

Black Clouds and Bright Blessings

(No. 3215)

A SERMON PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1910.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth." *Ecclesiastes 11:3*.

IT was raining very heavily this afternoon at four o'clock when I was thinking over this text. The sharp crack of the thunder and the quick flash of the lightning seemed to be constant where I sat. When I came here, I found that you had not had a drop of rain—the weather was just as hot and feverish as ever. This seemed to me an example and an illustration of the Sovereignty of God's dispensations. It is still true in the spiritual as well as the natural economy, that one place is rained upon and another is not rained upon. In one part of the Church, God's Grace descends in a flood, while another part remains as dry and arid as the wilderness, itself. Even under the same ministrations, one Christian's soul may be refreshed till it becomes like a watered garden while another may remain parched as the desert. God has the key of the rain and it is for us to ask Him to give us of the dew and the rain of His Holy Spirit. Let us walk humbly before Him lest He should say of us, as He did of His Jewish vineyard of old, "I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." We may stand up and look to the Most High and learn our dependence upon Him for spiritual blessings, just as the farmer, knowing his dependence for his harvest upon God, watches the sky and the clouds—for without the rain what can he do?

But now, to come to the text itself, I propose a meditation upon three of its practical uses. First, as suggesting a comfort for the timid. Secondly, as giving an argument with the doubting. And thirdly, as furnishing a lesson to the Christian.

I. First, I think we may fairly use the text as A COMFORT FOR THE TIMID.

The clouds are black, they lower, they shut out the sunlight, they obscure the landscape. The timid one looks up and says, "Alas, how black they are and how they gather, fold on fold! What a dark, gloomy day!" What makes them black? It is because they are full of rain and, therefore, light cannot pierce them. And if they are full, what then? Why, then it will rain and the hot earth will be refreshed! And every little plant and every tiny leaf and rootlet of that plant will suck up moisture and begin to laugh for joy. Out of the black sky comes the bright daisy and the garden is painted with many colors—and the only palette that is used is, after all, that black one—for the sky does it by its rain.

Now, Christian, you too, are of a timid disposition and every now and then, your circumstances are not as you would like to arrange them. Losses come very closely, one upon another. Friend after friend forsakes you. Sickness treads upon the heel of sickness. All things seem to be against you, as against Jacob of old. The clouds are very black, but may

they not be black for the very same reason as the clouds above you—because they are full? And is it not very possible that it will be with you as it has been with all God's saints, according to the hymn we sang just now—

"You fearful saints, fresh courage take.

The clouds you so much dread

Are big [yes, black] with mercy, and shall break

Li blessings on your head"?

If the clouds were not black, you might not expect rain! If your afflictions were not grievous, they would not be profitable. If your adversities did not really pain and trouble you, they would not be blessed to you. We have heard some people say, "If this trouble had come in such-and-such a shape, we would not have minded it." But God meant you to mind it, for it was in your minding it that it was blessed to you! "The blueness of a wound," says Solomon, "cleanses away evil." When the stroke causes black and blue wounds, when the spirit is really thoroughly wounded, then the blessing comes! It is not merely said in the Scriptures that there is a necessity for affliction. That is a great Truth of God, but it is added

that there is a necessity that the affliction should lower our spirits. Listen to the words—"Now for a season, if necessary, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations." The necessity is not merely for the temptation, but that you be in heaviness through the temptation—not for the iron, only, but for the iron entering into your soul. If the child liked the rod, it would be no chastisement—and if the Christian loved his affliction while he was in it—and it seemed joyous to him, then it would be no affliction! But it is the very sharpness of it, the vinegar and gall, that is the medicine that produces the good effect. The blackness of the cloud proves its fullness—and its fullness brings the shower.

I suppose we know this experimentally. As a Church, we can look back upon mercies which God has given us in a very extraordinary manner God intended that this house should be full of hearers every Sabbath for years. It is a very remarkable circumstance and one that always astonishes me more, perhaps, than it does any of you, when I see the aisles and every place crowded Sabbath after Sabbath. But how much of the success, with which God has crowned our ministry, has been due to the most afflicting Providence that ever befell a Christian minister or a Christian Church? Was it not, dear Friends—to allude to that sad event which is still upon the minds of some of us, and will be till we die—when the cry was raised and death came into the midst of our solemn assembly? Was it not due to that, to a very great extent, that the preacher became known and that so he has had an opportunity of speaking to many more souls than otherwise would have listened to him concerning the unsearchable riches of Christ?

