

ACCIDENTS, NOT PUNISHMENTS

NO. 408

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 8, 1861,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“There were present at that season some that told Him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, suppose you that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no: but, unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, think you that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem! I tell you, no: but, unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.”
Luke 13:1-5.

THE year 1861 will have a notoriety among its fellows as the year of calamities. Just at that season when man goes forth to reap the fruit of his labors, when the harvest of the earth is ripe, and the barns are beginning to burst with the new wheat, Death, the mighty reaper, has come forth to cut down his harvest. Full sheaves have been gathered into his garner—the tomb, and terrible have been the wailings which compose the harvest hymn of death! In reading the newspapers during the last two weeks, even the most stolid must have been the subject of very painful feelings. Not only have there been catastrophes so alarming that the blood chills at their remembrance, but column after column of the paper has been devoted to calamities of a minor degree of horror, but which, when added together, are enough to astound the mind with the fearful amount of sudden death which has of late fallen on the sons of men! We have had not only one incident for every day in the week, but two or three; we have not simply been stunned with the alarming noise of one terrific crash, but many have followed upon each other’s heels, like Job’s messengers, till we have needed Job’s patience and resignation to hear the dreadful tale of woes!

Now, Brothers and Sisters, such things as these have always happened in all ages of the world. Think not that this is a new thing; do not dream, as some do, that this is the produce of an overworked civilization, or of that modern and most wonderful discovery of steam. If the steam engine had never been known, and if the railway had never been constructed, there would have been sudden deaths and terrible accidents, not withstanding. In taking up the old records in which our ancestors wrote down their accidents and calamities, we find that the old stage coach yielded quite as heavy a booty to death as does the swiftly-rushing train! There were gates to Hades then, as many as there are now, and roads to death quite as steep and precipitous, and traveled by quite as vast a multitude as in our present time. Do you doubt that? Permit me to refer you to the Chapter before you. Remember those 18 upon whom the tower in Siloam fell? What if no collision crushed them? What if they were not destroyed by the ungovernable iron horse dragging them down from an embankment? Yet some badly built tower, or some wall beaten by the tempest could fall upon 18 at a time, and they might perish. Or worse than that, a despotic ruler, having the lives of men at his belt like the keys of his palace, might fall upon worshippers in the Temple itself, and mix their blood with the blood of the bullocks which they were just then sacrificing to the God of Heaven! Do not think, then, that this is an age in which God is dealing more harshly with us than of old. Do not think that God’s Providence has become more lax than it was; there were always sudden deaths, and there always will be! There were always seasons when death’s wolves hunted in hungry packs and, probably, until the end of this dispensation, the last enemy will hold his periodic festivals, and glut the worms with the flesh of men! Be not, therefore, cast down with any sudden fear, neither be troubled by these calamities. Go about your business, and if your avocations should call you to cross the field of death itself, do it, and do it bravely. God has not thrown up the reins of the world, He has not taken off His hands from the helm of the great ship, still—

*“He everywhere has sway,
 And all things serve His might;*

*His every act pure blessing is,
His path unsullied light.”*

Only learn to trust Him, and you shall not be afraid of sudden fear; “Your soul shall dwell at ease, and your seed shall inherit the earth.”

The particular subject of this morning, however, is this—the use which we ought to make of these fearful texts which God is writing in capital letters upon the history of the world. God has spoken once, yes, twice; let it not be said that man regards it not. We have seen a glimmering of God’s power, we have beheld something of the readiness with which He can destroy our fellow creatures. Let us “hear the rod and Him who has appointed it,” and in hearing it, let us do two things. First, let us not be so foolish as to draw the conclusion of superstitious and ignorant persons—that conclusion which is hinted at in the text, namely, that those who are thus destroyed by accident are sinners above all the sinners who are in the land. And, secondly, let us draw the right and proper inference; let us make practical use of all these events for our own personal improvement; let us hear the voice of the Savior saying, “Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.”

I. First, then, LET US TAKE HEED THAT WE DO NOT DRAW THE RASH AND HASTY CONCLUSION FROM TERRIBLE ACCIDENTS, THAT THOSE WHO SUFFER BY THEM SUFFER ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR SINS.

