

1 Peter: Exposition by A. MacLaren

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1 Peter: Expositions

by Alexander Maclaren

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Sojourners of the Dispersion

'Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered...' — 1 Peter 1:1.

THE words rendered 'strangers scattered' are literally 'sojourners of the Dispersion,' and are so rendered in the Revised Version. The Dispersion was the recognised name for the Jews dwelling in Gentile countries; as, for instance, it is employed in John's Gospel, when the people in Jerusalem say, 'Whither will this man go that we shall not find Him? Will he go to the Dispersion amongst the Greeks?' Obviously, therefore the word here may refer to the scattered Jewish people, but the question arises whether the letter corresponds to its apparent address, or whether the language which is employed in it does not almost oblige us to see here a reference, not to the Jew, but to the whole body of Christian people, who, whatever may be their outward circumstances, are, in the deepest sense, in the foundations of their life, if they be Christ's, 'strangers of the Dispersion.'

Now if we look at the letter we find such words as these — 'The times of your ignorance' — 'your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers' — 'in time past were not a people' — 'the time past may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles' — all of which, as you see, can only be accommodated to Jewish believers by a little gentle violence, but all of which find a proper significance if we suppose them addressed to Gentiles, to whom they are only applicable in the higher sense of the words to which I have referred. If we understand them so, we have here an instance of what runs all through the letter; the taking hold of Jewish ideas for the purpose of lifting them into a loftier region, and transfiguring them into the expression of Christian truth. For example,

we read in it: 'Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation'; and again: 'Ye are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices.' These and other similar passages are instances of precisely the same transference of Jewish ideas as I find, in accordance with many good commentators, in the words of my text.

So, then, here is Peter's notion of —

I. What the Christian Life is.

All those who really have faith in Jesus Christ are 'strangers of the Dispersion'; scattered throughout the world, and dwelling dispersedly in an order of things to which they do not belong, 'seeking a city which hath foundations.' The word 'strangers' means, originally, persons for a time living in an alien city. And that is the idea that the Apostle would impress upon us as true for each of us, in the measure in which our Christianity is real. For, remember, although all men maybe truly spoken of as being 'pilgrims and sojourners upon the earth' by reason of both the shortness of the duration of their earthly course and the disproportion between their immortal part and the material things amongst which they dwell, Peter is thinking of something very different from either the brevity of earthly life or the infinite necessities of an immortal spirit when he calls his Christian brethren strangers. Not because we are men, not because we are to die soon, and the world is to outlast us; not because other people will one day live in our houses and read our books and sit upon our chairs, and we shall be forgotten, but because we are Christ's people are we here sojourners, and must regard this as not our rest. Not because our immortal seal cannot satisfy itself, however it tries, upon the trivialities of earth any more than a human appetite can on the husks that the swine do eat, but because new desires, tastes, aspirations, affinities, have been kindled in us by the new life that has flowed into us; therefore the connection that other men have with the world, which makes some of them altogether 'men of the world, whose portion is in this life,' is for us broken, and we are strangers, scattered abroad, solitary, not by reason of the inevitable loneliness in which, after all love and companionship, every soul lives; not by reason of losses or deaths, but by reason of the contrariety between the foundation of our lives, and the foundation of the lives of the men round us; therefore we stand lonely in the midst of crowds; strangers in the ordered communities of the world.

Ah, there is no solitude so utter as the solitude of being the only man in a crowd that has a faith in his heart, and there is no isolating power like the power of rending all ties that true attachment with Jesus Christ has. 'Think not that I am come to bring peace on earth, but a sword' — to set a man against his own household, if they be not of the household of faith. These things are the inevitable issues of religion — to make us strangers, isolated in the midst of this world.

And now let us think of —

II. Some of the plain consequent duties that arise from this characteristic of the Christian Life.

Let me put them in the shape of one or two practical counsels. First let us try to keep up, vivid and sharp, a sense of separation. I do not mean that we should withdraw ourselves from sympathies, nor from services, nor from the large area of common ground which we have with our fellows, whether they be Christians or no — with our fellow-citizens; with those who are related to us by various bonds, by community of purpose, of aim, of opinion, or of affection. But just as Abraham was willing to go down into the plain and fight for Lot, though he would not go down and live in Sodom, and just as he would enter into relations of amity with the men of the land, and yet would not abandon his black camels'-hair tent, pitched beneath the terebinth tree, in order to go into their city and abide with them, so one great part of the wisdom of a Christian man is to draw the line of separation decisively, and yet to keep true to the bond of union. Unless Christian people do make a distinct effort to keep themselves apart from the world and its ways, they will get confounded with these, and when the end comes they will be destroyed with them.

Sometimes voyagers find upon some lonely island an English castaway, who has forgotten home, and duty, and everything else, to luxuriate in an easy life beneath tropical skies, and has degraded himself to the level of the savage islanders round him. There are professing Christians — perhaps in my audience — who, like that poor castaway, have 'forgotten the imperial palace whence they came,' and have gone down and down and down, to live the fat, contented, low lives of the 'men who find their good upon earth and not in heaven. Do you, dear brethren, try to keep vivid the sense that you belong to another community. As Paul puts it, with a metaphor drawn from Gentile instead of from Jewish life, as in our text, 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' Philippi, to the Christian Church of which that was said, was a Roman colony; and the characteristics of a Roman colony were that the inhabitants were enrolled as members of the Roman tribes, and had their names on the register of Rome, and were governed by its laws. So we, living here in an outlying province, have our names written in the 'Golden Book' of the citizens of the new Jerusalem. Do not forget, if I might use a very homely illustration, what parish your settlement is in; remember what kingdom you belong to.

Again, if we are strangers of the Dispersion, let us live by our own country's laws, and not by the codes that are current in this foreign land where we are settled for a time. You remember what was the complaint of the people in Persia to Esther's king? 'There is a people whose laws are different from all the peoples that be upon the earth.' That was an offence that could not be tolerated in a despotism that ground everything down to the one level of a slavish uniformity. It will be well for us Christian people if men look at us, and say, 'Ah, that man has another rule of conduct from the one that prevails generally. I wonder what is the underlying principle

of his life; it evidently is not the same as mine.'

Live by our King's law. People in our colonies, at least the officials, set wonderful store by the approbation of the Colonial Office at home. It does not matter what the colonial newspapers say, it is 'what will they say in Downing Street?' And if a despatch goes out approving of their conduct, neighbours may censure and sneer as they list. So we Christians have to report to Home, and have so to live 'that whether present or absent' — in a colony or in the mother country — 'we may be well pleasing unto Him.'

Keep up the honour and advance the interests of your own country. You are here, among other reasons, to represent your King, and people take their notions of Him very considerably from their experience of you. So see to it that you live like the Master whom you say you serve.

The Russian Government sends out what are called military colonies, studded along the frontier, with the one mission of extending the empire. We are set along the frontier with the same mission. The strangers are scattered. Congested, they would be less useful; dispersed, they may push forward the frontiers. Seed in a seed-basket is not in its right place; but sown broadcast over the field, it will be waving wheat in a month or two. 'Ye are the salt of the earth' — salt is sprinkled over what it is intended to preserve. You are the strangers of the Dispersion, that you may be the messengers of the Evangelisation.

Lastly, let us be glad when we think, and let us often think, of —

III. The Home in Glory.

That is a beautiful phrase which pairs off with the one in my text, in which another Apostle speaks of the ultimate end as 'our gathering together in Christ.' All the scattered ones, like chips of wood in a whirlpool, drift

gradually closer and closer, until they unite in a solid mass in the centre. So at the last the 'strangers' are to be brought and settled in their own land, and their lonely lives are to be filled with happy companionship, and they to be in a more blessed unity than now. 'Fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.' If we, dwelling in this far-off land, were habitually to talk, as Australians do of coming to England of 'going home,' though born in the colony, it would be a glad day for us when we set out on the journey. If Christian people lived more by faith, as they profess to do, and less by sight, they would oftener think of the home-coming and the union; and would be happy when they thought that they were here but for awhile, and when they realised these two blessed elements of permanence and of companionship, which another Apostle packs into one sentence, along with that which is greater than them both, 'so shall we ever be with the Lord.'

By, Through, Unto

'... Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.' — 1 Peter 1:5.

THE Revised Version substitutes 'guarded' for 'kept,' and the alteration, though slight, is important, for it not only more accurately preserves the meaning of the word employed, but it retains the military metaphor which is in it. The force of the expression will appear if I refer, in a sentence, to other cases in which it is employed in the New Testament. For instance, we read that the governor of Damascus 'kept the city with a garrison,' which is the same word, and in its purely metaphorical usage Paul employs it when he says that 'the peace of God shall keep' — guard, garrison — 'your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.' We have to think of some defenceless position, some unwall'd village out in the open, with a strong force round it, through which no assailant can break, and in the midst of which the weakest can sit secure. Peter thinks that every Christian has assailants whom no Christian by himself can repel, but that he may, if he likes, have an impregnable ring of defence drawn round him, which shall fling back in idle spray the wildest onset of the waves, as a breakwater or a cliff might do.

Then there is another very beautiful and striking point to be made, and that is the connection between the words of my text and those immediately preceding. The Apostle has been speaking about 'the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away,' and he says 'it is reserved in Heaven for you who are kept.' So, then, the same power is working on both sides of the veil, preserving the inheritance for the heirs, and preserving the heirs for the inheritance. It will not fail them, and they will not miss it. It were of little avail to care for either of the two members separately, but the same hand that is preparing the inheritance and making it ready for the owners is round about the pilgrims, and taking care of them till they get home.

So, then, our Apostle is looking at this keeping in three aspects, suggested by his three words 'by,' 'through,' 'unto,' which respectively express the real cause or power, the condition or occasion on which that power works, and the end or purpose to which it works. So these three little words will do for lines on which to run our thoughts now — 'by,' 'through,' 'for.'

