

Instability

A Sermon

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“Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.”—[Genesis 49:4](#).

PERFECT STABILITY has ceased from the world since the day when Adam fell. He was stable enough when in the garden he was obedient to his Master’s will, but when he ate of the forbidden fruit he did not only slide himself, but he shook the standing places of all his posterity. Perfect stability belongs alone to God he alone, of all beings, is without variableness or shadow of a turning. He is immutable, he will not change. He is all-wise, he need not change. He is perfect; he cannot change. But men, the best of them are mutable, and therefore to a degree, they are unstable, and do not excel. Yet it is remarkable that, although man has lost perfect stability, he has not lost the admiration of it. Perhaps there is no virtue, or, rather, no compound of virtues, which the world more esteems than stability of mind. You will find that, although men have often misplaced their praise, and have called those great who were not great, morally, but were far below the level of morality, yet they have scarcely ever called a man great who has not been consistent, who has not had strength of mind enough to be stable in his principles. I know not how it is, but so it is, whenever a man is firm and consistent, we always admire him for it. Though we feel certain that he is wrong, yet his consistency in his wrong still excites our admiration. We have known men whom we have thought to be insane, they have conceived a design so ridiculous that we could only laugh at them, and despise their idea; but they have stuck to it, and we have said, “Well, there is nothing like a man standing to a thing,” and we have admired even the senseless, brainless idiot, as we have thought him, when we have seen him pertinaciously insisting that his idea would at last triumph, and persevering in futile endeavors to realize his wish. The weathercock man is never admired, as a politician or as anything else he will never succeed; he must be one thing or another, or the world will never respect him.

Now, my brethren, if it be so in earthly things, it is so also in spiritual. Instability in religion is a thing which every man despises, although every man has, to a degree, the evil in himself, but stability in the firm profession and practice of godliness, will always win respect, even from the worldly, and certainly will not be forgotten by him whose smile is honor and whose praise is glory, even the great Lord and Master, before whom we stand or fall. I have many characters here to-day whom I desire to address in the words of my text. “Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.” I propose, first, briefly to notice, *the common and unavoidable instabilities* which necessarily attach themselves to the best of Christians. I shall then note

the character of a *Christian who is noted for glaring instability*, but who, notwithstanding, has sufficient of godliness to bid us hope that he is a child of God, I shall then have to do with *the mere professor*, who is “unstable as water,” and cannot excel in any way whatever; and then I must deal with *the unstable sinner* who, in any pretensions he may ever make to better feelings, is always like the early cloud and the morning dew.

I. First, then, to ALL Christians, permit me to address myself. Our father Adam, spoilt us all; and, although the second Adam has renewed us, he has not yet removed from us the infirmities, which the first Adam left us as a mournful legacy. We are none of us stable as we should be. We had a notion when we were first converted, that we should never know a change; our soul was so full of love that we could not imagine it possible we should ever flag in our devotion; our faith was so strong in our Incarnate Master, that we smiled at older Christians who talked of doubts and fears; our faces were so stedfastly set Zionward that we never imagined Bye-path Meadow would ever be trodden by our feet. We felt sure that our course would certainly be “like the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” But, my brethren, have we found it so? Have we not this day to lament that we have been very changeable and inconstant, even unstable as water? How unstable have we been in our frames? To-day we have climbed the top of Pisgah, and have viewed the heavenly landscape over by the eye of faith; to-morrow we have been plunged in the dungeon of despair, and could not call a grain of hope our own; to-day we have feasted at the banquetting table of communion; to-morrow we have been exclaiming, “Oh! that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even unto his feet.” At night I have said, “I will not let thee go except thou bless me,” to-morrow has beheld my grasp loosened, and prayer neglected until God has said “I will return unto my rest, until thou hast acknowledged thy transgressions, which thou hast committed against me.” High frames one day, low frames the next We have had more changes than even this variable climate of ours. It is a great mercy for us that frames and slings are not always the index of our security, for we are as safe when we are mourning as we are when we are singing; but verily, if our true state before God had changed as often as our experience of his presence, we must have been cast into the bottomless pit years ago.

