

XVIII.

Spiritual Blindness.

Isa. liii, 2.

## Spiritual Blindness

Isaiah liii, 2: "And when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him."

Branchville, Dec. 17 a. m., 1876: - Scranton, Dec. 23, 1877. Boston, Jan. 15/88.

~~Christmas~~ The Centennial year is almost gone, & Christmas is near, with its festivities & gayeties, its stockings & its concerts; & every eye brightens & every heart thrills, from the youngest even to the oldest, in the sound of its magic name. What now ~~has so many memories, is so full of good~~ has such magic in it as Xmas?

Scranton Dec. 23/77/Sp. 2, bottom

We have much reason to thank God for living in a time when Xmas is not frowned upon because some one has misused it; when we may eat our mince pies & gather about our Xmas trees without any fear of breaking the law or of being excommunicated; for it was even thus two hundred years ago. Xmas is ours, to enjoy & to perpetuate. Now that we are all looking forward to it, shall we not remember here in church, what it means? <sup>Begin Here, 1877</sup> We are 'looking forward to' it is <sup>the</sup> day that has been chosen to commemorate the birth of Christ. In the manger in humble Bethlehem, eighteen hundred and seventy-three years ago, the virgin Mary laid her little one, the holy child Jesus. So He was called, Who came down

from Heaven in such a manner,  
 to save His people from their sins. The  
 rulers of the world little recked then, of His humble  
 birth; but presently, as ~~the rest of the world~~  
 for whom yet they were anxiously, ignorantly, waiting  
 a growing tree by its roots, even the solid rock, so  
~~well upturned great stones,~~ the mighty Ro-  
 man empire found ~~her~~ foundations  
 loosening, & the doctrine of that holy  
 Being <sup>instead</sup> filling the whole world. Hence we  
 are rejoicing in countless blessings of  
 freedom, which that doctrine has brought  
 to us. The day of the beginning of it all  
 does indeed mean a great deal to us.  
 Christ was born on Xmas day.

But amid all your joys, dear friends,  
 is He Himself entering? As you are  
 making your <sup>plans</sup> ~~calculations~~ for enjoying  
 His birthday, are you quietly rejoic-  
 ing in Him? Perhaps His name is  
 often on your lips; does your heart

name to all that <sup>4</sup> your lips utter, ~~that~~  
your eyes read, or your ears hear of  
him? Is he your dear savior—  
do you love him?

It was prophesied of <sup>the</sup> Christ, that  
when he should appear on earth, the  
very people who knew most & talked  
most about him, would see nothing in  
him to desire. And as it was prophesied,  
so it turned out; he was de-  
spised, & his own countrymen rejected  
him; & he whose birth will be the theme  
of a thousand choirs, & in the most  
brilliant assemblages, a few days hence,  
was led as a lamb to the slaughter.  
Most of the men & women who lived  
when he ~~did~~ did, & who saw him  
& the miracles which he did, & heard  
his sermons, saw no beauty that they

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should desire him; so he trod the  
winepress alone, & of the people there was,  
in his saddest hours, none with him.  
So it is with us? What can I say to  
you, my people, now on the verge of  
Christ's natal day, more fitly, than to  
ask this question? Do you delight in  
Christ?

We certainly do not, unless we find in  
him what responds to our own wants  
& <sup>seekings.</sup> ~~needs.~~ We cannot love him, except  
he is what our ~~natures~~ hearts crave.

Of course there can be no doubt that  
there is beauty to be desired, in the  
Lord Jesus X. Oh how I wish I could  
clearly suggest it to you! No one thinks  
of denying it. Infidel's writers are more

then ready to say <sup>6</sup> that He was good, &  
gracious, & holy. Better testimonies are  
gathered around Him. The happy be-  
ings in Heaven broke through the por-  
tals of the sky to sing as in our ears  
their praise of Him, when Jesus  
was born in Bethlehem. More than  
two legions of angels longed to fight  
His battles with Judas & Pilate. Saints  
of all ages have longed to depart from  
our world & be with Him in the  
heavenly mansions. there came a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. He went before to  
prepare them. The Lord Jesus <sup>is</sup> in  
Heaven the chief among ten thousand  
and of the One altogether loved.

