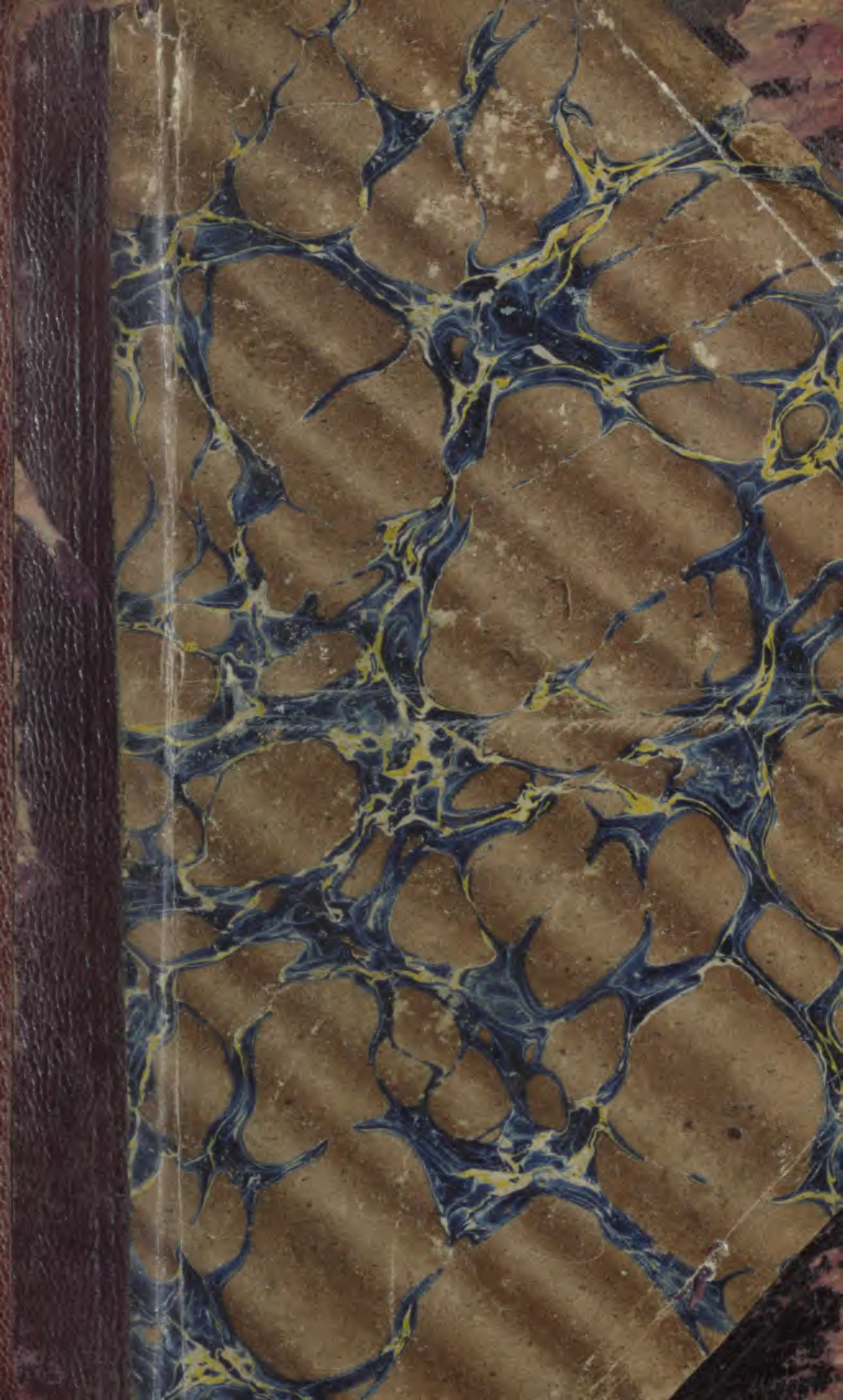

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GOOD WISHES

FOR

SENIOR SCHOLARS.