And how variable have we been in our faith! In the midst of one trouble we have declared, “though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” We have courted the jeer, we have laughed at the scorn of the world, and have stood like rocks in the midst of foaming billows, when all men were against us; another week has seen us flying away, after denying our Master, because, like Peter, we were afraid of some little maid, or of our own shadow. After coming out of a great trouble, we have resolutely declared “I can never doubt God again,” but the next cloud that has swept the sky, has darkened all our faith. We have been variable in our faith.

And have you not also, at times, my friends, felt variable in your love? Sweet Master, King of heaven, fairest of a thousand fairs! my heart is knit to thee—my soul melteth at the

mention of thy name; my heart bubbleth up with a good matter, when I speak of the things which I have made touching the King.

The strings that bind around my heart,
Tortures and racks may tear them off;
But they can never, never part,
The hold I have of Christ, my love.”

Sure, I could die for thee, and think it better than to live, if so I might honor thee. This is the sweet manner of our spirit when our love is burning and fervent: but anon we neglect the fire, it becomes dim, and we have to rake among the ashes even for a spark, crying,

“‘Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or am I not?”

How unstable we are! At one time we are quite certain we are the Lord’s. though an angel from heaven should deny our election, or our adoption, we would reply that we have the witness of the Spirit that we are born of God, but perhaps within two minutes we shall not be able to say that we ever had one spiritual feeling. We shall perhaps think that we never repented aright, never fled to Christ aright, and did never believe to the saving of the soul. Oh! it is no wonder that we do not excel, when we are such unstable creatures. Alas! my brethren I might enlarge on the inconsistencies of the mass of Christians. How unfaithful we have been to our dedication vows! how negligent of close communion! How unlike we have been to holy Enoch! how much more like Peter, when he followed afar off! I might tell how one day, like the mariner, we mounted up to heaven, and how the next moment we have gone to the lowest depths when the waves of God’s grace have ceased to lift us up. I wonder at David, at Jacob, and at every instance we have in Scripture of excellent men. Marvel! O ye angels, that God should ever make such bright stars out of such black blots as we are. How can it ever be that man, so fickle, so inconstant, should nevertheless be a pillar in the house of his God, and should be made to stand “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord!” How is it, O our God, that thou couldst have steered a vessel so safely to its port which was so easily driven by every wind and carried away by every wave! He is a good marksman who can shoot so crooked an arrow straight to its target. Marvel not that we do not excel—marvel that we do excel in anything unstable as we are.

II. And now leaving these general remarks I have to single out a certain class of persons. I believe them to be TRUE CHRISTIANS but they are Christians of a singular sort. I would not be so harsh as to condemn them, though I must certainly condemn the error with which I am about to find fault. I doubt not that they have been converted in a genuine manner, but still they are often a mystery to me, and I should think they are a mystery to themselves. How many Christians have we in our churches that are unstable as water! I suppose they

were born so. They are just as unstable in business as they are in religion; they open a grocer's shop, and shut it in three months, and turn drapers, and when they have been drapers long enough to become almost bankrupts, they leave that and try something else. When they were boys they could never play a game through, they must always be having something fresh, and now they are just as childish as when they were children. Look at them in doctrine: you never know where to find them. You meet them one day, and they are very full of some super-lapsarian doctrine, they have been to some strong Calvinist place, and nothing will suit them except the very highest doctrine and that must be spiced with a little of the gall of bitterness, or they cannot think it is the genuine thing. Very likely next week they will be Arminians; they will give up all idea of a fixed fate, and talk of free-will, and man's responsibility like the most earnest Primitive Methodist. Then they steer another way. "Nothing is right but the Church of England. Is it not established by law? Ought not every Christian to go to his parish church?" Ah! ah, Let them alone, they will be at the most gross schismatical shop in the metropolis before long. Or if they do not change their denomination they are always changing their minister. A new minister starts up; there is no one, since the apostles, like him; they take a seat and join the church; he is everything to them. In three months they have done with him, another minister rises up some distance off, and these people are not particular how far they walk; so they go to hear *him*. He is the great man of the age; he will see every man's candle out, and his will burn on. But a little trouble comes on the church, and they leave him. They have no attachment to anything; they are merely feathers in the wind or corks on the wave. They hear a sermon preached, and they say, "I think it did me good" but they do not venture to be sure till they speak to some great man who is a member of the church, and he says "Oh! there was nothing in it." "Ah! just so," they say, and cannot make up their minds whether it was a good sermon or not. They are unstable; they could easily be talked into anything or out of anything, they never had any brains in their head, I suppose, or if they ever had any they gave them to somebody else to muddle as he liked. They believe the last man they hear, and are easily guided and led by him.

