

CHEERING WORDS AND SOLEMN WARNINGS

NO. 729

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"Say you to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.
Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him."
Isaiah 3:10, 11.*

THERE are two classes mentioned here, the righteous and the wicked; and into these two orders the Book of God is accustomed to divide the whole population of the globe. It speaks but little of upper and lower classes; it says but little concerning the various ranks into which civil and political institutions have divided the race of man; but from its first page to its last it is taken up with this grand division, the righteous and the wicked. Very early in human history we find the "Seed of the woman," and the "seed of the serpent," and we meet with Cain, who was of that Wicked One, and slew his brother, because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous. While the deluge destroys the ungodly, Noah floats in the Ark in security as the representative of the righteous; and when the destroying angel kills the rebellious Egyptians, Israel feasts in safety upon the Passover. The two races have always been in existence and at enmity. Israel was oppressed in Egypt, attacked by Amalekites in the wilderness, beset by foes in Canaan, and carried away captive into Assyria or Babylon. In the nation of Israel itself the very heart of the people was depraved by an idolatrous seed, and at length eaten out by the hypocrisy of a generation of vipers who were of Israel, but were not the Lord's chosen.

In our own age, when the Church of God is found among the Gentiles, we see still the broad mark of distinction between men who fear the Lord and men who fear Him not. The line of nature and the line of Divine Grace run on the same as ever; the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent still contend with each other. And it is not the intent of God in His Providence that the line of demarcation should be withdrawn. He would not have His people enter into alliance with the camp of evil, but "come out from among them and be separate." Nonconformity, in its spiritual sense, is the duty of every Christian. "Be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the renewing of your minds." The Flood came upon the world when the sons of God were united with the daughters of men, and unholy alliances between the Church and the world provoked God to the highest possible degree. He will have the distinction maintained between the precious and the vile till time shall be no more. God of old divided light from darkness; the light He called Day, and the darkness He called Night; and He will not have us call light darkness, nor darkness light. He forbade the Jews to sow with many seeds intermingled, or the wearing of linsey-woolsey, because He would typically forbid unhallowed blending. He will have a seed that shall serve Him and that shall fear Him, and go outside the camp bearing the reproach of His dear Son, and these shall be evermore distinct from that other seed under the dominion of the prince of the power of the air, whose rebellious inquiry is, "Who is Jehovah that we should obey His voice?"

A crimson line runs between the righteous and the wicked, the line of the Atoning Sacrifice; Faith crosses that line, but nothing else can. Faith in the precious blood is the great distinction at the root, and all those Divine Graces which spring out of Faith go to make the righteous more and more separate from the ungodly world, who, having not the root, have not the fruit. Do you believe on Jesus Christ? On whose side are you? Are you for us or for our enemies? Do you rally at the cry of the Cross? Does the uplifted banner of a dying Savior's Love attract you? If not, then you remain still out of God, out of Christ, an alien to the commonwealth of Israel, and you will have your portion among the enemies of the Savior.

This distinction is so sharp and definite, that there are none who dwell in a borderland between the two conditions. There is a sharp line of division between the righteous and the wicked, as clear as that which divides death from life. A man cannot be between death and life; he is either living or dead. If there is but a spark of life he cannot be numbered with the dead; he lives, and he will, let us hope, live to a better purpose; but if he is dead, and the vital spark is quite quenched, you may dress him as you will and hang ornaments on his ears, and fill his mouth with the sweetest dainties,

but you cannot breathe into his nostrils the breath of life again—he is dead. A clear line of demarcation exists between life and death, and such a division is fixed by God between the righteous and the wicked. There are no *betweenities*; no amphibious dwellers in Divine Grace and out of Divine Grace; no monstrous nondescripts who are neither sinners nor saints. You are, dear Hearer, this day, alive by the quickening influences of the Holy Spirit, or else you are dead in trespasses and sins. He who is not with Christ is against Him, he who gathers not with Him scatters abroad; so that to every man, woman and child in this place, my text, with its double utterances, has a voice. If you are righteous, it shall be well with you; if you are not righteous, though you may think that you are not wicked, and may feel indignant that the term should be applied to you, yet it must be and my text means *you* when it says, “Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him.”