"THAT OUR SONS MAY BE AS PLANTS GROWN UP IN THEIR YOUTH; THAT OUR DAUGHTERS MAY BE AS CORNER STONES, POLISHED AFTER THE SIMILITUDE OF A PALACE."—*Psalm* cxliv. 12.

STRONG is the lion, as he walks in all his native freedom through the forest of which he is the king. Swift is the deer, when, startled by the appearance of man, he runs along the valley or bounds over the barren and rugged mountain. Majestic is the eagle, when resting on the lofty crag, or soaring upwards and onwards towards the sun. Sagacious is the dog, that will watch not only his master's property, but his master too, and defend him from danger if necessary, at the risk and the sacrifice of his own life. But though these and other members of the animal kingdom have wonderful instincts and extraordinary powers, they are not able to speak to us. In this respect we are far above them. We can unfold our thoughts to our equals in the fluent flow of manly speech. We can express our desires to our superiors in suitable words. If two or three of the holy angels were to come to us as they did to Abraham, while he sat one day at the door of his tent, we could converse with them. Yea, we are so remarkably gifted in this respect that we can address Him who created all worlds, and who is constantly upholding them by the word of His power. This is the exercise in which David, the poet and the patriot, the

father and the king, was engaged. He was speaking to God on behalf of the young people of Israel. The blessings which he desired for them are just the blessings, my young friends, which your teachers desire for you. We may call this text, therefore, the teacher's wishes for his senior scholars,—"*That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth, that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.*"

This is not only poetry, but true poetry, which is always superior to prose. For, while it is truth, it is truth embodied in beauty, and consequently it is more inviting, attractive, and rememberable than it could be in prose. In this poetical language there are many thoughts, too many, indeed, for a single address. We could name every one of them, and give a brief outline of each; but this would not be quite satisfactory, and so we shall take only those which can be illustrated and enforced in the space at our disposal.

Life is the first idea contained in the text. Life is very mysterious; the most intelligent cannot define it, the most acute cannot analyze it, and the most expert cannot grasp it. If we were to dissect any object in which it is lodged, for the purpose of finding it, the endeavour would be useless. We should destroy by this means the very thing for which we were searching. A stone can be seen and felt, measured and weighed, but it has no life of any kind, and therefore it must remain where it is, and as it is, until moved by a power beyond itself. It is otherwise with plants; they possess life, for while they draw their nourishment from without, they circulate it through every pore. You have *animal* life; it glances in your eyes, warbles in your tongues, throbs in your hearts, beats in your pulses, serves in your hands, walks in your feet, and keeps your souls and bodies together. You have *intellectual* life. By a power which God has given you, though it is as invisible as the wind, you can read and observe, think and meditate, reject and retain, and thus increase your knowledge of men and

things, from day to day, as certainly as a warehouseman increases his goods. But have you *spiritual life?* Do you not comprehend this question? Let us explain it. By spiritual life is meant supreme love to Christ. Do you love Him more than your brothers and sisters, more than your fathers and mothers? (Matt. x. 37). If He stood before you now, and said to each of you, Lovest thou Me? Could you individually reply like the apostle Peter, *Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee?* (John xxi. 17). If this love to Christ is not dwelling in your hearts, the great aim of your teachers has not been realized. You cannot honestly take the name Christian. You are not qualified as you might be for the trials and the temptations, the difficulties and the duties which are before you in this world. Nor are you prepared to enter the happy land of which you have so often sung in your various Sunday schools. For this qualification and preparation spring from love to Christ, as the blossoms and the fragrance and the fruit of plants are produced by the life which pervades them.

