

SUPPLEMENT TO "CANADIAN CHAMPION."

THE WEB OF LIFE.

SERMON IN KNOX CHURCH BY THE REV. M. C. CAMERON, B. D., ON THE DEATH OF THE LATE PETER MACLEAM, F. R. S. L., BEFORE A VERY LARGE AUDIENCE.

"My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle."—Job. 7. 6.

The experience and testimony of men in every age and condition of life, together with the authority of inspiration, abundantly confirm the words of this prophecy. With the rapid flight of time all God's people are partakers of most exalted privileges. They take a calm, intelligent view of the entire situation. Unlike Cicero with his culture, philosophy and eloquence, when mourning as those who have no hope in the disease of his beloved, beautiful daughter, we gladly place against such uncertainty the experience of patriarch, apostle, prophet, saint, those of whom, in the deprivation of health, wealth, loss of life and comforts of home, in the oil of wormwood which self-righteous friends poured into their gaping wounds, could still honor the supreme God and possess their souls in patience. Successive storms, which would have swept others away, only raised those grand old heroes on their mountain billows to higher altitudes of faith, self-conquest and endurance.

Death, apart from revelation, is a great mystery. It is not wonderful that the multitudinous forms of vegetable life, when they have accomplished the object of their creation, should wither and die. Neither is it very strange that the various tribes of inferior animals, possessing no power of thought nor responsibility, should, generation after generation, die, and pass away from earthly habitations. But it is astonishingly strange that a being so formed as man, with high intellectual powers, capable of profound reasoning and research, with a love for life and a reluctance for death, with longings after immortality, having undeveloped capacities, often when these powers of the mind have attained their maturity and the soul enriched with experience and knowledge—science being unable to find a flaw in the human system that would necessarily lead to death—it is a great mystery; I say, that man should sicken, wither and die. Revelation removes the chaos. "The wages of sin is death." "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle."

In dependence upon the Holy Spirit for guidance, let me ask earnest consideration to four truths which this passage has suggested to my mind.

1st. The shuttle flies swiftly, so does life. Those truths with which we are most familiar would seem to be the most difficult to learn and appreciate. The prophet may say, "Son of man, behold I will take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke." We see this prophecy fulfilled in every walk of life, from a Vanderbilt with his millions to the little child on its mother's breast. Only to the few it has a personal voice. We hope that the Dispenser of life and death will pass us by, notwithstanding the often repeated warning in His word that our "days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle." Whether you number your days numerically, or count them by your activity in works of philanthropy and love, are they not few and full of evil? Have you listened to the voices which are sent to separate between the dross and gold of life? The rod, the fire, the cross, and even death itself, reveal a loving Father, who chasteneth His children not for His pleasure, but for their eternal profit. We do not understand why the main support of a family, with so many comforts of home, should be removed so suddenly, nor can we comprehend the many and sore and often special afflictions which befall the righteous, but in this God is declaring a fundamental principle in the government of the world. He shuts us up to faith while sojourning in this probationary state. Faith and trust would not be called into exercise if all were clear and perfect, in God's revelation, in His providential dealings with us. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." We do not know the purposes of our heavenly Father in removing our brother from us, but we shall know hereafter. We know that his days were few—out down in the prime of life. The web of life was woven "swifter than a weaver's shuttle." How prone we are not to prize our days until they are gone. Health is scarcely ever valued correctly until after a bed of sickness. Each day was full of mercy; did we fully appreciate them? Each hour was full of opportunities; did we use them wisely, or abuse them, or, forsooth, we let them pass by forever? The web of life is woven by present opportunities, because "The wheel will never grind to the water that is past."

Brethren, it is a solemn scene to stand by a death-bed and witness the last struggles for life. I desire to throw oil upon the troubled waters, not to agitate, but to calm the wave. My time is largely spent among the dying and the dead. I have often seen the chamber of death odorous with the sweet breath of flowers. I have heard the last words ever spoken, and the last breath ever drawn; I knew that it was death. I have seen the awful change pass over the countenance like a cloud over a summer sun, and realized that the spirit had departed. Watch as closely as you may, you can see nothing depart from the body.