There ought to be at the outset of our discourse this morning a great searching of heart, and each one should say to himself—

*“And what am I?—My Soul, awake,
And an impartial prospect take;
Does no dark sign, no ground of fear,
In practice, or in heart appear?
What image does my spirit bear?
Is Jesus form’d, and living there?
Say, do His lineaments Divine
In thought, in word, and actions shine?”*

Do not ask such questions, and then leave their answer in cloudland; rather wait at the Mercy Seat till you know for a certainty that Christ is yours and you are His. Dear Hearer, if there is a comfortable word spoken this morning, do not apply it to yourself, if you are not among the righteous; if you are not made righteous through the blood of Christ, and through the transforming power of His Spirit, do not steal a dangerous consolation from the Word. On the other hand, if there is a dark and dreary threat, which in solemn truth applies to you, tremble at it, but let it come home with power; for it may be that God will visit you in the whirlwind or in the storm of the threat, making the clouds of the text to be the dust of His feet, and while He rebukes you, you shall find it to be in love. If the Lord shall break your heart, consent to have it broken, asking that He may sanctify that brokenness of spirit to bring you in earnest to the Savior, that you may yet be numbered with the righteous ones.

We shall now come, as God may help us, to the text.

I. THE WELL-BEING OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

Here let us read the words again, that we may get the fullness of their meaning. “Say you to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.” Observe attentively *the fact mentioned*, the great fact—it shall be well with the righteous. The statement is singularly simple. There are few adverbs or adjectives to describe, and, therefore, to limit the announcement, the statement is made broadly. It is almost as grand, in its simplicity, as the saying, “Let there be light, and there was light.” “*It shall be well with them,*” that is the whole of the declaration; but the very fewness of the words creates and reveals a depth of meaning.

Observe, then, we may gather from the fact that the text is without descriptive limits; that *it is well with the righteous* ALWAYS. If it had said, “Say you to the righteous, that it is well with them in their prosperity,” we must have been thankful for so great a gift, for prosperity is an hour of peril; or if it had been written, “Say you to the righteous that it is well with them when under persecution,” we must have been thankful for so sustaining an assurance, for persecution is hard to bear; but when no time is mentioned, all time is included; when no particular occasion is singled out, it is because upon every occasion the saying is alike true—

*“Well when they see His face,
Or sink amidst the flood;
Well in affliction’s thorny maze,
Or on the mount with God.”*

“Say you to the righteous, that it shall be well with them,” from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, from the first gatherings of evening shadows until the day-star shines. It shall be well with them when, like Samuel, God calls them from the bed of their childhood; it shall be well

with them when, like David in his old age, they are stayed up in the bed to conclude their life with a song of praise; it shall be well with them if, like Solomon, they shall abound in wealth, and well with them if, like Lazarus, they shall lie upon a dunghill and the dogs shall lick their sores; it shall be well with them, if like Job they wash their feet with oil and their steps with butter, if the princes are before them bowing their heads, and the great ones of the earth do them obeisance; but it shall be equally well with them if, like Job in his trial, they sit down to scrape themselves with a potsherd, their children gone, their wives bidding them curse their God, their friends miserable comforters to them, and themselves left alone; it shall be well, always well.—

*“Tis well when joys arise,
Tis well when sorrows flow,
Tis well when darkness veils the skies,
And strong temptations blow.”*

The text evidently means that it is well with the righteous at all times alike, and never otherwise than well, because no time is mentioned, no season is excluded, and all time is intended—

*“What cheering words are these!
Their sweetness who can tell?
In time, and to eternal days,
Tis with the righteous well.”*

