THE
STRAIT GATE

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BY THE

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My Dear Young Friends,

You have all heard of heaven. Many of you have sung of "the happy land." And may children go to that blessed place? Oh! yes. There are many children there, who, like Samuel, feared God in their youth; or, like young king Josiah, were tender-hearted in the things of the Lord; or, like John the Baptist, were filled with the Holy Ghost from their mothers' womb.

Listen, then, while I try to tell you of the gate, which opens into the only way leading to this happy land. And, while you listen, pray, that Jesus himself may take each of you by the hand, and lead you to the house of many mansions.

I. THE GATE.—"I am the door," says Jesus in another place. Christ is the gate. The justice of God has built a high wall round heaven, to keep us out, because we have sinned. Understand this. A father makes it a rule, that in his family the sin of lying shall be punished. One of you, his children, tells a lie. Is not your father bound by his word to punish the offence? Does not justice debar the

lying child from his father's favour, and draw a fence as it were round his father's table, shutting him out? Just so does God's justice draw a fence round his table in heaven, shutting us all out, for we all have sinned. But in this wall, which none could ever climb over, God's love has opened a door, by which we may enter in and return. This door is Christ. The father of the lying child says to him:—"Your sin must be punished. But hear what I shall do. Out of pity to you, one of your brothers offers, and I accept his offer, to bear the punishment of your sin in your stead. If you agree to this, gladly falling in with this proposal, then I let you go free, and

restore you to your place among the children at my table. If you refuse, you must remain shut out from my presence, and suffer yourself." Does not this open a door for his return to his father's favour? Is not his brother, in suffering for him, that door? Is not he the gate, by which the guilty child may enter in? Now, this is what Christ has done for sinners. The Eternal Son of God has "suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." God says:—"If you agree to Christ's suffering for you, if you are willing to be indebted to *that* for pardon; then I shall set you free, and restore you to my favour and family. If you reject this offer,

you must yourself bear the punishment, and continue for ever shut out from my presence." Christ is the door. Christ is the gate.

II. It is a Strait Gate.—There is room for thousands, millions, to enter at once; and yet it is a *strait* gate. You remember the case of Naaman the leper. Oh! what would he not give to be free of his loathsome distemper! He goes a long journey, and arrives at the house of Elisha, who dwelt on the banks of the Jordan. He applies to the prophet for a cure. "Go," said the man of God, by the mouth of another, "and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be

clean." What more simple than this? Did not the prophet set before him an open door? But Naaman was proud. He "was a great man." "With his horses and with his chariot he stood before the door of the house of Elisha." And is this the cure for which he has come so far?—and sent by the mouth of a mere messenger too! "Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said: Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus,* better than all the waters of Israel? May I

* His home.

not wash in them and be clean? So, he turned, and went away in a rage." The prophet's method was simple and easy; but the great man's loftiness made it hard and difficult. Elisha set before him an open door; but Naaman's pride made it a strait gate. If you, the lying child, were so proud, as to be unwilling to be indebted for pardon to your brother's suffering in your stead, then the door which your father had opened for your return to his favour would be hard for you to enter. There was the gate, open wide; and you might enter in. But to you, disdaining to be obliged to another, it was a strait, a narrow gate. We are all, even the youngest of us, disposed

to spurn from us God's offer :—" Accept of Christ to suffer and do good works for you, and you shall escape, and get to heaven." We are too proud to like to do this. We would fain get to heaven for our own repentance, and good thoughts, words, and deeds. It is too humbling to us to be indebted to the merits of another. Why is it that the Hindoo woman, as seen in the picture on your missionary card, stands with one arm held up in a fixed position for days, and months, and years, till her finger nails hang down in tangled threads? It is because she wants to purchase the favour of Heaven. Tell her of him whose hands were pierced, and whose body was

racked on the accursed tree for sinners. Tell her, that the great Jehovah offers her a free pardon, if she will be indebted for it to the sufferings of his Son. And, unless her heart is changed by grace, she will spurn the offer, and continue, by her own sufferings and services, to seek the favour of her fancied gods. In the same spirit, persons nearer home have been known to travel long journeys on sharp spikes of iron, and to crawl, with bare and bleeding knees, over sharp and flinty stones, to make up, as they foolishly thought, for their sins, rather than owe their salvation to Gethsemane's bloody sweat, and Calvary's agonizing death. "Give up the covenant of

works!" said one,—and this is the language of many a heart among us, of every unrenewed heart,—"Give up the covenant of works! No! never, while I have my senses." And, in each of your young breasts, the same pride says:—"Won't you make up for your sins yourself? Be sorry when you do wrong at any time. Behave well—obey your parents—tell no lies—keep the Sabbath—say your prayers, and this will be sure to get you to heaven. What need have you to trust to the sufferings of Christ for pardon, or to be indebted to the merits of another for God's favour? Don't submit to so humbling a way as that." Ah! this is what makes the gate

strait. In that wall which shuts us out of heaven, God has made a door, open, wide; but our pride makes it a strait gate,—hard and difficult for us to enter.

