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Until the Day Dawn

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Title: Joy in Service; Forgetting, and Pressing Onward; Until the Day Dawn

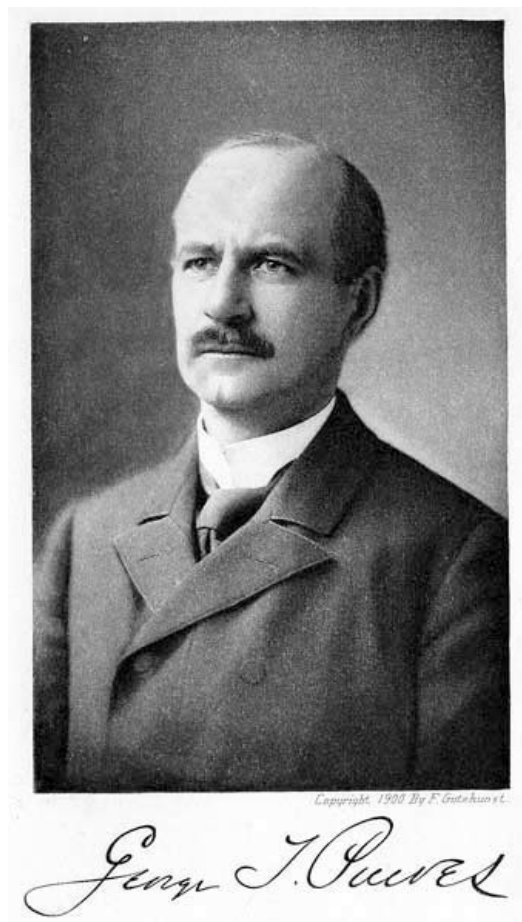
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Release date: July 25, 2007 [eBook #22141]

Language: English

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JOY IN SERVICE.
FORGETTING, AND PRESSING ONWARD.
UNTIL THE DAY DAWN.

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THE TEACHER AND PASTOR.

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**AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY
150 NASSAU STREET, NEW YORK**

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JOY IN SERVICE.

*"Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent
me, and to finish his work."—JOHN 4:34.*

JOY IN SERVICE.

This is one of the sentences that dropped from the lips of Christ, which let us into his personal spiritual life and in some measure lay bare his mind. To be permitted thus to share his confidence is one of our greatest privileges. Viewing him from a distance, we may admire his character; viewing him in history, we may confess his incomparable power; viewing him when convincing us of our own sin, we may adore him as our Saviour; but we desire, and may have, a still more intimate acquaintance. He tells us about himself. He describes here and there his personal inner life. He permits us to share his secrets, and all that we otherwise feel of reverence, admiration, and gratitude gives new value to these disclosures of the spiritual life of the God in man.

Now, in the words before us, Christ describes his joy in the service of the Father. They reveal a devotion so complete as to entirely control his mind. They reveal a soul so absorbed in doing the Divine will as to be insensible for the time to ordinary physical needs. They reveal a self-consecration which is absolute, and yet which is so spontaneous and glad as to be self-sustaining; so that Christ needed no other support in serving the Father than simply the opportunity of such service. We, on the contrary, require support to enable us to serve. We must be rewarded for our work, must be encouraged by sympathy, must be fed with promises and spiritual gifts, in order to be strong enough to do our duty. Christ found duty its own reward, service itself joy, obedience a source of renewed strength. His will was one with the Father's; and thus he discloses the, to us, marvelous spectacle of one who could truly say, Not my desire or my duty, or my purpose is, but my meat—my food—my source itself of life and strength—is to do the will of God, and to finish his work.

And yet our Lord Jesus was a very genuine man. He did not impress observers with the common insignia of holiness. It was the Pharisees, not Christ, who stood at the corners of the streets to make long prayers, who enlarged the borders of their phylacteries and chose the chief seats in the synagogues. It was the Baptist, not Jesus, who clothed himself in a garment of camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey. Jesus, on the contrary, lived the outward life of other men, consorted with them in their usual places of resort, dressed and spake as they did; so that, in outward manner, it was impossible to distinguish him from the common mass in which he moved. All the more precious, therefore, is this revelation of his inner life. What a soul was his! The thought uppermost in his mind was devotion to the Father's will. The joy which most gladdened his lonely life was the joy of unknown, but sublime and perfect, obedience. He had been pointing a Samaritan woman, sitting by the wellside, to the salvation of God; and though she was but one, and that to human eyes an unworthy subject,—though she was a Samaritan and an open sinner,—his soul found such intense pleasure in bringing her—as the Father had sent him to bring men anywhere—to the knowledge of the truth, that fatigue and hunger were forgotten, and all his energies were absorbed in the delight of the task. In this I think Christ appears simply Divine. No later fame or success, no gaudy robes of human praise, no gilded crown of human admiration, are needed to adorn him. He discloses the very ideal of a godly life. All our poor efforts at obedience, all our faint aspirations after the knowledge and love of God, all our unfulfilled prayers, and falling flights, and unredeemed promises and sin-stained attempts to serve, confess the ideal perfectness of him who could truthfully say, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

I. Let us first, then, draw a little closer to this peerless soul, in which there was such perfect sense of the worth of infinite things, and let us note more particularly, and appreciate as far as we are able, this phase of the character of the Son of Man.

I have said that Christ was a very natural man. But he was more than that. I am sure that none can study his character without admitting and admiring the perfect proportion in which truth evidently lay in his mind. This is one of the rarest beauties of character. Most of us are very one-sided. We can grasp but a part of truth; and in order to grasp that part firmly, we have to absolutely let other truth go. In order to be devoted to duty as we see it, we commonly have to leave other duties untouched. Our spiritual growth ought to take just this direction of including broader views of truth and duty, of obtaining a conception of life in which the various elements shall be held in their proper relations and proportions; no one allowed to eclipse the others, but each modified to a proper extent by the presence and influence of the rest. I say this is a rare achievement. No one but Christ has ever achieved it perfectly. It is easy to see that even the apostles, inspired as they were, did not equally appreciate all sides of revelation. They have their distinguishing doctrines and points of view.