What should you do? As the sailor will not leave the harbour unless his anchor is made of the toughest iron, and as the soldier will not go to the field of conflict unless his sword is made of the truest steel, so you should be unwilling to take another step in life unless Christ is reigning upon the throne of your hearts. How is this to be accomplished? It is the light which dispels the darkness, and it is Christ's love to us which implants and maintains within our bosoms love to Him. *We love Him because He first loved us* (1 John iv. 19). Think of His love to you. For you He left His blessed and glorious home, and came to this world. For you He took upon Him the form of a servant, and became the Man of sorrows. For you He endured an agony of soul in Gethsemane, the depth and acuteness of which we can never sufficiently understand. For you He gave Himself to the shame and the pain, the

suffering and the death of Calvary. There the awful darkness encompassed Him, and the terrible storm thundered all around Him. He looked for some one to comfort Him, but there was none. Nevertheless He did not fail for a single moment; His great love for you led Him through the darkness and the storm; nor did He pause till He had raised His flag of triumph to the cross, on which were inscribed these cheering and saving words, *It is finished* (John xix. 30). Meditate upon this love more than upon any lesson you ever committed to memory. Believe it was manifested for you as truly as for Peter and James, John and Paul, since the New Testament declares that *Christ tasted death for every man.* Ask God to open your hearts to receive this love as He opened the heart of Lydia. He will hear. He will answer. Then just as beneath the light and heat of the sun the snow disappears, the ice is melted, winter recedes, and vegetable life is again creeping through the fields and the valleys, clothing all that it touches with verdure and loveliness; so, before the presence and the power of this love, the enmity of your minds and the coldness of your hearts toward Christ will pass away, and you will be *quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. ii. 1). You will be the possessors of spiritual life, which will be followed by eternal life, as the golden autumn succeeds the sprightly spring and the lovely summer.

Growth is the second idea contained in the text. The sculptor can give us the marble in forms of gracefulness and beauty. The artist can give us the canvas with the prominent and lifelike figure upon it. The builder can give us the grand and imposing cathedral. The machinist can give us the engine which carries us with such rapidity from one part of London to another, or from the city to the country and the Continent. The author can give us the book which becomes like an intelligent companion and affectionate friend. But there is not one of all the clever sons of Adam who could make a single seed, to be cast into the soil and to

yield fruit. God only can do that, and if all the seed now in the world were wholly and irrecoverably lost, it would be utterly impossible for human power and skill to obtain a new supply. Consider the plants to which the Psalmist refers. As they differ from one another in colour and form; so they do in size, just like the members of the human family. Some are a few inches high, and others are several feet. Once, however, they were all slumbering in those tiny seeds, which could have been carried in an infant's hand, or crushed by an infant's foot, as certainly as you were once sleeping in your cradles. They have, therefore grown from these seeds gradually, continually, and silently to what they are.

You understand what is meant by a good character. It is composed of such excellences as wisdom and prudence, truthfulness and honesty, self-control and sobriety, generosity and purity. You have frequently heard of the immense value of a good character. It commands the attention and respect of all men, and the smile of God rests upon it. It gives authority and energy to everything which its possessor says and does. It keeps him back from many improprieties and follies, and even outward sins. It is the only thing which he can take with him when he passes through the gates of death, and it is the germ out of which will arise his beautiful, blessed, and eternal paradise. Your teachers pray that you may have a good character, and if you think of its importance for time and eternity as you ought, you will say from the heart, "Amen." But you cannot obtain it all at once, as you do an article which you purchase. It *grows*, and from its very nature it must grow. Nor can it become yours apart from your own efforts. You must work for it as truly as some of you may have already commenced to labour for the staff of life; and if you study for a little the plants to which the text solicits our attention, you will learn from them what you ought to do in order to secure the priceless treasure.

All these plants must have their appropriate food, which

comes from the soil and the rain, the light and the heat of the sun. Deprive them of any one of these, and they will soon begin to decay and droop, wither and die. So you must have *truth*, and truth which is adapted to the condition of your minds and the state of your hearts, for that is the nourishment which character requires. Take, therefore, the advice which Paul gave to Timothy, and *give attendance to reading* (1 Tim. iv. 13). Procure a few of the best books and magazines of the day, and, by meditation or profound thinking, become familiar with them. Specially read and study the Bible, which is superior to all other books as the lofty tree is to the daisy growing at its roots; for while it is full of varied instruction, and reveals the way of salvation, it is like Him who gave it—infallible. Endeavour to converse with those who are more advanced than yourselves in knowledge and experience. Pursue this course, not once or twice a week, but daily. Supply your minds and hearts with truth as frequently and as regularly as you meet the wants of the body. Take, for instance, a single text from the Sacred Volume, and lay it upon your memory in the morning. Turn it over again and again during the day. Extract from it as much as you possibly can. In this way your character will grow as the building rises on which the builders are daily employed, or as the light advances which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