I. In the first place, what are we guarded for?

'Guarded... unto salvation.' Now that great word 'salvation' was a new and strange one to Peter's readers — so new and strange

that probably they did not understand it in its full nobleness and sweep. Our understanding of it, or, at least, our impression of it, is weakened by precisely the opposite cause. It has become so tarnished and smooth-rubbed that it creates very little definite impression. Like a bit of seaweed lifted out of the sunny waves which opened its fronds and brightened its delicate colours, it has become dry and hard and sapless and dim. But let me try for one moment to freshen it for our conceptions and our hearts. Salvation has in it the double idea of being made safe, and being made sound. Peril threatening to slay, and sickness unto death, are the implications of the conditions which this great word presupposes. The man that needs to be saved needs to be rescued from peril and needs to be healed of a disease. And if you do not know and feel that that is you, then you have not learned the first letters of the alphabet which are necessary to spell 'salvation.' You, I, every man, we are all sick unto death, because the poison of self-will and sin is running hot through all our veins, and we are all in deadly peril because of that poison — peril of death, peril arising from the weight of guilt that presses upon us, peril from our inevitable collision with the Divine law and government which make for righteousness.

And so salvation means, negatively, the deliverance from all the evils, whether they be evils of sorrow or evils of sin, which can affect a man, and which do affect us all in some measure. But it means far more than that, for God's salvation is no half-and-half thing, contented, as some benevolent man might be, in a widespread flood or disaster, with rescuing the victims and putting them high up enough for the water not to reach them, and leaving them there shivering cold and starving. But when God begins by taking away evils, it is in order that He may clear a path for flooding us with good. And so salvation is not merely what some of you think it is, the escape from a hell, nor only what some of you more nobly take it to be, a deliverance from the power of sin in your hearts; but it is the investiture of each of us with every good and glory, whether of happiness or of purity, which it is possible for a man to receive and for God to give. It is the great word of the New Testament, and they do a very questionable service to humanity who weaken the grandeur and the greatness of the Scriptural conception of salvation, by weakening the darkness and the terribleness of the Scriptural conception of the dangers and the sicknesses from which it delivers.

But, then, there is another point that I would suggest raised by the words of my text in their connection. Peter is here evidently speaking about a future manifestation of absolute exemption from all the ills that flesh and spirit are heir to, and radiant investiture with all the good that humanity can put on, which lies beyond the great barrier of this mortal life. And that complete salvation, in its double aspect, is obviously the end for which all that guarding of life is lavished upon us, as it is the end for which all the discipline of life is given to us, and as it is the end for which the bitter agony and pain of the Christ on the Cross were freely rendered. But that ultimate and superlative perfection has its roots and its beginning here. And so in Scripture you find salvation sometimes regarded as a thing in the past experience of every Christian man which he received at the very beginning of his course, and sometimes you have it treated as being progressive, running on continually through all his days; and sometimes you have it treated, as in my text, as laid up yonder, and only to be reached when life is done with. But just a verse or two after my text we read that the Christian man here, on condition of his loving Jesus Christ and believing in Him, rejoices because he here and now 'receives the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul.' And so there are the two things — the incipient germ to-day, the full-foliaged fruit-bearing tree planted in the higher house of the Lord.

These two things are inseparably intertwined. The Christian life in its imperfection here, the partial salvation of to-day demands, unless the universe is a chaos and there is no personal God the centre of it, a future life, in which all that is here tendency, shall be realised possession, and in which all that here but puts up a pale and feeble shoot above the ground, shall grow and blossom and bear fruit unto life eternal. 'Like the new moon with a ragged edge, e'en in its imperfections beautiful,' all the characteristics of Christian life on earth prophesy that the orb is crescent, and will one day round itself into its pure silvery completeness. If you see a great wall in some palace, with slabs of polished marble for most of its length, and here and there stretches of course rubble shoved in, you would know that that was not the final condition, that the rubble had to be cased over, or taken out and replaced by the lucent slab that reflected the light, and showed, by its reflecting, its own mottled beauty. Thus the very inconsistencies, the thwarted desires, the broken resolutions, the aspiration that never can clothe themselves in the flesh of reality, which belong to the Christian life, declare that this is but the first Stage of the structure, and point onwards to the time when the imperfections shall be swept away, 'and for brass He will bring gold, for iron He will bring silver,' and then the windows shall be set 'in agates, and the gates in carbuncles, and all the borders in pleasant stones.' Perfect salvation is obviously the only issue of the present imperfect salvation.

That is what you are 'kept' for. That is what Christ died to bring you. That is what God, like a patient workman bringing out the pattern in his loom by many a throw of a sharp-pointed shuttle, and much twisting of the threads into patterns, is trying to make of you, and that is what Christ on the Cross has died to effect~ Brethren, let us think more than we do, not only of the partial beginnings here, but of that perfect salvation for which Christian men are being 'kept' and guarded, and which, if you and I will observe the conditions, is as sure to come as that X, Y, Z follow A, B, C. That is what we are kept for.

II. Notice what we are guarded by.

'The power of God,' says Peter, laying hold of the most general expression that he can find, not earing to define ways and means,

but pointing to the one great force that is sure to do it.

Now if we were to translate with perfect literality, we should read, not by the power of God, but in the power of God. And whilst it is quite probable that what Peter meant was 'by,' I think it adds great force and beauty to the passage, and is entirely accordant with the military metaphor, which I have already pointed out, if we keep the simple local sense of the word, and read, 'guarded in the power of God.' And that suggests a whole stream of Scriptural representations, both in the Old and in the New Testament. Let me recall one or two. 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe.' 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.' 'Israel shall dwell safely,' says one of the old prophets, 'in unwall'd villages, for I will be a wall of fire round about her.' The psalmist said, 'The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him.' And all these representations concur in this one thought, that we are safe, enclosed in God, and that He, by His power, compasses us about. And so no foe can get at us who cannot break down or climb over the encircling wall of defence. An army in an enemy's country will march in hollow square, and put its most precious treasures, or its weaker members, its sick, its women, its children, its footsore, into the mid-die there, and with a line of lances on either side, and stalwart arms to wield them, the feeblest need fear no foe. We 'are kept in the power of God unto salvation.'

But do not forget how, far beyond the psalmist and prophet, and in something far more sublime and wonderful than a poetic figure, the New Testament catches up the same phrase, and gives us, as the condition of vitality, as the condition of fertility, as the condition of tranquillity, as the condition of security, the same thing — 'in Christ.' Remember His very last words prior to His great intercessory prayer, in which He spoke about keeping those that were given Him in His name. And just before that He said to them, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace.' Kept, guarded as behind the battlements of some great fort, which has in its centre a quiet, armoured chamber into which no noise of battle, nor shout of foeman, can ever come. 'In Christ,' though the world is all in arms without, 'ye shall have peace.' 'Guarded in the power of God unto salvation.'

III. Lastly, what we are kept through.

'Through faith.' Now there we come across another of the words which we know so well that we do not understand them. You all think that it is the right thing for me to preach about 'faith.' I daresay some of you have never tried to apprehend what it means. And I daresay there are a great many of you to whom the utterance of the word suggests that I am plunging into the bathos and commonplaces of the pulpit. Perhaps, if you would try to understand it, you would find it was a bigger thing than you fancied. What is faith? I will give you another expression that has not so many theological accretions sticking to it, and which means precisely the same thing — trust. And we all know that we do not trust with our heads, but with our hearts and wills. You may believe undoubtedly, and have no faith at all, for it is the heart and the will that go forth, and clutch at the thing trusted; or, as I should rather say, at the person trusted; for, at bottom, what we trust is always a person, and even when we 'trust to nature,' it is because, more or less clearly, we feel that somehow or other at the back of nature there is a Will and an Intelligence that are working and trustworthy. However, that is a subject that I do not need to touch upon here. Faith is trust, trust in a Person, trust that, like the fabled goddess rising, radiant and aspiring to the heavens, out of the roll of the tempestuous ocean, springs from the depths of absolute self-distrust and diffidence. There is a spurious kind of faith which has no good in it, just because it did not begin with going down into the depths of one's own heart, and finding out how rotten and hopeless everything was there. My friend, no man has a vigorous Christian faith who has not been very near utter despair. 'Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee.' The zenith, which is the highest point in the sky above us, is always just as far aloft as the nadir, which is the lowest point in the sky at the Antipodes, is beneath us. Your faith is measured by your self-despair.

Further, why is it that I must have faith in order to get God's power at work in me? Many people seem to think that faith is appointed by God as the condition of salvation out of mere arbitrary selection and caprice. Not at all. If God could save you without your faith, He would do it. He does not, because He cannot. Why must I have faith in order that God's power may keep me? Why must you open your window in order to let the fresh air in? Why must you pull up the blind in order to let the light in? Why must you take your medicine or your food if you want to be cured or nourished? Why must you pull the trigger if your revolver is to go off? Unless I trust God, distrusting myself, and the spark of faith is struck out of the rock of my heart by the sharp steel in the midst of the darkness of despair, God cannot pour out upon me His power. There is nothing arbitrary about it. It is inseparable from the very nature of the case. If you do not want Him, you cannot have Him. If you do not know that you need Him, you cannot have Him. If you do not trust that He will come to you and help you, you will not have Him.

