



I have often been asked why I have so many OLD books in my library instead of more contemporary works. The reason, of course, is that truth and devotion to God are timeless treasures and, it so happens, that the more ancient writers were far more closely devoted to God and His immutable truths than are the more modern writers (there are few exceptions to this understanding).

I have frequently referred to the Rev. William Arnot as my dear friend though he lived and wrote about one hundred and fifty years ago in England. I see no disparity in considering a man whose writings have taught me so much about the Love of God and His Scriptures as has the Rev. Arnot. Whether he spoke them directly to my ears, or wrote them on paper for my understanding, is irrelevant – one teaches me great truth is a dear friend like unto that One Friend *“that sticketh closer than a brother.”*

The Rev. Arnot taught me, in my childhood reading, tantalizing similarities about the magnetic compass and the Gospel of Christ; the great Anchor of the Soul as compared to a ship facing, headlong, the gales of the storm; and a hundred other natural laws and objects that point to Christ. Below is one of his excellent commentaries on the Strait Gate:

THE STRAIT GATE NOT A SHUT GATE

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” — Matt. 7: 14.

In the Scriptures, as in God whom they reveal, "goodness and severity" are marvelously united and harmonized. Sometimes this side, and sometimes that is more directly presented to view, but both are present in every exhibition of divine truth. When one is set forth in the light, the other necessarily remains in shade; and it is by alternate presentations that a full and impartial view is obtained. When mercy is, in express terms, held forth to men, a careful observer may trace the outline of judgment lying in fainter light behind it; when judgment is displayed, it leans on a back-ground of

love. The sweetest promise holds in solution the terrors of the Lord; terrors have mercy in their bosom, and burst in blessings on the head of the penitent. "Come unto me, ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; "here is a promise, distilling like dew from the Lord's own lips; but the other side of that tender word is a sword that might pierce the joints and marrow of every formalist. If the weary who come to Christ are saved, the weary who do not come to Christ perish.

Again, look to the sharp threatening, " Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;" and through the dark transparency you may read, in lines of light beyond, the cheering counterpart, Turn and live.

Such is the character of the Bible as a whole; and in this respect our text may serve as an illustrative specimen.

Every word of God is needed, each in its own place, as the sustaining food of his children. The terrors are as useful and as necessary as the promises. The same God who made day and night to serve different yet conspiring purposes in nature, has exhibited alternate streaks of light and shade in the revelation of his will to men.

Righteousness and peace embrace each other throughout all providence and all grace. Wherever mercy is manifested in the gospel, there is a just God; wherever justice frowns, it is making way for mercy. These two agree in one. Conspicuously they meet in Christ crucified. There "the goodness and severity of God" are most clearly seen. It is beside the cross that you may see a sinner saved and a sinner lost. Those who trust in Christ cannot be lost; those who distrust cannot be saved.

The text is a scroll written within and without. The sterner aspect is turned this way. Judgment is the direct and ostensible announcement; but mercy lies within, and obliquely glances through the folds.

While the unbending requirements of the divine holiness are here proclaimed more loudly, the still small voice of invitation and encouragement is equally articulate and sure.

We shall glance first at the side of the text which is more obviously presented, and then endeavor to read the inscription which lies more in the shade. We shall take nothing out of the text, except what even the less instructed may easily see lying in it. Our effort shall be, not to bring our own meaning into the text, but to bring out of the text, for our own and others' use, the meaning with which the Holy Spirit has charged it.

I. **The faithfulness of a Holy God**,—the meaning which lies more obvious on the surface.

II. **The tenderness of a merciful Father**,—the meaning which lies in the heart, and more faintly, but not less certainly shines through.

I. **The faithfulness of a holy God**. "*Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*" Sin has separated man from God, and the whole world lies in an "outer darkness." In this state all men are born, and in this state all abide, unless and until they are saved, one by one, in Christ. All the world is a way. It is so broad that the whole generation for the time travel abreast upon it. Like a river ever flowing is the stream of human life, moving along that worldwide path. Cold, dark, dead is the mass; outward, downward it flows. The world is a lost world. We are of it at first, and shall perish with it at last, unless in the day of mercy we come out from it, and enter into life new creatures in Christ.

To the perishing a Messenger has come, and the message which he brings is life from the dead. Christ died for our sins, and rose again for our justification. To the poor the gospel is preached. To you, men, he calls, and his voice is to the sons of men.

Whosoever will, let him come.

Such are the glad tidings that have come from heaven to earth. But what sound is this that grates upon our ears; and whence does it proceed? It is the voice of Jesus, and it proclaims, "*Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life.*" Strait, narrow, few! These are hard sayings, who can hear them? Ah! it is still the same as it was in the period of his personal ministry. Many when they hear him, and take into their minds some faint glimpses of his meaning, go away and walk no more with him.