It has been most absurdly stated that those who travel on the first day of the week, and meet with an accident ought to regard that accident as being a judgment from God upon them on account of their violating the Christian’s day of worship. It has been stated even by godly ministers, that the late deplorable collision should be looked upon as an exceedingly amazing and remarkable visitation of the wrath of God against those unhappy persons who happened to be in the Clayton tunnel. Now, I enter my solemn protest against such an inference as that not in my own name, but in the name of Him who is the Christian’s Master, and the Christian’s Teacher! I say of those who were crushed in that tunnel, do you think that they were sinners above all the sinners? “I tell you, no—but, unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.” Or those who perished but last Monday, do you think that they were sinners above all the sinners that were in London? “I tell you, no—but, unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.” Now mark, I would not deny but what there have sometimes been judgments of God upon particular persons for sin; sometimes but I think but exceedingly rarely, such things have occurred. Some of us have heard in our own experience instances of men who have blasphemed God, and defied Him to destroy them, and have suddenly fallen dead. And in such cases the punishment has so quickly followed the blasphemy, that one could not help perceiving the hand of God in it! The man had wantonly asked for the judgment of God, his prayer was heard, and the judgment came.

And beyond a doubt, there are what may be called natural judgments. You see a man ragged, poor, homeless; he has been a profligate, he has been a drunk, he has lost his character, and it is but the just judgment of God upon him that he should be starving, and that he should be an outcast among men. You see in the hospitals loathsome specimens of men and women foully diseased; God forbid that we should deny that in such a case—the punishment being the natural result of the sin—there is a judgment of God upon licentiousness and ungodly lusts! And the same may be said in many instances where there is so clear a link between the sin and the punishment, that the blindest men may discern that God has made Misery the child of Sin. But in cases of accident, such as that to which I refer, and in cases of sudden and instant death, again, I say, I enter my earnest protest against the foolish and ridiculous idea that those who thus perish are sinners above all the sinners who survive unharmed!

Let me just try to reason this matter out with Christian people; for there are some unenlightened Christian people who will feel horrified by what I have said! Those who are ready at perversions may even dream that I would apologize for the breach of the day of worship. Now I do no such thing. I do not extenuate the sin, *I only testify and declare that accidents are not to be viewed as punishments for sin, for punishment belongs not to this world, but to the world to come.* To all those who hastily look on every calamity as a judgment I would speak in the earnest hope of setting them right. Let me begin, then, by saying, my dear Brothers and Sisters, do you not see that *what you say is not true?* And that is the best reason why you should not say it! Does not your own experience and observation teach you that one event happens both to the righteous and to the wicked? It is true, the wicked sometimes fall dead in the street, But has not the minister fallen dead in the pulpit? It is true that a pleasure boat, in which men were seeking their own pleasure on a Sun-

day, has suddenly gone down. But is it not equally true that a ship which contained none but godly men, who were bound upon an excursion to preach the Gospel, has gone down, too? The visible Providence of God has no respect of persons! And a storm may gather around the “John Williams” missionary ship, quite as well as around a vessel filled with riotous sinners. Why, do you not perceive that the Providence of God has been, in fact, in its outward dealings, rather harder upon the good than upon the bad? For did not Paul say, as he looked upon the miseries of the righteous in his day, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”?

The path of righteousness has often conducted men to the rack, to prison, to the gibbet, to the stake—while the road of sin has often led a man to empire, to dominion, and to high esteem among his fellows. It is not true that in *this world* God punishes men for sin, and rewards them for their good deeds. Did not David say, “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree”? And did not this perplex the Psalmist for a little season until he went into the sanctuary of God, and then he understood their end? Your faith assures you that the ultimate result of Providence will work out only good to the people of God. Your life, though it is but a brief part of the Divine drama of history, must have taught you that Providence does not outwardly discriminate between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous perish as suddenly as the wicked! The plague knows no difference between the sinner and the saint! The sword of war is alike pitiless to the sons of God, and the sons of Belial! When God sends forth the scourge, it slays the innocent as suddenly as the perverse and obstinate!

