

PRACTICAL RELIGION.

BEING PLAIN PAPERS
ON THE DAILY DUTIES, EXPERIENCE, DANGERS, AND
PRIVILEGES OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANS.

BY

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OUR HOME!

“Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.” PSALM xc. 1.

THERE are two reasons why the text which heads this paper should ring in our hearts with special power. It is the first verse of a deeply solemn Psalm,—the first bar of a wondrous piece of spiritual music. How others feel when they read the ninetieth Psalm I cannot tell. It always makes me lean back in my chair and think.

For one thing, this ninetieth Psalm is the only Psalm composed by “Moses, the man of God.”¹ It expresses that holy man’s feelings, as he saw the whole generation whom he had led forth from Egypt, dying in the wilderness. Year after year he saw that fearful judgment fulfilling, which Israel brought on itself by unbelief:—“Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against Me, doubtless ye shall not come into the land.” (Num. xiv. 29.) One after another he saw the heads of the families whom he had led forth from Egypt, laying their bones in the desert. For forty long years he saw the strong, the swift, the wise, the tender, the beautiful, who had crossed the Red Sea with him in triumph, cut down and withering like grass. For forty years he saw his companions continually changing, consuming, and passing away. Who can wonder that he should say, “Lord, Thou art our dwelling-place.” We are all pilgrims and strangers upon earth, and there is none abiding. “Lord, Thou art our home.”

For another thing, the ninetieth Psalm forms part of the Burial Service of the Church of England. Whatever fault men may find with the Prayer-book, I think no one can deny the singular beauty of the Burial Service. Beautiful are the texts which it puts into the minister’s mouth as he meets the coffin at the churchyard gate, and leads the mourners into God’s house. Beautiful is the chapter from the first Epistle to the Corinthians about the resurrection of the body. Beautiful are the sentences and prayers appointed to be read as the body is laid in its long home. But specially beautiful, to my mind, are the Psalms which are selected for reading when the mourners

¹ I am quite aware that I have no direct authority for this statement, except the prefatory heading at the beginning of the Psalm. However ancient those headings may be, it is agreed among learned men that they were not given by inspiration, and must not be regarded as a part of God’s Word. There is, nevertheless, a curious amount of agreement among critics, that in the case of this ninetieth Psalm the tradition about its authorship is not without foundation.

have just taken their places in church. I know nothing which sounds so soothing, solemnizing, heart-touching, and moving to man's spirit, at that trying moment, as the wondrous utterance of the old inspired law-giver: "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place." "Lord, Thou art our home."

I want to draw from these words two thoughts that may do the readers of this paper some good. An English home is famous all over the world for its happiness and comfort. It is a little bit of heaven left upon earth. But even an English home is not forever. The family nest is sure to be taken down, and its inmates are sure to be scattered. Bear with me for a few short minutes, while I try to set before you the best, truest, and happiest home.

I. The first thought that I will offer you is this:—I will show you *what the world is*.

It is a beautiful world in many respects, I freely admit. Its seas and rivers, its sunrises and sunsets, its mountains and valleys, its harvests and its forests, its fruits and its flowers, its days and its nights, all, all are beautiful in their way. Cold and unfeeling must that heart be which never finds a day in the year when it can admire anything in nature! But beautiful as the world is, there are many things in it to remind us that it is not home. It is an inn, a tent, a tabernacle, a lodging, a training school. But it is not home.

(a) It is a *changing* world. All around us is continually moving, altering, and passing away. Families, properties, landlords, tenants, farmers, labourers, tradesmen, all are continually on the move. To find the same name in the same dwelling for three generations running is so uncommon, that it is the exception and not the rule. A world so full of change cannot be called home.

(b) It is a *trying and disappointing* world. Whoever lives to be fifty years old and does not find to his cost that it is so? Trials in married life and trials in single life,—trials in children and trials in brothers and sisters,—trials in money matters and trials in health,—how many they are! Their name is legion. And not the tenth part of them perhaps ever comes to light. Few indeed are the families which have not "a skeleton in the closet." A world so full of trial and disappointment cannot be called home.