It shall be well with the righteous, especially, in *the future*. The text says, “it *shall* be well with them.” They often dread the future, but they certainly have no reason for unbelieving fear. It *shall* be well with the righteous. They may look forward to a day of trouble which they clearly foresee, but they have no reason for foreboding, for it shall be well with them in the coming struggle; and if perhaps on the heels of that trouble there shall come another and yet another, it shall still be well with them, for is it not written, “In six troubles I will be with you, and in seven there shall no evil touch you”? If they shall extend their vision to those years of coming decline, when the dry leaves shall cover their path, when the grasshopper shall be a burden, and their teeth fail because they are few, and they who look out of the windows shall be darkened, it shall be well with them at eventide; their last days shall be their best days; they shall dwell in the land Beulah, and sing upon the bank of Jordan; for their souls shall be ravished with foretastes of the rest which remains for the favored ones. Should the man of God extend his view yet further, and through the telescope of Faith should gaze upon unknown worlds, he may discern distinctly, by the light of gracious Promises that it shall be well with him in the land of the hereafter. The text hints at no end, it does not say it shall be well with us up to a certain point, but beyond that the text says nothing; no, the words are simply and grandly, “*it shall be,*” and nothing less. God’s “shalls” must be understood always in their largest sense, and so we know that when the cycles of time shall cease, and the wheels of this huge engine shall go to rack, it shall be well with the righteous.

Let the nations be dashed in pieces, let there come terrific conflicts, let Armageddon’s last dread shout be heard, let the Euphrates be dried up, let the sea be licked up with tongues of forked flame, let the very mountains melt like wax in the Presence of God, let the elements be consumed with fervent heat, it matters nothing to the Christian what shall happen in all those days of dread catastrophe, for has not God said it shall be well with the righteous?

Always well then, and well into the future. We add, *well upon Divine Authority*. A wise man may say to us, “It is well,” and his experience may be so little at fault that the utterance may be accurate; we ourselves may sometimes come to a fairly safe conclusion that things are well with us; but oh, how much better it is to have it under the hand and seal of Omniscience! He who searches the heart, who sees every secret thing, says that with the righteous it is well. It is the mouth of God who speaks the comforting assurance. Oh Beloved, if God says that it is well, 10,000 devils may say it is ill, and we laugh them all to scorn. Blessed be God for a faith which enables us to believe God when the creatures contradict Him. It is, says God, at all times well with you, you righteous one; then, Beloved, if you cannot see it, let God’s Word stand in the place of your sight; yes, believe it on Divine Authority more confidently than if your eyes and your feelings told it to you. Whom God blesses is blest indeed, and what His lips pronounce is Truth most sure and steadfast.

It is well, we may rest assured again, *with our best selves*. The text does not say it is always well with our bodies, but our bodies are not ourselves—they are but the casket of our nobler natures; our soul is the true jewel. Our bodies are but the garments, our soul is the precious life which wears them for a while. I understand the text to mean, our nobler parts, our new God-given life, it shall be well with it. If it is passed through the fire, it is but to refine it of its dross; if it is com-

pelled to take a pilgrimage through the floods, it is that it may come up like a sheep from the washing. It is always well with our better and nobler natures; if God is but with us to sanctify us and sustain us, the worst of circumstances shall work for our good.

When I looked at the text, studying it as best I could, I thought, “Yes, and if God says it is well, He means *it is emphatically well*.” It is well with weight. It is not a superficial statement that it is apparently well, but it is a deep, true, lasting, sincere “*well*.” Conceive, if you can, of the soul’s being well in the best sense in which it could be well. Now all that you have imagined and more is true of the righteous—“it shall be well.” It shall be so well with the righteous man in the sight of God as to the grand matter that it could not be better. He shall be as pure, as happy, as ennobled as a man could possibly be when Divine Grace has fulfilled its purpose in him. God has already given the Believer all that his heart can desire, for He has given him all things in Jesus, and He has insured to that man by oath and by Covenant all that he can ever need in time and eternity. In the best, highest, largest, truest sense of the term, it is well with the righteous.

I want you to observe before I leave this fact, *that it is so well with them that God wants them to know it*. He would have His saints happy, and therefore He says to His Prophets, “Say you to the righteous, it shall be well with them.” It is not wise sometimes to remind a man of his wealth, and rank, and prospects, for pride is so readily stirred up in us. If a Brother is endowed with remarkable talents, he will generally find that out soon enough himself; it is dangerous, perhaps, to tell him so; but it is not dangerous to assure Christians that it is well with *them*, for otherwise the Lord would not command us to repeat the assurance in the ears of the godly. The Lord would have every preacher comfort His people; He would have the Book, the good old Book itself, speak plainly to them of the dignity of their relationships, of the security of their portion, of the comfort of their present estate, and the Glory of the world to come. “Say you to the righteous, it shall be well with them.” Say it often and plainly, for the statement will be beneficial. I desired to have said this upon the present occasion in such a way that you could see it and feel it, and rejoice in it. Are you in Christ, my Brother, my Sister? Have you come to the Fountain of His precious blood? Have you washed there? Have you trusted in Jesus? Now it may seem to you that everything goes amiss with you, and the more you try to set matters right, the worse they become; but God has said to His servant, this morning, “Say you to the righteous, it shall be well with them,” and I do say it, yet not I, but God says it, it shall be well with you, it is well with you. Oh that you would believe it! Ah, if you did believe it you would be so joyful.

