

ETERNAL LIFE¹

A SERMON

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“This is the true God, and eternal life.” John 5:20

Last Lord’s day morning we observed that the way in which the Savior is here presented as the true God stands in contrast to that which is false; and that one part occupied all the time we had. We observed it stood also in contrast to our state by nature; all flesh is but grass; it hastily passes away; but here we have in contrast to that, that which is abiding; the true God and eternal life. Also, it stands in contrast to that which is good in itself, but only temporal. Hence the manna; “Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness;” that manna was good in itself and answered its purpose; but then notice the end; “your fathers did eat manna and are dead;” but he that eats of this bread, that is by Jesus Christ can never die.” It stands therefore, a contrast in these respects.

This morning we have to notice the last part of our text: that of life; and in so doing, I notice, first, *the nature of this life*, secondly, *the root of this life*, for the Savior here appears the root of life; thirdly and lastly, *the way of this life*.

First, I notice, *The nature of this life*, and this I do for the sake of a little explanation; that eternal life does not mean a mere prolongation of existence, because those who are lost are punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and into everlasting punishment, and shall be tormented forever and forever. However mysterious it may be, there is the solemn fact clearly revealed in the Word of the living God, that there is a worm, that dies not, a fire that is not quenched, nor do we anywhere read of a terminus to that punishment into which the lost shall go. So that eternal life does not mean a mere prolongation of existence. There are two ideas that are intended by the words ‘eternal life’. I might have summed them up in one, but I prefer the two, for the sake of making it clear. Eternal life means in the first place a super-added life, in the place of the life we lost. When the fall took place, we lost a life, and this new life, this eternal life comes

¹ This is the third of three sermons’ Wells preached on this text. As I noted in the other sermons, he deals the Sonship of Christ. I would encourage the reader to read all three sermons, number 106 titled “Complexity” and 107 “A Strong Hold” as well. All three, as well as most of James Wells published sermons are available at: <https://www.surreytabernaclepulpit.com/> Richard Schadle

into the place of that life which we lost. We had by creation, a life that was holy, just, and good; or to put it in another shape, we then had an existence in that which was holy, just, and good. But that life of holiness, righteousness, and goodness, that life we lost; and we became dead in trespasses and in sins; so that now by nature we exist not in a life that is holy, just, and good and in accordance, therefore, with the holy law of God; but we exist now in a life that is unholy, unrighteous, and every way evil; the natural course of the imagination of the heart, only think, of it, what a humbling description that we, who are destined for eternity, we, whose souls have in them vast and hidden powers to be hereafter developed either in a way of punishment or enjoyment, that we, who are thus immortal, such is our state by nature, that in the natural course of things, the imagination of the heart is evil, and only evil; and that continually. You observe, then, that this eternal life is a super-added, a new life, put into the place of the one we lost. Hence, we read that "You must be born again." You read also that "you are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, that lives and abides forever." Hence, then, the solemn importance of this vital change, that change which the Lord alone can work, and he brings us into a life that is holy, a life infinitely superior to the one we lost: he brings us into a life that is righteous, by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, infinitely superior to the life of righteousness we lost: he brings us into a life that is good, by the Good Shepherd, who is the Mediator of the better covenant, established upon better promises. So that as the law of God is holy, just, and good, so Jesus Christ is holy, just, and good; and he being holy, just, and good, has both actively and passively met that law, and has gone to the end of its precept and its penalty; and as the Lord has "predestinated his people to be conformed to the image of his dear Son," so by being born of his Spirit, washed in his blood, clothed in his righteousness, and reconciled to him, the people become holy, just, and good. Thus, the law of God, the Christ of God, the people of God, the God of the people, are all brought into sweet harmony no disturbance being able to take place, for this is a matter that is settled to all eternity, "Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven." Thus, then you see, that eternal life does not mean the mere prolongation of existence, because the wicked will exist for ever. But, first, it means a new state of existence; old things are passed away, and all things have become new: so says the apostle relative to that which was merely in the flesh, typical, and shadowy, and temporal, he says "Circumcision avails not, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature;" must be born of God, and as many as walk according to this rule, the rule of the new creature, the new creature in Christ, Christ gives the new name, he is the new and the living way; as many as walk according to this rule, walking as the children of God, in the faith of God, in the love of God, and in the fear of God, and in the light of God, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. This then is the life.

