

A VOICE TO THE YOUNG, FROM A DEATHBED.



HATE one rainy evening in the month of November, I received a message that a young woman who was dying was very anxious to see me. I immediately went. She was living in a country parish adjoining the town of Cambridge. Although she was unknown to me, she had been in the habit of attending the services of the church in which I ministered. I found her in a most agitated state of mind; and after that evening I saw her several times again. What resulted will be best explained by the subjoined extracts from a sermon, which, at her request, I preached to the young on the Sunday after her decease. The text was one selected by herself; it was, "Remember thy
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Creator in the days of thy youth.”* The discourse began thus:—

“My dear hearers;—I read these words for your consideration this evening under peculiar circumstances. I read them at the earnest request of one who is now in the eternal world.

“A few weeks ago, that young person was in this church, for the last time; and on that occasion I alluded in my sermon to the somewhat sudden removal of a youth, whom she well knew, and who for some months previously had attended the services of this house. She then little thought that in so short a time as has since elapsed her own soul would be summoned into another world.

“Just before she died, she made a solemn request that I would, after her decease, convey a message from her to the young people of this congregation. That dying message is this—that, although she had a humble hope that her own soul was safe in Christ, she was most anxious that all other young persons, and especially her own sister, should seek Christ at once, in the time of health, and not leave that all-important matter, as she foolishly and wickedly had done, to a sick and dying bed. She therefore mentioned the present text, and wished me to be this night, as it were, her mouth-piece, and to speak to her own family, and to her young friends and acquaintances, and to urge you all to make Jesus your portion without an instant’s further delay.

“I am quite aware that my voice this evening will produce but very little effect, compared with that which might have been produced if you had stood, as I stood, at the side of her dying bed, had seen her wasted form, had noticed her panting breath, and had heard her whispered words—her whole system being so weakened, and her senses so enfeebled, as to make it impossible for her to put

* Eccles. xii. 1.

forth one single effort to seek Christ by earnest prayer.

“May the Holy Spirit bless our present meeting ; and may that young woman’s death become, through sovereign grace, the life of some careless sinners in this assembly !”

The congregation was large, and there were present many young persons, several of whom had for years known the deceased. To these I explained what is meant by remembering their Creator, and I gave some reasons why they should remember Him in the days of their youth. One reason is, because an evil time is coming—the time of old age, the time of sickness, and the time of death. Another reason is, because youth is the most favourable time. The third reason—and that on which I dwelt with the greatest earnestness—is, that youth may be the only time, as it was in the case of her to whose removal I was referring. I then mentioned some particulars in connection with the deceased, which, by the Holy Spirit’s blessing, I hoped might prove of great service to those who were there assembled. I said :—

“Our departed sister went through much spiritual conflict upon her deathbed. And it is right that the cause of that conflict should be known. That conflict arose from this circumstance. She had always been a moral, amiable, well-conducted young person ; and wherever she had lived she had gained the respect and esteem of all who knew her. Still, she inwardly felt that something more was wanted. She felt that she was a sinner, and that she needed pardon ; and she knew that till, by the Holy Spirit’s power, she had cast herself as a lost sinner upon Christ, there could be no hope of her salvation.

“These feelings were very strong upon her last spring ; but in the summer, as she grew somewhat better, she became less anxious about her soul. And that circumstance afterwards became like a thorn in her dying pillow, so that she spoke with the deepest

anguish of heart about her past neglect of God her Saviour. During one of my visits, I was much struck with this deep anxiety. She was unable, through weakness, to speak much. Her mother had told her that I had consented to preach, after her decease, from the words which she had selected, and then asked if there was anything else she wished to say to me.

“With an earnestness I shall never forget, she asked (and the effort was almost more than she could make), ‘Do you think, sir, I shall go to heaven when I die?’ She felt that every breath she drew with so much pain might be her last; that she was about to depart into the eternal world; that heaven and hell were trembling, as it were, in the balance; and she knew not in which place she would have to spend her eternity.

“What a position for an immortal creature to occupy! How solemn, to be going into the valley of death without light and without hope! Happily, in the later stages of her illness, she was enabled to realise her pardon through Christ, and her acceptance through His blood. But I wish to impress upon you, my young friends, what she also was so anxious for you to remember—that what happened in her case may not happen in yours. She, through God’s grace, found mercy, there is reason to believe, upon her dying bed. You may have no time to seek the Lord before you die. You may be seized with fever, and lose your reason, and die without the opportunity of offering up a single prayer. Many young persons have thus entered eternity. Their youth was their only time of grace, and that time was not improved.

“This was the chief cause of her anguish of heart upon her dying bed. This, too, is the reason why I am now preaching her funeral sermon. She was so grieved that she had not closed earlier with the offers of the gospel, that she wished me, as I have already said, publicly to state here her deep regret;

and to warn you by mentioning her own sorrowful experience.

"The same was her earnest desire in behalf of all whom her living voice could reach. In bidding farewell to her earthly friends, she had a suitable word for each.

"She first addressed her mother, and expressed her belief that they would one day meet in heaven; and God grant that what she then said respecting her father may be blessed to his soul!