So then, brother, your faith, my faith, anybody's faith is nothing of itself. It is only the valve that opens and lets the steam rush in. It is only the tap you turn to let Thirlmere come into your basins. It is not you that saves yourself. It is not your faith that keeps you, any more than it is the outstretched hand with which a man, ready to stumble, grasps the hand of a stalwart, steadfast man on the pavement by his side that keeps him up. It is the other man's hand that holds you up, but it is your hand that lays hold of him. It is God that saves, it is God that guards, it is God that is able to keep us from falling, and to give us an inheritance among all them that are sanctified. He will do it if we turn to Him, and ask and expect Him to do it. If you will comply with the conditions and not else, He will fulfil His promise and accomplish His purpose. But my unbelief can thwart Omnipotence, and hinder Christ's all-loving purpose,

just as on earth we read that 'He could there do no mighty works because of their unbelief.' I am sure that there are people here who all their lives long have been thus hampering Omnipotence and neutralising the love of Christ, and making His sacrifice impotent and His wish to save them vain. Stretch out your hands as this very Peter once did, crying, 'Lord, save, or I perish'; and He will answer, not by word only, but by act: 'According to thy faith be it unto thee.' Salvation, here and hereafter, is God's work alone. It cannot be exercised towards a man who has not faith. It will certainly be exercised towards any man who has.

Help us, O Lord, we beseech Thee, to live the lives which we live in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God. And may we know what it is to be in Him, strengthened within with might by His spirit.

Sorrowful, Yet Always Rejoicing

'Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' — 1 Peter 1:6.

You will remember the great saying of our Lord's in the Sermon on the Mount, in which He makes the last of the beatitudes, that which He pronounces upon His disciples, when men shall revile them and persecute them, and speak all manner of evil falsely against them for His sake, and bids them rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is their reward in Heaven.

Now it seems to me that in the words of my text there is a distinct echo of that saying of Christ's. For not only is the whole context the same, but a somewhat unusual and very strong word which our Lord employs is also employed here by Peter. 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad,' said Christ. 'Ye rejoice greatly,' said the Apostle, and he is echoing his Master's word. Then with regard to the context; Christ proposes to His followers this exceeding gladness as evoked in their hearts by the very thing that might seem to militate against it — viz., men's antagonism. Similarly, Peter, throughout this whole letter, and in my text, is heartening the disciples against impending persecution, and, like his Lord, he bids them face it, if not 'with frolic welcome,' at all events with undiminished and undimmed serenity and cheerfulness. Christ based the exhortation on the thought that great would be their reward in Heaven. Peter points to the salvation ready to be revealed as being the ground of the joy that he enjoyed. So in the words and in the whole strain and structure of the exhortation the servant is copying his Master.

But, of course, although the immediate application of these words is to Churches fronting the possibility and probability of actual persecution and affliction for the sake of Jesus Christ, the principle involved applies to us all. And the worries and the sorrows of our daily life need the exhortation here, quite as much as did the martyr's pains. White ants will pick a carcass clean as soon as a lion will, and there is quite as much wear and tear of Christian gladness arising from the small frictions of our daily life as from the great strain and stress of persecution.

So our Apostle has a word for us all. Now it seems to me that in this text there are three things to be noticed: a paradox, a possibility, a duty. 'In which ye rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' Look at these three points.

I. This paradox.

Two emotions diametrically opposed are to be contained within the narrow room of one disposition and temper. 'Ye greatly rejoice ... Ye are in heaviness.' Can such a thing be? Well! let us think for a moment. The sources of the two conflicting emotions are laid out before us; they may be constantly operative in every life. On the one hand, 'in which ye greatly rejoice.' Now that 'in which' does not point back only to the words that immediately precede, but to the whole complex clause that goes before. And what is the 'which' that is there? These things; the possession of a new life — 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath begotten us again!' — the springing up in a man's heart of a strange new hope, like a new star that swims into the sky, and sheds a radiance all about it — 'Begotten unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'; a new wealth — an 'inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away; a new security — guarded by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' These things belong, ipso facto, and in the measure of his faith, to every Christian man, a new life, a new hope, a new wealth, and a new security; and in their conjoint action, all four of them brought to bear upon a man's temper and spirit, will, if he is realising them, make him glad.

Then, on the other hand, we have other fountains pouring their streams into the same reservoir. And just as the deep fountains which are open to us by faith will, if we continue to exercise that faith, flood our spirits with sweet waters, so these other fountains will pour their bitter floods over every heart more or less abundantly and continually. 'Now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' There are confluent streams that one has sometimes seen, where a clear river joins, and flows in the same bed with, one all foul with half-melted ice, and the two run side by side for a space, scarcely mingling their waters. Thus the paradox of the Christian life is that within the same narrow banks may flow the sunny and the turbid, the clear and the dark, the sorrow that springs from earthly fountains, the joy that pours from the heavenly heights.

Now notice that this is only one case of the paradox of the whole Christian life. For the peculiarity of it is that it owns two; — it

belongs to, and is exposed to, all the influences of the forces and things of time, whilst in regard to its depths, it belongs to, and is under the influence of, 'the things that are unseen and eternal'; so that you have the external life common to the Christian and to all other people, and then you have the life 'hid with Christ in God, 'the roots of it going down through all the superficial soil, and grappling the central rock of all things. Thus a series of paradoxes and perennial contradictions describes the twofold life that every believing spirit lives, 'as unknown and yet well known, as dying and, behold we live, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things.'

Remember, too, that according to Peter's conception neither of these two sources pours out a flood which obliterates or dams back the other. They are to coexist. The joy is not to deprive the heaviness of its weight, nor the sorrow of its sting. There is no artificial stoicism about Christianity, no attempt to sophisticate one's self out of believing in the reality of the evils that assail us, or to forbid that we shall feel their pain and their burden. Many good people fail to get the good of life's discipline, because they have somehow come to think that it is wrong to weep when Christ sends sorrows, and wrong to feel, as other men feel, the grip and bite of the manifold trials of our earthly lives. 'Weep for yourselves,' for the feeling of the sorrow is the precedent condition to the benefit from the sorrow, and it yields 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.'

But, on the other hand, the black stream is not to bank up the sunny one, or prevent it from flowing into the heart, ay! and flowing over, the other. And so the coexistence of the joys that come from above, and the sorrows that spring from around, and some of them from beneath, is the very secret of the Christian life.

II. Further, consider the blessed possibility of this paradox.

Can two conflicting emotions live in a man's heart at once? Rather, we might ask, are there ever emotions in a man's heart that are not hemmed in by conflicting ones? Is there ever such a thing in the world's experience as a pure joy, or as a confidence which has no trace of fear in it? Are there any pictures without shadows? They are only daubs if they are. Instead of wondering at this co-existence of joy and sorrow, we must recognise that it is in full accord with all our experience, which never brings a joy, but, like the old story of the magic palace, there is one window unlighted, and which never brings a sorrow so black and over-arching so completely the whole sky, but that somewhere, if the eye would look for it, there is a bit of blue. The possibility of the paradox is in accordance with all human experience.

But then, you say, 'my feelings of joy or sorrow are very largely a matter of temperament, and still more largely a matter of responding to the facts round about me. And I cannot pump up emotions to order; and if I could they would be factitious, artificial, insincere, and do me more harm than good.' Perfectly true. There are a great many ugly names for manufactured emotions, and none of them a bit too ugly. Peter does not wish you to try to get up feeling to order. It is the bane of some type of Christianity that that is done. You cannot thus manufacture emotion. No; but I will tell you what you can do. You can determine what you will think about most, and what you will look at most, and if you settle that, that will settle what you feel. And so, though it is by a roundabout way, we can regulate our emotions. A man travelling in a railway train can choose which side of the carriage he will look out at, either the one where the sunshine is falling full on the front of each grass-blade and tree, or the side where it is the shadowed side of each that is turned to him. If he will look out of the one window, he will see everything verdant and bright, and if he will look out at the other, there will be a certain sobriety and dulness over the landscape. You can settle which window you are going to look out at. If the one — 'in which ye greatly rejoice.' If the other — 'ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' You have seen patterns wrought in black and white, you may focus your eye so as to get white on a black ground, or black on a white ground, just as you like. You can do that with your life, and either fix upon the temptations and the heaviness as the main thing, or you can fix upon the new life, and the new wealth, and the new hope, and the new security as the main things. If you do the one, down you will go into the depths of gloom, and if you do the other, up you will spring into the ethereal heights of sober and Christian gladness.

So then, brethren, this possibility depends on these things, the choice of our main object of contemplation, and that breaks up into two thoughts about which I wish to say a word. The reason why so many Christian people have only religion enough to make them gloomy, or to weight them with a sense of burdens and unfulfilled aspirations and broken resolutions, and have not enough to make them glad, is mainly because they do not think enough about the four things in which they might 'greatly rejoice.' I believe that most of us would be altogether different people, as professing Christians, if we honestly tried to keep the mightiest things uppermost, and to fill heart and mind far more than we do with the contemplation of these great facts and truths which, when once they are beheld and cleaved to, are certain to minister gladness to men's souls. These great truths which you and I say we believe, and which we profess to live by, will only work their effect upon us, so long as they are present to our minds and hearts. You can no more expect Christian verities to keep you from falling, or to strengthen you in weakness, or to gladden you in sorrow, if you are not thinking about them, than you can expect the most succulent or most nutritive food to nourish you if you do not eat it. As long as Christ and His grace are present in our hearts and minds by thought, so long, and not one moment longer, do they minister to us the joy of the Lord. You switch off from the main current, and out go all the lights, and when you switch off from Christ out goes the gladness.

Then another thing I would point out is that the possibility of this co-existence of joy and of heaviness depends further on our taking

the right point of view from which to look at the sources of the heaviness. Notice how beautifully, although entirely incidentally, and without calling attention to it, Peter here minimises the 'manifold temptations' which he does expect, however minimised, will make men heavy. He calls them 'temptations.' Now that is rather an unfortunate word, because it suggests the idea of something that desires to drag a man into sin. But suppose, instead of 'temptations,' with its unfortunate associations, you were to substitute a word that means the same thing, and is free from that association — viz., 'trial,' — you would get the right point of view. As long as I look at my sorrows mainly in regard to their power to sadden me, have not got to the right point of view for them. They are meant to sadden me, they are meant to pain, they are meant to bring the tears, they are meant to weight the heart and press down the spirits, but what for? To test what I am made of, and by testing to bring out and strengthen what is good, and to cast out and destroy what is evil. We shall never understand, even so much as it is possible for us to understand, and that is not very much, of the mystery of pain until we come to recognise that its main purpose is to help in making character. And when you think of your sorrows, disappointments, losses, when you think of your pains and sickness, and all the ills that flesh is heir to, principally as being 'trials,' in the deep sense of that word — viz., a means of testing you, and thereby helping you, bettering you, and building up character — then it is more possible to blend the sorrow that they produce with the joy to which they may lead. The Apostle adds the other thought of the transitoriness of sorrow, and yet further, the other of its necessity for the growth of humanity. So they are not only to be felt, not only to be wept over, not only to make us sad, but they are to be accepted, and used as means by which we may be perfected. And when once you get occupied in trying to get all the good that is in it out of a grief, you will be astonished to find how the bitterness that was in it was diminished.