Well, and should not the righteous be joyful? Ought they not to exceedingly rejoice? The thought has been crossing my mind many times this week that I am not joyful enough, and that God’s people, as a whole, are not joyful enough. Am I mistaken in that idea? What is the truest worship in the world? Why, it is joy in the Lord! “Rejoice in the Lord always.” I believe that we adore God best and please Him most when the thought of Him does bring to our soul exalted pleasure. But alas, we give our God little of the sweet odors of our delight; we get to muddling our brains about our worldly estate, our sins, our conflicts, and inward corruptions, and we forget what a good God we have, and His loving kindness is disregarded. What a blessed God is ours in Christ Jesus! A sea of never-failing delights, a river of boundless joys, forever flowing on. Blessed be the name of the Lord forever and ever! Let our hearts exult at the thought of His goodness, and leap for joy at the sound of His name. God Himself is our exceeding joy, and then to help us in all our holy exultation He cheers us with these heavenly words, “It is well with you, My dear Child; it is well with you now, and shall be throughout eternity.”

A few minutes will scarcely suffice in full length to *account for this Truth of God*. As I have but so short a time, will you accompany me with earnest attention while I give a bare outline and hasty list of the causes of the Christian’s joy; to do more than this it were vain to attempt. It is no wonder that it is well with the Believer when you consider that *his greatest trouble is past*. His greatest trouble was the guilt of sin. This threw him into the dungeon, where there was no water; from which he has now escaped, for sin is pardoned, and the repenting sinner is set free from the terrible bondage of the Law. He mourns over sin, but he knows that the guilt of it was endured and taken away by the Great Substitute, and he rejoices that he now stands an absolved person, against whom the Justice of God can bring no account, for he is completely forgiven. Do you not remember the time when you thought that if God would but forgive you your sins, you would not make another stipulation; if He would command you to be a galley slave, yet if sin were pardoned, you felt you could tug the oar and bear the smart of the driver’s whip right cheerfully, as long as the legal whip was taken away.

Now, Christian, your sin is pardoned, that which separated you from God is gone; your iniquity is forgiven through Jesus Christ, and none can lay anything to your charge.

Then *your next greatest trouble is doomed*. Your second greatest trouble is indwelling sin. The power of sin plagues you now. Well, that is doomed. Christ by His death has driven the spear through the heart of sin as to its power over you; it shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the Law but under Grace. The day is hastening on when you shall drop all tendency to sin. Oh, blissful hour! Oh, joyous change, when the tendency shall be all upward, all toward good, all toward God, and not one whisper of temptation toward evil; not one carnal passion, not a thought of crime, not one unsubdued desire, but the whole soul through and through washed and cleansed and made like unto God. The holiness, without which no man can see the Lord, is guaranteed to every Believer in the Covenant, and so his second greatest mischief is moved away by the blessing of his God. This ought to make him a happy man, if neither the guilt nor the power of sin can curse him he ought to rejoice.

With regard to the Christian, he knows that *his best things are safe*. If the ship is wrecked, yet he never had his treasure on board this earthly vessel; if the thief should break through and steal, yet the thief cannot get at his jewels, for his jewels are hidden with Christ in God; if the moth should corrupt and fret his garments, yet his Everlasting Robe will never be moth-eaten, for that hangs up in the Great House above ready for him that he may put it on after he has undressed himself and left his weekday garments in the tomb. His best things are all secure; time cannot change them, nor death destroy them, or Satan rob him of them. As for *his worst things they only work his good*. He has his worst things as other men, for he cannot always feast, but his worst things are among his mercies. He gains by his losses, he acquires health by his sicknesses, he wins friends through his bereavements, and he absolutely becomes a conqueror through his defeats. Nothing therefore can be injurious to the Christian when the very worst things that he has are but rough waves to wash his golden ships home to port and enrich him.

