

Good Words for Every Day of the Year,
Good Words, 1860. Editor, Norman MacLeod, DD.
Edinburgh: Alexander Strahan and Co. London: Sampson Low, Son, and Co.

November 22.

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." -- 1 Peter i. 13.

We often find in the words of St. Peter, evident allusions to some precept of his Lord, elsewhere recorded, and it is so in the verses before us. He describes, as he had heard his Master describe it, the attitude in which servants who expect their Lord's coming ought to be found; not in a careless indolent state, but watchful, hopeful, sober-minded.. There are many who seem never to have the "loins of the mind" girt for earnest thought or serious work; they suffer themselves to be engrossed with every passing trifle, and forget that their *minds*, as well as their affections, ought to be engaged in the service of their Lord; this disposition to be carried away by passing excitements is the very opposite of the state here described; "*be sober,*" -- *sober* in your estimates of earthly things, characters, and of events going on around you, being neither unduly depressed nor elated with what shall soon pass away; but there need be no gloom in this sobriety, for a bright hope is set before you; and it is even to make you "gird up the loins of your mind and be sober," that you are told to "*hope to the end.*"

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November 23.

"And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not."
-- John i. 5.

It was given to the beloved disciple to declare the sublimest truths in the simplest words, and this text presents one of them to us; a little child may repeat it, but who can fathom its depths? who can tell how great is that Light, or how awful that darkness of which he here speaks? These words explain the secret of this world's woe, the rejection *of that Light*; for "if I had not come and spoken unto them, says our Lord, "They had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin;" men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil." Blessed be God, it is not so with all. His light has shined irresistibly into the darkness, and has *banished* the darkness from the minds of His own dear children; and if, through His grace, it is so with me, O let it be my constant care and endeavour to "*walk* in the light as He is in the light," keeping the eye of the soul fixed on Him, and following Him continually.

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November 24.

"Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."
--1 John iii. 22.

There are then right and wrong ways of asking. There are those who receive not when they ask, as well as those who can say with the apostle, "*whatsoever* we ask we receive of Him." It is important to discover why these things are so, lest our prayers should be vain, or lest our just confidence in God's promises should be weakened by unnecessary fears that we may be asking so as not to receive. St. James gives the reason why some prayers are rejected; he says, "*ye ask amiss*, that ye may consume it upon your lusts;" they asked not according to the mind of God, or the teaching of His Holy Spirit; they asked for earthly things with earthly and sensual purposes, having neither the glory of God, nor the good of their souls at heart; and this was not that believing prayer in the name of Christ, to which the promise was given. But I cannot suppose that this would forbid our asking, in humble submission, for temporal blessings: for I observe, that the instance given of an effectual fervent prayer that availed much, is one of this very kind, the prayer of Elias for rain. Would that we were as like him in our prayers as we are in our passions!

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November 25.

"And Stephen kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And, when he had said this, he fell asleep."

--Acts vii. 60.

Wonderfully indeed was the dying prayer of the holy Stephen answered, and though he lived not to see its fulfillment, we may believe that when the angels in heaven rejoiced over Saul of Tarsus repenting, a new song of joy arose from the martyr soul! And Paul, too, may have recognised the prayer, when, long years after, he was enabled to speak of the grace of God exceeding abundant shown to him who had been before a "blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious;" or when in his holy confidence of faith in Jesus, whom he had once persecuted, he says, as if in reference to Stephen's very words, "Who shall *lay anything to the charge* of God's elect? it is God that justifieth!" Thus we see that Stephen's prayer was a link in God's purpose of mercy for him who was "consenting unto his death." And how often do we see prayers answered after the petitioner has been taken from earth! Prayers of a parent for a child, of a dying child for a godless parent; of a faithful minister or missionary for a careless flock. These often lie long as precious seed buried in the earth, hidden but not dead, to arise at last when God's time shall come, and to bear an abundant harvest to His glory.

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November 26.

“The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison-doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of *this life*.” -- ACTS v. 19, 20.

Men would have said “this doctrine, this religion, this belief;” the angel called it “*this life*.” And this is indeed the true word, for the religion of Jesus Christ must be a *life* to us, or it is nothing. The soul that has received Christ has received life; it may be but a feeble life, yet there is in it all the difference which there is between a living baby and a dead giant. This life is of God, from God, and to God. The man of science confesses that, with his utmost skill, he cannot give natural life to a dead body, and as impossible is it for the power of man to make a dead soul live. But God employs human means, and when he sends his ministers to “speak to the people all the words of this life,” he offers the gift to all that have ears to hear, saying to each, “Lay hold on eternal life!” Let us not be slow to believe in the power of His Word; it is indeed quick and powerful, however feeble may be the hand that wields it. Let us seek to realize the transforming power of “*this life*” in our own hearts, then shall we be enabled to glorify Him by making it known as our life for the good of others.

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November 27.

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.”

-- 2 Peter ii. 9.

These two lessons are taught from the two awful examples of God's judgments here referred to, -- the deluge, and the destruction of Sodom. Noah saved from the one, and Lot from the other, show how the Lord delivers his own; temptations could not prevail against them, though the whole world round them lay in wickedness; and their temporal deliverance from the flood and the fire were but types of their still more wonderful deliverance from spiritual death. The power of God is the very same now. He can bring His own people out of as great dangers, and deliver them out of as great temptations. Let us not doubt Him; *let us seek to have high thoughts of the justice of our God*; such thoughts will be the answer to many a perplexing question, the key to many a mystery. Let us have a firm belief that these two things hang together, the deliverance of the godly, the punishment of the ungodly. The chaff shall be burned, but not the least grain of His wheat shall perish. However long the deliverance or the punishment may be deferred, *let us trust Him still*, and say in humble adoration, “Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne; mercy and truth shall go before thy face.”

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November 28.

"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." --Galatians ii. 20.

This is a wonderful Christian paradox. It seems to me the key to it lies in the great truth of the believer's *union with Christ*. He is united to Christ in His death, and so is regarded as having already borne the penalty of his sins by being crucified with Christ. He is united to Christ in his life; not his natural but his spiritual life. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Thus we see the apostle's meaning by considering what he means by life and death, not the mere life of the body but that of the soul; and as far as the life of the body is concerned, he owes that also to his union with his Saviour, "for the life which I now live in the flesh," the continued existence in this world, "I live," he says, "by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me;" as if he said -- life without faith in *that* love, would not be life to me.