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The Epistles of St. Peter

John Henry Jowett





The Epistles of St. Peter

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Description: *Epistle of St. Peter* is a commentary written by English pastor John Henry Jowett on 1 and 2 Peter. He writes 18 entries on 1 Peter and 11 on 2 Peter, moving chronologically through the letters. He engages each verse of the section and attempts to further explain or add to what the Apostle Peter has written. Jowett explains metaphors and events, characterizes God, and outlines the commands given in the letters. This commentary will always remain fresh due to Jowett's clean and sincere writing and his attention to detail. This online edition also includes an index of scripture verses, making it easy to locate commentary on the desired verse.
Abby Zwart
CCEL Staff Writer

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THE POSSIBILITIES AND DYNAMICS OF THE REGENERATE LIFE

1 Peter i. 3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

How easily these early disciples break into doxology! Whenever some winding in the way of their thought brings the grace of God into view, the song leaps to their lips. The glory of grace strikes the chords of their hearts into music, and life resounds with exuberant praise. It is a stimulating research to study the birthplaces of doxologies in the apostolic writings. Sometimes the march of an argument is stayed while the doxology is sung. Sometimes the Te Deum is heard in the midst of a procession of moral maxims. The environment of the doxology varies, but the operative cause which gives it birth is ever the same. From the height of some ascending argument, or through the lens of some ethical maxim, the soul catches a glimpse of the “riches of His grace,” and the wonderful vision moves it to inevitable and immediate praise. I am not surprised, therefore, to find the doxology forming the accompaniment of a passage which contemplates the glory and the privileges of the re-created life. It is a Te Deum sung during the unveiling of the splendours of redeeming grace. Let us turn our eyes to the vision which has aroused the grateful song.

“Blessed be the God and Father . . . who begat us again.” [Verse 3] “Begot again.” That is one of the unique phrases of the Christian vocabulary. It is not to be found in systems of thought which are alien from the Christian religion. It is not to be found in the vocabulary of any of the modern schools which are severed from the facts and forces of the Christian faith. The emphasis of their teaching gathers round about terms of quite a different order, such as culture, training, discipline, education, evolution. The Christian religion has also much to say about the process of evolution. It dwells at length upon the ministries of “growth,” “training,” “increasing,” “putting on,” “perfecting.” But while it emphasises “growth,” it directs our attention to “birth.” While it magnifies the necessity of wise culture, it proclaims the necessity of good seed. So while the Bible lags behind no school in urging the importance of liberal culture, it stands alone in proclaiming the necessity of right germs. You cannot by culture develop the thorn-bush into a laden vine. You cannot by the most exquisite discipline evolve “the natural man” into the “measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” If we had merely to do with perverted growths, then the trainer and pruner might twist the crooked straight. But we are confronted with more than perverted growths; we have to do with corrupt and rotting seed. If all we needed was the purification of our condi-



tions, then the City Health Department might lead us into holiness. But we need more than the enrichment of the soil; we need the revitalising of the seed. And so the Christian religion raises the previous question. It begins its ministry at a stage prior to the process of evolution. It discourses on births and generation, on seeds and germs, and proclaims as its primary postulate, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Now, man is not enamoured of that dogmatic postulate. It smites his pride in the forehead. It lays himself and his counsels in the dust. It expresses itself in an alien speech. Men are familiar with the word "educate"; the alien word is "regenerate." Political controversy has familiarised them with the word "reform"; the alien word is "transfigure." They have made a commonplace of the word "organise"; the alien word is "vitalise." They have made almost a fetish of the phrase "moral growth"; the alien word is "new birth." And so we do not like the strange and humbling postulate; but whether we like it or not, the heart of every man bears witness to the truth and necessity of its imperative demand. Man becomes incredulous of the necessity of the new birth when he surveys the lives of others, but not when he contemplates his own. We gaze upon the conduct and behaviour of some man who is dissociated from the Christian Church, or who indeed is hostile or indifferent to the Christian faith. "We mark the integrity of his walk, the seemliness of his behaviour, the purity of all his relationships, the evident loftiness of his ideals, and we then project the sceptical inquiry, Does this man need to be begotten again? I do not accept one man's judgment as to the necessity of another man's regeneration. I wish to hear a man's judgment concerning himself. I would like a man to be brought face to face with the life of Jesus, with all its searching and piercing demands, and with all its marvellous ideals, so marvellously attained, and I would like the man's own judgment as to what would be required before he himself, in the most secret parts of his life, is clothed in the same superlative glory. I think it is impossible to meet with a single unconverted man who does not know that, if ever he is to wear the glory of the Son of God, and to be chaste and illumined in his most hidden thoughts and dispositions, there will have to take place some marvellous and inconceivable transformation. Let any man gaze long on "the unsearchable riches of Christ," and then let him slowly and deliberately take the inventory of his own life, and I am persuaded he will come to regard the vaunted panaceas of the world as altogether secondary, he will relegate its vocabulary to the secondary, and he will welcome as the only pertinent and adequate speech, "Ye must be born again."

Into what manner of life are we begotten again? What is the range of its possibilities, and the spaciousness of its prospects? The apostolic doxology winds its way among a wealth of unveiled glories.



“Blessed be the God . . . who begat us again unto a living hope.” [Verse 3] It is a hope affluent in life, It is a vivifying hope. There are hopes that are inoperative, ineffective, uninfluent. They generate no energy. They impart no power to work the mill. But the spiritual hope of the redeemed is living and life-creating, operating as a vital stimulus upon the consecrated race. How the Bible exults in the use of this great characteristic word: “Living Bread!” “Living Water!” “Living Fountains!” “The Living God!” The word conveys the suggestion of superabundant life, exuberant energy, an overflowing vitality. It quickens the sentiments. “We rejoice in hope.” The dispositions dance in the radiant light! It vitalises the thought. The mind which is inspired by the glorious expectation is grandly secure against the encroachment of the evil one. Hope-inspired thought is its own defence. It energises the will. The great hope feeds the will, vivifies it, makes it steadfast and unmovable. Into all this powerful hope are we begotten again by the abundant mercy of God.



“Begot us again . . . unto an inheritance.” [Verse 4] With our regeneration we become heirs to a glorious spiritual estate, with all its inexhaustible possessions and treasures. How the apostles roll out the New Testament music by ringing the changes upon this eagerly welcomed word! “Heirs of salvation!” “Heirs of the kingdom!” “Heirs together of the grace of life!” “Heirs according to the hope of eternal life!” The apostles survey their estate from different angles, that they may comprehend the wealth of the vast inheritance. With what fruitful words does the Apostle Peter characterise the nature of these possessions! It is an inheritance “incorruptible.” It is beyond the reach of death. No grave is ever dug on this estate. It is an inheritance “undefiled.” It is beyond the taint of sin. No contamination ever stains its driven snow. The robes of the glorified are whiter than snow. It is an inheritance “that fadeth not away.” It is beyond the blight of change. The leaf never turns. “Time does not breathe on its fadeless bloom.” Into this glorious inheritance are we begotten again by the abundant mercy of God.



“Begot us again . . . unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” [Verse 5] Here conies in the graciousness of spiritual evolution. All the steps on the work of salvation are “ready,” right away to the ultimate consummation. There has been no caprice in the arrangements. There need be no uncertainty in the expectations. There has been no defect in the preparations. There is no lack in the resources. What is needed for the ripening of the redeemed character has been provided. At every step of the way “all things are ready.” The glorious possibilities range from the seed to the “full corn in the ear”; from the new birth to the “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Such is the inspiring prospect, and such are some of the glorious possibilities of the redeemed and re-created life.



“We have searched this glowing doxology for glimpses of the new-begotten life. We have gazed upon its fascinating range of possibilities. Has it any suggestion to offer of the dynamics by which these alluring possibilities may be achieved? I have already dwelt upon the vitalising energy which flows from its living hope. Are there other suggestions of em-

powering dynamics by which even the loftiest spiritual height may be scaled? Let us glance at some of these suggested powers.

“According to His great mercy.” [Verse 3] I am glad and grateful that the pregnant passage is prefaced by this word. The regenerated soul is just enveloped in “great mercy.” Now mercy implies sympathy. “We cannot have mercy without sympathy. “Without mercy we cannot have leniency; but leniency is only thin, pinched fruit compared with the fat, juicy fruit of mercy. “Without sympathy we may have giving, but unsympathetic giving is like the cold, outer threshold, while mercy is like a glowing hearthstone. Mercy implies sympathy. Go a step further. Sympathy suggests the choicest companionship, the rarest of all fellowships. Where there is true sympathy, there is the most exquisite companionship. If, then, our God and Father enswathes us in “great mercy,” He visits in the sweetest fellowships. Therefore in the redeemed life there can be no loneliness, for in the Father’s presence all possible loneliness is destroyed. The mercy which implies companionship accompanies me as a dynamic from my faintest breathing as a babe-Christian on to the consummation when I shall have become a full-grown man in Christ.

“Begot us again . . . by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” [Verse 3] His resurrection opens to me the doors of the immortal life. If He had not risen, my hope had never been born. The breaking up of His grave means the breaking up of man’s winter, and the soft approach of the eternal spring. Because He has risen, death no longer counts! That Life, which in death defeated death, and converted “the place of a skull” into the altar of the people’s hope, is the dynamic of the regenerate soul, and makes the life invulnerable.

“By the power of God guarded unto salvation.” [Verse 5] Here is another aspect of the gracious energy which enables me to convert possibilities into achievements. I am “guarded.” The “power of God” defends me, hems me in, and secures me from every assault. My Father’s power is my garrison. He engirdles me, like a defensive army occupying a city wall, and makes me invincible against the menace and attacks of the devil. “As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people.” Such are the adequate resources, and such the wonderful equipments of the regenerate life. The land that stretches before us is glorious. The power to possess it is equally glorious. They may both be ours “by faith.”



SORROWFUL, YET ALWAYS REJOICING

1 Peter i. 6, 7

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, might be found unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

“WHEREIN ye greatly rejoice!” These fountains of spiritual joy shoot into the light at most startling and unexpected places. Their favourite haunt seems to be the heart of the desert. They are commonly associated with a land of drought. In these Scriptural records I so often find the fountain bursting through the sand, the song lifting its pæan out of the night. If the text is a well of cool and delicious water, the context is frequently and waste. “*Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now . . . ye have been put to grief.*” [verse 6] A present rejoicing set in the midst of an environing grief! A profound and refreshing satisfaction, even when the surface of the life is possessed by drought! I never expected to find a fountain in so unpromising a waste. “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice!” Who ever expected to find a well in that Sahara? As I trod the hot burning sands of “reviling” and “persecuting” and false accusing, little did I anticipate en countering a fountain of spiritual delight. Let us once again contemplate the strange conjunction. “Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Capernaum!” This on the one hand. And on the other hand, “A certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Him.” And between the two, “Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit.” Again, I say, I am amazed at the setting. If life were a prolonged marriage-feast, one might anticipate hearing the happy bells at every corner of the way; but to hear the joyous peal in the hour of grievous midnight and eclipse arrests the heart in keen and strained surprise. “These things have I said unto you, that My joy may be in you.” “My joy!” And yet Calvary loomed only a hand’s-breadth off, just twenty-four hours away! I thought the joy bells might have been heard away back in Nazareth, in the beauty and serenity of a secluded village life, or on some quiet evening, with His friends on the Galilean lake; but I never anticipated hearing them at Calvary’s base, in full view of shame and crucifixion. “My joy!” “One of you shall betray Me.” It is a marvellous conjunction, but one which is almost a commonplace in the Christian Scriptures. “They received the word in much affliction, with joy in the Holy Ghost.” It is a mysterious, yet glorious wedlock. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now . . . ye have been put to grief.” What is the suggestion of this apparently forced and incongruous union? The suggestion is this, that the spiritual joy of the redeemed life is continuous, and is not conditioned by the changing moods of the transient day. Spiritual delights are not dried up when I pass into the seasons of material drought. When the shadows settle down upon my life, and my experiences darken into night, the night is not to be

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without its cheery and illuminating presence. The place of the midnight is to be as “the land of the midnight sun.” There shall be light enough to enable me to read the promises, to see my way, and to perceive the gracious presence of my Lord. “He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” Therefore the shadow need not annihilate my joy. My temporary grief need not expunge my spiritual delights. The funeral knell of bereavement may be tolling in the outer rooms of the life, while in the most secret places may be heard the joy bells of trustful communion with God. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now . . . ye have been put to grief.”

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“Wherein ye greatly rejoice.” [Verse 6] If our spiritual joy is to be continuous and persuasive, sending its pure vitalising ray even through the season of grief, we shall have to see to it that it is adequately nourished and sustained. Now, the nutriment of joy is to be found in appropriate thought. Happiness is usually the resultant of sensations, the ephemeral product of sensationalisms, having the uncertain life of the things on which it depends. Joy is the product of deep, quiet, steady, appropriate thought. Thought provides the oxygen in which the bright, cheery flame of love is sustained. What kind of thought is required? “Wherein ye rejoice”! In what? The rejoicing emerges from an atmosphere of thought—the thought which is contained in the previous verses, and which formed the basis of our last exposition. It is a contemplation of the possibilities and dynamics of the redeemed life. The possibilities stretch away in a most glorious and alluring panorama: “a living hope”; “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away”; “a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” The dynamics are no less wealthy than the prospects: the “great mercy” of the Father; “the resurrection of Jesus from the dead”; “the power” of the Holy Ghost! These constitute the oxygenating thought of the Christian redemption. If the soul be immersed in it, faint sparks will be kindled into fervent flames, and timid desires will be strengthened into confident rejoicing. “As I mused, the fire burnt.” Let mind and heart make their home in the spacious thoughts of God, and there will be born in the life a moral and spiritual glow which will not be chilled by any transient cloud, nor extinguished by the storms of the most tempestuous night. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice.”

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“Though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in *manifold trials*.” [Verse 6] The “manifold trials” “will come. Antagonisms may rush down upon us from north, south, east, and west, and may twist and wrench our lives into strange bewilderments, and yet the continuous thread of spiritual rejoicing need never be broken. Our affairs may be tossed into incredible complications, and yet “the joy of the Lord may be our strength.” The pleasing air of music, which in its simplicity a child might hum, may appear to be lost as it passes into the maze of tortuous variations and complications, but an expert ear can detect the continuity of the primal air beneath all the accretions of the voluminous sound. The air of simple spiritual rejoicing, which may be clearly heard when life is plain and serene, may be continued when life becomes complex and burdened, torn and harassed by “manifold

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trials.” We may still hear the sweet primitive air of Christian rejoicing. I am not surprised to hear the sounds of rejoicing from Paul’s life, when he was holding precious and sanctified intercourse with such beloved friends as Prisca and Aquila. But when the apostle is “put to grief through manifold trials,” and life becomes dark, heavy, and complicated, how will it fare with him then? “The gaoler thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And it came to pass that at the midnight”—that is what I want to know about—“at the midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God.” It is the old air, rising through the pains and burden of a harassed and sorely tried life. “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”

Now, these “manifold trials” assume many guises and employ varied weapons of painful inquisition. Some of them may be found in the antagonism of men. Loyalty to truth may be confronted with persecution. A beautiful ministry may be given an evil interpretation. Our beneficence may be maligned. Our very leniency may be vituperated and proclaimed as a device of the devil. This may be one of the guises of “the manifold trials.” Or our antagonism may be found in the apparent hostility of our circumstances. Success is denied us. Every way we take seems to bristle with difficulties. Every street we enter proves to be a *cul de sac*. We never emerge into an airy and spacious prosperity. We pass our days in material straits. Such may be another of the guises of “the manifold trials.” Or it may be that our antagonist dwells in the realm of our own flesh. We suffer incessant pain. We are just a bundle of exquisite nerves. The streets of the city are instruments of torture. The bang of a door shakes the frail house to its base. We are the easy victims of physical depression. Who knows but that this may have been Paul’s “thorn in the flesh”? At any rate, it is one of “the manifold trials” by which many of our brethren are put to grief. I will go no further with the enumeration, because I am almost impatient to once again declare the evangel which proclaims that behind all these apparent antagonisms we may have the unceasing benediction of the joy of our Lord. It is possible—I declare it, not as my personal attainment, but as a glorious possibility which is both yours and mine—it is possible to get so deep into the thought and purpose of God, and to dwell so near His very heart, as to “count it all joy” when we “fall into manifold trials,” because of that mystic spiritual alchemy by which trials are changed into blessings and our antagonists transformed into our slaves.

Can we just now nestle a little more closely into the loving purpose of God? Why are antagonisms allowed to range themselves across our way? Why are there any blind streets which bar our progress? Why does not labour always issue in success? Why are “manifold trials” permitted? We may find a partial response in the words of my text. They are permitted for “*the proof*” [Verse 7] of our faith. That is the purposed ministry of the sharp antagonism and the cloudy day—“*the proof of your faith*.” Now, to “prove” the faith means much more than to test it. First of all, it means to reveal it. To prove the faith is to prove it to others. God wants to reveal and emphasise your faith, and so He sends the cloud. May we not say

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that the loveliness of the moonlight is revealed and emphasised by the ministry of the cloud? It is when there are a few clouds about, and the moonlight transfiguring them, that the glory of the moon herself is declared. And it is when the cloud is in the life that the radiance of our faith is proved and proclaimed. How conspicuously the calm, steady faith of our glorified Queen was proved by the clouds which so frequently gathered about her life! The “manifold trials” set out in grand relief that which might have remained a commonplace. Light which fringes the cloud is light which is beautified. Faith which gleams from behind the trial is faith which is glorified. It is the hard circumstance which sets in relief the quality of our devotion. As I listened to a thrush singing in the cold dawn of a winter’s morning, I thought its song seemed sweeter and richer than when heard in the advanced days of spring. The wintry setting emphasised the quality of the strain. Perhaps if we heard the nightingale in the glare of the noontide, the song would not arrest us as when it proceeds from the depths of the night. The shades and loneliness add something to the sweetness. “And at midnight Paul and Silas sang.” That is the song which is heard by the fellow-prisoners and startles them into wonder. The trial came and your faith was “proved.” You lost your money, and men discovered your devotion. Your gold, the finest of your gold, the most rare and exquisite among your treasures, was destroyed and perished; but in the hour of your calamity your faith was proved, and men bowed in spiritual wonder before the mystery of the Divine. Your trial was your triumph; the place of apparent defeat became the hallowed shrine of a glorious conquest. “Now are ye in grief through manifold trials,” that in the midst of the cloud the Lord might “prove” and reveal your faith.

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But “the manifold trials” do more than reveal the faith. There is another ministry wrapped up in this suggestive word “prove.” The trial that reveals the faith also *strengthens* and *confirms* it. [Verse 7] The faith that is “proved” is more richly endowed. The strong wind and rain which try the tree are also the ministers of its invigoration. The round of the varying seasons makes the tree “well seasoned,” and solidifies and enriches its fibre. It is the negative which develops the strength of the affirmative. It is antagonism which cultivates the wrestler. It is the trial which makes the saint. The man who sustains his hold upon God through one trial will find it easier to confront the next trial and exploit it for eternal good. And so these “manifold trials” prove our faith. They reveal and they enrich our resources. They strengthen and refine our spiritual apprehension. They may strip us of our material possessions, “*the gold that perisheth*” but they endow us with the wealth of that “inheritance” which is “in corruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.”

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And, finally, there is one other radiant glimpse of the resplendent issues of a “proved” and invigorated faith: “That the proof of your faith . . . *might be found unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*” [Verse 7]

Our “proved” faith is to come to its crown in a manifestation of praise and glory and honour. When Jesus appears, these things are to appear with Him. The trial of our faith is

to issue in “*praise*.” And what shall be the praise? On that great day of unveiling, when all things are made clear, I shall discover what my trials have accomplished. I shall perceive that they were all the time the instruments of a gracious ministry, strengthening me even when I thought I was being impoverished. The wonderful discovery will urge my soul into song, and praise will break upon my lips. “Found unto praise *and glory*.” And whose shall be the glory? When the Lord appears, many other things will become apparent. What I thought hard will now appear as gracious. What I recoiled from as severe I shall find to be merciful. What I esteemed as forgetfulness will reveal itself as faithfulness. He was nearest when I thought Him farthest away. He was faithful even when I was faithless. At His appearing I shall apprehend and appreciate my Lord. “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed.” “Found unto praise and glory *and honour*.” And whence shall flow the honour? I shall find that when the Lord sent a trial, and by the trial revealed my faith, many a fainting heart took courage, and by the beauty of my devotion many a shy soul was secretly wooed into the kingdom of God. I never knew it, but at His appearing this shall also appear. This discovery shall be my coronation. The supreme honours of heaven are reserved for those who have brought others there. “They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.” And so by the cloud of manifold trials God leads me into the spacious sovereignty of glory, praise, and honour.



God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.



Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
With blessings on your head.



A TWOFOLD RELATIONSHIP AND ITS FRUITS.

1 Peter i. 8, 9

Whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

“Whom not having seen ye love.” [Verse 8] We some times speak of “love at first sight.” Two lives are brought together, and there is a recognition pregnant with far-off destinies. “Deep calleth unto deep.” The affinities leap into spiritual wedlock. Each knows the other as life’s complement, and the hearts embrace in hallowed union. It was only a look, and love was born:

Entering then,
Right o’er a mount of newly fallen stones,
The dusky-raftered, many-cobwebbed hall,
He found an ancient dame in dim brocade;
And near her, like a blossom vermeil-white
That lightly breaks a faded flower sheath,
Moved the fair Enid all in faded silk,
Her daughter. In a moment thought Geraint,
“Here by God’s rood is the one maid for me.”

The fair vision came, and its gentle impression awoke the sleeping love and stirred it into fervent and vigilant life. It was “love at first sight.”

But love is not always aroused by the first sight. The “first sight” may not stir the heart to even a languid interest. The vision may be as uninfluential as a cipher. Or the “first sight” may create a repulsion. It may excite my dislike. It may rather rouse the critic than wake the lover. But love that remains sleeping at the “first sight” may be aroused by more intimate communion. The ministries of the spirit may triumph where the allurements of the countenance failed. Love may be born, not of sight, but of fellowship. It may spring into being amid the intimacies of a deepening companionship. You remember the story of Othello and Desdemona, and how their hearts were drawn into affectionate communion. It Was not love at “first sight,” but love at heart sight. He told her the story of his chequered life, of “battles, sieges, fortunes” he had passed, of disastrous chances, of moving accidents by flood and field. “This to hear would Desdemona seriously incline.”

My story being done
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs;
She swore, in faith, ’twas strange, ’twas passing strange;
’Twas pitiful, ’twas wondrous pitiful.



* * * * *

She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.

It was the communion of spirit with spirit which unsealed the springs of their affection. We recognise the principle in common life. A number of young people are thrown together in frequent fellowship. For months, and perhaps for years, their association does not pass beyond the sphere of friendship. But one day the fellowship of two of them opened into intimacy, and the sober servant, friendship, made way for the master passion, love. They had seen each other's faces for years, and they remained companions; they caught a glimpse of each other's hearts, and they were transformed into lovers. So love may be the child of spiritual intimacy. It may wait on knowledge. It may wake into being through the ministry of a deep communion.



“Whom not having seen ye love.” Theirs was not the love born of gazing upon Christ's face, but the love begotten by communion with His heart. Love may be born of spiritual fellowship. If only we can get into intimacy with the Master's spirit, love may wake into being and song. It is just for this opportunity of individual communion that the Master is craving. He has little fear of our not falling in love with Him, if we will only listen to His story. He wants to visit the heart and whisper His evangel in the secret place. Do I debase the sublime quest when I say He yearns to “court” the soul, to woo and to win it? “If any man will open the door, I will come in and sup with him.” That is what He asks—an open door. He asks to be allowed to visit the soul, to pay His attentions, to declare His aims and purposes, and to whisper the Gospel of His own unsearchable love. He wants to talk to us separately in individual wooings. He wants us to find a little time to listen to Him while He talks about the Father and Sonship, and life and its resources, and heaven and its rest and glory. He wants to talk to us about the burden of sin and guilt, and the exhaustion of weakness. He wants to whisper something to us about our newly born child and about our newly made grave. He would like to come very near to us and tell us what He knows about sorrow and death, and the morrow which begins at the shadow we fear. I say He wants to tell it all to thee and to me—to thee, my brother, as though there were no other soul to woo beneath God's heaven. The winsome story shall wind its wonderful way around Christ and Bethlehem and thee, around Christ and Gethsemane and thee, around Christ and Calvary and thee, around Christ and heaven and thee! He will tell thee of His agonies and tears, and He will show thee the scars He received in the quest of thy redemption.



Hath He marks to lead me to Him
If He be my guide?
In His hands and feet are wound-prints,



And His side.

He will tell thee all His story. And the sublime purpose of the communion shall be to woo thee, that in His tender fellowship the springs of thine own love may be unsealed and thou mayest become engaged, by the bonds of an eternal covenant, to the Lord of life and glory. “We love him because he first” wooed us The early love may be timid and shy, half afraid of itself, and trembling in some un certainty, but it shall put on strength and sweetness in the deeper and riper fellowships of your wedded life. Wedded to the King, you shall come to realise more and more the freedom of His forgiveness, the triumph of His power, the sweet pressure of His presence, the alluring glory of the living hope, and with this enrichment of your intimacies your heart will become possessed by a more intense and fervent affection for Him “whom not having seen ye love.”

“*On whom . . . believing.*” [Verse 8] Here is a second expression of the Christian’s relationship to Christ. “*On whom . . . believing.*” The figure is suggestive of a leaning posture, an attitude of dependence, a confident resting of one’s weight upon the Christ we love. It is the acceptance of His reasonings as sound. It is the assumption that His judgments are dependable. It is the usage of His weapons as adequate for our strife. It is the assurance that His *promises* are the expression of *spiritual laws*, and that there is no more caprice in their ministry than there is in the operation of laws in the physical world. “*On Him believing.*” But it is more than assent to a conclusion, more than a confidence in His word. It is repose upon a person, a resting upon a presence, a trusting in a companionship. If the Christian evangel is worth anything at all it means this that the Christ of God, the “*Lover of the soul,*” is by the loved one’s side in inseparable and all-sufficient fellowship. In the moment of extraordinary crisis and strain, “on” Him I can depend for immediate equipment. In the long-drawn-out day of wearying and monotonous commonplace, “on” Him I can lean for un failing supplies. In the dark and cloudy day, and amid the gathering terrors of the advancing night, “on” Him I can depend for inspiring light and life. That is the very music of the Christian evangel. The words which indicate the Master’s presence suggest the all-significant closeness of His Spirit. “Companion!” “Comforter!” “Fellowship!” “Partaker!” The phraseology varies; the significance is one. The Lord is imminent and immediate: “Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet”; upon Him we may trustfully rest our weight in all the changing circumstances of our ever-changing way.

“*Whom not having seen ye love; on whom . . . believing, ye rejoice.*” [Verse 8] Is there anything surprising in the issue? Won by His love, wedded to the Lord, confident in His fellowship—is it any wonder that out of such wealthy conditions there should arise a fountain of joy? Surely we have the very ingredients of spiritual delight. If we take spiritual affection—“whom not having seen ye love”—and combine it with spiritual confidence—“on whom . . . believing”—I do not see how we can escape the crown of rejoicing. If either of



the elements be annihilated, our joy is destroyed. All the bird-music that rings through the countryside at the dawn can be hushed by the appearance of the hawk. Let your little child come into a presence in whom she has not gained confidence, and the light of joy departs, and her face becomes like a blown-out lamp. It is the co-operative ministry of love and confidence which awakes the genius of joy. It is the love and confidence of wedded life which make the clear, calm joy of the hurrying years. The thought of the loved one is a baptism of light. A letter from the loved one redeems any day from commonplace. The presence of the loved one is a full and perpetual feast. It is not other wise in the highest relationships. If the soul and the Lord are lovers, and there is a mutual confidence, the soul will drink at the river of rare and exquisite delights. To think of Him will set the bells a-ringing.



Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast.

How unlike that other soul of whom we read in the Sacred Word, "I remembered God, and was troubled." A thought that rang an alarm-bell.

Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast.

A remembrance that rang anew the wedding-bells. "Whom not having seen ye love." Then it is daytime in the soul. "On whom . . . believing." Then there is no cloud over the communion. Daytime and no cloud! Then there must be sunshine in the soul. "Ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

"*With joy unspeakable.*" [Verse 8] All the deepest and richest things are unspeakable. A mother's love! Who has discovered a symbol by which to express it? It is unspeakable. A profound grief! Where is the speech in which it can be enshrined?

In words like weeds I'll wrap me o'er,
Like coarsest clothes against the cold;
But that large grief which these enfold
Is given in outline and no more.



It is unspeakable. A bleeding sympathy! Has it not just to remain dumb? "We stand or sit with interlocked hands, bereft of all adequate expression! It is unspeakable. A spiritual joy! How shall we tell it? Where is the mould of speech which can catch and hold the ethereal presence? It is unspeakable.

But what to those who find? Ah! this
Nor tongue nor pen can show:

The love of Jesus, what it is
None but His loved ones know.

“With joy unspeakable and *full of glory*.” [Verse 8] It is a joy which is glorious and glorifying. There are joys that weaken and impair the soul. The happiness of the world is a corroding atmosphere that blunts and destroys the fine perception and discernments of the life. But “joy in the Lord” is light which glorifies life. It is like sunshine on the landscape. It adds warmth, and beauty, and tenderness, and grace. This joy is never productive of weakness; it is synonymous with power. “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”

“*Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*” [Verse 9] Wedded to the Lord in consecrated love, leaning upon Him in confident dependence, rejoicing in joy unspeakable—surely this will mean a ripening personality maturing day by day, shedding not only its disease but also its impotence. We “receive” the salvation of our souls. Moment by moment we “receive” it. Our salvation is a gradual but assured ascension into the strength and beauty of the King. We are in the currents of the everlasting life. Moment by moment we receive the end of our faith. Each moment deposits its own contribution to my spiritual heritage. Moment by moment I enter more deeply into my inheritance in Christ, into “the unsearchable riches of grace.”



BEING FASHIONED

1 Peter i. 13-16

Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is being brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in the time of your ignorance: but like as He which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy.

“Wherefore!” [Verse 13] The word gathers up all the wealthy results of the previous reasonings. The present appeal is based on the introductory evangel. The inspiration of tasks is found in the recesses of profound truths. Spiritual impulse is created by the momentum of superlative facts. The dynamic of duty is born in the heart of the Gospel. “Wherefore,” says the apostle, if these be your prospects and dynamics, if you have been “begotten again into a living hope,” if you are heirs to “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled,” if even apparent hostilities may be converted into wealthy helpmeets, and “manifold trials” into the ministers of salvation, “girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is being brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The “wherefore” is thus suggestive of the bases of this urgent and practical appeal. Our life is purposed to shine in Divine dignity. Our prospects are glorious. Our resources are abounding. We should therefore lay aside our laxity. Life should not be spent in idle reverie. Our movement should not be a careless sauntering. Our rest should not be a thoughtless lounging. Life should be characterised by clear sight, definite thought, eager purpose, and decided ends.

“Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind.” [Verse 13] The figure of the passage is taken from the flowing garments of the Oriental dress. The flapping robes catch the wind and wrap themselves about the legs, and become serious hindrances to easy and progressive movement. The wearer therefore lays hold of the entangling garments and tucks them into a girdle, which discharges the ministry of a belt. He gathers together the disorderly robes and binds them into a compact and serviceable vesture. Now, the apostle declares that a similar disorder may prevail in the realm of thought and affection. Our life may be characterised by mental slovenliness. Our thoughts may trail in loose disorder. We may give little or no care to the beauty and firmness of the mind. How much loose thinking there is concerning the profoundest and most vital concerns of our life! And the loose thinking does not end with itself. A loose garment may trip a man up and cause him to stumble. Loose thinking is equally perilous, and may lead to moral entanglement and perdition. Loose thinking is creative of loose living; mental slovenliness issues in moral disorder. Therefore “gird up the loins of your mind.” Put some strenuousness into your thinking. Do not let

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your thought drift along on the stream of reverie. Steer your thought and strongly guide it into wealthy havens. How do I think about God? Loosely and unworthily, or with firm and fruitful conception? “God is *great*,” and *greatly* to be thought about; and if I think about Him loosely my sonship will be a stumbling and an offence. How do I think about grace? Is my thinking sluggish and unworthy, and so do I “despise the riches of his goodness”? How do I think about my spiritual call and prospects and destiny? Am I stumbling over my own thinking? Are my own garments my most immediate snares? Is my spiritual confusion the result of my mental indolence? “My people do not consider.” In my want of strong and strenuous thinking may be found some explanation of my moral and spiritual disasters.



As it is with the element of thought, so it is with the power of affection; for perhaps in the spiritual term “mind” both thought and affection are included. We speak of “wandering affections,” and truly affection may become an appalling vagrant. Affection is easily allured, easily entangled, easily snared by the worldly glitter which gleams by the side of the common way. Or, if we recur to the apostle’s figure, our loose affections, like flowing garments that are blown about by the wind, entangle our faculties and make havoc of our moral and spiritual progress. We must “gird up the loins” of our affection. It will not be child’s play, but he who wants a religion of child’s play must not seek the companionship of Christ. The Master spake of cutting off the right hand and plucking out the right eye, and the bleeding figure has reference to the severing of relationships and the disentangling of well-established affections. To free a flowing garment which has been caught in a thorn hedge may necessitate rents, and to disentangle an unworthy affection may necessitate pain, but even at the cost of rent and pain the deliverance must be effected. We must gird up the loins of our trailing affections. We must not hold them so cheaply. We must not permit them to sweep the broad road and to expose themselves to the entanglement of every obtruding thorn. We must “set” our “affections upon things above,” and for that sublime purpose we must gather them together in strenuous concentration. This exhortation is therefore an appeal for collectedness both of thought and of feeling. It is a warning against mental and affectional looseness, and with loving urgency the apostle pleads with his readers to pull themselves together, to gird up their loins, and with full energy of thought and feeling devote themselves to the worship and service of God.



“*Be sober.*” [Verse 13] This is more than an injunction against intemperance in diet. Intemperance is productive of stupor. It is the enemy of a refined sensitiveness. It is creative of heaviness and sleep. And it is this closing of the senses, by whatever agency it may be induced, against which the apostle raises his voice in clamant warning. “Be sober.” Be on your guard against everything which is creative of heaviness, and which may put your senses into a perilous sleep. At all costs keep awake and vigilant! Just as excessive drinking drugs the flesh and sinks the body into a heavy sleep, so there are other conditions which create a similar stupor in the soul and by which the moral and spiritual senses are burdened and



benumbed. There are opiates and narcotics which may make us spiritually drunk, and render us unconscious of the Divine voices that peal from the heights. “Not a few sleep.” The sleep is induced by opiates. There is the opiate of pleasure; there is the opiate of prosperity; there is the opiate of self-satisfaction; there is the depressing drug of disappointment. Against all these we are to be on our guard. “Be sober,” and amid all the narcotising atmospheres of enchanted grounds preserve a wakeful spirit by a ceaseless fellowship with God.

“*And set your hope perfectly on the grace that is being brought unto you in the revelation of Jesus Christ.*” [Verse 13] Here is the spiritual attitude by which the girded and sober life may be attained. My resources are to be found in the grace that is brought unto me in Christ. In Christ is my reservoir of power. The grace of the Lord Jesus is my dynamic. The resource will never fail me. The supply is never exhausted. It is “being brought” unto me continually—a “river of water of life.” Grace is just a full river of heavenly favour, carrying all needful equipment and rich with the potencies of eternal life. Upon this grace I am to find the basis of my hope. I am to “set my hope perfectly” upon this as the all-sufficient energy for lifting me to the unveiled heights and enabling me to dwell there in undisturbed serenity. I am to release my thought from hindering entanglements, and I am to deliver my affection from enslaving fellowships, and I am to preserve a vigilant sobriety amid all the sleep-inducing atmospheres of the world; and for the accomplishment of this glorious emancipation I am bidden to “set my hope perfectly on the grace that is being brought unto me at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The apostle now probes more deeply into the mode of godly living, and unveils a little more clearly the principle by which the holy life is fashioned. Life is formed by conformity. There is always a something towards which we tend and approximate, and “we take hue from that to which we cling.” There is always a something “according to” which we are being shaped. “According to Thy word,” “according to this world,” “according to the former lusts.” We are for ever coming into accord with some thing, and that something determines the fashion of our lives. Now, this principle of “forming by conforming” is proclaimed by the apostle in the succeeding words of this great passage; and as “*children of obedience*” we are called to a manner of life which at once demands a stern nonconformity and a strong and fervent conformity.

“*Not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in the time of your ignorance.*” [Verse 14] “Not fashioning . . . according to lusts.” That conformity must be broken. That “accordance” must be destroyed. Our lusts must not be our formatives, giving shape and fashion to our lives. If our lust raise its feverish and imperious demand, we must be stern and relentless nonconformists. Are we imagining that the imperiousness of lust moves in very circumscribed ways, and that perhaps we escape from its fierce and burning tyranny? The New Testament conception of lust covers a very spacious area, and includes elements to which perhaps we should not give the appalling name. You may have the same element

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in different guises, now appearing as a solid, and now as a liquid, and now as a gas. And you may have the same essential vice in some tangible loathsomeness and in some hidden and impalpable temper. The Master told us that we have the same essential thing in anger and in murder, only one is gross and solid, while the other is gaseous and comparatively refined. But the trouble is that, when vice is gaseous, we conceive it as proportionately harmless; when it solidifies into open crime, it ensures our reprobation. Now, when the Master speaks of lust, He speaks of it in its gaseous state, as a condition of thought, as a state of temper, as a mode of spirit; and in this interpretation “lust” is just the essentially carnal, the itching after the world, the feverish desire for selfish pleasure, to the utter ignoring of the supremacy of the truth.



In many lives this lust is the determining and formative force; everything is made to bow to it; all the affairs of life are fashioned by it. It occupies the throne and moulds all life’s concerns into its own accord. The apostle vehemently counsels his readers against this conformity. He pleads that the children of liberty should not retain the governing powers of their servitude. The night should not provide the patterns for the day. The season of “ignorance” should not create the ruling powers for the season of knowledge and revelation. He urges them to revolt against the old forces, to become spiritual nonconformists, not fashioning themselves after their former lusts.

“But like as He which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living.” [Verse 15] The holy God is to be the formative force in our life, and to Him are we to be devoted in close and intimate conformity. “As He which called you.” The call is a Divine pledge. The acceptance of the call implies a human obligation. There is the pledge on the side of God, and the obligation on the side of man. The call, given and received, creates an intimate fellowship. The One who calls is holy, and by the mighty ministry of the Spirit he who shares the fellowship is transformed into the same holiness. AH fellowship with God is productive of spiritual likeness. If we gaze into His face, we shall be illumined with the light of His countenance. “Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are transformed into the same image.” We absorb the glory of the Lord. We become transfigured by it. Let us mark the breadth of the transforming process. We are to be holy “in all manner of living.” The pervasive power of the Spirit is to influence every walk of life and every part of the walk. The transfiguring energy is to inhabit even trifles, and the commonplaces of life are to be illumined by the indwelling of the eternal light. We shall grow in grace, putting on more and more of the beauty of Him in whose fellowship we dwell.