(c) It is a *dying* world. Death is continually about us and near us, and meets us at every turn. Few are the family gatherings, when Christmas comes round, in which there are not some empty chairs and vacant places. Few are the men and women, past thirty, who could not number a long list of names, deeply cut forever in their hearts, but names of beloved ones now dead and gone. Where are our fathers and mothers? Where are our ministers and teachers? Where are our brothers and sisters? Where are our husbands and wives? Where are our neighbours and friends? Where are the old

grey-headed worshippers, whose reverent faces we remember so well, when we first went to God's house? Where are the boys and girls we played with when we went to school? How many must reply, "Dead, dead, dead! The daisies are growing over their graves, and we are left alone." Surely a world so full of death can never be called a home.

(d) It is a *scattering and dividing* world. Families are continually breaking up, and going in different directions. How rarely do the members of a family ever meet together again, after the surviving parent is laid in the grave! The band of union seems snapped, and nothing welds it again. The cement seems withdrawn from the parts of the building, and the whole principle of cohesion is lost. How often some miserable squabble about trinkets, or some wretched wrangle about money, makes a breach that is never healed, and, like a crack in china, though riveted, can never be quite cured! Rarely indeed do those who played in the same nursery lie down at length in the same churchyard, or keep peace with one another till they die. A world so full of division can never be home.

These are ancient things. It is useless to be surprised at them. They are the bitter fruit of sin, and the sorrowful consequence of the fall. Change, trial, death, and division, all entered into the world when Adam and Eve transgressed. We must not murmur. We must not fret. We must not complain. We must accept the situation in which we find ourselves. We must each do our best to lighten the sorrows, and increase the comforts of our position. We must steadily resolve to make the best of everybody and everything around us. But we must never, never, never, forget that the world is not home.

Are you young? Does all around and before you seem bright, and cheerful, and happy? Do you secretly think in your own mind that I take too gloomy a view of the world? Take care. You will not say so by and by. Be wise betimes. Learn to moderate your expectations. Depend on it, the less you expect from people and things here below the happier you will be.

Are you prosperous in the world? Have death, and sickness, and disappointment, and poverty, and family troubles, passed over your door up to this time, and not come in? Are you secretly saying to yourself, "Nothing can hurt me much. I shall die quietly in my bed, and see no sorrow." Take care. You are not yet in harbour. A sudden storm of unexpected trouble may make you change your note. Set not your affection on things below. Hold them with a very loose hand, and be ready to surrender them at a moment's notice. Use your prosperity well while you have it; but lean not all your weight on it, lest it break suddenly and pierce your hand.

Have you a happy home? Are you going to spend Christmas round a family hearth, where sickness, and death, and poverty, and partings, and

quarrellings, have never yet been seen? Be thankful for it: oh, be thankful for it! A really happy Christian home is the nearest approach to heaven on earth. But take care. This state of things will not last forever. It must have an end; and if you are wise, you will never forget that—"the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." (1 Cor. vii. 29–31.)

II. The second thought that I will offer you is this: I will show you *what Christ is, even in this life, to true Christians.*

Heaven, beyond doubt, is the final home in which a true Christian will dwell at last. Towards that he is daily travelling: nearer to that he is daily coming. "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Cor. v. 1.) Body and soul united once more, renewed, beautified, and perfected, will live forever in the Father's great house in heaven. To that home we have not yet come. We are not yet in heaven.