III. ENTERING IN AT THE STRAIT GATE.—If, in reply to your father's offer, you say,—"I gladly agree to be indebted to my brother for escape from punishment and restoration to your smiles and your love,"—you enter the door, which has been set before you, and through the gate which your father's and brother's love has opened, you get within the fence which had shut you out from your father's table. And if with your heart you embrace Christ, and gladly accept of him as

suffering in your stead that you may go free, then, in so doing, you cross the threshold of the door, which God has opened in the wall, shutting you out of heaven; you enter in at the strait gate.

IV. STRIVING TO ENTER IN.—Were you ever asked to do a piece of work which you thought beneath you? Did not pride say to you: "Don't do this work. It's mean work; not work for *you* to do?" If you were ever to do this work, must you not strive to do it? And why strive? Is it that the work is hard to get through? No; but because your haughty spirit will not let you touch it. The struggle must be within your own breast. You must strive against your pride, which

would disdain the humbling task. This is the kind of striving of which Jesus speaks in the text. In entering in at the strait gate, in coming to Christ, you will have to strive against folly and heedlessness, which would make light of death and eternity,—of heaven and hell. But it is mainly with your proud, self-righteous spirit that you have to struggle. For it is this which most opposes your coming to Jesus, making the gate strait. Naaman had a struggle something like this. "My father," said his servants, when they saw their lord turn his back on Jordan's healing waters, "if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?

How much rather, then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?" The proud Syrian paused. His leprous body was still uncleansed. Damascus' rivers might not—could not cleanse it. Was he to return to Syria as he left it, and live and die a loathsome leper? The prophet's plan is easy: Jordan's waters flow at his feet. Shall he not wash and be clean?—Thus does he *strive* to enter in at the door which Elisha had set before him. And, in spite of his pride, he enters in. He went down, we are told, and washed, and was clean. So do ye. See yourselves lost, ruined sinners; unable to deliver yourselves; deserving only hell, and eternal death. See your

best things, for which parents love you, and friends praise you, all sin in the sight of God, all filthy rags. See yourselves unclean, unclean,—however fair your pride may paint you, fit only for Satan's company. See that there is no other way of salvation for you, but God's own way. See the amazing love of the Father, in opening up a way, in itself so simple and easy, by the death of his well-beloved Son. See, believe, feel these things. Seek the Holy Spirit to enable you to resist the promptings of your proud, self-righteous heart, tempting you to trust in your own righteousness, and to think little of Christ's. Say :—"Woe is me, for I am undone! For I am a

child of unclean lips. God be merciful to me, a sinner! What shall I do to be saved? Shall I not accept God's gracious offer? Shall I perish in my pride, rather than touch the hem of Jesus' garment? Away, proud heart, I will not cling to my filthy rags, only to perish. I will take the blessed Son of God for my Saviour;—well content to be indebted to him for pardon, glad to be saved in God's own way."

V. Reasons for Striving to Enter in.—Strive to enter in at the Strait Gate, because,

1st, *The gate leads to holiness, to heaven.* The instant you cross the threshold of the strait gate, you step upon "the narrow way." The instant

any child takes Jesus for his Saviour, he begins to love Jesus, and to hate sin; he enters on "the way of holiness." And he treads, too, on heaven's ground; the glory of God's house above shines down upon him; the sunny smiles of God's face gladden his heart. He has then a title to heaven. He then, in part, enjoys heaven itself. For to love God, and to be loved by him, form a main part of heaven's happiness. And, with bounding step and gladdened heart, he goes forward in the narrow way to the heavenly city, and, at length, it may be soon, takes his place at his Father's table. Would it not be well for you to enter in at this gate? It is

far better to be holy than sinful—to be like God, than like Satan. "There is no peace to the wicked." They "cannot rest." "Great peace have they who love God's law." The child who loves Jesus, fears to sin, obeys his parents, and loves to pray, is the only happy child. "Oh! that they would all come to Jesus," said a young boy, "they would all be so happy." As the child who comes to Christ is the only happy child *here;* so he is the only happy child *hereafter.* While others are, like the rich man, tormented in the flame, without a drop of water to cool their tongue; he has his abode in heaven. The blessed God is his Friend, and Father. The Lamb

which is in the midst of the throne feeds him, and leads him to living fountains of waters. There is only one road to this happy land; and only one gate opening into this road. Will you not strive to enter in at the strait gate?