It is still easier to see that Christian churches and theologians differ for this same reason, and to a much greater extent. No creed, no church, no theology, that builds on the Word of God, can be wholly wrong. Its difference from others must lie in its partial appreciation of the truth, in its inability to take in all truths in their relative proportion. And so in literature and science and philosophy some men are impressed with material evidences, others with moral. Some men are poets, others are logicians; some critical, others dogmatic. The hope of

the future for the Church and for humanity is in the slow approximation and combination of these partial views, until at last, "in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, we shall come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Meanwhile, at the beginning of our Christian history, Christ stands perfect. To see this is to appreciate his authority. As Paul said, He is the corner stone of the spiritual temple which the Divine Spirit is building.

I do not mean that he taught explicitly all the truth which later times have discovered, or which after him apostles taught. But he laid the living germs of all later religious truth, and he held them in such perfect proportion that when the long course of history shall be finished, when that which is in part shall have been done away, and that which is perfect shall have come, the result will be but the reproduction on a large scale of the already perfect stature of Christ.

And this is particularly manifested in Christ's views of life. His peerless spirituality did not make him an ascetic. His clear vision of the future did not lead him to despise the present. His love of God did not destroy his love of nature or of man. His hatred of sin did not cause him to shun the sinner. Hence, though our Lord was the model of a religious man, he was no enthusiast, still less a fanatic. The enthusiast is a man who sees but part of truth and magnifies it out of its proportion; and the fanatic is one who, in addition to this, hates what he cannot understand. According to Isaac Taylor, "Fanaticism is enthusiasm inflamed by hatred." But Christ exaggerated nothing and hated no man. He hated sin, but no sinner. His boundless, tender love itself prevented such moral distortion. And, therefore, he is the ideal or model of human life. We do not feel that in striving to imitate even his most spiritual qualities we shall become impractical or unnatural. We do not feel this in the case of most other holy men. They become examples of one virtue by exaggerating it. But Christ never did this. Lofty as the view of life was which he discloses in our text, sublime as was its spiritual consecration, it existed in him in harmony with the life which by its thoroughly human and practical features proves that we too, in at least some measure, can make even his highest traits our exemplars. Look, therefore, at this text which discloses his mind, and mark its principal elements.

1. There is first disclosed the strong and constant consciousness that he had a distinct errand in the world. He knew that he had been born for a purpose, that a divine aim was in his coming, and that a positive result would follow his life. This sense of a definite errand was expressed by him on numerous occasions; in some of them quite incidentally, and in others more directly. You remember how, as a boy in the temple, he said to his mother, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" You remember how, at the marriage in Cana, he said to her again, "My hour is not yet come." So with that precious phrase which on several occasions fell from his lips, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." He regarded himself as one sent from God; and when his life was about over he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour is come; I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

So in our text, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." He was here on a special errand, and that errand was always before his mind. Earth was but a place of appointed work. Life was to him an office, a stewardship. He had this consciousness, even when he seemed to be accomplishing nothing. It gave unity to all his acts and words. To Galilean peasants and to Jewish scribes he could speak with equal assurance, because his errand was to both. Yet he knew its limitations. He said to the Syro-Phœnician woman, "I am not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He had come to do a special work among the Jews, and in that a work for all mankind. He had not come to be glorified. He had not come to be ministered unto, but to minister. But he had come on a distinct errand; and whatever be your doctrine of Christ's person, you must confess that he considered himself no accident of history; that he did not regard his life work as originating in his own choice; that his sense of a mission did not come as an afterthought to him, or grow clear as he advanced in life. He felt his special errand from the start. It was always before his mind, so that life was to him the performance of a given task and the fulfillment of an assigned duty.

2. But furthermore, our text discloses that, to Christ's mind, this errand of his in the world derived its sanctity from the fact that it was the will or wish of his Father. Every man is governed by some controlling motive or class of motives. The lowest of all is the motive of personal gain and pleasure, and the sorrows and sins of men chiefly spring from the tyranny of this degraded passion. Higher than it is the motive of pity and compassion, which may lead us to do good for the sake of benefiting others. This is the spring of much charity and philanthropy, and, so far as it goes, it is of course to be commended. But there is a higher motive than even it, and Christ reveals it to us here. It is the wish to do God's will. Such was his motive. To him the will of the Father was the perfect good. He knew of nothing nobler than it, so that the whole energy of his character consisted in the force of obedience.

This phrase may carry us back to that time in the counsels of the Godhead when, as we conceive such matters, the Father determined to save the world that had rebelled

against him. The question was, where to find a Saviour; and the spirit of the Divine Son was manifested in his self-dedication to the work. He, too, loved man, but that was not his main motive. He loved the Father. He appreciated the Father's wish to save. He gave himself to carry out that wish. "Lo, I come," said he, "to do thy will, O God." Thus we may perceive, I think, the deep reality in the Divine Sonship of Christ; and certainly on earth this was his controlling motive. He was obedient even unto death. To obey to the very least particular the Father's will was the principle of his being. To him the Father's will was not hard, stern law, as we with our rebellious instincts so often regard it; it was the Father's wish. When love exists between two persons, the will of one it is the other's joy to do, if possible. Love impels to its accomplishment. Love rejoices in being of service, in giving the loved one pleasure, in carrying out the other's desire. So the will of God was, to Christ, his Father's wish. Obedience was the mainspring of his soul's life, and his errand in the world derived its sanctity and its glory—in spite of man's antagonism and in spite of apparent fruitlessness—from the fact that it was the will of God. In this Christ discloses the very highest spiritual life which it is possible to conceive. How marvelous was this! He who has won the greatest influence over the race, he before whom the head bows in adoration, he who has changed already the course of history, and will change it until every knee has bowed to him, was one whose supreme wish was to be an obedient Son. Instead of conquering by selfishness he conquered by self-abnegation. Instead of doing his own work, he gave himself up to doing his Father's. Here is at once a miracle of history and a model of life of which man would never have dreamed.

