

INWARD CONFLICTS

NO. 593

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon you.
What will you see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies.”
Song of Solomon 6:13.*

THIS verse is not addressed to the Church in her doubting state, nor while seeking her absent Lord, but it refers to her in her very best condition—when she has lately come from the enjoyment of fellowship with her divine Spouse and when her soul, in consequence, is like the chariots of Amminadib. Read the context, and you will perceive that believers who are rejoicing in the Lord may look upon this text as their own. Observe *the title* of the person addressed—it is a marriage name. She has been espoused to Solomon, and she has taken his name, and become *Solyma*, for such is the best rendering of the word rendered Shulamite. This name is appropriate to souls who are united to Christ, to those whom Christ has betrothed unto Himself in righteousness, who live in union with their Lord. You who abide in the Lord Jesus are, by a mysterious bond, made one with Christ; and He has conferred upon you His own name—He is Solomon, and you are Solyma. That is a remarkable expression in the book of Jeremiah—“This is *her* name whereby *she* shall be called, the Lord our righteousness.” One would have thought that such a title was incommunicable; but yet so close is the union between Christ and His people, that the Holy Spirit actually transfers that dignified expression, “Lord our righteousness,” to His Israel—His beloved. The title Solyma also signifies both perfection and peace. There is *perfection* in every child of God, but not a perfection in the flesh. We are perfect in Christ Jesus; complete in Him; spotless, by being washed in His blood; glorious, by being robed in His righteousness. Every child of God is right sumptuously arrayed in the wedding dress of the Savior’s righteousness. We may truly say that, “Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Every believer stands in Christ perfectly accepted! The sweet name, Solyma, also signifies *peace*—“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The true heir of heaven is not at enmity with God, nor at war with his own conscience. The silver trumpet has proclaimed an everlasting peace; God’s sword has been sheathed in the Savior’s heart, and divine justice is on the side of the chosen people.

The request of the text next demands a moment’s consideration. It is repeated four times. “Return, return, O Solyma; return, return, that we may look upon you.” Does not this request proceed from the daughters of Jerusalem who desire to behold her beauty? Souls, that are anxious about their own state, may well desire to understand the experience of the true child of God. You need to know whether you also are a Christian, therefore, you need to know how Christians feel, how they think of Christ, how they are moved by His Spirit, what is their appearance when His love is shed abroad in their hearts. You anxiously desire to see the true Christian that you may measure yourselves and see whether there is the life of God in you. These daughters of Jerusalem also desire to look upon her for their own delight; for, as to gaze upon beauty is exceedingly pleasant, so is it specially delightful to the pure in heart to have fellowship with the pure in heart—to see the fruits which the Spirit has brought forth—to behold the cleanness of the believer’s walk, and to know the savor of the believer’s conversation. No beauty equals the beauty of holiness; nothing is so lovely as uprightness; and therefore, we wonder not that four times the request is made. Perhaps, too, these daughters wanted to look at her as an example to themselves. Saints look upon the beauty of others that they may be enabled to emulate their excellencies. Let us read with affectionate attention the biographies of holy men that they may be a stimulus to ourselves, exciting us to exert ourselves in the Redeemer’s cause, and may afford us some hope that the highest Christian attainments are not altogether beyond our reach. I think this is the reason why the daughters of Jerusalem said, “Return, return, O Solyma”—they would comfort themselves by seeing whether they are like she is; they would delight themselves by beholding her perfections; they would also stir up their own souls by seeing her example.