By exercise the body grows and becomes strong; and so does the mind by thinking. Some of you may imagine that plants have no kind of exercise, but this is a mistake. Watch them closely, and you will find that they turn and bend and struggle in their own peculiar way, until they attain to the expansion and the height for which they have been designed by the Creator. As they exercise themselves so must you; but notice in what manner. Have you observed a single drop of rain upon the leaf of the tree? There it rested, and sparkled like a diamond in the sun, and, supposing it remained there only, it could do no good to the

tree; it must go down to its roots before it can be the means of imparting to it any fresh vigour. Well, you hear a truth from your teachers and ministers, or you read it in a book; you receive it into your mind and keep it there; but if you do not translate it into action, it will not, and cannot, add much strength to your character. Whatever you learn, therefore, which is good, be sure and practise it. You are told to be patient, and patience is an excellent quality. Like the tree which Moses cast into the bitter waters, and which seasoned them, it imparts a sweetness to many of the troubles and trials of life. When next you are provoked by any one, let the raindrop go down to the roots; do not become soon angry, like Jonah, if angry at all; but endeavour to rule your own spirit, and then you will be greater than he who taketh a city. This is what an apostle means when he says, *Exercise thyself unto godliness* (1 Tim. iv. 7); and it is by this exercise as well as by nourishment that a good character grows.

An uncongenial atmosphere is very injurious to plants. On this account some have lost their bloom and fragrance, and others have perished. We have known senior scholars of whom high and even brilliant hopes were entertained. We pictured them to our mind as devoted teachers in the future, zealous missionaries in the future, or faithful ministers in the future. But, forgetting that they should ever try to breathe a pure moral atmosphere, they were tainted and blighted, and some of them, alas! stood in the felon's dock, and were immured in the convict's prison. By these sad examples be ye warned. Never enter one of those places where Satan reigns, and frequent only those over which Christ sways His sceptre. Refuse to accept those as your companions who do not love the Sunday school, the house of God, and the Holy Scriptures; and cultivate the friendship of those only who are really on the Lord's side. Do not read those books, periodicals, and papers which retail the untrue and the impure, but those only which are truthful

and pure. Keep back as far as possible from everything which is morally polluted. You will then be always surrounded by a very pure moral atmosphere; your character will have every fair opportunity of maintaining its health and increasing its vigour; you may also reasonably and hopefully anticipate that, under the blessing of God, it will reach its rich and perfect maturity.

Erectness is the third idea contained in the text. Plants, as a rule, assume and retain this attitude; they raise their little or their large heads in the same direction as the mountains—towards the sky. Although often swayed to and fro by the wind, they come back in the calm to their original and natural posture. If, as some have taught, the Psalmist includes the palm tree, it is peculiarly distinguished for its erectness. It grows to about seventy or eighty feet high, and from the root to the loftiest point it is as straight as a military sentinel. In this position it remains in spite of all opposition; for neither the heavy weight which the gatherers of dates sometimes place upon its head, nor the importunate energy of the wind, can permanently bend it from its perfect uprightness. The palace, too, stands even amid the storm and the hurricane immoveable as the mountain.

By and by, sharp, severe, and prolonged trials may come to you. Affliction in some of its many forms may smite your bodies, stealthily creep through them, and even grapple for your heart-strings. Friends in whom you trust, and to whom you make known your secrets, may forsake you, betray you even as Judas betrayed Jesus, and become your bitter foes. Instead of being kindly spoken to and well used by those in the great world of business whom you serve; they may address you roughly, and treat you in a harsh, yea, tyrannical manner. Death may come and take away your fathers and mothers, your brothers and sisters, your affectionate friends and dear companions. These trials may be painful, and, physically, they may lay you very low; but when we pray that you may be as plants and as a palace, we earnestly de-

