

was called away from earth. At an age when the higher mental powers are often found in their greatest maturity, and when the results of observation and experience seem to qualify a minister for most efficient service in the church, his career was terminated. But THE LORD JESUS "holdeth the stars in His right hand;" and even as He kindles their brightness, and appoints the spheres which they shall respectively illuminate, so it belongs to Him, *in His own time*, to withdraw them from earth, and to place them in that world where "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

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 AFTERWARD.

(Matt. xxi. 29, 32.)

1865-1866.

*What think ye?* This question is the preface, not of one only, but of all the Lord's discourses: it is the expression of a law that has always governed His dealings with mankind. He is evermore a calm and earnest Reasoner with the children of men; enlightening and convincing their judgments, that their judgments may constrain their hearts, and their hearts direct their lives. We hear in this appeal that one and the same Voice which sometime pleaded with rebellious Israel, *Come and let us reason together*; which throughout His incarnate ministry contended with the Jews in every variety of argument and expostulation; and which now speaks from heaven, by the Holy Spirit, to those who hear the Gospel, in the language of searching reproof and conviction. His cry of compassionate appeal is heard amidst the crowds of those who surround Him now as it was in the days of His flesh. But now, as then, His still small voice seeks the solitude of the individual soul: *I have somewhat to say unto thee*. His argument singles out every one who hath ears to hear; and He never fails to win Himself the victory in this personal contest, where He finds an honest and sincere heart to listen to His plea.

But when our Lord gives, as He does here, specific expression to this appeal to His hearers' judgment, we may be sure that what follows has a peculiar emphasis, whether to those who first heard it from His own lips, or to us who hear it in the silent page. Let us go to the scene, and mark what the question meant to the Jews, and what answer was extorted from their consciences, before we consider its significance to ourselves.

The controversy of Jesus with the men of His own time was now fast drawing to a close. His *acceptable year* was about to end as a year of rejection. Their *day of visitation* was about to sink into a night of deeper than Egyptian darkness. We here listen to some of

our Lord's last appeals, in which the mightiest reserves of His reasoning and love were exhausted : appeals which, however, were not so much designed to arrest the ruin of this generation,—that being already sealed and expressly predicted,—as to prevail with the judgments and hearts of some of the less obdurate individuals in the mass. *What think ye ?* occurs in the middle of one of those remarkable Trilogies into which it pleased the Redeemer more than once to pour the passion of His soul, and in which the argument rises by degrees to its sublime climax. He exhibits before them in three discourses,—containing history, parable, and prophecy,—the sad scenes of their day of lost probation. The voice of John in the wilderness, with its clear and sufficient testimony to the Messiah, began their day. They had accepted his testimony in their consciences, and many of them had paid it a certain homage with their lips ; but they had, as a body, denied it in their lives. The morning of their day had been heralded by as clear and loud and general a call as ever came from above, sustained and sanctioned by evidences that were in the fullest sense signs from heaven. They never doubted that John's mission was Divine, until the Messiah whom he announced had testified of their sin. When Jesus detected to them their hypocrisy, their hatred of Him was reflected back upon His forerunner ; and John, who, like Jesus Himself, came in the *way of righteousness*, against whose character and whose testimony they had nothing to object, was not only forsaken by a capricious generation, like “children in the market-place,” but was vilified by a slanderous generation as an instrument of Satan. Meanwhile, publicans and harlots—our Lord reminds them—had kept better faith : they had repented of the riotous ungodliness of their lives, and had found their way into the kingdom of God, furnishing an example which it was the aggravation of these hypocrites' guilt that they did not afterwards follow. Thus, in the little parable of the two sons, the faithful Historian of their day, mourning over its loss as already foreseen, shows them, as in a mirror, how they had lost it. He constrains them to confess—virtually, at least, to confess—that the good appearances of the morning had been falsified during the day, that its vows had been broken and its pledges unredeemed ; while He adds His own complaint that the manifestations of His mercy to the vilest of the land had been wasted upon their hardened hearts : they *repented not afterward*. The gloomy evening of their day of visitation had now come : and what that evening would witness His third discourse depicts. In this, the most affecting of all His parables, He prophesies His own rejection and death, and their final doom. Nothing can be more sublime than the manner in which His picture glides out of parable into reality, by its pathos extorting sympathy from what remained of human in their hearts ; a sympathy, however, as they could hardly disguise from themselves, expressed at the expense of their own self-condemnation. Thus the *What think ye ?*