You will have found it so, I think, in your own private estate. A big wave has washed you on to a safe rock. A black lifeboat has taken you out of a gay and bright, but leaky vessel, and brought you to your desired haven. You have been unburdened. If you have lost your

riches, you have been better without them than with them. Your losses have, in the end, come to be practical gains. The good ship has gone across the waters more swiftly when some of that which was but needless ballast has been heaved overboard! I am sure I can allude to your spiritual sorrows—certainly I can to my own—as being most soul-enriching. It is when one labors under a deep sense of sin—when, perhaps, one's hope is jostled to and fro like a reed shaken by the wind—when the spirit sinks and the soul is brought very low—it is then that we learn to study the promises, find out their value, prove their faithfulness and to know and understand more than ever of the Grace and goodness of a Covenant-keeping God! "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept your word." This is only another way of putting the same Truth of God. The clouds were full of rain, but they emptied themselves upon the man who needed Grace from on high!

Now, Brothers and Sisters, what has been true in the past, depend upon it, is true in the present. I do not know—how can I tell?—what is your particular trouble, but I do believe that He who appointed it, He who measured it, He who has set its bounds and will bring you to the end of it, has a gracious design in it all! Do not think that God deals roughly with His children and gives them needless pain. It grieves Him to grieve you! "He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." It is easy to have a faith that acts backwards, but a faith that will act forwards—a faith for the present and for the future is the true faith—and the faith that you need now. Has God helped you out of one trouble after another and is it to be supposed that He will leave you in this? In six troubles He will deliver you—yes, in seven there shall no evil touch you. The particular water in which you now are struggling is intended and included in the promise, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you." It is, I must confess, sometimes difficult to bring the promise down to the particular case, for unbelief fights hard against it, but remember, unless the promise is applied to the particular case, it is like the liniment which is not applied to the wound, or like the medicine that is not received by the patient. The medicine not received may be very potent, but the man cannot know its value—and the promise of God may be very sweet and precious, but it cannot comfort you unless it is applied! Do ask, then, for Grace that you may believe while you are still under the cloud, black as it looks, that it will empty itself in blessed rain upon you.

So will it be, on the largest possible scale, in the whole Church of Christ. There are many clouds surrounding the Church of God just now. And I must confess that with all the religious activity there is abroad, there is very much to cause us great sorrow. The friends of evangelical opinions are few compared with the advocates of Broad Churchism and Romanism. The strength seems to be, meanwhile, on the wrong side—and the devil has stirred up a fierce tempest by reason of which some are alarmed. But we must not yield to fear. The Master knows that it is right for His soldiers to be sometimes rebuffed at Ai, though they have won Jericho, that afterwards they may search and find out the accursed thing and stone

the Achan who has brought upon them defeat. He will yet be with us and the time shall come when we shall see that every cloud that was full of rain has emptied itself upon the earth!

II. Our second point is AN ARGUMENT WITH THE DOUBTING AND THE DESPONDING.

It is a law of Nature that a full thing begins to empty itself. When the cloud gets full, it no longer has the power of retaining its fluid contents, so it pours them down upon the earth. When the river gets swollen, does it not rush with greater impetuosity towards the deep? And the ocean, itself, is continually emptying itself into the ocean that is above the firmament—that same ocean above the firmament emptying itself again—according to the text, upon the earth. As there is a circulation in the body and every pumping of blood into the heart is accompanied by another pumping of it out again, so is there a circulation in this great world—everything revolving and the whole machine kept in order, not by hoarding, but by spending—not by retaining, but by consecutively getting and giving.