Now, my Brothers and Sisters, if your idea of an avenging and awarding Providence is not true, why should you talk as if it were? And why, if it is not correct as a *general rule*, should you suppose it to be true in this one particular instance? Get the idea out of your head, for the Gospel of God never needs you to believe an untruth!

But, secondly, there is another reason. The idea that whenever an accident occurs we are to look upon it as a judgment from God *would make the Providence of God to be, instead of a great deep, a very shallow pool*. Why, any child can understand the Providence of God, if it is true that when there is a railway accident, it is because people travel on a Sunday. I take any little child from the smallest infant class in the Sunday school, and he will say, “Yes, I see that.” But then if such a thing is Providence, if it is a Providence that can be understood, manifestly it is not the Scriptural idea of Providence, for in the Scripture we are always taught that God’s Providence is “a great deep.” And even Ezekiel, who had the wings of the cherubim, and could fly aloft, when he saw the wheels which were the great picture of the Providence of God, he could only say the wheels were so high that they were terrible, and were full of eyes so that he cried, “O wheel!” If—I repeat it to make it plain—if *always* a calamity were the result of some sin, Providence would be as simple as twice two made four; it would be one of the first lessons that a little child might learn. But Scripture teaches us that Providence is a great depth in which the human intellect may swim and dive, but it can neither find a bottom nor a shore. And if you and I pretend that we can find out the reasons of Providence, and twist the dispensations of God over our fingers, we only prove our folly, but we do not prove that we have begun to understand the ways of God! Why look, Sirs; suppose for a moment there were some great performance going on, and you should step in the middle of it and see one actor upon the stage for a moment, and you should say, “Yes, I understand it,” what a simpleton you would be! Do you not know that the great transactions of Providence began nearly 6,000 years ago? And you have only stepped into this world for 30 or 40 years, and seen one actor on the stage, and you say you understand it! Tush! You do not; you have only begun to know. Only He knows the end from the beginning! Only He understands what are the great results, and what is the great reason for which the world was made, and for which He permits both good and evil to occur. Think not that you know the ways of God! It is to degrade Providence, and to bring God down to the level of men when you pretend that you can understand these calamities, and find out the secret designs of wisdom!

But next, do you not perceive that such an idea as this would *encourage Phariseeism*? These people who were crushed to death, or scalded, or destroyed under the wheels of railway carriages, were worse sinners than we are? Very well, then what good people we must be; what excellent examples of virtue! We do not such things as they, and therefore God makes all things smooth for us. Inasmuch as we have travelled, some of us every day in the week, and yet have never been smashed to pieces, we may on this supposition rank ourselves with the favorites of Deity. And then, do you not see, Brothers and Sisters, our safety would be an argument for our being Christians? Our having traveled on a railway safely would be an argument that we were regenerate persons—yet I have never read in the Scriptures, “We know that we have passed from death unto life because we have traveled from London to Brighton safely twice a day.” I never found a verse

which looked like this; and yet if it were true that the worst of sinners met with accidents, it would follow as a natural converse to that proposition, that those who do *not* meet with accidents must be very good people, and what Pharisaical notions we thus beget and foster! But I cannot indulge the folly for a moment. As I look for a moment upon the poor mangled bodies of those who have been so suddenly slain, my eyes find tears, but my heart does not boast, nor my lips accuse—far from me IS the boastful cry, “God, I thank You that I am not as these men are!” No, no, no—it is NOT the spirit of Christ—nor the spirit of Christianity! While we can thank God that we are preserved, yet we can say, “It is of Your mercy that we are not consumed,” and we must ascribe it to His Grace and to His Grace alone. But we cannot suppose that we are any better. It is only because He has had mercy, and been very long-suffering with us, not willing that we should perish, but that we should come to repentance, that He has thus preserved us from going down to the grave, and kept us alive.