spoken in the middle of these three discourses, has in it the inexpressible tenderness of an appeal uttered consciously in vain; as if it were a prophetic soliloquy rather than an awakening question. But, as we have hinted, it was designed to touch all individual hearts that were still capable of thought and reflection. Relinquishing the mass to a ruin He could not avert, He never forgot His pursuit of the one sinner that might repent. How many there were who pondered His question to good purpose, and yielded themselves to the plea when the Pleader was gone,—to whom *He being dead yet spoke*,—the day of Pentecost may suggest to the hope of charity, but only the day of doom will declare.

The central parable served its purpose in that generation: it revealed the thoughts of many hearts among those who first heard it. And the same purpose it still subserves. The Lord constructed it in its exquisite simplicity for universal application. But when we reflect upon the meaning of these parables, we have an advantage which their first hearers had not: we have the full light of redemption poured upon them, and all the instruction of the Pentecostal Interpreter. The Cross lights them all up into their perfect life. It is only when thus viewed that the present parable yields its full meaning. We cannot understand this father and his two sons, until we introduce that other unmentioned Son through whose mediation alone the vineyard has been thrown open to man's labour; who gives back to the rebel the forfeited name of *son*, whose intercession continues the day of probation after the first act of disobedience, and through the secret of whose atonement the strange paradox is solved that repentance *afterward* should be called a doing of the Father's will.

When it is read under the Cross, this little parable is found to contain the whole sum of the Gospel, exhibited in a manner most impressive and suggestive. Here we have the first great principles of man's relation to God presented in few words. But we shall best appreciate the Lord's meaning in commending it to our thoughts, if we ponder it in the light of that one word *afterward*, which is the key to its interpretation. He bids us reflect upon the gracious mystery of a term of probation permitted to disobedience at the outset of life; He describes to us the solemn alternative according to which that aftertime may be turned to salvation or lost; and He shows us that, if well spent, it may entirely, in the estimate of Divine mercy, retrieve the day. Meditations on these points can never be unprofitable: they are especially seasonable during the remaining days of this waning year.

I. Applying the parable to the relations of man with God, we meet the fact that God's commands are given for a day of probation: a mystery which requires the atonement for its solution. The Saviour here represents the eternal Father as assigning to His children a duty that ranges over the day. His command is met by simple disobedience: in the former case, representing one great mass of His creatures,

the rebellion is wilful and avowed ; in the latter, representing all the rest, it is disguised under a mask of obedience, which, of course, can never deceive Him. He *sees* the disobedience in the heart of the latter, even as He *hears* it from the lips of the former. Yet He keeps silence ; as it were, goes His way, to allow His children time to review their purposes ; and forbears to take account of their rebellion,—in scriptural language, *winks at* it,—deferring the decision on their conduct until the end of the day. The rebellion is designedly represented as wilful and absolute : nothing can be more awful than the blank *I will not*, as transferred to men's dealings with God, except it be the cold malignity of the hypocritical *I go, Sir*. The Lord would have us mark well the meaning of His forcible words, as well as of His equally forcible silence concerning any anger on the father's part,—a silence suggesting the thought that all would depend upon the *afterward*. It was through a failure in probation that sinful man left the vineyard once ; and now that the vineyard is re-opened, a time of probation is given to him wherein to enter again or exclude himself for ever.