Well now, dear Friends, you may gather that when the cloud is full, it is going to rain—and I want you to draw an argument from this. Our gracious God never makes a store of any good thing but He intends to give it to us. Just think for a moment of God, our gracious Father. He is Love. His name is Love. His Nature is Love. "God is Love." He is all goodness. He is a bottomless, shoreless sea, brimful of goodness! He is full of pardoning goodness to forgive sin. He is full of accepting favor to receive poor prodigals to His bosom. He is full of faithful goodness to watch over His dear children—full of bounteous goodness to bestow upon them all that they need. Now, if there is such a plenitude of goodness in the Father, it must be for some objective—not for Himself. Why should it be in Himself? It must be there for His creatures. Is it not written that He delights in mercy? We know that He makes the sun to shine upon the evil as well as upon the good. Then I, even though I am evil, will hope that this store of goodness in the heart of the Everlasting Father is intended, some of it, at any rate, to be poured out upon me, poor unworthy me! "If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth," and if God is full of goodness, it is that He may spend that goodness upon the sons of men! But from where do those bright and sparkling drops come, flashing like diamonds in the sunlight, turning to many colors and forming the wondrous iris? From where do you come, from where do you come, O you bright and Heaven-born drops of matchless rain, all pure and free from every stain—from where do you come? "We are come down to the black, hard, dusty earth. We are going to fall upon the desert or upon the sea. We descend on herds that ask not for us. We descend upon the soil that is chapped and needs us, but has not a tongue to ask for us, nor a heart to feel its need. We come down from our element in Heaven to tabernacle among men and to do them good." And so is it with the goodness of our blessed Father! If it is in Him, it is there for those on the earth who need it—for those who do not even feel their need and whose

need is, therefore, all the deeper! Those who cannot feel their need and who, therefore, have a need that is the deepest of all needs. O blessed goodness that delights to spend itself upon the unworthiest of men!

Ah, troubled, doubting soul, think again and let me ask you, this time, to think a little upon Jesus Christ the Son of the Father Beloved, it is a part of our belief that "it pleased the Father whom in Him should all fullness dwell." We believe that in His atoning Sacrifice there is a fullness of satisfaction made to Divine Justice, that there is a fullness of cleansing power in His precious blood, that there is a fullness of righteousness in His holy life, a fullness of vivifying power in His Resurrection, a fullness of prevalence in His plea, and a fullness of representation in His standing before the Eternal Throne to take possession of Heaven for us! No one here, I think, looks upon Christ as a well without water, or as a cloud without rain. Now, dear Heart, if you believe Christ to be a cloud that is full of rain, for what reason is He full? Why, that He may empty Himself upon the earth! There was no need that He should be a Man full of sympathy except to sympathize with mourning men and women! There was no need that He should bleed except that He might bleed for you! There was no necessity that He should die except that the power of His death might deliver you from death! There was no need whatever that He should be a Servant except that His obedience might justify many! The fullness of His essential Godhead may be supposed to be there for Himself, but the fullness of His mediatorial Character is a mere waste unless it is there for you!

A man, looking at the coal mines of England, naturally considers that God made that coal with the intention of supplying the world's inhabitants with fuel and that He stored it, as it were, in those dark cellars underground for this favored nation, that the wheels of its commerce might be set in motion. Well, now, if I go to those everlasting mines of Divine Faithfulness and of atoning efficacy which are laid up in Jesus Christ, I must conceive that there is a supply laid up for those who will require it—and so there is! Doubt it not—there is cleansing for the guilty, there is healing for the sick, there is life for the dead! If Jesus is full of power to save, He will save you. If you cry to Him, He will empty Himself upon you!

To proceed yet further, I would ask the doubter to look at the infinite fullness of power which is treasured up in the Holy Spirit. It is a part of our conviction that there is no heart so hard that the Holy Spirit cannot soften it, no soul so dead that He cannot quicken it and no man so desperately set on mischief that his will cannot be subdued by the effectual power of the Holy Spirit working in him. We believe the Holy Spirit to be no mere influence, no inferior or secondary power of moral suasion, but to be absolutely Divine—a Divine Being exerting irresistible force upon the mental powers of man! Well, now, if there is this might, surely, when He appears in the Character of a Comforter and a Quickener, His might is there to be exerted. Is your heart hard? He will empty His softening influence upon it. Is it dead? His quickening power shall there find a congenial sphere in which to work. Are you

dark? Then there is room for His light. Are you sick? Then there is a platform for His healing energy. "If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth," and if the Spirit of the living God is full of might and energy, it is that He may manifest it in all those poor, needy souls who desire to feel its power!

What a wondrous book this Bible of ours is! When you have read the Bible through a score of times, you may have only walked over the surface, then, or plowed, at most, the upper soil. If you take one passage and dig deep for the treasure that couches beneath, you will find it inexhaustible! This Book has in it a matchless fullness. It were as possible to measure space, or to grasp the infinite in the hollow of your hands, as to take the entire compass of Holy Scripture. "It is high, I cannot attain unto it." It is broad, I cannot reach its boundary. And especially is there a fullness of comfort in the promises of God's Word. Our hymn writer put it, I think, very properly—

"What more can He say than to you He has said, You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?" Now, why is there this fullness in the Bible? "If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth." If the Scriptures are full of comfort, they are intended to be enjoyed, to be believed, to be fed upon by you! There is nothing to spare in this Book. There is not too little, but rest assured that there is nothing too much. He that goes out in the morning after this manna, though he gathers his omer full, he shall have nothing over. And if he gathers little, yet still he shall have no need. There is enough for all and all its fullness is meant to be used!

