

The Man Who Said He Would

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TO THE
REV. S. C. DICKEY, D. D.,
AN HONORED SERVANT OF GOD, THIS BOOK
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

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Introduction.

FOR the suggestion of the outline of this book I am indebted to the pastors of the churches in Middletown, Ohio, and for permission to use the same to the Rev. W. Hamil Shields, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church.

This message is sent forth with the prayer that God may help us all to lay hold upon Him who will enable us to fulfil and perform our resolutions.

The Man Who Said He Would

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WHO SAID HE WOULD—AND DID N'T.

Texts: Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.—MATTHEW 26 : 35.

Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man.—MATTHEW 26 : 74.

IT would not be possible to imagine a greater contrast than that which is presented in the reading of these two texts of Scripture. In the one we are surrounded by that peculiar kind of atmosphere which always attends a confession of Christ, and we find our hearts glowing as we too say with Peter: "Dear Lord, this is exactly our own thought. We would die for thee a thousand times,

if that were possible, rather than deny thee once." In the experience of the second text we are plunged into the depths of darkness. We find ourselves shuddering as we say, "If the man who but a little time ago said he would die rather than deny Christ can curse and swear and say he knows him not, what hope is there for any of us?"

There are but thirty-eight verses between these two experiences, all of which leads me to say that we must walk carefully in the midst of this sinful and adulterous generation, for we who are praising Christ to-day may be crucifying him to-morrow, if for a little moment we take our eyes away from him.

In James the third chapter, the eleventh and twelfth verses, we read: "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh." Yet in these two texts which I have quoted we have an illustration of the bitter waters and the

sweet coming forth from the same lips, for it is the same man that is described by both the texts.

I do not know in any part of the Scriptures a better illustration of great contrast. The pendulum which swings one way and thrills us as we hear the words of loyalty of this disciple of Christ, swings quite as far the other way, and we are plunged into despair when we find the same man denying with oaths that he ever knew him.

We are all of us familiar with Stevenson's book, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"; yet this story is no illustration of the man whose experience I here portray, for Peter was not dishonest, neither was he hypocritical, but there were two Peters speaking here. He himself speaks of the "hidden man of the heart," and Paul describes our two natures, one of which is ours in natural birth, and the other ours because of regeneration. In every one of us, if we are Christians, these two natures are quite as distinct as our two hands. To live in the flesh is at the cost of the

spirit, while to live in the spirit is at the cost of the flesh; and these words of Scripture above quoted present us an illustration of the fact that any one of us may come to the place of denial if we turn our eyes away from Christ and encourage within us that which is basest.

It would be well for us to learn, if possible, the uncleanness of the human heart. The Old Testament declares it to be "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," while in the New Testament we read, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7: 21-23). You might be incensed if I should make this observation myself, but when God makes it we can only bow our heads in shame and say, "Alas, this is too true!" Peter meant what he said in the first Scripture; he was not a hypocrite. Hypocrisy was as foreign to his

nature as anything could possibly be. He never could play the hypocrite; when he tried it, he made a dismal failure; yet this man, who is naturally honest and really courageous, comes before us as a great warning, and we look and grow afraid as we say, "If Peter falls, who then can stand?" We, too, have made certain promises to Christ and we have failed; and, when I present to you the man who said he would and didn't, I am but painting for you your own portrait; at least, portraying your own past experience.

I. SOME NOTES OF WARNING.

First, let us learn that great promise in the Christian life will not keep us from falling. Peter was one of the chosen three; he was with Jesus in the home of Jairus, on the mount of transfiguration, and in the Garden of Gethsemane; yet he fell. Let us not imagine, because we may be exalted in Christian service, that therefore there is little chance of our denying Christ; even the

minister of the gospel, the officer in the church, the superintendent of the Sunday-school, and the faithful teacher of to-day may deny Christ to-morrow, if for a moment the eyes of faith are taken away from him and there is the least disposition or tendency to rely upon one's self.

Second, let us also learn that our danger is not where we are weakest; it is because we have forgotten this that oftentimes we have fallen into despair. Peter's characteristic was honesty, and yet he fell into deceit; Peter's nature was courageous, and yet he gives an exhibition of cowardice; Job was a most patient man, and yet became impatient. Do not say that you will not fail at this point or that because there is your strength, for in the consciousness of strength Satan may overthrow you. I have found myself saying that I was quite sure that I should never fall into sin so far as temptation to drink was concerned, but I have studied Peter only to realize that the man that thinketh he

standeth ought to take heed lest he fall. The chances are that you will never fail at your weak point, but rather where all along the journey of your life you thought you would stand, if you are to fail at all.

Third, there are two dangers before us in the struggle in life, and the first comes from without from our great adversary, the devil, whose personality I am sure is unquestioned. He does the work of a person, and many of us have felt in all our struggles with him that he is vastly more than an influence. There are two ways in which he works. In one he is described as a roaring lion, and in this respect is not so much to be feared, for in his roaring we may detect his presence, and, realizing his nearness, we may flee away from him.

A man staggered into my presence the other day, and told me that he had lost everything; reputation, home, peace, and even his soul; and his very misery was but the sounding forth of the roar of the lion. That man who has broken the

heart of his wife and is himself in despair because he feels himself beyond hope is but another roar of the lion.

But the other way in which he works is much more dangerous. When the Master was speaking to Peter of the work of the adversary, he said, "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired you that he may sift you as wheat." Those of you who are familiar with the sifting of the husbandman know that he sifts the wheat that he may separate it from the chaff and the dirt; but Satan's sifting is of quite another sort; he sifts that he may separate the wheat from the chaff and the dirt, and keeps only that which is refuse. Alas! he has been sifting some of us. We have lost our honesty and our zeal and our faithfulness and our spirit of loyalty; these things have gone from us without our scarcely knowing it, and we are day by day having less and less of the wheat and more and more of the chaff, and there is danger ahead.

The second great obstacle against which we must strive is from within.

Man's worst enemy is himself; so the Scripture is right when it declares that he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city. Outward sin is just the cropping out of an inward condition. There is a difference between sin and sins. It is the same difference that we find between the root and fruit. Let us not find ourselves smiling at little sins, passing them over with indifference; for, as a rising temperature in a fever patient tells of an alarming condition, so the commission of sins tells of the weakness of the human heart. It was not just an impulse with Peter to deny his Master; if so, his sin might have been more excusable. We have all of us found ourselves suddenly in sin, and I believe that because of our being taken unawares and tripped up by our adversary our Master is willing to show us special consideration. But with Peter all his sad failure was just a natural outcome of his self-consciousness and pride, his being headstrong and following afar off; and that is the trouble with the most of us.

We have failed at this point without being alarmed, when suddenly we are face to face with an awful transgression which all but wrecks our hopes for the future.

The sea-wall of Holland falls not because of the shock of the billows, for the waves have broken against it for years; but because a little stream has percolated through the foundation and undermined it. The strong oak in the forest goes down, not because of the tempests, for it has locked its branches with the arms of the storms for years and has not fallen; but it is down because the heart of it is decayed. God save us from little sins, for these are but the precursors of a coming wreck.