And then, will you allow me to remark that the supposition against which I am earnestly contending is a *very cruel and unkind one*. For if this were the case, that all persons who thus meet with their death in an extraordinary and terrible manner were greater sinners than the rest, would it not be a crushing blow to bereaved survivors, and is it not ungenerous on our part to indulge the idea unless we are compelled by unanswerable reasons to accept it as an awful Truth of God? Now, I defy you to whisper it in the widow’s ear. Go home to her and say, “Your husband was a worse sinner than the rest of men, therefore he died.” You have not brutality enough for that! A little unconscious infant, which had never sinned, though, doubtless, an inheritor of Adam’s Fall, is found crushed amidst the debris of the accident. Now think for a moment, what would be the infamous consequence of the supposition, that those who perished were worse than others? You would have to make it out that this unconscious infant was a worse sinner than many in the dens of infamy whose lives are yet spared! Do you not perceive that the thing is radically false, and I might perhaps show you the injustice of it best by reminding you that it may one day turn upon your own head! Let it be your own case that you should meet with sudden death in such a way—are you willing to be adjudged to damnation on that account? Such an event may happen in the House of God. Let me recall to my own, and to your sorrowful recollection, what occurred when once we met together. I can say with a pure heart, we met for no objective but to serve our God, and the minister had no aim in going to that place but that of gathering many to hear who otherwise would not have listened to his voice. Yet there were funerals as the result of a holy effort (for holy effort we still avow it to have been, and the later smile of God has proved it so). There were deaths and deaths among God’s people; I was about to say I am glad it was with God’s people rather than with others. A fearful fright took hold upon the congregation and they fled, and do you not see that if accidents are to be viewed as *judgments*, then it is a fair inference that we were sinning in being there—an insinuation which our consciences repudiates with scorn! However, if that logic were true, it is as true against *us* as it is against *others*, and inasmuch as you would repel with indignation the accusation that any were wounded or hurt on account of sin, in being there to worship God—what you repel for yourself repel for others—and be no party to the accusation which is brought against those who have been destroyed during the last fortnight, that they perished on account of any great sin!

Here I anticipate the outcries of prudent and zealous persons who tremble for the Ark of God, and would touch it with Uzzah’s hand. “Well,” says one, “but we ought not to talk like this, for it is a very serviceable superstition because there are many people who will be kept from traveling on a Sunday by the accident. We ought to tell them, therefore, that those who perished, perished because they traveled on Sunday.” Brothers and Sisters, *I would not tell a lie to save a soul*, and this would be telling lies! I would do anything to stop Sunday labor and sin, but I would not forge a falsehood even to do that. They might have perished on a Monday as well as on a Sunday. God gives no special immunity any day of the week, and accidents may occur as well at one time, as at another. It is only a pious fraud when we seek thus to play upon the superstition of men to make capital for Christ! The Roman Catholic priest might consistently use such an argument, but an honest Christian who believes that the religion of Christ can take care of itself without his telling falsehoods, scorns to do it. These men did not perish because they traveled on a Sunday! Witness the fact that others perished on the Monday when they were on an errand of mercy. I know not why God sent the accident; God forbid that we should offer our own reason when God has not given us His reason! But we are not allowed to make the superstition of men an instrument for the advancing the Glory of God. You know among Protestants there is a great deal of popery. I meet with people who uphold infant baptism on the plea, “Well, it is not doing any hurt, and there is a great deal of good meaning in it, and it may do good and even confirmation may be blessed to some people, and therefore do not let us speak against

it.” I have nothing to do with whether the thing does hurt or not! All I have to do with is whether it is *right*, whether it is *Scriptural*, whether it is *true*. And if the Truth does mischief, which is a supposition we can by no means allow, that mischief will not lie at our door! We have nothing to do but to speak the Truth even though the heavens should fall! I say again that any advancement of the Gospel which is owing to the superstition of men is a false advance, and it will by-and-by recoil upon the people who use such an unhallowed weapon. We have a religion which appeals to man’s judgment and common sense, and when we cannot get on with that, I scorn that we should proceed by any other means!