*What think ye ?* Many find here a primitive and tolerant doctrine concerning the goodness of the universal Father ; whose heart is too large to resent the waywardness of His children, who is supremely exalted above their caprices, and can never be moved from the tranquillity of His calm benevolence. In this parable, and its counterpart of the Prodigal Son, they think they see the true Gospel, in its pure original, before dogmatic inventions lowered it by the infusion of human passions. But men who in this way interpret the parables do not really *think* upon them at all : it is their prejudice, their pride, their thoughtlessness, that speaks in all such perversions. The very first instinct of pure thought revolts against the notion, that the Supreme Being can be insulted by the rebellion or mocked by the hypocrisy of His creatures, and remain unmoved. The notion of such a moral Governor of the universe has been rejected by the universal conscience of our race : it is easier to renounce the idea of a God altogether, than to reconcile the mind to the idea of a God who should permit a world of rebels to continue in their rebellion without some great secret to account for it. The world without revelation, or by the light of natural revelation, has ever been inquiring for and groping after the solution of this paradox. And we have it in the Gospel. Nor can we take a single step in our thinking until we have laid this at the foundation of all. The sacrifice of the Redeemer began the world's day : otherwise the first offence must have blotted out our race. So also the life of every transgressor is begun and continued under a law of forbearance which owes its existence to the atonement of Christ. This aftertime, granted to every man, is as much the fruit of our Redeemer's intercession as the offer of mercy is the fruit of His propitiation. And our first response to the Saviour's question must be to bless Him that He has obtained for us a second day of

probation ; to ascribe it to His atonement that our rebellion was not suffered to be our ruin, and that we may all have grace, the past being frankly forgiven, to do the will of God in a new obedience.

The father's silence, however, suggests another thought. In the parable the two sons are left to the working of their own minds, to the reflections which always haunt the human will, and argue with or solicit it. But in the great reality which the parable presents to our meditation, there is another secret which must be pondered. Our heavenly Father does not leave us to our own thoughts. The Afterward is filled with the striving of a Divine Spirit, the Spirit of this blessed Pleader Himself ; who is as unwearied in pleading *with* us upon earth, as He is in pleading *for* us in heaven. It is His function to follow these two sons, and solicit them to change their purpose. He points both to the gate of the vineyard ; and uses every argument to persuade the one to revoke the desperate *I will not* of his lips, and the other to repent of the disguised *I will not* of his heart. Only to persuade, however. The awful mystery of the will survives : throughout the day it remains inviolate to constraint, accessible only to persuasion ; as free in the later repentance as it was in the early rebellion. To the foolish thought of man this also often gives offence. He imagines that the God who created the human will must needs have the power to turn it at His sovereign pleasure ; he thinks it ought to be so, or that it would be a diviner solution of the difficulties of our probation if it were so. But our Saviour's parable does not on this point reason with us ; it simply suggests the only principle that is consistent with all facts ; and we cannot give a sound response to His appeal, *What think ye ?* without acknowledging and adoring the mystery of the striving grace of the Holy Spirit of God, who fills the longer or shorter Afterward of man's probation with the ceaseless operations of His grace.

*Longer or shorter* : here arises another most impressive thought. The mystery of Divine Providence follows hard on the mysteries of redemption and the Spirit's influence. Every man has his day allotted to him ; but not every man the same day, either in length, or in opportunity. To one there is appointed the long midsummer day, with its early dawn, its clear and steady sun, its slowly fading twilight. To another is appointed the short mid winter day, with its low light scarcely struggling out of its dimness, and soon swallowed up in early night. But to each it is the measure of time on which all eternal issues depend ; the only day for the vineyard, the kingdom of God, the doing of the Father's will. There is no one word more impressive, as it runs through the entire Scriptures, than *to-day* ; and there is no more impressive comment upon it than that appendage, *while it is called to-day*.

Here again man's perversion is ready, and that both theoretical and practical. On this point, also, he finds room for a comment of his