II. WHY HE FAILED.

It is necessary that we should enlarge a little bit on the cause of Peter's failure, and explain, if we can, why he said he would and did n't.

First, he was self-confident. The most confident swimmers are in the greatest danger of drowning; the most conceited

drivers oftenest overthrow the coach. I know of a man who was rescued from the horrible pit and really had his feet established upon the rock. He was restored to his former position of usefulness and power, and said again and again to me, "I shall never fail again," and he was like a strong man rejoicing to run a race; but I knew that he would fail, and the other day the tidings came that he was once more shipwrecked, hopeless and helpless, plunged into the depths of despair.

God knows you best, and he has written in large letters in his book, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," and Paul learned this lesson when he said, "When I am weak, then am I strong."

Second, he was with the enemies of Christ. It is supposed that both Peter and John entered into the presence of Jesus at the time of his trial. Peter had a chance of either going straight up to the Master or lingering with the servants about the fire, and he made the sad mis-

take of doing the latter. If he had stood close to Jesus, his promise would have been kept, and he would have died rather than deny his Lord; but the old Scotch woman was right when she said, "He had nae business among the flunkeys." You cannot stand in the presence of the enemies of Christ without some distinct mark to show that you are a Christian. There are many of us in our business who are obliged to associate with the people of the world, and it is possible for us to go to the very brink of hell, if need be, without even the smell of fire upon our garments, if we boldly take our stand for Christ and proclaim our allegiance to him; but, if there is the least disposition to shrink back from this, there is danger.

Third, he made little of being near to Christ. When Jesus took the chosen three into the Garden of Gethsemane, and then staggered away into the gloom of the night as if he were already bearing the weight of the world's woe, he bows in prayer, and then, rising with blood-marks upon his face, he goes back to his

disciples for just a word of sympathy from him who had said, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee," and finds him asleep. To be occupied with Christ is the secret of preservation ; to be longing for the world is the sign of weakness and an indication of the fact that we do not know him. What a comfort it would be if we could take Christ into our homes, bow at his feet, reach up and touch his hand, listen to his voice, and what a joy it is to know that this is exactly what we may do, for in the person of the Spirit of God he is here to-day, and, alas ! in his presence we have allowed ourselves to fall asleep and to grow indifferent. If one would but walk with his eyes fixed upon Christ, it would be all but impossible to stumble and fall.

III. HIS RETURN.

The greatest encouragement we have in the study of this man who said he would and didn't is that he turned back again to Christ, and this was all because his faith failed not. His courage failed

him ; his self-respect failed him ; his good reputation had failed ; but his faith was like an anchor, and just as we have seen a boat tossed to and fro by the waves, and yet not overthrown, because the anchor held, so Peter's faith gripped him to Christ, and so may ours hold us to Him that cannot be moved. When we think of Peter falling, we wonder who can stand ; yet, when we remember how he ran back to Jesus, when he looked at Jesus how he was transformed by the power of Christ until he rebuked the very men that crucified his Lord, and how he wrote his epistles, there is hope for every one of us.

IV. SOME OBSERVATIONS.

First, man's usefulness ordinarily springs out of some great recovery. We have but to remember the story of David and also this account of Peter, which proves this statement.

Mr. S. H. Hadley, of the old Water Street Mission, rescued twenty years ago from the awful curse of intemperance, by

his very fall has been given a sympathy for lost and dying men that is almost superhuman; and he has gone up and down the streets of New York like an angel of mercy, whispering hope to every downcast, discouraged soul whose attention he could gain. I think I know why Peter was chosen to preach. As a matter of fact we should hardly allow him to preach in these days, shame upon us for the truth of this statement!—but Jesus lets him preach because of the fact that no one could tell him that he had fallen so low that he could not repent, that he was too weak to be helped, or that he was too hopeless to be saved. The man who spat in Christ's face might say, "But, Peter, I spat upon him;" and the one who smote him with a rod could say, "I brought the blood from his blessed face;" and the one who thrust his heart through with a spear, "I thrust him through and through with this spear of mine; can there be hope for us?" and Peter could say: "But you did not know him, and I did; and I denied him, and I have been forgiven.

He met me on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and brushed away every thought of my denial, and took me back again into the embrace of his loving arms ; so there is hope for every suffering one."

Second, in this story we get a fresh glimpse of the Saviour. When we think of him as the God of Abraham, he is the strength of his people ; and as the God of Jacob he has power to change and transform the life ; as the God of Elijah he answers prayer ; as the Saviour of Thomas he deals with doubt ; and as the Saviour of Paul he is the helper in every time of trouble and of need, even for those whose minds are the greatest ; but as the Saviour of Peter he is an encouragement to all who have wandered and fallen.

A ministerial friend of mine said that on one occasion he was preaching in a certain church in the afternoon, and after the service a gentleman asked him whether he would not come to his house and take supper. He accepted the invitation, and as they were about entering the house the host said : " You are the first person who

has been invited to break bread in my house for seventeen years. I have an imbecile son, and I treat him just as if he had his reason, and I have thought that it would not be pleasant for visitors in the home, and so I have not invited any ; but something that you said in your sermon to-day made me think that you would not mind it, and so I asked you to come." My friend expressed his sympathy with the father, and said he was very glad indeed to accept the invitation. When it came time for the meal, the full-grown son was led in like a little child, and in all things during the meal the father and others ministered to him as if he were still an infant.

When the supper was finished and they had gone into another room, the guest asked the father whether his son had always been in that condition. And the father said: "No, indeed. When he was a child, he was one of the brightest boys that ever lived ; but when he was about six years old he was afflicted with a terrible disease ; and, although his body re-

covered from it, his mind was gone. And now for seventeen years he has been just as you have seen him to-night."

The minister said, "What a mercy it would have been if, when he was so sick, God had taken his life, instead of allowing him to grow up like this!"

Then the father burst into tears, and he said: "You could not have said anything else that would hurt me like that. I know he is an imbecile, but he is my son—he is my son."

And, if you have wandered from God, I bring you the message that he loves you, and, having loved you, he will love you unto the end.

The third observation is that, when Jesus prophesied this sifting of Satan, he said, "But I have prayed for thee." It is a great thing to have some one pray for us, but to know that Jesus prays is an increasing inspiration. O that God would open our eyes to realize that he is in the presence of Jehovah this very moment and that he will pray for us without ceasing! Dr. Arthur T. Pierson says that

when Peter fell he went down until he struck the prayers of Christ, and then he could fall no further. Thank God for this.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN WHO SAID HE WOULD—AND WOULD N'T.

Text: And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will—I will.—GENESIS 28 : 20-22.

AND God would, but Jacob would not. This sentence tells the story of his entire career, and writes not only his own history, but the history of very many of us who live at the present time. God is always willing to pour out upon us the best gifts of his great treasure-house. He has all but exhausted heaven upon us, has given us the Bible, sent us the Holy Ghost to make it plain, and, chiefest of all, has given us his Son. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3 : 16).