If then we do not desire Him, the  
difficulty must lie with us. Consider with  
me these three views of it:

- I. We are preoccupied with other objects
- II. We fail to observe our own need
- III. God does not reveal to us the deep beauty of His Son.

Under these three divisions I would have you take for a subject of thought today,

## Spiritual Blindness.

### I

If there is no beauty in  $\text{X}^c$  that we desire Him, it is because we are preoccupied with other objects. He is lovely enough, as we have just reflected; but Oh! how hard it is for men to get time to realize it!

Pleasure easily & early wins us, & then we are soon fast in its habits.

It seems a little thing, that wit & humor ~~both so large~~ are so common &



popular a feature of conversation as they are; & no one, surely, could wish that ~~good cheer & liveliness~~ <sup>good cheer & liveliness</sup> should be banished from the fireside. Yet there is not one of us, but knows — few perhaps but lament, sometimes — that an established wit drives out, even by his mere presence, sober, thoughtful conversation. When we have become habituated to a merry form of talk, we find we are just as much enslaved to that as to any other habit. How often you would be, & so ~~far~~ thankful to be able to utter a word of counsel to discuss <sup>perhaps the solemn themes of religion;</sup> ~~the solemn themes of religion;~~ to one near you, <sup>but</sup> that the usage between you have forbidden it! Under such circumstances, there is no talk of Christ the Crucified. He is <sup>not, perhaps,</sup> ~~not,~~ forgotten.

But his place is usurped by the last mitticism of the papers, or the original delery of ~~the~~ a companion. ~~You will by & by~~  
~~recall from~~ Nothing but some great catastrophe, or ~~other~~ like outside cause, can restore to ~~the~~ <sup>the common mind</sup> the privilege of sober thoughtful talk, when it has once been laid aside. ~~unless there be such a~~  
~~sight of will-power as but few have.~~

So likewise the ~~ambitions~~ of life preoccupy the mind from K. We can not prosper without ~~that earnest view~~ <sup>setting an aim before</sup> ourselves in life, & ~~stripping~~ <sup>stripping</sup> ~~hard~~ <sup>hard</sup> ~~give~~ <sup>give</sup> ~~of all~~ <sup>of all</sup> ~~power~~ <sup>power</sup> of the mind, which ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> ~~enjoy~~ <sup>enjoy</sup> to accomplish it, out upon a man indifferent style ~~ambitions~~ <sup>out</sup> ~~out~~ <sup>out</sup> upon a man to success! But yet it is too true, that we without it. We must needs set a too often give the rein to unworthy plans, ~~plan~~ <sup>plan</sup> ~~involving~~ <sup>involving</sup> ~~great~~ <sup>great</sup> ~~steadfastness~~ <sup>steadfastness</sup> & or even in the noblest parents become so ~~indistinct~~ <sup>indistinct</sup> ~~before us~~ <sup>before us</sup> ~~as~~ <sup>as</sup> ~~do~~ <sup>do</sup> ~~well~~ <sup>well</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> ~~life~~ <sup>life</sup>. deeply engrossed, that our whole life ~~but~~ <sup>but</sup> ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~also~~ <sup>also</sup> ~~so~~ <sup>so</sup> ~~true~~ <sup>true</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> is turned into a channel

So likewise the money & business interests of life preoccupy the mind of the man. We must work, & we must give attention to it; yet we suffer these necessities to engross all our thought. How almost impossible it is seen to be, for a brainy man who has not been careful to avoid this kind of slavery, to bend his attention to sentiments of religion! Christ does not seem to him to be in the world that he knows most about; he is seldom named there, his words are seldom quoted, unless in a manner rather to distract thought still further from the love of Him; & how can you expect a man who breathes no other atmosphere than that, to have much thought or desire of Jesus? He will tell you himself that he has been drifting further & further away, ever since he left his mother's knee. Some times he ~~will~~ ~~fully~~ wish it otherwise; but

~~as a drunkard, " sometimes, maybe, he~~  
~~is free from the law of his habit. But~~  
habit is a terrible master; & it can shut  
up a man's mind from ~~the~~ understanding  
& loving  $\chi^2$  just as effectually, by  
a few years immersion in worldliness,  
as on the other hand it can strengthen  
the religious sense.