3. As a consequence of all this we can perceive in the language of the text Christ's joy in the discovery of a special opportunity of carrying out the highest purpose of the Father's will. It would seem that his meeting with the Samaritan woman awakened almost a state of excitement in his mind. It lifted him above the reach of physical desires. This I suppose was because he recognized in that meeting an opportunity of doing what he knew was dearest to his Father's heart. His errand was to ultimately save the world, and now he was engaged in saving at least one soul. No doubt his devotion to the Father's will sustained him, even in the darkest hour. When the will of God consigned him to the hatred of men, to the rejection of the people, to the bitter sorrow of the cross, he could bow his head in humble compliance and say, "Thy will, not mine, be done." But he knew well that the Father willed his sorrows in order to the world's salvation, and that the object dearest to the Father's heart was the recovery of lost souls. He himself has told us of the angels' joy over such. And he has described the whole object of his appearing to man by these matchless words: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." And therefore his love of God the Father, no less than his love of man, made him hail with especial joy such an opportunity as this. We may fairly say that Christ followed the lead of providence. He did himself what he requires of us; he was quick to recognize opportunities. He heard in them a divine call; and by all his sense of his mission among men, by all his desire to please the Father, did he hail the rising faith of that Samaritan and rejoice in bringing to her the message of salvation. Hence I say his evident excitement, if we may use the phrase. Hence his obliviousness to hunger. Hence his forgetfulness of his former fatigue. "Lift up your eyes," he cried to his disciples, "and look on the fields, for they are white already unto harvest." The Father's will would be accomplished, and in the joy of service his soul found its food. He wanted nothing else. Such fruitful obedience was to him its own reward.

I say again, therefore, what a spiritual life was this! Praise itself seems almost to defile it. It was perfect. It was sublime. Thus can we understand his sinlessness. We can imagine no higher ideal; and marvelous to say, here was the ideal realized. We cannot wonder any longer that over this Jesus of Nazareth God should say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

II. And now, while admiring, we are to ask if it is possible for us to imitate in principle this spiritual life, of which the Master gave so fine an example. Possibly, you may say, we may imitate some of the least remarkable traits, but scarcely this. And yet this lies at the root and soul of the rest: imitation of them is but external and spurious if it does not reach this. Only by this can we have real fellowship with him.

We are met at the outset by man's natural reluctance to even think of regarding the will of God as aught but repulsive. Very often objection is openly made to the spiritual view expressed by Christ. God, it is said, must surely want to educate us into the love of virtue and truth for their own sakes. He does not want merely to conquer us, to break our wills by superior power. He wants to lead us to share his own spirit and life; and, therefore, would not ask us to submit merely to his will. To train men, therefore, to merely obey is not so noble as to train men to reason, or to love truth and righteousness for their own sakes. But we reply that we should attain to the most exalted love of truth and righteousness and every other noble thing in no way so well as through loyalty to God. Certainly God does not want to merely conquer us by force, but of all things in the world that is the one not exhibited in Jesus Christ. His was the obedience of love. It sprang from his admiration of the Father's

nature. And so must ours. God has laid us under immeasurable obligations of gratitude. He has condescended to reveal himself to us. He has given proof of his wisdom, his love, his holiness, his righteousness. And, therefore, the will of God is no arbitrary commandment. It is the wish of our dearest Friend. It is the direction given from the world's Pilot. It is the direction of infinite wisdom and righteousness and love; and to be devoted to his will is but to be confident that all his glorious attributes are being expressed for our guidance.

And then, what should we say of one who seeks after truth and righteousness, and yet does not yield obedience to him who is the source of all things—the truth, the righteousness? We should probably conclude that his search was a fancy, his aspiration an illusion. No! What we need is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, to feel that he is the wisest, the most lovely—the embodiment and the source of all other wisdom and goodness; the Sun by which the other planets shine, by whose rays the world of nature receives its life and beauty. We need to love God supremely; and if we do, then the will of God will seem to us always good, even as it did to Christ.

"Man's weakness, waiting upon God,
Its end can never miss;
For men on earth no work can do
More angel-like than this.

"He always wins who sides with God.
To him no chance is lost;
God's will is sweetest to him when
It triumphs at his cost.

"Ill that he blesses is our good,
And unblessed good our ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be his sweet will."

Let man behold, through Christ, the infinite Father, the source of all life and blessedness and good, and man will put God first, and find his highest glory in acting out the prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

But even so, we are met by the further difficulty that, unlike Christ, we are not always sensible of being sent on any special errand into the world. We lose what aim we have, amid the diversities of toil to which we are compelled. We lose what breadth of view we have, amid the multitude of trifles of which our lives are composed. We can imagine Christ's sense of his mission, and how it could absorb him; but what in our lots can correspond? It may indeed be true that, unlike Christ, you have no clear idea of why God sent you into the world. Few have, but it would seem to quite remove God from actual government of the world to say that, therefore, he had no purpose. That glowing picture which the apostle paints of the rising temple should forbid the doubt. Every stone has its place and is needed. It may need to be broken and hewn, to be polished; it may be hid in an unseen place within the wall; no man may notice it. But the Builder meant it to be there, and it contributes its share to the work before which the ages of eternity shall fall in wonder; that work which is to manifest to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God. We may dismiss the doubt therefore, since God is God. We have been made and sent here for a purpose. God's will is meaning to use us, and it is our duty and privilege now to carry out, as far as possible, that will of him that sent us, so far as he has made it known. And certainly, brother man, enough of the Father's will is made known to teach us our work.

We may rejoice to do his will as revealed *in conscience*. He has placed within the soul of man a guide which, within certain limits, and as applied to special acts and circumstances, infallibly indicates his will. So far as it acts, no man can say he is ignorant; and the true child of God will give heed and say, "This is the will of God." Conscience will itself be re-enforced by being so regarded; and it is practically impossible to question conscience, as to most of the practical duties of life, without plainly hearing, "This is the way."

