

Miscellaneous Writings of C.H.M. — Volume II

Decision for Christ

Esther 3 & Dan. 6

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DECISION FOR CHRIST.

IN approaching the subject of "Decision for Christ," there are two or three obstacles which lie in our way—two or three difficulties which hang around the question, which we would fain remove, if possible, in order that the reader may be able to view the matter on its own proper ground, and in its own proper bearings.

In the first place, we encounter a serious difficulty in the fact that very few of us, comparatively, are in a condition of soul to appreciate the subject, or to suffer a word of exhortation thereon. We are, for the most part, so occupied with the question of our soul's salvation—so taken up with matters affecting ourselves, our peace, our liberty, our comfort, our deliverance from the wrath to come, our interest in Christ, that we have but little heart for aught that purely concerns Christ Himself—His Name—His Person—His cause—His glory.

There are, we may say, two things which lie at the foundation of all true decision for Christ, namely, a conscience purged by the blood of Jesus, and a heart that bows with reverent submission to the authority of His word, in all things. Now we do not mean to dwell upon these things in this paper; first, because we are anxious to get, at once, to our immediate theme; and, secondly, because we have so often dwelt on the subject of establishing the conscience in the peace of the gospel, and in setting before the heart the paramount claims of

the word of God. We merely refer to them here for the purpose of reminding the reader that they are absolutely essential materials in forming the basis of decision for Christ. If my conscience is ill at ease, if I am in doubt as to my salvation, if I am filled with "anxious thought" as to whether I am a child of God or not, decision for Christ is out of the question. I must know that Christ died for me, before I can, intelligently and happily, live for Him.

So also, if there be any reserve in the heart as to my entire subjection to the authority of Christ as my Lord and Master; if I am keeping some chamber of my heart, be it ever so remote, ever so small, closed against the light of His word, it must, of necessity, hinder my whole-hearted decision for Him in this world. In a word, I must know that *Christ is mine* and *I am His*, ere my course down here can be one of unswerving, uncompromising decision for Him. If the reader hesitates as to this, if he is still in doubt and darkness, let him pause, and turn directly to the cross of the Son of God, and hearken to what the Holy Spirit declares as to all those who simply put their trust therein. Let him drink into his inmost soul these words, "Be it known unto you, therefore, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him, *all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.*" Yes, reader, these are the glad tidings for you. "*All from all,*" by faith in a crucified and risen Lord.

But we see another difficulty in the way of our subject. We greatly fear, that while we speak of decision for Christ, some of our readers may suppose that we are contending for some notion or set of notions of our

own; that we are pressing some peculiar views or principles to which we vainly and foolishly venture to apply the imposing title of "Decision for Christ." All this we do most solemnly disclaim. The words which stand at the head of this paper are the simple expression of our thesis. We do not contend for mere attachment to sect, party, or denomination, for adherence to the doctrines or commandments of men. We write in the immediate presence of Him who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men, and we distinctly avow that our one object is to urge upon the christian reader the necessity of decision for Christ. We would not, if we know ourselves, pen a single line to swell the ranks of a party, or draw over adherents to any particular doctrinal creed, or any special form of church polity. We are impressed with the conviction that where Christ has His right place in the heart, all will be right; and that, where He has not, there will be nothing right. And, further, we believe that nothing but plain decision for Christ can effectually preserve the soul from the fatal influences that are at work around us in the professing Church. Mere orthodoxy cannot preserve us. Attachment to religious forms will not avail in the present fearful struggle. It is, we feel persuaded, a simple question of Christ as our life, and Christ as our object. May the Spirit of God now enable us to ponder aright the subject of "Decision for Christ!"

It is well to bear in mind that there are certain great truths—certain immutable principles—which underlie all the dispensations of God from age to age, and which remain untouched by all the failure, the folly, and the sin of man. It is on these great moral truths, these foundation principles, that faith lays hold, and in them

finds its strength and its sustenance. Dispensations change and pass away—men prove unfaithful in their varied positions of stewardship and responsibility; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. It never changes, never fails. “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.” And, again, “Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” Nothing can touch the eternal truth of God, and, therefore, what we want, at all times, is to give that truth its proper place in our hearts; to let it act on our conscience, form our character, and shape our way. “Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.” “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.” This is true security. Here lies the real secret of decision for Christ. What God has spoken must govern us in the most absolute manner, ere our path can be said to be one of plain decision. There may be tenacious adherence to our own notions, obstinate attachment to the prejudices of the age, a blind devotion to certain doctrines and practices resting on a traditionary foundation, certain opinions which we have received to hold without ever enquiring as to whether or not there be any authority whatever for such opinions in holy scripture. There may be all this, and much more, and yet not one atom of genuine decision for Christ.