Brethren, will ye also go away? But to whom can you go, when you flee from this speaker? These, though they thunder in an unclean conscience like the knell of doom,—these are the words of eternal life. There is no gentler Savior than he who utters them; there is no easier path to heaven than that to which they point. The way that leads down to destruction is broad and easy. It requires no exertion, no self-denial, no crucifying of sinful desires. You have nothing more to do than lie like a withered leaf upon the stream, and without a thought or an effort you are carried quickly down. Sinners do not find it difficult to sin.

But to turn from this broad path unto the narrow way of life is difficult. It does not fall in with the current of a man's natural affections to follow the Lamb in the way of life. The act is above nature; a man cannot do it: the act is contrary to nature; a man will not do it. The terms are, "*If any will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.*" "*The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other*" (Gal. v. 17). They who would walk with Christ must hold themselves ready to cut off" offending right arms, and pluck out offending right eyes. Men do not like to do that even although they know and confess it to be necessary. Many stand and shiver on the edge of the kingdom, resolving to plunge into it someday, but every day postponing the painful act till the morrow. Alas, if they stand near the kingdom considering, until death overtake them, they will drop on the outside and come short of it for ever!

I speak here not to the careless who have never experienced the pain of conviction, but to the convinced who hang back because the step forward is difficult. I dare not go about to tell you that it is easy. I cannot make a plainer gospel than that which I find here. I cannot call that easy which Jesus pronounced hard; or that' wide which he declared to be narrow. A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he. Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one of these words. He is the Truth, and he has said, "*Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life.*" The gate unto life is strait. Dreams, by their unfettered combinations, give sometimes a better picture of great spiritual facts than any of the limited occurrences of actual life. It would appear that the human spirit during sleep is less clogged by the body, and capable of a freer, wider range. In the visions of the night you may have been in some unknown place of great but indefinite danger. All was dark above, all slippery beneath, all enemies around. You were about to be swallowed up. You tried to flee, but your limbs were feeble, they would not bear you up; your limbs were cramped, they would not carry you forward. By painful efforts, stumbling at every step, you reach a lofty wall within which lies safety; but you are exposed without, and unable to climb over. At length you discover a door in the wall at some distance, and make for the spot with all your might.

On the way your feet sink in the mire of clay. After a long struggle you reach the place, only to discover that the opening is too narrow to let your body through. But as

the case is desperate you make an effort. Pressing, agonizing in, you are caught on every side. A sense of suffocation creeps over you, and you faint away.

You are glad when you awake, although with a beating heart, and find that it is a dream. I have gone into the dim, middle region of sleep for a picture, because I have never seen one on all this waking world that so truly represents the state of the case. The unconverted, when some rays of light from the Scriptures come into the conscience, become alarmed. They apprehend danger, dread hell, and cast a longing look to heaven. They would like to go into the place where they have been told sinners will be safe, but there is no entrance that will admit the old man. They are afraid of being cast away, and yet are not willing to be stripped of their own selves in passing through the narrow entrance into life.

There is no wider gate in the wall of heaven for the convenience of those who would like to carry in themselves and their sins. Except a man be born again, he can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God. A freer gospel than that is not a true gospel. If sinners are saved, either God must change or they. He changeth not ; nothing that defileth shall enter into his presence. In the act of coming, the old man must be put off. It is a rending,—it is a crucifying of the flesh. If you think it enough to condemn any religious system that it runs counter to the strong current of a human will, you will reject Christ and the salvation which he brings. The offence of the cross has not ceased. He who bare it for us warns us plainly that we must bear it with him. The chief practical danger lies not in resolving to remain without, but in delaying to arise and press in. I think not many—perhaps not one whom I address will be lost through a formal determination not to agree to the Savior's terms; those who perish under the sound of the gospel perish mainly through a delay in closing with the offer and the offerer. A disease appears in one of your limbs. It is local in its character, and may be safely removed from the body; but it is deadly in its nature, and if not removed will bring your body to the grave. You know the state of the case. You know that your life depends on the severance of the infected member; but you shudder at the prospect of the operation. You know that it must be done, but you do not like to do it. Most natural! None who has a brother's heart will harshly upbraid you for your weakness. But a true friend, although he sympathizes with you in your suffering, will give no countenance to your refusal, or your procrastination. The poison will soon spread through the frame. If the deed is not done to-day, it may be done too late to-morrow.