I cannot apply that thought. I have not time to beat it out more, but I hope God means it for some of you. You do not trust God, some of you, as you ought to do. You measure His corn with your own bushel. You know that you would fail your fellow men and think that He will fail you. You know your own weakness and infirmity—and you imagine that He will faint or be weary. Moreover, you know that you could not do a very generous thing for some who have been ungrateful and unkind to you—and you think He cannot either. Remember that passage, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." You think about saving—God only thinks about giving. You take a delight in getting—He takes a delight in bestowing. Go to Him! Go to Him! You would not need anybody to be long praying you to accept a gift, so do not think that God needs much beseeching in order to give, for it is as easy for Him to give as it is for you to accept! And as accepting seems congenial to our nature, so does bestowing seem congenial to His! Go to Him and He will empty out His Grace upon you!

III. Now, thirdly, the text furnishes A LESSON TO CHRISTIANS.

"If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth." The drift of the passage is, of course, to be gathered from the context—and it was intended by Solomon to teach us liberality. He says, "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for you know not

what evil shall be upon the earth. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth." By which he means to say, "If your pocket is full, empty it out upon the poor and needy. If God has endowed you with much of this world's substance, look out for cases of necessity and consider it is as much the object of your existence to bestow help upon the needy as it is the design in the creation of a cloud that it should empty itself upon the earth."

Do the clouds ever lose by emptying themselves? No doubt when the cloud has emptied itself, it is renewed and still goes on its course. At any rate, however it may be with the cloud, if it is dissipated when the rain descends, it is not so with the Christian. God has a way of giving by cartloads to those who give away by shovelfuls. If we give at the back door, and I do not think we ought to give at any other door—He will be pretty sure to give to us in greater abundance at the window and at the front door likewise. Says Bunyan—

"There was a man and some did count him mad, The more he gave away, the more he had!"

Thank God for men of that sort! "There is that withholds more than is meet, but it tends to poverty" and, on the other hand, that sentence which has in it the nature of a proverb and a prophecy is often verified—"the liberal soul shall be made fat." I need not say much upon this to my own congregation, with whom I am acquainted. Most of you, I believe, do empty yourselves upon the earth in proportion as God assists you and enables you to give. But there are many persons in this land—at least there used to be—worth thousands upon thousands a year, whose contributions to the cause of God are so utterly insignificant that it is difficult to suppose that the love of Christ has ever gone far enough into them to thaw their hearts, for it has not even penetrated their pockets, making the gold to melt and their riches to flow in liberality.

I was spoken to by a brother minister, not long ago, when I was preaching for him, and he said, "Do not spare them, Sir, do not spare them. There is one pew there, in front of the pulpit, where three men sit who are worth a million between them. Our chapel is a thousand pounds in debt and yet three of our members have a million between them." I said to him, "I think you ought not to 'spare them,' yourself, I do not know why I should say it, only coming here to preach occasionally." "Well," he said, "but you may say, perhaps, what nobody else may." Really it is a most horrible thing that there should be such positive covetousness allied with a profession of Christianity—Christian men—shall I call them so—who, after all the plain precepts of Scripture, practice idolatry! They talk of being "stewards," but they act practically as if they were the owners. When a man once gets into the habit of giving to the cause of God, it becomes as much a delight to contribute of his substance as to pray for God's bounty or to drink in the promises! How could I dare to exist if I still do not do something for Christ? Not do something for Jesus? Were it not to rob me of the highest privilege which can be accorded a man this side the grave? When I pray, I ask for something for myself or other people. When I praise, it is but little I can render. But oh, to think that

I, a poor creature of God's own making, should be able to give to Him! It puts the creature in the highest conceivable light! It lifts him well above angels. There are works which laborious, disinterested, self-sacrificing Christians can do for Christ—

"Which perfect saints above And holy angels cannot do." Let the wealthy empty themselves upon the earth, and this shall be the way to fill themselves!