Now, if the matter ended there it would not be so bad; but these poor people are just the same with regard to any religious enterprise they take in hand. There is a Sunday-school, they are enchanted with the thought. What a lovely thing it must be to sit on a form and try to teach half-a-dozen boys the way to heaven. They go to the Sunday-school and are alarmed the very first day, when they hear all the boys talking louder than the teachers. After about ten minutes they think it is not quite so nice as they thought. Perhaps they think it is that particular school they do not like, and they try another, and at last they give up all Sunday-school teaching, and make up their minds that it is not a good thing, at least not for them. Then there is a Ragged-school. What a divine enterprise! They will be Ragged-school teachers, and off they go with their hearts full of fire, and their eyes full of tears over these poor ragged-school children they are going to teach. Ah! how soon is their zeal withered

and all their glory departed! Hear them talk about Ragged-schools a month afterwards: they shake their heads and say it is a very arduous enterprise. They do not think they had a call to it, they will try something else, and so they keep on to the end of the chapter, they are “everything by turns, and nothing long.” There are some brethren in the ministry very much of the same sort. They never preach in one pulpit long, (though some say they preach there too long, for they ought never to have preached there at all) but I sometimes think that if they had had a little more courage, and bore a little more of the brunt of the battle, they might have done good to some of the villages where they were placed. But they are unstable as water, and everybody sees that they cannot excel. The same instability men will carry out in their friendships; they meet a person one day, and are as friendly as possible with him; they meet him the next day, he does not know what he has done to offend them, but they turn their head another way. And some carry their instability a little farther, they carry it into their moral character. I shall not deny their Christianity, but they are a queer sort of Christians. For these people will sometimes, at least, stretch the cords of godliness a little too far, and though they certainly do act in the main conscientiously, yet their conscience is a large one, and it admits a great many things which tender-hearted people would think were wrong. We cannot find out any crime for which we could excommunicate them, yet in our hearts we often say, “Dear me! what a sad disgrace so-and-so is to the cause; we could do far better without him than with him, for he casts such a slur on the name of Christ.”

Now, do not think I am drawing a fancy picture. I beg to inform you I am not; there are persons here who are furnishing me with the model; and if they choose to think me personal I shall be obliged to them, for I intend to be. These persons are to be found in all churches and among all denominations. You have met them everywhere. They are as unstable as water; they do not excel.

Now, let me address these persons very earnestly. My brother, I would be far from dealing in a censorious manner with thee, for I am inclined to think that thine instability is a little owing to some latent insanity. We are no doubt all of us insane to a degree; there is some little thing in us, which if we saw in another we should regard as being a little madness. I would therefore, my brother, deal very leniently with you, but at the same time let me very solemnly address you as a Christian minister speaking to a professedly Christian man. My brother, how much moral weight you lose in the church, and in the world by your perpetual instability. No one ever attaches any importance to your opinion, because your opinion has no importance in it, seeing that you yourself will contradict it in a very short time. You see many persons growing up in the church who have an influence over their neighbor for good; you sometimes wish that you too could strengthen the young convert, or reclaim and guide the wanderer. My brother you cannot do it, because of your inconsistency. Now is it not a fearful thing that you should be throwing away the whole force and weight of your character, simply because of this insane habit of yours of being always unstable? I beseech thee, my