And, Brothers and Sisters, if there is any person who should harden his heart and say, “Well, I am as safe on one day as another,” which is quite true, I must say to him, “The sin of your making such a use as this of a Truth must lie at your own door, not at mine; but if I could keep you from violating the Christian’s day of rest by putting before you a superstitious hypothesis, I would *not do it*, because I feel that though I might keep you from that one sin a little while, you would, by-and-by, grow too intelligent to be duped by me, and then you would come to look upon me as a priest who had played upon your fears instead of appealing to your judgment.” Oh, it is time for us to know that our Christianity is not a weak, shivering thing that appeals to the petty superstitious fears of ignorant and darkened minds! It is a manly thing, loving the Light of God, and needing no sanctified frauds for its defense! Yes, critic, turn your lantern upon us, and let it glare into our very eyes! *We* are not afraid, the Truth of God is mighty, and it can prevail, and if it cannot prevail in the daylight, we have no wish that the sun should set to give it an opportunity. I believe that very much infidelity has sprung from the very natural desire of some Christian people to make use of common mistakes. “Oh,” they have said, “this popular error is a very good one, it keeps people right. Let us perpetuate the mistake, for it evidently does good!” And then, when the mistake has been found out, infidels have said, “Oh, you see how these Christian people are found out in their tricks.” Let us have no tricks, Brothers and Sisters. Let us not talk to men as though they were little children, and could be frightened by tales of ghosts and witches! The fact is that this is not the time of retribution, and it is worse than idle for us to teach that it is so.

And now, lastly—and then I leave this point—do you not perceive that the un-Christian and un-Scriptural supposition that when men suddenly meet with death it is the result of sin, *robs Christianity of one of its noblest arguments for the immortality of the soul*? Brothers and Sisters, we assert daily with Scripture for our warrant that God is just, and inasmuch as He *is* just, He must punish sin, and reward the righteous. Manifestly *He does not do it in this world*. I think I have plainly shown that in this world one event happens to both; that the righteous man is poor as well as the wicked, and he dies suddenly as well as the most graceless. Very well, then, the inference is natural and clear that there must be a *next world* in which these things must be righted. If there is a God, He must be just, and if He is just, He must punish sin; and since He does *not* do it in *this world*, there therefore must be *another state* in which men shall receive the due reward of their works, and they who have sown to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, while they who have sown to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting! Make this world the reaping place, and you have taken the sting out of sin. “Oh,” says the sinner, “if the sorrows men endure here is all the punishment they will have, we will sin greedily!” Say to them, “No. *This* is not the world of punishment, but the world of probation; it is not the court of justice, but the land of mercy; it is not the prison of terror, but the house of long-suffering.” And you have opened before their eyes the gates of the *future*. You have set the judgment throne before their eyes. You have reminded them of, “Come, you blessed,” and “Depart, you cursed.” You have a more reasonable, not to say a more Scriptural, ground of appeal to their consciences, and to their hearts.

I have thus spoken with the view of putting down as much as I can the idea which is too current among the ungodly—that we as Christians hold every calamity to be a judgment. We do not! We do not believe that those 18 upon whom the tower in Siloam fell were sinners above all the sinners that were in Jerusalem!

II. Now to our second point. WHAT USE, THEN, OUGHT WE TO MAKE OF THIS VOICE OF GOD AS HEARD AMIDST THE SHRIEKS AND GROANS OF DYING MEN? Two uses; first, *inquiry*, and secondly, *warning*.

The first *inquiry* we should ask ourselves is this—“Why may it not be my case that I may very soon and suddenly be cut off? Have I a lease of my life? Have I any special guardianship which ensures me that I shall not suddenly pass the portals of the tomb? Have I received a charter of longevity? Have I been covered with such a coat of armor that I am invulnerable to the arrows of death? Why am I not to die?” And the next question it should suggest is this—“Am not I as great a sinner as those who died? Are there not with me, even with *me*, sins against the Lord my God? If in outward sin