We may have the oil on the water, calming, though not ending, its agitation. We may carry our own atmosphere with us, and like the diver that goes down into depths of the sea, and cannot be reached by the hungry water around his crystal bell, and has communication with the upper air, where the light of the sun is, so you and I, down at the slimy bottom, and with the waste of water all around us, which if it could get at us would choke us, may walk at liberty, in peace and gladness. And so, 'though the labour of the olive shall gall and the fig tree not blossom, though the flocks be cut off from the folds and the herd from the stalls,' we -may joy in the Lord, and 'rejoice in the God of our salvation.'

III. Now lastly, we have here a duty.

Peter takes it for granted that these good people, who had persecution hanging over them, were still rejoicing greatly in the Lord. He does not feel it necessary to enjoin it upon them. It is a matter of course in their Christian life. And you will find that all through the New Testament this same tone is adopted which recognises gladness as being, on the one hand, an inseparable characteristic of the Christian experience, and on the other hand as being a thing that is a Christian man's duty to cultivate. Now I do not believe that the most of Christian people have ever looked at the thing in that light at all. If joy has come to them, they have been thankful for it, but they have very, very seldom felt that, 'if they are not glad, there is something wrong. And a great many of us, I am sure, have never recognised the fact that it is our duty to 'rejoice in the Lord always.' Have you realised it? I do not mean have you tried to get up, as I have been saying, factitious emotions, but have you felt that if you are doing what, as Christian men or women, it is your plain duty to do, there will come into your hearts this joy of the Lord. I have told you why you are not happier Christians, why so many of us have, as I said, only got religion enough to make you gloomy and burdened. It is because you do not think enough about Jesus Christ, and what He has given you, and what He is doing for you and in you. It is because you have not the new life in strong experience and possession, and because you have not the new hope springing in your hearts, and because you have not the new wealth realised often in present possession, and because you have not the new security which He is ready to give you. It is your duty, Christian man and woman, to be a joyful Christian, and if you are not, then the negligence is sin.

It is a hard duty. It is not easy to turn away from that which is torturing flesh or sense or natural desires or human affections, and to realise the unseen. It is not easy, but it is possible. And, like all other difficult things, it is worth doing. For there is nothing more helpful, more commendatory, of our Christianity to other people, and more certain to tell on the vigour and efficiency of our Christian service, than that we should be rejoicing in the Lord, and living in the possession of the experience of Christ's joy which He has left for us.

There is one other thing I must say. I have been talking about the co-existence of joy and sorrows. In one form or another that co-existence is universal. The difference is this. A Christian man has superficial sorrows and central gladness, and other men have superficial gladness and central sorrow. 'Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful.' Many of you know what that means — the black aching centre, full of unrest, grimly unparticipant of the dancing delights going on about it, like some black rock that stands up in the midst of a field flooded with sunshine, and gay with flowers. 'The end of that mirth is heaviness.' Better a surface sadness and a core of joy than the opposite, a skin of verdure over the scarcely cold lava. Better a transient sorrow with an eternal joy than the opposite, mirth, 'like the crackling of thorns under a pot,' which dies down into a doleful ring of black ashes in the pathless desert. Choose whether you will have joy dwelling with and conquering sorrow, or unrest and sorrow, darkening and finally shattering your partial and fleeting joys.

The True Gold and Its Testing

'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth though it Be tried with fire, might Be found unto praise and honour and glory... ' — 1 Peter 1:7.

THE Apostle is fond of that word 'precious.' In both his letters he uses it as an epithet for diverse things. According to one translation, he speaks of Christ as 'precious to you which believe.' He certainly speaks of 'the precious blood of Christ,' and of 'exceeding great and precious promises,' and here in my text, as well as in the Second Epistle, he speaks about 'precious faith.' It is a very wide general term, not expressing anything very characteristic beyond the one notion of value. But in the text, according to our Authorised Version, it looks at first sight as if it were not the faith, hut the trial of the faith that the Apostle regards as thus valuable. There are difficulties of rendering which I need not trouble you with. Suffice it to say that, speaking roughly and popularly, the 'trial of your faith' here seems to mean rather the result of that trial, and might be fairly represented by the slightly varied expression, 'your faith having been tried, might be found,' etc.

I must not be tempted to discourse about the reasons why such a rendering seems to express the Apostle's meaning more fully, but, taking it for granted, there are just three things to notice — the true wealth, the testing of the wealth, and the discovery at last of the preciousness of the wealth.

I. Peter pits against each other faith that has been tried, and 'gold that perisheth';

He puts away all the other points of comparison and picks out one, and that is that the one lasts and the other does not.

Now I must not be seduced into going beyond the limits of my text to dilate upon the other points of contrast and pre-eminence; but I would just notice in a sentence that everybody admits, yet next to nobody acts upon, the admission that inward good is far more valuable than outward good. 'Wisdom is more precious than rubies,' say people, and yet they will choose the rubies, and take no trouble to get the wisdom. Now the very same principles of estimating value which set cultivated understandings and noble hearts above great possessions and large balances at the bankers, set the life of faith high above all others. And the one thought which Peter wishes to drive into our heads and hearts is that there is only one kind of wealth that will never be separated from its possessor. Nothing is truly ours that remains outside of us.

'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.'

Nothing that is there whilst I am here is really mine. I do not own it if it is possible that I shall lose it. And so with profound meaning our Lord speaks about 'that which is another's in comparison with 'that which is your own.' It is another's because it passes, like quicksilver under pressure, from hand to hand, and no man really holds it, but it leaps away from his grasp. And if a man retains it all his days, still, according to the grim old proverb, 'shrouds have no pockets,' and when he dies his hands open, or sometimes they clutch together, but there is nothing inside the palms, and they only close upon themselves. Dear brethren, if there is anything that can be filched away from us, anything about which it is true that, on the one hand, 'moth and rust' — natural processes — 'do corrupt' it, on the other hand, 'thieves break through and steal' — accidents of human conduct can deprive us of it, then we may call it ours, but it is not ours. It possesses us, if we are devoted to it as our best good, and fighting and toiling, and sometimes lying and cheating, and flinging the whole fierce energy of our nature into first gripping and then holding it; it possesses us; we do not possess it. But if there is anything that can become so interwoven and interlaced with the very fibres of a man's heart that they and it cannot be parted, if there is anything that empty hands will clasp the closer, because they are emptied of earth's vanities, then that is truly possessed by its possessor. And our faith, which will not be trodden in the grave, but will go with us into the world beyond, and though it be lost in one aspect, in sight, it will be eternal as trust, will be ours, imperishable as ourselves, and as God. Therefore, do not give all the energy of your lives to amassing the second-best riches. Seek the highest things most. 'Covet earnestly the best gifts,' and let the coveting regulate your conduct. And do not be put off with wealth that will fail you sooner or later.

II. Note, again, the testing of the wealth.

I need not dwell upon that very familiar metaphor of the furnace for gold, and the fining-pot for silver, only remember that there are two purposes for which metallurgists apply fire to metals. The one is to test them, and the other is to cleanse them, or, to use technical words, one is for the purpose of assaying them, and the other is for the purpose of refining them. And so, linking the words of my text. with the words of the previous verse, we find that the Apostle lays it down that the purpose of all the diverse trials, or 'temptations' as he calls them, that come to us, is this one thing, that our faith should be 'tried,' and 'found, unto praise and honour and glory.' The fire carries away the dross; it makes the pure metal glow in its lustre. It burns up the 'wood, hay, stubble'; it makes the gold gleam and the precious stones coruscate and flash.

And so note this general notion here of the intention of all life's various aspects being to test character is specialised into this, that it is meant to test faith, first of all. Of course it is meant to test many other things. A man's whole character is tested by the experiences of his daily life, all that is good and all that is evil in him, and we might speak about the effect of life's discipline upon a great many different sides of our nature. But here the whole stress is put upon the effect of life in testing and clarifying and strengthening one part of a Christian's character, and that is his faith. Why does Peter pick out faith? Why does he not say 'trial of your hope,' of your 'love,' of your 'courage,' of half a dozen other graces? Why 'the trial of your faith?' For this reason, because as the man's faith is, so is the man. Because faith is the tap-root, in the view of the New Testament, of all that is good and strong and noble in humanity. Because if you strengthen a man's trust you strengthen everything that comes from it. Reinforce the centre and all is reinforced. Your faith is the vital point from which your whole life as Christians is developed, and whatever strengthens that strengthens you. And, therefore, although everything that befalls you calls for the exercise of, and therefore tests, and therefore, rightly undergone, strengthens a great many various virtues and powers and beauties in a human character, the main good of it all is that it deepens, if the man is right, his simple trust in God manifested by his trust in and love to Jesus Christ; and so it reinforces the faith which works by love, and thus tends to make all things in life good and fair.