But we may further rejoice to do his will as revealed *in Scripture*. Here he has gone beyond the starlight of conscience and flooded the world with the sunlight of his revelation. The Scriptures contain the will of God for our salvation. They speak in no doubtful tone. We may be as certain as Jesus was what the will of the Father is. Paul called himself an apostle "by the will of God"; so may we. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." It is the will of God that we trust him, that we serve him, that we be holy as he is holy, that we extend his knowledge. These are as absolute commands as are those of the Decalogue; and the true child will take this revelation for his guidance, and by its light will try to carry out his Father's will.

But you may say, "Much of this direction is general, it is not specific. What is the specific will of God for me?" I answer therefore, finally, that we may, like Christ, rejoice to do his will as revealed *in providence*. I have tried to show that even Christ followed where the Father led, embraced opportunities, met new circumstances, prepared for "the hour." And certainly we are to do so. The will of God for each one of us is unfolded by the events of life. These are not causeless. They are not a chance medley of good and bad. God rules: not a sparrow falls without him. And therefore, as providence unrolls the will of God for us, the true child is to

accept and obey. Now he brings an opportunity; now he lays a burden. Now he tries us with prosperity; now with sorrow. Now he sends us into battle and temptation; now he lays us on beds of pain and idleness. Now he wounds, and now he heals; the way opens under his Divine guidance. It may lift us up, it may cast us down. As with Christ, I say, so with us. It may give us a soul to save, it may cause our plans to be rejected, it may lead to Gethsemane, it may translate us to glory; but in all it is the will of him that sent us, the work he has for us to do. In all, infinite wisdom, the Father's goodness, and eternal righteousness move. He shows the way, and man's highest privilege—yea, man's strength and food—is to do his will, because we love and trust and adore him so entirely that what he wishes, that we are glad to do.

I hold, therefore, before us Christ's joy in service as not beyond our power to imitate; and I ask if conscience and reason do not testify that this is the loftiest ideal in life which we can have. When we reach heaven, this will be realized. But here, in the desert, now, in this world of sin, is the time to begin. I do not show you so exalted a Jesus as to put him beyond the reach of imitation. He came to make us like himself. And I ask if any other ideals of life can compare with this—if they are not poor and mean—if this does not soar above them. You claim to seek nobility and greatness and victory. Here they are. Come, learn from Jesus the love of God. Let it win your heart; and as at his feet you look in that infinite, eternal sea of love, whose depths are fathomless and whose billows break on the shores of time—that love of God to man out of which Christ came to save our souls by death—as you gaze on it, rise with this resolve: "By thy grace, O Christ, I too will joy to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

FORGETTING, AND PRESSING FORWARD.

"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."—PHILIPPIANS 3:13, 14.

FORGETTING, AND PRESSING ONWARD.

We are not to take the first part of this text too literally, nor press the apostle's words too closely. He certainly did not mean to say that he had forgotten all his past life and blotted out the memory of all that lay behind him. The Bible must be interpreted naturally, as you would interpret the language of ordinary writers. If we were to take texts =out of their connections and press the literal meaning of every clause and word, we would soon make the book a bundle of contradictions and reduce it to an actual absurdity. Unfortunately this has sometimes been done, and not a few of the differences of opinion which believers of the Bible have among themselves arise from such false and unreasonable methods of interpretation. So, as I have said, Paul did not mean that he had really forgotten the things that lay behind him. In fact, he refers again and again to his past life and experience. In this very chapter he relates his pedigree. Often he refers to his state of mind before he became a Christian—to his spiritual unrest and vain efforts after peace. Still oftener does he recount the story of his conversion, and hold himself up to all ages as a miracle of grace and a monument of Divine mercy. He was very far, therefore, from having forgotten the way along which he had been led. It had been too momentous both for himself and others. It had been too full of both storm and sunshine not to be worth remembering. It had written, as with a pen of steel, lessons of law and love upon the soul of the apostle, and in characters too deep ever to be obliterated.

What, then, did Paul mean when he here describes himself as "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before"? He meant his language to be understood comparatively and relatively. He was thinking chiefly of the new life which had been opened before him by Jesus Christ, and of the enthusiasm and devotion with which he pursued it. He likens himself to a contestant in a foot-race, whose eye is bent on the track before him, not on that behind his back—who is ever measuring in thought the distance yet to be traveled until the prize is won. He meant, therefore, that he was so absorbed in the new pursuits and duties given him by Jesus Christ that his past life was comparatively forgotten. He did not mourn the honors in the Jewish Church which he had lost by becoming a Christian. He did not dwell upon the anger of his Hebrew friends, now that he had the friendship of Christ himself. He did not regret the sacrifice he had made, since a better reward had been bestowed upon him. He did not let past troubles hamper present actions, nor past successes cause him to rest upon his laurels, nor past services satisfy him, nor past

losses embitter him. He turned resolutely to the future. He pushed ahead in his divinely appointed way. He let the dead past bury its dead, while he was absorbed in the living present and the coming future. Speaking relatively, in comparison with the absorbing business of his life, he could say, "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Thus understood, St. Paul's language becomes exceedingly suggestive of things that it is worth our while to forget, and the way in which we should forget them. Like him, we are not required to blot out the remembrance of the past. There could be no improvement if we did not remember past mistakes and profit by them. It is often our sweetest joy and highest pride to think of the days that are no more, of the wondrous history of mankind, of our own journey as Providence has led us on, and above all things, of him whom we are to hold in everlasting remembrance. But we must keep life's balance true. Some people are always living among the gravestones, regretting what is now inevitable, mourning over losses that cannot be repaired, thinking the days of old better than those which are to be—and wasting their energies in sorrowful reminiscences and wistful longings for a perished past, instead of using their energies in the accomplishment of what may be done for the winning of better crowns. It is against this practice that the apostle's experience warns. This practice makes progress impossible. It is a source of misery. It fetters the Christian mind. It does not know that the resurrection has taken place. It makes life a threnody instead of a hosanna. We are to turn from the past that we may obtain the better future. Let me give you an example of the way in which we are to forget the things which are behind, and reach forth unto those things that are before.