sire that in all trials your spirits may not be prostrated, but so erect that you will have much joy, show that you are sustained by a power far superior to that which is human, and be able to say to God from the heart, *Thy will be done.* That this prayer may be answered in your experience all through life, what should you do? Never forget that the Redeemer who loves you so much is the Ruler of the world, since all power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth. Have the utmost confidence in Him at all times, and in all His treatment of you whatever it may be. Serve him willingly and constantly, and let His glory be the motive to influence you in everything which you do. Of the beautiful promise, more beautiful than any flower in the garden, *All things work together for good to them that love God* (Rom. viii. 28), say, "It is ours." These things will prepare you to receive trials without being surprised, to bear them without giving way to despondency, and to pass through them, like the patriarch Job, without sinning against God.

To see plants of all kinds bending, breaking, and being destroyed before the storm, is sad; but it is infinitely more sad and awful to behold boys and girls, men and women, stooping to evil, and allowing sin, the enemy of God, to conquer them. This sight can be witnessed every day, and especially any night, in London. Among the number who thus yield to sinful temptations are some who were once in our Sunday schools, and others who are still there. You may tell us these temptations are powerful; we admit it, but we tell you that every one of them can be resisted. Allow me to remind you of the three Hebrew youths in Babylon. They were commanded by the proud and mighty monarch of the empire to do wrong—to fall down and worship the golden image which he had set up in the plains of Dura; and if they did not so prostrate themselves, he declared that he would cast them into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There was a temptation far more powerful than any you can ever meet in this great yet sinful city.

How did the young men act? Did they fear and tremble, crouch and cringe before the king, and ask for some time to consider his words? No, no. Standing before him with undrooping heads, and their souls still more erect, and looking, it may be, full in his face, they said with an emphatic voice, "We shall not obey the royal mandate." This is the noble example which you are to imitate. When you are tempted to sin as you walk along the streets, stand erect and say "No." When you are asked to do wrong in the places of business to which you have or may yet go, stand erect and say "No." When you are requested, perhaps, in gentle and soothing words, by an apparently loving friend, to trample upon some right, or to violate some law, stand erect and say "No." To all sinful solicitations, come from where they may, and in what form they may, stand erect and say "No." Do this all along your history, even until its close. Pray to God for the courage and the power to do this; He will give you these as He gave them to the three young men in Babylon. He will take care of you as He cared for them, and on some future day you will have the honour, as they have had it long ago, of shouting victory at the gates of heaven.

Proportion is the fourth idea contained in the text. If the one side of plants were to grow and not the other, they would be crooked, unshapen, and not pleasing to our eyes. But as the artist studies each feature, and endeavours to make each one in proportion to every other one, so God acts upon the same principle with all His plants. Look at the flowers in the garden, as they open their eyes to the light, and diffuse their odours, which freshen all around; look at the trees, in spring, with their beautiful blossoms, in summer with their variegated colours, and in autumn with their boughs loaded with fruit. Every one is proportionate; and so much so that you cannot in this respect detect a single flaw. Behold the palace which has been reared by the skilful architect. Each stone is where it ought to be,

and each one is of the right size and form. About the whole of the magnificent building there is a symmetry which commands our admiration. This is the way in which character should grow, but in many cases it is the very opposite. Let us give you a few specimens.

Here is a man who has grown and is still growing in zeal. If he could, he would convert every sinner in the world. But his knowledge is not at all in proportion to his zeal, and what is the result? He utters many imprudent sayings, and performs many imprudent actions. These prevent him from being a very useful man, and sometimes they bring a reproach upon the cause of Christ. He is like a machine which is not properly regulated, and which, therefore, produces steam faster than it can be used; and if he does not try to increase in knowledge, his zeal may become extravagance, and lead him into the domains of the wildest fanaticism. There is another who has been diligent in obeying the precept, "Grow in knowledge." Like the Athenians, he has learned much, and he is ever anxious to learn. But his zeal, when compared with his knowledge, is remarkably low, for seldom does he speak for Christ. He is like a ship on the ocean which is too heavily ladened; its movement is scarcely perceptible, and we are afraid, should a storm come, that it will founder and sink to the bottom with all its rich treasures. Here is a man who is distinguished for godly fear. His reverence for the Bible and for everything sacred and divine is most intense; but his faith is not equal to his filial fear. He hesitates before he grasps the divine promises, and when he does lay hold of them it is not with firmness, but with feebleness. Hence he is bowed down like the weeping willow, when he ought to be as straight as the poplar. When he sings, it is seldom in the major key; he is often afraid of the future; he is startled by his own shadow; yea, he trembles even when a leaf falls. There is another whose faith is not to be compared to a grain of mustard seed, but to the stalwart oak.