“Because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy.” [Verse 16] That is more than an imperative; it is an evangel. It is a command which enshrines a promise. Because God is holy we have the promise of holiness. Therefore we may sing with the psalmist, in words which at the first hearing may appear strange, “We give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness.” Wherefore, with this glorious provision for our life, with resources more than



adequate for our tasks, with power that even surpasses the grandeur of our calling, let us “gird up the loins of our mind, be sober, and set our hope perfectly on the grace that is being brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”



THE HOLINESS OF THE FATHER

1 Peter i. 17-21

And if ye call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear: knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ: who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of the times for your sake, who through Him are believers in God, which raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory; so that your faith and hope might be in God. "If ye call on Him as Father, who . . . judgeth." [Verse 17] That is an extraordinary conjunction of terms. It is a daring and surprising companionship to associate, in immediate union, the function of the judge with the personality of Father. I had anticipated that the term "Father" would have suggested quite other relationships, and would have emphasised functions of an altogether different type. I did not anticipate the intimate wedlock of "Father" and "judge." I had thought that the glad succession would have proceeded somewhat on this wise: "If ye call on Him as Father, who *loveth!*" "If ye call on Him as Father, who *pitieth!*" "If ye call on Him as Father, who *forgiveth!*" I had interpreted the word "father" as being suggestive of the free and kindly intimacies of the fireside; but here it stands indicative of the august prerogatives of a throne. "If ye call on Him as Father, who judgeth." The element which I had forgotten is made conspicuous and primary, and determines the shape and colour of man's relationship to God.

"If ye call on Him as Father, who judgeth." Then the element of holy sovereignty must be a cardinal content in our conception of the Fatherhood of God. What does the term "Father" immediately suggest to me? Good nature or holiness; laxity or righteousness; a hearthstone or a great white throne? The primary element in my conception will determine the quality of my religious life. If the holiness of Fatherhood be minimised or obscured, every other attribute will be impoverished. Denude your conception of holiness, and it is like withdrawing the ozone from the invigorating air, or detracting the freshening salt from the healthy sea. Suppress or ignore the element of holiness, and think of the Father as affectionate, and the love that you attribute to Him will be only as a close and enervating air. Love without holiness is deoxygenated, and its ministry is that of an opiate or narcotic. Pity without holiness is a bloodless sentiment destitute of all healing efficiency. Forgiveness without holiness is the granting of a cheap and superficial excuse, in which there is nothing of the saving strength of sacrifice. Begin with pity or forgiveness, or forbearance or gentleness, and you have dispositions without dynamics, poor limp things, which afford no resource for the uplifting and salvation of the race. But begin with holiness, and you put a dynamic into every disposition which makes it an engine of spiritual health. Forgiveness with holiness

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behind it is a medicated sentiment, fraught with healing and bracing ministry. Gentleness with holiness behind it touches the aches and sores of the world with the firm and delicate hand of a discerning and experienced nurse. Exalt the element of holiness, and you enrich your entire conception of the Fatherhood of God. The “river of water of life” flows “out of the throne.” “The Father who judgeth.” “Our Father, *hallowed* be Thy name.”

And now the apostle proceeds to tell us how his conception of the holiness of God is fostered and enriched. Wherever he turns it is God’s holiness, and not God’s pity, which smites and arrests his attention. He is never permitted to become irreverent, for lie is never out of sight of “the great white throne.” He moves in fruitful wonder, ever contemplating the glory of the burning holiness of God. If he meditates upon the character of the Father’s judgments, it is their holiness by which he is possessed. If he moves with breathless steps amid the mysteries of redemption, even beneath the blackness of the cross he discovers the whiteness of the throne. If he dwells upon the purposes of the Divine yearning, it is the holiness of the Father’s ambition for His children which holds him entranced. The holiness of the Father emerges everywhere. It is expressed and placarded in all His doings. Everywhere could the apostle take upon his lips the words of another wondering spirit who gazed and worshipped in a far-off day: “I saw the Lord, high and lifted up! Holy, holy, holy is the LORD.”

“*The Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man’s work.*” [Verse 17] The apostle finds the holiness of the Father expressed in the character of His judgments. The elements which so commonly shape the judgments of men do not count in the judgments of God. He judgeth “without respect of persons.” Fine feathers do not count as refinement. Faces may be masks. The “persona” may be an actor. The Father pays no respect to the mere show of things. All masks become transparent. All veils become translucent. The material show, with all ephemeral titles, and nobilities, and dignities, and degrees, are not accepted as evidence, but are put down, and only spiritual characteristics and moral essentials are permitted as testimony of personal worth. “The Father, without respect of persons, judgeth *according to each man’s work.*” [Verse 17] And what is the bulk and quality of my *work*? If the Father judge me by my output in the shape of finished and realised achievement, then I shrink from the wretched unveiling! I have laboured for the salvation of men; how will He judge my “work”? Will He tabulate the results? Will He count my converts? Is that how James Gilmour will be judged, who after long years of labour in Mongolia could not record a single regenerated soul? If “work” means finished results, how few of us will be crowned! “This is the work, that ye believe.” That is the basis of judgment. How much of holy energy is expressed in our relationship to God? What is the strength of our fellowship with the Divine? That is the primal energy of character, and that is the criterion

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of the Divine judgment. Out of that energy of belief there is born the magnificent force which expresses itself in prolonged labours in Mongolia, in fearless pioneering in New Guinea, in unromantic, educational ministry in India, in plucky, unyielding struggle with great evils in England, in tiring, unapplauded toil among the poor, in dry and heart-breaking service among the rich, in steady, persistent battle with “the world, the flesh, and the devil.” All these toils are the offspring of belief. In the energy of belief they find their life and the secret of their dauntless perseverance. And so James Gilmour will not be judged by his “results,” but by his “bloody sweat.” He will be judged, and so shall we all, by the supplicating wrestle of the heart, by the quality of our aspiration, by the depth and fervour of our belief. In this type and character of judgment the apostle sees the mark of the holiness of God. “I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God,” and the Father judged them “according to each man’s work.” “I remember thy *work of faith*.”

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The apostle now turns to another expression of the holiness of the Father, and he finds it in the character of our redemption. “Knowing that,” reflecting that, “*ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things . . . but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ*.” [Verses 18, 19] Now, link to this a previous word which forms a vital part of the apostle’s reasoning. “I am holy.” He immediately unites the conception of holiness with the ministry of redemption. To keep that holiness in mind I am to reflect upon the character of redemption. I am to gaze into the mysterious depths of redemption, and I shall behold the holiness of my Father. Now, that is not our common inclination. We look into redemption for mercy, forgiveness, condescension, love. We look for the genial flame of affection; have we been blind to the dazzling blaze of holiness? We have felt the warm, yearning intimacy of love, inclining towards the sinner; have we felt the fierce, burning heat where holiness touches sin?

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Redemption is more than the search of Father for child; it is a tremendous wrestle of holiness with sin. Have we felt only the tenderness of the search, and partially over looked the terribleness of the conflict? The fear is that we may feel the geniality of the one without experiencing the consuming heat of the other. I proclaim it as a modern peril. We do not open our eyes to the holiness that battles in our redemption, and so we gain only an enervated conception of redemptive love. Is not this a characteristic of many of the popular hymns which gather round about the facts of redemption? They are sweet, sentimental, almost gushing; the light, lilting songs of a thoughtless courtship: deep in their depths I discern no sense of bloody conflict, nor do I taste any tang of the bitter cup which made our Saviour shrink. And so, because we do not discern the majestic crusade of holiness, we do not realise the enormity of sin. If we look into the mystery of redemption, and do not see the august holiness of God, we can never see the blackness of the sovereignty of sin. Dim your sense of holiness, and you lighten the colour of sin. Now see what follows. Obscure the holiness and you relieve the blackness of sin. Relieve the blackness of sin and you impoverish the

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glory of redemption. The more we lighten sin the more we uncrown our Redeemer. If sin be a light thing, the Redeemer was superfluous. And so, with holiness hidden and sin relieved, we come to hold a cheap redemption, and it is against the conception of a cheap redemption that the apostle raises an eager and urgent warning—“There was nothing cheap about your redemption. It was not a light ministry which cost a mere trifle. Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with precious blood, even the blood of Christ.” Reason from the cost of redemption to the nature of the conflict; reason from the nature of the conflict to the black enormity of sin; reason from the enormity of sin to the glory of holiness! A lax God could have given us licence and so redeemed us cheaply! A cheap redemption might have made us feel easy; it would never have made us good. A cheap forgiveness would only have confirmed the sin it forgave. If we are to see sin we must behold holiness, unveiled for us as in a “*lamb without blemish and without spot.*” [Verse 19] And so in the sacrifice of Christ, the apostle discerns something of the holiness of the Father, and thus apprehends the unspeakable antagonism of holiness and sin. To him redemption is more than a search; it is a conflict. It is more than a tender yearning; it is the mighty bearing of an appalling load. Between the Incarnation, when Christ *was manifested*, and the Resurrection, when God *raised Him from the dead*, the powers of holiness and sin met face to face in mighty combat, and in the appalling darkness of Gethsemane and Calvary sin was overthrown and holiness was glorified. When I move amid the mysteries of redemption, I never want to become deaf to my Saviour’s words, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.” I never want His cry to go out of my life, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” So long as that cry sounds through the rooms of my life I can never have a cheap Redeemer, and I shall be kept from the enervating influence of a cheap redemption. In redemption I behold an unspeakable conflict which keeps me ever in mind of the holiness of the Fatherhood of God. In my conception of redemption there shall be “no curse,” nothing withering and destructive, for “the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it.” In the sacrifice of love I shall behold the holiness of God.

Out of this large conception of a holy Father hood there will arise a worthy conception of sonship. If God be holy, expressing His holiness in all His dealings, and “if ye call on Him as Father,” what manner of children ought ye to be? If I call the holy God “my Father,” the assumption of kinship implies obligation to holiness. If I say “Father,” I may not ignore holiness. “If God were your father,” ye would bear His likeness. “Ye shall be holy; for I am holy.” If then ye call on Him as “Father,” put yourselves in the way of appropriating His glory, and of becoming radiant with the beauty of His holiness: “*pass the time of your sojourning in fear.*” [Verse 17] There is no suggestion in the counsel of any enslaving timidity. We are not to cringe like slaves, or to move as though we expected that at any moment an

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abyss might open at our feet. The Christian's walk is a fine swinging step, born of hope and happy confidence. To "pass the time in fear" is not to move in paralysing dread. Nor is it to be the victim of a paralysing particularity which converts every trifle into a thorn, and makes the way of life a via dolorosa of countless irritations. The Christian is neither a faddist nor a slave. To "pass the time in fear" is just to be fearful of sleep, to watch against indifference, to be alert against an insidious thoughtlessness, to be spiritually awake and to miss no chance of heightening the purity of our souls by all the ministries of holy fellowships, and by a ready obedience to the Master's will. "If ye call on Him as Father," let the majestic claim inspire you to a spacious ambition: "pass your time" in a fervent aspiration after His likeness, "perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord."



THE CREATION OF CULTURE AND AFFECTION

1 Peter i. 22-25

Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from a clean heart fervently: having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth. For, All flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falleth: but the word of the, Lord abideth for ever.

IN the very heart of this passage there lies a fair and exquisite flower—the flower of an intense and fervent affection. Its surroundings reveal to us the means of its production. The earlier clauses of the passage describe the mode of its growth; the later clauses describe the cause of its growth. The first part is descriptive of the rootage and the preliminary life of the flower of love; the second part proclaims the all-enswathing atmosphere in which growth is rendered possible and sure. On the one hand, there are revealed to us the successive and progressive stages of spiritual culture; on the other hand, we are introduced to the all-pervading power which determines their evolution. The earlier part centres round about “obedience”; the latter part gathers round about “the word of God.” The first half emphasises the human; the second half emphasises the Divine. The human and the Divine combine and co-operate, and in their mingled ministry create the sweet and unpolluted flower of love.

“Love one another from a clean heart fervently.” [Verse 22] How can I grow this sweet, white flower of love? Its creation is not the immediate result of volition; it is the issue of a process. We cannot command it; we can grow it. It is not an “alpha” but an “omega,” the “amen” in a spiritual succession. If I want the flower, I must begin at the root. If I want the love, I must begin with obedience. The first stage towards a fervent affection is “obedience to the truth” If a soul yearns to be crowned and beautified by the grace of a delicate love, it must put itself in the posture of “*obedience to the truth.*” Ay, but what is this truth to which we are to pay obeisance? Just as I penned the question, the sun, which had been concealed behind a cloud, broke from its hiding, and a broad, wealthy tide of light flowed over the garden, and revealed the young leaves in resplendent glory. The word “tree” obtains a new significance when you see the branches swaying in the golden light. It is even so with the familiar word “truth.” To one man the word is suggestive of a dim, dull, cloudy quantity, having little or nothing of arresting radiance or beauty. To another man “truth” is a gloriously unclouded light, suggesting the hallowed beauty of the eternal God. What do we mean by the term “hill”? That depends upon where we have lived. The word “hill” has one significance at Snowdon, another at Ben Nevis, another at Mont Blanc, and another amid the gigantic heights of Northern India. What do we mean by “the truth”? Where have we lived? The apostle has not used the word “truth” before. He seems to have kept it in abeyance until by

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some preliminary thought he has prepared our minds to give it adequate content. He has been leading us through a pilgrimage of contemplation, and at the end of the journey he utters the word “truth,” and if we would enter into his conception we must pack the word with the experiences of the previous way. We have been peering into the Fatherhood of God. The apostle has been pointing out to us elements which we were inclined to forget. We looked into the Father hood for sweetness; He pointed out whiteness. We looked for gentleness; He pointed out holiness. We looked for tender yearnings towards the sinner; He would not permit us to overlook the Divine hostility to sin. Wherever the apostle turns in the contemplation of the Father hood, it is the “whiteness” that arrests him. He looks into the Father’s judgments, and he beholds the whiteness of holiness. He glances behind the veil into the mysteries of redemption, and even amid the sacrifices of love he beholds the glory of “the great white throne.” Wherever he turns his wondering gaze, it is the perception of a character “without blemish and without spot” that brings him to his knees. When, therefore, we emerge from the solemn sight-seeing, as we do in the [twenty-second verse](#), and I hear the apostle use the word “truth,” I know that he inserts into the word the content of superlative whiteness, and that while he uses it he bows before the holiness of the Fatherhood of God. Here, then, we must begin the culture of affection. We must begin with the contemplation of whiteness, with a steady, steadfast gazing upon the holiness of the Fatherhood of God. We must let holiness tower in our conception of God, as the dazzling snow abides on the lifted heights of the Alps. The “truth” is the unveiled face of the Holy Father. The first step in the creation of pure affection is the contemplation of a Holy God.

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The apostle uses a very graphic word to further describe the healthy pose of a soul in reference to “the truth.” We are to be in “*obedience* to the truth.” There is a stoop in the word. It is a kneeling at attention. It is an eager inclining of the ear to catch the whisper of the Holy God. But it is more than that. It is the attention of a soul that is girt and ready for service. The wings are plumed for ministering flight. It is a listening, for the purpose of a doing. “Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine and doeth them.” It is a soul waiting consciously and eagerly upon the Holy Father with the intent of hearing and doing His will. This is “obedience to the truth,” and this is the preliminary step in the creation and culture of God.

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Now, let us pass to the vital succession described in the text. We enter a second stage of this progressive gradation. “*Ye have purified your souls* in your obedience to the truth.” [[Verse 22](#)] While ye were doing the one, ye were accomplishing the other. Obedience to truth is the agent of spiritual perfection. Homage to holiness is the minister of refinement. To bow to the august is to enlarge the life. “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” To listen in waiting attention for the expression of the will of holiness is to fill the life with cleansing and refining ministry. We bleach our fabrics by exposing them to the light. We

whiten our spiritual garments by dwelling in the hallowed glory of the Light of Life. We “purify our souls” by our “obedience to the truth.” We purify them. We make them chaste in all the varied meaning of that wealthy word. We rid them of secret defilements, washing quite out of the grain the soaking filth of selfishness and of impure ambition. We free them of all the uncouthness, the rudeness, and the rough discourtesies of the unhallowed life. We deliver them from the meretricious, the tawdry graces that are made to do duty for the fair realities of the sanctified life. The soul is made grandly simple, endowed with the winsome naturalness and grace of an unaffected child. This is the way of the eternal. When we dwell in the light, the powers of the soul are being rarefied, touched, and moulded into ever finer discernments. The organic quality of the life is enriched, and possibilities awakened of which we hardly dreamed. We transform our spiritual substance when we change our spiritual posture. We “purify our souls by our obedience to the truth.”

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Now, mark the next stage in this brightening sequence. “Ye have purified your souls . . . unto unfeigned love.” [Verse 22] We are rising into finer issues. We have passed from hallowed obedience to purified spirit, and now we go on to unfeigned affection! The rarest issue of the rose-tree is the perfume of the rose. From root to perfume you ascend a gradation of increasing refinements until you come to its subtle and bewitching breath. And here in my text we have arrived at the sphere of fragrance, the realm of sentiment, the haunt of affection. “Ye have purified your souls . . . unto unfeigned love.” Mark the directive force of the preposition—“purified unto love”; as though the purification of the soul made straight, as by a gracious destiny, for the birth and revelation of love. The spirit can be so chastened, so refined by “obedience to the truth,” that love will emerge from it as naturally and spontaneously as perfume distils from a rose. “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that *loveth!*” He cannot help loving; his love is a spontaneous affluence, and he can no more restrain it than the rose can imprison her fragrance when she is tossed by the playful breeze. A fine sentiment is the offspring of a fine spirit. The posture of the soul determines the quality of the disposition. If the soul; “live and move and have her being” in the presence of the Holy Father, revealed in Christ our Saviour, and shape her course in “obedience to the truth,” she will be sublimed, and all her ministries will be attended by a gracious affection, diffusing itself as fragrance about the common ways of men. “Ye have purified your soul unto unfeigned love of the brethren.”

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But now it may occasion a little surprise that, having reached this apparent climax in the thought, the affluence of a spontaneous affection, the apostle should add the injunction, “*love one another from a clean heart fervently!*” [Verse 22] What is the purpose of the apparently needless addition? We have watched the ascending stages in the spiritual processes that issue in love; what if there are ascending stages in the refinement of love itself? There may be degrees of riches even in perfumes. Even love itself may be refined into more and more exquisite quality. That, I think, is the meaning of the apostle’s counsel. He urges them

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to seek for the superlative in the sweet kingdom of love, ever to set their minds on “the things above,” and to fix their yearnings upon still finer issues. We get a clear glimpse into the apostle’s mind through the vivid word in which he urges the counsel, “love one another . . . fervently.” There is a suggestion of increased tension in the word, as when the string of a violin has been stretched to a tighter pitch that it might yield a higher note. That is the apostle’s figure—a little more tension, that you may reach a little higher note. There are heights of love unreached. Tighten the strings of your devotion, that your soul may yield the entrancing strains. Be vigilant against all laxity, and stretch yourselves to the uttermost in the endeavour to compass the manifold music of the marvellous scales of love. When, there fore, the apostle enjoins a more fervent love, I feel that he drives me back to the first preliminary stage of spiritual growth. When he appeals for higher notes of love, he is really counselling a deeper holiness. If my love is to be more intense, I must seek a “closer walk with God.” I must tighten my holiness if I would enrich my music. There will come a more discerning love when there is a more devoted obedience. I shall pass from finer homage to rarer spiritual purity, and from rarer spiritual purity to increasing exquisiteness in love. “Seeing you have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from a clean heart fervently.”

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How can we depend upon this succession in the processes? How can we be assured that one stage will lead to another in inevitable spiritual gradation? What is the nature of the bond and the quality of the guarantee? What is our assurance that “obedience to truth” will issue in chaste refinement of spirit, and that spiritual refinement will be crowned by a rare and fervent affection? The basis of our reliance is “the word of God.” [Verse 23] It was through the word of God there was given to us the seed of a regenerated life. We were “begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God.” That word, through which there came the first, faint seminal beginnings of a holy life, remaineth sure through all the stages of subsequent growth. We may rely upon “the word of God.” It “liveth and abideth,” an energising all-enveloping atmosphere, in which the beautiful young growth will be matured. If the centre of love depended upon the power of any human ministry, the issue would assuredly fail. Our dependence would then be built upon a thing enduring only through a transient season. Human aid is but “as the grass”; and the best of human aid, the very glory of it, only as “the flower of grass” [Verse 24] In the fierce, scorching noontide, the time of feverish strain, when we are most in need of enriching rest, “the grass withereth, and the flower falleth,” and there is barrenness where we yearned to find a soft and healing peace. No; not upon flesh must we depend for the evolution of the spiritual life. “Our hope is in God.” The Lord Himself pervades the processes and determines the line of ascending growth. “The word of the Lord abideth for ever.” [Verse 25]

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THE LIVING STONES AND THE SPIRITUAL HOUSE

1 Peter ii. 1-10

Putting away therefore all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation; if ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious: unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Because it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be put to shame. For you therefore which believe is the preciousness: but for such as disbelieve, The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner; and, A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence; for they stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may shew forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light: which in time past were no people, but now are the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

THERE is a wonderful ascending gradation in the earlier portions of this great chapter. It begins in the darkness, amid "wickedness" and "guile" and "hypocrisies," and it winds its way through the wealthy, refining processes of grace, until it issues in the "marvellous light" of perfected redemption. It begins with individuals, who are possessed by uncleanness, holding aloof from one another in the bondage of "guile" and "envies" and "evil speakings"; it ends in the creation of glorious families, sanctified communities, elect races, "showing forth the excellencies" of the redeeming Lord. We pass from the corrupt and isolated individual to a redeemed and perfected fellowship. We begin with an indiscriminate heap of unclean and undressed stones; we find their consummation in a "spiritual house," standing consistent and majestic in the light of the glory of God. We begin with scattered units; we end with co-operative communions. The subject of the passage is therefore clearly defined. It is concerned with the making of true society, the creation of spiritual fellowship, the realisation of the family, the welding of antagonistic units into a pure and lovely communion.

Where must we begin in the creation of this communion? The building of the house, says the apostle, must begin in the preparation of the stones. If the family is to be glorified, the individual must be purified. A choir is no richer than its individual voices, and if we wish to enrich the harmony we must refine the constituent notes. The basis of all social reformation is individual redemption. And so I am not surprised that the apostle, who is contemplating the creation of beautified brotherhoods, should primarily concern himself with the preparation of the individual. But how are the stones to be cleaned and shaped and dressed for the house? How is the individual to be prepared? By what spiritual processes is

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he to be fitted for larger fellowships and family communion? I think the apostle gives us a threefold answer.

“*If ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*” [Verse 3] That is the basal clause of the entire chapter. Everything begins here. It is no use our dreaming of perfected human relationships until the individual has deliberately tasted the things that are Divine. A chastened palate in the individual is a primary element in the consolidation of the race. There must be a personal experimenting with God. There must be a willingness to try the spiritual hygiene enjoined in the Gospel of Christ. We must “taste and see” what the grace is like that is so freely offered to us of God. We must *taste* it, and find out for ourselves its healthy and refreshing flavour. What is implied in the apostle’s figure? In the merely physical realm, when we taste a thing, what are the implications of the act? When we take a thing up critically for the purpose of discerning its flavour, there are at any rate two elements contained in the method of our approach. There is an application of a sense, and there is the exercise of the judgment. We bring an alertness of palate that we may register sensitive perceptions, and we bring an alertness of mind that we may exercise a discriminating judgment. Well, these two elements are only symbolic of the equipment that is required if we would “taste and see how gracious the Lord is.” We need to present to the Lord a sensitive sense and a vigilant mind. There is no word which is read so drowsily as the Word of God. There is no business so sluggishly executed as the business of prayer. If men would discern the secret flavours of the Gospel, they must come to it wide awake, and sensitively search for the conditions by which its hidden wealth may be disclosed. “Son of man, eat that thou findest. . . . Then did I eat it, and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.” He had tasted and seen. “Eat that thou findest!” Well, the only way in which we can eat a message is to obey it. Obedience is spiritual consumption; and in the act of obedience, in the act of consumption, we discern the wondrous flavours of grace. We are, therefore, to approach the Gospel of our Lord. We are to patiently and sensitively realise its conditions. We are to put ourselves in the attitude of obedience, and, retaining a bright and wakeful mind, we shall begin to discern the glories of our redemption. We shall taste the flavour of reconciliation, the fine grace of forgiveness, and the exquisite quality of peace. This is the primary step in the creation of the family; the individual is to taste and appreciate the things of God.

All delights imply repulsions. All likes necessitate dislikes. A strong taste for God implies a strong distaste for the ungodly. The more refined my taste, the more exacting becomes my standard. The more I appreciate God, the more shall I deprecate the godless. I do not wonder, therefore, that in the chapter before us the “tasting” of grace is accompanied by a “*putting away*” [Verse 1] of sin. If I welcome the one, I shall “*therefore*” repel the other. The finer my taste, the more scrupulous will be my repulsions. Mark the ascending refinement in this black catalogue of expulsions: “*wickedness, guile, hypocrisies, envies, evil speakings!*” The list ranges from thick, soddened, compact wickedness up to unkindly speech, and I

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am so to grow in my Divine appreciation that I just as strongly repel the gilded forms of sin as I do those that savour of the exposed and noisome sewer. The taste of grace implies the “putting away” of sin; and therefore the second step in the creation of the family is the cleansing of the individual. Is the cleansing essential? Let us lay this down as a primary axiom in the science of life—there can be no vital communion between the unclean. Why, we cannot do a bit of successful soldering unless the surfaces we wish to solder are vigorously scraped of all their filth. I suppose that, in the domain of surgery, one of the greatest discoveries of the last fifty years has been the discovery of dirt, and the influence which it has exercised as the minister of severance and alienation. It has been found to be the secret cause of inflammation, the hidden agent in retarded healing, the subtle worker in embittered wounds; and now surgical science insists that all its operations be performed in the most scrupulous cleanliness, and its intensified vigilance has been rewarded by pure and speedy healings and communions. It is not otherwise in the larger science of life. Every bit of uncleanness in the individual is a barrier to family communion. All dirt is the servant of alienation. It is essential, if we would have strong and intimate fellowships, that every member be sweet and clean. “Therefore put away all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies and all evil speakings,” and by purified surfaces let us prepare ourselves for spiritual communion.

“As newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk.” [Verse 2] Having tasted of the grace of the Lord, and freeing yourselves from the embittering presence of sin, adopt an exacting diet—“long for the spiritual milk *which is without guile.*” Feed upon the loftiest ideals. Suffer nothing of adulterating compromise to enter into your spiritual food. Nourish yourselves upon aspirations undefiled. Do not let your wine be mingled with water. Do not permit any dilution from the suggestions of the world. “Long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, *that ye may grow thereby unto salvation.*” [Verse 2] It is the unadulterated food that ministers to growth. It is the high ideal which lifts men to the heights. The loftiness of one’s aim determines the degree of one’s growth. In these matters my spiritual gravitation is governed by my personal aspirations, my spirit pursues the path and gradient of my desires.

Here, then, is the threefold preparation of the individual for a family life of intimate and fruitful fellowship—a personal experience of grace, the expulsion from the life of all uncleanness, and the adoption of a rigorous and uncompromising ideal. The whole preparatory process is begun, continued, and ended in Christ. In Christ the individual is lodged, and in His grace, which is all-sufficient, he finds an abundant equipment for the spacious purpose of his perfected redemption.

Now, let us assume that the individual is ready for the fellowship. We have got the unit of the family. We have got the “living stone.” cleansed, shaped, dressed, ready to be built into the “spiritual house.” How, now, shall the society be formed? What shall be its cement? What shall be its binding medium, and the secret of its consistency? Here are the “living

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stones”; what shall we do with them? “*Unto whom coming . . . as living stones ye are built up a spiritual house.*” [Verses 4, 5] “Unto whom coming!” The living stones are to find their bond of union in the living Christ. The alpha of all enduring communion is Christ. We cannot prepare the individual stones without Christ. We cannot build the individual stones into a house without Christ. He is the “corner stone,” and the pervading strength of every enduring structure. What is the implication of all this? It is this. We cannot have society without piety. We may have juxtapositions, connections, clubs, fleeting and superficial relationships, but the only enduring brotherhood is the brotherhood which is built upon faith. Apart from the Christ there can be no social cohesion. The “Word of God proclaims it, and history confirms it. Every preposition seems to have been exhausted by the Word of God in emphasising the necessity of a fundamental relationship with Christ—“in Christ,” “through Christ,” “by Christ,” “with Christ,” “unto Christ.” In every conceivable way Christ is proclaimed as the all-essential. In seeking to create societies we have therefore got to reckon with the Christ. We cannot ignore Him. He will not be ignored. We either use Him or we fall over Him. We use Him and rise into strength, or we neglect Him and stumble into ruin. We either make Him the “*head of the corner,*” [Verses 7, 8] or He becomes our “*stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.*” Societies and families and nations, which are not built upon the Christ, fall to pieces, thrown into ruin by the very “law of the spirit of life.” But have not societies been built upon the Christ, and yet been far from manifesting the glory of a radiant, family communion? Look at the sects! Is not Christ the corner stone, and yet where is the sweet communion? Ah! it is when the different communities have got away from the Christ that their communion has been destroyed. It is when the sects get away from the spirit of the Christ, when they become wranglers about a letter, when they are heated by the fever of personal vanity, and lust for the spoils of sectarian triumph—it is then that the spiritual house collapses, and lies scattered in a heap of inhospitable fragments. But when we build upon Him, when He, and He only, is “the preciousness,” when all our personal aims are merged in line with His, when we have the Spirit of Christ, then are we bound into a gracious communion, into a vital and fundamental unity. And into what is He prepared to build us? This chapter is overflowing in the wealth of the figures by which it seeks to express the glorious mission. He will build us into a “*spiritual house,*” [Verse 5] a spacious home, enclosing but one tenant, the gracious Spirit of God. He will distinguish us as “*an elect race,*” [Verse 9] moving in the world, yet not of it, standing out in strong relief from the discordant and fragmentary life by which it is surrounded. He will endow us with all the dignities of “*a royal priesthood,*” having kingly and priestly prerogatives, reigning with Christ in the realm of the spirit and exercising a powerful ministry of intercession in the most holy presence of God. He will constitute us “*a holy nation,*” a people whose policies shall be purities, and whose state craft shall just be the enlightened administration of large

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and unselfish minds. This is what our God is prepared to make of us. It is a great ideal, but then we have a great Father and a great Saviour and a mighty Spirit, and vast ideals are native to the very spirit of our redemption. It is a grand house which the Lord would build, and if only He had the stones the majestic edifice would speedily be reared.



And what is to be the mission of the glorified fellowship? If even two or three are gathered together, by common possession of the Spirit of Christ, into a sanctified society, what purpose is to be achieved by their communion? They are to “*shew forth the excellencies of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light.*” [Verse 9] The “elect race” will be distinguished by its cheeriness, its geniality, its radiant sympathies, its abounding optimism. It will be of little use our professing that we are “called into marvellous light” “if our society is only the home of controversy, or the abode of a brooding melancholy and depression. The redeemed society is composed of “children of light.” We are to prove that “*now we are the people of God,*” [Verse 10] that we have been naturalised—or shall I say supernaturalised?—into the kingdom of God, and we are to prove it by bringing into common affairs the air of a better country, a loftier tone, a finer temper, a nobler spirit. “Our citizenship” is to be “in heaven,” and we are to “shew forth the excellencies of God” in the lightsomeness and spirituality of His people. Such is to be the ministry of the spiritual society which our Father will create out of His reconciled and sanctified children. Such is to be the “spiritual house,” built up of “living stones,” and having as its one and only foundation Jesus Christ, our Lord.



THE MINISTRY OF SEEMLY BEHAVIOUR

1 Peter ii. 11-17

Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul; having your behaviour seemly among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to them that do well. For so is the will of God, that by well-doing ye should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your freedom for a cloke of wickedness, but as bondservants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

THIS is an appeal for the evangelising influences of a chaste and winsome character. It is an apostolic entreaty to consider the immeasurable momentum of a beautiful life. It is a glorification of the silent witness of saintliness. It is not given to all men to have the faculty and function of the prophet, his clear sight, and his power of fruitful interpretation, The persuasive, wooing speech, of the evangelist is not an element in the common endowment. The evangelist and the prophet may be only infrequent creations, and their gifts may have only a limited distribution. But we may all exercise the ministry of beauty. Every man may be an ambassador of life, discharging his office through the medium of holiness. Every man may be an evangelist in the domain of character, distributing his influence through the odour of sanctity, in seemliness of behaviour, in exquisite fitness of speech, in finely finished and well-proportioned life. This is a ministry for every body, the apostleship of spiritual beauty. And so in the passage before us the apostle is engaged in delineating the features of *the character that tells*. He is depicting a forceful life. He is exhibiting the behaviour which is influential in leading men to reverent thought and religious inquiry and spiritual conviction. What are these public aspects of the sanctified life? By what kind of living can we best arouse the interest of the world in the claims and kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? How may we become powerful evangelists, even though we have been denied the gift of tongues? How may we arrest the world in fruitful wonder? Let us seek the answer in the apostolic word.

“Abstain from fleshly lusts.” [[Verse 11](#)] That is the first note in the forceful life. Do not let us so narrow its interpretation that the majority of us escape the grip of the apostle's injunction. Let us attribute a comprehensive content to the unwelcome word “lust.” Lust includes the entire army of unclean forces which are antagonistic to the exalted realm of the spirit. It includes not only the carnal desire, but the jealous eye and the itching palm. It comprehends every form of heated and feverish motion which is destructive of spiritual treasure. Fleshly lust is anything in the life which steams the windows of the spirit. Fleshly lust is therefore inclusive of envy, jealousy, avarice, insatiable selfishness, and immoderate



ambition. “Abstain from fleshly lusts,” from any excessive heat which maintains its fire by consuming the furniture of the soul.

Now, what is this but a plea for the ascendancy of spirit? It is a plea for the magnificent passion of moderation, and for the imposing grace of a noble self-restraint. “Abstain from fleshly lusts.” Do not let any fire get outside the bars. Do not let the flames reach the furniture. Hold everything in its place. Suffer no usurpation. Do not let the lower supplant the higher. Rigidly observe the distinction of subject and sovereign, and preserve the purity of the throne. Such is the all-inclusive meaning of the apostolic counsel. In the constitution of man there is a Divine order. His powers are arranged in ranks and gradations. The science of life is the doctrine of gradation; the art of living is the recognition of gradation. I suppose that George Combe did a great service to the cause of practical thinking when, seventy years ago, he wrote his work on *The Constitution of Man*. I am not aware that there was anything new in the philosophy of the book. It only confirmed the teaching of the entire range of philosophy stretching back from his own day to the days of Socrates and Plato. And what was the teaching? That the powers of the human personality are arranged in heightening gradation, and that the secret of beautiful living consists in awarding to each rank its own precise and peculiar value. The service rendered by George Combe consisted in the attempt to make this philosophy a plain, practical rule for common life. I find in the resources of my personality regiments of diverse, powers. I find vital forces, affectional forces, social forces, moral forces, spiritual forces. I find elements whose kinship is with the swine, and I find elements which have the lustre and the preciousness of pearls. “What is the art of successful and forceful living. “Give not that which, is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine.” Do not treat swine and pearls as though they were of equal value. Recognise an aristocracy among the powers, and to them give the preference and the sovereignty. When there are two calls in the life, the bark of the dog and a voice from the sanctuary, “give not that which is holy unto the dogs,” but ever keep the lowest under the severe jurisdiction of the highest. “Abstain from fleshly lusts.” Do not allow any lower power to prowl about in loose licentiousness. Keep the chain on. “Let your moderation be known unto all men.” Exercise the ministry of a well-ordered life. Let all the powers in the life be well drilled, well disciplined, healthily ranked, each one in its place, from the private soldier up to the commander-in-chief. “Abstain from fleshly lusts.” The primary characteristic of forceful, influential character is the ascendancy of the spirit.

[Verses 13, 14] “*Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to them that do well.*” That is the second element that tells—“Be subject to every ordinance . . . to the king . . . or unto governors!” Is there any suggestion of forcefulness in the counsel? It appears to indicate the cringing obedience of boneless weaklings. I thought that the influential character was conspicuous for its beauty. Is there anything of beauty in this

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apparent servility? John Ruskin has told us that one of the primary elements of beauty is the element of repose. But he is careful to explain that by repose he does not mean the weak passivity of a pebble lying upon the highway, but the repose of a mountain, with its protruding rocks revealing themselves like gigantic muscles. It is repose suggestive of might, hinting of splendid power in reserve. May we translate the axiom into our interpretation of spiritual beauty? Spiritual beauty must not have the repose and passivity of a pebble: it must display muscle, and be suggestive of irresistible strength. Character that tells must be the ally of power. Its very sub missions must be indicative of strong nobility. Its bendings must not be the bendings of the invertebrate, but the voluntary, reasonable homage of a splendid will. What, then, is all this about, this submitting to ordinances and kings and governors? Whatever else it may mean, it is not the bending of reeds, but the devotion of giants. Here, I think, is the secret. A Christian man is one who clearly recognises the necessity of social order. The sanctity of society is a cardinal element in his faith. The hallowing of human relationship is not one whit behind the hallowing of himself. The ultimate purpose of redemption is to make an orderly family out of a disorderly race. The Christian will not stand aloof from his fellows. He will not walk the lonely way of isolation, or assume an attitude of selfish aggression. He will not maintain a stern individualism, in which the claims and rights of others are ignored. He will recognise the hallowedness of social fellowships, and he will strongly accept his social obligations. He will bend himself to the discharge of civic duties, and put his shoulder beneath the responsible burden of national life. He will fit himself into the social order, into the body corporate, and he will willingly share his blood in the common life.

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If this be evangelistic character, the character that tells upon “the Gentiles,” then Christian life is not perfected and beautified where the hallowing of the social order is ignored. When civic duty is neglected, and national obligation is overlooked, the fair circle of spiritual devotion is broken. “Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake . . . to the king . . . or unto governors.” Bend your strength into an intelligent obedience which will be creative of a larger and more fruitful corporate life. I have no personal doubt as to what we should do with kings and governors if their rule minister to moral chaos and disorder. The sovereignty is only hallowed when it works to hallowed ends. If this predominant purpose is violated by the supreme king or governor, a man’s very reverence for social sanctities will transform him into a rebel. It was because our fathers were possessed by hallowed civic instincts, and by a burning eagerness for pure and righteous corporate life, that they hurled Charles I. from the throne, and in his rejection and dethronement pledged their souls to a deepened devotion to the sovereignty of God. A primary characteristic of forceful, evangelistic character is the serious recognition of the sanctity of corporate life.

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“As free, and not using your freedom for a cloke of wickedness, but as bondservants of God.” [Verse 16] Here is another aspect of the influential life—“Using your freedom . . . as

bondservants.” All privilege is used with a sense of responsibility. All exercise is taken “as ever in the great Task master’s eye.” No freedom is permitted to become licence. Every liberty is under the dominion of a fine restraint. “Why, a sense of responsibility and restraint is essential even to the appreciation of freedom itself. Restraint is always creative of refined perceptions, The ascetic can discern finer flavours than the glutton. The man who puts reins upon his appetite has a more delightful appreciation of his food. He must be a bondsman to appreciate his freedom. It is even so with every manner of freedom. It is only responsible exercise that discovers their luxurious essence. Licence, in any kind of freedom, works to coarseness, to injury, and to waste. Is this word altogether inopportune for our own day? Are there no alluring freedoms which may entice us into licence? Freedom of thought! “Use your freedom as the bondservants of God.” No man has a right to think as he likes. No man has a right to think about the unworthy, or to contemplate the unclean. In the domain of the mind, it is the man who angles in narrow waters who has the wealthiest haul. Freedom of speech! “Use your freedom as the bondservants of God.” Exercise it with severe restrictions. “Let no communication proceed out of your mouth but what is edifying.” In all these freedoms the element of responsibility is the saving salt, and sometimes the element of responsibility will cause the freedom to be unused. If a man resign his freedom to take intoxicating drink that he may the better minister to an imperilled brother, I cannot but think that in reality he is no bondsman, but the Lord’s freeman, and that his deed will not appear unworthy when it is placed in the searching rays of the Eternal Light. In the character that tells, the responsible use of freedom is a great and influential factor.

“Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” [Verse 17] “Honour all men!” The injunction includes the entire circle of human relationships. “Honour!” “Fear!” “Love!” What do the counsels mean except this—that our entire life is to be passed in the exercise of an all-inclusive reverence. We are to move about in the spirit of homage, expecting that at any time, and anywhere, we may come upon crowned sovereignties before which it will be well for us to bow in serious and grateful regard. If we are irreverent, monarchs will be continually passing us, but they will not be known. They will pass “like ships in the night.” Reverence is the very spirit of perception. Frivolity has no eyes, and so it bestows no honour. Censoriousness is blind, and so is never aroused into love. Pride walks with a heavy veil. The cocksure never rest in the deep quietness of the Divine certainties. It is the man who walks in reverence, the man who feels the mystery of all things, whether he be contemplating common men or kings or God, who enters into the secret treasure-house, and discovers unsuspected wealth. We should see more in one another if the angel of reverence dwelt near the springs of our life. It is the man who stands in reverence before flowers, and little children, and his own loved ones, and his leaders, and his God, to whom are revealed the secret essences which turn life into a garden of unspeakable delights.

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These, then, are some of the characteristics of the “seemly behaviour,” which, working through the medium of holiness, proclaim the glory of God the ascendancy of spirit, the aspiration after social sanctity, the responsible use of freedom, and the ceaseless exercise of reverence. These are the primary aspects of the forceful life which works mightily in the evangelisation of the world. As to what would be the issues of such a life the apostle proclaims a triumphant hope. “*The Gentiles,*” [[Verse 12](#)] the great unleavened mass of men, “*by your good works, which they behold,*” shall “*glorify God in the day of visitation.*” The beautiful life is to raise their thoughts in homage to the glorious God. When they behold the Divine realised in the human, they too are to be wooed into heavenly fellowships. They are to be wooed, not by the eloquence of our speech, but by the radiance of our behaviour. By the imposing grace of noble living we are to “*put to silence the ignorance of foolish men,*” [[Verse 15](#)] and that silence will be for them the first stage in a life of aspiring consecration.



THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

1 Peter ii. 21-25

For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously: who His own self bare our sins in His body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were going astray like sheep; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

“Christ also suffered . . . who did no sin.” [Verses 21, 22] The two phrases must be conjoined if either is to receive an adequate interpretation. The earlier term discloses its significance by the light of the later term. If we would know the content and intensity of the suffering, we must know the character of the sufferer. “Christ also suffered.” [Verse 21] The word is indeterminate until I know the quality of His life. Suffering is a relative term. The measure of its acuteness is determined by the degree of our refinement. The same burden weighs unequally on different men. Lower organisation implies diminished sensitiveness. The higher the organisation the finer becomes the nerve, and the finer the nerve the more delicate becomes the exposure to pain. The more exquisite the refinement, the more exquisite is the pang.

I do not limit the principle to the domain of the flesh. It is a matter of familiar knowledge that in the body it is rampant. There are bodies in which the nerves seem atrophied or still-born, and there are bodies in which the nerves abound like masses of exquisitely sensitive pulp. But the diversity runs up into the higher endowments of the life, into the aesthetic and affectional and spiritual domains of the being. The man of little aesthetic refinement knows nothing of the aches and pains created by ugliness and discord. The rarer organisation is pierced and wounded by every jar and obliquity. It is even so in the realm of the affections. Where affection burns low, neglect and inattention are unnoticed; where love burns fervently, neglect is a martyrdom. If we rise still higher into the coronal dominions of the life, into the domain of moral and spiritual sentiments, we shall find that the degree of rectitude and holiness determines the area of exposure to the wounding, crucifying ministry of vulgarity and sin.

“Christ also suffered . . . who did no sin.” We must interpret the rarity and refinement of His spirit if we would even faintly realise the intensity of His sufferings. “Who did no sin, [Verse 22] neither was guile found in His mouth.” “No sin!” The fine, sensitive membrane of the soul had in nowise been scorched by the fire of iniquity. “No sin!” He was perfectly pure and healthy. No power had been blasted by the lightning of passion. No nerve had been atrophied by the wasting blight of criminal neglect. The entire surface of His life was

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as finely sensitive as the fair, healthy skin of a little child. “Neither was guile found in His mouth.” [Verse 22] There was no duplicity. There were no secret folds or convolutions in His life concealing ulterior motives. There was nothing underhand. His life lay exposed in perfect truthfulness and candour. The real, inner meaning of His life was presented upon a plain surface of undisturbed simplicity. “No sin!” Therefore nothing blunted or benumbed. “No guile!” Therefore nothing hardened by the effrontery of deceit. I ask you to try to imagine the immense area which such a life laid open to the wounding implements of unfaithfulness and sin.

Now, it is a Scriptural principle that all sin is creative of insensitiveness. “The wages of sin is death,” deadened faculty, impaired perception. “His leaf shall wither!” Sin is a blasting presence, and every fine power shrinks and withers in the destructive heat. Every spiritual delicacy succumbs to its malignant touch. I suppose that Scripture has drawn upon every sense for analogies in which to express the ravages of sin in the region of perception. Sin impairs the sight, and works towards blindness. Sin benumbs the hearing and tends to make men deaf. Sin perverts the taste, causing men to confound the sweet with the bitter, and the bitter with the sweet. Sin hardens the touch, and eventually renders a man “past feeling.” All these are Scriptural analogies, and their common significance appears to be this—sin blocks and chokes the fine senses of the spirit; by sin we are desensitised, rendered imperceptive, and the range of our correspondence is diminished. Sin creates callosity. It hoofs the spirit, and so reduces the area of our exposure to pain.

“Who did no sin!” No part of His being had been rendered insensitive. No perception had been benumbed by any callous overgrowth. Put the slightest pressure upon the Master’s life, and you awoke an exquisite nerve. “And they disputed one with another who should be greatest.” . . . “And Jesus perceiving their thoughts!” How sensitive the perception! The touch of a selfish thought crushed upon the nerve, and stirred it into agony. Such is the sensitiveness of sinlessness, and in this vulgar, selfish, and sinful world it could not be but that the Sinless One should be “a Man of Sorrows,” and that He should pass through pangs and martyrdoms long before He reached the appalling midnight of Gethsemane and Calvary. “Christ also suffered . . . who did no sin.”

Now, let us watch this sensitive Sufferer, so quick and apprehensive in every nerve, and let us contemplate the nature of some of the sufferings He endured. “He was reviled.” [Verse 23] Give the word its requisite intensity. He was vilified, vituperated, slandered!” What was the shape of the reviling? He was denounced as a liar! “He deceiveth the people.” Why, even with our blunt and benumbed consciousness, there is no charge like falsehood for tearing us with poignant pain. There is no word which pierces to the quick and stabs the very marrow, like the awful word “liar!” But to the Pure One, with His unimpaired perception, and in whose life the truth lay as fair and white as newly fallen snow, the charge of falsehood would create unutterable pain. “Christ also suffered,” being reviled. What was the shape of the re-

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vilings? “This man blasphemeth!” This meek and lowly Being, walking ever in the stoop of reverence, seeking ever to be well pleasing to His Father, now charged, by those He came to save, with irreverent and sacrilegious speech. His sacred ministry belied as profanity! “He hath a devil, and is mad!” “He casteth out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils!” This holy and sensitive Christ, whose one evangel was to tell men of His own sweet companionship with the Father, and whose one mission was to raise them into the delights of the same eternal fellowship, now charged with living in league with the devil, the evil despotism from which He sought to deliver them! It is the proof of our own benumbment if we do not feel that such accusations resulted in spiritual crucifixion. “He was reviled . . . *He suffered.*” [Verse 23] The suffering covers the whole scope of the Passion, from the dull pangs of the physical crucifixion to the sharper and more terrible pangs of the crucifixion of the spirit. Now, I say, take this Man of the sinless, guileless life; let Him move amid the chaos of selfishness, the riot of lustfulness, the cruelty of thoughtlessness, the chilling insults of studied neglect and contempt; let Him be made the victim of incivility; let there be withheld from Him the common courtesies; let Him be denied the hospitable kiss, and the kindly gift of water for His tired feet; let rough men roughly handle Him; let them mock Him and deride Him; and as the very consummation of coarse vulgarity, let them go up to this Man of exquisite refinement, and spit in His face, and then let them subject Him to all the howling, laughing brutality of the crucifixion,—I say, watch all this, gaze steadily upon it, look long upon all its repellent offensiveness, and while you keep in mind the exquisite sensitiveness of the Sufferer, you will enter with a little more power of interpretation into that familiar cry, “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow!” “His visage was so marred more than any man.” “He was a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”

We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains He had to bear.

How did the Lord endure His sufferings? “*When He was reviled, He reviled not again.*” [Verse 23] The bitter attack was not creative of bitter retaliation. The hurled venom did not poison His springs. Amid the enviroing bitterness the Man of Nazareth remained sweet. I have sometimes heard bitter retaliation justified on the plea that even the sweetest milk will turn sour under the influence of a prolonged storm. I am doubtful of the accuracy of the physical analogy, but I am confident of the inaccuracy of the spiritual inference. It is possible for “the milk of human kindness” to be kept sweet in the most tempestuous weather. “When He was reviled, He reviled not again.” Is the example too remote? Come down, then, from the high, cool altitudes of the Master’s abode, and let us see if the milk can be kept sweet in the presumably more sultry vales of common men. Here is a man with a stormy, tempestuous life,—“in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent. . . . Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. . . . Thrice was I beaten with rods, once

was I stoned . . . in weariness, in painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness!" Did the milk keep sweet? All these things he suffered of the Jews. When he was reviled, did he revile again? "I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh!" "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they may be saved!" I thought that out of the heart of the tempest I might hear the angry shout of retaliation; instead of which I hear a sweet and self-forgotten prayer, sounding like silvery village bells in a night of storm. The spirit was not embittered. The milk was not soured. The apostle was just the Master over again. "*When He suffered, He threatened not.*" [Verse 23] There was no violent menace in the Master's life. There was no dark, fateful hinting of a day of vengeance. There was no sullen, angry bidding of His time for the season of retaliation. He remained quiet, unembittered, sweet, and "*committed Himself,*" in happy confidence, and with ever-increasing assurance, "*to Him that judgeth righteously.*"

Such was the Sufferer, such were His sufferings, and such the way in which He endured them. What were the fruits of this transcendent endurance? If I were even to attempt to give an exhaustive reply to the great inquiry, I should have to quote the New Testament record from end to end. On every page one can find the enumeration and catalogue of the gracious fruits. Their proclamation is the New Testament glory. But just look at the pregnant summary given by the apostle Peter in the passage of our text. "Christ also suffered . . . *that we might live.*" [Verse 24] What is the significance of the word? Out of His sufferings there issues a *vital energy* for the reviving and enlivening of the race. It is evidence whose testimony cannot be ignored that when the heart is crushed with sin, and is sinking under the burden, it turns its eyes to those scenes in the Saviour's life where His sufferings are most abounding. Men in whose vitals the poison of the devil is dwelling, and whose spiritual force is ebbing away, do not tarry at Bethlehem, or even upon the great Mount where the great teaching was given. They make their way to Gethsemane and Calvary. It is when we are feeling respectable that Calvary has no allurements. But when the heart is bleeding in unclean tragedy, when life ceases to be a debating society topic, a light subject of controversy for a quiet summer's eve, when the burden of sin weighs down upon us with heavy and intolerable load, it is then we follow the pilgrim band along the well-trodden way to Gethsemane and Calvary, that in the fellowship of the august Sufferer we might discover the vital energy of a restored and reinvigorated life. "Christ also suffered . . . *that we might live.*" "*By whose stripes ye were healed.*" [Verse 24] Do not let us overlook the experience because we cannot find an explanation. Do not let us reject the fact because we cannot contrive a theory. The sorest places in human life, the raw, festering wounds of indwelling sin, can only be remedially touched by the healing influence of His stripes. The miracle is repeated every day. The sufferer from sin turns for release to the suffering Christ. There is a strange allurements about "the Man of

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Sorrows ” to which the common heart bears witness. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me!” The word proclaims the magnetic influence of the uplifted, suffering Christ. “*Ye were going astray like sheep; but are now returned*”; [Verse 25] ye have come home again, wooed and allured by the wondrous spectacle of a suffering God! Such are the issues of the calm endurance of this sensitive Sufferer—vital energies, full of reviving and healing ministry, wooing us back to God.



And now this unspeakable ministry of suffering is proclaimed as an example to all men. “Christ also suffered, *leaving you an example, that ye should follow His steps.*” [Verse 21] Do not let us shrink from the tremendous sequence. If the calm, strong endurance of the Master has been creative of transcendently blessed ministry, so our endurance will be productive of vital powers which will work for the enrichment of Verses the race. “*Do well.*” [Verse 19-21] Have “*conscience toward God.*” “*Follow His steps.*” Let no revilings make thee desist, let no sufferings turn thee sour, and thy very endurance shall make thee a large contributor to the co-operative forces of the kingdom of God. To remain sweet under coarse reviling is to be a fountain of healing energy. To remain unselfishly prayerful in the presence of menace is to bring currents of heavenly air into the atmosphere of common life. All fine endurance is a force of renewal, which contributes its quota of energy to the ultimate emancipation of the race. I am glad that this superlative passage springs out of counsel to a slave. I am glad that these stupendous heights are connected by a well-made road with this very lowly estate. I am glad that the endurance of Jesus is placarded before a slave. The apostle tells the slave that he too may be an element and factor in the universal emancipation and redemption. The slave may accomplish more by calm endurance than by hasty, precipitate revolt. Fine, noble endurance is energy—an energy which raises the common temperature, and to raise the temperature will more effectively remove the burden of icy bondage than the hasty attacks of ten thousand men armed with the pickaxe of premature revolt. Let us do well; let us have conscience towards God; let us endure, if need be, the contradiction of sinners; let us persist even through sufferings, and, by the very nobility of our endurance, we shall be leavening the world with the emancipating forces of the Christian redemption. “Christ also suffered, leaving you an example.” “The things which happened unto me have turned out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel.” “If we suffer we shall also reign with Him.”



WIVES AND HUSBANDS

1 Peter iii. 1-8

In like manner, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, even if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behaviour of their wives; beholding your chaste behaviour coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner aforetime the holy women also, who hoped in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands: as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose children ye now are, if ye do well, and are not put in fear by any terror. Ye husbands, in like manner, dwell with your wives according to knowledge, giving honour unto the woman, as unto the weaker vessel, as being also joint-heirs of the grace of life; to the end that your prayers be not hindered. Finally, be ye all likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humbleminded.

WHERE shall we begin our interpretation of this influential passage? The starting-place of the exposition has much to do with the character and quality of its issues. Everybody knows the starting-place of a superficial and short-sighted curiosity. It fastens its primary attention upon the words "subjection," "fear," "obedience." These are the words which are regarded as the points of emphasis. Around these words the interest gathers and culminates. The rest of the broad passage is secondary, and takes its colour from their determination. I propose to reverse the order. We will begin with the broad significance of the passage, and then reason backwards to the content of the individual words. We will gaze upon the entire face, and then take up the interpretation of single features. If we begin with the words "subjection," "fear," "obedience," with no helpful clue of interpretation, we shall have a perverted and destructive conception of the dignity of womanhood. But if we begin with the broad, general portraiture of the wife and the husband, their mutual relationships will stand revealed as in the clear light of a radiant noon. In the passage for exposition the apostle delineates some of the spiritual characteristics of the ideal husband and the ideal wife. Let us quietly gaze at the portraiture, if perchance some of its beauty may steal into our spirits, and hallow common life with the light and glory of the blessed God.

Where does the apostle begin in his portraiture of the ideal wife? "*Chaste behaviour.*" [Verse 2] The first element in worthy womanhood is the wearing of the white robe. The spirit is perfectly clean. "The King's daughter is all glorious within." All her powers consort together like a white-robed angel-band. In every room of her life one can find the fair linen, "clean and white." In the realm of the imagination her thoughts hover and brood like white doves. In the abode of motive her aspirations are as sweet and pure as the breathings of a little child. In the home of feeling, her affections are as incorruptible as rays of light. If you

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move among the powers of her speech, on the threshold of her lips you will find no stain, no footprint of “anything that defileth or worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.” In the inner life of the ideal woman, no unclean garment can be found, for everything wears the white robe. The spirit is “chaste.” But chasteness is more than cleanliness. The stone is not only white, it is chiselled into delicacy. Character is not left in the rough; it is refined into thoughtful finish. The substance is not only pure, it is worked into beauty. It is not only true in matter, it is consummated in exquisite manner. If the analogy of purified womanhood is to be found in the whiteness of the snow, its finish is to be found in the graceful curves and forms of the snowdrift. “Chaste behaviour” is just the refined purity of all the activities of the inner life.

Refined purity is therefore the primary element in the ideal wife, and it is the first essential in human communion. There can be no vital communion where both the communicants are not clean. “When dirt intrudes, fellowship is destroyed. Corruption is the antagonist of cohesion. “The wicked *shall not stand.*” Their very uncleanness eats up the consistency and brings the structure to ruin. “When uncleanness breaks out in the family circle, the family cannot “stand.” If envy take up its abode, or jealousy, or any type of carnal desire, the fair and beautiful circle is broken. The great family of the redeemed, “the multitude whom no man can number,” are one in the wearing of the “white robe.” Their consistency and solidarity are found in their purity, and in the absence of all the alienating forces of uncleanness and defilement. It is not otherwise in the relationship of husband and wife. The wearing of the white robe is the primary essential to their communion. “Keep thy garments always white”! Does the ideal appear insuperable? Then let me proclaim another word: “They shall walk with Me in white!” That is not a command; the words enshrine a promise. “Walking with Me, they shall be white.” The whiteness is the result of the companionship. “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean.” The sprinkling is not a transitory act; it is a permanent shower. The forces of the cleansing Spirit are sprayed upon our powers just as the antiseptic is sprayed upon the exposed wound to ward off and destroy the subtle forces of contamination and defilement. To be a companion of the Lord is to have the assurance of purity. “The fear of the Lord is clean.”

What is the second element in the portraiture Verse 4 of the ideal wife? “*A meek and quiet spirit.*” [Verse 4] There is nothing cringing or servile in the disposition. It is infinitely removed from the saddening, paralysing obeisance of the slave. “I am meek,” cries the Master; and can we detect anything fawning or fearful about the Son of Man? In the interpretation of the great word, let us eliminate from our minds every suggestion of servility and servitude. Meekness is just the opposite to self-aggressiveness and violent self-assertion. Meekness is just self-suppression issuing in beneficent service. Meekness does not tread the narrow path of a selfish ambition, tending only to some self-enriching end. Meekness takes broad, inclusive ways to large and unselfish ends. Meekness seeks the enrichment of life

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through the comprehension of the many. Self-assertion may appear to succeed, but it never really wins. It may gain a telescope, but it loses an eye. It may win an estate, but it loses the sense of the landscape. It may gain in goods what it loses in power. "It may gain the whole world, and lose its own soul." The meek are the only true "heirs." They gain an ever finer perceptiveness, and life reveals itself in richer perfumes and flavours and essences with every passing day. "The meek shall inherit the earth."

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"A meek and quiet spirit." A quiet spirit! The opposite to that which we describe as "loud." The "loud" woman is the ostentatious woman, moving about in broad sensations. "He shall not cry"; there was nothing loud about Him, quite an absence of the scream: "neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets"; there shall be nothing about Him of the artifice of self-advertisement. The Master was never "loud," and so He was a most winsome and welcome companion. The "loud" woman is never companionable. The difference between a "loud" woman and a woman of "quiet spirit" is the difference between fireworks and sunshine, between a quiet, genial glow and a crackling bonfire. The apostle contrasts the "quiet spirit" with the love of sensational attire and loud adornments, the disposition to arrest attention by vulgar dazzle and display. The disposition is a fatal foe to real communion. After all, we cannot bask in the glare of fireworks; we rejoice in the quiet sunlight. Home is made of quiet materials, and one of the elements in the constitution of beautiful wedded fellowship is "a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

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What is the third element in the portraiture of the ideal wife? "Not put in fear by any terror" How shall I describe the disposition? Let me call it the grace of repose. "*Not put in fear by any terror.*" [Verse 6] They are not the victims of "sudden, wild alarms." They are not easily aroused into the fearfulness which is so often the parent of thoughtlessness. They have reposefulness of spirit. Now, if I may be allowed to say it, I think this fearfulness is more characteristic of women than of men. There are larger enemies inside the gates of men's gardens; but in the garden of woman's life, I think that the heat of fearfulness and the slugs of worry and fretfulness will be found to be more abounding. Fearfulness is destructive of the deeper delights of human fellowship. Restfulness is essential to deep and fruitful communion.

What are the lineaments of the ideal husband? "*Dwell with your wives according to knowledge.*" [Verse 7] How shall we describe the characteristic? Let us call it the atmosphere of reasonableness. "According to *knowledge.*" We may grasp its content by proclaiming its opposite: "Dwell with your wives according to ignorance. Just walk in blindness. Don't look beyond your own desires. Let your vision be entirely introspective and microscopic. Never exercise your eyes in clear and comprehensive outlook. Dwell in ignorance!" No, says the apostle, "dwell according to knowledge." Keep your eyes open. Let reason be alert and active. Let all your behaviour be governed by a sweet reasonableness. Don't let appetite determine a doing. Don't let thy personal wish have the first and last word. Exalt thy reason! Give

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sovereignty to thy reason! Be thoughtful and unceasingly considerate. It is the absence of this prevailing spirit of reasonableness which has marred and murdered many a bright and fair-promising communion. “He is not really bad at heart, but he doesn’t think!” That is the fatal defect. He does not think! He dwells according to ignorance; his reason is asleep, and the beautiful, delicate tie of wedded fellowship is smitten, wounded, and eventually destroyed.

“*Giving honour unto the woman, as unto the weaker vessel.*” [Verse 7] Giving honour, paying homage, bowing down in the spirit in the posture of serious and religious regard. To the atmosphere of reasonableness we are to add the temper of reverence. Now, see the wealthy suggestiveness of this. Reverence implies at least two things—perception and homage. “We must first see a thing before we can pay it regard. We must first behold a dignity before we can pay homage to it. Homage implies perception: perception implies eyes. How are the seeing eyes obtained? Let us lay this down as an axiom: it is only the lofty in character that can discern the spiritual dignities in life. Men of little nature cannot apprehend spiritual magnitudes. John Ruskin has told his countrymen that they are incapable of depicting and portraying the sublime, *because they cannot see it!* You know his explanation. He says there is in the Englishman’s character an element of burlesque which has shortened and dimmed his sight, and rendered him incapable of discerning the superlative glories of far-off spiritual heights. Whatever may be the quality of the inference, the basal principle is true. Perception implies elevation, and we cannot see the enduring dignities of life unless we ourselves are dignified. To truly revere a woman, a man himself must be good. He must dwell on high. He must abide in the heavenly places in Christ. He must bathe his eyes in heaven, and he will acquire a power of perception which will discern in his wife, and in all womankind, spiritual dignities which will preserve his soul in the abiding posture of lowly and reverent regard. The husband will see in his wife a “*joint-heir of the grace of life,*” [Verse 7] and in that perception every relationship is hallowed and enriched. The master who sees in his servant a “*joint-heir of the grace of life,*” and the servant who perceives in his master a similarly enthroned dignity, will create between themselves a relationship which will be the channel of “*the river of the water of life.*” “Give honour unto the woman,” and to preserve that sense of reverent perceptiveness, a man must dwell in “*the secret place of the most High.*”

“What is the last lineament in this ideal portraiture? How else must the husband live? “*That your prayers be not hindered.*” [Verse 7] His conduct has to be the helpmeet of his prayers. There has to be no discord between the one and the other. The spirit of his supplications is to be found in his behaviour. When he has been into the garden of the Lord in lonely communion, the fragrance of the flowers has to cling to his garments when he moves about in the common life of the home. Here is a man, living out his own prayers, taking the spirit of his communion into ordinary conduct, so demeaning himself that his highest aspirations may receive fulfilment. “Whatever he prays for he seeks to be, finding a pertinent

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duty in every supplication. “Who would not covet such a companionship? The character of the ideal husband is just a beautiful commingling of reasonableness and reverence, manifesting itself in conduct which is in harmony with the range and aspirations of his prayers.

Here, then, are the spiritual portraitures of the wife and the husband: on the one hand, the robe of purity, the ornament of modesty, the grace of repose; on the other hand, an atmosphere of reasonableness, the temper of reverence, and the conformity of conduct and prayer. What, now, in the light of such relationships, can be the content of such terms as “subjection,” “obedience,” “fear”? The partners are a wife, clothed in purity, walking in modesty, with a reposefulness of spirit which reflects the very glory of God; and a husband, walking with his wife according to knowledge, bowing before her in reverence, and pervading all his behaviour with the temper of his secret communion with the Lord. There is no room for lordship, there is no room for servility. The subjection of the one is paralleled by the reverence of the other. I say there is no lordship, only eager helpfulness; there is no subjection, only the delightful ministry of fervent affection. The relationship is a mutual ministry of honour, each willing to be lost in the good and happiness of the other. Wherefore, “subject yourselves one to the other in the fear of Christ,” that in the communion of sanctified affection you may help one another into the light and joy and blessedness of the Christian.



BE PITIFUL

1 Peter iii. 8

Finally, be ye all likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humble-minded.

“BE PITIFUL!” Here the standard of authority is set up in the realm of sentiment, and obedience is demanded in the domain of feeling! I did not anticipate that the Christian imperative would intrude into the kingdom of the feelings. I thought that feelings would lie quite outside the sphere of authority. I thought that feelings could not be made to order, and yet here is an order in which their creation is commanded! “Be pitiful!” I could have understood a commandment which dealt with the external incidents and manifestations of life. I should not have been surprised had there been laid upon me the obligation of hospitality—hospitality may be commanded. But then, hospitality need not touch the border lands of feeling. Hospitality may be generous and plentiful, and yet noble and worthy feeling may be absent. Hospitality may be a matter of form, and therefore it can be done to order. I should not have been surprised had I been commanded to show beneficence. Beneficence may be exercised while sentiment is numb. It is possible to have such a combination as callous prodigality. Beneficence may therefore be created by authority. But here in my text the imperative command enters the secret sanctuary of feeling. It is not concerned with external acts: it is concerned with internal disposition. It is not primarily a service which is commanded, but a feeling. But can feelings be made to order? Charity can: can pity? Labour can: can love? “This is My commandment, that ye love one another.” “Love one another with a pure heart fervently.” “Be kindly affectioned one to another.” “Be pitiful.” The order is clear and imperative: can I obey it? Authority commands me to be pitiful: then can pity be created by an immediate personal fiat? Can I say to my soul, “Soul, the great King commands thee to be arrayed in pity; bring out, therefore, the tender sentiment and adorn thyself with it as with a robe”? Or can a man say to himself, “Go to; this day I will array myself in love, and I will distribute influences of sweet and pure affection! I will unseal my springs of pity, and the gentle waters shall flow softly through all my common affairs”? Such mechanicalised affection would have no vitality, and such pity would be merely theatrical—of no more reality or efficacy than the acted pity of the stage. Feelings cannot rise matured at the mere command of the will.

But, now, while I may not be able to produce the sentiment of pity by an act of immediate creation, can I rear it by a thoughtful and reasonable process? I cannot create an apple, but I can plant an apple-tree. I cannot create a flower, but I can create the requisite conditions. I can sow the seed, I can give the water, I can even arrange the light. I can devote to the culture thoughtful and ceaseless care; and he who sows and plants and waters and tends is a fellow-labourer with the Eternal in the creation of floral beauty. What we cannot create

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by a fiat we may produce by a process. It is even so with the sentiments. Feelings cannot be effected at a stroke; they emerge from prepared conditions. Pity is not the summary creation of the stage; it is the long-sought product of the school. It is not the offspring of a spasm; it is the child of discipline. Pity is the culmination of a process; it is not stamped as with a die, it is grown as a fruit. The obligation therefore centres round about the process; the issues belong to my Lord. Mine is the planting, mine the watering, mine the tending; God giveth the increase. When, therefore, I hear the apostolic imperative, "Be pitiful!" I do not think of a stage, I think of a garden; I do not think of a manufactory, I think of a school.



Let us now consider the process. "Be pitiful!" That is the expression of a fine feeling; and if life is to be touched to such exquisite issues, life itself must be of fine material. Fine characteristics imply fine character. You will not get fine porcelain out of pudding-stone. The exquisiteness of the result must be hidden in the original substance. If you want rare issues, you must have fine organic quality. Some things are naturally coarser than others, and there are varying scales of refinement in their products. The timber that would make a good railway sleeper would not be of the requisite texture for the making of violins. I saw, only a little while ago, the exposed hearts of many varieties of Canadian timber. In some the grain was coarse and rough; in others the grain was indescribably close and compact, presenting a surface almost as fine as the rarest marble. Their organic qualities were manifold, and their destinations were as manifold as their grain. Some passed to rough-and-tumble usage; others passed to the ministry and expression of the finest art. These organic distinctions are equally pronounced when we ascend to the plane of animal life. The differing grains of timber find their analogy in the differing constitutions of an ordinary dray-horse and an Arab steed. You cannot harness the two beasts to the same burden and work. The sensitive responsiveness of the one, its quivering, trembling alertness, makes it fitted for ministries in which the other would find no place. It is again the repetition of the chaste porcelain and the common mug. It is not otherwise when we reach the plane of man. There is the same difference in grain. Our organic qualities are manifold. Look at the difference in our bodies. Some have bodies that are coarse and rough, dull and heavy, with little or no fine apprehension of the beauty and perfume and essences of the material world. Others have bodies of the finest qualities, alert and sensitive, responding readily to the coming and going of the exquisite visitors who move in sky or earth, on land and sea. In our bodies we appear to differ as widely as Caliban and Ariel—the thing of the ditch, and the light and buoyant creature of the air. Now, dare we push our investigation further? Do these organic differences appertain to the realm of the soul? Are there not souls which seem to be rough-grained, organically and spiritually coarse? The very substance of their being, the basis of motive and thought and feeling and ambition, is inherently vulgar, and they seem incapable of these finer issues of tender pity and chaste affection. Now, where character is rough-grained fine sentiments are impossible. You can no more elicit pity from vulgarity than you can elicit



Beethoven's Sonatas from undressed cat-gut. If we would have fine issues, we must have rare character. If we would have rare pity, we must become refined men.

"What, then, can be done? Can we do anything in the way of culture? Can the organic quality be changed? Can we make coarseness retire before the genius of refinement? It is surprising how much we can do in the kingdom of nature. By assiduous care we can transform the harsh and rasping crab-apple into the mild and genial fruit of the table; and we can, by persistent neglect, drive it back again into the coarseness of the wilderness. It is amazing how you can bring a grass-plot under discipline, until even the rank grass seems to seek conformity with the gentler turf; and it is equally amazing how by neglect and indifference you can degrade a lawn into a common field. In the realm of garden and field organic qualities can be changed. Does the possible transformation cease when we reach the kingdom of man? Can dull and heavy bodies be refined? Is it possible to alter the organic quality of a man's flesh? It is much more possible than the majority of people assume. By thoughtful exercise, by reasonable diet, by firm restraint, by "plain living and high thinking," it is possible to drive the heaviness out of our bodies, and to endow them with that organic refinement which will be the revealing minister of a new world. Can the transformation proceed further? Let me propound the question which is perhaps one of the greatest questions that can come from human lips: Is it possible to go into the roots and springs of character, into the primary spiritual substance which lies behind thought and feeling, and change the organic quality of the soul? If this can be done, the creation of pity is assured! If the coarse fibres of the soul can be transformed into delicate harp-strings, we shall soon have the sweet and responsive music of sympathy and affection! Can it be done? Why, this transformation is the very glory of the Christian evangel! What do we want accomplishing? We want the secret substance of the life chastened and refined, that it may become vibratory to the lives of our fellows. What think you then of this evangel? "He sits as a refiner." And what is the purpose of the Refiner? Let the Apostle Paul supply the answer, "We are renewed by His Spirit in the inner man." The Refiner renews our basal spiritual substance, takes away our drossy coarseness, and makes our spirits the ministers of refinement. And what are the conditions of obtaining refinement? The conditions are found in communion: "His Spirit *in* the inner man": it is fellowship between man and his Maker; it is the companionship of the soul and God. All lofty communion is refining! All elevated companionships tend to make me chaste! What, then, must be the transforming influence of the companionship of the Highest? We can see its ministry in the lives of the saints. Lay your hand upon any one, man or woman, who walks in closest fellowship with the risen Lord, and you will find that the texture of their life is as the choicest porcelain, compared with which all irreligious lives are as coarse and common clay. By communion with the Divine we become "partakers of the Divine nature."

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In fellowship we find the secret of spiritual refinement, and in spiritual refinement are found the springs of sympathy. To be pitiful we must become good. Our pity is born of our piety.

But there is a second step in the process to which I must briefly direct your thought. It is not enough to be organically refined. Refined faculties must be exercised. A man may have a brain of very rare organic quality, and yet the particular function of the brain may be allowed to remain inactive and immature. It is not enough for me to become spiritually refined; I must exercise my refined spirit in the ministry of a large discernment. Now, for the creation of a wise and ready sympathy, there is no power which needs more continuous use than the power of the Imagination. I sometimes think, looking over the wide breadths of common life, that there is no faculty which is more persistently denied its appropriate work. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Such vision calls for the exercise of the imagination. "Put yourself in his place." Such transposition demands the ministry of the imagination. If the imagination be not exercised, we offer hospitality to the shrieking sisterhood of bigotry and intolerance. If a pure and refined imagination had been at work, how could an Anglican clergyman have declared that the Nonconformists are "in mad alliance with Anarchists"? And if a refined imagination had been in exercise, how could a Nonconformist have spoken of the Bishops as "caring little for the cause of Christ so long as they could suffocate Dissenters"? How much a refined imagination would have helped in the mutually sympathetic understanding of Pro-Boers and Anti-Boers? When this faculty is sleeping, evil things are very much awake! But for my immediate purpose I am asking for the exercise of the imagination in respect to things which would be otherwise insignificant. Imagination is second sight. Imagination is the eye which sees the unseen. Imagination does for the absent what the eye does for the present. Imagination does for the distant what the eye does for the near. The eye is concerned with surfaces; imagination is busied with depths. The dominion of the eye terminates at the horizon; at the horizon, imagination begins. Imagination is the faculty of realisation; it takes a surface and constructs a cube; it takes statistics, and fashions a life. Here is a surface fact: "Total of patients treated in the Queen's Hospital during 1901, 31,064." The eye observes the surface fact and passes on, and pity is unstirred. The imagination pauses at the surface, lingers long, if perchance she may comprehend something of its saddening significance. Imagination turns the figures over; 31,064! Then these afflicted folk would fill twenty buildings, each of them the size of the chapel at Carrs Lane. Says Imagination, "I will marshal the pain-ridden, bruised crowd in procession, and they shall pass my window and door, one a minute, one a minute, one a minute! How long will it take the procession to pass? Twenty-one days!" But what of the units of the dark and tearful procession? Imagination gets to work again. Have you a child down? They are like him. Have you a brother falling, or a sister faint and spent? They are like them. Have you known a mother torn and agonised with pain, or a father crushed and broken in his prime? They are like him. Have you gone down the steep

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way to the death-brink, and left a loved one there? Some of these, too, have been left at the brink, and their near ones are climbing up the steep way again alone! This is how refined imagination works, and, while she works, her sister, Pity, awakes and weeps! But if pity is not to be smothered again, the aroused impulse must be gratified and fed. I know that pity can give "ere charity begins," but charity confirms pity, and strengthens and enriches it. Feelings of pity, which do not receive fulfilment in charity or service, may become ministers of petrification. Let our piety be the basis of our pity; let our imagination extend our vision; and from this area of hallowed out look there will arise rivers of gracious sympathy, abundantly succouring the children of pain and grief.



CHRIST SANCTIFIED AS LORD

1 Peter iii. 8-15

Finally, be ye all likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humble-minded: not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing; for hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For, He that would love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: and let him turn away from evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplication: but the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous of that which is good? But and if ye should suffer for righteousness sake, blessed are ye: and fear not their fear, neither be troubled; but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear.

“Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.” [Verse 15] The heart is a sanctuary. It is a place of worship. Worship is always proceeding. There is a large congregation. Who are the worshippers? Let me name a few. There are our wishes, our ambitions, our motives, our willings. All these are worshippers, bowing in the heart before some enthroned and sovereign Lord. Our dispositions are also among the crowd. All the forces of thought and feeling are mingled in the varied congregation! Go into the sanctuary of any heart, and you will find, kneeling side by side in homage and obeisance, wishes, motives, sentiments, purposes, dispositions, all bowing before some central shrine. “Who is the Lord of the temple? In some temples it is Mammon! He is sanctified as Lord, and round him are kneeling the congregated thoughts, passions, and ambitions, offering him incense, supplication, and praise. Who is the Lord? In some temples it is the Lord of Misrule. He is sanctified as Lord! Chaos reigns, and in riotous disorder the mob of tumultuous thoughts and feelings offer him noisy acclamation. Who is the Lord of the temple? In some temples indifference is enthroned. Indifference is sanctified as Lord! The atmosphere is opiated; life is a lounge; everything comes and goes in carelessness; all the worshippers are narcotised in thoughtlessness, or sunk in profound and perilous sleep. Who is the Lord of the temple? In some temples it is the devil. Every worshipper bends in adoration of vice, reciting the liturgy of uncleanness, and every member of the congregation, every thought, every feeling, every ambition, bears upon its forehead the mark of the beast. Who is the Lord of the temple? In some temples it is the Christ. All the assembled forces and powers of the life willingly prostrate themselves in fervent and lowly worship. Every hour of the day there is a worshipper in the radiant temple! Now it is a wish, now a shaping plan, now a completed purpose, now a penitent feeling, now a gay delight—these all stoop in reverent homage before the exalted Christ, and as we always appropriate the worth of the object we worship, the bending congregation of thoughts and

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sentiments acquire the beauty of the Lord. The worshipping motive is chastened and refined; the kneeling wish is etherealised; the stooping sorrow is transfigured; all the reverent forces of the personality are transformed into children of light. Who is the Lord in the temple? That is the all-determining question. "Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord." In your temple let the Christ be enthroned. Let everything in the life be made to kneel in that sanctuary. Bring ye everything to the foot of the great white throne. Let the Lord be King!" Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

"Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord." [Verse 15] That is the creative centre of the passage. All the surrounding context is resultant and consequent. This is the all-originating fountain! Around it are stretches of land, threaded with rivers which are the children of its creative springs. Let us pass from the springs to the rivers. If Christ be sanctified in the heart as Lord, if everything in the deep, secret places of the life bow before His throne, if at Matins and Evensong, and through all the intervening hours of the day, the endless procession of mystic forces in the soul reverently bend to His dominion, what will be the quality of the issues, what will be the striking characteristics of the life?

