

OLD AGE.

BY

REV. E. BALLANTINE.

BLOOMINGTON, IND.:

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OLD AGE.

TWO DISCOURSES UPON THIS THEME;

DELIVERED

THE FIRST IN THE CHAPEL OF THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY,
THE SECOND IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA.

BY REV. E^{lisha} BALLANTINE,

EX-PROFESSOR OF GREEK IN THE UNIVERSITY, AND AUTHOR OF "CHRIST
HIS OWN WITNESS."

"And even to your old age I am He."—Isa. xlii. 4.

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OLD AGE.

I.—ADDRESSED TO THE YOUNG.

AT the request of one of my late and honored associates, and with the sanction of them all, I am here this afternoon to take part in these services. I have selected for a theme of remark "OLD AGE."

To the possible query why the subject of Old Age should be chosen for a lecture designed especially for young persons, an answer may be given in the form of a good wish that all and each of you, my young friends, may live to be old. If you do, this subject will be both a personal and a very practical one.

A man who has reached his sixty-fifth year may thenceforward be classed with the old. From that time he is passing the last stage of life, and is at a point from which the views of human existence have a character of their own. And as the Natural Bridge or the Falls of Niagara appear differently viewed from above or from below, as an Alpine scene has elements of beauty looked at from every position, but as seen from one particular stand-point combines more of these than from the rest, so the stand-point of old age commands, perhaps, more characteristic features of life than any other.

It may not be unprofitable, then, for you all to see how, from the position of old age, a man may look out upon his Past, his Present, and his Future.

And first, upon his Past.

His Past, to the old man, is the greater part of his life,

perhaps the whole of his active part. That, the active part of life, which to the young man is before, is to the old man all behind, and the two parties meeting together may compare their views. The contrast is striking,—there are such differing elements in the two views. The one view is Fiction, the other Fact; the one is Possibility, the other Reality; the one is Imagination, the other History; the one Aspiration, the other Experience. Let me not be understood as disparaging the landscape beheld from the point of view of the young. By no means. Those who are now old once stood there themselves, and were filled and thrilled, perhaps benefited, by the view.

What is a young man or woman worth who has no plans, no aspirations? The youth who does not *look forward* to life cannot be efficiently preparing for it. If his plans and expectations are possible, they may become real. Indeed, the imagined future of the youth is only a mosaic made up of other people's experience. The materials of fiction are facts, and the silvery mist which is spread over the whole future, softening and brightening it to the youthful heart, is calculated to excite it to high exertion effective of great results. Let the young, then, look forward; let them build their castles; but let them do it as sanely as possible.

The old, looking *back*, need no such caution. The views which present themselves of their past lives will, if they see rightly, be found to contain much to sober them, to chasten their self-esteem; yes, probably, much to mortify them, to humble them to the dust, to make them penitent and contrite, perhaps even to subject them to unavailing remorse. History is in this respect terribly different from anticipation. It is far clearer to the view, and it cannot be changed. Alas for the deep gnawings at heart of the old man, who yet cannot refrain from dwelling in thought upon some dark, infamous passage of his history, which he would, but cannot, blot out. There it stands, written plainly on the page. It stares at him; he shuts his eyes; but, as if written in raised letters, it meets his finger-

ends, it touches his forehead, it presses its words and facts upon his cheek and his heart. Nothing but a sweet sense of Divine forgiveness can change his misery to peace. An old age of remorse is the beginning of future perdition. Lay not up for yourselves, young friends, this provision for old age. Do you ask how this may be avoided? By being conscientious now and always; by honesty, and purity, and doing good; and these by means of the love of God and man.

But even without causing remorse, can the just and honest view of his past be to the old man otherwise than forbidding? 'Tis quite possible, my friends.

That old person has led a miserable life indeed who cannot discern, as he looks back upon it, first, the evidence and marks of a kind Providence ruling through it all, the proofs of a Heavenly Hand which, unseen at the time, was yet all the time ordering, preventing, providing, silently, mightily, graciously, securing for him great and good results; the hand, namely, of a Wise Father superintending the life and life-experiences of his child struggling here on earth.