I. It is worth our while to forget old doubts and questionings, through absorption in the practical application of the truth brought us by Jesus Christ. Most of the doubts and questionings which men have on the subject of religion are very old. Their hair is gray with the anxious thought of many centuries. They may be represented by old men, with wrinkled foreheads and feeble knees, pretending by dress and manner to be young. But you would be surprised to find how old they are, these questions that disturb your religious faith and hinder you from the performance of your whole duty.

There, for instance, is that weary question about the reason why God allowed sin and misery to enter into his world—a question which men are still pondering, under which they are still restless and sometimes unhappy. But lo! it is as old as human history. The ancient Brahmins wrestled with it. We find it echoed in the hymns of Chaldea that date from the days of Abraham, in the songs of Greece, and in the literature of the age of Solomon; and neither philosophy nor science, neither discovery nor accident, has to this day been able to frame a satisfactory answer.

In like manner the question how to harmonize in thought the absolute sovereignty of God, who ruleth over all and designed the end from the beginning, with the freedom and responsibility of man, is an ancient problem which no answer has been found able to finally solve. Hindoo philosophy settled it by fatalism, making man nothing and deities all. Greek thought vibrated between the two extremes; and from the beginning of Christian history the problem has vexed the ingenuity and taxed the patience of the Church. It is not peculiar to Calvinism. It is a problem which has ever risen up before inquiring minds and baffled the wisdom of the greatest who have grappled with it.

And so, too, most of the specific doubts about and objections to Christian doctrine have descended to us from remote generations. Modern philosophy turns out to be only a careful repetition of speculations which were indulged in by the earliest thinkers. Most of the really important objections to the Bible were raised by the shrewd and cultured antagonists whom ancient paganism put forward as its champions. There can scarcely be a new theory devised, for the human mind has long since gone over the whole ground with plowshare and rake. Nothing is more instructive and entertaining to the student of Christianity than to recognize in ancient times the faces with which he is familiar in our day, although they may be dressed in different clothes and speak another tongue. He will hail them as well-known families, and will return with the conviction that, so far as the religious doubts and questionings of the human mind are concerned, there was some truth in the declaration of Solomon, that there is nothing new under the sun.

I do not mean to say that progress is not being made in religious thought as well as elsewhere. I think there is. God's truth is being better understood. God's Word is being read more intelligently. Light is falling from many a source and on many a fact. Neither do I mean to say that these old problems should not be considered, if for no other reason than that men may be reminded that some of them are insoluble by us, and that what we do know concerning them may be fairly and wisely stated. But I think it clear that they should not be allowed to burden us nor to keep us back from the performance of practical duty. For, mark you how progress has been made even while these dark questionings remained unsolved. Jesus and the apostles did not attempt to answer these philosophical questionings which had been and would be raised by inquiring minds. They gave us certain positive, practical truths, and told us to test them by actual trial, and obtain the good which they would be sure to bring. Christianity in later years did not triumph by confuting the objections raised against it on the part of culture. It answered many of them indeed, but its triumph came from the practical religion which it introduced, and from the effects of faith in Jesus which blessed

individuals and society. So, while the human intellect has been wrestling with the giant problem of life, the being of God has silently been established. Overhead has been the battle of the elements, as on earth the quiet growth of the seed of truth which fell from the Master's hand. While the Titans have been warring in the air, the power of God's love and the offer of his Gospel have been making the world better. The laws of Christ have been closely applied to human conduct; the beauty and the majesty of Jesus have won their way to the hearts of millions. Thus progress in righteousness, in the love of God, and in the practical application of the Gospel, has gone forward, while these profound problems have remained, and hover like clouds above the fretful world.

I judge, therefore, that in view of these facts it is worth our while to forget these doubts and questionings. History has proved that many of them are both hopelessly dark and have nothing whatever to do with the attainment of happiness and peace of mind. That they will ever cease to engage the attention of some would be too much to believe. Every new generation will undertake the task of settling them. But it will soon be glad to leave the task to generations following. It is, therefore, not material for a man to consider them. There are things before him which can be done and questionings which can be probably solved. His own personal Christian duty is as clear as sunlight. That Christ is worthy of his following is manifest to every unperverted mind. That men need to have Christ's teachings taken home to them, and that man himself needs to practically walk with Christ and do his service, the clear facts demonstrate. It is worth his while to forget those doubts and leave those problems unsolved. It is not wise to let them burden him or keep him back from service. Let him leave them behind him, and bend his strength to the racetrack of acknowledged duty, and perhaps when he has reached the goal he may be in fitter condition to deal with them. I am certain that then he will thank God that he did not let them hold him back from the glorious prize.

II. Again, it is worth our while to forget our trials and sorrows, through absorption in the pleasure and gains of Christian work. Not everyone by any means can do this. Not a few dwell on the trials they have had, until they become veritable burdens, invisibly borne on weary shoulders. Under the palsy of regret, energy for new duties becomes enfeebled. Some are embittered by regret, fretful under the apparently hard ordainments of Providence, carrying within their mind sour thoughts of God and of those who are more fortunate, so that the world grows dark to them, loses its beauty and loveliness, and life ends in welcome death. Others simply grieve, striving to be patient and submissive, but knowing not what balm to apply to their wounds or where to find consolation. Few things are sadder than the spectacle of such cherishers of bitter memories; and yet how they nurse their regret and attach an almost sacred dignity to their sorrows, and refuse to undertake the duties and privileges which are before them, as though fettered by the past.

On the other hand, it is only fair to remark that human nature shows marvelous elasticity and capacity to forget. The really wonderful thing is that men and women are so well able to forget the trials and sorrows through which they pass. When we think how heavy these are in nearly every life—how bitter the partings are as we journey along the pathway, how much disappointment and loss there are in the experiences of even the more fortunate—the marvel is that there are so many happy faces and that the sorrows of humanity are so soon forgotten in the enjoyment of other things.