The rest of the text, you will observe, may be considered two ways—either the spouse asks the question, which is the most probable—she says, “What shall you see in Solyma?” She thinks that there is no beauty in her, nothing in her that anyone should delight in her, or fix his eyes upon her, or derive any profit from regarding her. “Why,” she says, “all that you will see in me is a company of two armies—a conflict between good and evil. If you look upon me you see nothing but good and evil fighting together, darkness and light contending. I am not worth your looking at.” And so she would gladly veil her face and go away if it were not for the earnest request which seems to hold her fast—or, as some think, this question is asked by bystanders, and is answered by the daughters of Jerusalem—“What shall you see in the Shulamite?” the giddy crowd inquires; and instructed believers cry, “We shall see in her the concurrence of two triumphant armies returning as choristers, with music and with dancing, from the field of battle! We shall see in her the King immortal, invisible, with all His hosts of grace; we shall see in her the purified soul co-working with the glorious Savior; we shall see in the Christian Church the activity of sanctified manhood, combined with the majestic power of Deity residing within.” This is what *she* might not say of herself; but what they would see in her. Observe, then, the two meanings, and let us dismiss the second until another occasion. There is, in every Christian, a sweet composition of Christ’s power and of the activity of his own soul; there is the power of God, and there is the creature himself made willing in the day of God’s power. There is in the Christian, God working in him to will and to do of His own good pleasure, and the man himself working out his own salvation with fear and trembling. In the Christian Church, there is man working for God and God working in man—and all this in such a joyful manner as to be rather resembling the triumph of returning conquerors than the going forth to fight of those who make war. What shall we see in Solyma? We shall see the blessed meeting of the two great armies of sanctified humanity and of God made flesh.

But we are now coming to take the text in the first sense—the Church blushingly declares that there is nothing to be seen in her except conflict, turmoil, the wrestling of two great powers—two mighty armies contending for the mastery. Upon this point, may God give us light for the comfort of many who are passing through this stage of Christian experience.

I. We shall, at the outset, this morning, first call upon you, who know the Lord, to OBSERVE THE FACT OF THE TWO ARMIES IN EVERY CHRISTIAN.

This is very evident, but to aid your reflections, let me remind you, *throughout this very book you see traces of it*. This Canticle is a marriage song—it therefore speaks less of the battlefield than some other portions of Scripture, for at the marriage feast allusions to trial and to warfare ought to be few. Yet, that the Church is not altogether sanctified is clear, if you note such passages as the fifth verse of the first chapter. “I am black,” she says, “but lovely, O you daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.” She is black—here is her natural state—here we have the manifestation of her continued depravity of heart. “I am black, but lovely”—here is her spiritual condition—the Spirit of God has clothed her with beauteous graces; Christ has washed her and made her fair in His sight. “I am like the tents of Kedar,” she says, “the smoke-dried curtains of those Arab wanderers who dwelt in this country set forth my sinfulness.” And yet in Christ, she compares herself to those embroidered curtains, heavy with gold and silver threads, which hang about the throne of Solomon! In the third chapter, she plainly proves that she is not always enjoying fellowship, but is in a mixed condition. “By night on my bed”—here is her slothfulness—“I sought Him whom my soul loves”—here is her activity. “I sought Him”—here is her desire—“but I found Him not”—here is her sad experience of His absence. Then in the fifth chapter, the second verse, there is a singular commixture. “I sleep”—I am sluggish, cold, dead, lethargic—“but my heart wakes”—the inward principle is still vital, still panting after something better. We find her in the third verse making vain excuses for not opening to her Lord; but before long you come to the fifth verse, and you find her opening to her Beloved, though her Beloved has withdrawn—refusing but soon complying; the two natures battling; the one fast closing the door, and the other opening it and seeking the Beloved with tearful complaint. Throughout the Song there is always this mixture.

But, as I have said, we cannot expect to find much of this in a nuptial ode; turn, therefore, to the great book of battle songs, *the Book of Psalms*, and here you have in almost every Psalm indications of the complexity of the Christian character. So strange are some of the Psalms that it has been well said they might have been written rather by two persons than by one. David will begin out of the very depths

calling unto God, and then, he will end with all the jubilant notes of a conqueror leading captivity captive. I shall not have time to refer to many passages, but the 42nd Psalm will strike you where the one David seems to be reasoning with another David. “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope you in God: for I shall yet praise Him.” And the next Psalm is much to the same effect. Perhaps, however, the most eminent and striking paradox of the whole, is the 73rd Psalm, the 22nd verse, there he says of himself, “So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before You.” He could not go further than that surely in a description of himself. “Nevertheless, I am continually with You: You have held me by my right hand. You shall guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside You.” Heavy as a stone, he lies embedded in the mire, and yet all of a sudden, he takes wings to himself and outstrips the eagle’s flight, as he loses himself in the splendor of the Sun of Righteousness, mounting so high as to be entirely lost to all but God! David’s experience, as we find it pictured to us in the Psalms, is but our own, written out in large capital letters; and here we see what strange incongruities, what marvelous paradoxes are found in men.