It is only too true that the story of

many a life of failure and despair may be written in this single sentence, "God would, and ye would not."

Jacob comes suddenly before us in the story. We have the account of his birth and a description of his own appearance as well as that of Esau his brother; and then we behold him as a man, deceitful above all things, but most interesting to us because of what he became under the touch of the hand of God. As Jacob appears, Isaac drops out of sight; and, although he lived for years after the deception was practised upon him, yet we hear little of him except the account of his death. We cannot calculate the end of men from their beginning. We remember the fascinating story of Isaac and his father's willingness to sacrifice him on the mountain, and we say when we see the dawn of such a life that the sunset will be thus and so; but Isaac's story is an illustration of the fact that we cannot always tell. There are some lives the beauty of which we can see only in the setting, and other lives the

power of which we lose sight of after the dawn. Jacob belongs to the former company, while Isaac clearly may be classed with the latter.

As a matter of fact, however, the story of Jacob is a story of our own experience in the main. His was a life of contrast just as is our own. To-day he is seeing angels, looking up into heaven and listening to the voice of God, while to-morrow he is just as he was in other days, a man of weakness and making a miserable failure of his life; but this is the history of mankind, not of Jacob alone. To-day we are in a rapture, almost in heaven; indeed, all there but the body; and to-morrow our faces are literally in the dust. To-day we are on the transfiguration mountain, wishing to build and stay there forever; to-morrow we are in the valley with our ears filled with the complaints of those who are distressed and our attention taken up with the story of the sorrowing.

But we cannot read the story of this man who said he would, and then

would n't, without realizing how bold the Bible is in its statements. It hides nothing of the story of our shame. It is not afraid to use the words that sometimes make the cheek burn and compel us to bow our heads in confusion. It holds up to the light all that is found in the experience of men. "It is not a gallery of artistic figures, nor a gathering together of dramatic characters, but of living men and women whose true stories are told, as they pray, as they shout, and as they sing." God speaks about us that which is true, and perfectly describes men's hearts when he says, "Deceitful above all things and desperately wicked."

And so naturally we have this story of Jacob told in its entirety. If we would appreciate his spirit of disloyalty to God and to his own vow to be true to him, we must rehearse again the story of the stolen birthright. Esau is weary with his hunting, and Jacob with his craftiness takes advantage of his weakness, and gives him the mess of pottage and

claims the birthright. That birthright in the olden times was the right to be a priest in one's household and to lay claim to special covenant blessings with Jehovah; but let us not be too hard upon Esau, for many of us have sold our birthright for less than a mess of pottage; just for the enjoyment of one's sin, for the possession of one questionable thing, we have parted with that which would have given us the right to be the priests in our households. Do not condemn Esau, for in so doing you may condemn yourself.

I learn also from Jacob's sad story that one sin follows another. Graces come with linked hands, it is said, and so do vices. Every grace is a link in the chain, and the chain binds us to heaven, while every sin is a link in the chain, and, alas! this chain binds us to hell.

If a man could commit but one sin and then stop, it would be bad enough; but he never does. One sin makes it easier to commit another, and the end baffles description. How Jacob illustrates this!

He first of all decides to defraud his brother and deceive his father. He must put on his brother's dress and make his way into the presence of the old man lying upon his couch, and he did deceive him by direct falsehood when he said, "I am Esau thy first-born; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me" (Gen. 27: 19); and he made a blasphemous use of the name of Jehovah. "And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the Lord thy God brought it to me" (Gen. 27: 20).

I have an idea that he supposed he could go into the presence of his father and by the very sound of his voice compel him to believe that he was Esau and not Jacob, but the old man draws him near to himself. What must have been his horror, therefore, when he felt his father's hand moving over the neck which had been covered with the skins of the kids and the goats, and also clasping his

hands! His face must have grown pale and his heart gone throbbing like a trip-hammer, but this is the way with sinners always. You did not imagine when you committed that sin the other day that it was to draw in its wake other sins which would defeat you, but this also is true. You did not suppose when you took the first glass of wine that the almost inevitable results of that one sin would be to make you a drunkard.

A poor old waif, ragged and unkempt, stood looking in through the plate-glass window of a gilded saloon in New Orleans. Two fashionable young men noticed him, and one said to the other, "Say, let's do the good Samaritan, and set Hobo up to a drink." The other hilariously consented, and the tramp slouched into the saloon at their heels. As he poured the liquor into the glass with a trembling hand, one of the young men said, "Make us a speech!"

The tramp swallowed down the liquor with a fierce thirst, then straightened himself and stood before them with a

grace and dignity that all his rags and dirt could not obscure. "Gentlemen," he said, "I look to-night at you and at myself, and it seems to me I look upon the picture of my lost manhood. This bloated face was once as young and handsome as yours. This shambling figure once walked as proudly as yours, a man in the world of men. I, too, once had a home and friends and position. I had a wife as beautiful as an artist's dream, and I dropped the priceless pearl of her honor and respect in the wine-cup. I had children as sweet and lovely as the flowers of spring, and I saw them fade and die under the blighting curse of a drunken father. To-day I am a husband without a wife, a father without a child, a tramp without a home to call his own, a man in whom every good impulse is dead—all, all swallowed up in the maelstrom of drink."

The tramp ceased speaking. The glass fell from his nerveless fingers and shattered into a thousand fragments on the floor. The swinging doors pushed open

and shut again, and he was gone. Let the young man who is offered a glass of wine remember his sermon.

But after Jacob had deceived his father and defrauded his brother he goes forth to Bethel, and it is at Bethel after he has had his dream that we hear him saying, "If God will—I will."

But I should like to pause just a moment here and give the story of Jacob's death as it is recorded in the forty-ninth and fiftieth chapters of Genesis. We have seen great buildings in process of erection, and have admired the magnitude of them; but because of the scaffolding outside we have not been able to take in all the beauty of the architectural lines; but, when the scaffolding is down, we look and wonder; and, when we read the story of Jacob's death, we find this wonderful character with the scaffolding removed. He is Jacob no longer, but Israel the prince, with his children about him, bestowing upon them a father's blessing and asking from them the promise that he should be buried in that cele-

brated tomb where his illustrious dead are to-day waiting the resurrection morning; and he closed his eyes and fell asleep only to awake in the presence of Him who in all the years of his wanderings loved him and would not let him go. This picture is given over against the story of his deceit in order that we may not grow discouraged and say, If Jacob could be so mean a man, what hope can there be for the man like him to-day who finds it easier to do wrong than to do right? There is every hope, for God is our Father, Jesus Christ is our Saviour, and we are the objects of an everlasting love. I am very sure that when Jacob vowed his vow, "If God will—I will," he meant to do exactly what he said.

I.