own, that is wiser than what is written. Man's probationary day in time has, in his vain imagination, a supplement between time and eternity; a supplement which multitudes openly assert as if revealed, and to which many fondly cling who reserve their thoughts in their own bosoms. The present parable silently rebukes this notion; which is contradicted also by the whole tenor of Scripture. Whatever support it may be thought to derive from a few isolated and dim intimations, the clear current of scriptural teaching, exhortation, and warning, lays the whole stress of eternal destiny upon the prudent use of the day of life upon earth. But the most common perversion of this truth is a practical one. Men act as if there were no uncertainty as to the length of their probation; as if what is commonly called the natural term of human life was to be theirs. On this lamentable supposition, they give the day, as it passes, to the vanities of time, resolving to reserve the evening of life to the preparation for eternity. But he who rightly reflects on the Lord's words, and bethinks himself that his own probation may, in the mysterious order of Providence, at any moment abruptly end,—that his sun of life may go down while it is yet day,—will never rest while the ends of probation are unsecured. He will never let the natural sun go down upon his path, outside the kingdom of God. As there may be only a step between him and the end of his probation, he will take care to make his refuge sure, at least; trusting to the mercy of God for time afterwards to labour. And it is a blessed truth underlying the parable, that to the resolute soul there is but a step also to that gate to knock at which, in the right spirit, is to receive admission, and to be eternally safe.

II. The heart of the parable, however, is not reached, until we consider the terse exhibition given by our Lord of the two classes of men who respectively use and abuse the term of probation.

Here it must be observed that He does not describe the conduct of all men and all classes of men; but singles out, for His purpose at the time, two characters, the contrast of which is the more forcible for being thus isolated from all others. He does not refer to the multitudes of those who begin life with rebellion, and urge their way through all the impediments of Divine grace to destruction. Nor does He refer to those better Pharisees who, amidst the general perseverance in hypocrisy, did repent of their deceitful professions, and followed the open sinners into the kingdom. Nor does He speak of those happy few—few, but never wanting—who yield at once to the first command of Divine grace, *I go, Sir*, and persevere to their lives' end in obedience. Nor does He speak of the multitudes whose lives are more or less a succession of lapses from one state into another, and who use interchangeably, at various times in their course, the language of the two sons. It is not the Lord's design to give illustrations of man's probationary history, drawn from all classes, but to define sharply and impressively two of the most typical, for universal warning and encouragement.

First, we have the refractory son, whose instant and reckless *I will not* represents the conduct of those who deliberately refuse to obey the commandments of God. The root of their character is that refusal. In other respects diversified, in that they are one. Their rebellion may be the loud and riotous rebellion that makes *I fear not God nor regard man* its watchword ; or it may be the more subdued, but not less resolute, resistance to Divine claims which omits the latter part of that clause, and keeps up appearances before the eyes of human observers. It may be the unblushing wickedness of those who trample on all decency, in their contempt of religion, of which the harlots of the Lord's discourse are the types ; or it may be the more refined and subtle impiety that carries on its iniquity in the dark, of which the publicans are here the types. The one thing common to both and to all is the wilful disregard of religion.

Of these our Lord says simply that they afterwards repented, and went. Their representative in the parable, at some part or other of the day, came to himself ; was struck with compunction that he had grieved his father, or began to dread the punishment that he would incur, or found the guilty want of occupation unendurable ; and went into the vineyard. Let us not fail to mark the emphasis of the expression : he *repented, and went*. He did not repent and despair, or despond. It was not the remorse that admitted no hope, or the terror that gave up all for lost. It was that honest vigorous repentance of which the Scripture everywhere speaks ; a repentance that lost no time in empty reflection, but instantly set about the work of amendment. Were we in our imagination to follow this young man in the parable, we should find him like his brother the Prodigal Son arising at once, and resolving to cast himself on his father's forbearance ; hastening to the vineyard, and making vigorous efforts to redeem the time ; revenging upon himself his past undutifulness and ingratitude ; and as earnest in his new obedience as he had been desperate in his early rebellion. In this he is the type of one great class of the children of the kingdom of God ; and a pattern for imitation to all who, like him, are arrested in the full course of a rebellious life. He represents the openly ungodly, who are as decided in their repentance as they had been decided in their sin ; and to whom, on their thorough repentance, the vineyard, through the mercy of God in Christ, accepted by faith, is ever thrown open.

