

## Dr. Edgar M. Levy

In Mr. Olin Garrison's compilation, *Forty Witnesses*, the longest contribution is by the Rev. Edgar M. Levy, D.D. It is too long for full inclusion here, but our excerpts reproduce coherently his testimony concerning entire sanctification.

After describing his conversion at the early age of thirteen, Dr. Levy resumes: "In my twenty-first year I was ordained pastor of the First Baptist Church, West Philadelphia, then just organized. Here God greatly blessed my labours. I was proud of my success. After a pastorate of fourteen years I accepted a call to Newark, New Jersey. Here, also, God wonderfully blessed my labours, and hundreds were added to the Church. But oh, how were all my services, even the best, mixed with selfishness, ambition, and pride! A consciousness of this often filled me with shame and sorrow. Then I would make a new effort to improve my life by more watchfulness, zeal, and prayer; and although failure was sure to follow, yet, not knowing of any better method, I would tread the same weary road over and over again.

"Severe afflictions visited me. The sweetest voice of the household group was hushed; the brightest eyes were darkened in death; health failed; many friends proved unreliable; hopes withered; the way grew rough and thorny. My unsanctified soul, instead of learning submission, became impatient of restraint, would sometimes murmur against the dealings of God with me, question His wisdom, and doubt His love.

"After a residence of ten years in Newark I returned, in the autumn of 1868, to the scene of my early labours, and became pastor of the Berean Baptist Church, Philadelphia. In February, 1871, Mr. Purdy, an evangelist, was holding meetings in the Methodist church adjacent to mine. Many Christians from different churches were also in attendance. Day after day, with meekness and gentleness, and yet with unwavering confidence, they told the story of long years of conflict, and of ultimate and complete triumph through simple faith in the blood that cleanses from all sin, of their soul-rest and abiding peace, of their power with God and man, and the fulness of their joy.

"At first I became deeply interested, and then my heart began to melt. I said: These Christians are certainly in possession of a secret of wonderful power and sweetness. What can it be? Is it justification? No; it cannot be that. I have experienced the blessing of justification; by it I have been absolved from all my sins; by it I stand in the righteousness of Christ; every privilege of a child of God, and every grace of the blessed Holy Spirit, has been secured to me; but I do *not* find that it has destroyed the power of inbred sin, or brought to me complete rest of soul. I have peace; but it is often broken by 'fear which has torment'. I am conscious of loving God, but it is like some sickly, flickering flame which I am expecting every moment to expire altogether. I have joy, but it is like a shallow brook; the drought exhausts it. I have faith, but it is such a poor, weak thing that I am in doubt sometimes whether it is faith at all. I 'hate vain thoughts'; yet they continue to come, and seem at home in my mind. I believe that Jesus saves from sin; and yet I sin from day to day, and the dark stains are everywhere visible.

"I commenced a careful examination of the doctrine of sanctification. I reviewed my theological studies. I conversed with intimate friends of my own and other denominations. Nearly all of them pronounced the views advanced as nothing else than unscriptural and pernicious errors. They admitted the existence and universality of the disease, but could tell of no adequate remedy this side the grave. They allowed that the malady might be mollified; but in this life, they affirmed, it could never be perfectly healed."

Dr. Levy then describes a later meeting in his own church, and continues: "After the sermon a number of persons bore testimony to the fullness and completeness of their present salvation. They represented several evangelical denominations—the Methodist, the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, the Friends, the Baptists; and there was a beautiful harmony in all they said. I had no reason to doubt the truthfulness of their statements. I might question their logic, and find fault with their theories, and reject their phraseology, but how could I dispose of their *experience*? My judgment was assailed as it had never been before. After the meeting I returned to my study, fell upon the floor, and poured out my soul before God. I did not pray for pardon, but for purity. I did not seek clearer evidence of my acceptance, but to be 'made free from sin', not in a judicial or theological sense, but by a real, conscious *inwrought holiness*.

"That night I was unable to sleep. I was completely broken down in heart before God. The vision of Isaiah seemed

reproduced. 'I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.' 'Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.'

"The morning at length dawned, and on every ray I could read, 'Walk in the light, as He is in the light.' 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts', as chanted by the seraphim, seemed floating through all the air. As I thought of God, it was not so much His power or wisdom or justice or love that attracted my attention, as His infinite holiness.

"That day, Friday, March 9, 1871, was observed by the church as a special season of fasting, humiliation, and prayer. My soul was in great agony. I can compare my experience on that memorable day to nothing else than crucifixion. It seemed to me that I had gone up with Christ to Calvary and was transfixed to the cruel and shameful cross. A sense of loneliness and abandonment stole over my mind. 'An horror of great darkness fell upon me', and all the powers of hell assaulted my soul. The enemy brought before me with tremendous force my life-long prejudices, my theological training, my professional standing, my denominational pride. It was suggested that I must leave everything behind me should I go a step further in this direction. The dread of being misunderstood, of having my motives questioned, of being called 'unsound in doctrine', of being slighted by my ministerial brethren, and of being treated with suspicion and coldness, filled my heart with unspeakable anguish. Everything appeared to be sliding from under my feet.

"This mental conflict, however, soon subsided. The storm-clouds passed away, and light began to stream in. I was now done with theorizing, with philosophical doubts and vain speculations. I cared no longer for the opinions of men. I was willing to be a fool for Christ and to suffer the loss of all things. I cried out, 'Teach me *Thy way*, O Lord! and lead me in a plain path'.

"When the meeting ended I repaired immediately to the parsonage. I threw myself into a chair, and at once the wondrous baptism came. I seemed 'filled with all the fullness of God'. I wept for joy. At once I had a new and wonderful sense of the presence of Christ. Those words of Jesus were made real to me:

'Abide in Me, and I in you'. The sovereign will of God seemed at once so sweet and blessed that I felt lost in the thought that God ruled over me and in me. I found myself praising Him for every trial, sorrow, disappointment, and loss. My sense of unworthiness was greatly quickened. I felt a sweet spirit of forgiveness in my heart. My love for the brethren was much enlarged. Denominational distinctions disappeared.

"Answers to prayer now began continually occurring. The personality and work of the blessed Holy Spirit were revealed to my spiritual perceptions as never before. Indeed, all the doctrines of the Gospel at once became luminous in the presence of the Sanctifier. What was formerly a speculative conviction became now a wondrous reality. Life has become marvelously simplified and natural. I no longer work for liberty, but as having liberty. I do not find this life—what in my ignorance I once regarded it—one of mysticism, indolence, and self-congratulation, but a life of ceaseless activity amid undisturbed repose.

"I have not found that this experience exempts us from trial, persecution, or disappointment. For me the way has frequently been strewn with thorns rather than roses. Unkindness has often wounded my heart. Friends have turned away, sometimes with pity, and sometimes with blame. At times I have been in heaviness through manifold temptation, and faith has almost yielded to the outward pressure; but, blessed be God, for sixteen years I have been preserved from all murmuring, disquietude, or fear."