Once more, the mind may get  
preoccupied with impure thoughts; &  
then farewell to the mastery, & to any  
discernment of Christ, or of any good.  
Nothing is more utterly destructive of  
all the finer nature of man, than  
this. One evil thought, once allowed  
to remain in the memory, has more  
power than anything this side the  
sovereign grace of God. It will come  
up unbidden, like Baucro's ghost, in  
spite of every wish & effort of the soul.  
Other evil powers we may fight; but

no mortal man give this any felt  
at all; "flee youthful lusts!" Yet how  
widespread & mighty a power has impulse  
thought to preoccupy the mind, & shut  
it to all consideration, much more to  
of the holy Saviour!

Alas! society is full of distractions from  
Him. Its amusements, its excitements,  
its entanglements, fill up ~~the~~ minds. We  
are kept interested, amused, busy; we  
have no time to think; & if indeed  
sometimes ~~we~~ thought of eternity comes  
in, the whole machinery of the mind  
is working so entirely in a different  
manner from that necessary to port  
X<sup>t</sup>: before the heart, that it soon fires over  
the unwonted effort. So it hard to get  
the attention of a child at play, to a seri-  
ous duty? So our attention is fixed far

below X? Does one strive in vain to bring up from memory what he has too careless to store away there? Some hardly like to retain X? in our knowledge. Is the imagination of the impure a curse rather than a valuable faculty to them? If we have more fondly dwell on earthly than on heavenly riches, we cannot apprehend X?. We have suffered our minds to get preoccupied with lower themes, and we can hardly dare to say that God is in any of ~~our~~ the beauty that is to be desired in X? is a remote mystery to us.

The ordinary privileges of religion do not materially help us. Alas! when we have given ourselves up to our minds to the things of this life, ~~we are far~~ <sup>our going</sup> to church

is like a dream. We sing, we bow our heads, we listen to preaching, as acts of merit, not attentively. Whatever we may be elsewhere, in church we are absent-minded. We can hardly repeat a text used. Such dullness in anything else, would bring us into noful disrepute. Is it any wonder that we are puzzled to say why K<sup>r</sup> should be loved? Is it any mystery that we do not feel that He is a real living Friend truly — a Friend that sticks closer than a brother? We do not desire Him, because we are too much preoccupied to think of Him as He is.

II

A second reason, & a consequence of the first, is: that we fail to ~~cherish~~ feel our own need of K<sup>r</sup>. So we do not

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desire Him. This preoccupation not only drives Him out of our thought but altogether out of our desire: "out of sight out of mind."

We do not think of sin, unless as something which other people do. We do not look forward to a reckoning, we are so busy spending. Some remain marvellously ignorant of our own spiritual bankruptcy, from which Christ alone can save us.

~~If we were less preoccupied, we should be able to avoid seeing wonders.~~ The As Archimedes was so preoccupied with his figures that the invaders slew him before he knew his danger, so our busy worldliness hides from us our impending fate.

~~If we should able to look up from~~





may wish we felt a desire for Him,  
 but are obliged to own that we do not.  
 We underrate our need of Him. God has  
 told us, that if His Son had not cared  
 enough for us to leave Heaven & come  
 here to die in the sight of men for us,  
 He would have eternally cursed us, for  
 our sins. Our consciences would re-  
 peat & confirm this assurance, if we  
 would let them. It would seem as if there  
 were no crushing this innate sense  
 of accountability. But no; we make light  
 of it. We avoid the subject. And so, in  
 a false estimate, or rather with no  
 estimate of our eternal prospects, we  
 turn away from the only attitude  
 in which our eyes can rest upon  
 Christ the Savior.

III

A third reason, & a further consequence

of the first & also <sup>18</sup> of the second, is:  
we find no beauty & desire in X<sup>c</sup>. be-  
cause God does not reveal to us what  
we do not ~~do~~ seek. To us, to use  
the prophet's phrase, the Son of the  
Lord is not revealed.