And he has led a *poor life*, to say the least, who, being now old, cannot, on looking back, discern a course of useful industry, of energetic activity, directed to and productive of benefits to himself and others, good results immediate, and perhaps lasting for generations.

Perhaps, also, the old man, looking back, is permitted to recognize the coming of *new elements* into his life's experience, such as *repentance* and *love* to God and the Saviour, and these entering not as mere sentiments, but as principles of action, resulting in a *reformation of life*; and, accompanying these, a *joy* unknown before, namely, that of a *loyalty* and a *service* directed towards his God and Saviour; in short, the beginning to live for eternity. If these elements have existed, as they may, and do exist, in fact, in the case of many, as factors in the past of one's life, the views of that life from the standpoint of age cannot be altogether forbidding. Nay, suppose

that with these elements there appear upon review also their natural and proper consequences, lines of effort at self-improvement, and at doing good to others, benevolent and religious efforts for their eternal good, and, what many are permitted to see and know, manifest and blessed results of these efforts in the rescue of some, perhaps of many, from a life of godlessness, wickedness, and vice to one of purity and piety, and to companionship with themselves in all these sentiments and efforts. I tell you, young friends, if your lookings-forward to life are pleasant, if the pictures which your imaginations and fond hopes draw have their silver fringes, their golden linings, all of them as yet unreal, these lookings-back of the old and their views of their lives—now unchangeable history—have, with all their abatements arising from sin and short-coming, also *their* silver and golden linings, the creation, indeed, all of them, of a Divine Hand, but belonging really to the personal picture, and contributing rightfully and richly to the peace and joy of him who can say with the apostle, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” May you all in your old age have much of this blessed experience! So much in regard to the Past.

We next look at the old man in his situation at the time,—in his Present.

We see upon him the marks of age. And he is more or less affected by its power both in body and mind. Yet he is not necessarily wrecked, or even racked. He has probably less *elasticity* of thought and limb; but with body, mind, heart, and conscience well preserved, he is still a man. For I am not now speaking of the down-broken and imbecile, though such are not uncommon among the aged. Such are found even among the younger, shattered prematurely,—victims of disease, perhaps of vice. The old man, then, who has taken proper care of himself has a net-work of *good habits*, which, like the coat of mail of the old knights, protects him measurably from the onsets of bodily and mental disease and prolongs his vital energy. He has, too, a fund of *experience* and *observation* greater

than that of others by the greater number of his years, and all of it now available capital. There is a *maturity* both of principles and powers which makes them available to their utmost extent, and enables him to make much of a little time. With a well-stored *memory* and well-practised *judgment*, he is not so liable to be misled; and with *objects of thought* and steady effort, approved by time, he certainly need not be as yet either idle or useless.

Yet the aged have the right to withdraw from places of active duty. It is not well that their physical and mental muscle should be subjected to the constant or occasional strain which such places will bring upon them. Destined soon to leave this busy scene, it is appropriate for them to stop a little beforehand and address themselves to their situation. Nay, to the right-minded, the objects of active business, so far as they are merely worldly, *lose their interest* in great part as eternal things come nearer; and, unless personal or family necessity compel the contrary, the old find it pleasant to retire, and yield to others the places which they have held and their emoluments.

But, then, what shall they do? Join the crowd of idlers and busybodies? By no means. The man who has in former life been really active, usefully industrious, will have no inclinations of that kind. Ennui would oppress and crush him at once. It takes hard apprenticeship and long practice to endure idleness. So the man of industry, when old, will be industrious still. "But at what?" said a young man lately to your speaker. With no more examinations to pass,—the idea was,—no position to gain, no professional reputation to make, what motive for study or effort further? But are these the only objects and ends of study? Is not knowledge valuable for its own sake? Is not truth precious in itself? And are there not stores of golden thoughts laid up in books still unread, the treasures of the ages, lofty imaginings, holy aspirations of human souls with which it will be good to hold communion; and above all, divine revelations, often already read, but still

unfathomed, and yielding to right search most precious pearls of heavenly truth, and bringing their earnest students into communion with the holiest and the best, with angels and with God? Do you ask, then, What shall the old man do? Shall an *immortal*, having an undying mind, even before his short life is spent, *lack something to do*, because, forsooth, he needs no more to obey the bell-tap, write a sermon, or prepare an argument? He has learned but little, practically, who, with a measure of health and eyesight, and leisure, finds his time hangs heavy on his hands.