Are you surprised that the apostle's answer begins with an enumeration of the softer graces: "*compassionate, tenderhearted, humbleminded*"? [Verse 8] Did you anticipate that he would begin with attributes more majestic, more manly and commanding? Is it disappointing that the apostle should give emphasis to graces which we commonly associate with women rather than with men? I have called them the softer graces; perhaps I ought to have called them the riper fruit. The ultimate expression of the strongest tree is its sweetest and ripest fruit. The tender, exquisite colour of a ripening acorn is the finest expression of the oak. Hearts of oak reach their finished achievement in the softest hues of their ripest fruit. Manliness is never perfected until it issues in tenderest grace. Therefore I am not surprised to find the apostle giving prominence to the finished and ripened attainments in sanctified life. What, again, are their names?

"Compassion" [Verse 8] The range of a man's life is just the range of his compassions, which is only another name for the range of his correspondences. Death is just the destruction of all correspondence. The dying lose correspondence after correspondence; nerve after nerve and sense after sense collapse; communications are slowly broken; and by gradual paralysis and benumbment all correspondences end. The measure of my life is determined by the quality and quantity of my correspondences. This is true of the life of the flesh. It is true in the realm of the mind. How much am I in touch with? What is the range of my interests? What are my correspondences? It is true in the domains of the soul. How much do I live? That depends upon my compassion, my responsiveness, my "correspondence." What is the extent of my fellow-feeling? What is my power of apprehending and realising my brother, and by the ministry of an unveiling imagination planting myself in the heart of his interests and estate? That is one of the rarest attainments in the sanctified life. The Lord



refines His disciples into compassionateness. He indefinitely enlarges their correspondences. He endows them with sensitive passion, with profundity of feeling. “Deep calleth unto deep,” and they maintain fruitful fellowship with the joys and sorrows of their fellow-men.

“*Tenderheartedness.*” [Verse 8] That carries one a step further than compassion. Tenderheartedness is more than correspondence; it is gentle ministry. It includes the service of the tender hand, it not only feels the pains of others; it touches the wounds with exquisite delicacy. Even the pitiful man can be clumsy. Six men may have the sympathy, but only one of the six may be able to touch the wound so as to heal it. The Lord will add a gentle hand to our compassion. He will take away all brusqueness, all spiritual clumsiness, so that in the very ministry of pity we may not “break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.”

“*Humblemindedness.*” [Verse 8] Surely that adds a still richer bloom to the heavenly grace! The Lord will not only give us a heart of compassion; it shall be compassion rid of all brusqueness; it shall also be purged of all superciliousness and pride! It shall be “humbleminded.” Even pity may wear some of the garments of pride! There is something bitter and offensive in all compassion which moves in patronage. The Man whose “compassions failed not” was “meek and lowly in heart!” Pity is petrifying when it comes from pride; it is soothing and healing when it flows from the humble mind, and this is the perfected grace of the sanctified life.

“*Not Tendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing.*” [Verse 9] Surely that is the perfection of compassion! Compassion may go out on chivalrous errands with sensitive hands and lowly mind, and may meet with ingratitude and angry rebuff from those whom she seeks to serve. When the one we have been compassionately nursing turns and reviles us, and treats our ministry with contempt, how easy it is to become sour and hard, to return reviling for reviling, and to throw up the knightly service with disgust! But the Lord will so perfect the compassion that even in the midst of reviling it will continue in “blessing,” and in atmospheres of ingratitude and contempt will toil on in the ministry of “healing them that are bruised.” What say you now to these softer graces, these riper fruits of the sanctified life? Are they not a resplendent issue? He who continually, in his heart, sanctifies Christ as Lord, becomes possessed by a compassion which moves in delicate sensitiveness, and in humblemindedness, and which remains sweet and persistent in hostile atmospheres of murmuring and contempt.

Now let us turn to the sterner products of the sanctified life. Let us turn to the hearts-of-oak of which the softer graces are the perfected fruit. Let us contemplate the severer virtues, the more commanding strength.

“*Zealous of that which is good.*” [Verse 13] That sounds suggestive of strength! “Clarify your conception of duty! Get it clearly in your eye! Set the good firmly before you! Then be zealous!” Such is the strong, definite virtue which is the fruit of the sanctified life. “Zealous of the good!” You will get the native energy of the word “zealous” if you recall its kinsman

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“jealous.” It is significant of consuming eagerness and ceaseless vigilance. It is suggestive of burning passion. There towers the “good!” The “zealous” soul confronts it, not with faint and timid aspiration, but possessed by a blazing and driving ambition! The strength of his passion is the measure of his defence. You may play tricks with a candle-flame; you must give margin to a bonfire. You may trifle with the lukewarm; who would try it on with the zealot? You may carry an evil suggestion to one man, and quite unembarrassed you may lay it across the threshold of his mind. You may take the suggestion to another man, and before you have got out of the preface you are scorched and consumed. There are lives so sanctified by the indwelling Christ that they blight all evil approaches, and cause them to wither away. Their fire is their defence. That is a wonderful figure employed by the prophet—“clad with zeal as a cloak.” The man wears a protective garment of fire! He is secured in his own enthusiasms! He is preserved in the spirit of burning. Now, that burning passion for “that which is good” is one of the strengths of the sanctified life. “Why, our very word “enthusiasm,” which is now suggestive of ardour, passion, fire, had no such significance in its earliest day. It literally signifies “in God,” and it is because men have found that souls which are united with God are characterised by zeal and fire, that the word has lost its causal content, and is now limited to the description of the effect. The enthusiastic is the fiery, but fiery because in fellowship with God. “He shall baptize . . . with fire.” One of the resultant virtues of sanctification is spiritual enthusiasm, a zeal for “that which is good.”

“*Suffering for righteousness sake.*” [Verse 14] That sounds like a masculine virtue! It is a phrase which unveils a little more of the firm strength of this spiritual ambition! The zealot goes right on, with “the good” as his goal, suffering loss, if need be, of ease and comfort and wealth and fame, and counting the loss as “*blessed*” if only it help him in the way of spiritual attainment, This is the character of spiritual enthusiasts! We may reserve for such character whatever criticism we please, we cannot deny it the eulogium of “strength.” At any rate it is not weak and effeminate. There is something about it granitic and majestic! Christ Jesus makes men and women who despise ease, who are “ready to be offered,” who will plod through toils and pains and martyrdom if these lie in the way of duty and truth. Only a few months ago our little chapels outside Pekin were destroyed by the Boxers, and the majority of the native Christians foully murdered. The chapels are being erected again. I have read the account of the opening of one of these restored sanctuaries. And who took part in the reopening? The remnant of the decimated church! Men stood there whose wives and children had been butchered in the awful carnival; there they stood, their love undimmed, their faith unshaken, themselves “ready to be offered” in their devotion to the Lord! I say, give to it any criticism you please, you cannot deprive it of the glory of superlative strength! “They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” That is the product

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of the sanctified life. The Lord lifts us above the common fear. See how the passage proceeds: “*And fear not their fear, neither be troubled.*” [Verse 14] That is the characteristic which is even now shining resplendently in the lives of the native Christians in China. They have been gloriously delivered from common fear and distraction. They are fearless and collected, quietly prepared to “suffer for righteousness sake,” and strongly holding on the way of life, “zealous of that which is good.” “Unto them it is given on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in His name, but also to suffer for His sake.”



Now, let me sum up my exposition. The fruits of the sanctified life are to be found in the tender graces and in commanding virtues, in compassion, sensitive and humbleminded, and in moral and spiritual enthusiasm which is perfectly devoid of fear. Now, do you not think that where these soft compassions flow and these sterner virtues dwell—river and rock—a man will be able to “*give answer to every man that asketh a reason concerning the hope that is in him*”? [Verse 15] The finest reason a man can give for a spiritual hope is a spiritual experience. What have I seen, and heard, and felt, and known? In these experiences I shall find invincible reasons in days of inquiry and controversy. If a man has sanctified in his heart Christ as Lord, and discovers that his hardness has been softened into gracious sympathies, that his coldness towards the right has been changed into passionate enthusiasm, and that his trembling timidities have given place to firm and fruitful fearlessness, has he not a splendid answer to give to every man who asketh him a reason concerning the hope that is in him? The answer does not peep out in an apologetic “perhaps” or a trembling “if”; it is a masculine “verily,” a confident “I know.” As to the issues of such an answer the apostle is clear. A vital testimony is invincible. Fine living is not only a fine argument, it is the only effective silencer of bad men. “They will be put to shame who revile your good manner of life in “Christ.” Men may more than match you in subtlety of argument. In intellectual controversy you may suffer an easy defeat. But the argument of a redeemed life is unassailable. “Seeing the man that was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.”



BRINGING US TO GOD

1 Peter iii. 18-22

Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit; in which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which aforetime were disobedient, when the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water: which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.

THE concluding passage of this great chapter is like a landscape in the uncertain light of the early morning. Here and there the black shadows still linger and prolong the night. The hollows are filled with mist. A prevailing dimness possesses the scene. From only a few things has the veil dropped, and their lineaments are seen in suggestive outline. On the whole, we are dealing with obscure hints, with partial unveilings, which awaken wonder, rather than convey enlightenment. Perhaps, in the present stage of our pilgrimage, an open-eyed wonder is more fruitful than an assurance begotten of broader light. Assurance may nourish sluggishness; an expectant wonder disciplines the powers to a rare perceptiveness. But amid all the indefiniteness of the revelation, there are two or three visions which are sufficiently clear to enrich our thought and life. We have glimpses of the Lord in a threefold activity. We see Him engaged in His redemptive work among men upon earth: "*Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.*" [Verse 18] We behold Him ministering to spirits who have left the sphere of earth, but who are not yet in reconciled fellowship with their God. "*He went and preached unto the spirits in prison.*" [Verse 19] And we see Him again on the throne of His glory receiving the willing and jubilant homage of the mystic powers who surround the sovereignty of God. "*He is on the right hand of God . . . angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.*" [Verse 22] Let us contemplate these three relationships.

"*Christ also suffered for sins ONCE.*" [Verse 18] There is a reference to some distinct and definite historical event. To the apostle there was a certain nameable season when our redemption was achieved. The sufferings of the Master were infinitely more than momentary incidents, reflecting the permanent mood of God. Christ's sufferings were altogether unique. They were paralleled by no previous happenings, and they would never be repeated. "Christ suffered for sins *once*"; something was done, done "once," and done for ever. Therefore, Gethsemane and Calvary are gravely and uniquely significant. They are more than the tempestuous ending of a noble and laborious life. Behind their appalling externalities there

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are more appalling conditions. Behind the loneliness of the garden there is the more awful loneliness of the soul. Behind the blackness of Calvary there is the deeper darkness of the spirit. The real movements of redemptive ministry are not to be witnessed in the material setting of the Crucifixion. The human and material environment of the Master's death has dominated our thought too much. I do not think that the material incidents of Gethsemane and Calvary were essential to our redemption. I believe that if Christ had never been betrayed by one of the twelve, He would still have died for our sins. I believe that if He had never suffered the brutal accompaniments of mockery and blasphemy, and the loathsome coarseness of contemptible men, He would still have died for our sins. I believe that if He had never been crucified, He would still have died for our sins. I believe that if He had finished His ministry in public acclamation, instead of public contempt, He would still have passed into outer darkness, into an un thinkable loneliness, into a terrible midnight of spiritual forsakenness and abandonment. He came to die, came to pass into the night which is "the wages of sin," and what we men did was to add to His death the pangs of contempt and crucifixion.



"Christ suffered for sins once." But could not sin have been forgiven without the sufferings? Could not sin have been forgiven without abandonment? Might we not have had our forgiveness without that cry of "forsaken"? I ask these questions not because I can answer them, but in order to awake a reverent wonder and a fruitful awe. This I know, that cheap forgiveness always lightens sin. Flippant forgiveness gilds the sin it forgives, and the sorest injury we can do to any man is to lighten his conception of the enormity of sin. The only really healthy forgiveness is the forgiveness which pardons sin while at the same time it reveals it. This, at any rate, is one of the commanding glories of evangelical religion—it never makes light of sin. Nowhere does forgiveness shine more resplendently, and nowhere does sin gloom more repulsively, than in the redemptive love of Christ. In that love we behold both the horrors of the midnight and the quiet, sunny glories of the noontide. "Christ suffered for sins once," in order that sin might never be glozed and venerated. In obtaining our forgiveness by His death, the Lord Christ revealed His love and unveiled our sin.



"Christ suffered for sins . . . *that He might bring us to God.*" [Verse 18] By the power of His redemption we can make our way home. He is "the way"; the road has been opened for us by the ministry of His grace. He is the "truth"; in His redemption truth was not dimmed but glorified. He is "the life"; in His grace are to be found all the resources for raising the dead into the renewed and glorified estate of children of God. He suffered, "that He might bring us to God." All that need be said about that gracious "bringing" is just this, that in Jesus, answering the call of His redeeming grace, men and women in countless numbers have turned their faces home, and are making their way out of the deadening bondage of sin into the "glorious liberty of the children of God."

Far, far away, like bells at evening pealing,

The voice of Jesus sounds o'er land and sea;
And laden souls, by thousands meekly stealing,
Kind Shepherd, turn their weary steps to Thee.

And now the sphere of our vision is changed. Our minds are turned to another aspect of the saving ministry of Christ. The Saviour has died. "The great transaction's done." He has suffered for sins "once." Forgiveness is offered to all. What of those who have departed this life, and have never heard the news of the great redemption? Men have sinned against their light, they have revolted against the Master. But they have lacked the unspeakable advantage of hearing the story of redemptive love. Are they to have no chance? The souls "*which aforesaid were disobedient . . . in the days of Noah,*" [Verse 20] are they to suffer for their disobedience, deprived altogether of the ministry of Christ's redemption? Let the question be stated with perfect frankness—are the sinful, who have never heard of Jesus, to pass into the darkness of a final destiny, a darkness which will never be illumined by the gospel and ministry of redemption? Here is the scriptural answer to that painful quest: "*He went and preached unto the spirits in prison.*" [Verse 19] I know we are dealing with dim hints, and not with bright revelations, but from those words one thing is clear to me, that final judgment is not to be pronounced on any until they have heard of the redemptive love of Jesus, and have had the offer and opportunity of accepting it. No man's destiny is to be fixed until he has heard of Christ. The "spirits in prison," who have not heard the gospel of redemption, are to hear it in their prison-house and are to have the gracious offer which is made to you and me to-day. I know the objection which is taken to this interpretation. It is said to weaken the urgency of foreign missions, to make men sluggish in the labour of taking the gospel of light to unillumined tribes and peoples. If the offer of salvation is to be made to the ignorant on the other side of death, what special urgency is there for strenuous labour in the present? That is how many men have reasoned, and how many reason to-day. If the unenlightened heathen are not swept into hell, the burden of the situation is lightened, and the strain is relaxed. It is a terrific motive to conceive that the unillumined multitudes are dropping over the precipice of death into ever lasting torment. And that has been the conception of many devoted followers of Christ. I was reading a book the other day in which the writer made the terrible declaration that three millions of the heathen and Mohammedans are dying every month, dropping over the precipice into the awful night, swept into eternity! Swept into what? If they go out with unlit minds and hearts, are they never to see the gracious countenance of the Light of Life? "He went and preached unto the spirits in prison." Again I ask, does this destroy the urgency of foreign missions, and will it lull the heart of the Church to sleep? Where are we if the motive of our missions and ministry is to save people from the fires of hell? Apart altogether from salvation from torment, is the Master Himself worth knowing? Sup posing we could now be assured that every soul in the heathen world would

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be here after rescued from the torments of hell, is there nothing in our Gospel which shapes itself into an urgent and all-constraining evangel? Seek out some ripe old saint, who has deep and intimate intercourse with the Lord; let her open her heart to you about the glories of her faith; and you will discover that the word “hell” has dropped out of her vocabulary. She is so absorbed in the glories of her Lord, so possessed by the delights of daily companionship, so engaged in carrying her own God-given comfort to the sorrows of others, that the house of torments has no place in her heart. If you ask her the nature of the evangel she carries about with her, this will be her reply:

God only knows the love of God,
Oh that it now were shed abroad
In every human heart!

The real missionary motive is not to save from hell, but to reveal the Christ; not to save from a peril, but to proclaim and create a glorious companionship. Here is the marrow of the controversy, concentrated into one pressing question: *Is it of infinite moment to know Christ now?* Assume that there are now men and women in the heathen world who are to remain upon the earth for the next twenty years, and it is in our power to make those twenty years a season of hallowed fellowship with the Lord, is it worth the doing? Even further assuming that if they pass through death unenlightened, they will hear the message of reconciliation in the beyond, is it worth our while to light up those twenty years with the gracious light of redemptive grace? What is the money-value of an hour with the Lord? I do not address my question to the unredeemed, for the unredeemed have no answer, and in them the missionary-motive has no place. I speak to those who have accepted the offer of reconciling love, and who know the power of the Lord’s salvation, and of them I ask—What is the money-value of an hour with the Lord? “Beyond all knowledge and all thought.” Carry your values across to the regions of ignorance and night. To be able to give one “day of the Son of Man” to some poor old soul in heathendom: to lighten one day’s load; to transfigure one day’s sorrow; to lift the burden of his passion; to create a river of kindness; to light his lamp in the evening-time, and to send him through the shadows in the assurance of immortal hope,—is it worth the doing? “A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand.” Such is the value of a day with the Lord. “We are stewards of the mysteries of grace. Because we have them we owe them. Woe be to us if through our thoughtlessness we leave our fellowmen in days of burdensome terror and night, when by our ministry we might have led them into the peace and liberty of the children of light.

And now the sphere of the Lord’s activity is again changed. The apostle next turns our minds to the Lord’s enthronement and dominion. He “*is on the right hand of God, having gone Verse into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.*” [Verse 22] I need that conception of the Christ! I know Him as a Sufferer, despised and

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lonely, sharing our frailties, and hastening on to death. I know Him as “a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief.” I need to know Him as the risen and glorified King, moving in supreme exaltations, receiving the glad and reverent homage of “the spirits that surround the throne.” I have seen Him weep; I have seen Him wearied at the well; I have heard Him cry “I thirst”; I have heard the still more awful cry “Forsaken!” Now I would see Him, “with a name above every name,” “highly exalted,” “angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.” We are timid, and nerveless, and hope less, lacking in spiritual energy and persistence, crawling in reluctance when we ought to speed like conquerors, and all because we do not realise the majestic lordship of our King. “All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth.” What kind of followers ought that to create? Surely it ought to be creative of disciples who can “strongly live and nobly strive.” Soldiers will dare anything when they have confidence in the strength and wisdom of their general. His commands are their possibilities, and they are eager to turn them into sure achievements. We have a brave Captain, seated upon the throne, and exercising universal sovereignty. Surely we ought to march in the spirit of assured conquest. We ought to attack every stronghold of sin with confidence, as though the dark citadel were already falling into ruin. The Lord wishes His disciples to begin all enterprises in the knowledge that victory is secured. “Believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them.” That is the spirit of victory.



All this redemptive power may become ours by baptism, but not the baptism that consists in any outward sprinkling of external cleansing. “Not by the putting away of the filth of the flesh.” We need to be lifted above the filth of the spirit, and so the baptism must be an inspiration. There must be poured into our life rivers of energy from the risen Lord.



That cleansing flood will create within us moral soundness. We shall attain unto “a good conscience.” Our lives will be set in “interrogation toward God.” Our souls will be possessed by a reverent inquisitiveness, and they will be ever searching among the deep things of God.



THE SUFFERING WHICH MEANS TRIUMPH

1 Peter iv. 1-6

Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh, arm ye yourselves also with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that ye no longer should live the rest of your time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past may suffice to have wrought the desire of the Gentiles, and to have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, winebibbings, revellings, carousings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to Him that is ready to fudge the quick and the dead. For unto this end was the gospel preached even to the dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

“Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh.” [Verse 1] Do not let us so think of the sufferings of Christ as to relegate them to the last few days of His earthly ministry. It is well to confine the great term, “the passion,” to the awful events of Gethsemane and Calvary. In the midnight of the latter days the happenings are unspeakable. On Calvary the sufferings not only culminate; they become unique. They detach themselves from the common lot, and pass into the pangs of a lonely and terrible isolation whose supreme bitterness cannot be shared.

We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear.

It is well to mark these appalling hours by the distinctive term, “the passion.” But we must not allow “the passion” to eclipse the sufferings of the earlier days. Christ always “suffered in the flesh.” The streak of blood lay like a red track across the years. The marks of sacrifice were everywhere pronounced. What occasioned the common sufferings? Here is the explanation. His life was dominated by a supreme thought; it was controlled by an all-commanding purpose. What was the purpose? What was the prevailing characteristic of His mind? “I do always those things that please Him.” He has translated that purpose of obedience into counsel for His disciples: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” That was the mind of the Master. He made his abode in the unseen. He sought His gratifications in the eternal. He rejected the sovereignty of the flesh. He subordinated the temporal. He uncrowned the body, making it a common subject, and compelling it into obeisance to high commands. In all the competing alternatives that presented themselves, priority was given to the spiritual. The allurements of ease, the piquant flavours of pleasurable sensations, the feverish delights of passion, the delicious thrill of popular acclamation, the sweetness of immediate triumph: all these many and varied offspring of the temporal were not permitted to be regnant; they were not allowed to usurp the place of executive and determining forces;

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they were muzzled and restrained, and kept to the rear of the life. Christ looked “not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” Such was the mind of the Master.

Now, emphasis of this kind inevitably necessitates suffering. No man can give pre-eminence to the unseen without the shedding of blood. When the immediate contends with the apparently remote, the immediate is so urgently obtrusive that to hold it down entails a crucifixion. When carnality contends with conscience, the healthy settling of the contention necessitates suffering. When ease opposes duty, the putting down of the fascinating enemy necessitates suffering. When mere sharpness comes into conflict with truth, when money seeks to usurp the throne of righteousness, when the glitter of immediate success ranges itself against the fixed and glorious constellation of holiness, the controversies will not be settled in bloodless reveries and in unexhausting dreams. To put down the immediate and to prefer the remote, to subject the temporal and to choose the eternal, demands a continual crucifixion. Christ also suffered, being tempted! Alternatives were presented to Him, and the preference occasioned the shedding of blood. Christ suffered, being tempted! The temptations were not bloodless probings of the invulnerable air. They were searching appeals to vital susceptibilities, and resistance was pain. “Christ also suffered in the flesh.” All through the years He had been exercising the higher choice. Before He emerged into the public gaze, in the obscure years at Nazareth, in His early youth in the village, in the social life of the community, in the little affairs of the carpenter’s shop, He had been denying Himself and taking up His cross. He had preferred the eternal to the temporal, and His clear, commanding conscience had dominated the clamours of the flesh. This was the emphasis of the Master’s life; He “suffered in the flesh.” Now such emphasis spells sinlessness. When the eternal rules the temporal, when the remotely glorious is preferred before the immediately bewitching, when suffering is chosen before the violation of the moral and spiritual ideal, the soul is already wearing the crown of the sinless life.

“*He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.*” [Verse 1] And now the apostle takes up the example of the Master and makes it a motive in the life of the disciple. “Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh, *arm ye yourselves also with the same mind.*” What was His mind? The preference and the predominance of the eternal. “Arm yourselves with the same mind.” Let the same governing purpose determine the choices in your life. In every moment of the little day let the eternal rule. “*No longer live the rest of your time in the flesh.*” [Verse 2] Don’t let the flesh constitute the entire circle of your movement! Don’t let the temporal define the boundaries of your journeyings! Launch out upon larger waters! Live no longer “*to the lusts of men.*” Don’t follow the feverish will-o’-the-wisps that flit about the swamps! But live “*to the will of God.*” Follow the eternal star! Let the spiritual control all the events in your life, both great and small, just as the force of gravitation dominates alike the swinging planet and the mote that sports in the sunbeam. Such a sovereign purpose

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will necessitate suffering, but the purpose will of itself provide the necessary defence. “Arm ye yourselves also with the same mind.” [Verse 1] The exalted purpose will be our armour, our assurance against destruction. If we are wounded, in the wounds there shall be no poison. If we suffer, in the sufferings there shall be no disease. In the combat there shall be no fatality. We are “armed” against destructive hurt. “What shall harm us if we be followers of that which is good?” “As dying, yet shall we live.” “Our light affliction . . . worketh for us a weight of glory.” “Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh, arm ye yourselves also with the same mind.”

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From the contemplation of the Master’s “sufferings in the flesh” the apostle now turns the minds of his readers to the contemplation of their own yesterdays, if perchance they may find in the retrospect an added force to constrain them to a life of triumphant suffering. He has sought to allure them to exalted, spiritual living by the example of the Lord; now he will seek to drive them into the same lofty tendency by causing them to dwell upon their own loathsome and appalling past. The repulsion obtained from our yesterdays will give impetus to the inclination to live “to the will of God” to-day. “*For the time past may suffice to have wrought the desire of the Gentiles, and to have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, wine-bibblings, revellings, carousings, and abominable idolatries.*” [Verse 3] What an appalling list! And how plainly worded! Surely a list like that will add the force of recoil to the newly-born inclination towards God! It is a fruitful exercise to go into our yesterdays, and quietly meditate upon “our times past.” It is a humbling and painful ministry to trace the face of the past, bit by bit, feature by feature, giving to each characteristic its own plain and legitimate name. The Apostle Paul frequently employed this ministry when writing to his converts. He would never allow them to forget their yesterdays, lest they should lose the impetus that comes from the retrospect. “And such were some of you.” There you have a retrospective glance. What had they been? “Fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners.” How black the catalogue!” And such were some of you.” I think the reminder would send the converts to their knees in intenser supplication. Hear the apostle again in his letter to the Ephesians: “In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” I say he will not suffer the past to be eclipsed and forgotten. He lifts the veil, and pointedly describes the terrible scene. And here is the Apostle Peter seeking to confirm his readers devotion by the power of a repulsion, and he turns their minds to “the times past.” It is a rare ministry for the creation of sincere and agonising prayer! A man may pray, “Lead, kindly Light,” and in in the utterance there may be “no agony and bloody sweat.” If he turn his face to the past, the burden of his yesterdays may crush out of his heart a prayer which is more a moaning cry than an articulate speech.

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I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on.

I loved to choose and see my path, but now
Lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears
Pride ruled my will: *remember not past years.*

That last prayer is just the cry of an aching and broken heart! The retrospect made him a humble and wrestling suppliant. That is the motive of the apostle in reminding his readers of “the times past” in their lives. He longed to corroborate their new-born spirituality by the rebound acquired from the contemplation of their own past. “I thought over my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies.”

Now, let us assume that a man has become “armed with the mind” of Christ, that his own wasted past gives impetus to his renewed present, that he will pay homage to the eternal even at the cost of immediate suffering what will be the influence of such a life upon the world? Assume that the “unseen and eternal” receives the emphasis, that the temporal is denied at all costs if it conflict with the eternal, how will such a life of mingled restraint and loftiness affect the world? Here is the answer. “*They think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot.*” [Verse 4] “They think it strange!” They are arrested in wonder! What is the significance of this? That we shall startle the world by our Puritanism. We “run not with them into the same excess of riot.” They are astounded! Puritanism is arresting. Do not let us be ashamed of the old word. Puritanism is most vigorously denounced where it is least understood. We need to get back the commanding characteristics of its life. We need to recover its broad principles, but not its particular and detailed application. I speak not now of the counterfeit Puritanism which expressed itself in loud and eccentric externalisms, and in much-flaunted and self-advertised piety and self-denial. There is the Puritan described by Lord Macaulay, who was distinguished from other men by “his gait, his garb, his lank hair, the sour solemnity of his face, the upturned white of his eyes, his nasal twang, and his peculiar dialect.” That is a Puritanism for which no sane and healthy man desires a resurrection. But there is the Puritanism which Longfellow portrays in Miles Standish; there is the Puritanism of John Milton, in whose poetry we touch the very heart and spirit of the great awakening. “What, then, is the characteristic ideal of true Puritanism? It is life whose secret springs are governed by the eternal. It is choice of duty before ease, of ideas before sensations, of truth before popularity, of a good conscience before a full purse, of the holy God before dazzling and bewitching Mammon! That is the true Puritanism, and that is the life whose glorious passion arrests the unrestrained and riotous world in sharp and inquisitive wonder. “They think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot.” That sense of wonder may ripen into reverence and may issue in prayer. The contemplation of a fine restraint and an unspotted integrity has often created an uneasiness which has eventually led its victim into the very rest and peace of God. But the world’s

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wonder does not always mature into reverence. Some times it sours into resentment, and results in a malignity which demands the Puritan's crucifixion. I cannot forget that the men of old wondered at the Master, and then proceeded to His crucifixion. "They think it strange . . . *speaking evil of you.*" [Verse 4] They will attribute your restraint to evil motives. The hiding of your benevolence will be interpreted as stinginess; its expression will be regarded as self-advertisement. Your self-denial will be explained as a cloak that conceals a deeper covetousness; your entire walk will be denounced as inspired by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. In the face of such resentment and reviling what shall the Puritan do? What says the apostle? Just go on! In the face of it all, just calmly persist. Do not return reviling for reviling. Leave them and yourselves to the arbitrament of God. He knows all! We must all "give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead." Maintain the emphasis! Proclaim and exalt the Eternal! Live "not to the lusts of the flesh," but "to the will of God." The path of suffering is "the way to glory." And "wisdom shall be justified of her children."



GETTING READY FOR THE END

1 Peter iv. 7-11

The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore of sound mind, and be sober unto prayer: above all things being fervent in your love among yourselves; for love covereth a multitude of sins: using hospitality one to another without murmuring: according as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God; if any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth: that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, whose is the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

THAT is a most momentous conviction which is expressed in these words: “*The end of all things is at hand.*” [Verse 7] What kind of conduct will it determine, and to what kind of counsel will it lead? Here is an apostle, deeply possessed by the solemn conviction that the great Consummation is approaching, that the glorified Christ is returning, that the judgment is impending, and that the “end of all things is at hand.” In the looming presence of so urgent and so commanding an event, how will the apostle shape his message? What kind of counsel will he give to his readers? What manner of preparation will he constrain them to make? It matters little or nothing to my purpose that the apostle’s anticipations of the second advent were premature, and that the stupendous consummation was delayed. For you and for me the instructive and all-absorbing conjunction remains the same. Here is the Apostle Peter sharing with his fellow-Christians the expectation of an immediate end. The Judge is at the door! What will be the manner of their behaviour? If we knew that within a year or two the Master will reappear as the august and, sovereign Judge, how ought we to pass the intervening days? We know, from the letters of the Apostle Paul, how the urgent expectancy influenced many of the early Christians. Some were thrown into panic. Others were despoiled of their spiritual collectedness by the invasion of unreasonable excitement. Others abandoned their ordinary employment, and lapsed into an indolence in which they might find more leisure to wait and watch for the King’s appearing. And we know with what severity the apostle denounced these perilous and irrational excesses. “Study to be quiet and to do your own business.” “Be not shaken in mind.” “We command that with quietness ye work and eat your own bread.” “Let us watch and be sober.” All this dangerous sensationalism was combated and subdued by the cool self-possession of this man’s healthy and imperial mind.

And now here is the Apostle Peter confronted by the same prevailing and insidious inclinations. What will be the character of his message? Let us make the matter directly pertinent to our own condition that we may appreciate the strong, cooling, controlling influence of the apostle’s counsel. For us, too, “the end” may be at hand. Death looms on the not-distant horizon. The King is at the gate! What shall be the nature of our preparations, and the character of our behaviour? “The end of all things is at hand: *be ye therefore of sound*

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mind,” [Verse 7] Sound mind! Life is to be characterised by reasonableness and sanity. There is to be nothing morbid about our mental state, nothing melancholy or diseased. We are to be mentally “sound,” emancipated from distraction and panic. We may enter into the content of the descriptive word by watching its usage in our common speech. We are familiar with the phrase “as sound as a bell,” and the usage will act as part-interpreter of the apostle’s thought. “Sound as a bell!” There is no break in the metal, no severance in the elements; it holds together in compact and undivided unity. “Sound mind”; as sound as a bell; no break in the mind, no division, no distraction, but a wonderful collectedness, issuing in the definite tone of clear and decisive purpose. “We are also familiar with another application of the word, as in the usage, “sound” and “unsound” meat, where the significance is indicative of health and disease. And this, too, may guide us into the content of the apostle’s thought, for when he counsels “sound-mindedness” he unquestionably refers to a mental condition which is freed from all morbidity, defilement, taint, and disease. “The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore of sound mind,” delivered on the one hand from the mental distraction that destroys life’s music, and on the other hand from the morbid depression which so frequently opens the gate for the invasion of death. “*And be sober*” [Verse 7] That is the second note of the apostle’s counsel. “And be sober.” It is a warning against all kinds of intoxication, but especially against the intoxication of excited and tumultuous emotion. There are stimulants other than those of intoxicating drinks; and there is a sensationalism to be found elsewhere than in carnal gratification. Excessive stimulants may be found in the revival meeting, and men may revel in intoxicated emotionalism even in the sanctuary. Men may “lose their heads “in many more ways than by the excessive imbibing of strong drink. “Be sober.” Don’t give way to any excitement which will make life grotesque and foolish! Beware of the sensationalism which is often the minister of sin. “Be sober.” It is an appeal for the culture and discipline of emotion. “Be sober *unto prayer*”; [Verse 7] preserve that calmness of life which is consistent with steady aspiration and fruitful supplication; maintain a quiet “watching unto prayer.” Here, then, are two of the features which characterised a life possessed by a healthy expectancy of the Lord’s appearing: soundmindedness and sobriety. “We are to wait the coming of the King with mind and heart delivered from the distractions of panic, from the taint of corruption, and from a feverish sensationalism which is destructive of the higher ministries of fellowship and prayer.

And now the apostle proceeds to add a third element to those already mentioned. “*Above all things being fervent in your love among yourselves.*” [Verse 8] To “sound-mindedness “and “sobriety” he adds the ministry of “love.” Now the apostle is at some pains to make it clear to us what is the quality of this love which should characterise the life which expects the King’s appearing. In the first place, it is to be “fervent.” Now the significance of our English word “fervour” scarcely unveils to us the contents of the apostle’s mind. He did not so much suggest a love that is ardent as a love that is tense. This very word “tense” is almost



the original word. The love has to be “tense,” stretched out, extended to the utmost limit of a grand comprehensiveness. The New Testament recognises different types and qualities of love, and there is no counsel in which it is more abounding than just in this counsel to push back the boundaries of a circumscribed affection so that it be characterised by a more spacious inclusiveness. There is love whose measure is that of an umbrella. There is love whose inclusiveness is that of a great marquee. And there is love whose comprehension is that of the immeasurable sky. The aim of the New Testament is the conversion of the umbrella into a tent, and the merging of the tent into the glorious canopy of the all-enfolding heavens. Therefore does the writer of this very letter, in a second letter which he has written, give this very suggestive counsel, “add to brotherly love, love.” Which just means this: make your love more tense; push back the walls of family love until they include the neighbour; again push back the walls until they include the stranger; again push back the walls until they comprehend the foe. The quality of our love is determined by its inclusiveness. At the one extreme there is self-love; at the other extreme there is philanthropy! What is the “tense,” the stretch of my love? What is its covering power? I do not wonder that the apostle proceeds to indicate the magnificent “cover” afforded by a magnificent love. “*Love covereth a multitude of sins.*” [Verse 8] Not the sins of the lover, but the sins of the loved! Love is willing to forget as well as to forgive! Love does not keep hinting at past failures and past revolts. Love is willing to hide them in a nameless grave. When a man, whose life has been stained and blackened by “a multitude of sins,” turns over a new leaf, love will never hint at the old leaf, but will rather seek to cover it in deep and healing oblivion. Love is so busy unveiling the promises and allurements of the morrow, that she has little time, and still less desire to stir up the choking dust on the blasted and desolate fields of yesterday. “Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners.” There’s a “cover” for you! “And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew . . . stood at His feet behind Him weeping!” There’s a cover for you! “The Son of Man is come to seek that which is lost.” There’s a cover for you! I do not wonder that the great evangelical prophet of the Old Testament, in heralding the advent of the Saviour, should proclaim Him as “a hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” “Love covereth all things.”

But we have not yet done with the apostle’s characterisation of the qualities of love. He adds a third word which confirms and enriches the other two. True love, “stretched-out” love, all-sheltering love, “*uses hospitality without murmuring.*” [Verse 9] True love is a splendid host, a veritable Gaius in the lavish entertainment which it offers to weary and footsore pilgrims. In the primitive Christian day, the apostolic days, love opened the door and gave hospitality to the itinerant preachers as they went from place to place proclaiming the message of the Cross. Love opened the door to the persecuted refugees, driven from their homesteads because of their devotion to the Lord. There were many of them about,

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and the love-children were to keep an open door and a sharp look-out, and offer the welcome entertainment. Love is the very genius of hospitality; it opens the “hospice” in the stormy and perilous heights, and provides a travellers rest. Wherever love is, the hospice may be found! “Love never faileth.” And the gracious ministry is all discharged so graciously; “without murmuring!” There is no frown upon the face, no sense of “put-outness” in the attention. It is all done, as Matthew Henry says, “in a kind, easy, hand some manner,” as though the host had been almost impatiently waiting for the privilege, and yearning for its speedy approach.

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Now, brethren, the King is at the gate! Soon His hand will be upon the latch! How shall we prepare for Him? In sound-mindedness, in spiritual sobriety, and in a love which is ever straining after more and more spacious breadth of gracious and generous hospitality. How shall these dispositions express themselves? What shall be the medium of affection? What shall be the line of our ministry? The apostle provides the answer: “According as each hath received a gift.” [Verse 10] We must work through what we have received. “What hast thou that thou hast not received?” Our members, our senses, our mental aptitudes, our spiritual endowments! They are all the gifts of the King! We must use them all in the ministry of love. But beyond all these there is the mysterious and indescribable gift of our own individuality. We are each as unique in personality as we are each distinctive in face. Individuality is a unique gift, and is divinely purposed for unique service. We must reverently consecrate our individuality to the King’s use, that it may become the minister of His own “*manifold grace*” [Verses 10, 11] and “*strength*” In this subordination the individuality is preserved intact and unimpaired. Working through us, the Holy Ghost will, shall I say, impinge upon the world in a somewhat different form than from the life of any of our fellows. If an electric current be led through a series of several different materials, its appearance in the outer world will vary with each wire. “In a platinum wire it may appear as light, in an iron one as heat, round a bar of soft iron as magnetic energy, led into a solution as a power that decomposes and recombines.” So in many individualities are there “diversities of operations, but the one Spirit.” What we have to do is to take our individuality, “according as each hath received the gift,” and so reverently consecrate it that “the manifold grace” may work a unique ministry, and by “the strength which God supplieth” we may manifest a daily salvation which shall be to the glory of God.