Now we feel we cannot do better than furnish our readers with an example or two drawn from the page of inspired history, which will do more to illustrate and enforce our theme than aught that we could possibly advance. And first, then, let us turn to the book of Esther, and there contemplate, for a few moments, the instructive history of

“MORDECAI THE JEW.”

This very remarkable man lived at a time in which the Jewish economy had failed through the unfaithfulness and disobedience of the Jewish people. The Gentile was in power. The relationship between Jehovah and Israel could no longer be publicly acknowledged. The faithful Jew had but to hang his harp on the willows, and sigh over the faded light of other days. The chosen seed were in exile; the city and temple where their fathers worshipped were in ruins, and the vessels of the Lord's house were in a strange land. Such was the outward condition of things in the day in which Mordecai's lot was cast. But, in addition to this, there was a man, very near the throne, occupying only the second place in the empire, sitting beside the very fountain-head of authority, possessing princely wealth, and wielding almost boundless influence. To this great man, strange to say, the poor exiled Jew sternly refuses to bow. Nothing will induce him to yield a single mark of respect to the second man in the kingdom. He will save the life of Ahasuerus; but he will not bow to Haman.

Reader, why was this? Was this blind obstinacy or bold decision—which? In order to determine this we must enquire as to the real root or principle of Mordecai's acting. If, indeed, there was no authority for his conduct in the law of God, then must we at once pronounce it to have been blind obstinacy, foolish pride, or, it may be, envy of a man in power. But if, on the other hand, there be within the covers of the five inspired books of Moses, a plain authority for Mordecai's deportment in this matter, then must we, without

hesitation, pronounce his conduct to have been the rare and exquisite fruit of attachment to the law of his God, and uncompromising decision for Him and His holy authority.

This makes all the difference. If it be merely a matter of private opinion—a question concerning which each one may lawfully adopt his own view—then, verily, might such a line of conduct be justly termed the most narrow-minded bigotry. We hear a great deal, now-a-days, about narrow-mindedness on the one hand, and large-heartedness on the other. But, as a Roman orator, over two thousand years ago, exclaimed in the senate-house of Rome, “Conscript Fathers, long since, indeed, we have lost the true names of things;” so may we, in the bosom of the professing Church, at the close of the nineteenth century, repeat, with far greater force, “Long since we have lost the true names of things.” For what do men now call bigotry and narrow-mindedness? A faithful clinging to, and carrying out of, “Thus saith the Lord.” And what do they designate large-heartedness? A readiness to sacrifice truth on the altar of politeness and civility.

Reader, be thou fully assured that thus it is at this solemn moment. We do not want to be sour or cynical, morose or gloomy. But we must speak the truth, if we are to speak at all. We desire that the tongue may be hushed in silence, and the pen may drop from the hand, if we could basely cushion the plain, bold, unvarnished truth, through fear of scattering our readers, or to avoid the sneer of the infidel. We cannot shut our eyes to the solemn fact that God's truth is being trampled in the dust; that the Name of Jesus is despised and rejected. We have only to pass from city

to city, and from town to town, of highly-favoured England, and read upon the walls the melancholy proofs of the truth of our assertions. Truth is flung aside, in cold contempt. The Name of Jesus is little set by. On the other hand, man is exalted, his reason deified, his will indulged. Where must all this end? "In the blackness of darkness for ever."

How refreshing, in the face of all this, to ponder the history of Mordecai the Jew! It is very plain that he knew little and cared less about the thoughts of men on the question of narrow-mindedness. He obeyed the word of the Lord, and this we must be allowed to call real breadth of mind—true largeness of heart. For what, after all, is a narrow mind? A narrow mind we hold to be a mind which refuses to open itself to admit the truth of God. And what, on the contrary, is a large and liberal heart? A heart expanded by the truth and grace of God. Let us not be scared away from the path of pain decision, by the scornful epithets which men have bestowed upon that path. It is a path of peace and purity, a path where the light of an approving conscience is enjoyed, and upon which the beams of divine favour ever pour themselves in undimmed lustre.