But is there meanwhile no home for our souls? Is there no spiritual dwelling-place to which we may continually repair in this desolate world, and, repairing to it, find rest and peace? Thank God, there is no difficulty in finding an answer to that question. There is a home provided for all labouring and heavy-laden souls, and that home is Christ. To know Christ by faith, to live the life of faith in Him, to abide in Him daily by faith, to flee to Him in every storm of conscience, to use Him as our refuge in every day of trouble, to employ Him as our Priest, Confessor, Absolver, and spiritual Director, every morning and evening in our lives,—this is to be at home spiritually, even before we die. To all sinners of mankind who by faith use Christ in this fashion, Christ is in the highest sense a dwelling-place. They can say with truth, "We are pilgrims and strangers on earth, and yet we have a home."

Of all the emblems and figures under which Christ is set before man, I know few more cheering and comforting than the one before us. Home is one of the sweetest, tenderest words in the English language. Home is the place with which our pleasantest thoughts are closely bound up. All that the best and happiest home is to its inmates, that Christ is to the soul that believes on Him. In the midst of a dying, changing, disappointing world, a true Christian has always something which no power on earth can take away. Morning, noon, and night, he has near him a living Refuge,—a living home for his soul. You may rob him of life, and liberty, and money; you

may take from him health, and lands, and house, and friends; but, do what you will, you cannot rob him of his home. Like those humblest of God's creatures which carry their shells on their backs, wherever they are, so the Christian, wherever he goes, carries his home. No wonder that holy Baxter sings,—

“What if in prison I must dwell,
May I not then converse with Thee?
Save me from sin, Thy wrath, and hell,—
Call me Thy child, and I am free!”

(a) No home like Christ! In Him there is *room for all*, and room for all sorts. None are unwelcome guests and visitors, and none are refused admission. The door is always on the latch, and never bolted. The best robe, the fatted calf, the ring, the shoes are always ready for all comers. What though in time past you have been the vilest of the vile, a servant of sin, an enemy of all righteousness, a Pharisee of Pharisees, a Sadducee of Sadducees, a publican of publicans? It matters nothing: there is yet hope. All may be pardoned, forgiven, and forgotten. There is a home and refuge where your soul may be admitted this very day. That home is Christ. “Come unto Me,” He cries: “Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” (Matt. xi. 28; vii. 7.)

(b) No home like Christ! In Him there is boundless and unwearied *mercy for all*, even after admission. None are rejected and cast forth again after probation, because they are too weak and bad to stay. Oh, no! Whom He receives, them He always keeps. Where He begins, there He makes a good end. Whom He admits, them He at once fully justifies. Whom He justifies, them He also sanctifies. Whom He sanctifies, them He also glorifies. No hopeless characters are ever sent away from His house. No men or women are ever found too bad to heal and renew. Nothing is too hard for Him to do who made the world out of nothing. He who is Himself the Home, hath said it, and will stand to it: “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.” (John vi. 37.)

(c) No home like Christ! In Him there is unvarying *kindness, patience, and gentle dealing for all*. He is not “an austere man,” but “meek and lowly in heart.” (Matt, xi. 29.) None who apply to Him are ever treated roughly, or made to feel that their company is not welcome. A feast of fat things is always provided for them. The holy Spirit is placed in their hearts, and dwells in them as in a temple. Leading, guiding, and instruction are daily provided for them. If they err, they are brought back into the right way; if they fall, they are raised again; if they transgress wilfully, they are chastised to make them better. But the rule of the whole house is love.

(d) No home like Christ! In Him there is *no change*. From youth to age He loves all who come to Him, and is never tired of doing them good. Earthly homes, alas, are full of fickleness and uncertainty. Favour is deceitful. Courtesy and civility are often on men's lips, while inwardly they are weary of your company and wish you were gone. You seldom know how long your presence is welcome, or to what extent your friends really care to see you. But it is not so with Christ. "He is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." (Heb. xiii. 8.)

