


NEWMAN HALL

EWMAN HALL, a noted English Nonconformist divine, was born at Maidstone, Kent, May 22, 1816, and was educated at Highbury College and London University. Entering the Congregational ministry he was from 1842 to 1854 pastor of the Albion Congregational Church at Hull, and in the latter year was called to the Surrey Chapel, Blackfriars Road, London. His London congregation subsequently built a great church in Westminster Bridge Road, in early English Gothic style, its tower, 200 feet high, being erected in memory of Abraham Lincoln with funds collected in England and the United States. When our Civil War broke out, Newman Hall warmly advocated the cause of the North, and subsequently made two extended lecture tours in the United States, seeking by his words and influence to bring about international good feeling. Since 1893 he has been pastor emeritus of the Westminster Bridge Road congregation, London. He is not only widely known as an eloquent preacher, but has had an extended influence as a religious and devotional writer, his famous tract, "Come to Jesus" (1846), having been translated into over twenty languages. Other works by him are "The Land of the Forum and the Vatican" (1855); "The Christian Philosopher Triumphant over Death"; "It Is I"; "Memoir of Rowland Hill"; "Sermons" (1868); "From Liverpool to St. Louis" (1870); "Mountain Musings"; "Pilgrim Songs in Cloud and Sunshine" (1871); "Prayer: Its Reasonableness and Efficacy" (1875), and "Gethsemane; or Leaves of Healing from the Garden of Grief."

SERMON: CHRISTIAN VICTORY

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."—Rev. ii, 17.

THE Christian life is often compared in Scripture to a warfare. Followers of Jesus are "soldiers." They are exhorted to put on "the whole armor of God." They "fight the good fight of faith." Some of you have long been engaged in the conflict: others have more recently entered upon it. But, whether young or old in the Christian career, all find it necessary to be constantly stirred up to watchfulness against the never-ceasing assaults of the foe. It

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is not enough to put on the armor and to commence the battle. He that overcometh, and he alone, will receive the salutation, "Well done, good and faithful servant,"—he alone shall "lay hold upon eternal life."

But we are not left to fight without encouragement. As generals before a battle go in front of their troops to stimulate them to valor, so Christ, the Captain of our Salvation, leads on the consecrated hosts of his elect; and having himself set us a glorious example of valor and victory, animates us to follow in his footsteps by the "exceeding great and precious promises" of his Word. Christian warrior!—let your eye be lifted up to him. . . .

A great war is going on between the Church and the powers of darkness. It is not an affair of strategy between two vast armies, wherein skilful manœuvres determine the issue, many on either side never coming into actual combat; but every Christian has to fight hand to hand with the enemy. We cannot be lost in the crowd. We may not stand in the middle of the hollow square, without sharing the perils of the outer rank. Every Christian must not only occupy his post in the grand army, but must personally grapple with the foe.

Before conversion there was no fighting. The devil's suggestions and the heart's inclinations were allied. Then we did the enemy's bidding, or were lulled to sleep by his intoxicating cup. But when light shone into the soul, and we strove to escape, the struggle began. God, as our Creator and Redeemer, justly demands our obedience and love. Whatever interferes with these claims, is an enemy summoning us to battle. The world of frivolity is our foe. How numerous and insinuating are its temptations—the more perilous because of the difficulty of defining them!

Moreover, lawful pleasures and necessary cares become dangerous when they cease to be subordinate to the love of God. The enjoyments he bestows and the labors he appoints, are calculated to minister to godliness,—and yet they may be perverted to idolatry, by our forgetting him on whom our highest thoughts should be fixed. What danger is there that things in themselves holy and beautiful may thus become pernicious and destructive!

The flesh, too, furnishes its contingent to the army of our foes. Not that any of our natural appetites, being divinely bestowed, can have in them the nature of sin. No! the flesh, as God made it, is pure and holy. But those instincts, which, regulated by the revealed will of their Author, are “holiness to the Lord,” may, by unhallowed gratification, become those “fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” As we carry about with us these animal propensities, there is necessity for constant vigilance lest our own nature, being abused, should become our destroyer.

Inbred depravity lurks in the heart of even the true believer. Though dethroned, it is not completely expelled. With what selfishness, covetousness, vanity, hastiness of temper, uncharitableness, have we not to contend! Who has not some sin which most easily besets him? How varied are the forms of unbelief! Spiritual pride, too, corrupts our very graces, piety itself furnishing an occasion of evil, so that when we have conquered some temptation or performed some duty, our victory is often tarnished, our holy things corrupted, by our falling into the snare of self-complacency.

Above all, there is that great adversary who “goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” He avails himself of the world, and the flesh, and the infirmities of the spirit, to tempt the soul to sin. This is no fable, although

one of Satan’s most skilful stratagems is to make men disbelieve in his existence. Overlooked or despised, a foe is already half victorious. But the Captain of our Salvation, in his word, often warns us both of the craft and of the violence of our adversary. We sometimes read of “the wiles of the devil;” and sometimes of “the fiery darts of the wicked one.” They who fail to watch and pray, are sure to be vanquished by such a foe.