My dear Friends, I was about to say of the Christian that it is so well with him that I could not imagine it to be better, for he is *well fed*, he feeds upon the flesh and blood of Jesus; he is *well clothed*—“Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him”—he wears the Imputed Righteousness of Christ; he is *well housed*, he dwells in God who has been the Dwelling Place of His people in all generations; he is *well married*, for his soul is knit in bonds of marriage union to Christ; He is *well provided for* for the present, the Lord is his Shepherd, and he will not want; and he is well provided for the future—

***“This world is his, and worlds to come;
Earth is his lodge, and Heaven his home.”***

Time would fail me to say that it must be well with the Christian, because *God has put within him many Graces, which help to make all things well*. Has he difficulties? Faith laughs at them, and overcomes them. Has he trials? Love accepts them, seeing the Father’s hand in them all. Has he sicknesses? Patience kisses the rod. Is he weary? Hope expects a rest to come. The sparkling Graces which God has put within the man’s soul qualify him to overcome in all conflicts, and to make this world subject to his power in every battle; I mean that he gets good out of the worst ill, or throws that ill aside by the majesty of the Life that is in him.

Then mark how the Christian has, beside what is put within him by the Holy Spirit, this to comfort him; namely, *that day by day God the Holy Spirit visits him with fresh Life and fresh Power*. If our Eternal Life depended upon what we have within, apart from fresh spiritual help, we might find it to be far other than well with us; but the perennial fountains which winters’ frosts cannot freeze, and which the burning heats of summer can never dry, flow perpetually to us. We draw Living Waters from the depth that lies under, the Eternal Fountain which couches beneath is ours. The Everlasting Fullness of God, which is treasured up in the Person of Christ, is given over by an Immutable Covenant to be the provision for the faithful; fortifications of stupendous rocks are our secure dwelling places, and the Inexhaustible Fullness of God in Christ Jesus is our never-failing supply.

Briefly let me run over a few things which the Christian has, from each of which it may be inferred it must be well with him. He has a Bank that never breaks, the glorious *Throne of Grace*; and he has only to apply on bended knee to get what he will. Over the door there is written, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.” He has always near him a most sweet Companion, whose loving converse is so delightful that the

roughest roads grow smooth, and the darkest nights glow with brightness. The coldest and most shivering days become warm when that Companion talks. “Did not our hearts burn within us while He spoke with us by the way?”—

*“Though enwrapt in gloomy night,
We perceive no ray of light;
Since the Lord Himself is here,
'Tis not meet that we should fear.
Night with Him is never night,
Where He is, there all is light;
When He calls us, why delay?
They are happy who obey.”*

The Believer has *an arm to lean upon* also, an arm that is never weary, never feeble, never never withdrawn; so that if he has to climb along a rugged way, the more rough the road the more heavily he leans, and the more graciously he is sustained. Moreover, he is favored with *a Perpetual Comforter*—not an angel to whisper of Heaven, but God Himself, the blessed Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, to pour in oil and wine into every wound, and to bring to his remembrance the things which Christ has spoken. Why, Sirs, if there were anything that the Christian needed which were not supplied to him, I might admit that it must sometimes be ill with him; but when I read, “All things are yours, whether things present or things to come; or life or death, all are yours; and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s,” truly I conclude that it is and must be well with the righteous.