Opposed to him is the obsequious son, who meets his father's commandment with a ready *I go, Sir*, but throughout the day went not. The Lord does not more closely describe him, or define his motives ; but marks that only which makes him a representative of a large class. The root of their character is the professed willingness to do the will of God, but the failure to do it. In other respects these also are diversified. There is the deliberate hypocrite, whose whole life is one studied mockery of God, whose conduct it is hard to-

reconcile with the possession of reason, and of whom, in the height of their irrational perfidy, there can be but few examples. There are the modified hypocrites, whose hypocrisy is, according to the original meaning of the term, a secret reservation ; who profess to obey God's commandments, but cunningly substitute commandments of their own, which, at length, they cheat themselves into accepting as true religion. But we may be sure our Lord did not design to omit another large and miserable class, whose profession has no positive hypocrisy in it, but who let irresolution and criminal indolence postpone for ever the performance of their vows. These are they who are always ready with their *I go, Sir* ; but who never really enter the kingdom, or work in the vineyard, or do the will of God.

The examples furnished by our Lord's generation are fair representatives of this class with its several varieties. Some perfect hypocrites there were, who accepted both John the Baptist and Jesus with every semblance of loyal submission to the will of God, while their hearts were full of the deadliest rancour against both. These *went out* to the Baptist's mission, but were *not* baptized of him ; these had *Rabbi* ever ready for Jesus, but were always plotting against His life. We cannot understand some passages in the evangelical narrative save on this supposition ; and this only will explain the awful severity of some of our Saviour's *woes*. But there were still greater numbers of those less malignant hypocrites whose guilt consisted in this, that they allowed their prejudices to get the better of their honesty, and failed to redeem their pledges because they found the new Teacher too severe. They said *I go, Sir*, to the Baptist, because he came as a new Elias to herald the Messiah ; but when his doctrine in its spirit and letter condemned themselves, they cunningly evaded its force, and went their way to forget their vows. They said *I go, Sir*, to Christ, so long as He came fascinating their carnal expectations by His miraculous works ; but when, in process of time, He began to pour His too searching light into the recesses of their own iniquity, they turned away from Him with the hatred of fear, and sought out many inventions to excuse their sin. But we find traces also of that other variety ; of those, namely, who were during the whole course of the Lord's ministry striving, but striving as it seemed in vain, to surrender themselves to His service, and to embrace His high and holy rule. No view of the great ministry is complete which omits this class ; a class profoundly interesting in themselves, and still more so as representing many in every age whose *I go, Sir*, pays its tribute to the Redeemer's sacred attraction, but whose aspirations remain for ever unrealized, little more than a beautiful but empty dream.

All, however, are united in one point : the day is spent and they are not in the vineyard. Their representative in the parable neither went at the first, nor did he repent afterwards of his not having gone. He neglected his own promise, and he was not moved by the conduct



of his brother. Such is our Lord's comment upon His own parable. The abandoned reprobates of the law had become the converts of the Gospel; their characters were changed by what none could deny to be the finger of God. But the hypocritical and self-righteous men of the generation had failed to learn the lesson which the Saviour thus strove to teach them: they had added to their original guilt that of resisting all the evidences of His power and goodness, as seen in the redemption of the most abject slaves of sin. Thus there remained no more that He could do for them. He had spent upon them all His resources of mercy. He had pursued their souls with an ardour infinitely more fervent even than that with which they had persecuted Him. And now He intimates to them that their day was gone. Their representative in the parable was not found in the vineyard at the close of the day. His early *I go, Sir*, his subsequent vacillations, his sighs after an obedience that he had not the heart to render, his long day of unattained aspirations, all end in one sad statement, *He went not*: a sentence much to be pondered by all who are self-convicted of resemblance to this most pitiable character.

III. This leads us to some reflections upon the Afterward, as looked back upon when all is over. The Redeemer affectingly speaks in the parable of the day as ended and spent. In His application to His hearers He continues the same strain; and His question, *What think ye?* might seem only to make them pronounce their own condemnation. But we must leave them to their righteous Judge; and consider the one lesson which our Lord commends finally to our thought. *Which did the will? They answered, The former.* This our Lord confirms, and thereby teaches us that on the right use of the Afterward the day really depends. But obviously such a doctrine as this demands to be very carefully stated and discreetly guarded.