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Here then, I conclude. I think that no one can be made to stumble by any narrowness and irrelevancy in the apostle’s counsel. His commandment is exceeding broad. How shall we prepare for the coming of the King? What can be more reasonable than the response I have attempted to expound? In sound-mindedness, in spiritual sobriety, in an affection which is ever seeking greater inclusiveness, and working through the distinctive gifts of the consecrated individual life. I tell you, if this be my condition, I shall not be afraid “at His coming.” He may come in a moment, and very suddenly, in the noontide, or the midnight,

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or at the cock-crow; come when He may, I shall “love His appearing.” Living calmly, in the atmosphere of affection, and in the mystic strength of consecration, I shall know Him as my friend. The present Bishop of Durham has told us of a beloved friend of his who narrated to him a strangely vivid dream which he had long, long years ago. Let me tell it in the Bishop’s words. “Through the bed-chamber window seemed to shine on a sudden an indescribable light; the dreamer seemed to run, to look; and there, in the depths above, were beheld three forms. One was unknown, one the Archangel, One the Lord Jesus Christ. And at this most sudden sight that soul, the soul of one over whom, to my knowledge, the unutterable solemnities of the unseen are wont to brood with almost painful power, was instantaneously thrilled with a rapturous joy . . . unspeakable and full of glory: ‘My Saviour, my Saviour!’”

I pray that when that light breaks upon us, not in the ministry of a dream, but in the veritable coming of the Lord; when for you and for me “the end of all things is at hand,” may we have so brooded on “the solemnities,” and so laboured in the gracious ministry of affection, that we too, “when He cometh,” shall be “instantaneously thrilled with raptuous joy, unspeakable and full of glory: ‘My Saviour, my Saviour!’”



THE FIERY TRIAL,

1 Peter iv. 12-19

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you: but insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of His glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy. If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are ye; because the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you. For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters: but if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name. For the time is come for judgement to begin at the house of God: and if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear? Wherefore let them also that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator.

"The fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you." [Verse 12] But is it not one of the perquisites of sainthood to be delivered from suffering? One would have anticipated that part of the inheritance of grace would be freedom from the fiery trial. The flames would never reach us. The enemy would be stayed, and we should sit down in happy quietness at the King's feast! But this is not the programme of Christianity. Christianity is almost alarmingly daring in the obtrusive emphasis which it gives to the darker elements in its programme. There is no attempt to hide or obscure them. No effort is made to engage our attention to the "green pastures" and "still waters," and to distract us from the affrighting valley of shadow and gloom. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." "In the world ye shall have tribulation." "Perfected through sufferings." "Let him take up his cross daily and follow me." "The fiery trial which is to try you." These are not words which are addressed to "murderers" or "thieves," or "evil-doers," or "busybodies"; they are quietly spoken to the saints, to men and women whose lives are pledged to virtue, and who are aspiring after the holiness of the perfected life in Christ.

Then let us just note this: our sufferings do not prove our religion counterfeit. Our many temptations do not throw suspicion on our sonship. Our trials are not the marks of our alienation. Do not let us think that we are strangers because our robes are sometimes stained with our blood. "Think it not strange," says this much-schooled apostle, "Think it not strange!" Don't think you have never been naturalised—super-naturalised—that you are still a foreigner, an outcast from the home of redemptive grace! These are the happenings of the home-country! They are not the marks of foreign rule. They are the signs of paternal government. You are in your Father's house! God will convert the apparent antagonism into a minister of heavenly grace. The oppressive harrow, as well as the genial sunshine, is part of the equipment needed for the maturing and perfecting of the fruits of the earth.



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“What, then, is the purpose of “the fiery trial”? What is the meaning of this permitted ministry of suffering? Well, in the first place, it tests character. It discharges the purpose of an examination. An examination, rightly regarded, is a vital part of our schooling. It is a minister of revelation. It unfolds our strengths and our weaknesses. And so it is in the larger examination afforded by the discipline of life. Our crises are productive of self-disclosures. They reveal us to ourselves, and I think the revelations are usually creative of grateful surprise. In the midst of the fiery trial we are filled with amazement at the fulness and strength of our resources. When the trial is looming we shrink from it in fear. “We say one to another, “I don’t know how I shall bear it!” And then the crisis comes, and in the midst of the fire we are calm and strong; and when it is past, how frequently we are heard to say, “I never thought I could have gone through it!” And so “probation worketh hope”; the heavy discipline is creative of assurance; the terror becomes the nutriment of our confidence.



But the fiery trial not only tests by revealing character, *it also strengthens and confirms it*. Hard trial makes hard and much-enduring muscle. The water that is too soft makes flabby limbs; it is not creative of bone. And circum stances which are too soft make no bone: they are productive of character without backbone. Luxuriousness is rarely the cradle of giants. It is not unsuggestive that the soft and bountiful tropics are not the home of the strong, indomitable, and progressive peoples. The pioneering and progressive races have dwelt in sterner and harder climes. The lap of luxury does not afford the elementary iron for the upbringing of strong and enduring life. Hardness hardens; antagonism solidifies; trials inure and confirm. How commonly it has happened that men who, in soft circumstances, have been weak and irresolute, were hardened into fruitful decision by the ministry of antagonism and pain. “Thou art *Simon*”—a hearer, a man of loose hearsays and happenings; “Thou shalt be called *Peter*”—a rock, a man of hard, compact, and resolute convictions. But “Simon” became “Peter” through the ministry of the fiery trial. The man of “soft clothing” is in the luxury of kings houses; the hard man with the camels hair and the leathern girdle is away out in the hardships of the desert. “We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God.”



But the fiery trial not only reveals and hardens the character, it also develops it by bringing out its hidden beauties. I am using the word develop as the photographer uses it. You know how he brings out the lines of his pictures. The picture is laid in the vessel, and the liquid is moved and moved across it; it passes over the face of the picture, and little by little the hidden graces are disclosed. “All Thy billows are gone over me.” That is the Lord’s developer; it brings out the soft lines in the character. Under its ministry we pass “from strength to strength, “from grace to grace,” “from glory to glory.”

And so the fiery trial tests and confirms and develops the character. I do not wonder that with conceptions such as these, and with such outlooks, the apostle calls upon his Christian readers to lift up their heads, to walk not as children of shame, but as children of

rejoicing. And look at the motives he adduces to create the spirit of rejoicing. “Look at your companionship,” he seems to say. “*Ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings.*” [Verse 13] In the furnace with you is “one like unto the Son of Man.” We have scarcely touched the fringe of life if we have not discovered what that conviction means to men. “Yet I do persuade myself,” says Samuel Rutherford to one of his correspondents, “ye know that the weightiest end of the cross of Christ that is laid upon you lieth upon your strong Saviour; for Isaiah saith, ‘In all your afflictions he is afflicted.’ O blessed Second, who suffereth with you! And glad may your soul be even to walk in the fiery furnace with one like unto the Son of Man, who is also the Son of God. Courage! Up with your heart! When ye do tire He will bear both you and your burden.” And writing to Lady Forrest the same saintly writer gives this comfort: “I hear that Christ hath been so kind as to visit you with sickness. He would have more service of you. He is your loving husband, and would draw you into the bonds of a sweeter love.” Look at your companionship! “Rejoice,” inasmuch as the Lord is with you in unceasing fellowship.

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And look at the character of the Operator. “*The Spirit of glory resteth upon you.*” [Verse 14] In the fiery trial the Operator is the Glory-spirit, the Maker of glory. As though He were controlling the hardships and trials and converting them into ministers of beauty and grace. The immeasurable waters of Niagara generate electrical power which a man may use to engrave a name upon a jewel; and the Spirit of Glory can so employ these waters of sorrow as to write our Father’s name upon our foreheads. In some hands the trial would be an agent of indiscriminate destruction. In some hands the implements in a surgery would be implements of mutilation and murder; in the hands of a wise and confident surgeon they are the ministers of sanity and health. “The Spirit of Glory resteth upon you,” and He has control of the implements! He sits by the fire. Look at the character of the Operator, and you will be filled with rejoicing.

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And look at the splendid issues of it all. “*At the revelation of His glory ye may rejoice with exceeding joy.*” [Verse 13] Why this jubilant rejoicing? Because this shall be the ultimate issue: when the Lord is revealed in His glory it will be disclosed that we are sharers of the glory. The Spirit of Glory, which has rested upon us, will have wrought upon us, and brought us into the Master’s likeness. We “shall be manifested with Him in glory.”

Well, now, if this be the ministry of trial, surely the fiery trial is a solemn necessity. Luxurious ease would destroy us. If the winds remained asleep we should remain weak and enervated. Life would drowse along in effeminate dreams. The glory of the perfected life would never be ours. And so life must have its crises. Judgments are necessities. Judgment must “begin at the House of God.” Even the consecrated folk need the testing, the strengthening, the confirming discipline of suffering and pain. Even Paul must be thrown into the fiery furnace! Even John must feel the bite of the stinging flame! And if that be so with Paul and Peter and John, how much more for you and me! “If the righteous scarcely

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be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" What a work is our salvation! These wills, these desires, these yearnings, these bodies!" What work God has with us, to lift us into His own glory!



TENDING THE FLOCK

1 Peter v. 1-7

The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according unto God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder. Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He careth for you.

“I exhort.” [Verse 1] Let me fix your eyes upon the counsellor. There is an evangel in the speaker, altogether apart from the inspiration of his message. “We are contemplating Simon Peter in the ripe, assured strength of his evening-time. “I exhort.” Shall we pause a moment that we may invite the ministry of reminiscence? By what chequered way has he reached this bourn of clear and quiet assurance? Let me recall some of the prominent landmarks. “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” . . . “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” . . . “Even if I must die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee.” . . . “Then began he to curse and swear, saying, I know not the man.” . . . “Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee.” . . . “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter, they marvelled.” . . . “I, a fellow elder, a witness of the sufferings of Christ, a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.” It is a wonderful evolution! From the call of the spring-time to the ripe, confident testimony of the autumn-time! And between the two extremes what a medley of sharp and changeful experience! The rough, untutored, impulsive character-force has been washed and disciplined into discerning and fruitful strength. And now I picture Simon Peter as an old saint, bearing the marks of the stern fight; sealed with the brands of the Lord Jesus; his face lit up with the sober light of chastening memory and glorious hope. “I am a witness of the sufferings.” Think of the content of the phrase when it falls from the lips of Simon Peter! How much he had seen which he now recalled in tears! “Could ye not watch with Me one hour?” He had seen that lonely and grief-filled Presence. “And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.” He had caught a glimpse of that betrayed face, and the features were burnt into his soul in lines of remorseful fire. “I am a witness of the sufferings.” All the black and heart-rending events of Gethsemane and Calvary crowd the witnessing, for they were never absent for an hour from the Apostle’s so penitent and regretful heart. But Calvary did not eclipse Olivet. The terrors of the Crucifixion were looked at in the soft light of the Resurrection dawn and in the startling wonders of the Ascension. And so yesterday became

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linked with the morrow. Memory was transfigured into hope. The witness became a herald. The denier became the heir. "I am a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed."

And now let us listen to the scarred old warrior's counsel. He is giving fatherly instruction to the officers of the Church. He is speaking to the elders, the overseers, the appointed leaders of these hallowed primitive assemblies. I wish to give the counsel the widest application, that it may include the outermost circle of Christian service. If we limited the counsel to bishops, then we should all listen to the tremendous charge as critical or unconcerned spectators. If we included all pastors and deacons, still the unconcerned majority might listen with perilous relish to the implied indictment. The counsel applies to every kind of Christian leadership. Wherever man or woman assumes the post of leader of souls, guide to the home of God—whether it be among children or adults, in visiting the hospitals or in going from house to house, in the pastorate or in the class, in the obscure mission or in the conspicuous phases of cathedral labours—the Apostle's counsel is pertinent, and unfolds the primary dispositions which are the secrets of prosperous service.

Mark, then, the opening word of the counsel. "*Shepherd* the flock of God which is among you." [Verse 2] It is a very wealthy and suggestive word which forms the initial note of the Apostle's instructions. The Authorised Version translates it "feed," the Revised Version translates it "tend." Each element is significant of the shepherd, and both are essential to the full interpretation of the apostle's mind. It is a wonderful sphere of service which is disclosed to me. I am told that I can be the nourisher of my brother; I am told that I can also be his defence. I can "feed" him; I can stand between him and his hunger. I can tend him; I can stand between him and his perils. That is a beautiful ministry which God entrusts to me. I can get in among my brother's wants and take him bread. I can feed his faith, his hope, his love. I can lead him into "green pastures and by still waters," and discover to him the means of growth and refreshment. I can get in among my brother's perils and erect extra safeguards and defences. It is possible to love my way in between my brother and his appetites, between his spirit and his snares. That is our ministry, whatever be the precise character of the leadership we have assumed. It matters little or nothing whether we be called bishops, pastors, teachers, visitors; our mission is to feed and to fend, to take nourishing bread, and to offer protective shelter. If a man stand between his brother and spiritual necessity, or between his brother and spiritual peril, he is discharging the office of a day s-man, a mediator, a faithful under-shepherd, working loyally under the leadership of the "chief Bishop and Shepherd of our souls."

How, then, is this ministry of feeder and fender to be successfully discharged? How is it to be saved from offence and impertinence? How shall we gain admission to move among

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the needs and perils of our brother's soul? How shall we gain an entrance into his secret place? "What dispositions are required in order to back the ministry and make it spiritually effective? The apostle acts as our counsellor, and gives us detailed instruction in all these things.

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First of all, it must be the service of willingness. "*Not of constraint, but willingly.*" [Verse 2] One volunteer is worth two pressed men. I am not quite sure whether the proverbial saying is pertinent. I am doubtful if an equation can be established. On the high planes of spiritual service no number of pressed men can take the place of a volunteer. But can men be pressed into unfruitful spiritual service? Yes, men are sometimes constrained by what they call "the pressure of circumstances." They say that they "could not very well get out of it." They had been importuned so frequently that for very shame they could decline no longer. If they could have found another excuse, another excuse would have been offered. But their inventiveness failed them. Their excuse-chamber was empty. They simply had to do it! Their wills had no part in the hallowed service. They were just pressed into the ministry by circumstantial constraint which they could no longer comfortably resist. What shall we say about it? Just this—that people whose wills are not in the service, are really not in the service at all. Where there is no spontaneity the fervour is fictional, and we shall never thaw the wintry bondage of men by painted and theatrical fires.

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But there is a loftier constraint than the pressure of importunity and the failure of the supply of excuse. There is the constraint of conscience, which sends men into service impelled by the sense of duty. But even the conscience-labourer may toil and toil away in a fruitless task. Men may do their duty unwillingly, and the absence of the will deprives their service of the very atmosphere which would render it efficient. Duty, without the inclination of the will, is cold and freezing, and never makes a warm and genial way into the hidden precincts of another's soul. If I were stretched in pain and sickness I would not care to be nursed by duty. All the attentions might be regular and methodical, and yet I should mourn the absence of the *something* which makes the ministry winsome and alive. "I just love to have her near my bed," said a hospital patient to me the other day, speaking of her Christly and consecrated nurse. That is duty with an atmosphere. It is duty transfigured. Duty may make people righteous; alone it will not make them good. "And scarcely for a righteous man, will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." I do not think that duty will carry us far into the deep hungers and weaknesses of our fellow-men. We need the "plus," the gracious inclination of the will, the leaning of the entire being in the line of service. We need to be swayed, not by the compulsion of external pressure, not even by the lonely sovereignty of the moral sense, but by an inward constraint, "warm, sweet, tender," the un-failing impulse of grace, abiding in us as "a well, springing up into eternal life." "Not of constraint, but willingly."

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Secondly, our service must be the service of affection. “*Nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.*” [Verse 2] We are not to be moved in our service by any hunger for external reward, and do not let us think that external rewards are exhausted under the single category of money. Men may take up Christian service to enrich their purse, to enlarge their business, and in many ways to advance a transient interest, But we may also labour in the hunger for recognition and applause, and I am not sure which of the two occupies the lower sphere, he who hungers for money, or he who thirsts for applause. A preacher may dress and smooth his message to court the public cheers, and labourers in other spheres may bid for prominence, for imposing print, for grateful recognition. All this unfits us for our task. It destroys the fine sense of the shepherd. It destroys his perception of the needs and perils of the sheep. It despoils us of our bread, and robs us of our staff, and we have neither food nor protection to offer to our starving and endangered fellow-man. “Not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.” Do thy service, not for the praises and rewards of men, but as Martin Luther says, “from the very bottom of the heart, out of love to the thing itself, out of joyous devotion to the work which the Lord thy God gives thee.”

The service of willingness! The service of affection! It must also be the service of humility! “*Neither as lording it over the flock . . . gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another.*” [Verses 3-5] That is most subtle and needed counsel. Who would have expected that spiritual pastors would be warned against lordliness and pride? Who would have imagined that men who are ministering the gospel of lowliness should themselves be exalted in pride! It is one of the most insidious temptations which beset the working disciple of Christ. Pride ever lurks just at the heels of power. Even a little authority is prone to turn the seemly walk into a most offensive strut. But the peril is subtler still. While I assume to feed my brother, my own soul may be a-hungered. While I am helping his defence, the enemy may be ravaging my own land. The peril is subtler still. Some how we come to find a virtue in preaching and teaching, and our preaching and teaching become our doing. Teachers and preachers are somehow allured outside their own message—its evangel and its warnings—and we are solaced and soothed by the lonely fact that we have shared in its proclamation. It is a terrible temptation, and if we yield to it, it swells the heart with lordliness and pride. What is our security? “All of you gird yourselves with humility.” Put on the apron of the slave! Go into the awful presence of the Lord, and contemplate His glory until the vision brings you wondering to your knees! “Go, stand on the mount before the Lord.” That is the place where we discover our size! No man speaks of his greatness who has been closeted with God. Lordliness changes into holy fear, and pride bows down in reverent supplication. Oh, we must come from the Presence-chamber into the pulpit! Nay, the pulpit itself must be the Presence-chamber, and the man must preach in the consciously realised presence of the Almighty and Eternal God. The Lord will have no proud men in His service. Such men are

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self-appointed. “I never knew you.” Their names are not to be found in the Lamb’s Book of Life. “God resisteth the proud.” He stands in the way and fights them! “The angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary.” It is an appalling thought; our strongest antagonist may be the Lord whom we are professing to serve. “God resisteth the proud.” Let us hasten to add the complementary evangel. “And giveth grace to the humble.” It is the humble, kneeling soul that receives ineffable outpourings of Divine grace. Grace ever seeks out the lowliest.



It streams from the hills,
It descends to the plain.

To the humble soul God gives the very dynamics of fruitful service. In all spiritual ministry it is only grace that tells. Nothing else counts! Other gifts may amuse, may interest, may allure, but grace alone can engage in the labour of spiritual redemption. The servants of the Lord are to be filled with grace, and their overflow will constitute their influence upon their fellows. Out of them shall flow “rivers of water of life.” ” God giveth grace to the humble.”

Lastly, it must be the service of trustfulness. “*Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He careth for you.*” [Verse 7] Take your alarms to Him. Talk out your fears with him. Lay them upon Him in quiet assurance. And this must be done in the interests of spiritual economy. Terrible is the waste of spiritual energy which results from anxiety and fear. To allow anxiety to rear itself in the soul is like permitting rank weeds to grow in the flower-bed; and the worthier growths, being deprived of nutriment, grow faint and droop away. “He careth for you.” In these high matters the Lord is doing the thinking.



Oh, could we but relinquish all
Our earthly props, and simply fall
On Thine almighty arms!

And what is to be the reward of such services? “*When the chief Shepherd shall be manifested . . .*” [Verse 4] Some day we are to see Him face to face. What then? “*Ye shall receive the crown of glory.*” The victory crown will be composed of leaves and flowers which will never fade away; of leaves which are the tokens of abiding spring; of flowers which are the tokens of ever-enriching glory.



THROUGH ANTAGONISMS TO PERFECTNESS

1 Peter v. 8-10

Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom withstand steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world. And the God of all grace, who called you unto His eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall Himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you.

“The devil . . . walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” [Verse 8] Peter’s memory is here helping Peter’s message. [Reminiscence is shaping his counsel. It does seem as though at times this apostle dips his pen in his own blood. At any rate, the living crimson of his own experience abundantly colours the page. The epistle is hortatory: it is also biographical. The document is alive. It unfolds a faith; it also records a pilgrimage. In the passage which is immediately before us one feels how the life emerges as the commentary upon the message. Let me for a moment identify portions of this dim background, and set them in relation to the text. Here is the foreground, “God . . . who called you.” Here is the background, “And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after Me.” Here is the text, “Be watchful.” Here is the context, “Simon, Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst thou not watch one hour?” Here is the warning, “Your adversary, the devil . . . walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” Here is the reminiscence, “Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee.” Here is the evangel, “The God of all grace . . . will make you perfect.” Here is the experience, “Thou art Simon [hearer]; thou shalt be Peter” [a rock]. I say that this man’s life-blood stains his speech. His words are life, not the expression of speculation, but the utterance of a travail, the ripe judgments of a man who has “known and felt.” And now he lays down his pen for a moment and surveys his chequered days. He notes the innumerable allurements which have beset his path. He recalls the gay fascinations, the incentives to pride, the lure of power, the bewitchment of personal ambition. He marks the violence of vice, the tempestuous charge of passion, the terrific onrush of the blind and brutal forces of persecution. And all these confront the lonely wayfarer as he picks his way towards God. Life abounds in moral antagonisms. The empire of devilry runs right up to our gates. The destructive mouth is open on every side. The flesh lusts against the spirit. Life is filled with moral menace! All this the apostle sees as he contemplates his own pilgrimage, and so he takes up his pen again and writes this warning to his young, inexperienced, and somewhat wilful readers, “Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

I think there is something very suggestive in the figures employed by the Bible to describe the approaches of the powers of evil and night. The devil has a fairly extensive wardrobe, but his common and more familiar guises are of three types—a serpent, an angel of light, and a roaring lion. It is in one or other of these three shapes that the forces of sin most fre-

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quently assail us. They come in the guise of the serpent. They beguile our senses. They pervert our judgment. They enchant our imaginations. We are fascinated, bewitched, paralysed by the influence of some illicit and unclean spell. The love of money becomes a fascination. It holds a man as under a wizard's spell. Gambling becomes a bewitchment, a kind of spiritual bondage, in which the poor soul, in mesmerised inclinations, is slowly drawn towards its own destruction. The devil approaches as a serpent, and like fixed and stupefied birds we are in peril of dropping into his devouring jaws. He comes also in the guise of an angel of light. He poses as an evangelist. He plays the *rôle* of one whose ministry it is to deepen our conception of the love and graciousness of God. He tells us that we do not think highly enough of God. He loves us too much to be pained by our small neglects. In fact, we best show our confidence in God by disregarding these neglects. Our trust is altogether too elementary and straight. We should cast ourselves down from a few pinnacles, and display to all men what a wonderful confidence we have in the out stretched everlasting arms of God! Such is the devil as an angel of light. Such is the devil as the preacher of the exceeding breadth of our Father's love. Such is the devil intent on easing the strain of our religious life, relaxing its severities, and putting our feet into the way of a more spacious providence and peace. He would turn religion into thin refinements; he would convert a deep devotion into a glosing plausibility; and he would transform a hallowed trust into light and flippant presumption. And the devil also comes as a roaring lion. The subtlety of the serpent is laid aside; he discards the sheen of the angel of light; he appears as sheer brutal force, an antagonist of terrific and naked violence, bearing down his victims under the heavy paws of relentless persecution. "When the apostle wrote this letter, the lion was about; Nero was at work; the Christians were being hunted unto death, in the vain attempt at stamping out their faith and devotion to the Man of Nazareth, their Saviour and their Lord. He comes as a serpent, as an angel of light, as a roaring lion. He came to the Master as a serpent when he offered Him worldly power. He came as an angel of light when he sought to deepen and enrich His trust. He came to Him as a roaring lion in the blows and blasphemies of the bloodthirsty multitude. This antagonism we have got to meet. How can we meet it in the hope of certain triumph? Let us turn to the apostle's counsel.

"*Be sober.*" [Verse 8] The culture of sobriety! See to Verse 8 it that you are not intoxicated, drugged into any kind of perilous stupor. Keep your head clear. Be collected. "Be sober." Now, the apostle is writing to men and women who are professedly the followers of Jesus Christ, and I think there are two perils in the religious life, both of which have their issue in moral stupor. We can lose our senses in excitement, and we can lose them in sleep. There are perils in sensationalism, and there are perils in encroaching drowsiness. There is the stupor which accompanies exaggeration, and there is the stupor of indifference. There is an excessive emotionalism which offers no barriers against the incursions of the devil. That is the peril of all revivals. Men may "lose their heads," and their very excitement fosters a

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moral drowsiness which gives hospitality to the besetting forces of temptation and sin. It is among the highly emotional races that we find the profoundest moral sleep. "Be sober." If your spirit be fervent, at all pains let it be clear. "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." And on the other side there is the moral stupor which is the issue of a growing indifference, frequently initiated by small neglects. A man neglects the pointing of his house; damp enters; chills are born; disease is invited; death reigns. Relaxation in trifles is often the beginning of moral benumbment. Or it may be that a Christian man begins to take his pleasures in injurious measure. He used to sojourn in them; now he lives in them. "He that *liveth* in pleasure is dead." The helpful potion has become an illicit drug. Taken in homœopathic doses the pleasure was a tonic and restorative; taken in larger measure it became an opiate, and sank the life in perilous sleep. "Whether our stupor be occasioned by excitement, or by neglect, or by dram-drinking, whether of alcoholic liquor or of drugging delights, such stupor gives the devil his opportunity, and offers him an open field in which his triumph is inevitable. "Be sober."

"*Be watchful.*" [Verse 8] The culture of perceptiveness! Not only be sober, but thoroughly awake, exercising your perceptions to the rarest and most fruitful refinement. We know the large possibilities which allure us in the cultivation of the physical senses; equally large possibilities glow before us in the culture of the soul. Every exercise of watchfulness ensures us stronger sight. In the quest of the Divine we come to self-possession. In this line of culture the progress is from the greater to the less. The moral senses perceive ever finer and finer essences of good and evil. Moral progress is in the direction of the scruple. The finest scholar in the school of Christ is he who has the rarest perception of the moral trifle. "He that doeth the *least* of these commandments is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Therefore, exercise thy moral senses, lest the hordes of evil should enter through the gates of unperceived neglects. "Be watchful."

"*Stedfast in the faith.*" [Verse 9] The culture of faith! Our faith has to be "stedfast," firm, solid, impenetrable like a wall. Our faith has to be "stedfast," a rampart of assurance, close, compact, and invulnerable. I have spoken of the cultivation of the moral sense, and of its progress in the detection of the trine. Here we are taken to a plane of still higher education, the culture of the spiritual sense, the apprehension of God, proceeding toward the goal of calm and invincible assurance. To be stedfast in faith is to be sure of God. The grand attainment necessitates continual exercise, the "practice of the presence of God." We must exercise our spiritual muscles in the ministry of communion with God, in praise and prayer and supplication and intercession; the exercise must be a wrestling, determined and continuous, until there steals into our life an awed sense of the Divine presence, and in the calmness of assurance we can confidently say, "I know that my Redeemer *liveth*." How, then, shall we resist the devil, in whatsoever guise he may appear to us? By the culture of sobriety; by the culture of moral perceptiveness; and by that culture of spiritual apprehension which will



lead us into the peace which is strength—“the peace of God which passeth all understanding.”

Now, let me carry your minds forward a moment to the contemplation of the *all-sufficient dynamic*, which may be ours in this inevitable conflict with the powers of evil and night. The culture of sobriety, the culture of perceptiveness, the culture of faith will open out our lives to Him whom the apostle calls “*the God of all grace*,” [Verse 10] and by His presence we shall be energised. “The God of all grace!” It is a beautiful and wealthy phrase, suggestive of varied endowment for varied and changing need. My need is manifold; the grace of God is also “manifold.” It will fit itself to my need as light or heat, as water or bread. My God is “the God of all grace,” now like sweet sunshine, now like burning flame, now like refreshing dew, now like the falling, softening rain. “The God of all grace,” a tower and a sword, my refuge and my shield. “My grace is sufficient for thee”; sufficient amid the beguilements and fascinations of the serpents; sufficient amid the plausible refinements of the angel of light; sufficient amid the apparently destructive forces of the lion of violence and persecution. The whole personality, in every faculty and power, shall be pervaded with Divine forces, and in thy God thou shalt find an exuberant fountain of mercy, goodness, and compassion. “My God shall make all grace to abound towards you.”

And what is to be the ultimate glory? “*The God of all grace . . . shall Himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you.*” [Verse 10] Perfected! Established! Strengthened! Settled! They are all architectural metaphors, and are massed together to suggest the fine wholeness, consistency, finish and security of the grace-blessed character as it will appear upon the glorious fields of light! “Established,” every layer firmly and securely based! “Strengthened,” splendidly seasoned, with no danger of splitting or of warping! “Settled,” the entire structure resting evenly, comfortably, upon the best and surest foundation! These are the metaphors, and they unveil before me future attainments of blessedness, when the grace-filled character shall appear before God like a firm, well-finished, and gloriously proportioned building; all the manifold faculties co-operating in rare association; every power firm, decisive, and sanctified, and the entire life settled in holy calm and comfort on “the one foundation, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Now, see the glorious range of the entire passage. “*The God of all grace, who called you unto His eternal glory.*” [Verse 10] That glory is not altogether remote. Even now we are beginning to share it. The spring is not yet here, but the lark is up! Glory awaits us in Emmanuel’s land; but we are finding heavenly tokens by the way.

The man of grace hath found
Glory begun below.

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THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PETER



LIBERTY! EQUALITY! FRATERNITY!

2 Peter i. 1, 2

Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained an equally precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

WHEN I had read this passage through many times in my effort to discover the inwardness and sequence of the apostle's thought, there leapt into my mind the great watchword of the French Revolution, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!" My text seemed to accept the proffered ministry of the watchword, and deigned to express itself through the heightened and glorified clarion of the Revolution. Here is the secret of liberty: "*A bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ.*" [Verse 1] And here is the basis of equality: "*They that have obtained an equally precious faith with us.*" And here is the very genius of fraternity: "*Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord,*" [Verse 2] Here, then, we have the apostolic evangel of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Here is the secret of liberty: "*A bondslave of Jesus.*" [Verse 1] At the heart of all true freedom there is a certain bondage. Liberty without restraint is always self-destructive. The man who will not be bound to anything or anybody is always the most enslaved. Even anarchist societies are compelled to have some rules, and the making of a rule always implies the forging of a chain. Liberty must be limited if it is to be possessed. Every type of freedom has its chains. That is true of intellectual freedom. A man who would be intellectually free must pay obeisance to certain laws of thought. Mental disorder is a dark enslavement. The movement that springs from obedience to the laws of thought is a fruitful freedom. Free thought begins in wearing a chain; the mental freeman is at heart a slave. That is true also of political freedom. Political freedom consists in the recognition of individual rights. To assert my brother's rights is to state a limit to my own. Here again we start with a chain. We recognise limitations. The real political freeman is at heart a slave. And this is true also of moral freedom; no man is morally free who does not pay homage to his conscience. Moral freedom springs from the sense of obligation. Apart from that ligament, that bond, the whole body of the moral life falls limb from limb in inextricable chaos and confusion.

Now let us lift the argument up to the highest type of freedom, the glorious freedom of the spirit. A great writer has denned the French notion of liberty as political economy and the English notion of liberty as personal independence. The Christian conception of liberty is inclusive of these, but infinitely greater. The most spacious of all liberties is liberation from self, and this kind of freedom springs from initial bondage. True freedom in the spirit begins in bondage to the Lord of Life. I am not surprised, there fore, that the; Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul, men who sing so loudly and so triumphantly of the wealth and plenteousness of their freedom, should begin by proclaiming themselves the Master's slaves.

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“Paul, a bonds slave of Jesus.” “Peter, a bonds slave and apostle of Jesus Christ.” Bondage is the secret of freedom.

“Peter, a bonds slave.” Let us see what is implied in this suggestive word. First, the term “bonds slave” implies *the acknowledgment of a fact*. He is a slave. He has been bought. He is the Lord’s property. A great price has been paid for him. The apostle thought of his Master’s weary days and nights, of the tears and agonies of Gethsemane, of the shame and darkness and abandonment of Calvary. By all this expenditure on the part of the Saviour the apostle had been bought. He acknowledged his Master’s rights; he was his Master’s slave. Secondly, the term “bonds slave” implies *the assumption of an attitude*. The apostle puts himself in the posture of homage and obedience. His eye was ever watching the Master, his ear was ever listening. He was a slave, but not servile. I do not know what word just expresses it; I have been unable to find one. But this I know, that if we would learn what “slave” means in my text we must go to the love-sphere and seek the interpretation there. We must go where the lover slaves for the loved, and yet calls her slavery exquisite freedom. A real loving mother, slaving for her child, would not change her slavery for mines of priceless wealth or for unbroken years of cushioned ease. “Thy willing bonds slave I.” And thirdly, to be a slave implies *the discharge of a mission*. “Peter, a bonds slave and apostle.” He is sent forth to do the Master’s will. The Master bids; he goes. Anywhere! Through the long, dusty, tiring highways of righteousness, or to the valley of gloom; “through the thirsty desert or the dewy mead.”

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His not to reason why,
His not to make reply,
His but to do and die!

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But in that bondage the apostle finds a perfect freedom. All the powers of his being are emancipated and sing together in glorious liberty. Life that is fundamentally bound becomes like an orchestra, every faculty constituting a well-tuned instrument, and all of them cooperating in the production of a harmony which is well-pleasing in the ears of God.

And here we have the basis of equality: “*To them that have obtained an equally precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God.*” [Verse 1] Let us rearrange the words a little. This I think is the meaning: in the righteousness of God, the absolute justice and fairness of God, you have obtained an equally precious faith with us. God in His righteousness has, in this consummate gift of faith, made us gloriously equal. Now look at that. Where does the apostle begin his reasoning about our primary equality? He begins with the righteousness of God. God is perfectly fair. He is no respecter of persons. I know this faith is troubled and disturbed by the material inequalities we see around us. Here is my little one safe at home in bed, and here is another little one, not much older, out upon the streets in the late night hungry and cold. Is God fair? Here is a good man in chronic pain; here is a bad man in health and wealth and honour. Yet God is righteous in His purpose! He does not treat us

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like puppets and marionettes. He has endowed us with brain and conscience and heart and will, and He has committed to us the power by which many of these gross injustices can be rectified. If the Church of the living God were to awake from her sleep to day you and I know how much could be done to rearrange material comforts, and to crush and destroy many things which make for misery, disease, and death. While our sword is rusting, and our couch has almost become our tomb, do not let us raise a mere debating-society topic and ask the question: Is God fair? It is for our own dignity, and for the disciplining and perfecting of the race, that our God has committed unto us the power by which many of these burdensome iniquities may be removed. But, leaving all these, let it be said that in the great primary things, the things out of which all other equalities take their spring, we may be grandly equal. We may all obtain an equally precious faith, the faith-dynamic which can remove mountains. Faith itself is a gift of God, and in this all men may be equal. You and Paul! The Salvation Army Captain and Martin Luther! "Precious faith," the apostle calls it, precious because of the wealth which through it comes into the life. "Faith buys wine and milk," says an old commentator. Faith goes into the country of God among His vineyards, and out among His fields, and eats and drinks the rare and sweet and toothsome things. I say that in this great primary matter we may all be equal, and in this fundamental equality all other healthy equalities will find their impulse and resource.

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And lastly, we have here the genius of fraternity. "*Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus.*" [Verse 2] How deep and exquisite is the spirit of fraternity!" What do these people seek for one another? Knowledge! "Knowledge of the Lord." And this means the advanced stages of a science, the most perfect learning, the riper unfoldings of the glory of God. They are ambitious for one another, that spiritual obscurities may be clarified, and that the partial may be perfected. A little while ago, at the dawning of the day, I looked out over a great stretch of country from the vantage ground of a lofty summit. I could only see things dimly, in vague and imperfect outline. There beneath me lay stretched out into the far distance a long, white streak of dull silver; and there rested a grey cloud; and yonder loomed a dark blotch which seemed to be a remnant of the departing night. But the light came on apace, and my knowledge was advanced and perfected. The thin white streak turned out to be a river! The bank of grey mist revealed itself as a lake! The dark blotch, which seemed like the belated baggage of the night, revealed itself as a forest! "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed." "Now I know in part, but then. . .!" "Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God." Out of this advanced and advancing knowledge there is to come a multiplication of grace and peace. Grace is to be multiplied; the single drops are to become showers; the solitary rays are to glow like the noon. And peace is to be multiplied, deepened, heightened, and enriched! Is not this the very genius of fraternity? What thing more beautiful can brotherhood grow than wishes and intercessions like these?

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THE CHRISTIAN'S RESOURCES

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2 Peter i. 1-4

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained an equally precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His Divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that called us by His own glory and virtue; whereby He hath granted unto us His precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust.

HERE is the apostle reckoning up his resources in the spirit. What has he got in the bank? *Divine power, glory, virtue.* [Verse 3] How is the wealth of the bank given out to him? In “exceeding great and precious promises”; in “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” And what is accomplished by this abundant and lavishly distributed wealth? *“That through these ye may become partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped from, the corruption that is in the world by lust.”* [Verse 4] Where had the apostle gained the knowledge of his resources? He had found them in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus, and he was never weary of reciting his discovery to others. We may be sure that when the Apostle Paul went up to Jerusalem, and tarried with Peter, it would be of these marvellous riches that the saintly fisherman would speak. “I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.” This well-trained and expert student, who had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, and who had proved to be one of his most alert and progressive disciples, goes up to Jerusalem to sit at the feet of another teacher, the fisherman Peter from the Galilean lake! “I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.” The pupil of Gamaliel wanted to hear from the lips of the fisherman all that his memory could recall and all that tongue could tell of those three eventful years! Long into the night they would sit and talk; long after the last wayfarer had gone home, and the sounds in the streets were stilled! The pupil could never get enough of the story, and the teller of the story never grew tired in its recital, and many times, in those crowded fifteen days, the dawn looked in through the lattice and found these sleepless men still busied in the story of their Lord. Peter would lead the eager and reverent steps of his new kinsman all the way across the years—the call on the beach that made him a disciple, the strange revealing miracle on the lake, the sermon on the hill, the private communions with the twelve when the crowd had gone away, the awful and overwhelming splendour of the transfigured Presence on the Mount: then in hushed and broken voice Peter would tell of Gethsemane, of the betrayal, of the scene among the servants in the hall, of his own denial, of his Master’s broken-hearted look, of the scourge and the crown of thorns, and the ribaldry and agonies of Calvary; and then the fisherman-teacher would recover his tone and feelings again as he related the wonders of the Resurrection, and all

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the gracious surprises of those altogether surprising forty days, until this pupil of Gamaliel, this once-while persecutor of the Saviour, could scarcely tell whether he was in the body or out of it! Depend upon it, those fifteen days with Peter left uneffaceable marks upon the mind and soul of Paul.

Well, now, ours is not the privilege of hearing that story from the lips of the fisherman-saint; but if I look at my text aright I think that here Peter puts his finger upon what he conceived to be the three great characteristics of his Master's life. It is something to have the words this man employs when his eyes sweep across the marvellous experiences which he had been privileged to share. What does he think about it all? What are the things which stand out in predominant distinction? If there are hills and mountains in a life altogether superlative, what are the mountains? And here, I think, is the apostle's answer, given in three of the great words which lie like the great foundations of my text—His "Divine power," His "glory," His "virtue."

That is supremely interesting as coming to us from one so human, so altogether akin to us as the Apostle Peter. When he flings his mind back in the contemplation of his Master, he summarises his ever-fresh impressions in the words, "power," "virtue," "glory." That is what Peter found in the Lord: and that is what we may find in the Lord to-day.