As the vegetation soon springs up on the battlefield, as ruined houses are transformed into fertile hillocks, and the plain where man and horse rolled in awful carnage becomes ere long the harvest field of the farmer, so the pains and griefs of human life are buried under the new labors and pleasures which beckon to themselves the human mind. Thank God it is so. He has made us thus elastic and self-governing that we may not be cast down. Otherwise history would stop, and earth become a graveyard; and the fact that this is part of our natural constitution indicates that it is wise and right to turn from even the keenest trial and the most sacred grief to the summons which the Father brings to us to further work. For it is impossible to suppose that these evil events are sent to us for their own sake. That would be an outrageous impugnation of the goodness and mercy of God, especially when he has distinctly declared that he does not willingly afflict or grieve the child of man. They are meant to discipline our souls—to show us truth more clearly, to open to our minds the realities of life, and to guide us into the ways of thinking and acting which are better than those we followed before. And if so, then they will do their work only when they are themselves relatively forgotten in the new life to which they introduce us.

The gardener prunes the vine that it may bring forth more fruit. He cuts off useless branches that others may replace them, stronger and fresher; and the pruning is to be forgotten in the ripening clusters that are gathered in consequence of it. The gold is refined that the alloy may be disengaged from union with the precious metal; and when the latter is purified, its worth far exceeds the trial through which it had to pass. And who of us cannot glean from our own lives illustrations of a like character? Looking back through the mist of years, we can recall the failures that at the time nearly broke our hearts; losses that nearly crushed us, but which it now requires a positive effort to remember, so completely have they merged into the life for which Providence meant them to qualify us. Those gloomy days were meant to be forgotten. They were meant to merge into a nobler life. They were like the sharp pain of a surgeon's knife—the pain soon passes away, but the benefit of it remains. God never meant them to linger as phantoms in our memories, to absorb our thought and claim

our sole attention. He meant them to make us patient, and stronger for other tasks, for the doing of which this discipline was required.

We should be very careful, however, to drown our pains and sorrows not in selfish work and pleasures, but in Christian work and in the joys of Christian service. Let us use no intoxicating cup to cover with oblivion our troubles and cares. Some plunge even into actual dissipation that they may kill the sting of memory. Others resort to business and social pleasures. But then the forgetfulness is short-lived and bitter, and you truly add new causes for further regret in years to come. It is worth our while to forget our trials and sorrows, if we do so by becoming absorbed in better living and in Christian work. Go out of thyself and serve others. Forget thyself in thinking of thy fellow-men. Reach forth unto the things that are before thee. Help the unfortunate. Raise up the fallen. Teach the ignorant. Keep thy mind busy with useful thoughts. Give thy brain and hand to useful toil. Forget thy own pains and griefs in ministering to those which others have. It will then indeed be worth thy while to dismiss them from command of thee, for they will never be of so much use as when they thus stimulate kind and gentle deeds. It is thus that thou wilt "find in loss a gain to match," and rise on "stepping stones of your dead self to higher things."

III. So, too, it is worth our while to forget our so-called successes and our earthly reverses by absorption in those ends of living which Christ has taught us to be really good and great. It was in this sense particularly that St. Paul used our text. The things which he forgot were his noble Jewish birth, his upright training, his successes and honors in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen. Not even a Roman was prouder of his birth than a Jew was of his. Before that young Jew of Tarsus high honors rose, ready almost to lay themselves at his feet. He attained the highest culture which his master Gamaliel could give him. The way was open for him to become a noted man in his nation, a leader in Church and State. He valued these things. He did not toss them from him without an effort, but he did toss them from him. In the sense in which I have explained it, he forgot them: "What things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ." That he might follow the truth and serve the Lord, he turned his mind away from all the honor and gain which the Jewish world could offer him. He did so absolutely. He did not let his mind dwell on the sacrifice which he had made. He did not repine over his loss. He cheerfully and joyfully pursued his way of Christian service, and never allowed himself to be deterred in it for a moment by any thought of the sacrifices which he had made, rightly thinking that nothing that the whole world could give him was worth comparison with the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Now, certainly it is harder for us to forget the glittering prizes which the world offers us than anything else. It is hard to persuade ourselves that they are really behind us; that we have left them in the rear and gone on by them to something greater and better. They absorb the energy of most of us, these imaginary piles of glittering dollars that we think we see one day ours, these famous honors in professional or public life that we hope one day to have. They are the corruptible crowns for which the majority of men are striving, and which fill the souls of millions with selfish and sordid thoughts. But let the light in on these earthly prizes, and how apt they are to turn out tinsel and brass! Finery that is quite resplendent by gaslight often appears tawdry and poor in the rays of the morning sun. So when the realities of life are felt by the soul, when the mind's supreme need of truth and of the fellowship with God are realized, then do the dollars and crowns for which this poor world struggles seem mean enough to awaken the contempt and even the hatred of those who have been deceived by them. On the other hand, the true life which Jesus has revealed will stand the test of the most searching investigation: when the blazing light of eternity falls on it, it is still found to be real gold. The life which follows Christ in doing good, which forsakes its own pleasure at the call of those in need, which loves and works for God—the life which is at harmony with God and at peace with its fellow-men—that life appears more and more beautiful as we try it, and its reward more and more worthy of our toil.

I say, therefore, that these paltry things which men call success and honor are worth forgetting, if their place be taken by those ends of living which Christ has taught us to be really great and good. We need not fret if we lose them; we need not care if we never win them. Seeking greater prizes, why should we repine if the baubles and tinsel are not had? I say to you, forget them. Go higher up. Seek wisdom and righteousness, truth and character. Lay up treasures in the heart, and do not be bound and limited by fancied good which, at the longest, will soon fade away.