Now after thus getting the meaning of this eternal life, then you may substitute as many words as you can find that are good, expressive of that state of existence into which we are then brought; and hence I have sometimes for my own convenience done so. For instance, in order to explain what I mean, I would take in the first place the Israelite. The Israelite was brought into a certain kind of life; and when the Israelite apostatized from God, he was spoken of as dying. Hence when the Lord said "O house of Israel, why will you die," the Lord did not mean spiritual death, for they were already spiritually dead, I mean those that were not born of God; and it did not mean a literal death, because we derive our literal death from the fall, "Dust you are, and unto dust you shall return," it did not mean a spiritual death, and it did not mean a literal death; but it meant a separation from God: when they were brought into their land, and apostatized, they became dead to the land, and they became dead to the city, and dead to the mercy seat, and dead to the advantages

of the Lord's presence; and thus dying this moral kind of death, shall I call it, perhaps that would be as good a shape to put it in as any other; they died this moral death; "why will you die, O house of Israel?" while they lived, their life was a life of possession, of freedom, of peace, of plenty, of safety, a life of the Lord's presence. You may apply these, and a hundred words more if you can think of them in this way; that he that believes in Jesus Christ has everlasting plenty, everlasting safety, everlasting peace, has God's everlasting presence; for his name shall be in their foreheads, and they shall see his face, and they shall reign, for ever and ever. This then is Jesus Christ, the true God and eternal life. Now men want to persuade us that this life means merely the prolongation of existence; but such men cannot prove that when the Lord said, "O house of Israel, why will you die" that it meant a literal death; it did not mean literal death, but it means a moral death. Hence the Israelites were in the graves of Babylon, seventy years represented as dry bones; and when the time arrived for their return, that is called a resurrection. Their apostasy was their death; their return was their resurrection; but then this is not a spiritual death, nor a literal death; but their resurrection serves as a type of that life which we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps by way of illustration I need not say anymore; but still it is a subject that would bear much enlarging upon, because there is something very delightful in it; in this new state of existence, when we look at what we are plucked from, what we are transplanted from, and what we are brought into fellowship and union with, into sweet oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ; who has said, "Because I live, you shall live also." Such then is the nature of eternal life; that it is a new life put into the place of the life we lost; by which we become new creatures and have in the place of the life we lost a life as superior to the one we lost as Christ is superior to the first Adam.

Second, I notice now, then, that the Lord Jesus Christ is in our text represented as *The Root of Life*. "This is the true God, and eternal life." I will take the word of the Lord, as usual, as my guide. John in the beginning of his Epistle, says, "that which was from the beginning," so that this eternal life in John's estimation was from the beginning. And if we notice, several beginnings, we shall see this eternal life appear in every one of those beginnings. But I will, to make matters clear in pointing out the Savior as this root of life, go back to the very beginning, when the fall took place. And there is a sweet correspondence, I am sure you must have noticed it some of you, perhaps all of you that do read the Bible all you can, a sweet correspondence between the first chapter in Saint John's Gospel and the beginning in Eden. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." I make no apology for repeating the words in these two or three last sermons so frequently.