If we need still further instruction upon this matter, let me refer you to *the epistles of our apostle Paul*. I read in your hearing, just now, that extraordinary passage in the seventh of Romans. How could there have been more graphically described than we have there, the war and the contention which is always going on between the old nature and the divine life which God has implanted within us? To the like effect is the 17th verse of the fifth chapter of the Galatians, where he says, “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would.” We are carnal and yet spiritual—lost in self, yet saved in Christ. We are all imperfections and yet perfect; incomplete in all things and yet complete in everything! Strange contradictions, but yet most strangely true.

Another evidence of this matter is *the concurrent experience of saved souls*. I thought of just taking down at random biographies from my library shelves and writing out passages, but I had scarcely time for that; in truth, you have but to read the truthful life of any Christian, and you soon find that he is not all Spirit, but also flesh; not all renewed nature, but still compassed with infirmity. We have whole volumes upon this subject. There is “*Bunyan’s Holy War*,” describing God’s conquest of the town of Mansoul, and its subsequent attacks by sins lurking within and foes storming without. Sibbe’s book, “*The Soul’s Conflict*,” contains a mass of experiential knowledge. But you will perhaps feel more pleased if I give you, instead of words prose, one or two expressions in the form of rhyme, which will show you that our hymn-writers—they should be among the more joyous of the Christian Church—have been compelled, sometimes, to sing paradoxes concerning themselves. Ralph Erskine has left us that strange work, “*The Believer’s Riddle*,” the greatest riddle that was ever written, a perfect maze to all but those who have the clue within. He says—

*“My heart’s a mirror, dim and bright,
A compound strange of day and night,
Of dung and diamonds, dross and gold,
Of summer’s heat and winter’s cold.”*

Hart, whose hymns come, indeed, from the heart—rightly named was he—in his hymn called, “*The Paradox*,” says—

*“How strange is the course that a Christian must steer,
How perplexed is the path he must tread.
The hope of his happiness rises from fear,
And his life he receives from the dead.
His fairest pretensions must wholly be waved,
And his best resolutions be crossed;
Nor can he expect to be perfectly saved
Till he finds himself utterly lost.
When all this is done and his heart is assured,
Of the total remission of sins;
When his pardon is signed and his peace is procured,
From that moment his conflict begins.”*

We have that hymn of Newton’s, which you will find in your *Rippon’s Selection*—

*“I would, but cannot sing,
I would, but cannot pray,”*

and so on. Still more remarkable is that hymn—

*“I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.”*

But I need not repeat it, because you have it in your books. You will there find that instead of God’s working in the way in which he expected, the singer was made to feel the hidden evils of his heart, and so he was humbled and brought in true penitence nearer to God. Cowper thus sings of himself in a hymn which is also in your book—

*“The Lord will happiness divine
On contrite hearts bestow;
Then tell me, gracious God, is mine
A contrite heart or no?
I sometimes think myself inclined
To love You, if I could;
But often feel another mind,
Averse to all that’s good.
My best desires are faint and few,
I gladly would strive for more!
But, when I cry, ‘My strength renew,’
Seem weaker than before.
O make this heart rejoice or ache!
Decide this doubt for me;
And, if it is not broken, break,
And heal it, if it be.”*