IV. Once more, and most earnestly of all, do we say that it is worth our while to forget our old sins and errors, in the joy of that forgiveness which God has provided to every repentant sinner. Forget them? It may be impossible wholly to forget them. The memory of them will sting. Their effects often remain long after they have been forgiven. As I have said, Paul did not literally forget them. He mourned over them to the day of his death, and even thought himself the chief of sinners, because he had persecuted the Church of God. But he did not allow them to trouble him any longer, heinous though his sins had been, for God's forgiveness of the repentant sinner is full and complete. He does not receive us on probation. He does not promise forgiveness hereafter. He offers it now. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." He welcomes every penitent as the father of the prodigal did his wandering boy, stopping his confession with the kiss of love and saying, "This my son was dead, and is alive again." He forgives and forgets. He bears no anger. He keeps no malice. He blots out the record of our misdeeds. He covers it with the merits of his

blessed Son.

Surely, then, it is worth our while to forget them also. We need not be burdened with them. So long as we have not repented of them, we may well be crushed under their load; but when we have cast them upon God, we are forever free. Let them go down into the pit of eternal oblivion. Let there be no phantom rising from the grave of buried sins to affright us. Looking to the Christ, their power is all gone. Oh, what a relief this is! See how men are driven by an accusing conscience—longing for deliverance from themselves, since in themselves they carry the executioner of broken law. Hear them crying out for waters of Lethe to drown the sting of memory. Again see them courting death in the vain hope of finding deliverance from their shame. But death will bring no deliverance to the impenitent. Behold Dives: "Son, remember!" There are no waters of Lethe. There is only one way of securing peace and forgetfulness—confession, repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ. Then we may forget our sins and errors. Over them is sprinkled the atoning blood. Justice is satisfied; and forgetting the things which are behind, reaching forth for the things which are before, we may with elastic step and happy hearts press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

There are, then, some things worth forgetting. It is not wise nor right to be forever halting under the bondage of that which Jesus Christ came to destroy. In order that we may rise to a higher life we must forget the lower. Why should we be forever killing foes that are already dead, clinging to the memories of things whose purpose has been served, dallying with toys when time has brought greater prizes to contend for, and groaning under sins for which Christ has brought redemption? No, let us believe and go forward. The future will be better than the past. The way is open; on to attainment! forward to the victory! Make Jesus Christ your Saviour. Take him altogether, and for all he is. Then will the glorious life and joy into which he leads us swallow up the doubts and fears and sins of former days. These will be forgotten in the enjoyment of God's loving mercy and guiding hand. I plead with you to take these truths to heart. Turn your face heavenward. Go forward to the Promised Land. Break your fetters and live for the new things which God hath prepared for those that love him.

"UNTIL THE DAY DAWN."

"The things which are not seen are eternal."—I CORINTHIANS 4: 18.

"UNTIL THE DAY DAWN."

Awake, my soul! The eternal day is breaking,
The darkness of the world is pierced with lights,
And rays, prophetic of the morn's arising,
Already gleam far up the eastern heights.

The day of painless life and tireless vigor,
The day of widening knowledge of the best,
The day when earth's deceits and adumbrations
Shall change into the truth in glory dressed.

O soul of mine, let not dull sleep bewitch thee;
Let not the gilded fantasies of sense
Cause thee to slumber when heaven's light is shining,
And God's dear voice is summoning thee hence.

Thine earthly life is but a preparation
For grander toil and never-ending joys,
Thou wast not meant to find it satisfactory,
Its keenest sorrows are its broken toys.

Already has thine opening eye caught vision
Of things more real, of gladness more profound,
When, through the rupture of this earth's relations,
The voice of God and truth has uttered sound.

Then bend thy gaze to the predestined future,
Anticipate the life that draweth nigh;
Awake, my soul, and contemplate the portion
Of those whose lot is fixed with Christ on high.

Think of the seed that bloometh into flower;
Think of the thought that shapes itself in deed;
Think of the chaos ordered into beauty;
Think of the Child that for the world did bleed.

Mark what portentous prophecies of power
All these suggest as thine intended goal,
When day, now breaking, shall at last be entered
And the grand promise shall itself unroll.

Soul! let the voice of Christ, thy sure Forerunner,
Summon thee now into the heavenly life.
Soon shall the brightness of the day flow o'er thee,
Soon peace shall end thy bitter earthly strife.

Thine are these mansions; thine the Father's bosom;
Thine the high paths that sinless feet have trod.
Thine is to be the light that faileth never,
The endless life of fellowship with God.

December 29, 1895.

THE TEACHER AND PASTOR.

From President F. L. Patton's address at the funeral of Dr. Purves.

We all felt the terrible shock when word came to us on Wednesday morning that Dr. Purves had died suddenly the night before. We knew that he was suffering under an acute attack and that in recent months he had been subject to such attacks, but we did not suppose that his illness was of a nature that was likely to prove fatal.

This congregation, the First Presbyterian Church of Princeton, the Princeton Theological Seminary, and Princeton University have sustained a great loss. All connected with these institutions feel that they have suffered a personal bereavement, for Dr. Purves had a singular power of laying hold upon the affections of those to whom he stood related.

We admired him as a preacher and as a teacher. We were impressed with his goodness and with the genuineness of his religious life, but, beyond all that, we loved him as a man. The story of his life is familiar to us all. He was born in the city of Philadelphia on the 27th of February, 1852. After graduating at the University of Pennsylvania, he entered Princeton Theological Seminary, remaining there after the completion of his curriculum for a year of graduate study.

It was during this year in Princeton that he came under the quickening influence of his great friend and teacher, the beloved Dr. Caspar Wistar Hodge, and that he acquired that taste for New Testament study which he so assiduously cultivated during his two pastorates in Baltimore and Pittsburg, and which ended in his being the unanimous choice of the directors of the Princeton Theological Seminary as the successor of Dr. Hodge.

It was a matter of great doubt to him and to his friends whether he should give up the pulpit to take the professor's chair, for he had singular qualifications for both positions. He was an eloquent preacher, and his services were especially acceptable to young men, who came in throngs to hear him on Sunday evenings.