brother, recollect that thou art responsible to God for thine influence; and if thou canst have influence and dost not get it thou art as sinful as if, having influence, thou hadst misused it. Do not, I beseech thee, suffer this instability to continue, lest thou shouldst become like the chaff which the wind driveth away—of no account to the world at all. Remember, my brother, how your instability ruins your usefulness. You never continue long enough in an enterprise to do good. What would you think of the farmer who should farm just long enough to plough his ground and sow his wheat, but not long enough to get a harvest? You would think him foolish; but just so foolish are you. You begin time enough to be overworked before you have well commenced. My brother, review your history, what have you done? You have made hundreds of futile attempts to do something, but a list of failures must be the only record of your labors. What do you think will be your distress of mind when you come to die, when you look back upon your life, and see it all the way through, a host of blunders? Do you not think it will stuff the pillow of your dying bed with thorns, to think that you were so wayward in disposition, so unstable in heart, that you were unable to accomplish anything for your Master, so that when you lay your crown at his feet you will have to say, “There is my crown, my Master but it has not a solitary star in it for I never worked long enough for thee in any enterprise to win a soul; I only did enough to fail and to be laughed at by all.” And I would have thee think also, my brother, how canst thou be a growing Christian, and yet be so changeable as thou art? If a gardener should plant a tree to day, and take it up in the course of a month, and transfer it to another place, what crop would he have when autumn came? He would not have much to repay his toil. The continual changing of the tree would put it into such a weakly condition, that if it did not actually die, it would certainly produce nothing. And how can you expect to grow in knowledge when you have no steadfast principle? The man who espouses one form of doctrine, and does it honestly, will, though it be a mistaken form, at least understand it, but you do not know enough of Calvinism to defend it from its opponents, or enough of Arminianism to defend it from the Calvinists. You are not wise in anything, you are a rolling stone, you gather no moss. You stay in one school only long enough to read through the curriculum, but you learn nothing. You are smiling I see. And yet some of those who smiled are just the men we smile at. They are here. But alas! I have noticed one sad thing respecting these people, they are generally the most conceited in all the world; they are excellent men they think; they are at home everywhere. If they are in error they know they can get right to-morrow, and then if some one else will again convince them they are in error, they know no difference between error and truth, except the difference which other people like to point out to them. O ye unstable Christians, hear ye the word of the Lord! “Unstable as water thou shalt not excel.” Your life shall have little of the cream of happiness upon it: you shall not walk in the midst of the king’s highway, in which no lion shall be found, but you shall walk on the edge of the way, where you shall encounter every danger, feel every hardship and endure every ill. You

shall have enough of God's comfort to keep you alive, but not enough to give you joy in your spirit and consolation in your heart. Oh, I beseech you ponder a little. Study the Word more, know what is right, and defend what is right. Study the Law more, know what is right, and do what is right. Study God's will more, know what he would have you do, and then do it. For an unstable Christian never can excel.

III. But now there is another class of persons whom we dare not, in the spirit of the widest charity admit to be true Christians. They are PROFESSORS they have been baptized, they receive the Lord's Supper, they attend prayer meetings church meetings, and everything else that belongs to the order of Christians with which they are connected. They are never behindhand in religious performances; they are the most devout hypocrites, they are the most pious formalists that could be discovered, range the wide world o'er. Their religion on the Sabbath day is of the most superfine order; their godliness when they are in their pews cannot be exceeded. They sing with the most eloquent praise, they pray the longest and most hypocritical prayer that man could utter; they are just up to the mark in every religious point of view, except on the point which looks to the heart As far as the externals of godliness go there is nothing to be desired. They tithe the anise, the mint, and the cummin; they fast twice in the week; or if they do not fast, they are quite as religious in not fasting, and are just as godly in not doing it, as if they did it.