Thus, if time did not fail us, we might go through all those men who have at any time served the Church of God, and say of them all that they have experienced, felt, and confessed a struggle and a conflict between what God has implanted and what nature has left in them. Nor do I think, dear friends, that we ought at all to wonder at this. It sounds strange in the carnal ear, but we ought not to marvel, for this is only according to the analogy of nature. If you look abroad, you will discern everywhere contending forces, and out of these contending forces the rule of nature comes. See yonder orbs; moved by a mysterious impulse, they seek to fly off into space; but the sun holds them by invisible bands. The bands of the sun’s attraction would draw them at once into his heat, but on the other hand, the centrifugal force would drive them far away into distant space. Between these two, they keep the circular orbit which God has at present appointed. So we have a corrupt nature within us, which would drive us to sin, and on the other hand, the divine power within would draw us into perfect conformity and union with Christ; between those two forces the Christian life becomes much what it is. Observe, how in this world death and life are contending together. Death crowds his graves, but life wins the victory; Death may toll the knell, and this is his note of triumph; but every cry of every new-born infant is another shout of the battle of life in which life still claims to be victorious! Look at your own persons, and in your own bodies, you see this duplex action. You breathe, but the same lungs which receive the fresh, pure air, give forth the noxious vapor. There is scarcely an organ of the body which is without an apparatus for the secretion of an injurious substance and its expulsion. The brightest eye that ever swam in light casts forth some defilement; the skin, if it is healthful, has a part of its functions to throw off from us that which would certainly breed disease. There is going on in every human body a strange conflict between life and death; and every moment, our life stands as it were in the center of two great armies who are contending whether we should be the prey of the worm, or should still continue to breathe. Do you wonder, therefore, if the whole world of nature is or has fallen into this state, that man, the little world, should be the same? Wonder or not, certain it is that it is so; and let those who have been staggered because they have felt a battle within, from this time forth rather rejoice, because this is the path which all the people of God have trod before.

II. Now, concerning THE ORIGIN OF THIS CONFLICT.

There is but a slight battle in an unrenewed man. There is a sort of conflict of a minor kind between conscience and his grosser passions. Even Ovid could speak of this, and several heathen writers confess a war within; but there is no conflict to any high degree in the ungodly man; because, while the armed strong man keeps his house, his goods are at peace. While there is one master, a man may cheerfully serve him; but in the moment of *regeneration*, a new Master comes into the house—a stronger than he has come, and He will bind the strong man, and after many conflicts, He will cast him out forever, and get that house to be in His own possession. The new nature, which God implants in His people, is directly the opposite of the old one. As the old nature comes of Satan, being defiled and depraved by the fall, so the new nature comes direct from heaven, pure and without spot. As the old nature is sin, is essentially sin, so the new nature is essentially divine grace—it is a living and incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever, a seed which cannot sin because it is born of God. When these two, therefore, come into conflict, it is as when fire and water meet—either the one or the other must die. There can be no truce, no parley; the two are deadly foes; the life of the one is the death of the other; the strength of the one the weakness of the other. Now, the old nature has been there beforehand; it is like a tree well rooted—it has been there 20, 30, 40, 50, or 60 years according to the date of conversion, and it is not easily torn up by its roots. Even when grace comes into the heart and makes sin fall, as Dagon did before the ark of God, yet is it true of sin as it was of Dagon—the stump is left, and there is still enough vitality in that old stump to breed pain and confusion without limit. The reigning power of sin falls dead the moment a man is converted, but the *struggling* power of sin does not die until the man dies.

Bunyan said that unbelief had as many lives as a cat, and sin has the same vitality. Until we are wrapped in our winding-sheets, we shall never have that black thread of depravity drawn out from us; it *will*, it *must* continue to be there till God shall sanctify us—spirit, soul, and body—and take us home. When you remember how pure the new life is which God has given you—it is from God Himself; an emanation from His Spirit; as pure as Deity—and think how sinful, on the other hand, is your corrupt nature; can it be possible that these two should be at peace? Can two walk together unless they are agreed? Can these two principles, which are entirely opposed to one another, by any chance live at peace? It cannot be, and even if it could be, there are allies without who will never be quiet; there is Satan, who will never rest from stirring up our corruptions, and on the other hand, there is the Holy Spirit, who will never pause in the putting forth of His divine power till all evil is cast out, root and branch. Since these two must fight, the Spirit of God and the spirit of evil, so the two principles within, which are their children, must continue in conflict till our dying day. Here, then, is the source of this conflict. O my dear hearers, some of you do not know anything about this! Remember, you are in the gall of bitterness if you do not. If you are all one way, then you are all the wrong way. If there is in you no conflict, it is because there is no divine power there to drive the evil one out. The more of these wars and fights you feel, the more have you cause to thank God and take courage! The battle is not yours, but God's. You are not alone in this warfare; you shall overcome, as millions have done before you—through the blood of the Lamb!