But, dear Friends, not many of us are entrusted with much wealth. Some Christians have a considerable amount of ability to serve the Lord. They are, perhaps, able to speak for the Master. Now, I think that wherever there is some knowledge of God's Word, a personal acquaintance with its power and some ability to speak, we should exercise our talent, if it is but one. And if we have ten, we should not keep one of the ten to ourselves. "If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth." And if a man is full of ability, he is the more bound to empty himself. If there is any minister who ought to work hard, it is the man who is successful. If there is a person living who ought to be always successful, it is the man whom God helps to preach with power. If God makes me to be a full cloud, I must go on emptying myself. If He gives me good store, I must take care that I scatter it. We must do, each man according to his ability, for God requires not what a man has not, but what he has. Now, dear Christian Friends, are you all, out of love for Jesus, doing what you can for Him? Are you, whether you are big clouds or little clouds, trying to empty yourselves upon the earth? The nearest people of your acquaintance—your children, your kinsfolk, your neighbors—are you trying to show these the way of life—

"Gladly telling to sinners round What a dear Savior you have found"?

Though comparatively few of us have great ability, we all have some little capacity. Some Christians have a large amount of experimental knowledge. They are not eloquent, they are not educated, but they are wise. It has been our privilege to have some, in the very humblest walks of life, whose experimental knowledge of Divine things was very much more profound than would usually be found in a doctor of divinity—men and women who have learned their theology, not in halls and colleges, but in courts and cellars. They have learned how to pray on bare knees. They have learned how to cry to the God of Providence when the cupboard was empty. They have tried the reality of religion in the hospital and perhaps in the workhouse. Some have done business in the great waters and have seen the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. It is a great treat to talk to some of those old saints! Their lips are like the lips of the girl in the fable, which dropped jewels. There is a savor, an unction, about what they say. It is not theory, but experience with them—not the letter, but the very soul, marrow and fatness of the Truth of God! You do not find them looking to an

arm of flesh, or talking about the dignity of manhood, or the glory of mental power and so on. They know of nothing human except weakness and nothingness! They trust in nothing but the Divine arm and the invincible strength of the Holy Spirit! Are there not some such here this evening? If you have any experience, let me say to you—as you have

opportunity tell it out. Empty it upon the earth! If you have gained some knowledge of God, communicate it. If you have proved Him, confess to the generation about you that He is a faithful God!

I recollect, in a time of very great despondency, deriving wonderful comfort from the testimony of a very aged minister who was blind and had been so for 20 years. When he addressed us with the weak voice of a tottering old man, but with the firmness of one who knew the truth of what he said—and spoke of the faithfulness of God because he had tasted and handled it, I thanked God for what he said! It was not much in itself. If I had read it in a book, it would not have struck me. But as it came from him—from the very man who knew it and understood it, it came with force and power! So, you experienced Christians, if any others are silent, you must not be! You must tell the young ones of what the Lord has done for you! Why, some of you good old Christian people—I do not mean all of you—but a few of you are very apt to get to talking about difficulties, troubles and afflictions more than about your joys, not unlike those persons in *The Pilgrim's Progress* who told poor Christian about the lions, and giants, and dragons, and the sloughs and hills, and all that sort of thing! They might have told this, but they should also have told of the eternal arm that sustains the Christian in his pilgrimage! Tell about the troubles—that is wise—but also tell about the strength of God that makes you sufficient! That is wiser! If you have experience, empty yourselves upon the earth!

I cannot particularize an instance of what may happen to be the form of treasure which God has committed to any or all of you, but I think there is not one saint out of Heaven but has his niche to fill, some particular work to do and, therefore, some special talent entrusted to him. Do not hide it in the earth. Dig up that talent and put it out to heavenly interest for the benefit of others and for the glory of your God! Herein is the folly of so many Christians, that being wrapped up in the interest of their own salvation and taken up with their own doubts and fears, they feel little care and they take little trouble for others. They never seem to empty themselves out into the world that is around them, and never seem to get into a world bigger than the homestead in which they live. But when a man begins to think about others, to care for others, to value the souls of others, then his thoughts of God get larger! Then his consolations grow greater and his spirit becomes more Godlike. A selfish Christianity—what shall I call it but an unchristian Christianity, an impropriety in terms, a contradiction in its very essence? You do not find the men who are anxious after others so often troubled as those who give no thought except to themselves!