But these people are unstable as water, in the worst sense; for whilst they sing Watts's hymns on Sunday, they sing other songs on Monday, and whilst they drink sacramental cups on Sabbath evenings, there are other cups of which they drink too deep on other nights; and though they pray most marvellously, there is a pun on that word *pray*, and they know how to exercise it upon their customers in business. They have a great affection for everything that is pious and devout; but alas! like Balaam, they take the reward of wickedness, and they perish in the gainsaying of Core. "These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots. Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." They bring a disgrace upon the cause which they profess: not the vilest profane swearer brings more dishonor on God's holy name than they do. They can find fault with everything in the church, whilst they commit all manner of wickedness, and are, as the apostle said, even weeping "enemies of the cross of Christ, for their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame." O hypocrite, thou thinkest that thou shalt excel, because the minister has been duped, and gives thee credit for a deep experience, because the deacons have been entrapped and think thee to be eminently godly, because the church members receive thee to their houses, and think thee a dear child of God too! Poor soul! mayhap thou mayest go to thy grave with the delusion in thy brain that all is right with thee; but remember, though like a sheep thou art laid in thy grave, Death will find thee out. He

will say to thee, Off with thy mask, man! away with all thy robes! Up with that whitewashed sepulcher! Take off that green turf; let the worms be seen. Out with the body; let us see the reeking corruption! and what wilt thou say when thine abominably corrupt and filthy heart shall be opened before the sun, and men and angels hear thy lies and hypocrisies laid bare before them? Wilt thou play the hypocrite then? Soul, come and sing God's praises in the day of judgment with false lip! Tell him now, while a widow's house is in your throat, tell him that you love him! Come, now, thou that devourest the fatherless, thou that robbest, thou that dost uncleanness! tell him now that thou didst make thy boast in the Lord! tell him that thou didst preach his word, tell him that thou didst walk in his streets! tell him thou didst make it known that thou wert one of the excellent of the earth! What! man, is thy babbling tongue silent for once? What is the matter with thee? Thou wast never slow to talk of thy godliness. Speak out, and say "I took the sacramental cup; I was a professor." Oh how changed! The whitewashed sepulcher has become white in another sense, he is white with horror. See now; the talkative has become dumb; the boaster is silent; the formalist's garb is rent to rags, the moth has devoured their beauty; their gold has become tarnished, and their silver cankered. Ah! it must be so with every man who has thus belied God and his own conscience. The stripping day of judgment will reveal him to God and to himself. And how awful shall be the damnation of the hypocrite! If I knew that I must be damned, one of my prayers should be, "Lord, let me not be damned with hypocrites," for surely to be damned with them is to be damned twice over. Conceive of a hypocrite going into hell. You know how one of the prophets depicted the advent of a great monarch into hell, when all the kings that had been his slaves rose up and said, "Art thou become like one of us?" Do you not think you see the godly Christian deacon, so godly that he was a liar all his life? Do you not think you see the eminent Christian member that kept a bank, took the chair at public meetings, swindled all he could, and died in despair? Do you not think you see him coming into the pit? There is one man there that was a drunkard all his life. Hear his speech, "*Ah! you were a sober man! you used to talk to me, and tell me that drunkards could not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Aha! and art thou become like one of us?*" Says another, "*About a month ago, when we were on earth, you met me and rebuked me for profane swearing, and told me that all swearers should have their portion in the lake. Ah! there is not much to choose between thee and me now, is there?*" And the profane man laughs as well as he can laugh in misery at his desperately religious adviser. "*Oh!*" says another—and they look round at one another with demoniac mirth; as much mockery of joy as hell can afford—"The parson here? Now preach us a sermon; now pray us a long prayer! Plenty of time to do it in!" "No!" says another, "*there is no widow's house to eat, here, and he only prayed on the strength of the widow's house.*"

This is a hard scene for me to describe; but I doubt not of its truthfulness. It may be given to you in rough language, but it needs far rougher to make you know the dread reality.