The day in each case was decided by the aftertime. The early rebellion was never reckoned against the penitent: it was as if he had never refused: he *did the will of his father*. His day, whenever his true repentance began, was retrieved: it was a new day to him, in which he became an obedient son. On the other hand, it was the neglect to repent of the hypocrisy that condemned the other. *Ye repented not afterward*, our Saviour says: that is, Ye have failed to correct the early error by a subsequent repentance. The tone of the whole discourse gives us to understand that even then, at that last hour, the unhappy men on whose countenances were falling the shadows of eternal doom, might have repented of their long rebellion, and by the right use of the last remaining moments of the day redeemed the whole.

However obvious to perversion this doctrine may be, it is the very Gospel of our Saviour; and the penitent in the parable was in reality the type, not of one class of men only, but of all. And here we have the real reason why one only is mentioned as having *done the will*;

all who will ever be saved will be saved as the justified ungodly. This is the faithful saying, that will vindicate its truth for ever,—*to save sinners, of whom I am chief*. The Gospel shows us how the vilest who repent may retrieve their day. It gives the Redeemer a name that He never disavowed, *the Friend of sinners*. In this parable, He Himself permits us to interpret His words as meaning that the early subjects of His kingdom, the reclaimed of His own ministry, were almost or altogether of this class; *the publicans and the harlots entered in*. Here is the precious secret of the atonement: pardon on the ground of Christ's satisfaction for all the past; the beginning of a new day; all earlier rebellion forgotten; the *I will not*, though uttered ten thousand times, and confirmed by ten thousand forms of wickedness, *no more remembered*; and the penitent, believing remnant of the day made, in the interpretation of grace, and according to the infinite mercy of God's method of righteousness, worth the whole. Let the question *What think ye?* be asked in the light of this ever-blessed doctrine, and what is our response?

Man's foolish heart has always been too ready to abuse this grace unto licentiousness; there is a dark and subtle interpreter always waiting to mislead his thoughts. To that interpreter he is, alas! only too willing to listen, when he would persuade him to sin on during the day, that grace may abound in the evening. How many there are who are deliberately, and of set purpose, risking their eternal state on a repentance which they think will be in their power at any future time when they shall firmly resolve upon it; and who persuade themselves that the gate of the vineyard will stand wide open to receive them at the latest moment! Understanding well that mercy will alone admit to eternal life, and that one equal heaven will receive all who shall leave this life as penitents, they virtually resolve to evade the burden and heat of the day, to enter at last only and literally through grace, without any good works either going before, or accompanying, or following them. Their *I will not* they will hold fast until it shall be expedient to change it. As the end of the day will decide everything, their only thought is to see to it that it shall be said of them, as well as of earlier penitents, that they *afterward repented, and went*. This is the extreme type of perversion; the worst thought that can interpret the Saviour's parable. But there is a more refined perversion that acts negatively rather than positively. It is that of which they are the victims who spend their day with an irresolute *I go, Sir*, always on their lips, but never set themselves with all their hearts to do the will of God. These are generally influenced, much more than they confess, or perhaps know, by a subtle reliance on the mercy that will reign till the last moment of the Afterward, and which they think can never be denied to those who have desired it so much and so long. They do not make the desperate decision at once, because they know that grace is always waiting; or, rather, they would not dare to

leave the great issue undecided a single hour were it not for a secret dependence, so habitual as almost to paralyze their energies, upon a term of grace not yet near its close.