But why did Mordecai refuse to bow to Haman? Was there any great principle at stake? Was it merely a whim of his own? Had he a "Thus saith the Lord" for his warrant in refusing a single nod of the head to the proud Amalekite? Yes. Let us turn to the seventeenth chapter of the book of Exodus, and there we read, "And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar

and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi; for he said, Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”*

Here, then, was Mordecai's authority for not bowing to Haman the Agagite. A faithful Jew could not do reverence to one with whom Jehovah was at war. The heart might plead a thousand excuses and urge a thousand reasons. It might seek an easy path for itself on the plea that the Jewish system was in ruins, and the Amalekite in power, and that therefore it was worse than useless, yea, it was positively absurd, to maintain such lofty ground when the glory of Israel was gone, and the Amalekite was in the place of authority. “Of what use,” it might be argued, “can it be to hold up the standard when all is gone to pieces? You are only making your degradation more remarkable by the pertinacious refusal to bow your head. Would it not be better to give just one nod? That will settle the matter. Haman will be satisfied, and you and your people will be safe. Do not be obstinate. Shew a tendency to be courteous. Do not stand up, in that dogged way, for a thing so manifestly non-essential. Besides, you should remember that the command in Exodus xvii. was only to be rehearsed in the ears of Joshua, and only had its true application in his bright and palmy days. It was never meant for the ears of an exile, never intended to apply in the days of Israel's desolation.”

All this, and much beside, might have been urged on

* It is deeply interesting to note that neither the Jews' best Friend, nor their worst enemy is once formally named in the Book of Esther; but faith could recognize both the one and the other.

Mordecai; but, ah! the answer was simple: "God hath spoken. This is enough for me. True, we are a scattered people; but the word of the Lord is not scattered. He has not reversed His word about Amalek, nor entered into a treaty of peace with him. Jehovah and Amalek are still at war, and Amalek stands before me in the person of this haughty Agagite. How can I bow to one with whom Jehovah is at war? How can I do homage to a man whom the faithful Samuel would hew in pieces before the Lord?" "Well, then," it might be further urged upon this devoted Jew, "you will all be destroyed. You must either bow or perish." The answer is still most simple: "I have nothing to do with consequences. They are in the hand of God. Obedience is my path, the results are with Him. It is better to die with a good conscience than live with a bad one. It is better to go to heaven with an uncondemning heart, than remain upon earth with a heart that would make me a coward. God has spoken. I can do no otherwise. May the Lord help me! Amen."

Oh! how well we can understand the mode in which this faithful Jew would be assaulted by the enemy. Nothing but the grace of God can ever enable any one to maintain a deportment of unflinching decision, at a moment in which everything within and around is against us. True it is, we know that it is better to suffer anything than deny our Lord, or fly in the face of His commandments; but yet how little are some of us prepared to endure a single sneer, a single scornful look, a single contemptuous expression, for Christ's sake. And, perhaps, there are few things harder, for some of us at least, to bear than to be reproached on the ground of narrow-mindedness and bigotry. We naturally like

to be thought large-hearted and liberal. We like to be accounted men of enlightened mind, sound judgment, and comprehensive grasp. But we must remember that we have no right to be liberal at our Master's expense. We have simply to obey.

Thus it was with Mordecai. He stood like a rock and allowed the whole tide of difficulty and opposition to roll over him. He would not bow to the Amalekite, let the consequence be what it might. Obedience was his path. The results were with God. And look at the result! In one moment, the tide was turned. The proud Amalekite fell from his lofty eminence, and the exiled Jew was lifted from his sackcloth and ashes and placed next the throne. Haman exchanged his wealth and dignities for a gallows; Mordecai exchanged his sackcloth for a royal robe.