And the old man may yet serve his generation. Now, when worldly motives have less power, let him show the power of his moral and religious convictions to keep fresh and strong his past profession and character. Let him be like the well-built arch, which had at first a temporary support, but having received the keystone, and made to depend upon itself, does not settle the fraction of an inch. Let me say that as there is no sight more pitiful than an aged person greedy, discontented, morose, because worldly property and pleasures are slipping from his grasp, so there is no sight more pleasant, or even, if you please, more sublime, than that of him who parts easily with all these, and is yet quiet, cheerful, and kind, because, forsooth, he has other and unfailing resources, fountains of supply, hidden but high, keeping full and overflowing the streams of serene and quiet joy. The well-built ship, now finished but still on the stocks, suffers no disaster and scarcely a shock as the props beneath are falling one by one. Well-braced and strong within itself, it is ready for the moment when, the last stay removed, it shall by easy glide enter the element for which it is prepared. So the aged, ready for death, may await its coming with serene assurance.

We consider, thirdly, the old man's Future.

He has a Future,—and not the young only. And these two Futures may be compared without disadvantage to that of the aged; especially if the Future of the young is limited, so far

as they look at it, to the present life. If the Present of the old man, who when young chose as his only treasure and joy the things that are now crumbling to dust in his hands, is pitiful and bitter, then the Future of this same man must, as he looks at it, be dark and terrible indeed, with no mitigating element whatever. Such a Future, however, is not necessary for any one: we turn from it with a sigh and look to its brighter alternative.

You have all read, in early American history, of the party who, after long marches and many labors, reached at length the summit of the Andes, and beheld, first of Europeans, the boundless western prospect which that position commanded. Nearest to them in the view, and almost beneath their feet, was a narrow strip of territory consisting of ridges, gorges, and torrents, crowded together, all descending rapidly to the near coast-line, and then the waters of the Pacific stretching off widely into the invisible. It was a time for cheers, and shouts, and triumph. A crucifix erected on the spot was the appropriate memorial of the hour. Let that rough strip of territory represent, if you please, the piece of life yet remaining to the aged one. Let its surface be jagged, its descent rapid, its torrents boiling and plunging, its only pathways on toppling crests; it is also narrow; it will soon be past; and in the mean time it furnishes from every point a commanding view of the blue, quiet waters beyond. And these are so broad, so level, so peaceful, so near, they make the traveller forget the few rough steps which are still before him. And has he in hand the trusty Alpine staff of Faith in Jesus Christ, by which alone he could have reached and passed in safety that summit now behind him? If so, he can travel the remainder of the descent without danger and fear. "In their hands they shall bear thee up, that thou dash not thy foot against a stone." "And even to your old age I am He, and even to hoar-hairs will I carry you. I have made and I will bear, even I will carry, and I will deliver you." These are words of God.

Are we immortal beings? and has the aged man done his life-work humbly and conscientiously, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of his faith? Is the Pacific Ocean of Eternity just before him? What is there, then, in death, though it be near, to terrify or even discompose him? He will indeed soon disappear from these material scenes. But watch him as he is making his last descent, as he reaches the shore, as the rippling waters already play with his feet. Or, to drop the figure, look and listen as, on his death-bed, he is gradually sinking. Hear his few broken words, catch the glance of his eye, the expressions of feeling glittering there and playing over his face. You will see that, whatever else may be failing, his personality, his conscious identity, his traits of mental and moral character, his affections, his religious fear and love and trust, *are all there*, and there, too, in all their undiminished strength, perhaps in more than their youthful vigor. All namely, that constitute the man, all save his crumbling tenement of clay, continues, substantial, compact, and instinct with a life which defies death's greatest power. Shall that man the next moment cease to be? Shall that soul, with all its matured powers and grace, *go out* as the spent lamp-wick? Be sure that, if you could rend the veil, and be endowed with spiritual light, you would see him still, and more alive than ever. We refrain from following his new, strange, and blessed experiences in that deathless, painless, sinless, perfect world.

