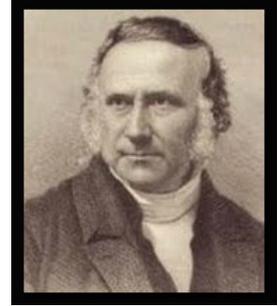


Physical Influence



A member of my church, the mother of a family, was sick, and I visited her. In conversation with her I discovered that her mind was shrouded in darkness and gloom. I prolonged the conversation, hoping to be able so to present divine truth to her mind, that she should see some light, and gain some comfort from the promises; or if I failed in that, hoping to discover the cause of her religious darkness. But it was all in vain. I left her as dark as ever, without discovering the cause of her gloom.

I soon visited her again. She was the same as before. “Dark! dark! all dark!” says she, in answer to my inquiry. “I have not long to live, and I am sure I am not fit to die.” She wept in agony. I pointed her to Christ, and recited to her the promises. I explained justification by faith in Christ Jesus, the undone condition of sinners, salvation by free grace, the offer and operations of the Holy Spirit, and the readiness of Christ to accept all that come unto Him. She only wept and groaned.

With much the same result I conversed with her many times. I could but imperfectly discover what had been the character of her religious exercises while she was in health; but she despised them all, and counted them only as deception. ‘When I treated her as a backslider, and referred her to what the sacred Scriptures address to such persons, inviting them to return unto their God; the very freeness and friendliness of the invitations appeared to distress her. When I treated her as a believer under a cloud, a child of God, from whom our heavenly Father takes away the light of His countenance, for some reason which we cannot explain,—perhaps to manifest His sovereignty, perhaps to teach us

our spiritual dependence, perhaps to arouse our efforts to draw nearer to Him, perhaps to teach us deeper lessons about religion, and give us richer experiences as He leads us, for a time, “in a way we know not,”—all these ideas appeared to increase her distress. If I treated her as an impenitent sinner, it was the same thing. Gloom, distress, despair, had taken possession of her soul!

After I had known her to be in this condition for several months, I called upon her, and to my surprise found that her mind was calm; her despair and distress had given place to hope and gladness of spirit. She could trust in God, she could submit to His will, rejoicing to be in His hands, she could rest upon the sufficiency of her Saviour;—“Jesus Christ is mine,” said she, “and I am glad to be His.”

Three days after this, when I saw her again, her light had departed, and all her former darkness and despair had returned. A few days afterwards, I found she had become calm and hopeful again, and then again in a few days I found her as gloomy as ever. Thus for months she alternated from gloom to gladness, and from gladness to gloom. I could not understand it. I studied her case, and tried in every mode I could think of, to find out why she should thus be tossed about betwixt hope and fear. But I studied in vain.

After awhile, as I was conversing with her one morning, when she was in one of her happy frames, I recollected that she had always been so whenever I had seen her in the morning, and had always been in darkness whenever I had seen her in the afternoon. I mentioned this fact to her, and asked her to account for it. She acknowledged the fact, but made no attempt to explain it. I explained it to her, as the result of her physical condition. Every morning, she awoke free from pain, and then her views were clear, and her mind comfortable. She continued in this comfortable frame till nearly noon, when, as her pain in the head returned, all her peace of mind vanished. This experience was uniform with her, week after week; and when I now called her attention to it, and explained her religious gloom as the result of her physical state, she was satisfied that the explanation was just. But, a week afterwards, when I saw her in the

afternoon, her mind was as dark as ever; and then she rejected the explanation; she could not be made to believe that her darkness was owing to her disease. So it was with her, week after week. She had a comfortable hope every morning; she was in despair every afternoon. In the morning she would believe that her afternoon despair was caused by her bodily infirmity; but in the afternoon, she would entirely disbelieve it. Thus she continued.

A few weeks before her death, and when her bodily condition had become different; all her darkness was gone, her mind continued light through the whole twenty-four hours; and she finally died in peace, with the full hope of a blessed immortality through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Despondency does not always arise from the same cause. It is difficult to deal with it: but there is one great principle, which has been of much use to myself, and which has some illustration in the following sketch.