

THE FLATTERER AND THE ENCOUNTER WITH ATHEIST

So they both went on, and *Ignorance* followed. They went then till they came at a place where they saw a way put itself into their way,¹ and seemed withal to lie as straight as the way which they should go; and here they knew not which of the two to take, for both seemed straight before them; therefore here they stood still to consider. And as they were thinking about the way, behold a man black of flesh, but covered with a very light robe, came to them, and asked them why they stood there. They answered, they were going to the Celestial City, but knew not which of these ways to take. Follow me, said the man, it is thither that I am going. So they followed him in the way that but now came into the road, which

A way and a way.

The Flatterer finds them.

Christian and his fellow deluded.

¹ *There is a way, saith Solomon, which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is death.* This is remarkably verified in the present day. What dangerous doctrines are broached under the most plausible appearance of piety? What antinomian practices are allowed by many professors? We need not wonder at such strange perverseness, when the law and testimony are not daily consulted--For want of attending to the note of directions about the way (that is, the Word of God) the poor pilgrims were deceived by the false apostle, and led into the snare.

by degrees turned, and turned them so from the city, that they desired to go to, that in a little time their faces were turned away from it; yet they followed him. But, by and by, before they were aware, he led them both within the compass of a net, in which they were both so entangled, that they knew not what to do;² and with that, the *white robe fell off the black man's back*: then they saw where they were. Wherefore there they lay crying some time, for they could not get themselves out.

They are taken in a net.

2. **Chr.** Then said *Christian* to his fellow, Now do I see myself in an error. Did not the *Shepherds* bid us beware of the flatterers? As is the saying of the wise man, so we have found it this day: *A man that flattereth his neighbor, spreadeth a net for his feet.*

They bewail their condition.

Prov. 29. 5.

3. **Hope.** They also gave us a note of directions about the way, for

² Beware of the flatterer; beware of self, beware of the praise of men; beware of all doctrines which are favorable to the good opinion we are too ready to form of our own wisdom, strength, and attainments. While we preserve a sense of our dependence upon the Lord, and keep our eye upon His word, we are safe, but not a moment longer.

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our more sure finding thereof; but therein we have also forgotten to read, and have not kept ourselves from the paths of the destroyer. Here David was wiser than we; for, saith he, *Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.* Thus they lay bewailing themselves in the net. At last they espied a *Shining One* coming toward them with a whip of small cord in his hand. When he was come to the place where they were, he asked them whence they came, and what they did there. They told him, that they were poor pilgrims going to *Zion*, but were led out of their way by a black man, clothed in white, who bid us, said they, follow him, for he was going thither too. Then said he with the whip, It is *Flatterer*, a false apostle, that hath transformed himself into an angel of light. So he rent the net, and let the men out. Then said he to them, Follow me, that I may set you in your way again; so he led them back to the way which they had left to follow the *Flatterer*. Then he asked them, saying, Where did you lie the last night? They said, With the *shepherds*, upon the *Delectable Mountains*. He asked them then if they had not of those *Shepherds* a note of direction for the way? They answered, Yes. But, did you, said he, when you were at a stand, pluck out and read your note? They answered, No. He asked them, Why? They said, They forgot.³ He

³ The Lord's people have nothing to plead in excuse for their forsaking His good way,

asked moreover, If the *Shepherds* did not bid them beware of the *Flatterer*? They answered, Yes; but we did not imagine, said they, that this fine-spoken man had been he.

4. Then I saw in my dream, That he commanded them to lie down; which when they did, he chastised them sore, to teach them the good way wherein they should walk: and as he chastised them, he said, *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent.*⁴ This done, he bids them go on their way, and take good heed to the other directions of the *Shepherds*. So they thanked him for all his kindness, and went softly along the right way, singing:

*Come hither, you that
walk along the way,
See how the pilgrims fare,
that go astray:*

and getting into the snare; he has not been wanting to them; he has given them directions and warnings in abundance; they have a note of the way, in which they are apprised of every turning; but they are inattentive and forgetful, and therefore often bringing themselves into trouble.

⁴ Though God does not disinherit His children, yet He will visit their sins with rods, and their iniquities with scourges, and this is all the effects of fatherly love. When He frowns and hides His face from His children, he alters not His love, but varies His method of acting towards them. When He chastises them, it is with a view to embitter sin, which He hates, and to make them more conformable to His own holy image, which He loves. Happy afflictions indeed, when this is all the fruit of them, to take away sin!