In conclusion, I will say :

First. That Old Age, though it is now far off from you who are young, is continually coming nearer to you. Its onward march is silent, but uninterrupted ; it is slow, but never delays. A few days ago you reassembled in this place just as you have done perhaps ten times before. The only, and yet a real difference is, that you are one term farther on in your course. The spring season is now opening just as did the last ; 'tis a year farther on in your lives. This morning dawned as did yesterday ; but you are a day nearer to death than you were then.

Old Age comes on with every tick of that clock. It moves visibly with that pendulum. You may see it walking with the second hand of your watch. By and by it will reach you—and lay its hand on you—unless, God so ordering, Death shall anticipate it and, with ruder shock, snatch you from its grasp. Look, then, at this certainty, young as you are.

Prepare for old age. Provide good habits, a good conscience, love for your kind. Secure the pardon of your sins, and a gospel hope of heaven. Prepare for old age by preparing for the eternity beyond it. Remember that “the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed;” while “the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” Take as your counsellor throughout your life the Bible.

I have thus tried to show you how, if you are permitted by the Giver and Preserver of life, you may spend a useful, quiet, and happy old age.

And with such an old age, by God’s grace within your reach, I repeat the wish with which this discourse was begun,—May you all live to be old!

II.—ADDRESSED TO THE OLD.

IN the previous discourse the subject of Old Age was presented in general. We will now pursue a special part of the subject, and illustrate the matter of *Piety in Old Age*, and endeavor to obtain light upon it from particular cases in the Bible. We take for this purpose those of Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna.

Luke is the sacred writer who tells us all that we know of these persons. He speaks of them all in connection with his account of the birth of Jesus Christ. This gives a unity to their several histories and furnishes us a stand-point from which to study them.*

As to their time of life, Luke says that Zechariah and Elizabeth "were now well stricken in age," and of Anna, that "she was a widow of about fourscore-and-four years." The advanced age of Simeon is implied in his story. They were all among the oldest people of their day, and therefore deserve the special attention of the aged now. They are "ensamples to us," and their history is "written for our learning."

In endeavoring to learn what we may about the Piety of these aged people, we will study, in order, their Religious Faith or Creed, their Religious Spirit, their Religious Life, and their Religious Blessings and Joys.

And, first, their Religious Faith or Creed. It was, in short, that of Jewish Orthodoxy. I will mention its two fundamental points, as comprehending all the rest.

The first of these was, *The Authority of the Hebrew Scriptures*

* Luke i. 5-20, 67-79; ii. 25-32, 36-38.

(our present Old Testament), as the *Word of God*, in all matters of religious faith and practice. Upon this point these people, in common with all their race of that generation, had not the shadow of a doubt. We hear Zechariah saying, "As he (that is, God) spake by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began. To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Abraham." These and other words of Zechariah show an implicit faith in the Scriptures as being God's word. Such a faith involves the reception of all the doctrines which the Old Testament plainly teaches, and of all its commands as binding on the conscience and the life. All that is related of these four persons shows the same fixed conviction, the same unfaltering faith in their holy book. The source of their religious beliefs was not tradition, or superstition, or philosophy, but Divine Revelation. The religious creed of the Jews contained all the great truths with which we, too, are familiar, except those distinctively Christian, and even these also in the germ. For,

The second great point of Jewish Orthodoxy to be noticed is the doctrine of *the Messiah to come*. This may be said to have been the central article of the Jewish faith. From the first promise made to Abraham,—“In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” which seed, Paul says, was Christ,—Jewish faith and piety looked forward to “Him who was to come.” The words of Zechariah, already quoted, show this in his case. Elizabeth, his wife, Simeon, and Anna express the same faith and expectation. Others also whom Anna knew “looked for Redemption in Israel.” Joseph of Arimathea “waited for the kingdom of God.” Of the whole nation Paul says, “To which promise (*i.e.*, of the Messiah) our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come.” Even the Samaritans, half heathen and half Jewish in their faith and practice, “knew that Messias cometh, and when he is come he will tell us all things.”

We rightly, then, sum up the Religious Faith of these four Jewish people in the two points, Belief in the Jewish Scriptures, as God's word, and Belief in a Redeemer to come. It was faith in a Divine Revelation and in a Divine Redeemer,—the best possible elements of all Religious Belief, and without which it must be utterly inadequate.

