds get up, they bear upon their wings the thistledown, and the seed is dropped here and there and everywhere. You cannot keep thistles to themselves. If you grow them in your own garden, they will be in your neighbour's garden before long; and if your neighbour grows them, it will be difficult for you to keep them out of your plot. And here is the worst point about an unconverted man. If thou hast been doing mischief, thy children grow up in thine own image, or thy servants imitate their master. If you are an unscrupulous trader, you assist to make other traders, if not palpably dishonest, yet scandalously lax. Your language pollutes the air you breathe; or if you keep that tolerably right, your sentiments are not without their influence upon your fellow-men. You live not unto yourselves. If you were to lead a hermit's life, your very absence from society would have its influence. If thou art literally a leper, I may shut thee up, and make thee cover thy lip, and cast ashes on thine head, and cry, "Unclean! unclean!" but with thy spiritual leprosy, I cannot so seclude thee. Thou wilt taint the air wherever thou goest; it is not possible for thee to do otherwise than to spread pollution round about thee. O thorn, seed-sowing thorn, may God change thee!

Do I to-night address some infidel who has been very earnest in the propagation of his views? How would my heart leap if the Lord would make thee just as earnest in uplifting the cross upon which thou hast trampled! He can do it; I pray God that he may. Do I speak to-night to one who has been furiously set against the things of God? Brethren, the worst of sinners make the best of saints; and if the Lord shall please to touch you, you shall be just as hot for him as you now are against him. He that has much forgiven shall love much. No one could break an alabaster box of precious ointment but the woman who was a sinner. John Bunyan used to say that he believed there would be a great band of saints in the next generation, for his own generation was noted for its many great sinners; and he did hope that, as these great sinners grew up, God would transform them into great saints. We could mention many names of men who have been, as it were, the devil's sergeants, but who, when God has once transformed them into his own soldiers, have made most blessed recruiting sergeants for the kingdom of Christ. Look at John Newton, and John Bunyan, and other men of that stamp, and see what sovereign grace can do in similar cases.

Yet once more. I cannot help remarking that *it was the thorn and the brier that composed the crown that pierced the Saviour's temples*; and it is our sins, our cruel sins, that have been his chief tormentors. Every soul that lives without Christ, after having heard of him, is piercing Christ's temples afresh. When you think that he is unwilling to forgive you, that ungenerous thought wounds him more than anything else. And when you speak ill of his name, when you slander his people, and despise his saints, what are you doing but plaiting another crown of thorns to put upon his head? Yet thou, thou who hast pierced the Saviour's brow, thou canst

yet become a myrtle to crown that brow with victory. The Saviour, having fought for thee, and won thee, having bought thee with his heart's blood, will put thee as a chaplet about his brow, "and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." The meaning of the whole is that God does, by the power of the gospel, transform his enemies into his friends; he turns men from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the kingdom of Christ, from being possessed with devils to become full of the Holy Spirit, from being a den of dragons, full of sin, to be temples where every grace shall shine to reflect the glory of the Most High. Some of you can bear witness to this as a matter of experience; others of you contemplate it with strong desire.

II. Secondly, we are to consider HOW THIS TRANSFORMATION IS WROUGHT IN MEN.

It is wrought *by the secret and mysterious agency of God the Holy Spirit*. Certainly, dear friends, it can never be wrought in us by the power of man. Let us tremble if our religion rests upon any man, for that is a poor, unstable foundation. I learn, each day, more and more, my utter inability to do good to my fellow-men apart from the Spirit of God. There come to me, sometimes, cases that completely stagger me. I try, for instance, to comfort a broken heart. I seek, but in vain, all sorts of metaphors to make the truth clear; quote the promises, bow the knee in prayer, and yet, after all, the poor troubled spirit has to go away unbelieving still, for only God can give it faith. There are other cases, where we know of men who have lived in sin, and God has been pleased to put his afflicting hand upon them, and we do not know what to say to them. They profess repentance, but we fear it is only remorse; they talk of faith in Christ, but we are afraid it is a delusion. We would convince them of sin if we could; we remind them of the past, and they give an assent to every sentence we utter against them, but yet they feel not the evil of their own ways. Oh, it is hard work to deal with sinners! It needs a sharper tool than man can keep in his tool-basket. Only God himself can break hearts; and when they are broken, only the same hand that broke them can bind them up.