What have we in the bank? *Divine power.* [Verse 3] In what had Peter witnessed the power? He had marvelled at the Master's power over Him self. He had stood in silent wonder as he gazed at Jesus self-possession and self-control. It was all so opposed to his own self-distractedness, his self-dissipation and indecision. He had marked his Master's power of patience, His refusal to be hurried into any precipitate action, His quiet waiting for the appointed time: "Mine hour is not yet come." He had witnessed the Lord's inexhaustible patience in the presence of His foes. How full of waiting gentleness He was through all those three years! How He bore with Judas, and how eagerly He watched for signs of his return. He knew him, He pleaded with him; even when Judas was intent on betrayal He held him as by a hair. And Peter had seen the Lord's patience with His friends. It takes an immense storage of power to be patient with dull people. And the Lord's disciples had been very dull, and they had imbibed the lessons very slowly. "Do ye not yet understand?" "Oh, slow of heart to believe!" And yet the lesson had been quietly repeated, and no sign of irritableness was witnessed in the Master's speech and behaviour. He condescended to the level of the dullest-witted disciple, and patiently bore with him as he learned the elements of the gospel of grace. I say Peter had gazed upon all this—it had been a daily phenomenon—and now when he looked back upon it all, and recalled his impressions of these marvellous years, he was re-impressed with the wealth of the "Divine power" of his Redeemer.

But Peter had also witnessed the Master's power over others. He had seen His transfiguring influence over their souls. He had seen faces illumined by His touch. He had watched

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the lighting up of a darkened life. He had seen the rekindling of a Magdalene and the restoration of a Zaccheus. He had seen the cold, paralysing burden of guilt fall away at the imperative of the Lord's command: "Thy sins be forgiven thee." And when the once paralysed body buoyantly stepped away from the Master's presence, Peter detected behind the released body a quickened and liberated soul.

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Peter had also seen the transfiguring power of the Lord upon the minds of others. He had seen Him break the tyranny of mental bondage, the sovereignty of vicious thinking, and he had seen the oppressed stand clothed and in his right mind. He had finally witnessed the Lord's power over the bodies of men. He could command the forces of health, and they came at His bidding. He could marshal them as an army and antagonise disease and drive it away. He had seen leprosy pass out of a man's face like a tide retiring from the beach. He had seen the mystic element of life return into a vacant body, and all its functions and faculties were restored. Is there any wonder that, when Peter gazed back upon all these things, his soul should bow in holy reverence in the contemplation of the Master's power?

What else did the apostle find emphasised in his retrospect? He was confronted by the all-predominant peak of the Lord's "virtue." [Verse 3] The moral goodness of His Master was never away from his sight. And let us remember that Peter now uses words with the Saviour's contents. He is judging his Master by the Master's own standards. There are many ways of using the same word, but he employs it in the highest significance. A scavenger may use the word "clean" as descriptive of a freshly swept road; a surgeon may use the word "clean" as applied to the instruments prepared for an operation; but how exacting is the second usage as compared with the first! And here is the word "virtue." As employed by the world it has a very impoverished content, a kind of mere scavenger significance; but when employed by the Master it embraces absolute purity in the profoundest depths of the life. And I say Peter applies the Lord's own standard to the Lord's own life, and he pronounces it full of virtue. He had listened to His conversation, and never for one moment had the print of an unclean or unfair word crossed his Master's lips. He had seen Him in His dealings with others, and never had a suggestion of double-dealing appeared in His behaviour. He had seen Him in His public life, and marked how He had rejected the help of all immoral auxiliaries and of all short cuts to a coveted end. He had refused the ministry of fire and the support of the sword, and the countenance and patronage of kings. "Wilt thou that we call down fire from heaven?" He would have none of it. "Lord, here are swords!" "They that take the sword shall perish by the sword." "Then Herod questioned with Him in many words." "He answered him nothing." Peter was astounded at the austerity and holy sovereignty of his Master's "virtue."

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And there is one other peak on which the apostle gazed when he surveyed the three wonderful years—the peak of Divine "glory" [Verse 3] What is glory? It is the bloom of character. It is majesty issuing in grace. It is solar glory falling upon infirm eyes in rays of

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softest shining. It is holiness consummated in tenderness. It is truth in the radiant robes of mercy. It is the splendour of the Godhead shedding itself abroad in the delicacy of love. We must never dissociate grace from majesty; in reality we are unable to do it, but we are sorely tempted in thought to make the division. In literal truth we can no more dissociate them than we can separate the sun from the sunlight. "We beheld His glory, *full of grace and truth.*" So that when we are contemplating the glory of the Lord we are among the holy tendernesses, the majestic gentlenesses, the incorruptible love which forgives and is never denied. Glory is the manifested presence of the Lord; warm and gentle as sunshine, and clean and pure as fire. Such are the outstanding characteristics of the Master's life as recalled by this fisherman-seer, the man who once shrank from his Master in the awful consciousness of a tremendous disparity, but who now longs and prays for an even closer and intimate communion.



Having named these three great significant wealths in the Lord Jesus, the apostle now proclaims them as the possible resources of all men. Because these riches are in the Lord Jesus they constitute a reservoir of treasure from which all His disciples can draw. It is wealth in the bank, and to us is given the privilege and the right to draw out from the bank and find mercy and grace in every time of need. What, then, may we get from this Lord of power and virtue and glory? We may obtain "*precious and exceeding great promises.*" [Verse 4] Now, what is a promise? In our modern usage it is rather a light-weight word. It is often used as synonymous with "wish," and it carries no heavy significance. But the word as used in the New Testament has a far wider and vaster content. A promise of the Lord has a threefold purpose: it reveals an ideal, it kindles an ambition, it inspires a hope. We may take any promise we please in the Word of God, and we shall find it enshrines the secret of this threefold ministry. Take, for instance, the promise "I will give you rest." Here we have the revelation of the ideal—the restful life, the harmonious life; not the still life of a mountain tarn, but the full, brimming life of the river. Rest is not the repose of stillness; it is the absence of friction, the music of co-operation. Here, then, is an ideal. As I contemplate it, it kindles an ambition, and my soul covets the gracious inheritance. A gospel promise transforms ambition into a mighty hope, and in the strength of a great expectancy the promised thing becomes possessed. So it is with all the promises of the Lord. They are "exceeding great" the ideal stretches across the life and fills the firmament; and they are "precious," pregnant with the possibility of inconceivable enrichment. But all this is not enough. A promise may reveal an ideal, and it may kindle an ambition, and it may inspire a hope, and yet it may fail to confer an operative endowment. I am not surprised, therefore, to find that the apostle goes on to record the gift of an endowment which is as sure as the word of the promise. "*His Divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.*" [Verse 3] In the Lord the believer has not only promise, but equipment. "All things that pertain to



life!" The life that now is! Whatever is requisite for a splendid life we may assuredly find in our Lord. It is not needful to have a strong body, but it is essential to have a fine judgment, and this we may find in the Lord. "The meek will He guide in judgment." "I will counsel thee with Mine eye upon thee." "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall be the light of life." It is not needful to have a heavy purse, but it is essential to have a sweet temper, and this we may find in the Lord. A harsh and ugly temper is not only destructive to one's own peace, and mars one's own work, but it works havoc upon the peace and ministry of others. "Love suffereth long"; it is a fine, chaste, gracious temper, one of the commanding things that pertain to life and godliness. It is not needful to have a great following, but it is essential to have a companionable conscience, and this we may find in the Lord. A man has got a splendid travelling companion when he is on good terms with his own conscience. And a man is weak, miserably weak, even with the support of a multitude, if his own conscience is ranked among his foes. "A good conscience" is one of the things that pertain to life, and we may find in the bank "a conscience void of offence." "The things that pertain unto life" are not the things that are commonly named; and "the things that pertain unto life and godliness" are still more rarely found upon the lips of men. "The things that pertain unto life and godliness" are such things as I have named—a good judgment, a sweet temper, a companionable conscience, and above all, and as the root of all, the gift of faith, the gift of love, the fruits of forgiveness, the grand sense of reconciliation with God, which form the glorious inheritance of every man in Jesus Christ our Lord. And all this we may take out of the bank, "exceeding great and precious promises," filling one's life with a vast ideal and with a fervent ambition and with an ardent hope; and "all things that pertain unto life and godliness," everything that is needful for the attainment of moral and spiritual strength and perfectness.

And so we have looked at our wealth in the bank, the power and virtue and glory of the Lord. And we have looked at what we can draw out of the bank—"exceeding great and precious promises"; "all things that pertain unto life and godliness." And what is to be the end of it all? What is our possible destiny? "*That through those ye may become partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust.*" [Verse 4] So the ministry of the wealth is to effect a deliverance and a glorious adoption! We are to escape one thing and find refuge in another. Here is our deliverance, "having escaped the corruption that is in the world." Alas! we can be in no doubt as to the presence of corruption. It is everywhere about us; in this corruption men and women are everywhere enslaved. The enslavement has various guises. Dante, in the *Divina Commedia*, tells us that when he turned from the desert plain to scale the shining mount he encountered three beasts. And first

A leopard, supple, lithe, exceeding fleet,
Whose skin full many a dusky spot did stain.

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He found a leopard in the way, a beast which typified the love of sensual beauty, and in this beastliness many souls are enslaved. And then he met a lion

Who seemed as if upon him he would leap,
With head upraised and hunger fierce and wild.

In the lion he typified the pride of strength, the vanity of perilous independence. And in this servitude how many souls are enslaved? And then he met a she-wolf—

A she-wolf with all greed defiled,
Laden with hungry leanness terrible,
That many nations had their peace beguiled.

And the she-wolf typified the spirit of greed, the imprisoning bondage in which many souls are enslaved. These three beasts are ever found in the way of the man who would leave the level plain and take the shining slope. He will meet the leopard and the lion and the wolf. But in Christ we have the means of deliverance. We can pass the beasts in safety, and “escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.” And with the deliverance there comes the glory of adoption. From the company of beasts we are translated into the fellowship and family of God. We “become partakers of the Divine nature.” We draw upon the power of the Lord, the virtue of the Lord, the glory of the Lord! More and more does the beauty of the Lord rest upon us and within us. We become ever more finely endowed with the unsearchable riches of Christ. “We are transformed into the same image from glory to glory.”



DILIGENCE IN THE SPIRIT

2 Peter i. 5-9

Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; and in your knowledge temperance; and in your temperance patience; and in your patience godliness; and in your godliness love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren love. For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins.

IN our previous meditation we were considering the vast resources which are the inheritance of every believer in Christ Jesus. “We gazed upon our bullion in the bank. We reverently contemplated the “exceeding great and precious promises,” and we bowed in awe before the overwhelming ministry of God’s redeeming grace. And now what shall we do with these stupendous resources? “We must not allow the Divine wealth to soothe us into slumberous and perilous impotence. If the Lord makes us to “lie down in green pastures,” it is only that by the gracious renewal wo might be enabled to walk in “the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” Therefore “*for this very cause add on your part all diligence.*” [Verse 5] It is a demand for business vigilance in the realm of the spirit. “We are not to close our eyes and allow our limbs to hang limp, in the expectancy that the Lord will carry us like blind logs. He made us of clay, but he formed us men, and as men He purposes that we shall live and move and have our being. And so He calls for “diligence.” It is a word which elsewhere is translated haste, carefulness, business. It is very wonderful how commonly the New Testament takes its similes from the commercial world. “Trade ye herewith till I come.” “Look therefore carefully how ye walk, buying up the opportunity.” “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman.” In all these varied passages there is a common emphasis upon the necessity of businesslike qualities in our spiritual life. We are called upon to manifest the same earnestness, the same intensity, the same strenuousness in the realm of spiritual enterprise as we do in the search for daily bread. And yet how frequent and glaring is the contrast between a man’s religious life and his life in the office or upon the exchange. His life seems to be lived in separate compartments; the one is suggestive of laxity and a waiting upon happy luck; the other is characterised by a fiery ardour and keen sagacity. There is method in the office; there is disorder in the closet. But here, I say, is a demand that men should be as businesslike in winning holiness as in seeking material wealth. We must bring *method* into our religion. “We must find out the best means of kindling the spirit of praise, and of engaging in quick and cease less communion with God, and then we must steadily adhere to these as a business man adheres to well-tested systems in commercial life. We must bring *alertness* into our religion; we must watch with all the keenness of an open-eyed speculator, and we must be intent upon “buying up every opportunity for the Lord.” We

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must bring *promptness* into our religion. When some fervent impulse is glowing in our spirits we must not play with the treasured moment; “we must strike while the iron is hot.” “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” We must bring *boldness* into our religion. Timid men make no fine ventures. In the realm of religion it is he who ventures most who acquires most. Our weakness lies in our timidity. Great worlds are waiting for us if only we have the courage to go in and possess them. “Why are ye fearful, ye of little faith?” And we must bring *persistence* into our religion. We must not sit down and wail some doleful complaint because the seed sown in the morning did not bring the harvest at night. We must not encourage a spirit of pessimism because our difficulties appear insuperable. We must go steadily on and wear down every resistance in the grace-fed expectancy that we shall assuredly win if we faint not. Such are the characteristics of common diligence which we are to bring into co-operative fellowship with the forces of grace. “Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.”

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Assuming, then, that these business qualities and aptitudes are being brought into the ministry of the Spirit, we must now address ourselves to the expansion of our spiritual traffic, to the enrichment of our souls, and the enlargement of our spiritual stock. “*In your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; and in your knowledge temperance; and in your temperance patience; and in your patience godliness; and in your godliness love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren love.*” [Verses 5-7] It is surely the addition of ever new departments to the wealthy interests of the soul! But let us mark that the endeavour after enlargement must have precise and distinctive aim. It is one of the perils of the religious life that we so frequently lose ourselves in vague and pointless generalities. Our confessions of sin have no pertinence, and our aspirations after holiness have no shining peaks. We must define our ambitions, and let them glow before us as distinct and radiant goals. It was a wise old monk who wrote, “We must always have some fixed purpose, and especially against those sins which do most of all hinder us.” The principle is equally effective and applicable in the pursuit of virtue. What do I lack? Let me examine myself. It will probably be found that the things which most displease me in others are just the things which most characterise myself. Am I impatient? Let me supply it. Do I lack self-control? Let me supply it. Is my love of the brethren wanting in range? Let me supply it. But can we supply these additions at will? Ah, but the writer of this Epistle is not beginning with ethical counsel. He began by taking us round the bank and showing us the mighty resources on which we can draw. And then, after the contemplation of our wealth, he assumes that we are taking possession of it by faith, and that in the strength of that faith we are translating our strength into holy attainment in common life. It is a will that is rooted in God, and from God is drawing the strength

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it needs, which is engaged in this active ministry of adding to its moral and spiritual treasures. And a will so set can attain unto anything, and can become clothed in the superlative beauties of the likeness of Christ.

But here, now, is a vital principle; every added virtue strengthens and transfigures every other virtue. Every addition to character affects the colour of the entire character. In Ruskin's great work of *Modern Painters*, he devotes one chapter to what he calls "The Law of Help." And here is the paragraph in which he defines the law: "In true composition, everything else not only helps everything else a little, but helps it with its utmost power. Every atom is full of energy. Not a line, not a speck of colour, but is doing its very best, and that best is aid." It is even so in the composition of character. Every addition I make to my character adds to the general enrichment. The principle has its reverse application. To withdraw a single grace is to impoverish every element in the religious life. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, is become guilty of all." We cannot poison the blood in one limb without endangering the entire circulation. But it is the positive application of the principle with which we are now concerned. And the graces are a co-operative brotherhood, they are inter pervasive, and each one lends energy and colour to the whole. We cannot possibly supply a new grace to the life without bringing wealth to all our previous acquirements. For instance, here is "godliness." Godliness by itself may be very regular, and at the same time very icy and very cold. It is like a room without a fire. But now "in your godliness supply love." And what a difference a fire always makes to a well-furnished room! Love brings the fire into the cold chamber, and godliness becomes a genial thing with a new glow upon it, and a new geniality at its heart. But the love thus supplied not only enriches godliness, but every other grace as well. What a tenderness it gives to patience, and what a soft beauty it brings to self-control! Take love away from the circle of the graces, and they are like a varied landscape when the sun is hid behind the clouds. "In your faith supply . . . love." And so on, with never-ceasing additions, for ever enriching the entire life of the soul.

Men who bring such business-like qualities into the sphere of their religion, and who are continually enriching their spiritual stock, make a lasting contribution to the common weal. "*For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" [Verse 8] Such lives are "not idle," they are active; they are not "unfruitful," they are efficient. Surely one could not find two words more descriptive of a worthy and positive life; it is active and efficient. It is active and efficient on the side of reception, the whole life being gloriously open to the incoming of the Divine; it is active and efficient in the ministry of impartation, communicating itself in rich currency to the interests and affairs of the world. "We become the best and the most active and the most efficient citizens when we contribute to the common life the gift of sweet and perfected dispositions. A poor but sanctified life is a magnificent civic asset! Who can compute the value to a community of a character enriched by patience, by self-control, by brotherly

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kindness, and by love? Such characters are moral health centres; they bring ozone into the crowded thoroughfares of common life. That is the true efficiency, as indeed that is the true success, which makes an enduring contribution to the common wealth. Such things can never die.

What then? If we are businesslike, continually adding to our spiritual stock, and thereby contributing to the common weal, what will be the issue? The apostle expresses the issue in negation. “*He that lacketh these things is blind.*” [Verse 9] Then if a man possess these things he is consequently endowed with sight. Every supplied grace enlarges the spiritual vision. Every refinement of the disposition is the acquirement of an extra lens. And now I think of it, my text is like a vast drawn-out telescope, with lens after lens added, ever contributing to the intensity and extension of its range. See how it runs: “Add virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and love of the brethren, and love!” What seeing power a man will gain with a telescope like this! But lacking these things I should only see things that are near, and there will be no distant alluring vision, and every thought will be of the immediate day. Lacking “these things,” bread is bread alone; let these things be added, and our daily bread becomes a sacrament through which we see the very beauty of the Christ. Without “these things,” affliction becomes a dark and a heavy deposit; let “these things,” be added, and we can see its issue in “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Drop “these things,” and life becomes a thing of purely transient import, a jostle and a squabble for a slice of bread. Let “these things” be added, and life becomes endowed with eternal significance, and every little duty becomes an open gate into the infinite world. And so the apostle concludes his exhortation by re-emphasising his kindly and urgent counsel. “*Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence.*” [Verse 10] Let every atom of energy be devoted to your holy cause. Never let your prayers be scrimped and niggardly! Do not enter into life maimed, and so escape corruption by the skin of your teeth! Seek to win life, and to win it well, “for thus shall be richly supplied unto you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

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THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE MEMORY

2 Peter i. 12-15

Wherefore I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and are established in the truth which is with you. And I think it right, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me. Yea, I will give diligence that at every time ye may be able after my decease to call these things to remembrance.

“I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance of these things. [Verse 12] And what things are these? We have seen how the earlier counsels of this great chapter are disposed. It is as though we had first a description of rare and fertile soil, and then a catalogue of the marvellously bountiful fruits which can be grown in it. Or to change our figure, it is as though the earlier verses are descriptive of every man’s banking account, and the later verses point out the possible issues of vigilant and aggressive enterprise. The whole passage begins in the general endowment of grace and peace, and it finishes in the glorious possibility of an abundant entrance “into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

“I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance of these things.” It is vital that we remember this connection between soil and fruits, between capital and labour. It is all-important that we hold the apostolic teaching that the Christian gospel is not a theory to be defended, but an inheritance to be explored and enjoyed. The Christian is not first an apologist, or even an evangelist, but an experimentalist, dealing personally with the proffered grace and power of his Lord. At every moment the Christian is both passive and active, passively receiving the redemptive power of grace, and actively working it out in rich and perfected character. He is both suppliant and ambassador; he communes with God, he intercedes with man. He is not separately a man of the cloisters or a man of the street; he is both in one. He keeps in touch with the tremendous background of grace in order that he may fill his foreground with the fruits of grace in Christian life and duty. He brings the infinite into the trifle, and he knows that without the powers of eternal salvation he cannot redeem the passing day. In a word the Christian takes knowledge of his resources and does not dare to seek to live his life without them. He remembers “these things.”

But is it not a strange thing that we should ever be inclined to forget them? We should surely assume that whatever other things we might be inclined to forget we should always remember that we are spiritual millionaires. Is it possible that in doing the little business of life we can ever forget our buried capital in the Lord, the treasure laid up for us in heaven, and seek to win spiritual success without it? Yes, all this is a grave possibility, and therefore the apostle ardently labours to keep our remembrance alert. Memory is such a child of caprice, even in purely human matters! The memory is in the habit of playing curious pranks.



We can remember people's faces, but we forget their names. We remember a story, but we forget its date. We can repeat all the marriage relationships of the royal house, but we forget the steps of even a short argument. We can recall the unessential, and we forget the fundamental. "Memory is a capricious witch; she husbands bits of straw and rag, and throws her jewels out of the window." And certainly in higher relationships our memory gives us no better service. We remember a single injury and we forget a multitude of gracious benefits. We remember material experiences and incidents, but we forget the things which most profoundly concern our peace. There is therefore surely great need for the strenuous word of the apostle. And it is as urgent upon us as upon the men and women of his own day that we vigorously set about to exercise and sanctify the powers of our remembrance.

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Now, what can we say about it? Let us begin here. The intensity of our remembrance very largely depends upon the depth of the original impressions. Some incidents bite deep into the mind, like acid into metal; they are not printed, but graven; not written, but burned. Other impressions are like the writing upon the steamed window-panes of a railway carriage; let the outside atmosphere get a little warmer and they pass away in an hour. Now the depth of the impression is determined by the vividness of the vision. If our gaze is cursory the impression will be transient. How does all this bear upon our remembrance in the spirit? It has this most crucial bearing; our impressions are fleeting because we do not give sufficient time to receive them. The vision does not bite! What can a man know of the country of Uganda by careering through it in a railway train? What can a man know of the wealth and glory of our National Gallery if he takes the chambers at a gallop? If he is to retain a lasting and a vivid remembrance he must sit down before one of the masterpieces, and allow himself to steep in the contemplation of its glory. It is quite impossible to take a snapshot of the interior of a cathedral. If the exquisite tracery, and even the dim outlines of the structure, are to be captured, it will be done as the issue of a long exposure. And so it is with the vastness of our inheritance in Christ. Our visions come from long exposures; we have got to sit down reverently and gaze upon the glory of the Lord in prolonged contemplation. We sometimes sing, "There is life for a look at the Crucified One!" That is scarcely true if by look we mean a transient glance, a passing nod, a momentary turning of the eyes. "There is life for a *gaze*" and that life is continuous only so long as the gaze is retained. If we only glance upon the Master we shall forget the impression at the next turning of the way; the enemy will come, and will snatch away that which was sown in our hearts. The strength of our memory depends upon the depth of our impressions.

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It is equally true that the intensity of the remembrance also depends upon the studied preservation of the impressions. There are forces ever about us that minister to erosion and oblivion. I noticed the other day that the workmen were engaged upon a very conspicuous monument in London, deepening the inscriptive letters which told the heroic story. The corrosives of time had been at work upon the once deep impressions, and they were being

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gradually effaced. And so it is with the lines in our memory; time is hostile to their retention, and is ever at work seeking their effacement. And so the impressions need to be periodically deepened and revived. Have we any ministries for effecting this purpose? Yes, I think we have many. A *place* can do it. If you go back to the little village where you spent your early days, how the old life comes back to you as you tread the accustomed ways and turn the familiar corners! How the sight of an old well can recall an experience, and even a drop upon the bucket can revive feelings which carry you back to your youth. And a place can sometimes refresh and deepen a spiritual impression. I wonder if Simon Peter ever went back to the court of the High Priest's palace! I warrant he never passed near the door without the fountain of tears being unsealed, and the stream of penitential feelings flowing anew. There was a little place in a garden to which Thomas Boston used to repair whenever he wanted to quicken his early love for the Lord. It was his spiritual birthplace, and the very place seemed to abound in the ministry of regeneration. It would be an amazingly fruitful thing if some of my readers, whose spiritual fervour is growing cool, and whose early conception of the Lord is becoming faint, would spare a day to go to the place where first they knew the Lord, and I warrant that the sacred spot would re-deepen the lines of their early covenant, and they would find themselves revived. It would be a great day in many a man's life if he would go back to the little village church, and sit for one Sunday in the seat which he occupied when there broke upon his wondering eyes, the vision of the glory of his Lord. For a place can renew the lines of our remembrances.

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And a *thing* can do it. An apparently commonplace thing can recall a conspicuous history. I have known the scent of a flower unveil a day which seemed to have been buried in permanent obscurity. I never get the fragrance of the common dog-rose without my memory leaping back to an old-fashioned garden in the North, and peopling that garden with presences now gone, and awaking experiences which are pregnant with inspiration and peace. But the principle has higher applications still. A piece of broken bread can recall the broken body of the Lord, and a cup of wine can become the sacramental minister of the blood of the Lamb. Can we afford to forget these helpmeets of grace? Even the superlative verities of our faith sometimes grow dim to our eyes, and we temporarily lose our hold upon them. Let us make use of every means appointed by the Lord, if perchance our memory may be revived and these fruitful sanctities may be retained.

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When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

An *incident* can do it. How frequently it happens that the hands busy themselves in doing a thing which has not been done for many years, and the little action draws the curtain

back from our youth. I played a little game the other day which I had not played since boyhood, and in very literal feeling I was a boy again, and all the past environments round about my feet. And it is even so with activity of a higher kind. That bit of Christian work you dropped, and the dropping of which has brought such a heavy penalty of spiritual degeneracy and recoil! Take it up again! Your Lord's grace was very real to you then! Take it up again, and you will find that in that God-blessed work your remembrance is revived, the effaced impressions have deepened again, and you have the old inspired vision of the glory of the Lord. Go to it again, I say, and your soul shall be restored. In all these ways, by a diligent determination to give ourselves time to receive our spiritual impressions, and by cherishing all the ministries by which the impressions can be preserved, it is possible to sanctify our memories and to make them temples of the living God.



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But in our text the apostle puts himself forward as a helpmeet of other men's remembrances. "*I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance of these things.*" [Verse 12] It is a gracious prerogative that we can minister to one another in holy things. It is possible for one man to rouse another man's memory to the recollection of the things of the Spirit, and to revive his sense of the superlative grace and goodness of God. But this ministry of remembrancer is one that requires the utmost delicacy if its exercise is to be hallowed and fruitful. The phrase in my text, "to put you in remembrance," literally signifies to remind quietly, to mention it under one's breath, to gently suggest it! There are two ways of performing the function of remembrancer. We can approach our brother like an alarm bell, or we can bear upon him like a genial breathing. We can rouse some people quite easily by drawing up the blinds and letting in the light. There is no occasion for the rattle of artillery; it is quite enough to let the sunshine in. And there are some men who seem to be spiritually slumberous who do not require some angry indictment, but only a gentle hint of spiritual resource. Here is a man who is down; his troubles have multiplied on every hand; and in the depth of the depression he has forgotten everything but the calamity itself. Now here is an opportunity for the Lord's remembrancer! But how unwise it would be to come with all the clatter of a fire-engine, and the accompaniment of a clanging, rousing bell. The only effective approach would be one of exquisite delicacy. We must approach the man as a nurse would touch a patient who is full of sores, and in tones of the softest compassion we must remind him that he is a millionaire, and that he has untold capital in the bank of the Lord. But, oh, the tact of it! See that fine touch in the apostle's ministry: "*I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance . . . though ye know them.*" [Verse 12] How delicate the courtesy!" I have nothing new to tell you, but you and I have both got the Lord, haven't we? I say the delicacy of it; it was the very inspiration of the Holy Ghost. "It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak."



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And this ministry of remembrancer is one that must not be delayed. The man's memory is getting numb. His early spiritual impressions are being effaced. The glory of the Lord is



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waning. The distant heaven is growing dim. Let not the remembrancer wait; let him set about his Christlike work in the assurance that the King's business requireth haste. "I think it right . . . *knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly.*" [Verses 13, 14] The remembrancer himself is only here for a time: he has but a day at the most: let him be up and about! The night cometh! But how beautiful the apostle's conception of the coming night! Life is a pilgrimage in tents, and to-morrow he will pull up the tent-pegs and depart to "the city that hath foundations." But meanwhile he must be active, deepening the lines in the memory of his fellow-disciples. "*Yea, I will give diligence that at every time ye may be able after my decease to call these things to remembrance.*" [Verse 15] He will do something to ensure the continuance of his ministry, even when he has gone home. "After my *decease!*" After my exodus! When he has left his Egypt and found his Canaan, the far-off land across the Jordan, the ministry of remembrancer shall be maintained. I think that every time they recalled the apostle, when he had gone home, the very memory would act as a restorative of their own spiritual experiences, and the depth of their early devotion would be regained.

Let us reverently and diligently see to the sanctification of our memories. Let us periodically inspect our impressions. Let us watch if we are in any way forgetful of our spiritual inheritance. Are we remembering our capital? Do we look like millionaires, or are we like beggars whose memories have utterly lost the significance of their grand estate? Lord, help us to remember what we ought never to forget!



THE TRANSFIGURED JESUS

2 Peter i. 16-18

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: and this voice we ourselves heard come out of heaven, when we were with Him in the holy mount.

“We were eyewitnesses of His majesty” [Verse 16] —eyewitnesses of the mystic glory in which the Lord was arrayed, and by which He was possessed upon the Mount of Transfiguration. The passage has reference to the superlative splendour which shone about the Lord upon what we call the “Mount of Transfiguration.” “We were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” When I had written that phrase upon my paper I looked up at my study walls, and I caught sight of Munkacsy’s great picture of “Christ before Pilate,” and the contrast between the mount of glory, when the majesty of the Lord was witnessed by the apostles, and the shame and the ignominy of the judgment hall, was to me positively startling. “We were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” I looked at the picture, and there was Pilate, bullet-headed, with short-cropped hair, with lustreless eyes, with effeminate mouth, and a most irresolute chin—Pilate, clothed in the garment of a little brief authority, disposing of the Maker of the world. And then the crowd! Fierce men with clenched fists in an attitude of threatening; faces made repulsive by passion; Pharisees in long, tasselled garments, yelling “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” other Pharisees bowing before the Lord in profound but mock obeisance; other Pharisees, with curling lips of scorn and contempt, looking on with sheer disdain; two or three women, with babes in their arms, gazing with the fascination of terror; one woman fainting, supported by a man who has the only gentle face in the crowd; and there, hiding in the very thick of the fierce mob, Judas Iscariot, with a face all alert with fear, and eyes in which there is already visible the flame of remorse; and added to all this a ring of impassive Roman soldiers, and one or two wondering little children, and a stray, terrified dog! And before all this mass of yelling and blood-seeking fanatics there stands the Lord! Upon His exposed breast there are the weals of the scourge. The plait of thorns is crushed down upon His brow; His hands are manacled; they bear the reed, the mock symbol of sovereignty; His face is perfectly white, wearied, sorrow-stricken, and yet there is an upward look, as though His eyes were piercing the gloom. Yes, I say, I looked at that when I read Peter’s words, “We were eyewitnesses of His majesty”; and I say the contrast was perfectly startling, for there seemed to be little radiance or glory as He stood there, bound and helpless, the victim of the tyrannous crowd. But, in reality, is the radiance of the transfiguration in any way dimmed by the ignominy and the tragedy of the later days? Has the glory which shone upon the mount been in any way eclipsed by what is now taking place before Pilate? By no means. In Pilate’s judgment-hall



the glory and majesty of the Lord had not departed; and it came to me, and I knew it as I gazed upon the picture in my study, that somehow that picture of the tragedy had to help me to explain the Transfiguration. The Transfiguration upon the Mount finds its explanation in the Passion.

What preceded the journey up the mount? What had taken place before the disciples and the Lord took their journey away to the mount? Can we get at their mind? If I may use a somewhat common phrase to-day, what was their “psychological mood”? What was their mental content when they began to climb the hill? What had been the last emphasis of the Master’s teaching? Had they any fear? Had they any special hope? How had they begun to climb the mount with Jesus? What were the last things in His private expositions which probably filled their minds? Happily for you and for me the matter is made perfectly clear. The very last thing we are told about our Lord’s converse with His disciples is this: a , little while before, and for the first time, the shadow of the Lord’s death was flung upon their sunlit and prosperous way. “From that time”—this was only just before the climb began—“From that time began Jesus to shew unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed.” I want you to think of that as suddenly entering into the programme. It had never been whispered before, and now, when the way was becoming more and more sunny, and the crowds becoming more and more loyal and multiplied, when the day was just dawning, and the Lord’s kingdom just appearing, He begins to talk about His own suffering and death. I do not wonder that the announcement from the Master’s lips startled and staggered and paralysed them. Why, the teaching darkened the whole prospect!” That shall never be unto Thee, Lord,” cried the ardent and impulsive Peter. “Get thee behind Me!” I think there is no preacher who can say that word in the Master’s tones, “Get thee behind Me!” It was not said in savage severity, but in the pleadings of love. He felt the allurements of the disciple’s words, “That shall never be unto Thee, Lord!” “Don’t, don’t, My beloved friend! Tempt Me not away from the gloom; thy friendship is seeking the victory of the evil one.” And then He gathered them round about Him and began to expound unto them the law of life. “Whosoever will take thy way, Peter, whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life shall find it.” He began to expound unto them the law of life through death, fulness through sacrifice. If we would live we must die; if we would find ourselves we must give ourselves away. He began to say unto them that He would suffer and be killed! And then He laid down for them the great condition of fellowship: “If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”

Well now, that is the mental furniture, that is the psychological mood which possessed the disciples as they turned to climb the slopes of the mount. They were under the shadow! To them had just been made a suggestion of the coming death of their King. They had had teaching about crosses, and losses, and sacrifice; and yet, through it all, a wonderful promise

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woven of ultimate victory. We must go back to that word about the cross, and self-denial, and the law of life; and when we climb the mount of transfiguration we must take it as a key to the glory, and to all that awaits us there.

“And then,” we are told, “Jesus taketh with him Peter,” with his mind filled with these things, “and James,” and his mind filled with these things, “and John.” “Jesus *taketh!*” That word “taketh” is an exceedingly feeble and unsuggestive English word. The word that lies behind it is full of pregnant significance. It is precisely the same word which, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, is translated “offered.” “He taketh with him.” It is not an ordinary journey. It is the solemn beginning of a walk which is to end at an altar, and that an altar of sacrifice. “He taketh with Him Peter, and James and John,” and they begin the solemn walk leading them up to the great surrender, the place of glorious sacrifice. “He taketh them into a high mountain, apart,” and this too, in the evening time. Let us pause there for a moment. There is always something so solemnising about the evening.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds.



Somehow in the gathering twilight God seems to come very near. And this experience receives emphasis when it is evening time upon the heights, when the clouds are coming back like tired vagrants to rest awhile upon the summits; when there is nobody near, and nobody can be heard, except, perhaps, some belated shepherd, gathering his flock together for the night. He led them unto a mountain apart, “and He prayed.” Let us get the scene well fixed in our imaginations. The Master is away up in the mountain; the heavy dews are lying upon the grass: that breeze is softly blowing, the breeze which seems to be always moving upon the lower slopes of Hermon, perhaps cooled by the snows beyond. And there He kneels, the Master, the Lord, and He prays! I want us to realise that all prayer is more than speech with God. Prayer is infinitely more than pleading. I sometimes wish I say it with the utmost deliberateness—I sometimes wish we could drop the word “plead” quite out of our religious vocabulary. We so frequently pray as though we had got an indifferent and unwilling God with whom we have to plead. The cardinal necessity in prayer is not pleading, but receiving. I do not believe—I say it with, a full sense of responsibility—I do not believe we have any more need to plead with God to bless than to plead with the air outside to come into a building. It is not so much pleading that is required as the making of an inlet. God is willing. Prayer is simply communion; the opening up of channels of companionship; the opening out of mind, the opening out of will, in order that into the open mind and will and conscience there may flow the Divine energy and the Divine grace. “Jesus prayed,” and I know that when it is said “Jesus prayed,” it means that He was absolutely open to the infinite. Surely that is the meaning of prayer. When a man prays, if he prays aright, he is simply opening himself out to the incoming of God. God says: “Behold! I stand at the door and knock; I



enshrine and surround you like the atmosphere.” Prayer is conscious receptiveness in the presence of the Divine. Jesus, upon the mountain height, in the evening time prayed, He opened Himself to God, the Infinite, and the Infinite began to possess Him.

“And as He prayed He was transfigured.” I am not surprised at that. Even among men we have seen the ministry of transfiguration, even though it be in infinitely smaller degree. You remember that Moses had been so opened out to God, and so possessed by the Divine light, that when he came down from the mount his face shone with mystic radiance. “We are told concerning Stephen that he was so opened out to the Infinite that they saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. He was simply possessed and pervaded by the Divine power. And surely one may say, as I can say, that in far humbler life than that of Moses, in life in which there has been little of what the world calls “culture,” little of mental furniture, little of dialectical power, but in which there has been great spiritual receptiveness, in the lives of the illiterate there has shone “a light that never was on sea or land.” But here with the Master, whose life was absolutely and uninterruptedly opened out to the glory of the God-head, the inflow of glory transfigured and transformed Him, and in superlative and supreme degree “His face did shine as the sun.” The very expression of His countenance was altered. And then the historians go even further, for we are told that the glory, the energy, I scarcely know how to describe it—one uses an almost violent phrase in seeking to give expression to it—the Divine effluence which flowed into the Lord not only transfigured His flesh, but in some mystic way transfigured even His outer vesture. “His garments became white as snow.” All of which just means this: that this man of Nazareth became so absolutely filled with God that His very material vesture was transfigured and transformed. “We were eyewitnesses of it.”

Now, I would like to pause there a moment, to offer an opinion for which I cannot quote Scriptural authority. “This say I, not the Lord.” I would venture to ask: What would have happened if man had never sinned? I think, just what happened on the mount. I have a conviction that this experience on the mount was just the purposed consummation for every life. I have a conviction that if there had been no sin you and I would never have known an open grave. We should have known a transformation, a transfiguration; there would have been a consummation in which the material would have been transfigured and transformed through the importation of the Divine glory. The corruptible would have put on incorruption, but not through the ministry of decay and death; just by the ministry of an inflow of Divine glory. I think that was our purposed end, and our purposed glory. I think that from the very day of our birth our road would have led ever forward and ever forward into light. There would have come a certain moment in the temporal life of everybody when the glory of the Lord would have absolutely possessed us, when the material shrine would have been transfigured, and we should have reached the higher plane of the immortal life. But sin came, and that consummation could never be. Instead of on some quiet evening just being trans-

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figured into the immortal, we have now to take the way to the shades, the way of the grave. But Jesus never sinned, and therefore I think that upon the mount His life was naturally consummated, and He could have entered into the permanent glory which then possessed Him.

But now, mark you, I say that our Master, with a perfectly holy life, came there to a natural consummation, in which His life was transfigured, and He might, I think, then have passed into the state of enduring glory. But He divests Himself of the glory, lays it aside, turns His back, as it were, upon the natural consummation, and takes the way to the grave. He turns from the appointed way of glory, the glory of sinlessness, and He takes the way appointed of sin. That is what I call the great renunciation; and I sometimes think that instead of calling it the Mount of Transfiguration we might call it the Mount of Renunciation. He would not claim the natural consummation. He would not claim the transfiguration. He takes up the cross even upon the mount; He takes the way of His brethren in sin; He came to do it; He leaves the glory, and He comes down the mount that by coming down the mount He might make for you and for me a new and living way by which we, too, can reach the consummation. "See, He lays His glory by!" He turns His face towards the grave.