Mr. Whitefield, in his diary, tells of his times of depression, but they are comparatively few. And when he is going from one "pulpit-throne," as he calls it, to another, and is preaching all day long and is hearing the sobs and cries of sinners—and perhaps bearing the hoots and pelting of a mob—sitting down as soon as he has done preaching in public, to finish up his letters, or to devote an hour to prayer, why, he has not time enough to get

to desponding! He cannot afford space enough to be doubting his own interest in Christ. He is so engaged in his Master's service and has so much of the blessing of God upon it, that he goes right on without needing to stop! Christian, may you get into the same delightful state—warm with love to Christ, fervent with zeal for the spread of His Kingdom! You shall not need, then, to ask any longer—

"'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?"

But you may give a very practical answer by saying—

"There's not a lamb in all Your flock

I would refuse to feed.

There's not a foe before whose face

I'd fear Your cause to plead." "If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth."

Observe, lastly, when it is that the clouds empty themselves. The text says when they are full. This is a broad hint, I think, to the Christian—it tells him, then, to work. David was to attack the Philistines at a certain signal—"When you hear the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then shall you bestir yourself." Take this as a Divine signal, then—when you are full, it is time for you to set about doing good, emptying yourselves upon the earth! Mr. Jay tells

young students—and there are some here—that they cannot always sermonize, but that there will come times when they can. "Now," he says, "when I find that the wind blows, I put up the sails. I make hay while the sun shines. And I get the outlines of my sermons when God assists me to do so, that I may have them in readiness, when, perhaps, the breeze may not seem to be so favorable and my mind not so much upon the wing."

Do good to yourselves by storing up when you have opportunity. But yet, Christians have particular times when they feel fuller than at others. A sermon has warmed you, or you feel very joyous and zealous just now. Well, you will, perhaps, feel sick tomorrow. You had better go and do some good tonight! "Nothing like the time present," is the old world's motto. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," says the proverb. So rest assured that a duty done today will be worth two duties saved up for tomorrow! A word spoken for Christ to somebody before you go out of the Tabernacle may be the word you ought to speak. But if you wait till you have another opportunity, you may wait and wait, but the opportunity may never come. A Primitive Methodist Brother said at one of the meetings, lately, that the reason why the Primitive Methodists got on so was that other Christians were waiting for something to turn up, but that the Primitive Methodists turned it up, themselves! It was an odd thing to say, but there is a great truth in it. Some Christian people are always waiting for something to turn up. They want an opportunity of doing good and they mean to do it— oh, so well—when they get the opportunity.

My Brothers and Sisters, you always have an opportunity if you will. How does Solomon put it? "Whatever your hand finds to do"—the first thing which comes—"do it with all your might." You want work in a city like London? A Christian woman wants work for God in a city of three million inhabitants? A Christian man does not know what to do to serve his Master with all these courts, alleys and crowded houses—and all this filth and these thousands of gin-palaces—and this drunkenness running down the streets? Nothing for a Christian to do? You are lazy, Sir, or else you would never raise such a question! Say not, "What should I do?" but, "Where shall I begin doing it?" And I would say, begin at the point that is nearest to you. So they did when they built the walls of Jerusalem—every man built opposite to his own house. There, you see, the advantage was that he had not to walk two miles to his work, and then come back at night. They built opposite to his own house, and so he was spared all that trouble. And then, again, when he had a little leisure time when he went to his dinner, he could sit and look at his work and think how to do it better next time, so that there was an advantage in that. And there is a great advantage in Christians working near where they live and in taking up that part of Christian service most congenial to their circumstances and to their tastes. "Whatever your hand finds to do"—next to it, close to it—"do it with all your might." Begin to do it and continue to do it, being always steadfast and immovable in the work of the Lord!

But if there is a time when you shall specially and particularly work for Christ, do it when you are full of His love. You have had a mercy lately—a great mercy—now is the time for special liberality! You were spared from bankruptcy during the great crisis, consecrate to God what might have been lost! You feel full of love to Jesus—go and talk about Jesus to those who do not know Him. You are full of zeal—let it manifest itself. You are full of faith—exercise it. You are full of hope—now go and lead others into the same hopeful state. Pray for a blessing upon others when you have had the best season of prayer, the sweetest period of communion at the Lord's Table, or when you have been well fed on the Word. "If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth."

May God grant to some here who have no rest, who are without God and without Christ, that they may know their emptiness—and then may the Lord fill them with His own rich Grace, as He will do to all those who put their trust in Him. The Lord bless you, every one! Amen.