It is the Holy Spirit, then, who is everywhere in the midst of his Church, who comes forth and puts himself into direct contact with a human spirit, and straightway a change is effected. I cannot tell you with what part of man the Holy Spirit begins; but this I can tell you, he changes the whole man. The judgment no longer takes darkness for light, and light for darkness; the will is no longer obstinately set against God, but bows its neck to the yoke of Christ; the affections are no longer set upon sinful pleasure, but they are set upon Christ. It is true that corruption still remaineth in the heart, but a new heart and a right spirit are given. There is put into the quickened soul a living seed, which cannot sin, because it is born of God,—a living seed which liveth and abideth for ever. "I don't know," said one, "whether the world is a new world, or whether I am a new creature, but it is one of the two, for 'old things are passed away, and all things are become new.'" When

Christ descends into the human heart to reign, he seems to take this motto, "Behold, I make all things new." There is "a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," within that poor sinner's heart. It is a complete change. You will observe that it is not the thorn somewhat trimmed and pruned; it is not the brier made to grow upon a wall, and trained into order: that is reformation. But it is the thorn turned into a fir tree: this is a perfect re-creation, a making anew of the man; and this must happen to every one of us, by the power and energy of the Divine Spirit, or else in the garden of the Lord we shall never bloom, nor ought we to join the Church of God on earth, for we have no part nor lot in the matter.

But, while I have said that it is the Spirit who works this change, you are enquiring *by what means he does it*. If you will kindly refer to the chapter from which my text is taken, you will observe that the Lord Jesus has to do with it: "Behold, I have given him for a Witness to the people, a Leader and Commander to the people." That verse comes before my text. We must know Christ before we can ever be changed. Some people think they are to change themselves, and then come to Christ. Oh, no! Come to Jesus just as you are! It is the work of his Spirit to change you. You are not to work a miracle, and then come to show the miracle to Christ; but you are to come to Christ to have the miracle wrought. It is Christ's work to begin with the sinner as the sinner, even as the good Samaritan did with the man who fell among thieves. He did not wait for him to be cured before he helped him, but he poured oil and wine into his wounds, lifted him upon his beast, and then carried him to the inn; and Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him.

But the chapter seems to teach another lesson. You say, "I know that the Holy Spirit brings Christ home to the heart and conscience, but how am I to get at Christ?" The chapter tells you. It says that God's Word shall not return unto him void. The way by which Christ is discovered and found out by a sinner, is by Christ being preached to him. "Hear, and your soul shall live." That is the gospel. The way by which Christ comes into the soul is through Ear-gate. "Satan tries to stop up Ear-gate with mud," says John Bunyan; but, oh, it is a glorious thing when God clears away the mud of prejudice, so that men are willing to hear the truth. There was an old man, a member of this church, who used to preach every Sunday in Billingsgate, and many persons tried to begin a controversy with him; but he was an old soldier in more senses than one, and his answer was, when anybody tried to dispute or enter into an argument with him, "'Hear, and your soul shall live;' I have not come to controvert; but to preach the truth, 'Hear, and your soul shall live.'" That was a plain answer, sure enough. Now, you know that simple trust in Christ is all that he asks of you, and even that he gives you. 'Tis the work of his own Spirit. Hear this, then, ye thorns and briars, before God sets himself in battle array against you,—before his fires devour you. Hear the gentle notes of a Father's heart as he speaks in gospel

invitations to you, "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." May you all be brought there! May God's grace bring you all to lay hold on Christ!

III. And then, to close,—WHAT IS THE RESULT OF THIS TRANSFORMATION?

To whose honour shall so beneficial a change redound? "*It shall be to the Lord for a name.*" As soon as that great sinner gets converted, it makes a buzz and a noise in the workshop where he goes. "What!" they ask, "has that wretch become a saint?" He used to curse, but, "Behold, he prayeth!" He could drink with the drunkard, but now he walks in the fear of God "in all temperance and sobriety." He could not be trusted, but now temptation cannot turn him from his integrity. The name of Christ at one time brought the blood into his cheeks, but now,—

"Sweeter sounds than music knows
Charm him in Immanuel's name."

I say there is a buzz about the workshop; the men say to one another, "What is the meaning of this? How came this about?" and, though they hate the change, yet they gaze at it, and admire it. They cannot understand it; they are like the magicians of Egypt; they cannot do these things with their enchantments, and therefore they are compelled to say, "This is the finger of God." If God converts some ordinary sinners, he does not get half so much glory out of them as he does out of these extraordinary ones. The man, whose vile character was known in a whole parish, whose name was foul in the court where he lived, who had acquired a reputation for evil in the whole district,—when this thorn becomes a fir tree, then everyone wonders. If I had in my garden a great brier which had once torn my hand, and one day, when I walked down, I saw, instead of that brier, a fir tree growing, and a genial shade could be enjoyed under its boughs, how astonished I should be! I should naturally ask, "Who hath done this? Who could have transformed this brier into a fir tree?" And so, when a great sinner is converted, the finger of God is recognized, and God is glorified. Even the ungodly are compelled to honour the name of the Most High when other ungodly ones are saved.