As we study the story of his life and find him deceived by Laban, when Leah was substituted for Rachel, we learn the lesson that he was just reaping the harvest he had sown. He was a deceiver, and he is himself deceived. We never

can escape this law ; for real judgment cannot be evaded or avoided, eluded or bribed. We do not like to be paid in our own coin, and there is something very interesting in Jacob's amazement that he of all men should be deceived when the most of his time had been given up to deceiving others. There is one text that ought to be written for us in letters of fire, "Be sure your sin will find you out." We may cover it over with good resolutions, but there will be a resurrection ; never until Christ covers it with his own blood can it be blotted out. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," and what he reaps he sows, and what he sows he reaps again. Sow to the wind and reap the whirlwind ; sow deceit, reap deceit ; it is an inevitable rule and cannot be broken.

II.

But I learn also from the story of this man that he was just following the bent of his disposition ; he was a deceiver from the beginning. He deceived him-

self because he thought he could defraud Esau without reaping a harvest, and he deceived Esau when he deprived him of his birthright, and he deceived his father when he attempted to talk like Esau, and dressed as Esau dressed, and he tried to deceive God, in the matter of the streaked cattle, he deceived Laban, and, when after the experience at Jabbok he met Esau, he deceived him, for he said, "I will go on to Mount Seir," for he did not keep his word; he was afraid of Esau, and did not like to journey with him, and so deceived him. Therefore he was but following the bent of his disposition. That is a dangerous thing to do. There is not one of us but has a bent or tendency towards evil of one form or another; it might be pride or deceit or wilfulness or lust; whatever it is, if Christ is not put in the place of weakness, there will be danger.

I would lift up a warning cry against little sins.

A terrible record of death and disaster was made in Cleveland, resulting from an

explosion which occurred in the water-works tunnel. A mule-boy was instructed to repair at noon an incandescent lamp which had become burned out during the morning. He obtained a new globe and fuse, and while the men were eating dinner attempted to adjust the globe and the fuse to the wire. A grain of sand had fallen into the fuse-receptacle; and, when the connections were made, this tiny sand-grain caused a spark. The gas in the tunnel, a quantity of which is always present, immediately exploded. Seven men were killed at once, others injured, and enormous loss of property entailed; and yet only a single grain of sand caused it. Beware of single sins and little sins! One fatal sand-grain of evil may cause the spark which explodes and desolates the whole life.

Yet singularly enough here we find the story of Jacob at Jabbok's ford, when he is within the grasp of the angel, and they wrestle together as men did in the Roman arena.

"Let me go," cries the angel.

"I will not let thee go without a blessing," answers the deceiver of other days.

"What is thy name?" asks the heavenly wrestler; and then he was honest, for he said, "My name is Jacob." It was as if he had said, "I am a deceiver and a cheat," and the angel answers as he touches the hollow of his thigh, "Thy name shall be called Israel, for thou art a prince"; and, while he limped away from that great struggle, yet he is in many ways a new man; and I am very sure that the story is written in order that we might understand that if our natures are as deceitful as Jacob's we may be changed if we will but yield to the influence of this angel of the Lord, who is none other than Jesus himself.

III.

Yet let us not imagine that a Jabbok's experience means freedom from temptation or necessarily escape from sin. It might mean all of this, but Jacob goes out to disobey once more. The word of

the Lord came to him bidding him go to Bethel, but instead of that he wants to go to Shechem, and he does go. He looked towards the city, then pitched his tent in that direction, and finally bought a parcel of ground and built there; but let us not condemn him, for we, too, have done the same thing. We have disobeyed God. We live on the very edge of the world, sometimes doing the things that are questionable, going just as far as we can without going over entirely to the enemy, and there is great danger. There is danger to others as well as to ourselves.

It is said that between Fire Island and the southern end of Ireland are ten wrecks in the line taken by steamers sailing to and from New York. These derelicts, as they are called, are the hulls of wrecked vessels that, though they show but little or nothing above the water, form a fearful peril for the ocean steamer. There is perhaps no danger in ocean travel that gives the steamer captain so much serious anxiety as the derelict.

Alas! there are many moral derelicts in

our churches. Their names are on the church-rolls, but they are water-soaked and water-logged with worldliness. They carry no flag and no light, but they are dangerous to run against. It ought to be our purpose not to drift with the currents, but to sail somewhere with a definite purpose. The drifting soul is always a danger to others as well as in deadly peril itself. For, while Jacob dwelt at Shechem, his daughter Dinah fell into sin and all but broke the old man's heart. I should be afraid because of my influence over others to yield to sin or to practise iniquity. May Jacob's story be a warning to us.

James Stirling, the great temperance apostle of Scotland, was a drunkard until old age, and then became the greatest temperance evangelist of his day. He was to speak in Dundee when, just as he entered the church, a message came to him that his son was in the inn intoxicated. He returned to the inn, took him in his arms, carried him to his room, and sat with him until the stupor was gone,

and then held his hand as the son signed his name to the pledge never to drink again. He came back and delivered such a temperance address as has rarely been heard, and then went to his room to sleep; but in the morning he was summoned to his son's room, where he found him dead. He had died by his own hand, and left this letter: "*Dear Father:* I did the best I could, but the old appetite came back and I went down. I knew it would kill you, and so I have killed myself. Good-bye." The old man read it through his tears, then fell upon his face upon the floor, and cried out, "My God, if I had been a different man, this never would have happened."

May we not learn from Jacob the lesson that we are our brother's keeper whether we will or no; and, if we fail to keep ourselves unspotted from the world in his behalf, we shall one day be called to an account?

IV.

It is most interesting to read the

account of the final recovery of this man who said he would, and would n't. Gen. 35: 1,—“And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.” There are so many of us like Jacob, and God still speaks to us. He wants us to be filled with peace and to lay hold upon blessing, but he would have us remember the vows that we have made, some of us possibly in other days, some of us perhaps to-day; and he would help us keep those vows.

There are certain things that always awaken a memory that is uplifting. With some it is the memory of an old home scene where with the father and the mother now in glory the sweet songs of the gospel were sung and God's precious promises were read. A name, a flower, will sometimes bring before us a whole panorama of beautiful memories; and so, when God said, “Go to Bethel,” the memory of that day when he saw the

angels and heard God speak was before him, and he said to those who were with him, "Put away your idols"; and, when they brought their idols, he buried them by the oak; and, thus freed from their contamination, he made his way back to Bethel to be Jacob no longer, but Israel the prince.

It is the will of God that we should put away the things that have been our defeat in the past. It is his will that our weakness should be lost in his strength, and so I bid you if yours is a life of failure turn back to Bethel, pray as you used to pray, live as you used to live, and God will be most gracious. I would say a word, too, for those of you who are not yet Christians. It is God's will that you should be saved. When the rocks were throbbing at Calvary and the crosses were shaking, and when it was dark as midnight, although it was only noon, and Jesus said, "It is finished," it was as if he were saying, "I will," to the world, and from that moment to this every lost sinner could be saved if he would but yield.

As I was travelling the other day with a friend, he told me of a man in New England who was just about to undergo a most critical operation. He was a believer in God, but not a believer in Christ. He could not accept his divinity, and the minister went to see him; but, when asked about his hope for the future, he had none because he had rejected Christ; and the minister said, "But, if he should reveal himself to you as your Saviour, you would accept him?"