others have exceeded me, are not the thoughts of my heart evil? Does not the same Law which curses them curse me? I have not continued in all the things that are written in the Book of the Law to do them. It is as impossible that I should be saved by my works as that they should be. Am not I under the Law as well as they by nature, and therefore am not I as well as they under the curse?" Instead of thinking of their sins which would make me proud, I should think of my own which will make me humble! Instead of speculating upon *their* guilt—which is no business of mine—I should turn my eyes within, and think upon *my own* transgression for which I must personally answer before the Most High God! Then the next question is, "Have I repented of my sin? I need not be inquiring whether *they* have or not—have *I*? Since I am liable to the same calamity, am I prepared to meet it? Have I felt, through the Holy Spirit's convincing power, the blackness and depravity of my heart? Have I been led to confess before God that I deserve His wrath, and that His displeasure, if it lights on me, will be my just due? Do I hate sin? Have I learned to abhor it? Have I, through the Holy Spirit, turned away from it as from a deadly poison, and do I seek now to honor Christ my Master? Am I washed in His blood? Do I bear His likeness? Do I reflect His Character? Do I seek to live to His praise?"

If not, I am in as great a danger as they were, and may quite as suddenly be cut off, and then where am *I*? I will not ask where are *they*? And then, again, instead of prying into the future destiny of these unhappy men and women, how much better to inquire into our own destiny and our own state!—

*"What am I? My soul, awake,
And an impartial survey take."*

Am I prepared to die? If now the gates of Hell should be opened, shall I enter there? If now beneath me the wide jaws of death should gape, am I prepared with confidence to walk through the midst of them, fearing no evil, because God is with me? *This is the proper use to make of these accidents.* This is the wisest way to apply the judgments of God to our own selves, and to our own condition. O Sirs, God has spoken to every man and woman in London during these last two weeks. He has spoken to me. He has spoken to you. Men, women and children! God's voice has rung out of the dark tunnel—has spoken from the sunset, and from the glaring bonfire round which lay the corpses of men and women. And He has said to you, "Be you also ready, for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man comes." It is so spoken to you that I hope it may set you inquiring, "Am I prepared? Am I ready? Am I willing now to face my Judge, and hear the sentence pronounced upon my soul?"

When we have used it thus for inquiry, let me remind you that we ought to use it also for *warning*. "You shall all likewise perish." "No," says one, "not *likewise*. We shall not all be crushed; many of us will die in our beds. We shall not all be burned; many of us will tranquilly close our eyes." Yes, but the text says, "You shall all likewise *perish*." And let me remind you that some of you may perish in the same identical manner! You have no reason to believe that you may not also *suddenly* be cut off while walking the streets. You may fall dead while eating your meals—how many have perished with the staff of life in their hands! You shall be in your bed, and your bed shall suddenly be made your tomb. You shall be strong, hale, hearty, and in health—and either by an accident or by the stoppage of the circulation of your blood, you shall be suddenly hurried before your God! Oh, may sudden death to you be sudden Glory!

But it may happen with some of us that in the same sudden manner as others have died, so shall we. But lately, in America, a Brother, while preaching the Word, laid down his body and his charge at once. You remember the death of Dr. Beaumont, who, while proclaiming the Gospel of Christ, closed his eyes to earth? And I remember the death of a minister in this country, who had but just given out the verse—

*"Father, I long, I faint to see
The place of Your abode;
I'd leave Your earthly courts and flee
Up to Your house, my God,"*

when it pleased God to grant him the desire of his heart, and he appeared before the King in His beauty! Why, then, may not such a sudden death as that happen to you and to me?

But it is quite certain that, let death come when it may, there are some few respects in which it will come to us in just the same manner as it has to those who have so lately been hurried away. First, it will come quite as *surely*. They could not, travel as fast as they would, escape from the Pursuer! They could not, journey where they may, *from* home or *to* home, escape the shaft when the time had come! And so shall we perish. Just as surely, as certainly as death has set his seal upon the corpses which are not covered with the sod, so certainly shall he set his seal on us (unless the Lord should come

before), for “it is appointed unto all men once to die, and after death the judgment.” There is no discharge in this way; there is no escape for any individual; there is no bridge over this river; there is no ferry by which we may cross this Jordan dry shod. Into your chill depths, O river, each one of us must descend; in your cold stream our blood must be frozen, and beneath your foaming billows our head must sink! We, too, must surely die. “Trite,” you say, “and commonplace;” and death is commonplace, but it only happens to us once! God grant that that dying once may perpetually be in our minds till we die daily, and find it not hard work to die at the last!