Now it may not always happen that the reward of simple obedience will be as speedy and as signal as in Mordecai's case. And, moreover, we may say that we are not Mordecais, nor are we placed in his position. But the principle holds good whoever and wherever we are. There is not one of us, however obscure or insignificant, that has not a sphere within which our influence is felt for good or for evil. And, besides, independent altogether of our circumstances and the apparent results of our conduct, we are called upon to obey implicitly the word of the Lord—to have His word hidden in our hearts—to refuse, with unswerving decision, to do or to say aught that the word of the living God condemns. "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" This should be the language, whether it be the question of a child tempted to steal a lump of sugar, or the most momentous step

in evil that one can be tempted to take. The strength and moral security of Mordecai's position lay in this fact, that he had the word of God for his authority. Had it not been so, his conduct would have been senseless in the extreme. To have refused the usual expression of respect to one in high authority, without some weighty reason, could only be regarded as the most unmeaning obstinacy. But the moment you introduce a "Thus saith the Lord," the matter is entirely changed. The word of the Lord endureth for ever. The divine testimonies do not fade away or change with the times and seasons. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but one jot or one tittle of what our God hath spoken shall never pass away. Hence, what had been rehearsed in the ears of Joshua, as he rested in triumph under the banner of Jehovah, was designed to govern the conduct of Mordecai, though clothed in sackcloth as an exile, in the city of Shushan. Ages and generations had passed away; the days of the Judges and the days of the Kings had run their course; but the commandment of the Lord with respect to Amalek had lost—could lose—none of its force. "The Lord *hath sworn* that the Lord will have war with Amalek," not merely in the days of Joshua, nor in the days of the Judges, nor in the days of the Kings, but "from generation to generation." Such was the record—the imperishable and immutable record of God, and such was the plain, solid and unquestionable foundation of Mordecai's conduct.

And here let us say a few words as to the immense importance of entire submission to the word of God. We live in a day which is plainly marked by strong self-will. Man's reason, man's will, and man's interest are working together, with appalling success to ignore

the authority of holy scripture. So long as the statements of the word of God chime in with man's reason, so long as they do not run counter to his will, and are not subversive of his interests, so long he will tolerate them, or it may be he will quote them with a measure of respect, or, at least, with self-complacency; but the moment it becomes a question of Scripture *versus* reason, will, or interest, the former is either silently ignored or contemptuously rejected. This is a very marked and solemn feature of the days that are now passing over our heads. It behoves Christians to be aware of it, and to be on their watchtower. We fear that very few comparatively are truly alive to the real state of the moral atmosphere which enwraps the religious world. We do not refer here so much to the bold attacks of infidel writers. To these we have alluded elsewhere. What we have now before us is rather the cool indifference, on the part of professing Christians, as to scripture; the little power which pure truth wields over the conscience; the way in which the edge of scripture is blunted or turned aside. You quote passage after passage from the inspired Volume, but it seems like the pattering of rain upon the window; the *reason* is at work, the *will* is dominant, *interest* is at stake, human opinions bear sway, God's truth is practically, if not in so many words, set aside.

All this is deeply solemn. We know of few things more dangerous than intellectual familiarity with the letter of Scripture where the spirit of it does not govern the conscience, form the character, and shape the way. We want to tremble at the word of God, to bow down, in reverential submission, to its holy authority, in all things. A single line of scripture ought to

be sufficient for our souls, on any point, even though, in carrying it out, we should have to move athwart the opinions of the highest and best of men. May the Lord raise up many faithful and true-hearted witnesses in these last days—men, like the faithful Mordecai, who would rather ascend a gallows than bow to an Amalekite!

For the further illustration of our theme, we shall ask the reader to turn to the sixth chapter of the book of Daniel. There is a special charm and interest in the history of these living examples presented to us in the Holy Scriptures. They tell us how the truth of God was acted upon, in other days, by men of like passions with ourselves; they prove to us that in every age there have been men who so prized the truth, so revered the word of the living God, that they would rather face death, in its most appalling forms, than depart one hair's breadth from the narrow line laid down by the authoritative voice of their Lord and Master. It is healthful to be brought in contact with such men—healthful at all times, but peculiarly so in days like the present, when there is so much laxity and easy-going profession—so much of mere theory—when every one is allowed to go his own way, and hold his own opinion, provided always that he does not interfere with the opinions of his neighbour—when the commandments of God seem to have so little weight, so little power over the heart and conscience. Tradition will get a hearing; public opinion will be respected; anything and everything, in short, but the plain and positive statements of the word of God, will get a place in the thoughts and opinions of men. At such a time,

it is, we repeat, at once healthful and edifying to muse over the history of men like Mordecai the Jew, and Daniel the prophet, and scores of others, in whose estimation a single line of holy scripture rose far above all the thoughts of men, the decrees of governors, and the statutes of kings, and who declared plainly that they had nothing whatever to do with consequences where the word of the Lord was concerned. Absolute submission to the divine command is that which alone becomes the creature.