~~How what with Xmas Day to be  
you without X<sup>c</sup>! A day of festivity;  
but O how much more it might  
be to you! A reminder of your Saviour,  
a double occasion of rejoicing.~~

this is the choicest gift of God to man.  
Last of all He sent forth His Son, saying:  
They will reverence My Son. But men  
mocked at Him, & called Him in deri-  
sion King of the Jews. Their eyes were  
blinded that they could not discern  
Him, & their blindness was their own  
fault & sin. If we turn aside from

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the plain truth of His face, we shall never come into the ineffable joy of comprehending, with all saints, what is the height & depth & length & breadth of the love of <sup>X<sup>c</sup></sup> God, which passeth knowledge (Eph. iii, 18, 19). We must remain in the outer court, the court of the Gentiles; ~~we~~ God will not reveal to us what He has reserved for them that love Him.

X<sup>c</sup> is freely offered to every soul. He that seeketh, findeth. X<sup>c</sup> said: Whosoever man will do My will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether it be of men (John vi, 17). He has abundantly demonstrated that, in the experiences of those who have done His will. God has promised (Isa. lxvi, 1, 2): "The heaven is My throne, & the Earth is My footstool; but to this man will I look, even

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Whim that is poor & of a contumacious spirit, & ~~that~~ trembleth at My word?

These terms are made in the spirit of love. If we come short of them, God still leaves us what we prefer; with constantly lessening powers of enjoyment, indeed, but still He leaves us the world & its delights; & He still proffers to us His love in X<sup>r</sup>.

But He goes no further. He does not reveal to the careless, those precious manifestations of Himself, that deep comprehending of X<sup>r</sup>, which is the unspeakable joy of the believer. These may be told in words; but it is the prerogative of God, to make them felt by the heart.

O my hearer! there is a beauty in

It, such as all your seeking has  
 never found elsewhere. Wealth may give  
 you the exquisite creations of art; but  
 no ~~soul~~ heart beats beneath the  
 cold marble of the sculptor, nor kind-  
 les even in the eyes of a Murillo's Ma-  
 donna. Keen wit may enliven the  
 coarsest hours, & pleasure with her  
 thousand forms may divert for a  
 time; but human happiness can ne-  
 ver rest short of the resources which  
 joy is not to be secured except thro'  
 the seat of the heart. And tho' it is  
 unspeakably sweeter than all the gifts  
 of the world, to know a mother's sym-  
 pathy & true, unselfish love; tho' the  
 felicity of home surpasses all pleasures  
 & palaces, & seems sometimes almost to  
 fill the heart beyond any need: yet above

all of these ~~times~~ rises the greatest  
 bliss of him who can confidently look  
 up to heaven & say: My Savior! ~~the~~  
~~man's heart may turn aside, yea, even~~  
~~a mother may forget her child; but~~  
~~God has made in ~~It~~ an everlasting~~  
~~covenant, & love those who seek His~~  
~~love & He changes not. Human un-~~

The heart of God beats with every  
 tender & gracious emotion which He  
 has implanted in the human breast,  
 but unlike His creation, it never chan-  
 ges. With a brother's love, He loves; see, He  
 comes on a long errand of grace, &  
 forfeits His life in the doing; with a  
 mother's love He cherishes; how He weeps  
 over Jerusalem - how He weeps for Saba-  
 mas - how tender He is of Peter - how  
 He forgives His murderers while He agon-  
 izes on their cross! He speaks a word

Christ Unwelcome to Men  
~~Christ's Reception Prophesied~~  
Brentsville Sun. or? Dec. 27/75.

Isaiah liii, 2: "And when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him."

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Christmas rejoicings.

Their professed cause; the coming of X<sup>t</sup>.

The actual feeling toward Him.

Use of this fact as an objection to X<sup>t</sup>,  
& answer in the text.

I. The Fact: X<sup>t</sup> unwelcome to men.

1. Isaiah's prophecy unwelcome.
2. Christ rejected, John xii, 36-38.
3. The apostles rejected, Romans x, 16.

II. The Reason:

1. There is no beauty to desire.
2. The Arm of the Lord is not revealed.



### III. The Application.

1. We are a dreadfully ~~degraded~~ <sup>degraded</sup> race.

2. The whole Bible has its unity in our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. We should humbly welcome Him & His word to our hearts.