It is well with the righteous when he comes to die. Here we speak what we know, and testify what we have seen. The dying songs of saints are often in our ears. During nearly all the term of my ministry in London I have had the privilege of knowing a dear friend in Christ Jesus to whom my heart has been greatly knit; one of the noblest and happiest of the sons of men. Yet it was not bodily vigor which made him so uniformly joyous, for as long as I have known him he has been of a very weakly constitution; so that as often as the wintry months came on he has had to wend his way to Egypt, Madeira, or South America, there to pass through the winter in banishment, and return to his ministry as soon as the season allowed. A loving heart and a large mind were blended in him; he was always making friends, and I should say never lost one; he was deeply interested in the work here, and was much at home in the midst of this great assembly, for our songs and praises, which he compared to the noise of many waters, were sweet to his ears. Now, it pleased the Lord but a day or two ago that he should fall asleep; much to my loss, but to his own eternal gain. He thought that perhaps he could labor through this winter, and his soul was warmed by holy zeal to stay with his people if he could, and preach the Gospel which he loved so well. That zeal has cost his life. He wrote me one or two sweet letters on his dying bed, and when at last he closed his eyes, he uttered for his last testimony, words so like my own John Anderson, that I am sure nobody could have invented them; his last words were *“All right! Farewell.”* Yes, that is how a Christian can live, and how he can die. “It is all right,” he said; “it is well with me. It is right here—I have done my work, and God accepts it; it is right up there—Christ has finished His work on my account; and now farewell, till we meet again.” No tinge of sadness—no, not a whisper of grief; it is ALL, all, all right. He had served his Master long, and was glad to rest. He had fought his battle, and as the warrior sheathed his sword his eye caught the flashes of his Master’s welcome, and he said to his comrades, “All right! Farewell!” He is with God, and we are following on. All right is it now, and all right it shall *be* with us also if we are depending upon the finished work of the Well-Beloved.

Lastly; *it is well with the righteous after death.* His disembodied spirit is in Jesus’ bosom. Is it not well? When the trumpet sounds, his spirit comes down to meet the risen body; to behold the glorious Advent of the once despised Son of David, to reign with Him in His reign, and triumph in His triumph, and then to be caught up to sit upon His Throne, and dwell with Him where the Glorified Church is, world without end. “Say you to the righteous, it shall be well with them.”

We have only a word or two left concerning *the ground* upon which it is well with the righteous. The text says that “they shall eat the fruit of their doings.” Dear friends, that is the *only* term upon which the Old Covenant can promise that it shall be well with us; but this is not the ground upon which you and I stand under the Gospel dispensation. Absolutely to eat the fruit of all our doings would be even to us, if Judgment were brought to the line and Righteousness to the plummet, a very dreadful thing. Yet there is a limited sense in which the righteous man will do this. “I was hungry, and you gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink,” is good Gospel language; and when the Master shall say,

“Inasmuch as you did this unto one of the least of these My people, you did it unto Me,” the reward will not be of debt, but still it will be a reward, and the righteous will eat the fruit of his doings. I prefer, however, to remark that there is One whose doings for us are the grounds of our dependence, and, blessed be God, we shall eat the fruit of His doings. He, the Lord Jesus, stood for us, and you know what a harvest of joy He sowed for us in His life and death. That living Holiness, that dying Obedience, has purchased for us unnumbered blessings; His the smart, but ours the sweet; His the sweet, but ours the rest. As we sit down at Heaven’s feasts, the food which we shall there eat will be the fruit of *His* doings, the joy we shall there receive will be the result of *His* griefs, and the “well done” will be, in its real merit, the reward of His Righteousness.

It shall be well with us, for we shall eat the fruits of our faith through the Righteousness of Christ, the fruits of our love through His love to us, being with Him forever, and beholding His Glory. Time forbids a further enlargement; I have set you down in a garden of nuts, among groves of pomegranates; pluck and eat as you will, for all things are yours if you are numbered with the righteous.

II. The second part of the text can only occupy a minute or two. It reveals THE MISERY OF THE WICKED. “Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.” I need not be long, because you have only to apply the negative to all that I have already said about the righteous. Observe this—it is ill with the wicked, *always* ill with him. There is no time mentioned, all time is therefore meant. It is always ill with him, whether he is by prosperity made fat for the slaughter, or is made in adversity to feel the first drops of the eternal shower of Divine Justice. It is ill with the wicked *on Divine Authority*. God says that it is ill—it must be very ill then. It will be ill with him in the *future*; it *shall* be ill with him. Worse and worse will his portion be till the worst thing of all shall come upon him. Beware, you that forget God, lest He tear you in pieces, and there are none to deliver you! It is ill with their best nature. If their body is healthy, their soul is sick. If their feet dance, yet their souls are condemned. If their mouths can sing their wanton songs, yet the Wrath of God abides upon their spirits. It is ill with them in the weightiest sense. Our words are only ounce words, God’s words fall like avalanches. It is ill with you, O unconverted man, O unregenerate woman! It is ill in the most tremendous sense! It is ill, and you ought to know it, for God has told us to say it to you—“Woe unto the wicked—woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him.” Oh that you felt this, for then you might escape from its future terror! If you did but know this mischief, the dread of it might drive you to the Savior, and His heart is open, the gates of Mercy are not shut; He is able to save to the uttermost them who come unto God by Him.