Now if thus the main end of life is to strengthen faith, let us remember that we have to give a wider meaning to the word 'trials' than 'afflictions.' Ah! there is as sharp a trial of my faith in prosperity as in any adversity. People say, 'It is easy to trust God when things are going well with us.' That is quite true. But it is a great deal easier to stop trusting God, or thinking about Him, when things are going well with us, and we do not seem to need Him so much, as in the hours of darkness. You remember the old story about the traveller, when the sun and the wind tried which could make him take off his cloak; and the sun did it. Some of us, I daresay, have found out that the faith which gripped God when we felt we needed Him, because we had not anything else but Him, is but too apt to lose hold of Him when fleeting delights and apparent treasures come and whisper invitations in our hearts. There are diseases that are proper to the northern, dark, ice-bound regions of the earth. Yes! and there are a great many more that belong to the tropics; as there is such a thing as sunstroke, which is, perhaps, as dangerous as the cramping cold from the icebergs of the north. Some of us should understand what that Scripture means: 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.' Prosperity, untroubled lives, lives even as the lives of those of the majority of mankind now, have their own most searching trials of faith.

But on the other hand, if there are 'ships that have gone down at sea, when heaven was all tranquillity,' there come also dark and nights of wild tempest when we have to lay to and ride out the gale with a tremendous strain on the cable. Our sorrows, our disappointments, our petty annoyances, and the great irrevocable griefs that sooner or later darken the very earth, are all to be classified under this same purpose, 'that the trial of your faith... might be found unto praise and honour and glory.' And so, I beseech you, open your eyes to the meaning of life, and do not suppose that you have found the last word to say about it when you say 'I am afflicted,' or 'I am at ease.' The affliction and the ease, like two wheels in some great machine working in opposite directions, fit with their cogs into one another and move something beyond them in one uniform direction. And affliction and ease cooperate to this end, that we might be partakers of His holiness.

I believe experience teaches the most of us, if we will lay its lessons to heart, that the times when Christian people grow most in the divine life is in their times of sorrow. One of the old divines says, 'Grace grows best in winter'; and there are edible plants which need a touch of frost before they are good to eat. So it is with our faith. Only let us take care that the fire does not burn it up, as 'wood, hay, stubble,' but irradiates it and glorifies it, as 'gold, silver, and precious stones.'

III. Now a word, lastly, about the ultimate discovery.

'Might be found unto praise and honour and glory.' Note these three words, which I think are often neglected, and sometimes misunderstood — 'praise, honour, glory.' Whose? People sometimes say 'God's,' since His people's ultimate salvation redounds to His praise; but it is much better to understand the praise as given to the Christians whose faith has stood the testing fires. 'Well done, good and faithful servant' — is not that praise from lips, praise from which is praise indeed? As Paul says, 'then shall every man have praise of God.' We are far too much afraid of recognising the fact that Jesus Christ in Heaven, like Jesus Christ on earth, will praise the deeds that come from love to Him, though the deeds themselves may be very imperfect. Do you remember 'She hath wrought a good work on Me,' said about a woman that had done a perfectly useless thing, which was open to a great many very shrewd objections? But Jesus Christ accepted it. Why? Because it was the pure utterance of a loving heart. And, depend upon it, though we have to say 'Unclean! unclean! We are unprofitable servants,' He will say 'Come! ye blessed of My Father.' Praise from Christ is praise indeed.

'Honour.' That suggests bystanders, a public opinion, if I may so say; it suggests 'have thou authority over ten cities,' and that men will have their deeds round them as a halo, in that other world. As 'praise' suggests the redeemed man's relation to his Lord, so 'honour' suggests the redeemed man's relation to the fellow-citizens of the New Jerusalem. 'Glory' speaks of the man himself as transfigured and lifted up into the light and lustre of communion with, and conformity to, the image of the Lord. 'Then shall we appear with Him in glory. Then shall the righteous blaze forth like the sun in My heavenly Father's Kingdom.'

'Shall be found.' Ah! there will be many surprises yonder. Do you remember that profound revelation of our Master when He represents those on whom He lavishes His eulogies as the Judge, as turning to Him and saying, 'Lord! when saw we Thee in... prison and visited thee?' They do not recognise themselves or their acts in Christ's account of them. They have found that their lives were diviner than they knew. There will be surprises there. As one of the prophets represents the ransomed Israel, to her amazement, surrounded by clinging troops of children, and asking, 'These! Where have they been? I was left alone,' so many a poor, humble soul, fighting along in this world, having no recognition on earth, and the lowliest estimate of all its own actions, will be astonished at the last when it receives 'praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.'

Joy In Believing

'In Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' — 1 Peter 1:8.

THE Apostle has just previously been speaking about the great and glorious things which are to come to Christians on the appearing of Jesus Christ, and that naturally suggests to him the thought of the condition of believing souls during the period of the Lord's absence and comparative concealment. Having lifted his readers' hopes to that great Future, when they would attain to 'praise and honour and glory' at Christ's appearing, he drops to the present and to earth, and recalls the disadvantages and deprivations of the present Christian experience as well as its privileges and blessings. 'Whom having not seen, ye love,' that is a very natural thought in the mind of one whose love to Jesus rested on the ever-re-membered blessed experience of years of happy companionship, when addressing those who had no such memories. It points to an entirely unique fact. There is nothing else in the world parallel to that strange, deep personal attachment which fills millions of hearts to this Man who died nineteen centuries ago, and which is utterly unlike the feelings that any men have to any other of the great names of the past. To love one unseen is a paradox, which is realised only in the relation of the Christian soul to Jesus Christ.

Then the Apostle goes on with what might at first seem a mere repetition of the preceding thought, but really brings to view another strange anomaly. 'In Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' Love longs for the presence of the beloved, and is restless and defrauded of its gladness so long as absence continues. But this strange love, which is kindled by an unseen Man, does not need His visible presence in order to be a fountain of joy unspeakable and full of glory. Thus the Apostle takes it for granted that every one who believes knows what this joy is. It is a large assumption, contradicted, I am afraid, by the average experience of the people that at this day call themselves Christians.

We notice —

I. The All-sufficient Ground or Source of this Glad Emotion.

'In whom,' with all the disabilities and pains and absence, 'yet believing,' you can put out a long arm of faith across the gulf that lies, not only between to-day and eighteen centuries ago, but the deeper and more impassible gulf that lies between earth and heaven, and clasp Christ with a really firm grasp, which will fill the hand, and which we shall feel has laid hold of something, or rather has laid hold of a living person and a loving heart. That is faith. The Apostle uses a very strong form of expression here, which is only very partially represented by our English version. He does not say only 'in whom believing,' but 'towards whom'; putting emphasis upon the effort and direction of the faith, rather than upon the repose of the heart when it has found its object and rests upon Him. And so the conception of the true Christian attitude is that of a continual outgoing of Trust and its child Love; of Desire and its child Possession; and of Expectation and its child Fruition towards that unseen Christ. It is much to believe Him, it is more to believe in Him; it is — I was going to say — most of all to believe towards Him. For in this region, quite as much as, and I think more than, in the one to which the saying was originally applied, 'search is better than attainment.' Our condition must always be that of 'forgetting the things that are behind'; and however much we may realise the union with the unseen Christ in the act of resting upon Him, that must never be suffered to interfere with the longing for the larger possession of myself, and fuller consequent likeness to Him, which is expressed in that great though simple phrase of my text 'believing towards Him.' Such a continual outgoing of effort, as well as the rest and blessedness of reposing on Him, is indispensable for all true gladness. For the in-tensest activity of our whole being is essential to the real joy of any part of it, and we shall never know the rapture of which humanity, even here and now, is capable until we gather our whole selves, heart, will, and all our practical, as well as our intellectual, powers in the effort to make more of Christ our own, and to minimise the distance between us to a mere vanishing point. 'Believing towards whom ye rejoice.'

That act of trust, however inadequate the object upon which it rests, and however mistaken may be our conceptions of that on which we lean, always brings a gladness which is real, until disappointment disillusionises and saddens us. There is nothing that so sheds peace over the heart as reliance, absolute and quiet, upon some object worthy of trust. It is blessed to trust one another until, as is too often the case, we find that what we thought to be an oak against which we leaned is but a broken reed that has no pith in it, and no possibility of support. So far as it goes, all trust is blessed, but the most blessed is simple reliance upon, and aspiration after, Jesus Christ. Ever to yearn for Him, not with the yearning of those who have no possession, but with that of those who,

having a little, desire to have more, is to bring into our lives the one solid and sufficient good without which there is no gladness, and with which there can be no unmingled sorrow, wrapping the whole man in its ebon folds. For this Christ is enough for all my nature and for the satisfaction of every desire. In Him my mind finds the truth; my will the law; my love the answering love; my hope its object; my fears their dissipation; my sins their forgiveness; my weaknesses their strength; and, to all that I am, what He is answers, as fulness to emptiness, and as supply to need. So, 'believing towards Him, we rejoice.'

But note that the joy is strictly contemporaneous with the faith. Tear away electric wire from the source of energy, and the light goes out instantly. It is as another Apostle says, 'in believing' that we have 'joy and peace.' And that is why so many of us know little of it. Yesterday's faith will not contribute to to-day's gladness, any more than yesterday's meals will satisfy to-day's hunger. Present joy depends upon present faith, and the measure of the one is the measure of the other.

Notice again —

II. The Characteristics of the Christian Gladness.

'Unspeakable,' and, as the word ought to be rendered, not 'full of glory' but 'glorified.' Unspeakable. Still waters run deep. It is poor wealth that can be counted; it is shallow emotion that can be crammed into the narrow limits of any human vocabulary. Fathers and mothers, parents and children, husbands and wives, know that. And the depths of the joy that a believing soul has in Jesus Christ are not to be spoken. Perhaps it is better that it should not be attempted to speak them.

'Not easily forgiven

Are those, who, setting wide the doors that bar

The secret bridal chambers of the heart.

Let in the day.'