III. This brings us to a third reflection. Let us for a moment consider THE REALITY OF THIS CONFLICT.

The warfare in the Christian mind is not a thing of imagination. It is most true and real. If you need proof of it, you must pass through it. Did you ever kneel down in an agony of spirit, resisting some furious temptation from within? Some of us know what it is to feel the cold sweat running down our brows when we have to fight against ourselves in fearful struggles against black thoughts of unbelief. Perhaps it may be that the base heart within has even doubted the existence of God, and dared to prompt us to defy the Deity; and we have loathed that thought, and hated it so much that our whole spirit was put to the utmost stretch of tension, in order to win a victory over ourselves. You must, if you are at all subject to strong emotions, have felt that this struggle was a terrible fact; to you there could be no doubt about it, for your whole soul felt it—your heart was like a field which is torn up and soaked with blood by the fury of battle. There is a frightful reality in this conflict, when we remember how some Christians fall during it, and sin gets the mastery. Remember, sin may win a battle, but it cannot win the campaign. What? Were there no corruptions in David? What do you think made him sin with Bathsheba? Was there no corrupt heart left in Noah, when he was naked to his shame? Was there no corruption in Lot, when he sinned in the cave? Why, those black things, which have stained the character of these holy

men throughout all time, prove to us how dreadful must be the power of sin, and how mighty must be the power which keeps sin down. Remember what the joy of a Christian is when he feels that he has triumphed over sin. Ah, there is something real here! If the daughters of Jerusalem praised David when he came back with Goliath's head, so do all our powers bless and praise God when He gives us the neck of our spiritual enemies. Like the songsters of old, we sing, "O my soul, you have trod down strength." These are no fictions or imaginations of a poetic and fevered brain—he, that has once been along the road to heaven, knows that above all things the traveler has need to be on the watch against himself.

IV. In the fourth place, let us notice THE CHANGES WHICH TAKE PLACE IN THIS WARFARE.

The conflict in a Christian is not always carried on with the same fury. There is always war, but there is not always battle; the flesh always hates the Spirit, and the Spirit is always the opponent of the flesh; but they are not always fighting, and when they fight, it is not always with the same fury. You ask why? Well, *sometimes the flesh is not as powerful* as at other times. There are moments when, if sin were in the Christian's way, the flesh would not choose it. I may not be able to tell you exactly why, but certain it is that, partly from changes of body, and also from certain phenomena of mind, there are seasons when the propensities to evil, though still as evil, are not so vigorous as they were—their strength is awful, but it sleeps. The young lion is always a lion; but its claws are concealed, and it plays like a lamb. The raging sea is not always in tempest, yet tempests sleep in its waves. Perhaps there is more to be dreaded in the quietness of our depravity than in the raging of it, for sometimes it is the treacherous calm which the Christian ought to fear more than the storm.

Again, it is quite certain that the Spirit's work within us is not always equally active. The Spirit of God is always in a Christian—He dwells in the believer as in a temple. "My Spirit will I not utterly take from him," is true of every saint; but yet you must know that your faith is often weak, that your love is not always like a flame of fire. You cannot pray at all times as you wished, Ah, brethren, we can sometimes dash along in service like the chariots of Amminadib, but at other times, the wheels are taken off, and we drag the chariots heavily like Pharaoh in the midst of the Red Sea. A change, then, in the flesh, or a change in the spirit, may produce a diversity in the present form of the conflict; it is always there, but not always the same. I suppose that, when it is most furious, the reason for its fury may be sought for in the strength of both sides. I do not think that when the flesh is strong and the spirit is weak, that there is much conflict, then there is rather a speedy defeat; but when the Spirit of God is gloriously at work in our souls, when faith is vigorous, when hope is bright, when love is flaming, and when, at the same time the corrupt powers put forth all their might, then it is that the conflict is stern. Some Christians do not enter into this state of strong conflict for two reasons—they are men of weak passions, and divine grace in them is at a low ebb. But when a man is endowed with a strong mental nature, and the Spirit is also vigorous within him, then, there will be a contest something like the combat of two Samsons fighting and struggling together as to who shall get the victory.