He is a stranger to doubt, and therefore he is always as bold as a lion. He is not ignorant as he thinks of the devices of his spiritual foes, and he is quite convinced he will overcome them. But he forgets to cultivate as he ought the grace of godly fear; hence in prayer he does not seem to be devotional. In conversing about spiritual themes he does appear to lack reverence. There is an apparent levity about all his Christian movements, and he often rushes into places which the holy angels would be afraid to tread. Here is a man, one of whose favourite themes of study has been the patience of Job. He has so much imbibed the tranquil spirit of the patriarch that he can endure any provocation, bear any insult, and submit to any trial without the slightest murmur or even irritation. He has, however, to a great extent practically ignored the fact that while Jesus is the Lamb of God, He is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He lacks boldness or courage, a virtue to the possession of which Christians are exhorted by the Scriptures. He therefore becomes all things to all men, in a sense never intended by the apostle. He does not reprove a Peter when he is to blame; and carrying this same timidity into his home, he commits the fatal blunder of Eli, for he does not restrain his children when they sin. There is another who does not require to hear a sermon on the text, "*Be strong and of a good courage* (Deut. xxxi. 6)," or the text, "*Quit you like men; be strong* (1 Cor. xvi. 13)." He reminds one of Lord Nelson when he was a child. One day his mother told him not to expose himself to some impending danger, but to fear it, when the boy turned round, looked his parent in the face, and said, "Mother, what is fear?" But this man has forgotten the precept, "Ye have need of patience;" and what are the natural consequences? When the rod of our heavenly Father is laid upon him, instead of being calm and resigned, he is discontented and fretful. When he reproves another for some offence, it is not with gentleness and forbearance, but with harshness and severity. Lacking to a

great degree the grace which governs the flesh, sweetens the temper, stifles anger, extinguishes envy, subdues pride, and bridles the tongue, he is far more in trouble than any of his brethren, notwithstanding all his true heroism. Such are a few illustrations of the disproportionate manner in which character frequently grows. Let them lead us to self-examination. In order that there may be a beautiful proportion between the trunk and the branches, the height and the width of a tree, the gardener is obliged to use the pruning-knife. Such a power is not required for the growth of character. Our love to God may be too cold, but it cannot be too warm. Our error consists not in abundance but in deficiency. What then is our defect? Let it be discovered. Which of the graces of the Spirit in us are weak and poor? Let us train these with careful assiduity, remembering that all the graces within us should be like the strings of an angel's harp, in perfect harmony with each other. Let us endeavour to secure this harmony. Do this, my young friends, earnestly and always; then you shall possess and exhibit a proportion and symmetry of character which will be pleasing to God, highly conducive to your own felicity and usefulness, and which will give a lovely and attractive exhibition to the world around you of Christian worth and excellence. For then your moral and spiritual beauty will be far superior to the growing *plants*, and *the corner-stones polished after the similitude of a palace.*

Usefulness is the fifth idea contained in the text. How useful are flowers! On their account the garden is inviting and charming. To the studious they suggest many instructive and animating thoughts. They scent the passing breeze and the surrounding atmosphere with their precious perfumes. How useful are trees! They offer a home to the birds of the air that build among their branches. Beneath them the traveller is often sheltered from the burning rays of the sun. When they fall before the woodman's axe they

give body and strength to our homes and to our ships. How useful are corner-stones! Next to foundation-stones they are the most important parts of the whole building. Upon them depend the stability and the unity of the building.