We see that the religious faith of these persons was very strong. They had imbibed it in childhood; it had grown with them to maturity; they had carried it through the years of their earlier and riper manhood and womanhood; and they had brought it with them, unshattered, unweakened, to their old age. Their faith wore well. It did not grow old with their bodies, but was now young and fresh as ever; and it was a light to their feet, a staff to their hands, a foundation of rock for them to build their house upon, which no floods or winds could shake. The sceptic's horizon is all uncertainty; especially when he is old all is darkness above, around, and before him. But to the aged believer in the Bible and in Jesus Christ there is a light shining "above the brightness of the sun," and "it shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

We look, secondly, at the Religious Spirit of these Bible examples of Piety in Old Age.

We learn from their story that they had not only the letter but the Spirit of true Faith in God. They not only "received the truth," but "received it in the love thereof." It is very possible to rest in the letter while lacking the spirit altogether. Many Jews were thus deficient in the time of Christ: they "said and did not." Paul speaks of those who "rested in the law," and "made their boast of God," and "knew his will," and yet lived in disobedience. In our day, also, many people, orthodox in faith, have little or none of the spirit of piety. Many aged people, alas, are of this description. There is nothing, my friends, more dead than a dead orthodoxy, or more damaging and dangerous to the soul. Mere orthodoxy is a scaffolding without any edifice being built up by its means; it

is a temple without its altar and its worship; it is a body from which the living spirit is gone, a skeleton which is a sarcasm upon the form, and beauty, and life of real piety. It deceives and pleases neither God nor man,—none except its blinded holder. The faith of the four aged saints whom we are now studying was a living faith and one working by love. Hear their words, look at their acts, and learn the spirit and feeling which breathes in all. Heartiness, earnestness, humility, gratitude to God, praise to God in the highest style of the ancient psalms, and mutual gratulations break out from their full hearts. They can be fired and be all aglow with religious emotion. Evidently they had not before this been strangers to strong and lively religious feelings; these appear too naturally in them to be entirely new. They were familiar with holy joys, and, doubtless, also with deep and sacred sorrows. I infer this from the times and events through which they had lived. These very persons had seen the close of the Maccabean dynasty, with which, sixty years before, the civil independence of the Jewish people ceased forever. Pompey and his legions crushed all opposition beneath their feet; and when that proud Roman, violating the religious feelings of every Jew, walked into the temple, and, drawing aside the sacred veil, pressed sacrilegiously into the Holy of holies, a shriek was heard, I reckon, and a wail, the like of which has not often been heard on earth. Especially the pious ones were afflicted. They could not see—what was, however, true—that these very events were preparing the way for the true Redemption of Israel. Then came the long reign of Herod, who with the profession of a Jew had the heart of a brute and the hand of a savage, desolating by murder even his own house and bed. Deeply tried these good people and others like them must have been! Did God, they asked, “remember his own elect?” Was he not “slack concerning his promise?” And now will they, thus tried, endure, so that “when the Son of man cometh he shall find faith on the earth?”

My friends, the history before us gives the answer. It shows to us these believers in God's promises, now grown gray with waiting, still looking for the promised One. Their whole hearts were bound up in their faith. Oh ! a blessed thing that is in human hearts, strong faith in God's work. It enables him who has it to endure the wear and tear of earth's struggles and disappointments. It holds the soul steady, as the strong cable fastened to the well-planted anchor does the ship, enabling it to ride out safely the night of darkness and storm. To such a living faith and piety, and only to such, the morning will surely come at last, if not in this world, then all the more gloriously in the next. Let us learn from these examples that the soul must be *alive* in its religion, must burn and glow with the spirit and affections proper for the child of God. The body may decay, the intellect may be enfeebled, but the truly pious may, and often do, exhibit, even in extreme old age, an undiminished strength of religious affections ; more like to heaven as more near.

We will look, thirdly, at the Religious Life of these aged people. And I mean their outer life, as we have already considered their inward spiritual life.