It is in shallow streams that the sunlight gleams on the pebbles at the bottom. The abysses of ocean are dark, and have never been searched by its light. I suspect the depth of the emotion which bubbles over into words, and finds no difficulty in expressing itself. The joy which can be manifested in all its extent has a very small extent. Christian joy is unspeakable, too, because just as you cannot teach a blind man what colour is like, and cannot impart to anybody the blessedness of wedded love, or parental affection, by ever so much talking — and, therefore, the poetry of the world is never exhausted — so there is only one way of conveying to a man what is the actual joy of trusting in Christ, and that is, that he himself should trust Him. We may talk till Doomsday, and then, as the Queen of Sheba said, when she came to Solomon, 'the half hath not been told.'

'He must be loved ere that to y,

He will seem worthy of your love.'

It is unspeakable gladness springing from the possession of an unspeakable gift.

'**Glorified.**' There is nothing more ignoble than the ordinary joys of men. They are too often like the iridescent scum on a stagnant pond, fruit and proof of corruption. They are fragile and hollow, for all the play of colour on them, like a soap bubble that breaks of its own tenuity, and is only a drop of dirty water. Joy is too often ignoble, and yet, although it is by no means the highest conception of what Christ's Gospel can do for us, it is blessed to think that it can take that emotion, so often shameful, so often frivolous, so often lowering rather than elevating, and can lift it into loftiness, and transfigure it, and glorify it and make it a power, a power for good and for righteousness, and for 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report' in our lives. And that is what trusting towards Christ will do for our gladnesses.

Lastly, in one word, let me lay upon your consciences, as Christian people —

III. The Obligation of Gladness.

Peter takes it for granted that all these brethren to whom he is writing have experience of this deep and ennobled joy. He does not say, 'You ought to rejoice,' but he says, 'You do rejoice.' And yet a verse or two before he said, 'Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' So, then, he was not blinking the hard, painful facts of anybody's troubled life. He was not away upon the heights serenely contemptuous of the grim possibilities that lurk down in the dark valleys. He took in all the burdens and the pains and the anxieties and the harassments, and the losses, and the bleeding hearts and the cares that can burden any of us. And he said, in spite of them all, 'Ye rejoice.'

Do you? I am afraid there is no more irrefragable proof of the unreality of an enormous proportion of the Christian profession of this day than the joyless lives — in so far as their religion contributes to their joy — of hosts of us. We have religion enough to make us

miserable, we have religion enough to make us uncomfortable about doing things that we would like to do. We are always haunted by the feeling that we are falling so far below our professions, and we are either miserable when we bethink ourselves, or, more frequently, indifferent, accordingly. And the whole reason of such experience lies here, we have not an adequately strong and continued trust in Jesus Christ working righteousness in our lives, nobleness in our characters, and so lifting us above the regions where mists and malaria lie. Let us get high enough up, and we shall find clear sky.

You call yourselves Christians. Does your religion bring any gladness to you? Does it burn brightest in the dark, like the pillar of cloud before the Israelites? 'Greek fire' burned below the water, and so was in high repute. Our gladness is a poor affair if it is at the mercy of temperaments or of circumstances. Jesus Christ comes to cure temperaments, and to enable us to resist circumstances. So I venture to say that, whatever may be our condition in regard to externals, or whatever may be our tendencies of disposition, we are bound, as a piece of Christian duty, to try to cultivate this joyful spirit, and to do it in the only right way, by cultivating the increase of our faith in Jesus Christ. 'Rejoice in the Lord always'; the man who said that was a prisoner, with death looking into his eyeballs. As he said it, he felt that his friends in Philippi might think the exhortation overstrained, and so he repeated it, to show that he recognised the apparent impossibility of obeying it, and yet deliberately enjoined it; 'and again I say, rejoice.'

Christ and His Cross the Centre of the Universe

Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently..., the things which are now reported unto you..., which things the angels desire to look into.' — 1 Peter 1:10,11, 12.

I HAVE detached these three clauses from their surroundings, not because I desire to treat them fragmentarily, but because we thereby throw into stronger relief the writer's purpose to bring out the identity of the Old and the New Revelation, the fact that Christ and His sufferings are the centre of the world's history, to which all that went before points, from which all that follows after flows; and that not only thus does He stand in the midst of humanity, but that from Him there ran out influences into other orders of beings, and angels learn from Him mysteries hitherto unknown to them. The prophets prophesy of the grace which comes in the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, and the same Spirit which taught them teaches the preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They that went before had for their deepest message the proclamation, 'He will come'; they that follow after have for their deepest message, 'He has come.' And angels listen to, and echo, the chorus, from all the files that march in front, and all that bring up the rear, 'Hosanna! Blessed be Him that cometh in the name of the Lord.'

My purpose, then, is just to try to bring before you the magnificent unity into which these texts bind all ages, and all worlds, planting Jesus Christ and His Cross in the centre of them all. There are four aspects here in which the writer teaches us to regard this unity: Jesus and the Cross are the substance of prophecy, the theme of Gospel preaching, the study of angels, and presented to each of us for our individual acceptance. Now, let us look briefly at these four points.

I. First, then, Christ and His Cross is the substance of prophecy.

Now, of course, we have to remember that general statements have to be interpreted widely, and without punctilious adherence to the words; and we have also to remember that great mischief has been done, and great discredit cast, on the whole conception of ancient revelation by the well-meaning, but altogether mistaken, attempts of good people to read the fully developed doctrine of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice into every corner of the ancient revelation. But whilst I admit all that, and would desire to emphasise the fact, I think that in this generation, and to-day, there is a great deal more need to insist upon the truth that the inmost essence and deepest purpose of the whole Old Testament system is to create an attitude of expectance, and to point onwards, with ever-growing distinctness, to one colossal and mysterious figure in which the longings of generations shall be fulfilled, and the promises of God shall be accomplished. The prophet was more than a foreteller, as is being continually insisted upon nowadays. There were prophets who never uttered a single prediction. Their place in Israel was to be the champions of righteousness, and — I was going to say — the knights of God, as against law and ceremonial and externalism. But, beyond that, there underlie the whole system of prophecy, and there come sparkling and flashing up to the surface every now and then, bright anticipations, not only of a future kingdom, but of a personal King, and 'not only of a King, but a sufferer. All the sacrifices, almost all the institutions, the priesthood and the monarchy included, had this on-ward-looking aspect, and Israel as a whole, in the proportion in which it was true to the spirit of its calling, stood a-tiptoe, as it were, looking down the ages for the coming of the Hope of the Covenant that had been promised to the fathers. The prophets, I might say, were like an advance-guard sent before some great monarch in his progress towards his capital, who rode through the slumbering villages and called, 'He comes! He comes! The King cometh meek and having salvation,' and then passed on.

Now, all that is to be held fast to-day. I would give all freedom to critical research, and loyally accept the results of it, so far as these are established, and are not mere hypotheses, with regard to the date and the circumstances of the construction of the various elements of that Old Testament. But what I desire especially to mark is that, with the widest freedom, there must be these two things conserved which Peter here emphasises, the real inspiration of the prophetic order, and its function to point onwards to

Jesus. And so long as you keep these truths, as long as you believe that God spoke through prophets, as long as you believe that the very heart of their message was the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and that to bear witness to Him was the function, not only of prophet, but of priest and king and nation, then you are at liberty to deal as you like with mere questions of origin and of date. But if, in the eagerness of the chase after the literary facts of the origin of the Old Testament, we forget that it is a unity, that it is a divine unity, that it is a progressive revelation, and that 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,' then I venture to say that the most uncritical, old-fashioned reader of the Old Testament that found Jesus Christ in the Song of Solomon, and in the details of the Tabernacle, and in all the minutiae of worship and sacrifice, was nearer to the living heart of the thing than the most learned scholar that has been so absorbed in the inquiries as to how and when this, that, and the other bit of the Book was written, that he fails to see the one august figure that shines out, now more and now less dimly, and gives unity to the whole. 'To Him gave all the prophets witness.' And when Peter declared, as he did in my text, that ancient Israel, by its spokesmen and its organs, testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, he is but echoing what he had learned from his Master, who turns to some of us with the same rebuke with which He met His disciples after the Resurrection: 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.' The Old and the New are a unity, and Christ and His Cross are the substance and the centre of both.

II. Note here Christ and His Cross, the theme of Gospel preaching.

If you will glance at your leisure over the whole context from which I have picked these clauses as containing its essence, you will find that the Apostle speaks of the things which the prophets foretold as being the same as 'those which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.' I must not take for granted that you are all referring to your Bibles, but I should like to point out, as the basis of one or two things that I wish to say, the remarkable variety of phrase employed in the text to describe the one thing. First, Peter speaks of it as 'salvation,' then he speaks of it in the next clause as 'the grace that should come unto you.' Then, in the next phrase, he designates it more particularly as 'the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.' Now, if we put these designations together — salvation, grace, Christ's sufferings, the subsequent glory — we come to this, that the facts of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension are the great vehicle which brings to men God's grace, that that grace has for its purpose and its effect man's salvation, and that these facts are the Gospel which Christian preachers have to proclaim.

Now notice what follows from such thoughts as these. To begin with, the Gospel is not a speculation, is not a theology, still less a morality, not a declaration of principles, but a history of fact, things that were done on this earth of ours, and that the Apostle's Creed which is worked into the service of the Anglican Church is far nearer the primitive conception of the Gospel than are any of the more elaborate and doctrinal ones which have followed. For we have to begin with the facts that Christ lived, died, was buried, rose again from the dead... ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God. Whatever else the Gospel is, that is the kernel and the basis of it all. Out of these facts will come all manner of doctrines, philosophies of religion, theologies, revelations about God and man. Out of them will come all ethics, the teaching of duty, the exhibition of a pattern of conduct, inspiration to follow the model that is set before us. Out of them will come, as I believe, guidance and light for social and economical and political questions and difficulties. But what we have to lay hold of, and what we preachers have to proclaim, is the story of the life, and eminently the story of the death.