He also had special qualifications as a teacher. He was a ripe scholar, and what was a very important factor in the case, he knew, as few men know, how to show the bearing of accurate, minute exegetical study of the Bible to the service of the pulpit. These facts, added to his warmth of temperament, gave him great facility in dealing with theological students.

None who had the privilege of being his pupil will ever forget his hospitality. His house was their home, and they were always welcomed to his table. Many a young minister in the service of the church to-day will recall his relations to Dr. Purves, and the hospitality of his home, as the brightest memory of his seminary days.

It is rare that we find a man equally capable to do the work of the pulpit and the professor's chair. And while each sphere furnishes ample opportunities for anyone, still, in rare cases, it is perhaps well to allow those who are fitted to do so to fill both positions. When, therefore, Dr. Purves, as stated supply to the First Presbyterian Church of Princeton, and afterwards its pastor, added the duties of the pulpit to those of his professorship, it was felt to be advantageous to the best interests of all concerned.

During his life in Princeton he had frequent invitations from prominent churches to become their pastor, but he declined. Through all, I believe, he felt that his heart was in the work of his chair, and that with a dual position of pastor and professor, he had the widest scope for the exercise of his best powers, and the fullest opportunity for the realization of his highest ambitions. I think I do not misrepresent him when I say it. But when the pulpit of this church became vacant, the eyes of the congregation turned to him. Occupying a foremost place in the denomination to which it belongs, it called for a strong man who could administer with great ability its affairs and maintain the high standard of spiritual preaching set by Dr. James W. Alexander, Dr. Rice, and Dr. Hall.

You made no mistake, my dear friends, when you felt that the one man to fill this vacant place in the American pulpit, and to be added to his great succession, was Dr. Purves. We were loath to have him leave Princeton, and there were some, perhaps, who were never satisfied respecting the wisdom of his decision, but most of us thought that the interests of the Church at large transcended all local interests, and that they would be best subserved by his acceptance of its call. He entered upon the duties here with enthusiasm. His heart and his head were enlisted to their utmost efforts in the work of this church, and he soon found himself absorbed in the many religious and philanthropic enterprises that consume the time and exhaust the energy of ministers of large churches in great cities. I do not think he worked harder in New York than he did in Princeton, for Dr. Purves was a man who did with all his might what his hands found to do.

One rarely finds a man with such capacity for hard work and varied work. When he sustained the dual relation of pastor and professor in Princeton, he never allowed the duties of one sphere of labor to be an excuse for slighting the other sphere of labor. He was always up to date in the literature of his department, notwithstanding the exacting calls of his parish. Nor did he find an easy mode of preparation for the pulpit by giving his theological lectures a homiletical form. Indeed I sometimes thought it would have been well if he had brought some of his New Testament studies into the pulpit. This was Dr. Hodge's method, and his sermons were all studies in biblical theology; but Dr. Purves, though always a preacher to whom theological students listened with delight for hours, was not distinctively a preacher to theological students. He was very comprehensive and varied in his range of topics for the pulpit, and was equally acceptable to the undergraduates of the university and to the men and women who constitute the congregations of great cities.

We cannot understand Dr. Purves as a preacher or as teacher unless we know him as a man. He had a warm heart; he had a keen eye, a good memory for names and faces. He seemed to know more people in Princeton than anyone else. He never loitered or dreamed; he was alert, active, energetic, interested in all good work. The movements of his mind, like those of his body, were quick. He was religious without being austere, just as he was companionable without being worldly. He touched human life at a great many points. As a New Testament specialist, it was his business to be familiar with the literature and progress of the Apostolic period. How much he had made himself master of that period his "Apostolic Age"^[1] will testify. But he had a wider range of thought than that. I have heard him preach Thanksgiving sermons that involved much thought, the result of much reading and clear thinking upon political science. While he was far from being disposed to allow sociology to supersede theology, yet he recognized that the Gospel had great bearing on social questions, and he was deeply interested in all sociological movements.

But when we judge him as a teacher, we must judge him rather by his influence upon the minds of his pupils than by the products of his pen, scholarly and creditable as they always were. For in a department that is so full of activity as that of New Testament literature, it is only by incessant study that one can do much original work.

A great teacher cannot always be an author, and a great author is not always the best teacher. Dr. Purves, as all his students will testify, was a great teacher, and by common consent he held, and is recognized as having held, a foremost place in the American pulpit. He was not a controversial preacher. He was not a theological preacher. He was not a literary preacher, though he had command of a finished style. Philosophy had little place in his sermons, and he made no use of the sensational topics of the day. He was eloquent rather than brilliant. His sermons were always spiritual. They were compactly, systematically organized, with no parade of logic. Of no one could it be more truly said than of him, that his coming among you was not with the wisdom of enticing words of man's pleasing, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, and that he determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified. He was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, believing it to be the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation.

I have spoken of Dr. Purves as I knew him. I have spoken of him in reference to his wide relations, because I believe that he belongs to the church at large, but I do not forget that the special grief of this occasion falls upon this bereaved congregation. He was a great preacher, but he was more than that, he was a great pastor. How comforting he was to the bereaved; how prompt he was to visit the sick; how uplifting and tender his prayers; how precious the communion seasons which you and I and others in Princeton and elsewhere have enjoyed under his ministrations!

There are men who are great in the pulpit, but who find the obligations of the pulpit are such that they leave them no time for pastoral visitation. There are men who are great in

other spheres who give their best efforts to the reviews and journals, and give what time is left to the pulpit. Dr. Purves gave his best to his congregation—heart and soul and spirit he gave to them.

And now that he is gone, it is with a full consciousness of our loss that we mourn him. The loss is ours, not his. Our hearts bleed for those who are left behind. We raise anxious questions, when men like him are called away, as to who shall fill the vacant place. But we do not murmur. For him to live was Christ and to die was gain.

1 ([Return](#))

Apostolic Age. Scribner's, 1900.

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