Brethren, a deadly disease is in your immortal being. The part must be put off, if you would enter into life. To know and confess that it must be done will not save you. To go about sad all your days because it must be done will not save you. Nothing will save but doing it.

There is the gate. It is strait. The compassionate Redeemer of men has told us that it is strait. He will not make it wider that the carnal may get through. Although a whole world should remain without and perish because it is strait, God will not make the entrance easier. The terms are clear and fixed. There is no ambiguity, and will be no change. The carnal are invited to enter the kingdom of God, but it is by a gate which will crush off their corrupt nature as they go in. Strive to enter. There is no other entrance, and no time to be lost. If it be not now, it may be never.

II. The tenderness of a merciful Father.

See now, in a series of four separate points, the consolation which the text contains:

1 . There is a gate.

When a window is opened in heaven to display a terror. The gate is strait, we see within, and read the mercy, There is a gate. Such is the union of mercy and

righteousness in God's covenant, that wherever one is manifested, the other also is exposed to view. In the very fact of telling the sinful that the gate is strait, the Scripture makes known for comfort to the convicted that there is a gate. While the ostensible announcement is, Your corruptions must be excluded, the covert intimation is, Yourself may go in. In form the text is a stroke directed against a sinful man, but in its nature it is intended to take effect only on the man's sin to destroy it, and so permit the emancipated man to enter into the joy of his Lord.

Within this faithfulness lies love; the way is not easy to the carnal mind, but there is a way. This is a father's voice. It is rough, as beseems it, when the child is prodigal. The sounds are forbidding, "strait," "narrow," "few,"—but the words forbid the entrance only of that which defileth. A father's heart is yearning beneath this stern look. He keeps back the filth, and rags, and employments, and associates of the prodigal; but he receives his lost and returning child. The gate is narrow,—tremble, self-pleasing, worldly, godless men ; but be of good cheer, weeping, heart-broken, conscience-stricken sinner, for the gate is not shut. The way is open. Yet there is room in the Lord's heaven,—the Lord's heart,—for you. If some of the Queen's soldiers were taken prisoners by the enemy', and confined in a fortress far in the interior of a forlorn land; and if an intimation were conveyed to the captives by a friendly hand that, at a certain part of their prison walls there is an opening to liberty and home, but that the opening is narrow and the path beyond it rough, their hearts would forthwith fill with joy. They would feel already free. Strait gate! what do they care for its straitness?—enough for them that there is a gate. Ere that setting sun get round to gild the east again, many long miles will be between them and the house of bondage. Surer and safer is their outgate, if slaves to sin were as willing to be free.

2. The gate leadeth unto life.

If the passage is dark and narrow like the grave, the mansion in which it issues is as bright as heaven, and as large as eternity. If one set of pleasures must be crushed by the straitness of the entrance, another set of pleasures begin as soon as you emerge into the light and liberty that lie beyond. If you have put off the old man, you have put on the new.

If the pleasures of sin must be left behind, the pleasures of holiness await you at God's right hand for evermore. If there is pain in the regeneration, there is gladness in a new life. From within the kingdom, even as it exists imperfectly on earth, already resounds the hum of a happy home ; the strait gate and the new life to which it led are woven both into a hymn, and sung in faith by saints before they get a sight of glory: "*We went through fire and water, but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place*" (Ps. 66. 12).

3. Those who enter neither make nor open the gate; they only find it.

Although the gate is strait, it appears from the text that its straitness is not the ultimate reason why so few go in. It is not Written, "Few there be that can force through", but, "*Few there be that find it.*" Men spend their strength for nought in efforts to escape from condemnation where the Mediator has not made a way.

Though awakened sinners labor in the fires, they can never make any impression on the wall of wrath that stands between the wicked and the favor of God. The first Adam's sin was our way out. We were carried out in him before any individual personal departure was yet possible. When our individual life begins, it begins in a distant place, and with an alienated spirit.

When one of these strangers in a strange land begins to learn the history of man's apostasy, and the alienation of his own heart, his first thought is to retrace his steps. He has come out from God's favor by sin; he will return by holiness. Forthwith he falls to

work in earnest. Alas, that way is shut. Outside the frowning barrier swarm the multitudes of all kindreds and tongues, who strive to be their own saviors. One will give ten thousand rivers of oil. Another, more alarmed, and more in earnest, will give the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul. Another will waste or wound his own flesh at the bidding of a priest who will assure him of an entrance. Another, without the intervention of any human mediator, will, under the spur of an alarmed but unenlightened conscience, abandon this life to blank, slavish fear, not daring to enjoy any comfort or any hour, in order that he may more surely propitiate the judge, and finally make his way into heaven. It is all labor lost. There is no gate on that side, and you cannot make one. By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. As long as the terms are, Keep the commandments, all men must go away sorrowful. There is no salvation in any or all of these efforts. Beware of a fatal mistake at this point.