Do you think there were no fears in His renunciation? I very frequently wish that we did not so divest our Lord of all attributes common to the flesh. Do you think our Master was altogether delivered from the common fears of man in the prospect of death? No fear of death, and that a death of such absolute abandonment, and of so unspeakable and unthinkable isolation? I think when He turned His back upon that glory, glory to which He had a right, and faced towards the grave, He felt a chill, the chill of a nameless fear. I know that on another mountain, when the devil came and tempted Him, and He then turned His back upon the offered sovereignty, "angels came and ministered unto Him." And I do not wonder that now, when, upon the mount of another renunciation, He turns His back upon the glory and contemplates death, there appeared unto Him two other ministers—Moses and Elijah: Moses who died no one knew how, and was buried no one knew where; and Elijah, who was transfigured that he should not see death. And then we are told in just one phrase, which although it does not satisfy, yet relieves our wonder, that they spoke together of the decease that He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Perhaps it is permitted us to indulge in a little reverent imagination? Here is the Lord turning His back upon glory and facing the chills of death, and there appears to Him from the other side of death Moses and Elijah, and surely their conversation about His decease would be heartening! It would be feeding speech, and sustaining speech, by which He would be able all the more boldly and all the more fearlessly to take His journey into twilight and night. And so, I say, our Saviour began His descent from glory to grave. It is not the going up the mount that cheers me, it is the coming down! Every step He took in that descent gives confirmation to your hope and to mine. Our ascent becomes possible in His descent.



And as He turned to go, and laid His shining glory by, behold! a voice, “*This is My beloved Son.*” [Verse 17] It was a great renunciation on Christ’s part, but it was a great gift on God’s part, and I think that on the mount of renunciation, when our Lord begins His descent, and the Father says, “My beloved Son,” we can in all reverence and truth add the other great word: “God so loved the world that He let Him lay His glory by”; “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” Down the mount He comes, on to Golgotha and the grave! Did not I say that the Transfiguration finds its explanation at the Passion? When I see Him coming down the mount, I can say with Paul, “He loved me and gave Himself for me.” It is through our Lord’s renunciation of glory that we become glorified. When I turn my face to the mountain-height, where the Apostle Peter was an eyewitness of the majesty of God, and when I think that that glory was the purposed consummation for every life, that I, if I had never sinned, might have been similarly transfigured into the immortal state, I wonder how the blest estate can be regained. And here is the answer:



There is a way for man to rise
To that sublime abode:
An offering and a sacrifice,
A Holy Spirit’s energies,
An advocate with God.

These, these prepare us for the sight
Of holiness above;
The sons of ignorance and night
May dwell in the eternal Light
Through the eternal Love!



THE MYSTERY OF THE PROPHET

2 Peter i. 19-21

And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a squalid place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost.

THE prophet, his prophecy, how to understand it! This passage is about as compact and concentrated as a crystal. It is compressed and solidified thinking, every sentence being as essential and as un wasteful as a passage of Browning. Just cast a glance at the crowded contents. I say it enshrines a description of the true prophet, it unveils the nature and significance of true prophecy, and it defines the only methods by which the secrets of prophecy can be disentangled and understood. Here is the vignette of the prophet: "No prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost." [Verse 21] And here is the out line, the primary feature of prophetic ministry: "A lamp shining in a squalid place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." [Verse 19] And here is the clue to sound and effective interpretation of prophecy: "No prophecy . . . is of private interpretation, for . . . men spake from God." [Verses 20, 21] These great guiding lines have not become confused by the march of time; they are as true and significant to-day as on the day when they were first penned, and if we would know a modern prophet when he appears, and be able to understand his message when we hear it, we shall do well to pay close and reverent heed to the teaching of this glorious and inspired companion of our Lord.

"Well, now, I think it is quite as well at once, when we are speaking about prophets and prophecy, that we detach ourselves almost entirely from the modern and popular interpretation of the word. Prophecy is not synonymous with prediction. When we use the sentence which has almost become a proverbial phrase in our ordinary speech and say, "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet," we are employing the words almost entirely in the sense of forecast, in the meaning of prevision, with the significance of unbosoming the secrets of the morrow. The element of prevision and of forecast is not entirely absent from the true equipment of the prophet, but it is not the primary element. I do not think any one can declare principles without forecasting issues; but the burden of a true prophet is not the forecasting of an event, but the proclamation of a principle. True prophecy is declaration, not anticipation; it is vision, not prevision. A prophet is a man who foretells, but who primarily forthtells, tells forth a message which God has given to him. The prophet is a forthteller of great truths, of dominant principles; he is a revealer of the great broad highways along which all the affairs of men move to inevitable destiny. I want, then, at once to put that primary

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meaning which we use in our modern interpretation of the word on one side, and as far as possible to leave aside this secondary element of prevision.

With this introductory assumption, look at the picture of the prophet himself. “No prophecy ever came by the will of man.” [Verse 21] Some things may come by human volition, but never prophecy. No man can will himself into the prophetic office. If he is not born there, his presence is an impertinent usurpation. The prophet is not the product of self-will, not the product of self-initiative. He is not the matured flower of human culture. The prophet’s own will has little or no part in his mission or vocation. He is not a cause, he is an effect. He is not the wind, he is an instrument. He is not the sun, he is a reflector. The prophet is born, not made. No prophecy and no prophet ever came by the will of man. The prophet’s role is not the perquisite of resolute purpose, or the prize of any strenuous ambition. He does not come by culture, but by nature. He is not made by struggle, he comes by birth. There is about the prophet an element which can never be manufactured. I think we know this deep, unnatural, unearthly, uncreated element in other spheres whenever a prophet appears. We can make rhymesters; we can easily manufacture them by the score. You can lay down a number of precise little rules for the making of a versifier; you can tell him how to measure out his little lines, how to regulate his metre, how to appoint his jingle. You can make a rhymester, but no poetry ever came by the will of man. When you are reading Wordsworth, you can instinctively feel when the manufacture begins, you can instinctively feel when the will of the poet begins to work, and you can instinctively feel when the manufacture ceases and something mysterious arrives, and the poet begins to sing. You can make politicians, make them by the crowd. Give a man a little programme, a glib tongue, a strong tincture of party loyalty, and there you are! But statesmanship never came by the will of man. We know the distinction between the political party-hack in all our political parties, and the man who tells forth the fundamentals, who speaks not in the mere party tone, but in the abiding speech of the ages. We can manufacture a politician; a statesman is beyond us. We can manufacture pianolas, we can make admirable imitations of the human fingers; we can endow the hammers with something of the living touch of the finger-tips, we can create a most elaborate and exquisite mechanism; but when we have finished our work we experience some nameless chill in the absence of mysterious life. No musician ever came by the will of man. We have to await his coming, and when he comes we know him by the unearthliness of his gifts, and the strains that breathe of another and a mysterious clime. And so I say we are conscious of this unmistakable element when ever the prophet appears, in whatsoever guise he comes. “Deep calleth unto deep”; there is about him a suggestion of the infinite, and we cannot explain him. We may not like him. It is quite probable we shall set about and crucify him. But there is in the prophet an element of mysteriousness which, though he be of our flesh and blood, links him with beings of quite another plane. We may

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not be able to define his distinction, but we feel it; and in these high matters of refined sentiment, feeling is perhaps our safest guide. Who does not feel the difference between Cecil Rhodes and Garibaldi? It is the unearthly element to which we pay our homage and our regard. Who does not feel the difference between John Bright and Benjamin Disraeli? What is it? It is the element that never came by the will of man. It is the difference between a spring and a cistern; it is the difference between glitter and glow; it is a difference unspeakable, made by the profound and mystic forthtelling from the Infinite. It is even so in every prophet, no matter what may be the garb he wears. It is so in Rudyard Kipling. I think his poetry is often feverish; to me, at any rate, it is often declamatory, sometimes inflammatory, often thoughtless. But again and again on the heedless page a wind springs up, and everything quickens, and the man is clothed in nameless inspiration, and the mortal puts on immortality. I say we feel it. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof," and it makes one man a statesman and leaves another a politician; it makes one man a poet, and leaves another a rhymester; it makes one man a prophet, and leaves another a mere speaker. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof," but thou canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth." "No prophet ever came by the will of man." We cannot make them. What then? What suggestion does the apostle give us in my text as to how this indefinable and mysterious element can be explained? Here is the apostolic explanation: "*Men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost.*" [Verse 21] I like that word "moved." It is one of the picturesque words of the New Testament Scriptures. It is precisely the same word which is translated in the Acts of the Apostles "drive." You remember in that graphic chapter which describes the shipwreck of the apostle, there comes this very suggestive phrase: "And when the ship was caught . . . we let her *drive*." That is precisely the word which is here translated "moved." "Men spake from God, *being moved*," driven by the Holy Ghost as Paul's ship was driven by the wind. That is the apostolic explanation of the prophet. "Suddenly there came a rushing mighty wind," and they spake! It was so with Moses, it was so with Elijah and Micah and Amos. They were all wind-swept children of God, driven by mysterious currents which they could never explain. That is why prophets can never understand the genesis of their own mission and their own message—they seem to have had nothing to do with it: Why Thackeray, who was sometimes endowed with the prophetic calling, speaking about his highest work, those parts of his work which bore the signs of inspiration, uses these very strange words, "I have no idea where it all comes from; I am often astounded myself to read it after I have got it down on the paper." I remember a great preacher telling me that he often felt just in that way about some of his sermons. When he had preached them, or when he had prepared them, he read them over again with curious and devouring interest, and could not think they were his own. He had been moved by the Holy Ghost, and he watched with great inquisitiveness the discoveries revealed to him. "*Men spake from God.*" [Verse 21] And that word "*from*"! It is in these prepositions

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that we so lack in trying to carry out the vividness of the original. It means right out of God, right out of the very depths of the Deity! "Men spake out of God!" Their speech was born in God, God-driven, God-controlled. That is so ever and every where, from the prophet of the earliest times to the last prophet who speaks to the listening ears of our own day. "The voice of the great Eternal speaks in their mighty tone." "No prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost."

So much, for the prophet. Now I turn from the prophet to the prophecy; and what, according to my text, is the abiding characteristic of all true prophecy? Here is the guiding word: It is "*as a Lamp shining in a squalid place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.*" [Verse 19] "As a lamp!" Then prophecy is something luminous, and therefore something illuminating. "A lamp shining in a squalid place." True prophecy always exposes the squalor of its time. When the prophet speaks, something shady stands revealed, something iniquitous stands exposed. The prophet always brings with him a light brighter than the twilight of accepted compromise. He comes with something of the light eternal; he is a lamp, and in the presence of the shining prophet the sins of his time come into visibility, and are named and declared. This is what we should expect. If we turn to the book of the psalmist we find these expressive words: "Our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance." We come into the light of the Lord's presence, and our secret sins leap into view, just as motes are seen in the sunbeam, and just as faded patches and rents are exposed in the broad light of the fuller day. And if a man comes from God, bearing with him something of this same eternal light, if he comes as a lamp, we must expect that the squalor and the deformity of his day will become visible before him. That is ever true, true of the far-off prophet Elijah. If you want to see the sin and the perversity and the squalor of that far-off day, stand near the man who has got the lamp. It is the same with the prophet Amos. If you want to see the rottenness of the gilded ceremonial religion of his day, and the injustices, and the perverted relationships of man to man, stand near the herdsman who has got the lamp. It is true of John the Baptist. If you want to see the sin of the times in which our Lord was born, stand near the man who has got the lamp. If you stand near Savonarola, you see the iniquities of Florence. If you stand near Thomas Carlyle, you behold the hollow shams and conventions of our own day. If you stand near General Booth, you will see the miseries and the deformities and the crookednesses of the submerged tenth. Until General Booth appeared we had never really seen them. "Darkest England and the way out." "The people who sat in darkness saw a great light." That is ever characteristic of prophecy. It reveals the squalor in the squalid place, it unveils it for the purpose of removing it. It reveals the darkness and corruption of the city by bringing into view a vision of the New Jerusalem, the city come down out of heaven from God. The first characteristic of true prophecy is that it is luminous and illuminating, exposing where exposure is needed. Mark the progress and sequence of my text. "A lamp shining in a squalid place, *until the day dawn!*" [Verse 19] Prophecy is not only

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luminous, it is progressive. Do you mark the increasing expansion of the terms? I think it is very beautiful and suggestive to notice it: “A lamp,” “a day-star!” The dawning! and on to perfect noon! The prophet of to-day speaks a larger word than the prophet of the earliest time. Savonarola was a child of the dawning; Amos was a child of the lamp. It is always necessary to remember this. When I remember this, it clears away a thousand difficulties from the sacred page. When I go back to Elijah, or to Amos, or to Micah, I must not expect the large and comprehensive light of the dawn. I must expect lamplight, partial light, local light; but a lamp always shining above the current standard of the time. When you go back to Elijah you go from dawn to lamps, and the principle must guide you in your apprehension and appreciation of the prophet’s teaching. I do not know that the electric light need speak altogether in such contemptuous terms of the horn lamp, and I do not know why the horn lamp should so fiercely and vehemently disparage the rush. The crucial criterion is this: Not whether Elijah equals Paul, and not whether Amos equals Thomas Carlyle. The crucial criterion is this: When Elijah held his lamp, what about the squalor? Was he above the current standard? Did he shine above the accepted compromise? Did he bring in the radiance of the ideal? When I go back to Amos I do not expect to see dawnlight, but lamplight. I find in Hosea, in Amos, many things I do not like; but I am a child of a richer privilege, a child of a larger day. The question is this: Had they a lamp which exposed the dirt? Did they bring out the squalor, and did they make revelations of which even we, in our own day, do well to take heed? The light has been progressive: a lamp for Elijah, a day-star for another man, the broader light of the dawning for another. And still the light of prophecy is progressive. We, too, are only yet in the early dawning; we are far away yet from the perfect noon. The prophet of to-day and to-morrow has still richer and deeper things to tell us from God. He need not be a repetition of yester day, he need not be a repeater of old saws and counsels, carrying precisely the same lamp. Still, to-day as ever, our prophet speaks from God, and in the utterance of these more privileged times we ought to behold a brightness far more radiant than the current standard, far more exacting in its demands—an inspiration leading us nearer to that glorious consummation when we shall know even as we are known.

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Arid lastly, how shall we receive a prophet and understand his message when he comes? Here is the guiding word: “*No prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation.*” [Verse 20] We are not at liberty to take our own roads to the interpretation. Private ways of that sort will never lead to the truth. There is a prescribed highway by which the deep secrets of prophets can be gained. A just interpretation of prophecy will always depend upon the spirit in which we approach it. Thomas à Kempis has a very revealing word in, I believe, the very first chapter of that wonderfully helpful book *The Imitation of Christ*. “By what spirit any scripture was made, by that same spirit must it be interpreted.” If you want to interpret a prophecy aright you must get into the spirit in which it was born. You cannot take a private way. Only in that way, the way in which it had its birth, can you get its secret meaning. I

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think that is true of literature in general. I was reading only the other day a book by one of the ablest literary critics of the last fifty years, and he said he never understood the drive, and spring, and leap of Sir "Walter Scott's *Marmion* until he declaimed it aloud on a galloping horse. But why did the secret of *Marmion* come out when it was declaimed on the back of a galloping horse? Because it was composed on the back of a galloping horse. And if you will turn to *Marmion* with this conception of the leap, and spring, and gallop in your mind and heart, you will get the very go and drive and rhythm of the poem. That will suffice for our purpose. We are to rearrange the conditions under which poetry was born if we are to discern and interpret its meaning. And so it is with all prophecy and all poetry, and all music. What is the use of bringing a commercial instinct to the interpretation of Wordsworth? What could you do with it? If you want to understand Wordsworth, you must become identified with the man, you must become possessed by the Wordsworthian mood. How, then, shall I find the secret of Isaiah, of Paul, of Savonarola, or of Luther? Not by any private interpretation, but by that same spirit in which their message and prophecy were born. Is not this the word of the Master? "*He that receiveth a prophet in the spirit of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.*" He that receiveth Wordsworth in the spirit of Wordsworth, will enter into Wordsworth's work. He that receiveth Paul in the spirit of Paul will walk in the highways and byways of Paul's inheritance. It is no use my going to Paul or to Isaiah with mere implements of criticism, however delicate or however refined they may be I shall fail to discover the secrets of his intimacy; I shall be locked out from his innermost fellowship. We must come to these men with reverence, with humility, with sincerity of purpose, with that absolute frankness which offers a sensitive surface to all good things. To sum it all up, the Holy Spirit must interpret what the Holy Spirit first inspired, and it would be far better to have no critical apparatus at all, and to know nothing about scholarship and nothing about learning, and to come to the sacred page with the shoes from off the feet, than to go burdened with all manner of learning and scholarship, and tramp loudly and flippantly in the most sacred place. You cannot get into secrets by private and heedless ways of that kind. It will have to be done in the broad highway of God's Holy Spirit. We need the Holy Spirit. And what we need we can get. And if ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father give the holy, interpreting Spirit to them that ask it? And so you see we can all be interpreters, and, blessed be God, we can all be prophets too! For if we are all filled with the Holy Spirit there will come into our message the prophetic significance, into our very singing the prophetic fervour, into our ordinary intercourse and converse spiritual energy and pith. The Holy Spirit will speak through me.

Oh, teach me, Lord, that I may teach
The precious things Thou dost impart;
And wing my words that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.

Oh, fill me with Thy fulness, Lord,
Until my very heart o'erflow
With kindling thought and glowing word
Thy love to tell, Thy praise to show.



DESTRUCTIVE HERESIES

2 Peter ii. 1

But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

THIS is a dark and appalling chapter. There is nothing quite like it elsewhere in the entire book. The misery and desolation of it are unrelieved. It is so like some wide and soddened moor, in a night of cold and drizzling rain, made lurid now and again by lightning-flash and weird with the growl of rolling thunder. Everywhere is the black and treacherous bog. The moral pollution is over whelming. I confess that I have stood before it for months, in the hope of seeing my way across, and even now I am by no means confident of a sure-footed exposition. The gutter conditions are ubiquitous. The descriptive language is intense, violent, terrific. There is no softening of the shade from end to end. It begins in the denunciation of "lascivious doings"; it continues through "pits of darkness," "lawless deeds," "lust of defilement," "spots and blemishes," "children of cursing"; and it ends in the gruesome figure of "the dog turning to his own vomit and the sow that had washed to wallowing in the mire." It is an awful chapter, borrowing its symbolism from "springs without water," and from "mists driven by a storm," and recalling the ashes of "Sodom and Gomorrah" "to enforce the urgency and terror of its judgment.

Is there any road across this dark and swampy moor? Has the bog a secret? To drop my figure, has this wide-spreading pollution an explanation? Amid all the cold mystery and darkness of the chapter, one thing becomes increasingly clear as we gaze upon it, that the depraved life is the creation of perverse thought, that in "*destructive heresies*" is to be found the explanation of this immoral conduct. I say this is one of the clear and primary emphases of the apostle's teaching. A man's thought determines the moral climate of his life, and will settle the question whether his conduct is to be poisonous marsh or fertile meadow, fragrant garden or barren sand. The pose of the mind determines the dispositions, and will settle whether a man shall soar with angels in the heavenlies or wallow with the sow in the mire. What we think about the things that are greatest will determine how we do the things that are least. "What are your primary thoughts about God? The prints of those thoughts will be found in your courtesies, in your intercourse, in the common relationships of life, in the government of commerce, in the control of the body, and in all the affairs of home and market and field. All the corruption of this chapter is traced up to unworthy conceptions of Christ, to the partial, if not entire, dethronement of "the Lord of life and glory." The immorality has its explanation in "destructive heresy."

"What think ye of Christ?" In what was their thought defective? What was the essence of the heresy? The secret is here, they had no adequate sense of His holiness. All true and

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efficient thinking about God begins in the conception of His holiness. If you begin with His love, you deoxygenate the very affection you proclaim. If you begin with His mercy, you deprive it of the very salt which makes it a minister of healing and defence. If you begin with His condescension, it is a condescension emasculated, because you have not gazed upon His lofty and sublime abode. You cannot get a glimpse of the unspeakable humility of Calvary until your eyes are filled with the glory of the great white throne. If you would know the depth you must begin with the height! Our thinking concerning the Lord must not take its rise in His compassions or His love. We must begin with the pure white ray. We must begin with the great white throne! When the man Isaiah was refashioned for the prophetic life, it was not some softened glimpse of a wistful family circle in glory which absorbed his gaze. It was the vision of a throne, "high and lifted up." And those who stood about the throne were not moving in light and familiar liberty. "Each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet." How solemn, and how reverent, and how worshipful! And the voices which he heard were not the jaunty songs and liltings which are sung at the fireside. "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." It was in circumstances like these, and upon heights like these, that the prophet's thinking began! Do not think that grave and venerable experiences of this kind make life severe and hard and rob it of its juice and freedom. There is no man who has more to say about the throne and the awful splendours that gather about it, no man who tells us more about the thunders and lightnings that proceed out of it, than just the apostle who has given us the most exquisitely tender letter in the New Testament Scriptures. John Calvin is a name that has become almost synonymous with hardness, unbendableness, severity, with high and austere contemplation, but you do the man a grave injustice and you miss the interpretative secret of his life if you ignore or overlook the wells of most delicate compassion in which his life and writings abound. Our softest water is the water that flows over granitic beds. If you would know what it made of Isaiah, read through his message and examine his life. The rivers of tenderness and compassion which flow in this book are not anywhere to be surpassed except by "the river of water of life" which "flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb." When you have read the sixth chapter of Isaiah, when you have tremblingly gazed upon the throne, "high and lifted up," when you have looked upon the veiled and stooping seraphim, and when you have listened to the solemn sound of holy voices "chanting by the crystal sea," then turn to the fortieth chapter, and hear the sound of running waters, the rivers of compassion "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith the Lord. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. . . . He shall feed His flock like a shepherd!" The soft compassion of the fortieth chapter finds its explanation in the solemn severities of the sixth. I stood by a Swiss chalet, on the lower slopes of a lovely vale, and by the house there flowed a gladsome river, full and forceful, laughing and dancing in its liberty, and instinctively I prayed that my life might

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be as the river, full of power and full of song, clearing obstacles with a nimble leap, and hastening on to the great and eternal sea. And to my voice less prayer there came reply, "Follow up the stream to its birth!" And I tracked the buoyant river, and I reached the snow-line, and I found that in the spreading wastes of virgin-snow the singing minister had its birth. And then I knew that full and forceful Christian lives must have their source in sovereign holiness, that only above the snow-line, near the great white throne, could they find an adequate birth. "Hast thou forsaken the snows of Lebanon?" That is the "destructive heresy," to begin one's thinking and one's doing elsewhere than in the holiness of God. To begin elsewhere is to be sure of impoverishment, and to have a life-river which will lose itself in unwholesome swamp and bog, and become the parent of moral corruption and contagion. "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts."

But let me still further analyse this "destructive heresy." If we do not begin with the Lord's holiness, we can have no discernment of the Lord's atonement. Dwell below the snowline, and you want no atonement! And for this reason. The man who does not begin his thinking in divine holiness will have no keen and poignant perception of human sin. "What you see in a thing depends very much upon its background. John Ruskin has shown us how the whitest notepaper, exposed before the tribunal of bright sunshine, reveals its inherent grey. It all depends upon the back ground. If your background be gas-light, your notepaper will appear superlatively white; but if the background be the all-revealing flame of God's resplendent sun, the apparent white will darken into grey. I have seen a sea-gull in flight, with a black cloud for a background, and the bird seemed white as driven snow; I have seen the same bird upon the water, with a back ground of snowy foam, and the wings were grey. Yes, what is your background? If you do not begin with the holiness of God you will never see the blackness of sin. If your back ground be some indifferent human standard, some halting expediency, some easy policy, human life, and your own included, will appear passably clear. I think I am no pessimist, but I confess I look with some alarm at what I cannot but regard as the lessening sense of sin which seems to hold our modern thought and life. One's fears are difficult to express because the dark symptoms themselves are so difficult to disengage and define. But I feel a certain dulness, a certain drowsiness, in the spiritual life. I feel a certain close, enervating mugginess in the moral atmosphere; a want of alertness, of sharp and sensitive response. Our modern Churches are too indolently contented, too prematurely satisfied, and are much too willing to take easy advantage of the compromises offered of the world. We must become suspicious of an indulgent terminology. A violent antagonist of the Christian faith, a man whose method of attack is of the slap-dash kind, declared, only a few days ago, "There is no such thing as sin; there is only error." The man who begins with that diagnosis can never prescribe for me. But we must see to it that we do not take advantage of this indulgent term, and the Christian pulpit must proclaim the holiness of the Lord, and allow no web of wordy sophistry to hide the great white throne!

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We have frequently been told that we need to recover the word “grace”; we need first to recover the word “holiness”; holiness will recover the word sin. And if sin does not appear sin, but passes muster as imperfect virtue, wherein comes the need of atonement? No holiness, no sin; no sin, no Saviour! Redemption is a superfluity, and the ministry of Jesus is a wasteful toil, and His passion is a fruitless death. The man who has no vision of holiness has no perception of the Atonement, and he “denies the Lord that bought him.” It is the man who has ascended above the snow-line, who will wail in his secret soul, “Woe is me, for I am unclean,” and who will smite upon his breast, saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”



Well, now, see the consequence of these things. I have been trying to expound the “destructive heresy” which I think is the initial cause of the pollution which is so terribly unfolded in this chapter. If these cardinal conceptions are dull or eclipsed, other precious things will be destroyed. Cast your eyes over this widespread corruption. There are some “conspicuous absences.” There are many missing treasures, whose absence accounts for the filth. I miss the instinct of reverence! They tremble not “to rail at dignities.” It is an ill thing in a life when a man has no sovereignty before which he bows in reverent awe. Take out the august, and life is reduced to flippancy, and levity is the master of the feast both day and night. A man who never reveres will find it impossible to be true. The man who never kneels in spirit can scarcely be upright in life. To bow to nothing is to be master of nothing. If we have no sense of the august to worship, we shall have little sense of sin to expel.



I know that in using this word “august” I am using and borrowing a characteristic expression of my great predecessor Dr. Dale, and I hope I am using it with something of his own reach and loftiness of thought. I do not know anything which is more needed in our Free Church life and worship than an awed and reverent consciousness of God. I could wish that we moved about our very sanctuaries with a softer step, and that our very demeanour was that of men who are held in a subdued wonder at the majestic presence of God. I sometimes think that our very detachment from any prescribed order of service, our boundless freedom, our familiarity with the Lord, our easy intimacy in communion, need to be guarded from besetting perils. Even when we rejoice in the Gospel of Calvary let us “give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness.”

Before Jehovah’s awful throne
Ye nations bow with sacred joy.

I do not think we are in danger of “railing at dignities,” but I do think we are in danger of forgetting the supreme dignity of them. In one of his letters to Matthew Mowat, Samuel Rutherford uses these words: “Ye should give [God] all His own court-styles, His high and heaven-names.” I think we are a little lacking in the court-style, in this use of the high and heaven-names. But the use of the high names will come back when our souls are humbly



gazing upon the high things. “When we shall see Him as John the Evangelist saw Him, we, too, “shall fall at His feet as one dead.” Our souls will always have the stoop of reverent adoration while we keep in view the vision of the holiness of our Lord. In all this revelling, sweltering chapter I miss the sense of sin.

And amid all the movements I miss another treasure, the sense of a large and noble freedom. I know there is a talk of freedom, but freedom is not enjoyed. “Promising them liberty,” and the poor fools are deluded into the thought that they are in possession of it. I know they are “doing just as they like,” but of all forms of bondage that is the worst; for this great world, and the laws of its government, are not built upon the “likes “of men, but upon the rights and prerogatives of God. How can a man be free, even though the song of freedom be ever on his lips, if all the powers in grace and nature are pledged to overthrow him? I tell you every flower of the field is ranked against defilement, and all the forces of this wonderful planet are arrayed against the man whose only arbiter is his own “likes,” instead of being determined by the arbitrament of the will and purpose of God. A man who is in sin, and assumes he is in liberty, and is satisfied with his position, has not risen to the contentment and liberty which are the glory of humankind, but is sunk to the animal bondage of the sow, which gloats and wallows in the mire.

There are other missing treasures which I might name, but I will content myself in mentioning only one the absence of any perception of the drift and purpose of history. When the great things go out of life, when the sublime is exiled, when reverence dies and the days decline in triviality, men lose their sense of history, and yesterday has no voice. “And I heard a voice behind me, saying!” That is the voice of yesterday, and it is the privilege of those who are in the fellowship of God to know its interpretation. Sodom and Gomorrah shout through the centuries, and so do Nineveh and Babylon, and Greece and Rome! “If God spared not the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when He brought a flood upon the ungodly”; and if God turned “the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes. . .”—that is the voice of history, the shoutings of experience, and by the people in this chapter the voice is unheeded because unheard. All these “conspicuous absences”—the instinct of reverence, the feeling of sin, the sense of a noble freedom, and the recognition of historical witness—are accounted for by perverse thinking, by “destructive heresies,” by the degradation of the Godhead, by the eclipse of the great white throne. Having no sense of holiness, they “denied the Lord that bought them.” The lack of lofty summit explains the corrupt and stagnant plain.

Now this particular species of heresy may not be prevalent to-day. I do not know that we could find its precise lineaments in our own time. But we may give the teaching wide dominion. Our primary conception of the Lord will determine the trend and quality of our own life, and the depth or shallowness of its ministry. Whatever dethrones or disparages Christ will impair and impoverish man. Anything that cheapens the Saviour will make us

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worthless. Any teaching which puts Him out of account, which removes Him from the front place, which relegates Him to the rear, which in any way “denies” Him, is a “destructive heresy,” and is fraught with peril and destruction. Is there any modern peril?

There is a prevalent teaching to-day which is usually known as the “New Thought.” I do not speak as its antagonist, but as one who wishes to preserve it from becoming a minister of weakness and destruction. I welcome much of its teaching. I believe that in discovering and clarifying psychological laws it may render unspeakable help to the living of a Christian life. I believe that we are now standing upon the borderland of a marvellous country, and that mystic forces are to be revealed to us of which hitherto we have only dimly dreamed. I believe that the marvellous phenomena of telepathy and hypnotism, and all the discoveries we are making in this dim and impalpable world, may mightily help us in the fortification of pure and resolute habit. But I see a danger, an ominous danger, a danger real and immediate. I know the literature of this new teaching, the literature both of this country and of the United States; I speak from first hand knowledge, and I say that the teaching gives no adequate place and sovereignty to Jesus Christ our Lord. He is of little or no account; He is occasionally mentioned, but only as one of a crowd, and He is not accorded that unique and solitary pre-eminence which He claims. In one of the latest, and in some respects the ablest, of these books I have looked in vain from end to end for even the bare mention of the Saviour’s name. He does not count! He is a negligible and therefore neglected factor, and is left entirely out of the reckoning. And because He is absent, other things are missing. I find no mention of guilt. Rarely do I stumble upon the fact of sin. In the “New Thought” there is no confession of sin, no sob of penitence, no plea for forgiveness, no leaning upon mercy. The atonement is an obsolete device, the pardonable expedient of a primitive day. “A man must acquire the art,” says one of the best of these teachers, “the art of allowing the past, with whatever errors, sins, faults, follies, or ignorances entangled, to slip out of sight.” How easy the suggestion, how tremendous the achievement! For the most of us that burden slips away only where the pilgrim’s burden rolled away, at the foot of the Saviour’s cross, where it rolls into the Saviour’s grave. I care not what veins of helpful ministry these men and women may strike, if they ignore the Saviour and the ministry of redeeming grace, they are dealing with essentially surface forces as compared with the mighty powers born of personal communion with Him. It is a teaching which practically “denies the Lord that bought us,” and so far it is a “destructive heresy” which offers no adequate ministry for the liberation of sinful men, and for the attainment of a full and matured life. All thinking is initially wrong which does not begin with the unique holiness of the Lord, and which does not reserve for Him a supreme and sovereign place in man’s redemption. And that, too, is the severest indictment of spiritualism. It has little or nothing to do with the Lord. It concerns itself with meaner folk, with smaller themes, and with trivial communion. Who ever heard of a spiritualistic campaign for the reclamation of the lost? That’s where its sense is dull.

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“Saviour!” That’s where the vision is dim. We must bring all teachings, and all ministries to the touchstone of our exalted Lord and Saviour. What do they do with Him? What think they of Christ? We must suspect any thing and everything which lays Him under eclipse. Do they deny the Lord that bought us? Do they dim His glory, and rank Him in the indiscriminate crowd? Then we must label them as “destructive heresies,” whose forces can never achieve the redemption of human kind.

What, then, shall we pray for ourselves and for others? First of all we will pray that we may never lose sight of the heights of the Divine holiness! We are told that they, who dwell beneath great domes, acquire a certain loftiness and stateliness of bearing which distinguishes them from their fellows. Let us pray that about our brethren and ourselves there may be a mystic significance, a breadth and height of character, a nobility of life, telling of the sublime abode in which we dwell. May we dwell in the truth, live and move in the truth, and by no perilous emphasis of minor themes and things deny the Lord that bought us.



WORSE THAN THE FIRST

2 Peter ii. 20, 21

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse with them than the first. For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

“The last state is become worse with them than the first.” [Verse 20] Apostasy is worse than ignorance! It were better for us never to have come within sight of the Kingdom, and to have remained in ignorance of its privileges and glory, than, having entered the gate, to become rebels to its sovereignty, and to turn our backs upon its contemplated ministries of grace. To approach the Divine is an unspeakable favour; it is also an appalling responsibility. Light that is trifled with becomes lightning; the splendour of the great white throne becomes a “consuming fire.” To have known, and then to rebel, translates our very knowledge into a minister of destruction. The abuse of the highest degrades us beneath the lowest. “The first shall be last.” “The last is become worse with them than the first.” “Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.” Here, in the apostle’s words, we have depicted for us the rise and fall of a soul. There is the realisation of moral deliverance: “*they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*” [Verse 20] There is the subsequent moral relapse: “*they are again entangled therein and overcome.*” And there is the consequent deterioration in the moral and spiritual capital of the life: “*the last state is become worse with them than the first.*”

The realisation of moral deliverance. “They have escaped the defilements of the world.” What is this “defilement” of the world in which these souls have been imprisoned? Who can define it? “Who can lay hold of this subtle and varying corruption, and give it an interpretative name? Its metamorphoses are extraordinary. It has a hundred different guises, changing its attire continually, but amid all its shifting appearances it remains essentially the same. You have the same essential elements in solid ice, in flowing water, in hissing steam, in wreathing vapour, in moving cloud. In all the multiplex forms you have the same essence: the reality abides; it is only a change of attire. You can have the same poison in varying preparations, mingling with different compounds, appearing in diverse colours, and confined within dissimilar flasks. The incidentals are many, the poisonous essence is one and the same. And so it is with this “corruption” of the world; it pervades different sets of circumstances; it enshrines itself in different compositions, but everywhere and anywhere it is the same destructive minister. It is the same in Whitechapel and Belgravia, in the House of Commons and on a racecourse, in the King’s palace and the peasant’s hut, in the Church and on the Exchange. You may have “the defilements of the world” palpable and gross, and



you may have them tenuous and refined. They may be rank and offensive as “the lust of the flesh”; they may be rare and vain and elusive as “the pride of life.” Yes, many forms, but one spirit! “The fashion of this world passeth away.” The “fashion” changes; the thing itself abides.

“The defilements of the world.” Every age seems to have its own characteristic corruption, its own destructive, worldly form and colour. When St. Anthony went out into the Egyptian desert as a protest and safeguard against the corruption of his time, it was a different form of worldliness to that which encountered St. Benedict in a succeeding century, and which drove him to found his great Monastic Order; and the worldliness against which St. Benedict contended differed from the corruption which surrounded St. Francis when, at a later day, he established the Order of the Mendicant Friars. All these forms of monasticism fought the same essential corruption, but it appeared here in the shape of a decaying individualism, and there in the shape of social and political dissolution, and yonder in the shape of a proud and luxurious Church. “The fashion of this world passeth away.” How different is the worldliness which forced the Salvation Army into existence from the worldliness which prevailed at the time of the evangelical revival! John Wesley and General Booth looked out upon quite different conditions, but the difference was only in the shape of the flask and the colour of the compound; the essential adversary was the same. The corruption of our own day wears a different guise from the corruption of twenty-five years ago. It has transferred itself to other spheres, and has pervaded new sets of relationships, and you have to look for it in new attire. The fashion changes; the pollution abides! Behind all the shiftings of the centuries the defilement persists, and it manifests itself in a mode of thinking, a mode of working, and a mode of living which is essentially anti-Christian. It is the anti-Christian drift in the life of a generation which constitutes its pollution, and such drift may be found with equal certainty in Mayfair and the Seven Dials. It is a subtle spirit, now enshrining itself in an individual, now in a society, now in a Parliament, now in literature, now in art, now in the acquisition of treasure, now in the apportioning of leisure, in a hundred different vestures, but remaining always the anti-Christian drift, and ever degrading its victims into Christian negations.

Now this “defilement of the world” is an infection, and propagates itself like a foul contagion. It is a significant and suggestive thing that the word which our version translates by “defilements” is our English word “miasma.” It is the suggestion of the process by which the corruption works. “The miasma of the world!” And what is a miasma? Medical science has a synonym for the word which gives us much enlightenment. “Aerial poison!” A miasma is an aerial poison, an emanation or effluvia rising from the ground and floating in the air. “The miasma of the world.” It is pervasive as an aerial poison, it distributes itself like a destructive contagion. Let an unclean miasma, some foul immorality, infest one lad in a public



school, and the school will seek its own security by his immediate expulsion. One polluted lad can infect a thousand. “The miasma of the world.” We know the workings of the principle in social clubs. It is amazing how soon the miasma can pollute a society. It has happened before: now that one man has degraded a social fellowship, and has created a malaria which pure men have refused to breathe. What has happened in smaller communities has also prevailed in civic fellowships and in the larger life of the State. “Evil communications corrupt good manners.” Sometimes we can withdraw ourselves from an evil contagion, and our withdrawal may tend to destroy it by neglect. But we cannot altogether get away from “the miasma of the world.” We are in the world, and the air is infected, and we have got to breathe it. How then?

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There is a way of escape. “They have escaped the miasma of the world.” We can be rendered immune, as medical science can make us immune in the presence of some particular contagion. “I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world,” but that Thou shouldest make them immune—“that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” Regard it or disregard it as we may, this is the claim of the real Christian science, the promise of the Gospel of Christ: “If they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them.” It is possible for a man to move amid the prevailing miasma of his day, to live and move and have his being in its very presence, and yet to remain in robust moral health. Now, mark you, this moral deliverance is attained through a spiritual fellowship. “They have escaped the defilements of the world *through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*” [Verse 20] An escape from the miasma by the “knowledge” of a Person! But that word “knowledge” implies infinitely more than mental conception. It is the “knowledge” which implies acquaintance, intimacy, communion, community. I should not be doing violence to the meaning of my text if I were to read it in this wise: “They have escaped the miasma of the world through the partnership of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” It is a “knowledge” which implies a league, a covenant, a “partaking of the Divine nature”; and through this marvellous union there flows into human-kind a river of regenerating energy, reinforcing our miserable weakness, and endowing us with all the resistances of invincible health. Our Lord makes us immune to the miasma of the world by communicating to us His own victorious virtue, and by making us sublimely positive to all the assaults and negations of the devil. “He restoreth my soul.” “Thou shalt not be afraid of the pestilence that walketh in darkness.” “I will fear no ill.” Such is the way of escape.