"She next turned to her sister, and repeated what has been already told you, and which I pray God's Spirit to bless, not only to her, but to all the young now hearing me. 'Will you promise me,' she asked—'will you promise me, that you will now give your heart to Christ?' In asking that question, she gave her own inward experience when she added, 'Depend upon it, you will be much happier if you do.' Much happier, indeed! Yes, dear young friends, there is no happiness like that of having God for our Father, Christ for our Saviour, the Holy Ghost for our Comforter, and heaven for our home.

"And how urgent were the exhortations which she next addressed to her two brothers! To the one she said, 'Henry, you must seek the Lord now, or you cannot come to heaven.' The other brother, not long before she died, she called to the side of her bed, and made of him the solemn inquiry, 'And will you now begin to seek God, so that you may meet me again?' She then added, 'William, set about it at once: it is such hard work on a sick bed!' May the Holy Spirit apply those exhortations to the hearts of all careless young men! May these words be continually sounding in your ears:—'Set about it at once: it is such hard work on a sick bed!'

"And now her work for Christ was done. She said no more. But she laid herself down, and died.

"And what more can I say to you, young people? You all know the proverb, 'The young may die, the

old *must.*' Is not, then, the bare possibility of your dying unreconciled to God enough to startle your fears? You who are thinking that some five or six years hence you will be religious, what if a fever or an inflammation should seize you to-morrow? You who are twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen, or twenty years old—who of you can be sure that you will have your health another week?

“If, therefore, you should be suddenly taken with some fatal illness, while you are still putting away the Saviour from your thoughts, what, as you are dying, will you think of your present procrastination? And such an event is not improbable. Go into our graveyards and cemeteries, and read the tombstones; and you will there see that some have been cut off as young as you, and their dust is now crying to each of you as you pass, ‘Prepare to meet thy God!’ ‘Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.’”

There is reason to believe that many young persons were much impressed, and as to others, there are grounds for hoping that they were led to seek Christ at once, by the sermon they that night heard. God grant that similar results may follow to those in whose hands this printed account may be placed!

Dear young friend, whose eyes are now scanning these lines, and whose soul in a very little time will be fixed for ever either in happiness or in misery, let me beseech you, in Christ's name, to yield yourself to Him at once. I can tell you that I have known many dear young persons who have made Jesus their friend in their early days, and I never met one who regretted the choice he had made; their only regret was that they had not sought Christ earlier still. But I have often heard those who have been converted later in life bitterly lamenting that their early years were wasted in vanity, instead of being dedicated to God and Christ.

The longer you put off the work of repentance and faith, the more difficult that work will become. Nothing, of course, is impossible with the Holy Spirit. He can as easily convert an aged man, even at a hundred years old, as He can a child. But in these things we must consider, not what the Spirit of God *can* work, but what He *does* work: and much more seldom do we see Him bringing sinners in the middle or later stages of life to a saving knowledge of Christ. I remember a painful case with which I was concerned some twenty years ago. I was counselling an aged man to prepare for eternity and how do you imagine he received my advice? With a mixture of cold indifference and of peevish fretfulness, he replied,—“ Ah, I am too old to change now!” He had lived up to that hour in sin and neglect of the gospel; and, although his well-being for eternity was at stake, he felt unable and “ too old ” to make an effort to save his own soul. The young twig is yielding and pliable, but the old tree will sooner break than bend.

How different was the state of mind of this aged man from that of a poor Welsh boy, whom a clergyman found on his dying bed in a town in the West of England! He was surrounded with strangers, his money was all gone, and he could hardly speak a word of English. The clergyman told him, as well as he could make him understand, how he pitied his condition, and directed him, as the only source of happiness, to look to his Saviour; when, to his delight, for he had no idea that the lad was pious, the lad replied (his eye glistening with joy as he uttered in broken English his inmost feelings),—“ *Jesus Christ is plenty for everybody.*” In his own country he had heard of Christ. In the time of his health and strength he had been led to embrace Christ as all his salvation; and now, amid destitution and suffering, he found in Christ all he wanted. Christ was his all!

May Jesus, my dear, young friends, be your all in life, and He will then be your all in the time of death!

Another young Christian, Mr. Janeway, when asked upon his dying bed if his soul was enjoying peace, replied, "Yes, yes! Oh, that I could but let you know what I now feel! Oh, that I could show you what I now see! Oh, that I could express to you the one-thousandth part of that sweetness which I now find in Christ! I would not for all the world be now without Christ and His pardon. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Death, do thy worst! Death (through grace) is nothing to me. I can as easily die as I can shut my eyes, or turn my head, or go to sleep. I long to be with Christ—I long to die! Worldly pleasures are pitiful, poor, sorry things, compared with one glimpse of this glory which shines so strongly into my soul. Oh, why should any of you be so sad when I am so joyous? This—this is the hour that I have longed and waited for."

Another young disciple of the Saviour, sixteen years old, while others of her own age were seeking happiness in the vanities of life, was asked whether, lying as she then was upon a bed of sickness, she found religion pleasant; and what was her answer?—"I am very happy; I would not change places with any one living. I long to go home. I am truly happy. If this be dying, it is a pleasant thing to die. I have no wish to live; I would rather die, and so go to my Redeemer!" May such, my dear young friends, be your choice in life, your support in death, and your portion throughout eternity, for Jesus Christ's sake!