And what a solemn thought it is! there is not one man nor one woman in this place who has not need to ask, "Is it so with me?" Many have been deceived—I may be—you may be, my hearer. "I am not deceived," says one, "I am a minister." My brethren, there are many of us who are preachers who are like Noah's carpenters; we may help to build an ark, and never get in it ourselves. Says another, "I shall not endure such language as that; I am a deacon." You may be all that, and yet, after having ministered, instead of earning to yourself a good degree, you may be cast from the presence of God. "No," says another, "but I have been a Christian professor these last forty years, and nobody has found fault with me." Ah! I have known many A rotten bough to have stopped on a tree forty years, and you may be rotten and yet stand all that time; but the winds of judgment will crack you at last, and down you will fall. "Nay," says another. "I know I am not insincere I am sure I am right." I am glad that you think so, but I would not like you to say it. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." There have been many great bubbles that have burst ere this, and your piety may be one of them. "Let not him that putteth on the harness boast as though he put it off." It will be time enough for you to be quite sure when you are quite safe. Yet blessed be God, we hope we can say, "O Lord, if not awfully deceived we have given our hearts to thee! Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest that we love thee, and if we do not, Lord thou knowest we pray this prayer from our hearts: 'Search me, O God, and try my ways, prove me and know my heart, and see if there be any evil way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.'" May God the Holy Spirit strengthen and settle each of us.

IV. And now I have the last word to address to those who MAKE NO PRETENSION TO RELIGION whatever. I have heard hundreds of persons in my short life excuse their sin by saying, "Well, I make no profession," and I have always thought it one of the strangest excuses, one of the most wild vagaries of apology to which the human mind could ever make resort. Take an illustration, which I have used before. To-morrow morning, when the Lord Mayor is sitting, there are two men brought up before him for robbery. One of them says he is not guilty, he declares that he is a good character, and he is an honest man in general though he was guilty in this case. He is punished. The other one says, "Well, your worship, I make no profession; I'm a down right thorough thief, and I don't make any profession of being honest at all." Why you can suppose how much more severe the sentence would be upon such a man. Now, when you say I do not make any profession of being religious, what does that mean? It means that you are a despiser of God and of God's law; it means that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. You that boast of making no profession of religion, you are boasting you know not what of. You would think it a strange thing for a man to boast that he made no profession of being a gentleman, or no profession of being honest, or no profession of being sober, or no profession of being chaste. You would shun a man who did this, at once. And you who make no pretensions to religion, just make your trial the more easy for there will be no need for any dispute concerning you. When the

scales of justice are lifted up at last you will be found to be light weight, and that upon your own confession. I cannot imagine you urging such a plea as that when God shall judge you. "My Lord, I made no profession." "What" saith the King, "did my subject make no profession of obedience?" "O Lord, I made no profession." "What!" saith the Creator, "make no profession of acknowledging my rights?" "I made no profession of religion." "What!" saith the Judge, "did I send my Son into the world to die, and did this man make no profession of casting his soul upon him? What! did he make no profession of his need of mercy? Then he shall have none. Does he dare tell me to my face that he never made any profession of faith in Christ, and never had anything to do with the Saviour? Then insomuch as he despised my Son, and despised his cross, and rejected his salvation, let him die the death;" and what that death is with its everlasting wailings and gnashing of teeth, eternity alone can tell.