When you are taught that all your efforts absolutely go for nothing, do not imagine that therefore God is indifferent to the fulfilment of his own law. He is ready to accept obedience whenever and wherever it is offered. He does not recede from the terms which his ambassador offered in the course of his mission: "*If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments.*" It is not that he draws back from this bargain; but that no man fulfils its terms. We offer to God what we call righteousness, but it is not righteousness. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and nothing but love. As long as you labor to get God's anger appeased, it is not love that inspires your effort.

In the nature of things, a struggle to avert God's anger cannot be the fruit of love to God. It is not your love of a God who is ready to condemn you that takes his condemnation away, but the free removal of the condemnation that makes you begin to love God. Once alienated and under condemnation, a man can never gain a footing to begin upon, that he may work his way back into favor. By the nature both of God and of man, it is impossible. The love that would engender obedience, cannot itself begin to be, until his anger is taken away. The wall meets you on this side, and there is no opening. Christ shows, —Christ is the way. In Adam, we came out by his fall; in Christ, we go in on the ground of his righteousness. To be in Christ by faith—that is necessary, and that is enough. He goes in by righteousness, and bears in all his own. All the delay and all the loss occur through the error of trying to make a gate, instead of seeking the gate that is already made. Its straitness, though hard to nature, never yet kept one earnest inquirer out. It is true of all who enter that they were stript of their old nature in the passage; but it is true of all who remain without, that they perish, not because the gate is narrow, but because they expended all their time and strength on a side where there is not a gate at all. Be of good cheer : that which is impossible is not necessary; that which is necessary is not impossible. The word is not, Make a way, but Seek the way that Christ has made.

4. He who made the way, and keeps it open now, is glad when many "go in thereat"

"*Few there be that find it*" Does that word FEW resound in your ear as a deep-drawn threat that closes heaven against the common throng of average humanity? Does it steal over you in hours of solitude, as if it would choke the breath of your hope? Do not wrest the Scriptures to your own destruction. Do not misread and misrepresent the plain meaning of the best teacher. He takes it ill when his words are turned upside down, and his truth thereby changed into a lie. Who said that few find the way, and in what tone did he utter the words?

Jesus spoke them, and spoke them with a sigh. His complaint that few are coming is the sweetest and strongest encouragement for all to come. What proportion of human kind, in any one, or in all generations, shall, in point of fact, be saved, and what proportion lost, is a question with which we have no concern, and which our Teacher expressly refused to answer. It is our business not to pry into the secret things of God,

but to look upon the world as it lies in wickedness, and strive to diminish the crowds that are thronging the broad way. " Few," in the lips of Jesus, is not the final summation of the names in the Lamb's Book of Life, after the accounts of time are closed, but the invitation to them that are ready to perish, while yet their day of grace is running, and before the door is shut.

Few! Bbut, Lord, are there not a multitude whom no man can number already walking with thee in white, and many thousands more than Jewish prophets reckon of, now in the body saved, waiting for the call to rest? Yes; and yet there is room. His soul is not satisfied yet. He is yearning for more, and will yearn, as long as one sinner remains on earth unsaved. Although he saw the lost coming to himself, the Savior, like doves to their windows, and coming in numbers like the sand on the seashore, he would still cry. Few, as long as any lingered. We owe great thanks to Jesus for speaking this word. Enough is a word that sometimes rends a human heart, and quenches hope's last feeble rays under a black, suffocating cloud of despair. The great ship, pierced by a sunken rock, is slowly settling down in the sea. The boats are lowered, and filled with a promiscuous throng of young and old, male and female. Each boat shoves off" as soon as it has taken in its complement. The largest lingered longest, because it can take in most. At last the stern voice of the officer in charge resounds clear above the hum of the eager multitude: Enough; give way. That word sank, like the dart of death, into the hearts of the helpless remnant who were left upon the wreck.

If Jesus should to-day send a great angel, with a commission to stand with one foot on the land, and another on the sea, and cry, Enough ! heaven is full, and the Savior satisfied has shut the gate ! If one should dream that he heard from heaven this dreadful message, and be awakened by the shock, how sweetly then would the tender plaint of Jesus— "*Few there be that find it*" — fall upon his startled ear.

This is the word that meets a man to-day when he awakens from the sleep of sin, trembling in terror of the judgment. It is the voice of Jesus issuing yet from an open heaven. He complains few are coming; sinners are the kind he came to seek; he has gotten some, and is wanting more,—is wanting you.