Ah, beloved, these things may change, as I have said, but the war is never over. Do not any of you ever say, "I shall never be tempted again." Gray-headed brethren, do not think that the old man in you is dead. If professors fall into grave sin, and dishonor the Church, they are as often old men as young men. No, I think I may say that they are more often elder men than younger ones. It is sad it should be so, but it is so; and there is many a professor who has stood well for 40 years, but makes a fool of himself at the last; and though he has been honored in God's Church, yet he leaves a blot upon his name, and the godly say in a whisper, "No doubt he was a child of God, but it is best that he should be dead, for in his old age he fell into sin." No, we shall never be out of gunshot of the devil till we have crossed the river of death. Our carnal minds are like a powder magazine—there only needs the spark—and ah, what an explosion there would be with any of us. May the Lord keep the sparks away. Let us be very vigilant and very careful; there is an enemy behind every hedge; there is a foe waiting for us at every step; and before this Sunday's hallowed hours may be over, you and I may have slipped and have fallen into sin, to our own perpetual hurt and hindrance, unless almighty grace shall intervene.

V. A few words now upon THE EFFECTS OF THIS CONFLICT.

Some will say, "But why does not God remove out of the Christian the old nature?" Some uninstructed Christians even think that, in conversion, the Lord turns the old nature into a new one, which is very far from the fact. The old nature remains in the Christian; it has received a blow which will ulti-

mately be its death, but it still lives, and the new nature in the Christian comes to struggle with it for the mastery. But why is this? Well, we cannot tell you. Such a question reminds us of the slave's inquiry to the minister—"You say that God is omnipotent, and therefore, He is greater than Satan?" "Yes." "Then why does not God kill the devil and have done with him?" We believe God to be as morally omnipotent as He is physically omnipotent; and if He willed it, we do not doubt but that evil of every form and shape would disappear out of the universe; why then does He permit it? Ah, why? But there we leave it. Be amazed at the mystery if you will, but do not question God nor cast the blame of sin upon His holy character. There it is, He allows sin to remain in the universe, and after all we can say, we observe the fact, but the reason we cannot tell. Still, I think we may, in some respects, see how sin is overruled in the Christian. Sin, remaining in the believer, drives him humbly to confess his own nothingness, excludes all boasting from his tongue, compels him to trust in his God, takes away from him his propensity to trust in himself, leads him to value the precious blood which cleanses him, to prize the Holy Spirit who sanctifies him, to rejoice in the faithfulness, and patience, and long-suffering of God who still continues to be gracious to him! And oh, what songs will the man of God sing when he gets to heaven! How much sweeter will be the music because of the conflict! How much more glorious the victory because of the warfare! If I could be totally delivered from sin, root, and branch, I certainly would; but yet am I conscious that no Christian would glorify God so much in heaven as he now does if there were not sin to be contended with. A creature that could not sin, could scarcely show forth much of the praise of God by its holiness; but that the creature can sin, no, that there is a strong drawing towards sin, and yet the divine grace keeps a man from it, and sanctifies him even to perfection—why this will make the song come swelling up of, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" If no adversaries had been tolerated, then no victories could have been won; if there were no temptations for us to struggle with, then there would have been no elbow room for our faith, no power for the display of the bare arm of God. Doubtless, it is best as it is, and when the winding up of the chapter comes, perhaps we shall see that our committed sins have been made the means of saving us from other sins which would have been our ruin. Many believers would have grown too proud to be borne with if some infirmity had not plucked the plume from their helmets and made them mourn with brokenness of heart before God. God can bring good out of evil by His overruling grace, while, on the other hand, our good works have often been the greatest curse we have ever had. Good works have puffed us up, and so have led us into pride; while our sins, though pulling us down, have, through almighty grace, led us to make men work for eternity.