But our Saviour's parable, rightly thought upon, utterly rebukes this and every similar perversion. The more it is pondered the more impressively will it be found to plead against all such ungenerous and ruinous interpretations of His meaning. The penitent whose acceptance it speaks of repented, *and went to do the will of his father*. He is not represented as seeking and finding mercy because he had not obeyed at all; but as repenting in order that he might obey. We cannot resist the impression that our Lord intended us to regard him as *doing* the will of his father, although late in beginning to do it. The doctrine that a sinner may enter heaven after a life spent in rebellion, but closed by a death-bed repentance and a final act of faith, may indeed be sought in the infinite mercy of God, and found in some gracious sayings of His word. It was illustrated in the very hour of redemption, and is, therefore, eternally sacred; but it is not taught in this parable. The repentance which the Gospel commands is a repentance that is not only unto life, but unto holiness also; a repentance that seeks mercy for the past and strength for a future obedience, a repentance that longs for life to retrieve the past, and cries, *O spare me, that I may recover my strength, before I go hence*. Not to speak of the uncertainty of human life, and the solemn argument which that uncertainty enforces, the tone of the parable, rightly read, urges to an instant repentance and to an instant amendment. It speaks of a day through the mercy of God retrieved; of a new obedience animated by gratitude for past mercy; of an ardent desire to repair the errors of the past; and of a zeal that would fain attempt what, alas! is, in the literal sense, impossible,—to *redeem the time*.

It is another perversion to read this parable as teaching that, provided the day of probation ends well,—that is, ends in the enjoyment of God's mercy through Christ,—the objects of probation are fully answered, and that eternity will be the same to all alike. There is no passage of Scripture that can without violent perversion be made to teach that doctrine. If the term probation is rightly introduced into the Gospel, and if it has any meaning when introduced, then every penitent believer is forming a new character in Christ for eternity. He is not only working in God's vineyard, he is also cultivating his own; and if by a thorough repentance, a faith unfeigned, and a strong reliance on the Divine Spirit, he seek the glory and honour of religion as well as its shield and security, his eternal character, as well as his eternal safety, will be his appropriate reward. It is true that our Lord—in order to obviate another and an opposite error—has taught us all to expect a penny for the day alike. Most assuredly we shall all be equal debtors to His mercy, and enter life by the same title of

grace ; but He who will bring His reward with Him, and *give to every man as his work shall be*, will not blend His innumerable servants in one indiscriminate mass. There is not so much difference between the penny of the Lord's parable and our modern penny, as there will be between the relative wages that the Lord teaches His reapers to expect. Our parable does not warrant any further digression here ; but we cannot leave the subject without remarking, that while eternal security may be attained by the right use of any hour of the day's merciful Afterward, every moment of that aftertime lost is, in a certain sense, lost for ever.

And as a thorough repentance breathes its solemn desire to retrieve the day, hoping and even praying for time to renew the soul's full strength, so a thorough conversion to Christ fills the soul with eagerness to give Him in His vineyard and kingdom the utmost service of gratitude. There after all lies the secret of the difference between a late and an early repentance. It will be boundless bliss to escape from hell, and enter heaven through a gate that was at once that of repentance and of death ; to offer to the Redeemer in heaven a gratitude that had no time to speak or act its thankfulness on earth. But O for the richer bliss of a life spent in the blessed revenge of grateful, self-denying obedience and devotion ! Conversion in the early morning ; the long midsummer day *ploughing or feeding cattle* ; the tranquil evening spent in waiting girded at the Master's table ; and then—eternal rest ! This is the perfect Afterward. This is the *long life* with which it pleases God to *satisfy* some of His elect. And for such a long life it cannot be sin, though it may be in vain, to pray.

Every one who reads these pages is here brought face to face with the Redeemer. *What think ye ?* He asks us all. *Consider what I say !* He says to each. And He who asks your reflection will sanctify it to your good. If you are convicted of having the spirit of that elder son in your heart, saying, till this moment, *I will not !* your Saviour commands you, and gives you grace, to renounce your rebellion at once. Let it be your very next act to go straight to the gate of the vineyard, and knock in the name of Jesus for admission. It cannot be too late now : to-morrow that gate may to your soul be shut for ever. If the spirit of the younger brother has hitherto kept you irresolute, wavering, with an ever-renewed but unreal *I go, Sir !* on your lips, your Saviour once more commands you to repent of this long trifling with His name. He speaks to you in the tones of the most solemn warning : He charges you not to let another year close upon your barren resolves, lest He should put an end to your life of empty profession, and you perish with the *fearful and the unbelievers*.

May the Covenant-service of another year find the elder and the younger son—represented by many penitents of both classes—kneeling together at the altar of consecration !

W. B. P.