

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

## PREFACE

The Bible is the sacred storehouse of heavenly wisdom. Its pages are stamped with the divine seal of eternal truth, and contain the charter of our hopes, our privileges, and our joys. Whatever tends to lead us from the love and study of the Holy Scriptures, should be dreaded as inimical to the highest interests of mankind; while every attempt, however feeble, which has for its object the promotion of the Redeemer's glory, and the good of souls, will be received with affectionate indulgence by real Christians, who well know that success in any effort of usefulness is 'from above'. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord," is a declaration at once calculated to strengthen the weak, and to humble the strong. The simple design in publishing the following reflections, is to induce a habit of self-examination and prayer; and to excite to a more diligent perusal of the word of God. The author, therefore, desires to come in the kindly aspect of a friendly visitor; and if privileged to enter into the sacred retirement of the Christian, would there, through the blessing of God, endeavor to lead him into a closer communion with his own heart, and with Jesus, his exalted Savior. Nothing new is here presented to the Christian. The good old way in which the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and all true believers in every age have journeyed to the heavenly Canaan, is pointed out— Jesus is the way, the only way to the Father; the living way to holiness, happiness, and heaven.

The prophet Isaiah was commanded to teach the people by line upon line, and precept upon precept; where, therefore, the same unspeakably precious truths recur again and again in these pages, their recurrence will not offend the humble believer who has tasted that the Lord is gracious. As bread and water are always pleasant to a healthy stomach, so the bread of life and the water of life are peculiarly refreshing to the soul which is hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

An original hymn is subjoined to each meditation, which, it is hoped, may assist the spirit of piety, although it can lay little claim to the charms of poetry. The Christian reader must kindly excuse the frequent lack of close connection between the hymns and the meditations to which they are attached, as they were composed before the present volume was contemplated by its author.

Should the Lord condescend to bless these humble exercises of the heart, to the guiding of some young inquirer to the Friend of sinners; to the quickening of some lukewarm professor; to the convincing of some skeptic; or the comforting of some afflicted believer; to the Triune God of our salvation be all the praise.

## 1. CHRISTIAN RETIREMENT

How needful to the real Christian, surrounded as he is by sensible objects, which have so powerful an influence on his mind and affections, are seasons for retirement from the hurry and distracting cares of the world! The soul cannot prosper in spiritual things, without much secret converse with its God and Savior.

Many duties are unavoidably of a public nature; but these, except in extraordinary cases, should not occupy those portions of time, which are sacred to meditation, reading the Scriptures, and prayer.

There is something peculiarly pleasant and profitable in the interchange of activity and retirement. As activity sweetens retirement, so retirement prepares the mind for renewed activity. Those people who are most engaged in active labors for the benefit of others, will find peculiar need for frequent retirement. In their closets, they must draw down from the Fountain of love, by faith and prayer, that spiritual strength, and those heavenly graces, which alone can enable them to labor perseveringly, as well as suffer patiently for Christ's sake.

The present times, which are so happily characterized by religious exertion, render this duty highly needful. It is no uncommon thing to hear excellent people complain, that their whole time is nearly divided between their own jobs and the claims of multiplying religious societies; thus leaving little or no leisure for the important duty of Christian retirement. Hence, spirituality of mind is much injured from the constant bustle in which some benevolent people live. They have frequent cause to join in the lamentation of the Spouse in the Canticles: "They made me a keeper of vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

The increase of valuable institutions, formed for the purpose of extending the kingdom of Christ throughout the earth, calls for perpetual gratitude to God, who thus designs to bless our favored island with the light of his truth, and to stir up his faithful servants to those interesting labors of love. But it never was the design of Infinite Wisdom, that one duty should extirpate another. As every thing is beautiful in its season, so there is a time for every thing. The art of accomplishing much, consists in giving to every duty its proper place, time, and quantity. Here much wisdom is required; yet by prayer, watchfulness, and self-denial, much practical knowledge may be attained.

When we seldom retire for holy converse with God, is there not great reason to suspect some latent, though perhaps unconscious repugnance to the more silent, unobtrusive offices of secret devotion? Some people grow almost melancholy if much alone. This surely betrays a defect either in the constitution or the heart. Absolute solitude is decidedly injurious; since He who made us has declared, that "it is not good that man should be alone." But occasional retirement, for the delightful purpose of holding converse with the Savior, greatly refreshes the spiritual faculties, just as rest from bodily labor recruits the wasted powers of our animal

frame.

Some good men are so wedded to their studies, that they can scarcely force themselves from their beloved retreat; while others are so fond of active pursuits, that their minds seem averse to the sedentary employments of the closet. Like birds of passage, they live upon the wing. Both these extremes are faulty, and consequently hurtful to each party. Every man has his circle of duty to fill up. This is larger or smaller, according to the station in which God has placed him. Let no one think that he may live for himself alone. Each individual has a sphere of usefulness to occupy; and his happiness is closely connected with the performance of his duty. Our divine Redeemer has left us an example that we should tread in his steps. May we daily study the conduct of Him whose life was one continued exercise of unwearied benevolence— "who went about doing good."

Nothing can more beautifully exemplify the duties of holy retirement and active benevolence, than the life of Jesus. In the Gospels, we read how incessant were his labors for the spiritual and temporal good of the thousands who followed him. And there we also read, how "he went up into a mountain apart to pray;" how "when the evening was come, he was there alone;" how "he continued all night in prayer to God." This he did, not occasionally, but frequently; thus setting us an illustrious example of ardent devotion, combined with unceasing exertion for the present and future happiness of fallen man.

Come, then, Oh! my soul, and withdraw yourself from a thoughtless world, which is so eagerly pursuing the phantom of happiness. Look unto Jesus—place all your affections upon him. He is the only source of spiritual felicity. While delighting yourself in the active services of a loving obedience, seek an increase of grace by daily secret converse with the Savior. We love the society of a dear friend. Can we then be strangers to communion with Jesus, if we indeed love him? Oh! that we may feel a sweeter relish for sacred retirement, when this retirement is designed to cultivate a closer acquaintance with our own hearts, and with Him who is "the chief among ten thousand,"— the "altogether lovely One."

Blessed Spirit of grace and truth, shed forth your kindly influences on my soul. Preserve me from spiritual sloth, under the specious mask of religious retirement; and from ostentatious pride, under the imposing garb of active benevolence. Oh! make me sincere in all my professions of love and obedience; simply depending on your grace, while laboring to promote the welfare of my fellow-creatures; that in all things I may be willing to do and suffer your righteous will.

Jesus! my soul would now repose  
Beneath the banner of your love:  
Each rising storm do you compose,  
Each darkening cloud far hence remove.

Beneath your smile is heavenly bliss;  
How sweet in solitude with thee!  
My soul, in such a world as this,  
May now from anxious cares be free.

Reveal your mercies to my heart;  
With joy my longing spirit fill;  
Your grace unceasingly impart,  
To do and suffer all your will.