"Certainly," said the man.

So the minister prayed that this revelation might come, and at his suggestion the man prayed after this manner: "O Jesus, I have been feeling out after thee for years, and could not find thee. If thou wilt but reveal thyself to me as my Saviour, I will believe;" and then because his eyes were not open the minister went quietly away, only to return a few days later when the operation was over, to find not the same face with sharp, drawn lines, but a face that was touched with glory and eyes that were constantly

overflowing with tears. "I have seen him; I have seen him," he exclaimed; "for, the moment I said, 'I will' to him the other day with eyes closed to shut out the world, he gave me a vision of his face, and I have seen him and do believe."

It is God's will that you should be saved. O that it might be your will to be accepted of him!

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN WHO SAID HE WOULD—AND COULD N'T.

Text: And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.—JUDGES 16: 20.

DOUBTLESS we are all familiar with what is known as a composite picture. It is like this: if a number of men should stand before the camera, the strong features of each face would come out prominently, and altogether a composite face could be made, which would at least be interesting to the student. The Bible presents such a composite picture of humanity. In Cain we have unbridled passions resulting in murder; in Abraham, a beautiful life whose prominent characteristic was faith; in Jacob we behold the supplanter and the cheat transformed by the power of God into one who bore not

only a princely name, but was the possessor of a princely nature; in Moses we see one of the world's greatest leaders; but somehow it would seem that we needed Samson to complete the picture, in order that to all these characteristics that have been mentioned we might add that of physical strength; for he was a mighty man indeed.

Yet I doubt not that this Old Testament story was written, among other reasons, for this, that we might know how trifling a thing, after all, human energy is, and that it might also reveal to us how easily the devil can overthrow it; for, while in one picture we behold Samson glorying in his strength, the terror of his enemies, and the admiration of his friends, in another picture, when he has yielded to the adversaries, we find him a pitiable object of weakness and a man acquainted with despair.

I.

But he was a great man in spite of all his weakness. It would seem as if God

could do no more for any one, in certain directions, at least, than he had done for Samson. From his birth, and before, he had showered upon him his best gifts.

First of all, he had the best of parents ; of Manoah we learn not only in Scripture, but also in the writings of Josephus, that he was possessed of such virtue as few could equal ; and of his mother it was said that she was a woman, not only of great strength of character, but of rare beauty. His parents before his birth were in the hands of the Almighty, that he might in the fulness of time pour out some special blessing upon their son ; but it is not enough for us to lay claim to good parentage ; yet at the same time there is hardly a greater blessing than to be well born.

You may remember that other Old Testament story of Lot and his wife fleeing together away from the doomed city ; but suddenly the wife turns to look back and becomes a pillar of salt, while Lot makes his way to the mountains for safety, all of which leads me to say that

kinship with the saved does not ensure salvation. Lot's wife is lost while he himself is saved.

Do not imagine that because you have the best of parents therefore you may be saved, for an act of faith on your part is essential to salvation ; and again we learn from this Old Testament account that endeavor that is but partial does not ensure salvation. Lot's wife started as did he from the city, and for a little time she ran by his side ; but she stopped and was lost. Many of us have been almost persuaded in other days to be Christians, and we have started, as we supposed, because we have given up this form of sin or that, but

“ Almost persuaded, harvest is past ;
Almost persuaded, doom comes at last ;
 ‘ Almost ’ cannot avail ;
 ‘ Almost ’ is but to fail ;
Sad, sad, that bitter wail,
 Almost—but lost ! ”

Second, he was a man of great strength. He seemed as if he were all

body. He was a real giant, but he was more than that. The simple possession of strength may be a very dangerous thing if that strength is not controlled. The more we have, the worse it is for us. Samson remembered his strength, and because he wanted to avenge himself on the Philistines we read in Judges, the fifteenth chapter and the fourth and fifth verses: "And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives."

"I never could be a Christian," said a man to me in another city; and when I asked him the reason, he said that it was because he had such a temper that he scarcely passed through a single day without some display of this temper, which to him was an awful thing; but I said to him what may be said to every

one, that, while the mere possession of temper, pride or zeal, might be our defeat, if these things were only under control by one who is mightier than ourselves, they would be to us like steam to the engine, and become the secret of our success.

Usually we see only one thing in a man, which leads me to say that Samson was more than a giant. If we should be asked to give at once our estimate concerning Moses, we should say he was a man of meekness, and yet we ought not to forget that he was one of the world's greatest leaders of men. If we were asked to give our opinion of Jeremiah, we should think of him as the weeping prophet, the one who said, "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" but let us not forget that he was a great advocate, an eloquent man, and one who pleaded for Jehovah as very few men have pleaded; and so the same is true of Samson. He was a great man

in physical strength, but let it not be forgotten that in the thirty-first verse of the sixteenth chapter of Judges in the closing clause we read, "And he judged Israel twenty years." We are liable to forget that, and to think of him only as tying foxes' tails together and doing other things quite as startling; but this is the way of the world. If a man does one bad thing, the world can hardly forget it. It may pass over a thousand of his virtues, and the one weakness is ever prominent in the world's memory; but it is a joy to know that we have to do with One who did not forget that Samson judged Israel twenty years and who does not forget our virtues, remembering even the cup of cold water to which the world might have been blind, but which he knew that we gave because of our desire to help him.

II.

This man who said he would, and couldn't, teaches us also a lesson that outward strength will surely perish.

Samson is under the influence of Delilah, and the Philistines have said to her, "Tell us the secret of his strength that we may overpower him;" and she seeks by fascination to learn this secret. Samson tells her to bind him with green withes that have never been dried and he will be overcome, and she does so. He snaps these withes as if they had been a piece of tow; and then he tells her to bind him with a new cord that had never been used; and, when the time came for the Philistines to lay hold upon him, he snapped the cord as if it had been a thread; and then he tells her to weave the locks of his hair into the cord, and bind him to the beam and the pin; and, when the enemy approaches him, he marches off with beam and pin as if he had not been bound at all; and then finally he tells her that the secret of his strength was not in the length of his hair, but that this hair of his was the sign of the Nazarite vow. He had vowed not to touch that which was unclean, and he said to her that if the hair be shaved from

his head his strength would depart; and she soothes him to sleep, and his locks are shorn, and there is a great transformation for the worse.

I suppose there may be some one whose eye may light upon this page who is depending upon human strength. "I do not need Christ," said a man to me not long ago, "for I have a strong intellect. I can think for myself, and so long as I feel this consciousness of strength I shall walk alone;" but let it not be forgotten that the strongest intellect may fail and the strongest man become as a little child again. "I do not need to be a Christian, for I have will-power enough to resist evil. I have determined that I will live a clean life and will not be intemperate," said another man; but one's will-power may give way, and the man who was a giant yesterday may be a child to-day; and then there are others of us who are putting our confidence in the help our loved ones can give to us, but they may die, and then what?