It is not, be it observed and well remembered, that any man or any number of men have any right to demand subjection to their decisions or decrees; this would be most strongly deprecated. No man has any right to enforce his opinions upon his fellow. This is plain enough, and we have to bless God for the inestimable privilege of civil and religious liberty, as enjoyed under the government of England. But what we urge upon our readers, just now, is plain decision for Christ, and implicit subjection to His authority, irrespective of everything, and regardless of consequences. This is what we do most earnestly desire for ourselves and for all the people of God, in these last days. We long for that condition of soul, that attitude of heart, that quality of conscience, which shall lead us to bow down in implicit subjection to the commandments of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. No doubt there are difficulties, stumbling blocks, and hostile influences to be encountered. It may be said, for instance, that "It is very difficult for one, now-a-days, to know what is really true and right. There are so many opinions and so many ways, and good men differ so in judgment about the simplest and plainest matters, and yet they all pro-

fess to own the Bible as the only standard of appeal; and, moreover, they all declare that their one desire is to do what is right, and to serve the Lord, in their day and generation. How, then, is one to know what is true or what is false, seeing that you will find the very best of men ranged on opposite sides of the same question?"

The answer to all this is very simple. "If thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light." But most assuredly my eye is not single if I am looking at men, and reasoning on what I see in them. A single eye rests simply on the Lord and His word. Men differ, no doubt—they have differed, and they ever will differ; but I am to hearken to the voice of my Lord and do His will. His word is to be my light and my authority, the girdle of my loins in action, the strength of my heart in service, my only warrant for moving hither and thither, the stable foundation of all my ways. If I were to attempt to shape my way according to the thoughts of men, where should I be? How uncertain and unsatisfactory would my course be! Thank God, He has made it all plain—so plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein; and all I want is a single eye, a subject will, a teachable spirit, to be led aright. If I really want to be guided aright, my God will surely guide me; but if I am looking to men, if I am governed by mixed motives, if I am seeking my own ends and interests, if I seeking to please my fellows, then, undoubtedly, my body shall be full of darkness, heavy clouds shall settle down upon my pathway, and uncertainty mark all my goings.

Christian reader, think of these things. Think deeply

of them. Depend upon it, they have a just claim upon your attention. Do you earnestly desire to follow your Lord? Do you really aim at something beyond mere empty profession, cold orthodoxy, or mechanical religiousness? Do you sigh for reality, depth, energy, fervour, and wholeheartedness? Then make Christ your one object, His word your rule, His glory your aim. Oh! that thus it may be with the writer and the reader of these lines. Alas! alas! how we have failed in these things, God only knows. But, blessed be His Name, there is full forgiveness with Him, and He giveth more grace, so that we can count upon Him to restore our souls, to revive His work in our hearts, and grant us a closer walk with Him than we have ever known before. May the blessed Spirit be pleased to use for the furtherance of these ends our meditation on the interesting narrative of

“DANIEL THE PROPHET.”

“It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; and over these, three presidents, of whom Daniel was first; that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion or fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.” (Dan. vi. 1—4.)

What a testimony! How truly refreshing to the

heart! "No error or fault!" Even his most bitter enemies could not put their finger upon a single blemish in his character, or a flaw in his practical career. Truly this was a rare and admirable character—a bright witness for the God of Israel, even in the dark days of the Babylonish captivity—an unanswerable proof of the fact that no matter where we are situated, or how we are circumstanced, no matter how unfavourable our position, or how dark the day in which our lot is cast, it is our happy privilege so to carry ourselves, in all the details of daily life, as to give no occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully.