Now I go back to the beginning; and read of the voice of the Lord God, walking in the garden. That I take to be John's reference, that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. I go back then to the beginning; and I find the voice, of the Lord God, the word of the Lord God, walking in the garden in the cool of the day. Most agree that that was about three o'clock in the afternoon; the cool of the day; the very time that the Lord Jesus Christ said, "It is finished;" that was the time he died, in the afternoon. And we could mention many circumstances in the Old Testament that point to that interesting time. And then, "the *cool* of the day." He did not come in the fierceness of his wrath; he did not come in the fulness of his anger; he came to reprove and chasten, but not to destroy; and though he passed the sentence of the law there, yet he came in the cool of the day. It was the word of the Lord, the voice of the Lord, walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the fourfold curse which was there pronounced upon the author of our misery, I mean upon the serpent, the fourfold curse which he pronounced

upon him implied in the reverse of fourfold blessing to his people. What was the first part of the curse? "Upon your belly shall you go." Go to the 44th Psalm, and there you will find that going upon the belly is an ancient mode of describing slavery. It is there said, "Our belly cleaves unto the ground." It is an idiomatic form of expression; and we never can understand things rightly without taking as far as we can into consideration their peculiar modes of expressing their thoughts upon certain subjects; and so doing, my hearer, we need no scientific information, we need no conjecture; that 44th Psalm shows the meaning, that Satan should be a slave, that he should be bound; and that although he has been suffered to do terrible things, yet he has always been restrained. If he comes in upon Job, and destroys Job's property, and destroys Job's family, and destroys Job's health, and destroy the good feelings of his friends towards him, yet he must spare the life of Job. Satan is restrained; he still goes upon his belly; he is still a slave, he is still in bondage; tied up by the chains of his own satanic sins, and tied by the chains of Jehovah's law, and Jehovah's power; so that "hitherto," is the great decree concerning him, "shall you come, and no farther." But just the reverse by Jesus Christ; God's elect, whom Satan had thus brought into bondage, they shall be eternally free; yes, they shall be delivered from slavery; neither sin, nor Satan, nor death, nor hell, nor peril, nor famine, nor sword, nor nakedness, nor persecution, nor height, nor depth, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature, shall be able to keep them from that freedom that is in Christ Jesus the Lord; for he is the true God, and eternal life, and in the very beginning set himself in battle array against this dragon, the old serpent, the devil; Christ set himself in battle array against Satan from the beginning. And I am sure, my hearer, that it is as true now as it ever was that if we overcome this adversary, it must be by the blood of the Lamb. Ah, when we can lay hold of Christ's atonement, and the Blessed Spirit is pleased to give us a little of the efficacy of that atonement, our souls leap into freedom, according as it is written, "By the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein there is no water." The next part of the curse was that he should eat dust; his object should always be mean. He can never rise to anything noble, never rise to anything beyond the dust. We all bear his image by nature: by nature, we are all in slavery though we know it not, and by nature our pursuits are mean and ignoble. What is that which the mere worldly man is seeking? Dust, only dust; white and yellow dust; and if he is seeking human honor, it is but dust; and human pleasures, they are but dust; everything human is but dust; alas! alas! they must all pass away as the chaff of the summer threshing floor. Such is Satan; he never can rise to pursue anything noble no, he is full of malice, full of enmity, full of meanness, full of that which is bad; and, as Milton has said, it is Satan's very delight to destroy all the good he can, and to do all the evil he can. But the people of God shall they be kept thus in the dust? No; the voice shall come, and come with sweetness, and the feeling of the new born soul shall sweetly fall in with it and shall do as is there commanded; "Awake, awake; put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, for there shall no more come in unto you the uncircumcised and the unclean." The uncircumcised and the unclean found you in the first Adam; there they came in unto you; there they ruined your habitation; there the hosts of hell ruined you; but I have found a habitation for you; I have encircled you with impregnable and unscalable walls; a habitation of perfect safety, into which nothing that defiles or makes a lie shall enter, neither adversary nor evil be occurrent "henceforth there shall no more come in unto you the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake yourself from the dust; arise and sit down, O Jerusalem; lose yourself from the bands of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion." And so we rise and pursue these; noble objects, eternal life, eternal victory, eternal possession, eternal glory; all that is holy, just, and good; there is our hope, and there is our delight; and all this by Jesus Christ, he is the true God, by whom we are freed from slavery; by whom we are raised

up from the dust, and made to pursue that which is worthy of the soul, worthy of our Maker, worthy of our Mediator, worthy of our existence; and worthy of that which shall glorify his name for ever.