2nd, *The gate is always near; ever open; and admission is free.*

The gate is always *near*. The weary traveller is ready to fall down with fatigue upon the open road. It is night, and the tempest rages. Yonder is a resting-place, a shelter, a home. But it is far away. And how shall he get to it? Oh! what would he give to have an open door just where he is overtaken by the hurricane? There

is a door ready to receive him, but it is a *distant* door; and, with drooping spirits, and enfeebled limbs, he sinks in the struggle to reach it.—The gate which leads to heaven is not far from any one of you. Wherever you may be, at whatever point in life's journey you are, there you find the gate of the gospel refuge, *Christ the door.* You have not to fear lest the tempest arrest you as you are moving to the place of shelter;—a single step, and you are in. Would any of you now escape the wrath of God? Even *now*, at this moment, and as you read this, you may enter in.

And the gate is ever *open.* You do not need to stand and knock at it. It

is never shut. It stands open to invite you in. I have read of a father and mother wandering about in quest of bread, carrying their starving and sickly babes. Night comes on with chilling wind and rain. They are faint with hunger and fatigue. They know not where to get shelter for the night. The father, leaving his poor flock by the way-side, makes for a farm-house some way off, and begs for shelter. He pleads earnestly ; he speaks of the lateness of the night, of the infancy of his children ; the meanest shed would be a blessing. "No no, no," is the only answer. He returns, and finds the children fast asleep. "O ! what kept you ?" said

the trembling mother. "I 'm fearful of Jeanie—she appears so ill. Let us go in from the cold." "We have no where to go," said he, "whate'er come of us. Yon folk won't *open the door* to us." In silence and sadness he drew their mother's mantle over the wet and chilled sleepers, and in anguish of heart sat down beside them on the storm-beaten way-side. It was near midnight before they lay down between the four walls of a half roofless shed. And it was at that deadly hour that Jeanie's death-scream awoke the sleeping children, to raise a frightful wail over the body of their dead sister.—Oh! rejoice, my children, that you will not be thus turned away from

mercy's door, to perish in the open field. The same hand of love which opened it at first, keeps it open still. And forth from its wide-flung portals ever sounds the voice: "Come unto me, all ye that are weary, and I will give you rest. This is the way, walk ye in it. Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die?" You will never find it shut because of the number already taken in. Ever since the cloud of vengeance lowered over Adam's head, weary and tempest-driven wanderers have taken refuge here: and still the door stands open, for "yet there is room." —But remember the door *is* shut to the child who dies without getting in. It is open now, open still to you.

Haste you, haste you! enter in, lest death shut you out, to perish for ever.

The admission is *free*. I have often crossed a bridge, which none went over without paying so much passage-money. The pennyless traveller pleads in vain for leave to cross. On this side there is no shelter for him—all is houseless, dreary. On that side there is a warm hearth, at which he would be a welcome guest. But this gate, which only gold can unlock, keeps him back. There is no other way. And across that bridgeway he may not go; for *he has nothing to pay*. Alas, for the hapless wanderer! He cannot reach yon kindly resting-place, whose cheerful light he sees twinkling pleasantly

through the gloom, as if to invite him thither.—Be glad, dear children, that you can enter the gate of heaven "without money and without price." You have nothing to give. If any thing were demanded, like the pennyless beggar, you must be refused admission, for your best deeds would not pass current there. But the door which leads to heaven is *free.* Christ by his blood has purchased a free passage for you. Behold the gate flung open, free. Come, ye that have no money; enter in.

3rd, *If you do not strive, you cannot enter; and if you do not enter, you perish.*

"Many shall seek to enter in," says

Jesus, "and shall not be able." Seeking won't do. Seeking won't overcome pride's resistance, and force a passage for you through the strait gate. If you would enter in, you must *strive.* You may think it an easy thing to get to Jesus. Was it an easy thing for Naaman to wash in Jordan? The easiest thing possible, if it had not been for his high looks. These made it hard. And it cost him a struggle but to dip his loathsome body in Jordan's waters. If it were not for your proud hearts, it would be easy for you to get to Christ. But the proud heart makes it a hard thing, for which you must strive. Every one who tries, finds he cannot lay hold on Christ without a

struggle. Idle wishing won't do. That was Balaam's way. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his." Here is wishing, seeking. But there is no striving here. And so Balaam did not enter in. "Oh! be earnest, be earnest," said a dying Christian boy to a companion whom he was exhorting to come to Jesus. "You'll not get to him unless you be earnest."

And if you do not get to him, you perish. There is no name given under heaven among men whereby you can be saved, but the name of Jesus. If you do not lay hold of that name, you are lost. God has opened but one gate by which you can enter on "the

way that leadeth unto life." If you do not enter in thereat, you must remain without, in outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. You will be without God here, and you will be with Satan hereafter. You will not only lose heaven: you will sink down to hell. Through the long dark night of eternity—a *never-ending* night—you will have to lie unsheltered beneath the storm of Jehovah's wrath. Outcast from God, you will be tormented with the worm that never dieth, and with the fire that shall never be quenched. This is the *second* death.—Oh! when that gate is open, free, *will you not strive to enter in?*

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