The outer is the outflow of the inner. "The good tree brings forth good fruit." We shall find in the present case that old Scripture fulfilled, "They (the pious) shall still bring forth fruit in old age."

And let the old note carefully the record ; for this is God's way of instructing us in our duty and our privilege.

The aged pair, Zechariah and Elizabeth, till now childless, had, by mutual affection and confidence, been everything to each other. Luke tells us that "they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." They sympathized entirely in their religious feelings and practice, and they were now spending their old age in united faith and fidelity towards God. Friends, there is a purity, and excellence, and serenity in the life of a

loving, pious, aged couple bordering on the life of the blessed in heaven. Zechariah was a priest. Twice in the year, and for a week each time, his office called him from his country home to the sacred duties of the temple. We see him in the story thus engaged. His lot at this time is to burn the incense. Look at him, the aged Aaronic priest, as, just like the long line of his predecessors, with the censer in his hand, he enters the house of the temple, the holy place, "wherein was the golden candlestick" with its seven burning lamps, and "the table" with "the shew-bread," and the golden altar standing immediately before the veil. Upon that altar he places the censer with its smoking incense, the symbol of the prayers of all saints. Doubtless he then prayed himself, standing alone before God; for it was "the hour of prayer," and the people also standing without in the court "were praying at the time of incense." Among them at that very time, probably, were Simeon and Anna; for Luke says that the former was "just and devout,"—that is, much in devotion,—and Anna "departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." Elizabeth, in her little home in the country village, like Daniel long before at Babylon, joined at the same hour with the devotions of the temple.

It is manifest that these aged people made much of the worship of God, both public and private, were faithful in these services as well as in the other duties of religion, spending much time in worship.

The words of Luke saying that Zechariah and Elizabeth "were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless," not only certify all we have said, but also show that they were conscientious and faithful in their duties to men. They made no selection of duties, but conscientiously performed them all. Such was their Religious Life. What is said of Simeon and Anna, their love and trust, and devotion, and also their being favored with direct communications from God, warrants us to believe

the same also of them. Their Faith and their inner and outer Life were in high harmony.

The fourth point to be noticed in the Piety of these old people was its Joy and Blessedness.

The history of all the happy religious experiences in their lives is not given us: only that of one inpouring into their cup of joy which made it run over. It was their experience in connection with the birth of Jesus, the coming of the Christ into the world.

I have already had occasion to say that the expectation of the Messiah was a prime element in Jewish faith and piety. It was important and precious to each individual in proportion to his spiritual attainments. Jesus says, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." And again he said, "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things that ye see and have not seen them, and to hear the things that ye hear and have not heard them." Peter speaks of the old prophets as "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom," he says, "it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you." Paul also says of the Old Testament saints, that they "died not having received the promise, but were persuaded of them and embraced them. God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Every pious Jew inherited and cherished this hope long deferred, this longing expectation of the Christ. In the hearts of the four aged saints of whom we now speak that desire had long burned, only increasing in intensity with their years. And now at length the fulness of time had come when this expectation was to be realized, when this desire was to be gratified. The great announcement was first made to Zechariah. It was, as we have seen, when he was in the temple alone burning incense in the holy place. The angel Gabriel—

the same one who, more than five hundred years before, had given to Daniel the most distinct revelation of the time of the Messiah's coming—now appeared to Zechariah standing on the right side of the altar where the smoking incense was, and told him that a son should be born to him of his wife Elizabeth who should be the forerunner of the Christ now soon to come. At the expiration of his week of service Zechariah, going home, made known the heavenly news to his wife. About the same time, probably, the aged Simeon, now expecting daily to die, is told by revelation that "he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Judge of the thrill of joy which these announcements would cause in the hearts of these aged saints. Within two years the great promises were fulfilled. Elizabeth's words to Mary, who made a visit to her, show the deep joy of her soul. And when her son was born, Zechariah first used his now recovered power of speech in sublime strains of joyful gratitude. When Mary presented *her* child in the temple, Simeon, informed by the Spirit, recognized in the babe the coming One, and thus found God's promise to him fulfilled. He saw with his eyes the Lord's Christ. There is no such interesting passage in human history outside of the history of Jesus himself. The old Simeon stood there, representing all the believing pious Jews of all the generations before him, all who had looked and longed for the Messiah. The faith and hopes and longings of them all were, as it were, concentrated in his own soul. And he now saw the One desired of all. Not doubting in his heart, but exulting in his assured faith, acting for the covenant people, and especially for the pious of all the ages, he took the child in his arms, expressing his faith, his love, and his gratitude. In him the chosen people accepted its Messiah. Did ever the rapture of joy rise higher on the earth? And did joy ever have a greater cause, a better occasion? Simeon's highest earthly wish is now fulfilled. There is nothing more to make him wish to live. He is ready to exchange earth for heaven. He "blessed God and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant

depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Such joy the sight of Jesus can give to the believing, pious soul. Just then Anna, the prophetess, also came into the temple, and learning the facts, and sympathizing in the joy and exultation of her friend, she too "gave thanks unto the Lord," and in the fullness of her soul "spake of" the child to all those of sympathizing spirit.

These happy experiences of these four aged saints show us, dear friends, that old age may be made very happy, may be as familiar with high and lasting joy as younger years can be. The case of Simeon shows that the joy of the aged saint may even be so near akin to that of heaven as to cause the soul to look with desire and confidence to the heavenly bliss as its sure and only appropriate sequence. The highest and holiest earthly joy passes easily and naturally into the heavenly.

We must not fail to note the important fact that the centre and source of this religious joy of these aged persons was Jesus the Christ. It illustrates the great truth that he, Christ, is the true and only source of the highest and enduring happiness of men. He says himself, "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst," and to his disciples, "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Nothing else can be substituted for this source of true joy. Men "forsake this fountain of living waters and hew out to themselves cisterns," but they "can hold no water." The time is near to the aged, or has already come, when they must say of earthly enjoyments, "I have no pleasure in them." Then those who are earthly-minded will have no joys left them. They become discontented, unhappy, morose, a burden to themselves and their friends, and a dishonor to religion. But those who believe, trust in, and love Jesus the Christ, when old may have their cup of joy running over, and, as Jesus says, "springing up into everlasting life."

This joy in Christ and his salvation, let the aged remember, will be in exact proportion to the strength of their faith and

the warmth of their love to him. The cases which we have been studying show this. Without their faith and love they would not have been made happy by the coming Jesus. Herod was not made happy thereby, nor the wicked and worldly-minded Jews, nor the formal, self-righteous Pharisees. Would we, then, be happy in old age, we must live as those saints had done,—believing, loving, obeying, and longing for him who is our Redeemer as well as theirs.

Do you say, Jesus can be born but once, and therefore no others can have the same joy as Simeon had and Anna and the rest? Remember the words of the angel to the shepherds of Bethlehem: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." And Simeon said that Jesus was given for "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel." We too, then, may share in the same joy which at that supreme moment filled the hearts of Simeon and the rest.

Let us notice as a fact of special interest in the surroundings of the Word made Flesh this circle, this quartette of aged people, thus brought into near relation to Jesus at his birth. It does not seem to us to be an essential part in the programme of events. It might, to human judgment, have been wanting without essential loss; but not so did the matter appear to Divine Grace and Thoughtful Love. God's thoughts of love "are higher" than ours, "as the heavens are higher than the earth." He cares for aged saints, and he has illustrated that care divinely in this arrangement, providing for the old, too, a place and a part in the scenes before, at, and after the birth of Jesus. "And even to your old age I am he." Those venerable four represent almost, to our eyes, the privilege of the aged in blessings procured for men by the Incarnation of Christ.

Nor is it unworthy, finally, to notice that of these four representative persons thus brought so near to the person of Jesus two were men and *two were women*. Is there no significance

here? Let us take it as a prophecy of the elevation of woman by the Gospel. The fact was an earnest of Paul's inspired announcement that "In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one." From the birth of Jesus, throughout his life, at his death and resurrection, women acted a prominent part, and obtained gracious recognition and signal favor. Be comforted, then, ye aged Elizabeths and Annas. You may be weak in body, poor in estate, friendless, sick, even bed-ridden, sinking down to death: Still love and trust, and "rejoice in Christ Jesus;" for you are dear to him. Thus await the time of your departure hence, expecting to go and be with him forever.