Then the next is the enmity; “there shall be enmity between; you and the woman.” That woman means the true church of God; she is clothed with Christ, the Sun of righteousness, she walks in the moonlight of the gospel, having the moonlight as her pathway, she is adorned with prophetic and apostolic stars that enrich her diadem, and there she stands at the Savior’s right hand, and she treads free will, duty faith, Popery, sin, the flesh, all human inventions, under her feet. “Your shoes shall be iron and brass;” you shall walk over these territories of the devil, and shall tread the whole of them down, and after you have walked on from strength to strength, and trodden them all down, and stood fast in your love to God, you will turn around, and in congratulation of the grace of God you will say, “O! my soul, you have trodden down strength.” Here then is the true God, and eternal life. Now there is enmity. Ah, says Satan, I wish I could get this woman to like me; but he cannot get her to like him, and he has put on all sorts of shapes and forms; yes, he has got his right-hand man at Rome, but the woman does not like him; he has got his *ism* here, and his *ism* there, but the woman does not like him. And Satan has from time to time sent rivers, free will and duty faith rivers, and all sorts of rivers, and he says to the woman, now do drink of this river of free will; it is very nice: if you once taste this free will, you will not want free grace anymore; if once you drink of this duty faith river you will, not want the gospel any more: if once you drink of this Popish river, (you can get pardon at any time for five shillings,) you will not want real religion anymore. But no! the woman is better taught; she can distinguish her Husband from all other men too well; her eyes are fixed upon her Husband, and her language is, “Whom have I in heaven but you, and there is none upon the earth I desire beside you.” Her soul goes out in voluntary and heartfelt adoration of her Husband, “He is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.” “This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O you daughters of Jerusalem.” So that Satan cannot take the Lamb’s bride away; he cannot take her affections away; she loves Jesus, she stands at his right hand, leans upon his arm, comes up out of the wilderness, and sings as she passes through this valley of tears,

“The righteous shall hold on his way.”

She loves him more and more, looking forth in his light as the morning, “Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners.” And then comes the climax of Satan’s curse, and then will come the climax of our blessedness; “The seed of the woman shall bruise your head.” Think you not that the Holy Spirit did not unfold to Adam and Eve, at least to Abel, (I will pass by Adam and Eve, because that matter is not clearly revealed; but at any rate to Abel) think you not the Holy Spirit did not unfold to Abel the fact, that the seed of the woman was the manhood of a Divine Person? Think you that the Holy Spirit did not unfold to Abel, that he who should bruise the serpent’s head, must be something more than man, must be something more than angel, must be something more than a creature, and yet must be a creature. Think you not that Abel was not acquainted with the complexity of Christ? Abel brought the spotless lamb, but think you that Abel’s faith was in the lamb he brought? No, Abel’s faith was in Christ: not in the manhood of Christ only, but in the Godhead of Christ, that gave to its sacrifice its efficacy and power, whereby his necessities were supplied. The voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the beginning was the Word, there is the voice the Word walked in the garden, and that Word was God. And there is a promise, that in the fulness of time that Word should be made flesh, not by

transformation, but by incarnation; and that when he should be made flesh, he should destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who all their lifetime are subject to bondage. Complexity: “the woman’s seed shall bruise the serpent’s head;” he did it essentially, and he does it operatively. The serpent’s head: he has a great many heads. His head means his ruling power, his royalty. Satan reigned over us by sin, Christ putting sin away, and bringing us into such a position, that this accuser of the brethren cannot lay any fault to our charge, herein Satan’s ruling power is gone. He reigned over you and reigned over me, but when God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, down went Satan, he fell as lightning from heaven; up went Christ, up went, the gospel, up went our souls, up went our affections, up went our desires, and up we have gone ourselves; our souls have been rising ever since, our inheritance in heaven, our hope in heaven, our desire in heaven. And thus, as he was bruised for us, dethroned for us, so he is dethroned in us, so that in every conversion of a sinner, that is nothing else but the bruising, the disabling of the ruling power of Satan; he is not able to reign over you now;

“The feeblest saint shall win the day,
Though earth and hell obstruct the way.”