But *why is it* ill with the wicked? It *must* be ill with him; he is out of joint with all the world. Though ordinary creatures are obedient to God, this man has set himself in opposition to the whole current of Creation. The man has an enemy who is Omnipotent, whose Power cannot be resisted; an enemy who is all Goodness, and yet this man opposes Him. How can it be well with the stubble that fights with the flame, or with the wax that strives with the fire? An insect fighting with a giant, how will it overcome? And you, poor nothingness, contending with the Everlasting God, how can it be anything but ill with you? It is ill with you, Sinner, because your joys all hang upon a thread. Let life’s thread be cut and where are your merriments? Your dainty music, and your costly cups, the mirth that flashes from your wanton eyes, and the jollity of your thoughtless soul—where will this be when Death, with bony hands, shall come and touch your heart and make it cease its beating? It is ill with you because when these joys are over you have no more to come. You have one bright chapter in the story, but ah, the never-ending chapter, it is woe, woe, woe from beginning to the end; the woe of death, and after death the Judgment, and after Judgment the woe of condemnation, and then that woe that rolls onward forever, eternal woe, never coming to a pause, never knowing an alleviation.

God help you, Sinner, God help you to escape from this ill of yours! It is ill with you now. You have no Mercy Seat to go to to pour out your troubles before God. You have no Father in Heaven to help you in the sorrows of this mortal life. You have no Son of Man to tread the furnace with you when your afflictions are heated seven times hotter. You have no Comforter to bring home to you the Promises; you have no Promises that can be brought home to you. You have no faith to sustain you; you have no love to Christ to cheer you; you have no patience to support you; you have no hope of another and better world to make your eyes glad. You miserable wretch, where are you? If you ride in your chariot yet I will not envy you—I will prefer to be like ragged Lazarus rather than be as you are; and if you are in poverty, yet hope not to escape, you are wretched in your present poverty; but what will eternal poverty be, when you are driven from the Presence of God without hope to pine in vain for a drop of water to cool your parched tongue!

It shall be ill with the wicked, and let no present appearance lead you to doubt it. You are like a field that is not plowed, overgrown with weeds, and you laugh at the field that has been tormented with the plow; but wait, O prosperous Sinner! Your time will come; when the weeds have gathered thick and foul there will be a burning, for the Great Husbandman will not forever endure the thorns and the thistles; and then you will wish that you too, like the tried Christian, had known the plow of spiritual trouble and felt repentance for sin. The eyes that never weep for sin here will weep in awful anguish forever. It will do you good to taste a little of the brine of your tears here, or else you will have to drink them forever and forever in Eternity. It will be a profitable thing for you to feel the Wrath of God heavy on your spirit now, for if not, it will crush you—crush you down and down without hope, world without end. It shall be ill with you. I will not stop to picture your dying bed. I know one, not far removed from me by relationship, who when he died had no bright hopes to gild the gloomy hour, but could only say in his last moments, “It is all dark! It is all dark!” And as he pointed to the fire grate that was without a fire he said, “It is dark like that black fireplace. I cannot see so much as a single spark of hope. Dark, all dark!”

And so will it be with you, no, worse than that, it may be ghastly with the furnace blaze of Divine Wrath. And as to the infinite future, I will not stop to speak of it. Forever! Forever! Forever! It shall be ill with the wicked. Oh, the wrath to come! The wrath to come.—

*“There is a death whose pang
Outlasts the fleeting breath;
Oh, what eternal horrors hang
Around ‘the second death!’
Lord God of Truth and Grace,
Teach us that death to shun;
Lest we are banish’d from Your face,
And evermore undone.”*

God help you to flee from His dreadful anger, while flee you may; and may all of us be found among the righteous with whom it is forever well. If so it be, unto God shall be all the praise, while Immortality shall last and Heaven’s high Throne endure.

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