And then *as to the church*, the members are, perhaps, at first rather shy, and cannot believe it is true; they hear that he, who once persecuted the brethren, now professes the name of their Master; and, at last, they get good evidence of the truth of it; and oh, what hallowed glee there is amongst the sons of God! There is a church-meeting, and he comes forward to confess his faith; they know how foully he has erred, and they rejoice to see him brought back again. There may be one "elder brother" who is angry, and will not come in; but, for the most part, the household is very glad when the prodigal returns; and chief in joy among you all, when such a scene occurs, is the one who has preached the gospel to you. Oh, the joy of my soul when some of you were brought to Christ! I remember the cheering nights I had, and how I went to my

nouse rejoicing and triumphant in my God because of some of you. You were once foul, "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God;" and, truly, there would be more of such joy if others were brought in. Some of the best of the members of this church are those who were brands plucked out of the burning. May we have more such sinners saved by the blood of Jesus!

Nor is this all. There was *an angel* present when the deed was done; they are always present in the assemblies of the saints; hence it is that the women have their heads covered,—“because of the angels.” If no one else could see it, yet the angels, who cover their faces when they bow before God, would have us come into his presence in decency and in order. This angel hears us weep; a stream of light ascends to the regions of the blessed; straightway the bliss spreads throughout the celestial fields, and, as the news is propagated, “A prodigal has returned, another heir of glory is born,” they take their harps, and tune their strings anew; they bow with greater reverence; they sing with loftier joy; they shout with more glorious praise, “Unto him that loved the souls of men, and washed them in his blood, to him be glory, and honour, and power, and dominion, for ever and ever;” and thus the songs of heaven are swollen, made more deep, more mighty with tumultuous joy by sinners saved on earth. Yes, they tell it in heaven that the thorn-brake has become a grove of firs, that the brier has become a myrtle; and, what shall I dare to say?—*even the Divine Trinity break forth in joy*. Their joy cannot be increased, for God over all is “blessed for ever;” but, still, it is written, “He will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.” Is it not said that, when the prodigal was yet a great way off, his father saw him? Can it be that, among the servants and friends, there was joy, and none in the father’s heart? Impossible! The Eternal God, Jehovah himself, views with delight the chosen of his heart; Jesus sees the purchase of his blood; the Spirit sees the result of his own power; and so, up to the very throne of God, the impulse of a sinner saved is felt. She came from the brothel; he came from the prison; and yet even heaven thrills with the news. She had defiled herself with sin; he had polluted others with his crimes; and yet angels tune their harps to Jehovah’s praise because of him. Was that prophetic when the woman broke the alabaster box, and filled the house with the perfume? Was that prophetic of what every penitent sinner does when his broken heart fills heaven and earth with the sweet perfume of joy because he is saved? And when she washed the Saviour’s feet, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, was that prophetic too? Did that show how Jesus gets his greatest honour, his purest love, his fairest worship, and his sweetest solace from sinners saved by blood? Methinks it was so. May he get such joy from us! Truly, Jesus died for me; and, at the foot of his cross, weeping I stand now to tell of his true love to sinners; and O poor sinner, Christ is able to save thee! Whosoever cometh to him, he will in no wise cast out. Oh, that thou wouldst come! May sovereign grace compel thee to come in!

I sat, this afternoon, looking at one with a withered countenance and a sunken cheek, marked out for death, once a member of this church, but foully fallen, and gone far astray; and I remember two or three of his age, once also professors, who, strange to say, went also away from God as he did. When I talked to him about the Lord and his infinite compassion, I could but have in my mind's eye the prodigal who wasted his substance with riotous living, and yet his father did not spurn him, did not even rebuke him; but he—

“— was to his Father's bosom pressed,
Once again a child confessed,
From his house no more to roam.”

And I thought I would say to you to-night,—

“Come and welcome, sinner, come.”

Do not think that God is harsh: think not that Christ is untender. There is no breast so soft as his, no heart so deeply full of sympathy. He cries over the very worst of you, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together. I cannot destroy thee, for I am God, and not man.” Oh, shall my Saviour plead with you in vain? Shall the tears of Jesus fall to the ground? Shall the love of God have no attracting influence? Shall not mercy, as it rings its silver bell, draw you to the feast of love? Oh! wherefore will you die? Is sin so sweet that you will suffer for it for ever? Are the trifles of this world so important in your estimation that you will lose heaven and eternal life? I pray you “seek the Lord while he may be found: call ye upon him while he is near,” and think not that he will reject you, for “he will abundantly pardon.” Oh, may he do this to-night!

“My God, I feel the mournful scene;
My bowels yearn o'er dying men;
And fain my pity would reclaim,
And snatch the firebrands from the flame.”