I happened to know of a young man

who broke his father's heart, and put him in an untimely grave, and then fled away from his mother, refusing to comfort her in her sorrow, only to find out when he was on the Pacific coast that she was dying; but it is a long journey from coast to coast, and when he reached New York the mother was dead. A friend saw him wending his way to the cemetery, and beheld him as he read his mother's name cut in the tombstone, and then saw him as he fell upon his face and cried out, "She has gone, she has gone, and who will pray for me now?" O, if we are depending upon human energy or upon the strength of others, we shall one day of all persons be the most miserable, for human strength may be as nothing to us.

III.

After Samson's locks had been shorn he speaks the words of our text: "And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him" (Judg. 16: 20).

Picture him if you can going forth into the presence of the people. He has broken his vow; he has lost his touch with God, and therefore lost his power. All the outer man is there, but it is like a temple without God. He knew not that his strength had departed. He was like a walking skeleton; he had eyes, but could not see, a mouth, but could not speak, and ears, but could not hear.

What an illustration he is of the loss of spiritual power! See him as he stands. The people breathlessly draw away from him; for he is the same giant in stature, and they do not know whether to fear him or not. He is physically the same, muscle and sinew, bone, nerve, and beating heart; but something is gone. He is like many of us who have been shorn of our power just because of one sin. You may remember that sin to-day; it was off in another city, and you had the choice between good and evil; and you said, "No one will know, and it is but for this once, and I am a stranger in a strange land;" and from that day till this you

have been crying out in an agony, "O, that I knew where peace might be found!" and I will tell you where you can find it; go back where you broke your vow and missed your step with Christ, and start again.

A railway brakeman was discharged from a hospital in Sedalia, Mo., after four months' treatment for a tarantula-bite. He touched a tarantula, and was bitten on the tip of the middle finger of the right hand. He felt a sharp pang of pain at the time, but paid little attention to it, and went on with his work. The bitten finger began to slough off. The hand and arm were soon swollen to three times their natural size. The finger was amputated again and again, but the wound would not heal. The surgeons were compelled to continue to follow the hand back, and finally made twenty-nine amputations in all; and he thought himself very fortunate to save his life with the loss of his arm. The poison of the spider-bite had become so thoroughly infused into his system that it was almost

impossible to overcome it, and his final recovery was considered almost a miracle.

All about us are men who have been bitten with strong drink, who have lost property, and good habits, and good character, and love of children and wife, and hope of heaven ; and their system has been so thoroughly poisoned that unless saved by some miraculous cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ they must be lost forever.

Let us not boast. Here is a man who is honest ; he may be so, but how about purity ? and here is another who lays claim to being pure, but how about intemperance ? and here is still another who claims to be temperate, but how about honesty ? So many of us boast of strong points, and quite forget about the weak tendencies. All of us need Christ ; without him we shall fail.

In connection with the story of Samson note, first, the persistency of the adversary. Samson showed his weakness because he did not immediately resist, but he trifled with the tempter.

Animal-trainers say that the secret of handling safely all beasts of the cat species, such as lions, tigers, and leopards, is to keep them constantly afraid of you. The instant they get over their fear, they will attack any one who crosses their path. They are all treacherous, too, and often gather courage for an attack when the master's eyes are turned away from them, although they would not dare revolt if he faced them. One never knows when they will get over their fear and spring at the keeper if they have a chance to do it from behind.

Our fight with the devil is like that. He is always seeking to attack us from the rear or in ambush. The devil goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour ; but he is a great coward when faced with courage. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" is as true in our time as it was when the apostle James first made the declaration.

Second, he ignored the strength of the adversary. I can imagine how when he snapped the green withes, and broke the

new cords, and walked away with the beam and the pin, he must have laughed his enemies to scorn. It is a dangerous thing for a man to ignore the strength of the great tempter.

A young lady in Morristown, N. J., grasped the guy-wire on the electric-light pole in front of her father's house, to see whether she could get a slight shock. Her hand was suddenly contracted by a powerful current which swept through her body. The young girl screamed in agony. She writhed and twisted, and fell to the ground; but she could not relax her hold upon the live wire, which was burning her hands, for she had reached up with her left hand to tear her right hand away.

Men and boys ran towards her, but not one dared to put out a hand to save the girl. Then her mother ran out. "Oh, mamma," cried the girl, "save me! My hands are burning up!" The mother quickly grasped her daughter around the waist, but was hurled to the ground as if by the blow of a club. Finally a man

came up with presence of mind enough to take an axe and sever the wire. He was in time to save the girl's life, but she was fearfully burned.

The incident suggests tragedies that are taking place every day before our eyes. Many people are willing to tamper with sin, and run the risk of a slight shock. A boy likes to drink a glass of wine that will make his nerves tingle, and many are asking themselves, "How far can I go in the wrong way without being overthrown?" That is the way the devil fishes for men and women. People grasp his wires, and get a slight shock, and only laugh at danger; but some day they take hold of a live wire that has all the fire of hell in it, and they are struck through and through with death. It is better not to play with the devil's wires at all.

Third, temptation comes gradually. Just inch by inch Delilah wore Samson out until at last he exclaims, "I am a Nazarite," and he gives her the secret of his power; and in a little time he is as

weak as the weakest of all his enemies. The trouble with us is that we harbor an impure thought to-day, and yield to just the slightest temptation to-morrow, and before we know it we are overthrown.

IV.

With every sin comes the blunting of one's moral capacity by which is detected the presence of evil. There was a time when the thought of dishonesty made you shudder, and the idea of impurity made you blush, when the consideration of intemperance roused all the manhood there was in you, and you hated this form of sin with bitter hatred. The time was when you were the last person in all the world to think that you would ever finally reject Christ; but you have yielded just a little to these things, and now you treat them indifferently, and your heart has become hardened, and you are going to be like this "man who said he would, and could n't," for the Lord is departed from you.

V.

“He wist not that the Lord was departed”; so gradually had this strength been taken from him in his trifling with the adversary. I can see him as he rises, saying in the text, “I will now shake myself,” and he attempts to lift his arms and move his body, only to find that he is powerless. He has trifled once too often.

It is said that there is on the Niagara River a place called “Past Redemption Point”; for you may drift on the river with safety up to a certain place, and from there on there is danger; for men stand on the banks of the river, and shout to those who are coming near, “Danger ahead, danger ahead;” but, if you allow yourself to pass the point, only the falls with an awful death are before you; and so men have drifted along in their relations to Christ. The minister has warned them; friends have pleaded with them; and the danger is that they

may be passing this Past Redemption Point, and do not realize it; and so I make an appeal to all who do not know Christ to choose him while yet it is called to-day, and there would be joy in every heart if those who have resisted times without number should cry out, "Nay, but I yield, I yield; I can hold out no more."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN WHO SAID HE WOULD—AND DID.

Text: For I determined.—1 CORINTHIANS 2: 2.

IN these words we find the secret of the apostle's power and likewise the secret of the great success of his life; that is, his Christian life, which stretched out from Damascus to the eternal city, and he never wavered in his determination. He passed through experiences that would have turned other men aside, but not so this man.