Look at the countenance, after the soul has been separated from the body how rapid and impressive the change! "The shape of the features is there; but the light and animation of the eye have gone; the expression has left the face, and you feel that the intellectual principle has departed." The real man has gone away, and nothing but the residence of the spirit is left behind. It is a sad mistake to suppose that all we ever saw is deposited in the tomb. Think of the soul that once looked out of the eye, the energy that filled the frame, the expression that played about the lips, and say are they committed to the grave? No! The house has only been taken down, while the inmate has departed to the spiritual world. How quickly this is done! "Swifter than a weaver's shuttle." It is done by our Sovereign Lord, our heavenly Father, in infinite mercy, in the plenitude of His grace, not to rot but to enrich, not to kill with grief, but to raise to higher altitudes of life, to mansions prepared for His own people.

II. As the weaver works according to a given pattern, so man should have a purpose in life. The shuttle flies swiftly to and fro, and every thread adds so much to the pattern in the weaver's mind. In weaving the great web of life there should be a definite purpose. You can never rise higher than your model. Water only rises as high as its fountain. Brethren, make your mark high, because you can with all certainty expect great things from God. Our brother, whose death we commemorate to-day, toiled faithfully up the hill of knowledge amid many difficulties, until he reached the honored position which he filled for some years, up to the hour of his death. Labor has sure reward.

I would ask you with all sincerity to have a pattern in the spiritual, as well as in the natural, or intellectual world. The heathen orator would ask you to follow Cicero, or Cato, or some of their false gods, but to the Christian there is only one perfect example—the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "Follow me." Work according to the pattern which He has placed before us in His life, and all is well. O! Christian, partaker of most exalted privileges! Yours are justification by the righteousness of Christ, adoption by the infinite love of God, regeneration by the Holy Spirit applying the work of Christ, sanctification by the unmerited favor of God, and perseverance in holiness through the intercession of Christ. You are not kept from persecution, nor affliction, nor temptation, not even death, but you are kept in these things, watched over by an all-wise and all-powerful Being. Weave the web of life carefully, according to the Divine model, and your heritage shall be love, peace and joy. Sudden death to you shall be sudden glory. "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle."

III. The durability of the piece woven depends on the quality of each thread, so the quality of life depends on the character of the elements which compose it. The strength of a chain depends on the strength of the weakest link. It is the weak threads in the web of life that determine our moral worth. It is this part in the fabric that calls for earnest consideration. Each day adds a thread to the web which we are weaving. No hand can move the shuttle, but thine own. We are only responsible for our own weaving. Your neighbor may be weaving a garment of many colors, but that avails you nothing. Turn your eye inward to thine heart and behold what a clash of colors! How many of them refuse to blend into an article of intrinsic worth? Each day has its far-reaching influences for good or evil, for sin or holiness, for God or the great enemy of our souls. Of how great importance, then, "to number our days," and assiduously watch every element that enters into the great loom of life, out of which garments are woven in time and worn in eternity. "Whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

On what are you resting your hope of salvation? Is it nearer now than when you believed? Twice blessed are they that have a sincere desire to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. Press onward, brethren, to the Golden City; amid all discouragements, deliverance will come! Let us prefer the sufferings of the new life of faith, to the tantalizing sweets of the old. We cannot sink down here and rest in worldly delights; we want a better country. Let our conduct rest upon the hope of immortal blessedness. This desired country therefore is beyond the region of death. The day may be dark and heavy, but "it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light." When our lives are brought into evidence to show that we were believers, all the glory shall be attributed to Christ. There are many defects in the lives of erring humanity, but cheered by the hope that Christ is our sufficiency—a sustaining power, we would weave in the web of life all the Christian graces. Are you willing to separate between you and your sins? One day, Wilberforce on the Isle of Skye noticed a great eagle flying bravely heavenward. He watched it with admiration and delight, but soon noticed that something was wrong with it. It seemed unable to proceed. It was stayed in its course, and by its uncertain movements showed for some reason its strength was failing. Soon it began to fall, and soon it lay a few yards from his feet, a lifeless mass. What could have wrought the change? No human hand had harmed

it. No sportsman's shot had reached it. He went to examine the bird, and what did he find? It had carried up a little vessel in its talons, and as the eagle drew these near to its body for flight, the little creature had wormed itself out of them and had drunk the life-blood from the eagle's breast. How like sin is this! It may seem to be but a little one, just one movement of the shuttle, but it fastens on the soul and worketh death. Will you not give your cause into the hands of Christ, for he will break every chain of sin that binds you to this world?