How very selfish are some little children! Observe one of this class. He holds out his hand to grasp what belongs to some other child; but he is most unwilling to share his toys and gifts and pleasures with another. When anything is taken from him which his parents think he ought to divide with another, the struggles of his little selfish spirit are manifested in mutterings, cries, and tears. If this selfishness grow with his growth, and is strengthened with his strength, his heart will be similar to the hearts of thousands; it will resemble a man's coffin, which is long enough and broad enough to hold himself, but has no room for any one else. But, my young friends, are you to receive and not to give, to be blessed and not to bless, to hold the interests of others as cheap, yea, as worthless, when compared with your own; to make self the beginning, the middle, and the end of all your plans and operations? No. You are to resemble the sun that shines to chase away the darkness from the worlds which roll around him, and to warm them all into a glowing fertility. You are to resemble the ocean, which gives a congenial home and suitable nourishment to innumerable creatures, and hangs the skies of all lands with clouds that temper their heat, and supply the rains which clothe their hills with forests, and cover their fields with corn. You are to resemble the lighthouse that shines so steadily and so constantly for the purpose of showing the course which mariners ought to pursue. To the utmost extent of your ability you are to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, enlighten the ignorant, comfort the sorrowful, protect the orphan, thaw the ice from the heart of the misanthrope, cause the treacherous to be faithful, bring back those who have wandered from the narrow way, and save

those from sin and the second death over whom you have the slightest influence. You are to be like Him whose birth was the manifestation of benevolence, whose life was the incarnation of benevolence, and whose death was the climax of benevolence. Shall you suffer, can you suffer, by giving as you receive to others of all that you have? Impossible. For six thousand years the monarch of the day and the queen of the night have been incessant givers. But just now the one is as resplendent, and the other is as beautiful, as they were when originally created. They have lost nothing by all their benefactions. Who can enumerate the number of harvests the soil has yielded, and the thousands of cattle that have fed upon its pastures? yet it is not poorer but richer on account of these countless donations. "*There is that giveth, and yet increaseth*," is the language of the Bible, the language of nature, and the language of human experience. It is the active body that gathers strength, it is the studious mind that obtains power, and it is the industrious labourer in the vineyard of the Lord who increases the brightness and the force of his character now, and lays up for himself undecaying and imperishable treasures in the third, the eternal heaven. It may be said by some of you, We would give to others and labour for others, but we have already received so much ingratitude from those whom we have benefited, that our hearts have become cold, and our benevolence restricted. Have you observed horses taken to water? They go into the running river and drink of it until they are satisfied. Then they begin to stamp in it with their feet until the water is quite polluted. This is the price which they pay for their refreshing draught. But what does the noble river do? It immediately floats away the mud which has been raised, it becomes as clear as it was before, and it welcomes as freely as ever the very same or other thirsty creatures. In a similar manner should you act. You should give to others, and labour for others, not to receive their gratitude, but to glorify Christ. Influenced by

this lofty, heavenly motive, you shall always be useful, whatever be the nature of the treatment which you receive from those whose temporal and eternal welfare you seek to secure.

If flowers had the power to refuse the sunshine and the shower, and did refuse them; if trees had the power to pull themselves out of the soil, and expose their roots to the burning sun, and did this; if some stones had the power to remain in the quarry, and did so; if others who allowed themselves to be taken from the quarry had the power to reject the operations of the polishing instruments, and did reject them,—if these things could and did occur, what confusion and disaster would follow! We should have useless flowers, worthless trees, few if any houses, and no architectural embellishments. These things have not happened, and cannot. We have in the order of nature the result following the cause. The materials cannot disobey, because they have no individual will. But, my young friends, you have the power to disobey, to say "No" to God, because you have wills. How are you going to act? Will any of you refuse to be what we have endeavoured to show you ought to be? If so, it cannot be well with you either in time or eternity. Take the advice we have given,—it is wholesome, sound, and right. Then it will be well with you now and for ever. That this may be realized in your experience, we and your teachers shall again pray and continue to pray, *that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.*

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