How sad when it is otherwise! How humiliating when those who make a high profession are found constantly breaking down in the most commonplace affairs of domestic and commercial life! There are few things which more tend to discourage the heart than to hear—as, alas! one so often does—that Christians, so-called, are the most unsatisfactory persons to have any dealings with—that they are bad masters, or bad servants, or bad tradesmen—that they do not attend to their business, that they charge higher prices and give worse value than those who make no profession at all. It is most deplorable when any just ground is afforded for such statements.

No doubt worldly people are only too ready to find occasion against those who profess the Name of Jesus; and, further, we have to remember that there are two sides to every question, and that, very frequently, a broad margin must be left for exaggeration, high colouring, and false impressions. But still, it is the Christian's plain duty so to walk in every position and relationship of life, as that "no error or fault" may be found in him.

We should not make any excuses for ourselves. The duties of our situation, whatever it may happen to be, should be scrupulously performed. A careless manner, a slovenly habit, an unprincipled mode of acting, on the part of a Christian, is a serious damage to the **cause of Christ**, and a dishonour to **His holy name**. And, on the **other hand**, diligence, earnestness, punctuality, and **fidelity**, bring glory to that Name. And this should ever be the Christian's object. He should not aim at his own interest, his own reputation, or his own progress, in seeking to carry himself aright in his family and in his calling in life. True, it will promote his interest, establish his reputation, and further his progress, to be upright and diligent in all his ways; but none of these things should ever be his motive. He is to be ever and only governed by the one thing, namely, to please and honour his Lord and Master. The standard which the Holy Ghost has set before us, as to all these things, is furnished in the words of the apostle to the Philippians: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." We should not be satisfied with anything less than this. "They could find none occasion nor fault, forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him." Noble testimony! Would that it were more called forth, in this our day, by the deportment, the habits, the temper, and ways of all those who profess and call themselves Christians.

But there was one point in which Daniel's enemies felt they could lay hold of him. "Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning *the law of his*

God." Here was a something in the which occasion might be found to ruin this beloved and honoured servant of God. It appears that Daniel had been in the habit of praying three times a day, with his window open toward Jerusalem. This fact was well known, and was speedily laid hold of, and turned to account. "Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree."

Here, then, was a deep plot, a subtle snare, laid for the blameless and harmless Daniel. How would he act in the face of all this? Would he not feel it right to lower the standard? Well, if the standard were something of his own, he might surely lower it, and perhaps he ought. But if it were something divine—if his conduct were based upon the truth of God, then clearly it was his place to hold it up as high as ever, regardless of statutes, decrees, and writings established, signed, and countersigned. The whole question hinged upon this. Just as in the case of Mordecai the Jew, the question hinged upon the one point of whether he had any divine warrant for refusing to bow to Haman; so, in the case of Daniel the prophet, the question was, had he any divine authority for praying toward Jerusa-

lem. It certainly seemed strange and odd. Many might have felt disposed to say to him, "Why persist in this practice? What need is there for opening your window and praying toward Jerusalem, in such a public manner? Can you not wait until night has drawn her sable curtain around you, and your closet door has shut you in, and then pour out your heart to your God? This would be prudent, judicious, and expedient. And, surely, your God does not exact this of you. He does not regard time, place, or attitude. All times and places are alike to Him. Are you wise—are you right, in persisting in such a line of action, under such circumstances? It was all well enough before this decree was signed, when you could pray when and as you thought right; but now it does seem like the most culpable fatuity and blind obstinacy to persevere; it is as though you really courted martyrdom."

All this, and much more we may easily conceive, might be suggested to the mind of the faithful Jew; but still the grand question remained, "What saith the scripture?" Was there any divine reason for Daniel's praying toward Jerusalem? Assuredly there was! In the first place, Jehovah had said to Solomon, in reference to the temple at Jerusalem, "Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." Jerusalem was God's centre. It was, it is, and ever shall be. True, it was in ruins—the temple was in ruins; but God's word was not in ruins, and here is faith's simple but solid warrant. King Solomon had said, at the dedication of the temple, hundreds of years before Daniel's time, "If thy people sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them

away captive unto a land far off or near. Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn and pray unto thee, in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly; if they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captive, and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name: then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee." (2 Chron. vi. 36—39.)