Well then, as death surely comes both to them, and to us, so will it come both to them, and to us most *potently* and *irresistibly*. When death surprised them, then what help had they? A child’s card house was not more easily crushed than these ponderous carriages! What could they do to help one another? They are sitting talking side by side. The scream is heard, and before a second cry can be uttered, they are crushed and mangled. The husband may seek to extricate his wife, but heavy timbers have covered her body; he can only see at last her poor head, and she is dead. He takes his sorrowful seat by her side, and puts his hand upon her brow until it is stone cold, and though he has seen one and another plucked with broken bones from the midst of the ruined mass, he has to leave her body there. Alas, his children are motherless, and himself robbed of the partner of his bosom! They could not resist; they might do what they would, but as soon as the moment came, on they went—and death or broken bones was the result. So with you and me; bribe the physician with the largest fee, but he could not put fresh blood into your veins; pay him in masses of gold, but he could not make the pulse give another throb. Death, irresistible conqueror of men, there is none who can stand against you; your word is law, your will is destiny! So shall it come to us as it did to them; it shall come with power, and none of us can resist.

When it came to them, it came *instantly*, and would not delay. So will it come to us. We may have longer notice than they, but when the hour has struck there shall be no postponing it. Gather up your feet in your bed, O Patriarch, for you must die and not live! Give the last kiss to your wife, you veteran soldier of the cross; put your hands upon your children’s heads, and give them the dying benediction, for all your prayers cannot lengthen out your life, and all your tears cannot add a drop to the dry well-spring of your being. You must go, the Master sends for you, and He allows no delay. No, though your whole family should be ready to sacrifice their lives to buy you but an hour of respite, it must not be. Though a nation should be a holocaust, a willing sacrifice, to give its sovereign another week in addition to his reign, yet it must not be. Though the whole flock should willingly consent to tread the dark vaults of the tomb to let their pastor’s life be spared but for another year, it must not be. Death will have no delay! The time is up, the clock has struck, the sand has run out, and as certainly as they died when their time was come, in the field by sudden accident, so certainly must we!

And then, again, let us remember that death will come to us as it did to them, with *terrors*. Perhaps not with the crash of broken timbers, not with the darkness of the tunnel, not with the smoke, and with the steam, not with the shrieks of women, and the groans of dying men—but yet with terrors. For meet death where we may, if we are not in Christ, and if the Shepherd’s rod and staff do not comfort us, to die must be an awful and terrible thing! Yes, in your body, O Sinner—with downy pillows beneath your head, and a wife’s tender arm to bear you up, and a tender hand to wipe your clammy sweat—you will find it awful work to face the monster and feel his sting, and enter into his dread dominion. It is awful work at any time and at every time—under the best and most propitious circumstances—for a man to die unprepared!

And now I would send you away with this one thought abiding on your memories. We are dying creatures, not living creatures, and we shall soon be gone. Perhaps, as here I stand, and rudely talk of these mysterious things, soon shall this hand be stretched, and dumb the mouth that lisps the faltering strain. Power supreme, O everlasting King, come when You may! Oh, may You never intrude upon an ill-spent hour, but find me wrapped in high meditation, singing to my great Creator; doing works of mercy to the poor and needy ones, or bearing in my arms the poor and weary of the flock. Or solacing the disconsolate, or blowing the blast of the Gospel trumpet in the ears of deaf and perishing souls! Then come when You will, if You are with me in life, I shall not fear to meet You in death! But oh, let my soul be ready with her wedding garment, with her lamp trimmed, and her light burning, ready to see her Master, and enter into the joy of her Lord! Souls, you know the way of salvation! You have heard it often, hear it yet again! “He who believes on the Lord Jesus has everlasting life.” “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, he who believes not shall be damned.” “Believe you with your heart, and with your mouth make confession.” May the Holy Spirit give the Grace to do both, and this done, you may say—

*“Come, death and some celestial band,
To bear my soul away!”*

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