Why does Peter put in the very centre here 'the sufferings of Christ'? That suggests another thought, that amongst these facts which, taken together, make the Gospel, the vital part, the central and the indispensable part, is the story of the Cross. Now what Christ said, not what Christ did, not what Christ was, beautiful and helpful as all that is, but to begin with what Christ bore, is the fact that makes the life of the Gospel. And just as He is the centre of humanity, so the Cross is the centre of His work. Why is that? Because the deepest need of all of us is the need to have our sins dealt with, both as guilt and as power, and because nothing else in the whole story of Christ's manifestation deals with men's sins as the fact of His death on the Cross does, therefore the sacrifice and sufferings are the heart of the Gospel.

And so, brethren, we have to mark that the presentation of Christian truth which slurs over that fact of the Sacrifice and Atonement of Jesus Christ, has parted with the vital power which makes the story into a gospel. It is no gospel to tell a man that Jesus Christ died, unless you go on to say He 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures.' And it is no gospel to talk about the beauty of His life, and the perfectness of His example, and the sweetness of His nature, and the depth, the wisdom, and the tenderness of His words, unless you can say this is 'the Lamb of God,' 'the Word made flesh,' 'who bare our sins, and carried our sicknesses and our sorrows.' Strike out from the gospel that you preach 'the sufferings of Christ,' and you have struck out the one thing that will draw men's hearts, that will satisfy men's needs, that will bind men to Him with cords of love. 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.' So, wherever you get what they call an ethical gospel which deals with moralities, and does not impart the power that will vitalise moralities, and make them into thankful service and sacrifices, in return for the great Sacrifice; wherever you get a gospel that falters in its enunciation of the sufferings of Christ, and wherever you get a gospel that secularises the Christian service of the Sabbath, and will rather discuss the things that the newspapers discuss, and the new books that the reviewers are talking about, and odds and ends of that sort that are thought to be popular and attractive, you get a gospel minus the thing that, in the Old Testament and in the New alike, stands forth in the centre of all. 'We preach Christ crucified'; it is not enough to preach Christ.

Many a man does that, and might as well hold his tongue. 'We preach Christ crucified.' And the same august Figure which loomed before the vision of prophets, and shines through many a weary age, stands before us of this generation; ay! and will stand till the end of the world, as the centre, the pivot of human history, the Christ who has died for men. The Christ that will stand in the centre of the development of humanity is the Christ that died on the Cross. If your gospel is not that, you have yet to learn the deepest secret of His power.

III. Once more, here we have Christ and His Cross as the study of angels.

'Which things the angels desire to look into.' Now, the word that Peter employs there is an unusual one in Scripture. Its force may, perhaps, be best conveyed by referring to one of the few instances in which it is employed. It is used to describe the attitude of Peter and John when they stooped, down and looked into the sepulchre. Perhaps there may be a reference in Peter's mind to that incident, when he saw the 'two angels... sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.' Perhaps, also, there floats in his mind some kind of reference to the outspread wings and bended heads of the brooding cherubim who sat above the Mercy-seat, gazing down upon the miracle of love that was manifested beneath them there. But be that as it may, the idea conveyed is that of eager desire and fixed attention.

Now I am not going to enlarge at all upon the thought that is here conveyed, except just to make the one remark that people have often said, 'Why should a race of insignificant creatures on this little globe of ours be so dignified in the divine procedure as that there should be the stupendous mystery of the Incarnation, and the Death for their sakes?' Not for their sakes only, for the New Testament commits itself to the thought that whilst sinful men are the only subjects of the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ, other orders of creatures do benefit thereby, and do learn from it what else they would not have known, of the mystery and the miracle and the majesty of the Divine love. 'To the principalities and the powers in heavenly places He hath made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.' And we can understand how these other orders — what we call higher orders, which they may be or they may not-of being, learn to know God as we learn to know Him, by the manifestation of Himself in His acts, and how the crown of all manifestations consists in this, that He visits the sinful sons of men, and by His own dear Son brings them back again. The elder brethren in the Father's house do not grudge the ring and the robe given to the prodigals; rather they learn therein more than they knew before of the loving-kindness of God.

Now all that is nowadays ignored, and it is not fashionable to speak about the interest of angels in the success of Redemption, and a good many 'advanced' Christians do not believe in angels at all, because they 'cannot verify' the doctrine. I, for my part, accept the teaching, which seems to me to be a great deal more reasonable than to suppose that the rest of the universe is void of creatures that can praise and love and know God. I accept the teaching, and think that Peter was, perhaps, not a dreamer when he said, 'The angels desire to look into these things.' They do not share in the blessings of redemption, but they can behold what they do not themselves experience. The Seer in the Revelation was not mistaken, when he believed that he heard redeemed men leading the chorus to Him that had redeemed them by His blood out of all nations, and then heard the thunderous echo from an innumerable host of angels who could not say 'Thou hast redeemed us,' but who could bring praise and glory to Him because He had redeemed men.

IV. And now my last point is that Christ and His Cross is, by the Gospel, offered to each of us.

Notice how emphatically in this context the Apostle gathers together his wider thoughts, and focusses them into a point. 'The prophets have inquired and searched diligently... of the grace that should come to you... To them it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you.' And so he would take his wide thoughts, as it were, and gather all together, to a point, and press the point against each man's heart.

Dear brethren, these wide views are of no avail to us unless we realise the individual relation which Christ bears to each one of us. He bears a relation, as I have been saying, to all humanity. All the ages belong to Him. 'He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.' From His Cross there flash up rays of light into the heavens above, and out over the whole rolling series of the centuries, from the beginning to the end. Yes; but from His Cross there comes a beam straight to your heart, and the Christ whom angels desire to look into, of whom prophets prophesy and Apostles proclaim His advent, who is the Lord of all the ages, and the Lover of mankind, comes to thee and says 'I am thy Saviour,' and to thee this wide message is brought. Every eye has the whole sunshine, and each soul may have the whole Christ. His universal relations in time and space matter little to you, unless He has a particular relation to yourself.

And He will never have that in its atoning power, unless you do for yourself and by yourself the most individual and solitary act that a human soul can do, and that is, lay your hand on the head of 'the Lamb... that takes away the sin of the world,' and put your sins there. You must begin with 'my Christ,' which you can do only by personal faith. And then afterwards you can come to 'our Christ,' the Christ of all the worlds, the Christ of all the ages. Go to Him by yourself. You must do it as if there were not any other beings in the whole universe but you two, Jesus and you. And when you have so gone, then you will find that you have 'come to the heavenly

Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly, and Church of the first born.' Christ and His Cross are the substance of prophecy, the theme of the Gospel, the study of the angels.

What are they to me?

Hope Perfectly

'Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' —1 Peter 1:13.

CHRISTIANITY has transformed hope, and given it a new importance, by opening to it a new world to move in, and supplying to it new guarantees to rest on. There is something very remarkable in the prominence given to hope in the New Testament, and in the power ascribed to it to order a noble life. Paul goes so far as to say that we are saved by it. To a Christian it is no longer a pleasant dream, which may be all an illusion, indulgence in which is pretty sure to sap a man's force, but it is a certain anticipation of certainties, the effect of which will be increased energy and purity. So our Apostle, having in the preceding context in effect summed up the whole Gospel, bases upon that summary a series of exhortations, the transition to which is marked by the 'wherefore' at the beginning of my text. The application of that word is to be extended, so as to include all that has preceded in the letter, and there follows a series of practical advices, the first of which, the grace or virtue which he puts in the forefront of everything, is not what you might have expected, but it is 'hope perfectly.'

I may just remark, before going further, in reference to the language of my text, that, accurately translated, the two exhortations which precede that to hope are subsidiary to it, for we ought to read, 'Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, and being sober, hope.' That is to say, these two are preliminaries, or conditions, or means by which the desired perfecting of the Christian hope is to be sought and attained.

Another preliminary remark which I must make is that what is enjoined here has not reference to the duration but to the quality of the Christian hope. It is not 'to the end,' but, as the Margin of the Authorised and the Revised Version concurs in saying, it is 'hope perfectly.'

So, then, there are three things here — the object, the duty, and the cultivation of Christian hope. Let us take these three things in order.

I. The object of the Christian hope.

Now, that is stated, in somewhat remarkable language. as 'the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ' We generally use that word 'grace' with a restricted signification to the gifts of God to men here on earth. It is the earnest of the inheritance, rather than its fulness. But here it is quite obvious that by the expression the Apostle means the very same thing as he has previously designated in the preceding context by three different phrases — 'an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled,' 'praise and honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,' and 'the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.' The 'grace' is not contrasted with the 'glory,' but is another name for the glory. It is not the earnest of the inheritance, but it is the inheritance itself. It is not the means towards attaining the progressive and finally complete 'salvation of your souls,' but it is that complete salvation in all its fulness.

Now, that is an unusual use of the word, but that it should be employed here, as describing the future great object of the Christian hope, suggests two or three thoughts. One is that that ultimate blessedness, with all its dim, nebulous glories, which can only be resolved into their separate stars, when we are millions of leagues nearer to its lustre, is like the faintest glimmer of a new and better life in a soul here on earth, purely and solely the result of the undeserved, condescending love of God that stoops to sinful men, and instead of retribution bestows upon them a heaven. The grace that saved us at first, the grace that comes to us, filtered in drops during our earthly experience, is poured upon us in a flood at last. And the brightest glory of heaven is as much a manifestation of the Divine grace as the first rudimentary germs of a better life now and here. The foundation, the courses of the building, the glittering pinnacle on the summit, with its golden spire reaching still higher into the blue, is all the work of the same unmerited, stooping, pardoning love. Glory is grace, and Heaven is the result of God's pardoning mercy.