Rom. 6. 18.
Deut. 25. 2.
2Chron. 6.
26, 27.
Rev. 3. 19.
*Deceivers
fine spoken*

*They are
whipt and
sent on their
way.*

Psal. 17.4.

*A shining
One comes
to them with
a whip in his
hand.*

Prov. 29. 5.
Dan. 11. 32.
2Cor. 11. 13,
14.

*They are
examined,
and con-
victed of
forgetful-
ness.*

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*They caught are in
an entangling net,
'Cause they good counsel
lightly did forget:
'Tis true, they rescued were,
but yet you see
They're scourged to boot:
let this your caution be.*

5. Now, after a while, they perceived afar off, one coming softly, and alone, all along the highway to meet them. Then said *Christian* to his fellow, Yonder is a man with his back toward *Zion*, and he is coming to meet us.

6. **Hope.** I see him, let us take heed to ourselves now, lest he should prove a flatterer also. So he drew nearer and nearer, and at last came up unto them. His name was *Atheist*, and he asked them whither they were going.

*The Atheist
meets them.*

7. **Chr.** We are going to the *Mount Zion*.

8. Then *Atheist* fell into a very great laughter.⁵

*He laughs at
them.*

⁵ We need not go far to find the Atheist. Persons of this stamp are to be found every where. All sin is practical Atheism. What is sin but a casting off our allegiance to God as creator and benefactor? What is sin, but a denial of His holy perfection's, and consequently a striking at His very being? Such atheists we all come into the world, affecting independency, and living without God in the world. And though this inward Atheism is in a great measure subdued by converting grace in the children of God; yet they feel the remains of it in their hearts, which causes them great perplexity,

9. **Chr.** What is the meaning of your laughter?

10. **Atheist.** I laugh to see what ignorant persons you are, to take upon you so tedious a journey, and yet are like to have nothing but your travel for your pains.

11. **Chr.** Why, man? Do you think we shall not be received?

*They reason
together.*

12. **Atheist.** Received! There is no such place as you dream of in all this world.

13. **Chr.** But there is in the world to come.

14. **Atheist.** When I was at home in mine own country, I heard as you now affirm, and from that hearing went out to see, and have been seeking this city these twenty years, but find no more of it than I did the first day I set out.

Jer 22. 13.
Ecl. 10. 15.

15. **Chr.** We have both heard, and believe that there is such a place to be found.

16. **Atheist.** Had not I, when at home, believed, I had not come thus far to seek; but finding none, (and yet I should, had there been such a place to be found, for I have gone to seek it further than you) I am going back again, and will seek to refresh myself with the things that I then

*The Atheist
takes up his
content in
this world*

and too often darkens their faith in eternal things.

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cast away, for hopes of that which I now see is not.

Christian
proveth his
brother Hope-
ful's gracious
answer.
2 Cor. 5. 7.

17. **Chr.** Then said *Christian* to *Hopeful*, his fellow, Is it true which this man hath said?

Remembrance
of former
chastishments,
is a help
against present
temptations.

18. **Hope.** Take heed, he is one of the *flatterers*. Remember what it hath cost us once already for our hearkening to such kind of fellows. What! No *Mount Zion*? Did we not see from the *Delectable Mountains*, the gate of the city?⁶ Also, are we not now to walk by faith? Let us go on, said *Hopeful*, lest the man with the whip overtake us again.

Prov. 19.27.
Heb. 10.39

19. You should have taught me that lesson, which I will round you in the ears withal: *Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge*: I say, my brother, cease to hear him, and let us believe to the saving of the soul.

20. **Chr.** My brother, I did not put the question to thee, for that I doubted of the truth of our belief myself, but to prove thee, and to

fetch from thee a fruit of the honesty of thy heart. As for this man, I know that he is blinded by the God of this world. Let thee and I go on, knowing that we have belief of the truth, and no lie is of the truth.

*The fruit of
an honest
heart.*
I John 2. 11,
21.

21. **Hope.** Now do I rejoice in hope of the glory of God: So they turned away from the man, and he laughing at them, went his way. †

NOTES:

⁶ The tastes and manifestations, which the Lord gives His people of His goodness, and of His glory which shall be revealed, are of singular service against destructive errors. Thus the weakest of them are qualified to slight the most spacious objections of proud reasoning infidels. Perhaps they cannot in a way of argument answer all their cavils; but they have experienced the truth; they have seen, heard, felt, tasted the word of life, and will not be disputed out of their spiritual senses.