These are our enemies! And if we would possess the promise we must “overcome.” A mere profession of religion is of no avail. It is not enough for our name to appear on the muster-roll of the camp. Many wear the soldier’s dress who know nothing of the soldier’s heart. Many are glad to glitter on the grand parade who fall off from the hard-fought, blood-stained battle-field. It is not enough to buckle on our armor; many do this, and lay it aside again. We must devote ourselves entirely and unreservedly to this great daily battle of life.

There is no exemption of persons. Women must fight, as well as men; the tender and the timid must be as Amazons in the conflict. Children must carry the shield, and wield the sword. The aged and infirm must keep the ranks. The sick and wounded must not be carried to the rear. No substitute can be provided, and there is no discharge in this war.

There is no exemption on account of circumstances. The rich and poor, the learned and the unlearned, the cheerful and the sad, all must fight. No accumulation of trouble, no unexpected death of friends, can be an excuse for laying down our arms. We must go to the marriage feast, and we must attend the funeral procession, as warriors, wearing our armor and grasping our weapons. We must be like those spoken

of by Nehemiah, "every man with one hand wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon."

There is no exemption of place. Foes lie in wait for the Christian wherever he goes—in the mart of commerce, in the busy workshop, when he returns to his home, when he rests on his bed, in the bustle of the day, in the silence of the night, in the circle of his friends, in the bosom of his family, in society, alone, in the city, in the fields, in his walks of benevolence, in his private meditations, in the church, in his secret retirement, when he worships with the great congregation, and when he enters his closet and shuts the door. He can never elude the enemy; he carries the foe in his own breast; the conflict ceases not!

There is no exemption of time, no season of rest. No truce is sounded. Satan never beats a retreat, except to lead us into an ambushade. No white flag comes out that can be trusted. If we parley, it is at our peril; if we pause, we are wounded or taken captive. Wars on earth may often terminate by mutual agreement. It is a war of extermination; no quarter is given; either we must trample Satan under foot, or Satan will drag us down to hell!

It is a warfare until death. While we are in the body it will be always true—"We wrestle." The oldest Christian cannot lay aside his weapons. "Having done all, stand." A great word that! "Having done all!" "What!" you may say, "after a long life of conflict, surely I may put aside my armor, and sheathe my sword, and recline on some sunny bank, and enjoy myself after my victory!"

No; you must not expect it; "having done all" it is enough if you stand at bay on the battle-ground; all you can hope for in this world is to maintain your post, still defying the foe, who will be still meditating fresh attacks. You will

never be able to say with St. Paul, "I have fought a good fight," until you can also say, "I have finished my course."

It is not the appearance of fighting. It is not a few faint, irresolute strokes. "So fight I," said the Apostle, "not as one that beateth the air." We must be resolute, determined, in earnest, giving our enemy no advantage. We must "not give place to the devil." We must watch against the smallest beginnings of sin. By "keeping the heart with all diligence," by putting on "the whole armor of God," by having faith as our shield, righteousness as our breastplate, the hope of salvation as our helmet, by keeping "the sword of the Spirit" bright with exercise, "praying with all prayer," standing near our Captain, looking to him, relying upon him, knowing that "without him we can do nothing,"—so must we fight! All this is necessary, if we would overcome.

It is not so easy to fight this fight as some suppose. It is not a true faith merely, an evangelical creed, a scriptural church, a comfortable sermon once or twice a week, a little Sabbath-keeping, an agreeable pause in your pleasures, giving to them a new relish—it is not this which constitutes Christianity. You that think religion so very easy a thing, have a care lest, when too late, you find that you knew not what true religion meant.

Easy? A depraved being to trample upon his lusts—a proud being to lie prostrate with humility and self-reproach—they that are "slow of heart to believe," to receive the Gospel as little children?

Easy? To "crucify the flesh," "to deny ungodliness," "to cut off a right hand, and to pluck out a right eye?"

Easy? To be in the world, and yet not of the world—to come out from it, not by the seclusion of the cloister, but by holiness of life,—to be diligent in its duties, yet not absorbed

by them; appreciating its innocent delights, and yet not ensnared by them; beholding its attractions, and yet rising superior to them?

Easy? To live surrounded by objects which appeal to the sight, and yet to endure as seeing what is invisible?

Easy? To pray and see no answer to prayer, and still pray on—to fight this battle, and find fresh foes ever rising up, yet still to fight on—to be harassed with doubts and fears, and yet walk on in darkness, though we see no light, staying ourselves upon God?

Easy? To be preparing for a world we have never visited, in opposition to so much that is captivating in a world where we have always dwelt, whose beauties we have seen, whose music we have heard, whose pleasures we have experienced?

Easy? To resist that subtle foe who has cast down so many of the wise and the mighty?