(e) No home like Christ! Communion once begun with Him shall *never be broken off*. Once joined to the Lord by faith, you are joined to Him for an endless eternity. Earthly homes always come to an end sooner or later: the dear old furniture is sold and dispersed; the dear old heads of the family are gathered to their fathers; the dear old nest is pulled to pieces. But it is not so with Christ. Faith will at length be swallowed up in sight: hope shall at last be changed into certainty. We shall see one day with our eyes, and no longer need to believe. We shall be moved from the lower chamber to the upper, and from the outer court to the Holy of Holies. But once in Christ, we shall never be out of Christ. Once let our name be placed in the Lamb's book of life, and we belong to a home which shall continue for evermore.

(1) And now, before I conclude, let me ask every reader of this paper a plain question. *Have you got a home for your soul?* Is it safe? Is it pardoned? Is it justified? Is it prepared to meet God? With all my heart I wish you a happy home. But remember my question. Amidst the greetings and salutations of home, amidst the meetings and partings, amidst the laughter and merriment, amidst the joys and sympathies and affections, think, think of my question,—Have you got a home for your soul?

Our earthly homes will soon be closed forever. Time hastens on with giant strides. Old age and death will be upon us before many years have passed away. Oh, seek an abiding home for the better part of you,—the part that never dies! Before it be too late seek a home for your soul.

Seek Christ, that you may be safe. Woe to the man who is found outside the ark when the flood of God's wrath bursts at length on a sinful world!—Seek Christ, that you may be happy. None have a real right to be cheerful, merry, light-hearted, and at ease, excepting those who have got a home for their souls. Once more I say, Seek Christ without delay.

(2) If Christ is the home of your soul, *accept a friendly caution*. Beware of being ashamed of your home in any place or company.

The man who is ashamed of the home where he was born, the parents that brought him up when a baby, the brothers and sisters that played with him,—that man, as a general rule, may be set down as a mean and despica-

ble being. But what shall we say of the man who is ashamed of Him who died for him on the cross? What shall we say of the man who is ashamed of his religion, ashamed of his Master, ashamed of his home?

Take care that you are not that man. Whatever others around you please to think, do you never be ashamed of being a Christian. Let them laugh, and mock, and jest, and scoff, if they will. They will not scoff in the hour of death and in the day of judgment. Hoist your flag; show your colours; nail them to the mast. Of drinking, gambling, lying, swearing, Sabbath-breaking, idleness, pride, you may well be ashamed. Of Bible-reading, praying, and belonging to Christ, you have no cause to be ashamed at all. Let those laugh that win. A good soldier is never ashamed of his Queen's colours, and his uniform. Take care that you are never ashamed of your Master. Never be ashamed of your home.

(3) If Christ is the home of your soul, *accept a piece of friendly advice*. Let nothing tempt you to stray away from home.

The world and the devil will often try hard to make you drop your religion for a little season, and walk with them. Your own flesh will whisper that there is no danger in going a little with them, and that it can do you no mighty harm. Take care, I say: take care when you are tempted in this fashion. Take care of looking back, like Lot's wife. Forsake not your home.

There are pleasures in sin no doubt, but they are not real and satisfactory. There is an excitement and short-lived enjoyment in the world's ways, beyond all question, but it is joy that leaves a bitter taste behind it. Oh, no! wisdom's ways alone are ways of pleasantness, and wisdom's paths alone are paths of peace. Cleave to them strictly, and turn not aside. Follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes. Stick to Christ and His rule, through evil report and good report. The longer you live the happier you will find His service: the more ready will you be to sing, in the highest sense, "There is no place like home."

(4) If Christ is the home of your soul, *accept a hint about your duty*. Mind that you take every opportunity of telling others about your happiness. Tell them THAT, wherever you are. Tell them that you have a happy home.

Tell them, if they will hear you, that you find Christ a good Master, and Christ's service a happy service. Tell them that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. Tell them that, whatever the devil may say, the rules of your home are not grievous, and that your Master pays far better wages than the world does! Try to do a little good wherever you are. Try to enlist more inmates for your happy home. Say to your friends and relatives, if they will listen, as one did of old, "Come with us, and we will do you good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." (Numbers x. 29.)