He must have had the same determined disposition before his conversion. This is certainly evident, for after he had seen Jesus and heard him speak that force which made him the dreaded foe is all subdued, and he becomes the most powerful friend that Jesus of Nazareth ever had in this world. He was a man of one idea. This must have been true before

his conversion. I can imagine him determining to go to Jerusalem and sit at the feet of Gamaliel, and allowing nothing of the pleasure of the great city, as it was then known, to turn him aside until he has won the crown and he is himself a master in all intellectual equipments.

We certainly find this in his persecution of the church; for, when once he has entered upon this career, he is never satisfied until he has persecuted the Christians even unto strange cities, cast them into prison, and if possible beaten them with stripes; but after his conversion in a remarkable degree it is true that he was a man of one idea. "This one thing I do," he said, and he kept his word. "None of these things move me," he declared when he had determined to go to Jerusalem; not even bonds or afflictions could turn him aside; and when he reaches the end of his remarkable career, he can look back over it all and say with commendable pride, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

How obstacles do melt away when one is desperately in earnest! If you walk down the streets in a busy city in a leisurely fashion, you will find your progress difficult; but, if you are on a mission and walk with enthusiasm, you will find that unconsciously people get out of your way and the journey is comparatively easy. There are some men whose lives we cannot study without thinking that they were sent of God to do a special work at a special time, which no one else could possibly have done; for them to fail would have been to hinder the plan of God.

Of course every one is sent of God. Concerning John the Baptist in the Gospels we read, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." It was suggested to me not long ago that it would be a good plan if we were to drop John's name out of this, and put our own in. "There was a man sent from God whose name was ———"; and, if our name should be written in this blank space and we had found that in the Bible,

that would have made it no more certain that we are called of God to do a special work than it has been ever since we became Christians. Luther was a man whom God had used to do a particular work at a particular time; so was Knox; so was Charles G. Finney; and so was D. L. Moody; and yet of Paul this was especially true. He came upon the field of action while the church was yet in her infancy, when she needed him, when a few fisher-folk and a company of very ordinary people made up the membership; and his great mind swayed theirs, and his mighty influence was used of God to mould the whole company.

The gospel shows what it can do with a man like Peter as we read his story, and we are quite aware that it can reclaim the outcast, save the drunkard, and redeem the harlot; but the gospel here shows us what it can do with a man like Paul, one of the greatest intellects not only of his time but of all time. He would have been great whether he had

been a Christian or not. Of the other disciples possibly this would not have been true. We doubtless should not have heard of Peter, James, or John ; but concerning Saul of Tarsus the world would have learned, for he was truly a great man.

He was great in his unselfishness. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ," he said, and I doubt not he was as anxious for gain as the rest of us.

He was great in his influence. In the sixteenth chapter of Acts he has only to sit beside a woman on the banks of the river, and she who had been a seller of purple is baptized, and became a part of the body of Christ.

He was great because he was not easily discouraged. "I know how to abound," he said, "and to suffer need." In the eighteenth chapter of Acts, the first verse, we read that after these things he leaves Athens and goes to Corinth. After what things? If you will read the seventeenth chapter of the Acts, you

will find that humanly speaking he had met with failure at Athens; philosophers had mocked him, and only a few people of little consequence had accepted his message. A preacher in these modern times would have grown disheartened, possibly turned to some other avenue of usefulness, but not so Paul the apostle. He makes his way to Corinth, and it was to these Corinthians he said, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified."

He was great in his illustrations; so was his Master, and he was but following in the Master's footsteps. But Jesus dwelt in the country and lived in small towns, and therefore drew his illustrations from the grass at his feet, the flowers that bloomed around him, and the birds of song about him. Paul was a city man, and drew his stories from the crowded streets, the busy wharves, the games in the arena, and other things that city people knew all about.

He was great as a preacher. Whether he is in prison and in chains, whether he

is at Antioch or on Mars' Hill, he is a preacher. I never have seen such a man; in season and out of season, by day and by night he preaches; with back bleeding, head aching, and body, O so weary that an ordinary man could scarcely think, he preaches because he had said he would and did.

The date of his birth we do not know, only this, that when Jesus was a boy in Nazareth, playing upon the streets of this beautiful town, over beyond Lebanon another boy named Saul was playing; but his whole life from childhood to premature old age is an inspiration. There never was such singleness of purpose exhibited in any man, never such untiring energy, never such difficulties met without complaint, never such sufferings borne with rejoicing, as in the life of this man who said he would and did. In him it was literally true that Jesus Christ went forth to conquer the world, using his hands and feet in desert and plain. He was a hero, this Paul the apostle; and in the light of these statements we

begin to understand what he meant when he said, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." There are some things that he determined to do that I will mention.

I. HE DETERMINED TO DO THE WILL OF GOD.

With the story of his conversion we are doubtless familiar. He is on his way to Damascus to persecute the church. It is high noon; the sun is shining brilliantly upon the white buildings of the old city; but suddenly he is stricken down, and in a most remarkable way he is converted. "What wilt thou have me to do?" he asks of him whose voice he hears, and then and there he determined that he would do the will of this new Master of his. How may we know God's will? I am sure this question is in the minds of many.

In answer to the question how to find out God's will Professor Drummond read the following from the fly-leaf of his Testament:

“First, pray. Second, think. Third, talk to wise people, but do not regard their decision as final. Fourth, beware of the bias of your own will, but do not be too much afraid of it. God never unnecessarily thwarts a man’s nature and likings, and it is a mistake to think that his will is in the line of the disagreeable. Fifth, meantime do the next thing, for doing God’s will in small things is the best preparation for knowing it in great things. Sixth, when decision and action are necessary, go ahead.” “You will probably not find out till afterwards, perhaps long afterwards, that you have been led at all.”

It has been said that the Bible is God’s will in words, that nature is God’s will in force, that our circumstances are God’s will in our every-day affairs.

There are three things that Paul did which we should do well to remember.

First, he was blind, and in his blindness he lost the world’s vision and saw Christ. The trouble with us is, we look down too much and up too little, in too frequently

and not out enough. We are too much taken up with the world's affairs to know well the interests of the kingdom of heaven. It is said that, when artists have been working for a long time at their easels, their vision becomes dim, and they look down at a handful of little bright pebbles on the easel that their vision may be toned up. If we would know God's will, we need to look up, shut our eyes, and look ; for we can see further into the plans of God with eyes shut than with them open.

Second, he began immediately to work. Acts 9 : 20, " And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God."

A man went to Mr. Moody to say that he was miserable. He was a Christian, but without joy. Then said Mr. Moody : " Begin to do something. Confess Christ to the first man you meet." This first man happened to be a stranger on the streets waiting with him for a car, and the one whose heart had been cold for so long said as they talked about the meet-

ing, "I am a Christian, are you? I believe in Christ with all my heart, do you?" and then fairly ran back into the presence of Mr. Moody to say, "My heart is overflowing with joy."