Easy? When Jesus says it is a "strait gate," and that if we would enter we must "strive," bidding us "take up our cross daily, deny ourselves and follow him?" Ah! it is no soft flowery meadow, along which we may languidly stroll, but a rough, craggy cliff that we must climb. "To him that overcometh!" It is no smooth, placid stream, along which we may dreamily float, but a tempestuous ocean we must stem. "To him that overcometh!" It is no easy lolling in a cushioned chariot, that bears us on without fatigue and peril. The trumpet has sounded to arms; it is not peace, but war, war for liberty, war for life, on the issue of which our everlasting destiny depends! If we are to be saved, we must "overcome."

But though the conflict is arduous, the encouragements are great. We have armor of proof. We have a mighty Cham-

peon. Victory is ensured to the brave. Others who stood on the same battle-field and fought with the same enemies, are now enjoying an eternal triumph. Not one faithful warrior ever perished. Their foes were not fewer than ours, their strength was not greater. They overcame by the same "blood of the Lamb" on which we rely.

"Once they were mourning here below,
And wet their couch with tears;
They wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins, and doubts, and fears."

But they are wearing their crowns, they are enjoying their rest; and the feeblest and most unworthy of our own day, trusting in the same Saviour, shall inherit the same promise. Then let us overcome. Sheathe not the sword, and it shall never be wrested from you; lay not down the shield, and no fiery dart shall ever penetrate it; face the foe, and he shall never trample you down, never drive you back.

Listen to your Captain; how he animates you onward! Look to the crown he is ready to bestow upon you; eat of the hidden manna which he gives; read the name in the "white stone,"—the name of God,—his name of love, recorded for your encouragement; and thus be animated to walk worthy of this holy alliance, and not to allow the foe to wrench from you such an assurance of divine favor, such a passport to heavenly bliss.

A little more conflict, and that "white stone" shall introduce you to the inheritance above, where, in the everlasting repose of the inner sanctuary, you shall without intermission eat of the hidden manna.

"Then let my soul march boldly on,
Press forward to the heavenly gate;
There peace and joy eternal reign,
And glittering robes for conquerors wait."

Some of you may consider this subject visionary and unreal. You say, "I know nothing of this warfare. I know what the conflict of business is, the race of fashion, the bustle of toil or pleasure; but to anxiety about spiritual things I am a stranger."

You are enjoying peace—but—what peace? There is a captive in a dungeon—his limbs are fast chained to the walls—yet he is singing songs. How is it? Satan has given him to drink of his drugged cup, and he does not know where he is. Look at that other. He says, "it is peace." There is truly no fighting, but he is grovelling in the dust, and the heel of his foe is upon his neck. Such is the peace of every one going on in his wickedness, unpardoned and unsaved. "Taken captive by the devil at his will."

Chained in Satan's boat, you are swiftly gliding down the stream to ruin, and because it is smooth, you dream that it is safe! What is the difference between the saint and the sinner? Not that in the saint there is no sin. Not that in the sinner there is never a thought about God. The difference is this—that the saint is overcoming his sin; but the sin is overcoming the sinner. O, what a terrible thing if sin have the upper hand! No "hidden manna" is yours. The symbols of religion you may look at, but real religion must be a stranger to you. You know not its enjoyment. You do not taste it. It is a hidden thing. Heaven too will be hidden. You hear of its gates of pearl—but they will never open to you. You may catch the distant accents of its songs—but in those songs you will never join. And that "white stone" cannot be yours. You have no joyful anticipation of heaven—but a fearful looking-for of fiery indignation—or else the insensate resolve not to think at all. And the "new name"—no! you cannot read it! You know God by

no such name as makes you seek his company. The thought of him renders you unhappy, and therefore you banish it from your mind. You are not now alarmed, but soon the spell may be broken, and you may find the chains riveted upon your soul forever.

I fancy I hear you say, "I wish that before it is too late, I could escape! But mine is a hopeless case. My heart is hardened against the Gospel, and evil habit has so got the mastery over me, that I have no power to begin this conflict!"

No, you have no power; but One has visited this world, and taken our nature, who can help you. The mighty Son of God became the suffering Son of Man, that he might be the Liberator of our enslaved race. He burst open the prison doors, that captive souls might escape. He stands near you, ready to break off your fetters and strengthen you to fight the enemy who has so long oppressed you. Tell him your simple but sad tale; how helpless, how miserable, how ruined you are! Tell him you want to be saved, but know not how to begin the work, and ask him both to begin and complete it for you! Let your prayer be this: "Be merciful to me a sinner;" and he who "came to destroy the works of the devil," he "whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and to forgive," will receive your "humble petitions; and though you be tied and bound with the chain of your sins, he, in the pitifulness of his great mercy, will loose you."

He will pardon your past shameful concessions to the foe, and, arraying you in "the whole armor of God," and animating you with his Holy Spirit, he will enable you so to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil, that you also shall share in the prize of them that overcome; you also shall eat of the "hidden manna," and receive the "white stone."