Our weakness is no help to the devil: because it is Christ that conquers him. “My God shall tread Satan down under your feet shortly.” Ah, say some, if we resist the devil, he will flee from us.” He cares not a straw for our resistance, if the Holy Ghost does not enable us to handle the sword of truth so as to cut him down; to hold the shield of truth so as to run against him, and stand and defy him; it is when the Lord is with us, it is then Satan is afraid of us; he is not afraid of us in ourselves; it is in our oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, then Satan is entirely disabled; and the declaration of the curse upon him is the declaration of the blessedness of the people of God. There is our victory; the warfare accomplished; it is finished; it is done; the victory is complete; there stands the victory, in Christ; the victory is won; it is complete; it is settled; Satan is disabled forever; sin is gone forever, death is gone forever; the powers of darkness and error are gone forever; there stands the victory. And when I am overcome, and brought into bondage, and kick like a wild bull in a net, that does not alter the fact that there stands the victory in Christ. “This is the true God, and eternal life;” that which was from the beginning. I could easily show, but will not stop to do so, that this same complexity appears in the Lord’s dealings with Abraham. There is the Abrahamic beginning. And we could show this same complexity appears in the beginning of Christ’s life; we could show that this same complexity appears in the beginning of Christ’s life; we could show that this same complexity appears in the resurrection of Christ. All these are beginnings, all these are starting points, as it were, and in every position, we have set before us the truth that this is the true God, and eternal life. Ah, my hearer, if you love Jesus Christ, you have something to love. You know we say sometimes of worthless people, there is nothing in them to love: but here is plenty to love, here there is no danger of extravagance, no danger of going too far. The Lord did not check Thomas: when his poor heart had been trembling, and weeping, and crying, when he had been saying, I will never believe unless I have some tangible proof that will quite put it out of my power to doubt it again. Ah, when the overwhelming glories of Christ flashed upon his mind, and wrapped his soul, and filled him so full of peace and happiness that he could not contain it, out he burst, and said what he had never said before, “My Lord and my God.” He grasped omnipotence, grasped eternity: seemed with his faith to grasp the infinite. Did the Savior

say, "Stop, Thomas, do not be extravagant, and do not go too far?" No; but the Savior confirmed what Thomas said, he said, "Thomas, because you have seen;" seen: I have seen that this is the true God, and eternal life; and I have seen that this is my God, my eternal God; I have seen that this is Jehovah my righteousness; this is the God that redeemed me with his own blood; "because you have seen, you have believed," blessed are they that are not got quite so far as to see me, could not say, "My Lord and my God;" "blessed are they that have not seen, yet have believed." As though the Lord should say, "Thomas, as a minister, you will meet with some who are poor, trembling, weak things; they will say, Yes, I can see my need of this great Savior; I can see no other deliverance, no other hope: still, I cannot say, My Lord and my God." But then you do believe in him. Oh yes, in his suitability to me. Ah then, blessed are you. But I do not know I am. But the Savior says you are. Ah, but I do not know that. But the Savior says you are, and your unbelief will not make his promise void. When you were in a state of nature, he did not wait till you got better before he came to save you, because you were every day getting worse instead of better; and in your state of grace your doubts and fears will not hinder him; they hinder you, oppress you, and trouble you, but they will not hinder him; and when the appointed moment comes, as he broke upon the soul of Thomas, so he will break in upon your soul, and you shall be brought to acknowledge the same eternal truth, and to glory in the same eternal name. Thus, then the fourfold curse upon Satan indicates in the reverse a fourfold blessing upon the people of God.