Now this was precisely what Daniel was doing—this was the ground he took. He was a captive exile, but his heart was at Jerusalem, and his eyes followed his heart. If he could not sing the songs of Zion, he could at least breathe his prayers toward Zion's hill. If his harp was on the willows at Babylon, his fond affections turned toward the city of God, now a heap of ruins, but ere long to be an eternal excellency, the joy of the whole earth. It mattered not to him that a decree had been signed by earth's greatest monarch, forbidding him to pray toward the city of his fathers and to his fathers' God. It mattered not to him that the lions' den was yawning to receive him, and the lions' jaws ready to devour him. Like his brother Mordecai, he had nothing to do with consequences. Mordecai would rather mount the gallows than bow to Haman, and Daniel would rather descend to the lions' den than cease to pray to Jehovah. These, surely, were the worthies—the spiritual giants of other days. They

were men of the right stamp—real, downright, thorough-going men—men whose hearts and consciences were governed absolutely by the word of God. The world may dub them bigots and fools; but, oh! how the heart does long for such bigots and fools, in these days of false liberality and wisdom!

It might have been said to Mordecai and Daniel that they were contending for mere trifles—for things wholly indifferent and non-essential. This is an argument often used; but, ah! it has no weight with an honest and a devoted heart. Indeed there is nothing more contemptible, in the judgment of every true lover of Jesus, than the principle that regulates the standard as to essentials and non-essentials. For, what is it? Simply this, "All that concerns my salvation is essential; all that merely affects the glory of Christ is non-essential." How terrible is this! Reader, dost thou not utterly abhor it? What! shall we accept salvation as the fruit of our Lord's death, and deem aught that concerns Him non-essential? God forbid. Yea; rather let us entirely reverse the matter, and regard all that concerns the honour and glory of the Name of Jesus, the truth of His word, and the integrity of His cause, as vital, essential, and fundamental; and all that merely concerns ourselves as non-essential and indifferent. May God grant us this mind! May nothing be deemed trivial by us which has for its foundation the word of the living God!

Thus it was with those devoted men whose history we have been glancing at. Mordecai would not bow his head, and Daniel would not close his window. Blessed men! The Lord be praised for such, and for the inspired record of their actings. Mordecai would

rather surrender life than diverge from the truth of God, and Daniel would rather do the same than turn away from God's centre. Jehovah had said that He would have war with Amalek from generation to generation, and therefore Mordecai would not bow. Jehovah had said of Jerusalem, "Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually;" therefore Daniel would not cease to pray toward that blessed centre. The word of the Lord endureth for ever, and faith takes its stand on that imperishable foundation. There is an eternal freshness about every word that has come forth from the Lord. His truth holds good throughout all generations; its bloom can never be brushed away, its light can never fade, its edge can never be blunted. All praise be to His holy name!

But let us look, for a moment, at the result of Daniel's faithfulness. The king was plunged into the deepest grief when he discovered his mistake. "He was sore displeased with himself." So well he might. He had fallen into a snare; but Daniel was in good keeping. It was all right with him. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." It matters not whether it be a lion's den at Babylon or a prison at Philippi, faith and a good conscience can make a man happy in either. We question if Daniel ever spent a happier night on this earth, than the night which he spent in the lions' den. He was there for God, and God was there with him. He was there with an approving conscience and an uncondemning heart. He could look up from the very bottom of that den straight into heaven, yea, that den was heaven upon earth to his happy spirit. Who would not rather be Daniel in the den than Darius in the

palace? The one happy in God; the other "sore displeased with himself." Darius would have every one pray to him; Daniel would pray to none but God. Darius was bound by his own rash decree; Daniel was bound only by the word of the living God. What a contrast!

And then see in the end what signal honour was put upon Daniel. He stood publicly identified with the one living and true God. "O Daniel," cried the king, "servant of the living God." Truly he had earned this title for himself. He was, unquestionably, a devoted and decided servant of God. He had seen his three brethren cast into a furnace because they would worship *only* the true God, and he had been cast into the lions' den because he would pray *only* to Him; but the Lord had appeared for them and him, and given them a glorious triumph. He had allowed them to realize that precious promise made of old to their fathers, that they should be the head and their enemies the tail; that they should be above and their enemies below. Nothing could be more marked—nothing could more forcibly illustrate the value which God puts upon plain decision and true-hearted devotedness, no matter where, when, or by whom exhibited.

Oh! for an earnest heart in this day of lukewarmness!
O Lord, revive thy work!