O sinner! thou hast some part and lot in my text Thou art "unstable as water." Let me remind thee that though thou makest no profession of religion now, there was a time when thou didst. Strong man! you are laughing now: I repeat it, there was a time when you did talk about religion; it is not quite gone from your memory yet. You lay sick with fever for six weeks: do you recollect when the delirium came on, and they all thought that you must die? Do you recollect when your poor brain was right for a moment how you asked the physician whether there was any hope for you, and he would not exactly say "NO," but he looked so blank at you, that you understood what it meant? Do you recollect the agony with which you looked forward to death? Do you recollect how you groaned in your spirit, and said, "O God, have mercy upon me?" Do you recollect that you got a little better, and you told your friends that if you lived you would serve God? "Oh! it is all over now," you say, you were a fool! Yes, you were a fool, that is true, you were a fool, to have said what you did not mean and to have lied before God. You do not profess religion! But you remember the last time the terrific thunder and lightning came. You were out in the storm. A flash came very near you. You are a bold man, but not so bold as you pretend to be. You shook from head to foot, and when the thunder clap succeeded, you were almost down on your knees, and before you knew it you were in prayer. "Please God I get home to-night," you said, "I shall not take his name in vain again!" But you have done it. You are unstable as water. You went sometime ago to a church or a chapel—I mind not which: the minister told you plainly where you were going. You stood there and trembled; tears ran down your cheeks, you did not knock your wife about that Sunday, you were a greet deal more sober that week, and when your companion said you looked squeamish, you denied it, and said you had no such thoughts as he imagined. "Unstable as water." Oh! and there are some of you worse than that still: for not once, nor twice, but scores of times you have been driven under a faithful minister, to the very verge of what you thought repentance, and then, just when something said in your heart, "This is a turning point," you have started back, you have chosen the wages of unrighteousness, and have again wandered into the world. Soul! my heart yearns

for thee! “Unstable as water thou shalt not excel.” No, but I pray the Lord to work in thee something that will be stable; for we all believe—and what I say is not a matter of fiction, but a thing that you believe in your own hearts to be true—we all believe that we must stand before the judgment bar of God, and ere long give account of the things done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil. Friend, what account wilt thou give of thy broken vows, of thy perjured soul? What wilt thou have to say why judgment should not be pronounced against thee? Ah! sinner, you will want Christ then! What would you give then for one drop of his blood? “Oh! for the hem of his garment! Oh, that I might but look to him and be lightened. Oh, would to God that I might hear the gospel once again!” I hear you wailing, when God has said, “Depart ye cursed!” And this is the burden of your song “Fool that I was, to have despised Jesus, who was my only hope, to have broken my promise, and gone back to the poor vain world that deluded me, after all!” And now I hear him say “I called, but ye refused, I stretched out my hand, but no man regarded; now I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh.” I always think those two last sentences the most awful in the Bible. “I will laugh at your calamity.” The laugh of the Almighty over men that have rebelled against him, that have despised him, and trodden his gospel underfoot! “I also will laugh at your calamity I will mock when your fear cometh.” Rail at that if you like, it is sure, sirs. Remember that all your kicking at God’s laughter will not make him leave it off; remember that all your rebellious speeches against him shall be avenged in that day, unless ye repent, and that speak as ye will against him your blasphemy cannot quench the flames of hell, nor will your jeers slay the sword of vengeance: fall it must, and it will fall on you all the more heavily because you did despise it.

Hear the gospel, and then farewell. Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary and became a man, he lived on earth a life of holiness and suffering; at last he was nailed to the cross, and in deep woe he died. He was buried; he rose again from the deed, he ascended into heaven. And now God “commandeth all men everywhere to repent;” and he telleth them this—“Whosoever believeth on the Son of God shall not perish, but have eternal life.” And this is his gospel. If you this day feel yourself to be a sinner, if that be a feeling wrought in you by the Holy Spirit and not a casual thought flashing across the soul, then Christ was punished for your sins; and you cannot be punished; for God will not punish twice for one offense. Believe in Christ; cast your soul on the atonement that he made; and although black as hell in sin, you may this day find yourself, through the efficacious blood of Christ, whiter than the snow. The Lord help thee, poor soul, to believe that the Man who died on Calvary was God, and that he took the sin of all believers upon himself—that thou, being a sinner and a believer, he has taken thy sins, and that therefore thou art free. Thus believe, and by faith thou wilt have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom also we have received the atonement.