But again, Jesus Christ is the root of life; from him the life arises. Here lies what may be called the causation of life. "I am the root," said Christ: there is his eternal divinity, at least I think so, because in the same scripture, "I am the offspring." "I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star;" both are combined in the Morning Star. The star is an oriental term of royalty; therefore, it means that this root and offspring, this complex person, is King in Zion. "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and he that shall rule in Israel." It is a term of royalty. "Unto him that overcomes will I give the morning star;" that is royalty, kingship, dominion. Star means royalty, reigning: "to him that overcomes will I give the morning star;" the beginning of an eternal dominion, the beginning of an eternal reign. The Lord Jesus Christ will not leave his brethren till he make kings of them all. Those that are at home in glory recognize their perfection as priests and their dignity as kings. "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever." He is the root, from him arises this dominion. "There shall be a root of Jesse," notice again; "that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles;" and by him shall the Gentiles reign too; one with Jesus in his reign.

I must advance one more idea, and then close. In the eleventh of Isaiah, the Savior is also spoken of as the root; and let us trace out some of the fruits, the consequences to those who belong to this root, that are one with him. You will find the characteristics of the people indicated by everything that results from this root. There are a weary people, conscious of their dishonorable, sinful, shameful, degraded state; and this true God, this root appears. Ah, he can take away my shame, my degradation, and everything that burdens me; he can take my weariness away, and he can give me honorable rest, that I can rest honorably, righteously. "There shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious;" not a dishonorable rest. "The whole world lies in wickedness;" that is a degrading, shameful, dishonorable rest, where we are all by nature; that is the bed of hell; the guests of such department are in the depths of hell. But his rest shall be glorious; it is a righteous rest first. Did Jesus rest, and

would he rest? No: not until he had caused by his wonderful life his righteousness to go forth as brightness; not until he had caused by his wonderful death, his salvation to go forth as a lamp that burns; then, and not till then, Jesus entered into rest. "Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest; Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Ah, my hearer, am I speaking this morning something that is of no importance? What is of more importance than the blessings I have tried to set before you? What is of more importance than this root? And he has said, "I will walk in them, and dwell in them;" and if the truth of Christ be not written in our souls, then we have not the root in us; but if we have the truth in our souls, then the root is in us, and we shall bear fruit, and we shall never die. Then notice another consequence of this, now as Jesus Christ appears as the root, the Lord proceeds to work upon new covenant ground, "It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people;" and let the people be where they may, they shall be recovered; mark the language, "to recover them;" There were many maladies of the old covenant people that that covenant made no provision for; for instance, natural death would overtake them, and there was an end of them: I mean an end of that covenant. But the Lord shall set his hand the second time. What was the first time? From Egypt, he recovered his people from Egypt, but he takes away the first, that he may establish the second; the second time, means the new covenant time, The first time was from Egypt, there was the song of Moses: "Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty;" there is the song of Moses. "True and just are your ways, you King of, saints;" there is the song of the Lamb. The one song dies out, except as it is taken, up antitypically by the followers of the Lamb, but the other shall, never cease. The second time, the new covenant time, is spoken of in the tenth of the Hebrews, "He takes away the first that he may establish the second;" Now in this second time he recovers the soul, brings it into Christ's redemption, Christ's righteousness; and into reconciliation and peace with himself, into fellowship with himself, according to that great scripture which I confess I was never more struck with than I was one morning, when I happened to meet one of the most spiritually-minded ministers we have, Mr. Silver, he said, "I was just thinking of that beautiful scripture in Ephesians; "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself." And he said, the part that struck me was to *himself*; he says, about his *infinite self*, his eternal self, his wondrous self, his glorious self; what a predestination, to *himself*; if people did but know what predestination was, they, they would not hate it so, no." So, I said, "Well, that certainly accords with another scripture, which says, "All my springs are in you." "Ah," he said, "that's it" and I said, "another scripture says, "God shall be all in all;" And if God himself is to be all in all; and if God himself is to be such al all we shall want nothing else." In this new covenant the Lord does not become the inheritance of his people by an earthly land but by a heavenly land; not by an earthly holy of holies, but by a heavenly holy of holies, not by an earthly temple, but by a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

But my time is gone, my eight pages full, I must say no more.