“But feeble my compassion proves,
And can but weep where most it loves;
Thy own all-saving arm employ,
And turn these drops of grief to joy.”

O Lord, do thou do it, for thou canst! Come forth, O Jesus; mount thy chariot now! Hell shakes at thy majesty; heaven adores thy presence; earth cannot resist thee; gates of brass fly open, and bars of iron are snapped. Come, Conqueror, now, and ride through the streets of this city, and through the hearts of all of us, and they shall be thine, “and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” May God command his blessing on you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM LXXXIV.

Verse 1. *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!*

“Though they are only tabernacles, temporary structures that are soon to be taken down, and carried away, they are very dear to us. Thy tabernacles are so lovely to us because thou dost meet us there.”

2. *My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.*

A little starving brings on an appetite for health-giving food, and a brief absence from the house of God, through sickness, or by reason of distance, makes a Christian sigh and cry for the dainties of the divine table. Even the heavy flesh, which is so slow to move, at last joins the heart in crying out for the living God.

3. *Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.**

He envies even the sparrows, which have no sort of bashfulness, but boldly enter God's house, and find a house for themselves there. O Lord, make me like the sparrows, blessed in finding shelter in the courts of thy house! As for the swallow, she makes God's house a nest for herself, and a place where she may lay her young; and it is blessed when our children, as well as ourselves, love the house of God,—when they have been so nurtured and cherished that they are at home there. We may well envy the sparrows and the swallows when we and our families are unable to go up to the house of the Lord; and it is as sad for those who have to go up to a place where there is nothing good to be had, a place where the gospel is not preached, and so their souls are not fed.

4. *Blessed are they that dwell in thy house:*

The men who are always occupied in the Lord's service, or those who are in God's house even when they are in their own houses,—the men who are always at home with God, who feel that the canopy of heaven is the roof of God's house in which they dwell, and who therefore never go away from God's house, but always dwell there with him.

“Bless'd are the souls that find a place
Within the temple of thy grace.”

4. *They will be still praising thee. Selah.*

How can they do otherwise? When they are God's children, at home with their Heavenly Father, and behold his glory, what can they do but praise, and praise, and praise yet again?

5. *Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.*

Or, as it might be rendered, “In whose heart are thy ways.” The man whose strength is wholly derived from God, and who spends all his strength in God's service,—the man who has God's ways in his heart, and his heart in God's ways, must be blessed. This is the man to get the blessing that the Lord is waiting to give. Half-hearted worshippers do not even know what the blessing is like, but the whole-hearted not only taste of it but drink it down with delight.

6. *Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.*

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 3,041, “The Sparrow and the Swallow.” (This Exposition really belongs to that Sermon, but there was not any space available for it there.)

They get a blessing on the road to God's house as well as a blessing in the house itself. It does their heart good even to be on the way to the assembly of God's people, and they sing, with good Dr. Watts,—

“How did my heart rejoice to hear
My friends devoutly say,
‘In Zion let us all appear,
And keep the solemn day!’”

They also sing, with the same writer,—

“I love her gates, *I love the road.*”

The very road to God's house has a blessing in it for those whose hearts are right with the God of the house.

7. *They go from strength to strength,*

They get stronger as they proceed on their happy, heavenward way. The men who love God, and who live with God, grow stronger and stronger;—not always in body, for the flesh may be growing weaker while “the inward man is renewed day by day.”

“They go from strength to strength,” or, as it is in the margin, “They go from company to company,” from the company of mourners to the company of hoppers; from the company of hoppers to the company of believers; from the company of the men and women of feeble faith to the company of those who rejoice in full assurance.

7. *Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.*

That is the glory of going to God's house, that we go there to appear before God, to spread our wants before him, to confess our sin to him, to sun our souls in the light of his countenance. It is little for us to appear before our fellow-men, but to appear before God is a blessed prelude to that day “when he shall appear,” and “we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

8. *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah*
O God of wrestling Jacob, hear my prayer! O God, thou who didst make such a gracious covenant with Jacob, be a covenant God to me!

9. *Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.*

Look upon the face of Christ, O God, for he is “thine Anointed”!

“Him, and then the sinner see;
Look through Jesu's wounds on me.”

10. *For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.*

That is, better than a thousand days spent anywhere else. Feasting and rioting with the ungodly are not worthy to be compared with feasting and praising in the courts of God's house.

10. *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

I hope many of us can say, again with Dr. Watts,—

“Might I enjoy the meanest place
Within thy house, O God of grace!
Not tents of ease, nor thrones of power,
Should tempt my feet to leave thy door.”

11, 12. *For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.*

Let us share that blessedness, dear friends, and be as happy as we can by trusting in the Lord of hosts as he deserves to be trusted.