There is another suggestion here to be made, springing from this eloquent use of this term, and that is not merely the identity of the source of the Christian experience upon earth and in the future, but the identity of that Christian experience itself in regard of its essential character. If I may so say, it is all of a piece, homogeneous, and of one web. The robe is without seam, woven throughout of the same thread. The life of the humblest Christian, the most imperfect Christian, the most infantile Christian, the most ignorant Christian here on earth, has for its essential characteristics the very same things as the lives of the strong spirits that move in light around the Throne, and receive into their expanding nature the ever-increasing fulness of the glory of the Lord. Grace here is glory in the bud; glory yonder is grace in the fruit.

But there is still further to be noticed another great thought that comes out of this remarkable language. The words of my text, literally rendered, are 'the grace that is being brought unto you.' Now, there have been many explanations of that remarkable phrase, which I think is not altogether exhausted by, nor quite equivalent to, that which represents it in our version — viz. 'to be brought unto you.' That relegates it all into the future; but in Peter's conception it is, in some sense, in the present. It is 'being brought.' What does that mean? There are far-off stars in the sky, the beams from which have set out from their home of light millenniums since, and have been rushing through the waste places of the universe since long before men were, and they have not reached our eyes yet. But they are on the road. And so in Peter's conception, the apocalypse of glory, which is the crowning manifestation of grace, is rushing towards us through the ages, through the spheres, and it will be here some day, and the beams will strike upon our faces, and make them glow with its light. So certain is the arrival of the grace that the Apostle deals with it as already on its way. The great thing on which the Christian hope fastens is no 'peradventure,' but a good which has already begun to journey towards us.

Again, there is another thought still to be suggested, and that is, the revelation of Jesus Christ is the coming to His children of this grace which is glory, of this glory which is grace. For mark how the Apostle says, 'the grace which is being brought to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ.' And that revelation to which he here refers is not the past one, in His incarnate life upon earth, but it is the future one, to which the hope of the faithful Church ought ever to be steadfastly turned, the correlated truth to that other one on which its faith rests. On these two great pillars, rising like columns on either side of the gulf of Time, 'He has come,' 'He will come,' the bridge is suspended by which we may safely pass over the foaming torrent that else would swallow us up. The revelation in the past cries out for the revelation in the future. The Cross demands the Throne. That He has come once, a sacrifice for sin, stands incomplete, like some building left unfinished with rugged stones protruding which prophesy an addition at a future day; unless you can add 'unto them that look for Him will He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.' In that revelation of Jesus Christ His children shall find the glory-grace which is the object of their hope.

So say all the New Testament writers. 'When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory,' says Paul. 'The grace that is to be brought unto you in the revelation of Jesus Christ,' chimes in Peter. And John completes the trio with his 'We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him.' These three things, brethren — with Christ, glory with Him, likeness to Him — are all that we know, and blessed be God! all that we need to know, of that dim future. And the more we confine ourselves to these triple great certainties, and sweep aside all subordinate matters, which are concealed partly because they could not be revealed, and partly because they would not help us if we knew them, the better for the simplicity and the power and the certainty of our hope. The object of Christian hope is Christ, in His revelation, in His presence, in His communication to us for glory, in His assimilating of us to Himself.

**'It is enough that Christ knows all,
And we shall be with Him.'**

'The grace that is being brought unto you in the revelation of Jesus Christ.'

II. And now notice the duty of the Christian hope.

Hope a duty? That strikes one as somewhat strange. I very much doubt whether the ordinary run of good people do recognise it as being as imperative a duty for them to cultivate hope as to cultivate any other Christian excellence or virtue. For one man that sets himself deliberately and consciously to brighten up, and to make more operative in his daily life, the hope of future blessedness, you will find a hundred that set themselves to other kinds of perfecting of their Christian character. And yet, surely, there do not need any words to enforce the fact that this hope full of immortality is no mere luxury which a Christian man may add to the plain fare of daily duty or leave untasted according as he likes, but that it is an indispensable element in all vigorous and life-dominating Christian experience.

I do not need to dwell upon that, except just to suggest that such a vividness and continuity of calm anticipation of a certain good beyond the grave is one of the strongest of all motives to the general robustness and efficacy of a Christian life. People used to say a few years ago, a great deal more than they do now, that the Christian expectation of Heaven was apt to weaken energy upon earth, and they used to sneer at us, and talk about our 'other worldliness' as if it were a kind of weakness and defect attached to the Christian experience. They have pretty well given that up now. Anti-Christian sarcasm, like everything else, has its fashions, and other words of reproach and contumely have now taken the place of that. The plain fact is that no man sees the greatness of the present, unless he regards it as being the vestibule of the future, and that this present life is unintelligible and insignificant unless beyond it, and led up to by it, and shaped through it, there lies the eternal life beyond. The low flat plain is dreary and desolate, featureless and melancholy, when the sky above it is filled with clouds. But sweep away the cloud-rack, and let the blue arch itself above the brown moorland, and all glows into lustre, and every undulation is brought out, and tiny shy forms of beauty are found in every corner. And so, if you drape Heaven with the clouds and mists born of indifference and worldliness, the world becomes mean, but if you dissipate the cloud and unveil heaven, earth is greatened. If the hope of the grave that is to be brought unto you at the

revelation of Jesus Christ shines out above all the flatness of earth, then life becomes solemn, noble, worthy of, demanding and rewarding, our most strenuous efforts. No man can, and no man will, strike such effectual blows on things present as the man, the strength of whose arm is derived from the conviction that every stroke of the hammer on things present is shaping that which will abide with him for ever.

My text not only enjoins this hope as a duty, but also enjoins the perfection of it as being a thing to be aimed at by all Christian people. What is the perfection of hope? Two qualities, certainty and continuity. Certainty; the definition of earthly hope is an anticipation of good less than certain, and so, in all the operations of this great faculty, which are limited within the range of earth, you get blended as an indistinguishable throng, 'hopes and fears that kindle hope,' and that too often kill it. But the Christian has a certain anticipation of certain good, and to him memory may be no more fixed than hope, and the past no more unalterable and uncertain than the future. The motto of our hope is not the 'perhaps,' which is the most that it can say when it speaks the tongue of earth, but the 'verily! verily!' which comes to its enfranchised lips when it speaks the tongue of Heaven. Your hope, Christian man, should not be the tremulous thing that it often is, which expresses itself in phrases like 'Well! I do not know, but I tremblingly hope,' but it should say, 'I know and am sure of the rest that remaineth, not because of what I am, but because of what He is.'

Another element in the perfection of hope is its continuity. That hits home to us all, does it not? Sometimes in calm weather we catch a sight of the gleaming battlements of 'the City which hath foundations,' away across the sea, and then mists and driving storms come up and hide it. There is a great mountain in Central Africa which if a man wishes to see he must seize a fortunate hour in the early morning, and for all the rest of the day it is swathed in clouds, invisible. Is that like your hope, Christian man and woman, gleaming out now and then, and then again swallowed up in the darkness? Brethren! these two things, certainty and continuity, are possible for us. Alas! that they are so seldom enjoyed by us.

III. And now one last word. My text speaks about the discipline or cultivation of this Christian hope.

It prescribes two things as auxiliary thereto. The way to cultivate the perfect hope which alone corresponds to the gift of God is 'girding up the loins of your mind, and being sober.' Of course, there is here one of the very few reminiscences that we have in the Epistles of the ipsissima verba of our Lord. Peter is evidently referring to our Lord's commandment to have 'the loins girt and the lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.' I do not need to remind you of the Eastern dress that makes the metaphor remarkably significant, the loose robes that tangle a man's feet when he runs, that need to be girded up and belted tight around his waist, as preliminary to all travel or toil of any kind. The metaphor is the same as that in our colloquial speech when we talk about a man 'pulling himself together.' Just as an English workman will draw his belt a hole tighter when he has some special task to do, so Peter says to us, make a definite effort, with resolute bracing up and concentration of all your powers, or you will never see the grace that is hurrying towards you through the centuries. There are abundance of loose, slack-braced people up and down the world, in all departments, and they never come to any good. It is a shame that any man should have his thoughts so loosely girt and vagrant as that any briar by the roadside can catch them and hinder his advance. But it is a tenfold shame for Christian people, with such an object to gaze upon, that they should let their minds be dissipated all over the trivialities of Time, and not gather them together and project them, as I may say, with all their force towards the sovereign realities of Eternity. A sixpence held close to your eye will blot out the sun, and the trifles of earth close to us will prevent us from realising the things which neither sight, nor experience, nor testimony reveal to us, unless with clenched teeth, so to speak, we make a dogged effort to keep them in mind.

The other preliminary and condition is 'being sober,' which of course you have to extend to its widest possible signification, implying not merely abstinence from, or moderate use of, intoxicants, or material good for the appetites, but also the withdrawing of one's self sometimes wholly from, and always restraining one's self in the use of, the present and the material. A man has only a given definite quantity of emotion and interest to expend, and if he flings it all away on the world he has none left for Heaven. He will be like the miller that spoils some fair river, by diverting its waters into his own sluice, in order that he may grind some corn. If you have the faintest film of dust on the glass of the telescope, or on its mirror, if it is a reflecting one, you will not see the constellations in the heavens; and if we have drawn over our spirits the film of earthly absorption, all these bright glories above will, so far as we are concerned, cease to be.

So, brethren, there is a solemn responsibility laid upon us by the gift of that great faculty of looking before and after. What did God make you and me capable of anticipating the future for? That we might let our hopes run along the low levels, or that we might elevate them and twine them round the very pillars of God's Throne; which? I do not find fault with you because you hope, but because you hope so meanly, and about such trivial and transitory things. I remember I once saw a sea-bird kept in a garden, confined within high walls, and with clipped wings, set to pick up grubs and insects. It ought to have been away out, hovering over the free ocean, or soaring with sunlit wing to a height where earth became a speck, and all its noises were hushed. That is what some of you are doing with your hope, degrading it to earth instead of letting it rise to God; enter within the veil, and gaze upon the glory of the 'inheritance incorruptible and undefiled.'