IV. Lastly, the result in both cases will be examined. The piece of cloth that comes from the loom is examined by the buyer. The web of life is tested by the world, and though the flaw may pass undetected through this life, rest assured that death cannot possibly be deceived. There is one possibility of escape! We must fall before this last enemy, like the field of corn before the reaper's sickle. It is an undeniable fact that death is no respecter of age, person, condition or character. On the same day I have taken the lovely infant from its mother's bosom, and man in the prime of life from his affectionate wife and loving family, and placed both in the tomb; sweet childhood, and vigor of life as well as withered age; the blooming bride as well as the way-worn pilgrim; the vanguard and rear-guard of life. Among kings and subjects, aristocrats and peasants, exalted and obscure, known and unknown, strong and feeble, healthy and sickly, death is no respecter of persons. His way is universal and inexorable; his sweep is universal and inexorable; from the poor and wretched to the rich and noble; from the obscure tenant to the gorgeous chamber and palatial home. "The saint is on the same footing with the sinner; the man of God as the child of Babel; the humble, praying, devoted man or woman as the man or woman devoted to mammon, or fashion or vice and evil-doing. Death is blind to all moral distinctions; he as soon and as remorselessly strikes down the most eminent, the most useful, the most holy and sainted, as the vagabond, the useless, the immoral and vicious. He never raises the question as to readiness, or as to times and seasons, or as to how many hearts will be wrung with anguish, how many interests will suffer, how many souls, in all their sins, hurried into eternity." Brethren, you cannot meet this last enemy, unless you meet him in Christ, who has taken away the sting of death.

Go to the marble city on either side of our town, and look on those last dwelling places of the frail body, and after investigation you will see that the majority are carried home in childhood. The reaper would rather, it seems, cut the blossoms and gather the flowers than wait for the ripened grain. The queen of fashion will not necessarily wear the white robe of purity yonder. What is the texture and coloring of the web of life, viewed with the light that comes from the tomb? O! that our lives were hid with Christ in God—clothed with the perfect robe of His righteousness!

"Yes! It is well! The evening shadows lengthen:
Home's golden gates shine on our ravished sight;
And though the tender ties we strove to strengthen
Break one by one—at evening-time 'tis light."
"Tis well! The earth will all her myriad voices
Has lost the power our senses to enthral;
We hear, above the tumult and the noise,
Soft tones of music, like an angel's call."

Every structure, which is built, must be tested at the final day of reckoning, before the Supreme Reviewer. Time is the enemy of fallacy, and will try every fabric in life. The one that is built upon the "Rock of Ages" will only stand the investigation. The blush of shame will be an infallible witness against us. Why is it that Eddystone lighthouse stands the storms that beat against it—the mighty avalanches of water that roll over it? Is it not that the ingenuity of John Smeaton dovetailed into the living rock and built his structure from a sure foundation? So, brethren, the life that is built upon Christ, the living rock, endures every storm or wave that beats against it. In the Rock that was cleft for us, we are safe. No enemy can dialogue us; no foe mortally wound us! We "are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation."

Is it well with you, my brethren? Are you weaving the web of life in this loom? Is your foundation sure in the land of our pilgrimages? Was our departed brother looking to Christ for strength? He has gone to give an account of his stewardship to the Master. I had many pleasant conversations with him. He had a firm grasp of the great truths of christianity. He acknowledged his weakness, but the promises were so strong and full that he could not doubt. He confessed Christ before the world, and commemorated the dying love of our blessed Lord. He said he attended to the one thing needful. Prayer was always observed in the family circle. My hope is that the custom will always be continued. He said that he was not afraid to die, but if spared, he would do more work than ever for his Master. Our Lear hangs over his wasting form, and cries, "Friend, friend! Stay a little!" His time for departure had come. The Master's call must be obeyed. The shuttle carries the last thread to the web of life. Dead! His latter end was peace. He has passed the bounds of time, the gate of death, and we trust, stands in the golden city, beholding the Master face to face! Amen.