Third, he went over into Arabia for a quiet time with God, and then simply obeyed what God commanded him. Obedience is the organ of spiritual vision. "If any man will do his will, he shall know." It is a great thing to do God's will, but it is a greater thing to will to do it; for he who is willing may have nothing to do but wait, and it is easier always to work than to wait; but, if you would know God's will, do the thing that lies just at your hand, and do it well; and the way will open to larger and better things.

II. HE DETERMINED TO PREACH.

That was a great scene when he was over in Arabia. Arabia throbs with holy memories. There the bush burned; there Elijah heard the still small voice; there the manna fell from the skies; and there

God had walked and talked with men. If we would know what Paul believed about the gospel, we need only read Galatians and Romans. What strange views men hold concerning the gospel! We say that such a man is a gospel preacher, and immediately we think of him as a ranting and irresponsible evangelist, or else we say that he is one who tells little stories and interests only little children, which is nothing against the man, rather to his credit; only it is said with a sneer. Paul's idea of the gospel was simply superb. An analysis of his epistles would reveal the fact that,—

First, he knew that men were longing for righteousness and in all the ages had been blindly reaching out after it.

Second, he knew that men had failed in their desire, for he had himself; and he taught that in Adam all had fallen, and there was no difference, for all had sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Third, man's extremity was God's opportunity; for as in Adam all died, even so in Christ could all be made alive.

Fourth, he believed that from Adam we inherited not only the guilt of sin, but a carnal nature; and he taught that in Christ we have by his sacrificial death had the guilt removed, and by regeneration have had implanted within us the very life of God which would overpower our tendency to evil.

Fifth, he knew that all this could be received by faith alone, for he had received, and from the day of his acceptance had been overflowing with joy.

Sixth, he taught that, when once we are united to Christ, nothing can ever separate us from his love, nothing in the heavens above, nothing in the earth beneath, can ever take us from his hand.

Seventh, he believed that even though we were Christians we should be obliged to pass through trial and tribulation, but he held that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Eighth, he taught that we should finally be free from this and as we went

looking up into the heavens the Saviour would come and change these bodies of our humiliation, fashioning them like unto his own glorious body.

Ninth, he believed that this Saviour of whom he preached would come again.

This is Paul's gospel; no wonder is it that he preached it with joy. It is easy to understand how with such a message he could preach in season and out of season, in prison and out of prison, and could say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," even to preach it in the city of Rome, at that time the world's centre so far as intellectual power and social position were concerned. This is the man who said he would, and did.

III. HE DETERMINED TO GO TO JERUSALEM.

In Acts the twentieth chapter, the twenty-second, twenty-third and twenty-fourth verses, we read, "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the

Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." He is now about sixty years of age; for twenty years he has been preaching; his body is worn by disease, bruised with much punishment; his hair is whitened and his face is furrowed. What a rebuke to those of us who have done nothing for Christ, and what we have done we have complained about! He goes to Jerusalem because he cannot help it; bound in the spirit he finds himself, and that is power. He was thinking of the same thing when he said, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." What were bonds and afflictions to him when the consciousness of the presence of Christ was with him?

There are two ways of meeting trouble. One way: a man stands beside an open grave in which he has buried the best of

his life, and clinches his fists, and sets his teeth, and says with grim determination, "I will pass through it; I will endure it; I will not break down;" but this is not the spirit of the Christian. His spirit is that of the apostle Paul in this story. He stands beside the open grave, weeping as if his heart would break, for he would not be human if he did not weep, but looking up through his tears into heaven to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away." This was what Paul meant when he said, "Bonds and afflictions abide me;" but none of these things moved him, for he walked with Christ; and with Christ every burden is easier to bear and every pain has had its sting removed.

IV. AND HE DETERMINED TO GO TO ROME.

The account of his going is in the twenty-seventh chapter of Acts. How like the journey of this life this is! In the fourth verse the winds are contrary;

in the eighth verse he enters Fair Havens; in the thirteenth verse the south wind blows; in the eighteenth verse the tempest is upon him; in the fortieth and forty-first verses the vessel is shipwrecked. We have all of us had the contrary winds in the beginning of life's journey; and we doubtless many of us have entered fair havens, and we laugh at the entreaty of the minister to lay hold upon Christ; and the south wind has been blowing against us, which only emboldens us the more; and suddenly we find ourselves in the tempest when the boat is wrecked and all aboard lost. How thankful we are to say that shipwreck is not necessary, for with Christ we may be safe! Paul was so in all his experiences.

Finally he enters Rome, gray-haired, prematurely aged, chained as a prisoner; his path lay along the way which many a conqueror had travelled before; but no car of victory was for him, no medals were on his breast, no admiring crowds welcomed him. The chain dangled at

his wrists, and yet Rome never had such a conqueror.

Here he stands before Nero. What a contrast there is! Nero stained with every crime, the murderer of his own mother, his soul steeped in every known and unknown vice; and Paul bearing about in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

At last we see him in prison, and as we stand beside him we see him write to Timothy and say, "It is a damp cell I am in, Timothy, my beloved son in the gospel; send me the old cloak I used to wear;" and then we see him write once more, "It is a lonesome place; and so, my son, I bid you come to me."

The end of his journey is near, and we find him writing to Timothy these words: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day;

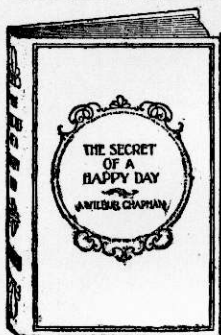
and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4: 6-8).

And they lead him forth, and he dies for the sake of Him who loved him and gave himself for him. Sin has done its worst; yet it has only opened the prison door and let the soul go free. Rome would not have him, but ten thousand times ten thousand greeted him at the gates of heaven, welcoming him with shouts of rejoicing; and the Master himself must have said, "Well done, well done; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

And why is it, may I ask, that Paul did not fail as Peter failed? For various reasons. He did not follow afar off; he kept in close touch; he separated himself absolutely from the world, and lived only for his Master. And why is it that Paul did not fail as Jacob failed? For the simple reason that, when he gave himself to Christ, he made no reservations; all there was of him was Christ's. There was no room in his heart for deceit and

no time in his life for the practice of iniquity. He was the bond-servant of Jesus Christ, living for him with every breath that he drew, and counting it a joy to die for him rather than to deny him. And why is it that Paul did not make the failure that Samson did? Simply because he hated sin, and he never trifled with the great adversary; and, hating sin, he knew that Christ was the only Saviour. In every time of temptation he fled to him; in every hour of trial he leaned hard upon him. It was for this reason that he has well earned the title of the subject of this chapter, "The man who said he would, and did."

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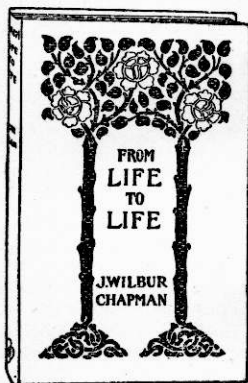
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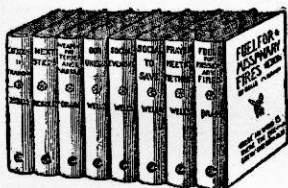
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