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But now the apostle unfolds a dark sequence. The moral deliverance may be followed by a moral relapse. “*They are again entangled therein and overcome.*” [Verse 20] Need I say that this immoral alliance is occasioned by the breaking of the spiritual alliance? Our spiritual attachment endows us with a powerful antidote and antagonism to the miasma of the world. Relax the attachment and you weaken the antidote. Sever your spiritual communion and you impoverish your moral defence. It is a sequence which is illustrated every day in

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multitudes of lives. Maintain your alliance with the Lord, and you are secure in a health which keeps your enemy at the gate. Let your alliance become loose, and your moral repulsion grows faint. I offer no argument to prove it; the proof is found in common experience. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present evil world." Yes, but before Demas had forsaken Paul, he had broken with the Lord, and then he swung back in mighty drift towards the world. When he had wilfully rejected the help of the heavenly energy, he succumbed to the gravitation of the world. He was no longer immune, and the miasma subdued him in the common defilement. How suggestive are the words in which the apostle describes the relapse: "*They are again entangled.*" [Verse 20] They begin to move towards the world, and presently they become involved. It is a figure of this kind: they go too near the destructive machinery; they go in a prying curiosity, and they are caught by a sleeve, and are undone! "They are again entangled." Ah, it is by our loosenesses that we are caught and involved! When we leave our Lord our thought becomes loose, we exercise too much freedom of thinking; and some loose end becomes entangled, and we are "overcome." When we leave our Lord our speech becomes loose; we say what we like and not what we ought; and some loose phrase gets entangled and we are "overcome." When we leave our Lord our affections become loose; deserting the great Lover we flirt with the world: "I will go after my lovers." We become "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," and we are speedily involved and undone. Immediately we begin to weaken our alliance with the Lord we begin to re-establish our communion with the world. The re-establishment of the immoral alliance may begin in apparently trifling flirtations, but it speedily issues in a dark enslavement. When you wish to moor a big boat to a pier, you first throw across the intervening gulf a light line. Gulliver's bondage in Lilliput began in the binding down of a single hair! And our light flirtations with the defiled world, the yielding of a hair here and a hair there to its playful caress, will lead to an eventual entanglement which will make the soul the bond-slave of pollution. To trifle with the world is to play with the plague. "They are again entangled and overcome."

And what is the moral status of the back slider? "*The last state is become worse with them than the first.*" [Verse 20] Here is a man who has had intimacy with the Lord. By the strength of the holy partnership he has been kept inviolate, and "no plague has come nigh his dwelling." He dissolves the partnership; he opens up a lost communion; he turns like "a dog to his vomit," and "a sow to the mire," and the appalling issue is this, that "it were better had he never known the way of righteousness," and the last state of the man is worse than the first! How is he worse? In spiritual apprehension. His sense of God is tremendously abused, and he has not the same receptive organ to the Divine that he had when first he sought the Lord. He has not the same appreciation of grace, the same craving for forgiveness, the same hunger for holiness, the same longing for home! How is he worse? In moral discrim-

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ination. His moral palate is not as sensitive as when he first surrendered his life to the King. His mouth is harder! He can swallow iniquity neat. How is he worse? In the poverty of his emotional force. The fundamental energies of the life are sluggish or dead, the love-force, the hope-force, the faith-force, the ultimate momenta which constitute the wealth and dignity of man. How is he worse? Because he does not know he is worse! "Thou sayest I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked!" "The last state of that man is worse than the first."



Can such a man be recovered? Oh yes! Backsliders may be converted and recovered. "He is able to save unto the uttermost!" "I will recover thee of thy backsliding." "All things are possible to him that believeth."

Though earth and hell the word gainsay,
The word of God can never fail:
The Lamb shall take my sins away,
'Tis certain, though impossible:
The thing impossible shall be,
All things are possible to me.

All things are possible to God,
To Christ, the power of God in man,
To men, when I am all renewed,
When I in Christ am formed again,
And when, from all sin set free,
All things are possible to me.



THE LEISURELINESS OF GOD.

2 Peter iii. 3, 4, 8, 9.

Mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His presence? . . . One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

“Where is the promise of His presence?” [Verse 4] Where are the signs of the King’s presence and ministry? Where are the prints of His goings? Show us the proofs of His interposition, the evidences of His revolutionary and transforming work! Reveal to us the witness of His handiwork, or at any rate let us see and touch the hem of His garment!” Where is the promise of His presence? “It is the uproarious cry of the mockers, *“walking after their own lusts.”* [Verse 3] They are proclaiming the heedlessness of the Almighty; “The Lord God is not moving, with attentive ministry, along the ways of men! He is far away, in the boundless hunting-ground of space, engaged with larger prey!”

“Where is the promise of His presence?” It is not only the shout of the scoffer, it is the low, poignant cry of the devout. The voices in this Book are many and manifold. You can hear the loud, laughing jeer of the mocker, rising in the very midst of prophecy and psalm: and you can hear the wail of the perplexed, like a low, long moan of pain. “How long wilt Thou forget me, Lord?” “Lord, how long wilt Thou look on?” “How long, Lord, how long?” The defiant and reckless scorn, and the agonising doubt, concern themselves with one thing—the apparent heedlessness of God.

What, then, is the problem? It is this. Men are confronted with an apparently indiscriminating and uncompassionating juggernaut. No hand seems to be busy in human affairs engaged in just and discerning judgment. There is no selection determined by moral worth. The vast movement is blind and capricious. The gigantic machine staggers along, like some untended traction engine, and its huge, grinding wheels bruise and break all things into a common mass, stones and little children, the wasteful and the useful, the sinner and the saint.

Let me read to you a short passage from one of the most delicate and sensitive of our present-day writers, who thus expresses a part of this sharp and burdensome problem: “Last summer, as I walked in my garden, I heard a fledgeling sparrow chirruping merrily under a bush. Possibly he had by accident dropped out of his nest, and, by making parachutes of his wings, had so broken his fall as to reach ground without taking hurt, and was now in a flutter, between pride and fear, at his own daring. For a few minutes I watched him ruffling it as roguishly as a robin, now cocking his glossy head at a sprawling worm, now stropping his tiny beak, razor-wise, upon a twig, and twittering lustily meanwhile for very joy of his

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freedom and of his merry youth and of the summer morning. . . . I insinuated myself into my hammock, and with my fingers between the pages of a book, lay a-swing in the sunshine as in the centre of a golden globe. For a time I forgot both book and bird. Then suddenly my golden globe shattered into darkness at a sound—a mere thimbleful of sound—a scream of terror and agony, so tiny and yet so haunting and so horrible, that I seem to hear it even now. A tame rook that has the run of my garden had pinned the sparrow, breast upward, under his talons, and, as I looked, was stabbing the life out of him with iron beak. For that wee bird no happy warbling among the leaves: no happier rearing of his young. . . . The sight of that helpless nestling, done to death in the June sunshine, and by one of his feathered kin, turned me sick and faint with horror.” *“Where is the promise of His presence?”*

I had just written these words when an urgent letter was placed upon my desk. I paused in my work to open and read it, and this sentence gave its crimson hue to deepen the colour of my page: “We have had another physician to see her, and he pronounces the disease to be cancer.” The victim is an incarnate angel, who has moved along the hard roads of life with all the sweetening and reviving ministry of a perfume. Her life has been a daily death; she has acquired only that she might give again, she has spent herself in order that by the energy of sacrificial blood others might be made alive. And now, cancer! “We have had another physician to see her, and he pronounces the disease to be cancer.” That cancer should have come to *her!* *“Where is the promise of His presence?”*

The same morning I had read these words in my daily paper: “The 6th Company of the 23rd Siberian Regiment reached the summit, and rushed in the Japanese defences. They were, however, received with fixed bayonets, the captain being lifted into the air by several Japanese on the points of their weapons. The rest of the company all perished before the companies following could get up. This is the tenth day such a butchery has been going on. The Turkish War was a joke to this! Over all this vast field of action, an area of thirty miles, the ground is strewn with the dead, and tens of thousands of human wrecks are being carried south and north from this unexampled battlefield.” Let that gory record add its quota to the already deeply dyed and troubled page. *“Where is the promise of His presence?”*

And that is not all. The difficulty is accentuated when one turns from the victims to some of those who apparently escape. Notoriously bad men are housed in comfort, and useless women are clothed in silks and satins, and walk the sunny side of the way. Dishonesty sweeps by in the carriage, while integrity creeps foot sore by the kerb. “Fools ride on horseback, while princes walk by their side.” The sleep of the beast is untroubled, while the saint moans through the night in pain. The contrasts are apparently appalling, and fortune does not favour the brave! *“Where is the promise of His presence?”*

What shall we say to these things? Let us say, first of all, that we are very ignorant, that our eyes are only endowed with short range, and that our knowledge has severe and almost

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immediate limitations. Do not let us regard our uncertain guessings as final judgments. Let us admit the mystery, and cease our bitter dogmatisms until the mist has rolled away. How little we know! That little fledgling, done to death by the rook, how little we know about him! The dropping from the nest, his little chirp, his material equipment, the scream and . . . we know no more! “If God saw fit,” says our literary friend, “to set that little creature singing in the green groves of Paradise (and who dare say that God has no place in His universe for the sparrow, that God Himself has told us is evermore within His care!), if God saw fit, at the cost of a moment’s pain, to take His bird—where danger shall menace never more, what is that to you?” Our range of vision is ineffective, and we haven’t the evidence to justify a harsh and bitter verdict.

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My cancer-stricken friend, how little I know about her! And sometimes in my thinking I do not include all the little I know. I called her “victim”; the strange thing is that she would never use the word about herself, and her thoughts about herself are part of the case. I refuse to allow any verdict upon her which takes no account of her peace, and resignation, and deep and unsmitten faith. I can hold no parley with judges who keep their eyes glued upon the corroding disease, and pay no regard to her long and radiant vista of immortal hope. I say that the “victim’s” assurance is part of the problem, and must not be ignored in the verdict.

The fact of the matter is, our thoughts are moving upon an altogether inadequate scale. That is the teaching of this chapter to troubled and doubt-stricken men. “*One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*” [Verse 8] We are not thinking on a sufficiently adequate scale: our thoughts cannot wrap themselves about the entirety of the place. We know what ministry an enlarged scale accomplishes even for some of the smaller things which lie in the term of human years. A thing looked at in the scale of one day is quite a different matter when set in the scale of seventy years. The scale of one day obscures purpose and tendency, and veils “the far-off interest of tears.” I lately read some extracts from a printed diary, and I would like to read you a part of them. The first is from the diary of a boy, and I will give it just as it appears.¹ “I cannot pretend to like this school, however much I try. The head is a beast, and not one of the under masters is a decent chap. I hate being kept in after hours when the other fellows are going out to games, yet, whenever I haven’t done a lesson right they make me do it until I know it thoroughly. This is constantly the case with my Latin. Also I do loathe the food they give us; we have to eat fat and lean together, and fat is beastly. Also, however cold it is, we have to take long runs when it would be much nicer to sit by the fire and be comfortable. Also I can’t understand my father and mother, who say they love me and all that, sending me to such a place.”

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1 Blake’s A Reasonable View of Life.

Just fifty years later the same hand wrote these words, when the writer's name was known throughout the world. "Of my many advantages in early life, I place easily first my parents, whose particular method of training me was beyond all praise. . . . In looking back upon my first school, I can think of it only with affection, for the manner in which the masters treated [my inert tendency of character was entirely admirable. To their insistence at that period I owe one of the keenest delights of my maturer years, a love for the Latin authors. . . . In the matter of physical soundness, also, I am certainly much indebted to the school runs, which were compulsory, and to the wholesome and sensible diet on which we were fed, without which I should not possess to-day the virility which has kept me free from disease to a quite unusual extent." Need I point the moral of the contrasts? The boy's entry enshrines a verdict fashioned upon the scale of a day: the man's entry declares a judgment fashioned to the scale of fifty years. It is all a matter of scale!" One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." In things of the day He has in view the thousand years; the thousand years being the full maturing of the designs that moulded the little day. "Where is the promise of His presence?" Think upon the scale of a thousand years.

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But in the chapter before us the mocker's scorn primarily concerns the heedlessness of God in the face of human sin. They are happy and untroubled in their lust! The jeer is this, that God is heedless of sin or virtue, and that there are no signs of discriminating judgment between the open sinner and the professed saint. Is God heedless about sin? "Where is the promise of His presence?" Are there any signs of His whereabouts? Let us ask ourselves this searching question—how do things trend? Is God heedless concerning sin? To what tribunal can we make our appeal? We can appeal to the testimony of the purest instincts. We can appeal to the witness of personal experience. We can appeal to the proclamation of the Christian Scriptures. And what is their united teaching? It is this that there is nothing more sure than "the everlasting burnings." I do not refer to some remote and unseen hell, the appointed destiny of an impenitent race. I refer to a present conflagration, the everlasting burning, in which the sinner is even now being inevitably consumed. I say that instinct and experience agree in this, that sin has to encounter an unavoidable Nemesis, and that wrong moves on to certain destruction. Our proverbial lore, the findings and expressions of the common life, gives emphatic utterance to the same truth. "A man's chickens come home to roost." "The whirligig of time brings round its revenges." "Sin doesn't pay in the long run." What the proverb declares, our experiences confirm. There is not a single sinner in this town to-day who is not, even now, in "the devouring fire," "the everlasting burnings." You say that some of them seem very happy in the fire! Yes, they do, but don't you see that their happiness is not a disproof, but the very proof of the conflagration. Degradation is penalty. Loss of fine perception is penalty. The destruction of the coronal powers is penalty. Is it no sign of horrible judgment that a man is satisfied with the pleasures of the kitchen,

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when the oratory of his life is ablaze? This is the plane of true and cogent reasoning; manhood maimed is manhood penalised. That men are contented to be as pigs in the mire is the clearest evidence that their crowns and dignities have been burnt away. In the early stages of their sin men are conscious of their loss, and they busy themselves in fashioning counterfeits. They employ divers kinds of religious cosmetics. They strive and strive to “keep up appearances” even when the internal treasure is destroyed! My God! no judgment in the world? No Nemesis? No fire? Is not this a most awful judgment, more awful than any other, that when the very virtues of a man are consumed away, he should move about in self-satisfaction, wearing a hollow and painted pretence? You want to see visible lightning appear and strike him! Our God uses the ministry of a more secret consumption. “Our God is a consuming fire.”

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As it is with individuals so it is with peoples. Judgment haunts the footsteps of the sinful state. We can trace the decline and fall of Rome. We can track it step by step through increased idleness, through demoralising employment, through heated sensuality, through the decline of agricultural pursuits, through the lapse of military virtue, on through all to Imperial perdition. There are grave and sober-minded men who are beginning to think that Nemesis is revealing a visible hand in the Russia of to-day. As for Britain, let her remember that, whatever adhesion may be found in material and commercial communion, it is not in these things that she will find the cement of an enduring and indestructible empire. “Righteousness alone exalteth a nation.” In men and in peoples we may be sure that our sin will find us out. All sin works towards decline, insipidity, impotence, and night. Of all sad spectacles, the saddest is the spectacle of the candle smouldering out in an ill-spent life! “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, ere the evil days come,” the insipid, burnt-out days, “when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”

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And yet, after all, God does appear leisurely. Why does He not hasten His goings? Why are not sin and perdition more closely joined? Why does He move at such a leisurely pace? Why is He so slack? Listen. “*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*” [Verse 9] “Not slack, as some count slackness,” not impotent, not indifferent, not unwilling to perform. What then? “But is longsuffering toward you.” It is the leisureliness, not of heedlessness, but of mercy. Our God is “slow to wrath”; it is a slow fire, slow in order that we may have opportunity to repent. God’s judgment on sin could have been appallingly swift and final. He might have ordained that one revolt should incur the paralysis of the will and the ruin of the life. And what would have been the effect? That we should have moved in a trembling terror, and though we might have been virtuous we should never have been free. The lowest motive would have operated in the soul, and the lowest motive can never produce the highest life. Some graces would never have ripened; we might have been pure, we could never have been genial and sweet. And so our Lord is

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apparently “slack”; He is “slow to wrath”; and by the very slowness He gives to us a gracious opportunity for reflection, a chance for the awaking of the affections, and room for the ministry of repentance. The far-off psalmist had discerned the secret of the Lord when he said: “Therefore will the Lord wait *that He may be gracious unto you.*” “The Lord is not slack . . . as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Let us give thanks at the remembrance of God’s leisureliness!

How have I Thy Spirit grieved
 Since first with me He strove,
Obstinately disbelieved,
 And trampled on Thy love!
I have sinned against the light;
 I have broke from Thy embrace,
No, I would not, when I might
 Be freely saved by grace.

After all that I have done
 To drive Thee from my heart!
Still Thou wilt not leave Thine own,
 Thou wilt not yet depart.
Wilt not give the sinner o’er;
 Ready art Thou now to save,
Bidst me come, as heretofore,
 That I Thy life may have.



PREPARING FOR THE JUDGMENT

2 Peter iii. 10-14

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? But, according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in His sight.

“Seeing that ye look for these things.” [Verse 14] What things? Let us glance back at the descriptive record of the outlook. “The day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” [Verse 10] Here is an apostle vividly anticipating an awful day of judgment. In that final judgment righteousness is to be triumphantly vindicated, and iniquity is to be irrevocably overwhelmed. The coming of the day is sure; the time of its dawning is uncertain. It will assuredly come, but it will come as a thief! The affairs of all men are moving forward to consummation and crisis. There are details in the apostle’s out look, the mere drapery of the expectation, which I do not profess to understand, and which I shall make no attempt to explain. But altogether apart from the mysterious vestures in which the judgment is clothed, there are three outstanding characteristics of this stupendous crisis in the history of the soul. The anticipated judgment is to be a time of dissolution. “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with a fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” With the material details in this description I am not now concerned. It is sufficient for me to receive this cardinal impression: that the judgment is to be a season of convulsion, of upheaval, of exposure of foundations, of the dissolution and exhibition of the component parts of things. In that day it is to be revealed of what elementary substance things and characters are made. And, secondly, the anticipated judgment is to be a time of *discrimination*. This out standing event is to mark not merely a culmination, but a crisis. Things are to be analysed and tested, and judged by the pattern in the mount, and there is to be a separation of part from part, of character from character, of the healthy from the corrupt. “The wicked not stand in the judgment..” And, thirdly it is to be a time of *transformation*. Out of the dissolution and discrimination is to arise a changed world. “According to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” [Verse 13] Out of the crisis is to be born a new morning, with new light and new at-

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mosphere, and a new home, and a new spirit pervading all things. Such are the pre-eminent characteristics of this overwhelming event in which every earthly life is to culminate in the judgment presence of God.

And now with this foreground of severe and sanctified expectancy, the apostle proclaims the following challenge: “*Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?*” [Verse 11] How ought men to live in the face of a hereafter and a sure and awe-inspiring judgment? With that towering possibility confronting us, which to the apostle was a great and solemn certainty, with what kind of ambition ought we to direct and control our days? Let us mark the coolness and sanity the apostle’s reply. For there is nothing heated in his speech, nothing feverish, nothing sensational and fanatical. He does not tremble in paralysing fear; he does not maim his life by ascetical severities. Looking upon this superlative event, his life is cool and calm, full-toned and healthy. “*Seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, with out spot and blameless in His sight.*” [Verse 14] That is not counsel for men in their decrepitude, when their evening time is come, and their sun is in the west, and the shout and struggle are over, and the fight and feast are done; it is counsel for life in its morning and its pride, counsel which seeks the creation of a rich and consecrated character, full-blooded and effective all along the changing way. If there be a judgment, as there will be, if there be a morrow of crisis, as there surely will, then in these robes we may meet it with eager and fearless face; “In peace, without spot and blameless in His sight.”

Now let us look a little more closely at those features of the character which will stand triumphant in the judgment. “*Found in peace.*” [Verse 14] Let us once again rid ourselves of the common interpretation of peace. In the ordinary mind peace is synonymous with quietness and rest. We are walking up Ludgate Hill at noon, and we are jostled by the hurrying and perspiring crowd, and we turn from the hurrying multitudes into the cool quietness of St. Paul’s Cathedral, and we are tempted to say to ourselves, How peaceful it is! Or we go into some little village church, hoary with the passage of many years, and with no sound disturbing the stillness except the occasional song of a bird which steals tenderly through the open window, and again we use the pregnant word, How peaceful! Or we go into the chamber of the dead, and we look at the body with the wrinkles wiped out, and the once-while weary limbs lying in undisturbed rest, and again we say, How peaceful it is! But these are not the symbols of Christian peace, however pertinently they may express the secret of stillness. Peace is not stillness, but a certain kind of movement. It is movement without friction: cog works into cog with perfect and noiseless harmony: everything moves without jar, and there is no grit in the wheels. Peace is not the absence of noise, but the absence of discord. “When we dig away to the very roots of the word we find its primary content is “perfect joining.” Nothing works out of its place. Everything moves in every thing else with delightful confluence. And this is peace, and therefore peace is harmony; it is the absence

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of the rebel, the extinction of strife. And so if there is to be peace in my life, all the powers in my life must co-operate without friction and move in harmony under the supreme control of the sovereign will of God. Here is a musical instrument, the organ. It is a very complex instrument, containing I know not how many hundred parts. And there is a movement in the organ known as ciphering. And what is ciphering? It is the sounding of an organ-pipe, in consequence of some derangement or maladjustment, independently of the action of the player. Harmony is dependent upon the obedience of each note to the organist's authority. If any note breaks out of its own accord, the harmony is broken, and we are the victims of jarring discord. Now every man's individuality is like a complex organ. How manifold and varied are the component parts! And the harmony of the individual is dependent upon the co-operation of all his powers. And yet how frequently the harmony of the life is broken by the ciphering of a part! Some faculty is rebellious, and breaks away from the control of the will. How often the player upon the instrument has to confess, "I cannot control my temper!" or, "I cannot control my imagination!" or, "I cannot control my passions!" But there is this distinction between ourselves and the musical instrument. The organist at the keyboard has no control over the ciphering; it is independent of him, and works entirely away from his resources and his will. But the individual has resources at his disposal, offered to him by his Lord, resources found in the dynamics of grace, by which every faculty can be subjected to the holy purpose of our Lord. It is possible for the individual to be "found in peace," and for "all that is within me" to bless God's holy name.

Let us investigate a little more in detail this manifold organ of the individual self. There are *my powers of body*. These are to be "found in peace." They are to work in harmony with one another, and under the control of the sovereign will of God, and they are to move as common subjects of the King. "Present your bodies." We must bring our basal energies to the Lord, and have these bodily forces subdued to the higher harmonies, like the profound notes of the organ that give body and fulness to its tender and sweetening strains. "Let the ape and tiger die," sings Tennyson. But there is a better way. And the better way is to transform them. I do not want my passions annihilating; I want them turning to useful force. I want the sword changed into a ploughshare, and the spear into a pruning-hook, and I want the beast at the base harnessed to the imperial and holy purpose of God. If a man consecrates "the ape and tiger" to the Lord, and these are brought into obedience under the Lord's control, the life will receive a tremendous driving-power, and every holy ambition will be pursued with almost violent zest. "I keep my body under," says the Apostle Paul. "I allow no ciphering!" Every bodily desire is held in the leash, and all work together, and are "found in peace."

There are *my powers of mind*. We speak of wandering thoughts, thoughts that are rebellious to the general dominion, and that steal away to forbidden fields. "We have unrestrained imaginations, fancies that go off on their own charges and ask no question concerning the

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lands in which they roam. “Bring every thought into captivity to Christ.” It is possible for all our mental powers to be “found in peace.” We have more power over our thoughts than we frequently conceive. There is much reserve of authority which has not yet been exercised. We can refuse a thought expression, and that refusal enormously strengthens our self-control. “Give no unproportioned thought its act.” Make every thought bow down to Jesus before you give it utterance! But if we still find that our sovereignty is ineffective we can refer our weakness to the Spirit. We can take these rebel thoughts and imaginings, and we can say to the Holy Spirit, “These thoughts, my great Companion, are beyond me! I have no power to deal with them! I hand them over to thee!” And marvellous is the efficacy of the reference! Marvellous is the re-arranging of this disordered world, and the subjection of the mental chaos into harmony and peace.



And there are my *powers of soul*. There are the superlative senses in my life. These also must be “found in peace.” Our sense of right must not be allowed to join the rebel forces of mere expediency. Our sense of the sublime must not be permitted to career after degrading superstitions. Our highest powers must pay obeisance in the holy place, and acknowledge in awed communion the holiness of the Lord. All this is peace, for this is harmony, the powers of body and of mind and of soul all co-operating in producing the music of the spheres, the melody which is well-pleasing unto God. And this is the character with which one can confidently meet the day of judgment. “Give diligence that ye may be found in peace.”

Now turn to the second of the characteristics of the triumphant life: “*found . . . without spot.*” [Verse 14] Let us mark the significance of the word. It describes a life distressed by no infirmity and corrupted by no disease. It is neither lame nor denied. Our God desires the entire life, and He resents a defective offering. He wants “a lamb without spot.” None of our powers are to be made infirm by disease, and none are to be rendered diseased by abuse. Is not this a sane and reasonable teaching? Surely this man’s mind is in no degree impaired by the spectacle of coming judgment! His ambition is to be diligent—to present himself healthy, with every part of his being in working order. We may vary in the quality of our endowments, but there need be no variety in their purity. One man may have ten talents, and another man only one, but in both instances the life can be perfectly clean. One man’s endowment may be as that of a cathedral organ, while another may be common place as an ordinary harmonium, but both can be kept in perfect purity, no part corrupted, and every part sounding out the obedient note.



And the third characteristic of the triumphant character is described in the succeeding phrase, “*without blame.*” [Verse 14] Is that possible? I may get my body under, and I may succeed, by the grace of God, in freeing every part of my being from infirmity and disease, but is it within the bounds of possibility that I can stand in the judgment “without blame”?

I think of my life. I retrace its steps. I mark its deliberate rebellions, its sins of selfishness and desire, its injustices in speech and deed, its disloyalties and secret treacheries. How can such a life ever be found “without blame”? And yet it is gloriously possible. It is the .very evangel of grace that, on the day of judgment, men whose lives were once defiled can stand before the Almighty, and no word of blame or rebuke shall fall upon their ears. They shall come to judgment, but there shall be no condemnation. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” I saw a man a little while ago with the marks of his old rebellion still seated in his face; but behind that disfigured countenance there was the illuminating presence of the light of life, and that man shall stand in the judgment “without blame.” But this can only be possible when the life is lost “in Christ.” We are regarded and judged as being in Him. What He is we are, for as He is we shall one day assuredly become. “Our life is hid with Christ.” It may be only poor as yet, and the footprints of the beast may be scarcely erased from our life, but one day we are to be manifested in His beauty. It fills me with amazement that I, once a vagrant, and bearing about with me signs of my degeneracy, shall one day “walk in His likeness.” Yes, and those old days, those pitifully blighted days, are never to be named by Him in whose holy presence we are all to stand. “I will remember them against thee no more for ever.”

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.

Here, then, is a great ambition—that on the awful day of unveiling we may thus be “found in peace, without spot, and blameless.” And see with what intensity this apostolic ambition is to be pursued. The apostle uses three very strenuous figures of speech. “*Be diligent.*” [Verse 14] It is again the favourite image of the business man. We are to pursue the riches of this finished character with all the ardour of an expert man of affairs. We are to be inventive and earnest and prompt, buying up every opportunity for moral and spiritual enrichment. “*Beware!*” [Verse 17] And secondly we are to have all the vigilance of a custodian. Having got a pearl, I am to guard it as one of the crown jewels. “Hold fast that which thou hast; let no man take thy crown.” And thirdly, we are to “*be steadfast.*” We are to manifest the unshakeable and unshrinkable loyalty of a soldier at the post of duty. In seeking this glorified character we are to stand faithful at our post, “and having done all, to stand.” Go forward to the judgment, seeking peace and spotlessness and blamelessness with all the diligence of a business man, with all the vigilance of a watchman, and with all the daring obedience of a soldier on the field of battle.

A life like that, hiding in Christ and always cherishing the Father’s business, need fear nothing that the morrow may bring. For that kind of life the judgment will have no terrors. If we live toward God we shall not fear to see Him. Nay, here is the apostle bold enough to use these very daring and exuberant words, “earnestly desiring the coming of that day.” It

is the very music of this Epistle. “That day!” “At that day!” I say it is music to the apostle, as indeed it was music to the Apostle Paul, who gloried in “the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not unto me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.”



GROWING IN GRACE

2 Peter iii. 18

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

IF these words, and indeed the nature and contents of all this wonderful chapter, were not penned by Simon Peter, they were composed by his “double” in the spirit. Their hearts are fashioned alike. The writer of this counsel has had Simon Peter’s experience, and he is possessed by Simon Peter’s penitence, and he shares Simon Peter’s trembling confidence and hope. If some firmly authenticated and altogether non-suspicious letter of the great apostle were to fall into my hands, this is the kind of matter, and this the manner, which I should expect in its intense and impetuous pages. I should expect much about pitfalls and snares, much about finely attired and specious seductions, much about secret treachery, cowardly denial, and open revolt. I should expect strong and jubilant evangels, proclaiming the capacity of frail and fragile man to become the loyal and bosom friend of God Almighty. I should expect glorious vistas of distant possibility, bright and alluring, the ultimate bourn of human life in fellowship with the Divine. All these I should expect from the hands and lips and heart of this great apostle—once impulsive, and cowardly, and disloyal, but now recovered, emboldened, glorified in the recreating power of the Holy Ghost. And they are all here, messages full of heartening, serious with warning, kindling with inspiration, and all of them culminating in this cheery word of sanctified Christian optimism, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Yes, it is Simon Peter, or his “double,” the man who had the two-fold experience of weeping bitterly in the cold twilight of the betrayal morning, and of gazing, with hungry, loving eagerness into the reconciled countenance of the risen Lord.

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Well, here in my text there is suggested a marvellous dignity, the supreme prerogative and endowment of human-kind, our capacity to receive the Divine. “*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*” Let us humanise it. To grow in a thing implies that I have the power to acquire it. Acquisition implies susceptibility, power of reception. When a man counsels me to grow, he suggests that I am in possession of a germinal aptitude, in the development of which the growth consists. “Grow in Art, and in the knowledge of the Masters of Art!” Such counsel implies that I possess initial artistic instincts, a certain elementary sensitiveness, which will respond to the revelations of each succeeding stage in the unfolding apocalypse of form and colour. If I am to grow in the grace and knowledge of Turner I must fundamentally possess the primal instincts of which the ultimate Turner is made. Growth implies a germ, an initial bias or tendency, an original aptitude or gift. And if I am to “grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ,” the consoling and inspiring suggestion is this, that I am not passive and ungifted like a splint from a planet,

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or a mineral in the mine, but that to me has been given an original capability, an innate possibility of holding commerce with the infinite God. We are fragments of Divinity!

Here then, I start with this glorious and marvellous implication, that the children of men have the power to apprehend and to growingly appropriate the “things” of the Spirit of God. Let us look at the capacity. “Grow in *grace*” We have the capacity to receive the Divine energy, to receive it more and more; to so grow in the appropriation of it that we are at last “filled with the fulness of God.” For Grace is an energy; it is the Divine energy; it is the energy of the Divine affection rolling abundantly to the shores of human need. Oh, it is this, and much more than this! Its manifold wealth eludes the span of human speed, and refuses to be defined. Grace is indefinable. Dr. Dale, with his strong hands and yet most exquisite touch, endeavoured to express its secret in a pregnant phrase, but he laid down his pen in despair. “Grace,” he says, “is love which passes beyond all claims to love. It is love which, after fulfilling the obligations imposed by law, has an unexhausted wealth of kindness.” Yes, it is all that; but when we have said all that, the half hath not been told. It reminds me of an experience in my life a little while ago. Some minister of the Cross, toiling in great loneliness, among a scattered and primitive people, and on the very fringe of dark primeval forests, sent me a little sample of his vast and wealthy environment. He sent it in an envelope. It was a bright and gaily-coloured wing of a native bird. The colour and life of trackless leagues sampled within the confines of an envelope! And when we have made a compact little phrase to enshrine the secret of grace, I feel that, however fair and radiant it may be, we have only got a wing of a native bird, and bewildering stretches of wealth are untouched and unrevealed. No, we cannot define it. Who can define an Alp? We may describe the varying aspects of a mountain, some of its ever-changing moods; we can add feature to feature, characteristic to characteristic, but we can never say that we have exhausted the significance of its wealthy face. And so it is with grace. We may have glimpses of its features and varying moods. Even when we can not construe its ultimate secret, we may describe when we cannot define. Now that is just what the New Testament permits us to do. It gives us a glimpse here, and a glimpse there, and we can put bit to bit, feat Lire to feature, until we are overwhelmed with the glory of the revelation of God’s redeeming grace! Let us put them together. Grace is energy. Grace is love-energy. Grace is a redeeming love-energy. Grace is a redeeming love-energy ministering to the unlovely, and endowing the unlovely with its own loveliness. Wherever I see grace at work in the Christian Scriptures it is ever a minister of purity, and joy, and song and peace. Cast your eyes over these! “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Like as you have seen the shore littered with filth and refuse, and the infinite deep has rolled in, and gathered up the uncleanness into its own purifying flood! “We have good hope through grace.” Like as the light in the lighthouse burns clear and steadily through the night, because of the unfailing and carefully administered supplies of oil, so the light of a cheery optimism burns strong and calmly in the night of life, because of the unfailing supplies of

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grace! “Singing with grace in your hearts unto the Lord.” Didn’t I say that grace is the mother of song? Grace makes a light and nimble atmosphere; the soul becomes buoyant, and breaks into music as instinctively as the bird sings in the soft airs of the dawn. All this is the work of the love-energy of the Eternal God, and the evangel is this, that to you and me is given the capacity to receive it, to grow in it, to appropriate it more and more, to more and more become its home. “He giveth grace for grace,” until every tissue and function in body, mind, and soul are saturated and sanctified in its redeeming ministry. “Grow in grace!”

“*And in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*” Then we have not only capacity to receive the Divine energy, but capacity to perceive the Divine character. Gifts of reception are succeeded by gifts of perception. We are to “grow in knowledge” too. I heard a great Bible student say the other day—he is a man of most delicate spiritual insight, and has worked and walked with his Lord for many years—and he was speaking among a few familiar friends, and he said, “I feel as if I have only investigated a small garden-bed, and there’s a continent still before me!” Have we not all shared his feelings? Is there a minister worth his salt who, as his experience broadens and deepens, does not realise that he has only touched the hem of his Master’s garment, and that the more glorious intimacy is all before him? Yes, so far as the Lord Jesus is concerned we have all pottered about a little garden-bed, with a continent awaiting us. But do not let us be despondent or afraid. We must not measure ourselves by the size of the garden-bed, but by the possibilities of the continent. We are not scaled to the size of the garden-bed; we are scaled and endowed to the ultimate demands of the continent. “Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known!” The continent is to be as familiar to us as the garden-bed. We can “grow . . . in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Does not that sound continental, that great, all-comprehensive name—Lord—Saviour—Jesus—Christ? Into the secrets, the deep, bright mysteries of that most wonderful name we are to enter, little by little, and we are to apprehend and appreciate things which have been “hidden from the foundations of the world.” Our capacity may at present be infantile, but infantile capacity is real, and the undeveloped germ carries in its heart the promise and power of its own prime. Caliban may be dark and imprisoned in contrast with the enlightened and appreciative Paul, but Caliban is a Paul in embryo, and even Paul himself, while he walked the ways of time, had but the comprehension of a babe in comparison with many a poor peasant who had “left his native lea” and had awakened amid the unveiled secrets of the Eternal day. Yes, we can grow; it is our dignity and our privilege to grow; we can grow “in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” “Now are we the sons of God,” aye, even now! And to what shall we grow? “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” What then? “We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” For what superlative glories we are made! Let us even now wear our crowns as kings and queens.

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How, then, can we increase our capacity for God? How may we best “grow in grace and knowledge,” in the two-fold gifts of reception and perception? I only know three ways; but I think they are all-inclusive, and they would bring a man at length into “the measure of the fulness of the stature of Christ.” You will not be surprised when I mention, as the first means of growth, the ministry of fervent prayer. That is an old counsel, almost threadbare by incessant reiteration, but we can no more ignore it than we can ignore the fresh air when we are reckoning up the conditions of physical health. When I speak of prayer I am thinking of a very active and businesslike thing. I think of something far more than speech; it is commerce with the Infinite. It is the sending out of aspiration, like the ascending angels in the patriarch’s dream; it is the reception of inspiration, like the descending angels that brought to the weary pilgrim the life and light of God. When we pray, we must drink in, and drink deeply, quietly, consciously, deliberately, the very love-energy of the Eternal God. Marvellous is the ministry of that inspired and inspiring grace! Shall I tell you how I heard one man speak of another man a little while ago? The one of whom he spake had appeared weary and worn, and dark, tired lines were pencilled here and there upon his face. And this weary man knelt and prayed! “And,” said my friend, “when he rose from his knees, I saw for the first time the significance of Pentecost! The weariness had gone! The dark care-lines were wiped out! His face was all aglow with a renewed flame! And I verily believe that if my own heart had been pure enough I should have seen a radiant nimbus enveloping his exalted head!” What had the weary man been doing on his knees? He had been growing in grace, and therefore in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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And the second means of growth is found in the ministry of honourable and consecrated labour. If we could not “grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” while we earn our daily bread, life would be very largely a dark and fruitless waste. But if the hours of labour afford a congenial season for spiritual growth, then life presents a vast and glorious opportunity. It was while the Man of Nazareth was yet working at the carpenter’s bench that we are told “He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” “In favour”—our very present word “grace”: the love-energy of the Eternal streamed into His soul while He engaged in the lowly toil of a humble village craftsman. The business of the little day was so done that at the same time it was commerce with the Infinite! Every business transaction was so scrupulously pure and honourable as to afford a dwelling-place for the Holy Spirit of the Eternal God! While He earned His daily bread He was drawing into His hungry heart the very bread of life. He and His Father were inseparable partners in the making of a household chair, or in the fashioning of a yoke for the ox of the field. Was not that, too, the restful boast of Stradivari?

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This is my fame—
When any master holds,
’Twixt chin and hand a violin of mine,

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He will be glad that Stradivari lived,
Made violins, and made them of the best.
The masters only know whose work is good:
They will choose mine: and, while God gives them skill,
I give them instruments to play upon,
God choosing me to help Him.

The man who goes out to his labour in the morning in that spirit, must and will grow in grace and knowledge, and he will find that the common path of duty is even now “close upon the shining tableland to which our God Himself is sun and moon.”

And the third means of growth is to be found in the ministry of unselfish service. In the sphere of the spirit, expenditure is ever the condition of expansion. We get while we give. We grow while we serve. “He that would be great among you let him be your minister.” “He giveth grace to the humble.” Aye, it is along that path that we come upon the crown jewels of the King of Kings. “He that loseth his life shall find it.” The man who goes out to serve his brother shall meet his God, and shall be partially transfigured into the Saviour’s likeness: he shall pass into ever richer acquisitions of grace, and he shall be taken into the deeper secrets of his Lord.



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