VI. I want your attention to the last point, which is, THE CONCLUSION OF IT ALL.

This contest—is it to continue forever? Shall we forever tremble in the balances? Will there be no valley of decision where our souls may take their rest? Yes, brethren, the fight will soon be over, and the victory is guaranteed and glorious! Yes, even at the present day, the Christian is making progress. I do not admire the term "progressive sanctification," for it is unwarranted by Scripture; but it is certain that the Christian does grow in grace, and though his conflict may be as severe on the last day of his life, as in the first moment of conversion, yet he does advance in grace, and all his imperfections and his conflicts within cannot prove that he has not made progress. Let me show you this. You know that, at certain periods in your children's history, they pass through diseases incidental to childhood. Here is your babe of a month old, and there is your child of three or four years; this child of three or four years of age is suffering from some of those complaints incidental to infancy; it is not in such good health as your child of a month old; it is far weaker, and its life seems far more in danger. Yet you will not say that there is no progress, for this child of three years old has passed through three years of its difficulties and hazards, which this little one, newly-born, has yet to encounter. We all know that there are certain growing pains which the lad feels when he is verging out into his manhood, but these pains do not prove a lack of strength, but the very reverse—the muscles are being braced, and the sinews are being strengthened. Stand by the seashore when the tide is coming up. There rolled up a big wave. Just mark the place in the sand. For the next few minutes there is no wave that comes up as high as that—no, some waves that suck back the rest, and you might even think the sea was retiring. Is there, therefore, no progress made? Why, friend, you will see in a moment, if you will but wait! Another great wave will come sweeping up, far outstripping the one that we marked just now; and when you shall come back in an hour's time, and the sea has come to the fullness of its strength, you will see that the receding of any one individual wave is no mark of its retrogression. You have but to mark the whole sea and take time in

which to examine it, and then, you discover there has been progress, and that progress has been effected by alternate advance and retreat.

Along the coast of Essex, the sea is greatly encroaching upon the land, and every time we go to some of the watering places, we perceive that cliffs have fallen, hundreds or thousands of tons have been carried away, and yet if you are there at a tide which has gone far out, you will often think, “Why, surely the land is gaining on the sea! I never walked out so far as this before; I never saw these rocks exposed and dry before.” Well, it is a strangely low tide, but at the same time, ask the old fisherman who has lived there all his days, and he will tell you that his mother was married out in a Church which stood where that ship is floating, far out to sea, and that all the intervening soil has been washed away. He recollects when this place, which is now a footpath on the cliff’s brink, was a quarter of a mile inland; and then, you understand that, though on any one occasion the land may apparently have gained, yet, on the whole, there has been a progress in the sea. And so it is with spiritual life. There are times when it seems as if sin had gained upon you, and you were going back in spiritual things; there is cause for alarm, but not despair; cause for watchfulness, but not for terror—go to the Lord and pray to Him to send a mightier wave of His irresistible grace, that your soul may be filled with all the fullness of God. The day is often gloomy at eleven o’clock, but that is no proof that you are not getting towards noon. Many a cold wind howls over the days of March and April, colder than there might have been at Christmas—but that is no proof that you are not getting on to summer. There may come a frosty night in May, nipping the flowers, but that is no proof that the frost is all coming back again. So you may feel within yourself such things as cause you to bow your head in sorrow, and to cry out to God in grief, but even these things shall but speed you on your way towards your desired haven. The battle will certainly end right. Just anticipate for a moment the glory of the victory. You *shall* be free from sin one day; you *shall* be perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect; you shall wave the palm branch, and wave it the more joyously because you had to contend with flesh and blood, and with spiritual wickedness; you shall join the eternal song, and it shall roll up to the throne of God all the more gloriously because you have—

*“To wrestle hard as we do now,
With sins and doubts and fears.”*

Come, anticipate that triumph and pluck up courage! Go forth, all you servants of God, as Barak went against Sisera, and the day shall come when your foes shall be swept away. That river of death shall do for your enemies what the Kishon did for Jabin—it shall sweep them away forever. Standing by the Red Sea of the atoning sacrifice, you shall sing unto the Lord who has triumphed gloriously, and cast the horse and the rider into the depths of the sea.

I have preached, this morning, especially for the comfort of those who are thus exercised, and who are saying, “If it is so, why am I thus?” You will now see that, instead of having cause for distress in all these conflicts, you have only a reason to come to Christ again. Come to Jesus again; look up to Him once more, and take Him today to be your Savior and your All. Put your case into His hands. Trust Him, and you shall be more than conquerors through Him who loved you. Trust Him, trust Him now, and we will meet in heaven at last to sing His praises forever! Amen.

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