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2 TIMOTHY EXPOSITION: PART 1 of 2 ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt.D.

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A VETERAN'S COUNSELS TO A YOUNG SOLDIER

2 Timothy 1:1-7

2 Timothy 3:14-17

PAUL'S heart had been drawn to Timothy long before this letter was written, as far back as the beginning of his second missionary journey, and Timothy had cherished the enthusiastic devotion of a young man for his great leader. He seems to have been the best beloved of the circle which the magnetism of Paul's character bound to him.

The tone of the two epistles suggests that Timothy needed to be braced up, and have a tonic administered. Probably he inclined to be too much affected by difficulties and opposition, and required the 'soul-animating strains' which Paul sounded in his ears. Possibly the Apostle's imprisonment and evidently impending death had discouraged and saddened the younger and weaker man. At all events, it is beautiful and pathetic that the words of cheer and brave trust should come from the martyr, and not from the sorrowing friend. Timothy should have been the encourager of Paul, but Paul was the encourager of Timothy.

The verses of this passage embody mainly two counsels. Verse 6 exhorts Timothy to 'stir up the gift' that was in him; 2Timothy 3:14 bids him 'abide in the things which' he has learned. These two — diligent effort to increase his spiritual force and persistent holding by the teaching already received — are based on Paul's knowledge of his faith and on Timothy's knowledge of the saving power of that truth. But Paul loved him too ardently to give him cold counsels. The advices are wrapped in the softest covering of gracious

affection and recognition of Timothy's inherited faith and personal devotion to Paul.

I. Before dealing with the advices, look at the lovely prelude in verses 1-5. Paul does not lay aside his apostolic authority, but he uses it to make his greeting more sweet and strong. What had he been made an apostle by? The will of God. What had he been made an apostle for? To make known the promise of the life which is in Christ. Thus clothed with authority, and bearing the great gift of life, he takes Timothy to his heart as his beloved child. The captain stoops to embrace the private. Christ's apostle pours his love and benediction over the young servant, and when such lips wish 'grace, mercy, and peace,' the wish is a prophecy as much as a prayer.

The flow of Paul's love outstrips that of his words, and there is some verbal obscurity in verses 3-5, but the meaning is plain. Paul's thankfulness was for Timothy's 'unfeigned faith,' but when he is about to say that, other tender thoughts start up, and insist on being uttered. The language of love in absence is the same all the world over. It comes across all the intervening centuries like the speech of today: 'I never forget you.' But love should be sublimed by religion, and find its best expression in 'supplications.' Think of the prisoner in Rome, expecting a near death by violence, and yet telling his young friend that he was always thinking about him, Timothy, and wearying for him with a great yearning.

How beautiful is that touch, too, that the remembrance of Timothy's tears, when he had had to part from Paul, fed the Apostle's desire to see him again! And how graceful, and evidently more than graceful, is the contrast between the tears of Timothy at parting and the hoped-for joy of Paul at meeting! No wonder that such a leader kindled passionate enthusiasm.

One can fancy the throb of pleasure with which Timothy would read the recognition of his 'unfeigned faith.' It is always a memorable moment to a young beginner when a veteran lays his hand on his shoulder and acknowledges his devotion. Nor less fitted to warm Timothy's heart was the praise of his grandmother and mother. It would not only do that, but would make him feel that his descent added force to the exhortation which

followed. Whoever might become careless, one who had such blood in his veins was called on to be true to his ancestral faith. One can well understand how such a beginning prepared Timothy for the succeeding counsels. But this was not art or rhetorical advice on Paul's part, but deep affection. The soil thus watered by love was ready for the seed.

II. The counsel thus delicately introduced is delicately expressed, as putting in remembrance rather than as enjoining authoritatively. Paul gives Timothy credit for having already recognised the duty. The 'gift of God' is the whole bestowments which fitted him for his work, and which were given from the Holy Spirit, through the imposition of the hands of Paul and of the elders (1 Timothy 4:14).

But whilst there was a special force in the command to Timothy, the principle involved applies to all Christians, and in a wider aspect to all men; for every Christian has received the gift of that self-same Spirit, and every man is endowed with some gifts from God. All God's gifts are held on similar conditions. They may be neglected, and, if so, will cease as surely as an untended fire dies down into grey ashes. The highest and the lowest are alike in this. An unused muscle atrophies, an uncultivated capacity diminishes. The grace of God itself wanes if we are unfaithful stewards. The gift of the Spirit is not a substitute for our own activity, and the extent to which we possess it is determined by our rousing ourselves to tend the sacred flame.

Timothy had probably been depressed by Paul's imprisonment and the prospect of his death. He had been accustomed to lean upon the Apostle, and now the strong prop was to be withdrawn, and he was to stand alone, and, worst of all, to take up some of the tasks dropped by Paul. Therefore the Apostle tries to brace up his drooping spirit with his clear clarion note. The message comes to us all, that discouraging circumstances and heavy responsibilities are reasons for gathering ourselves up to our work, and for 'stirring up' smouldering fires kindled by God in our hearts, and too often left untended by us.

Paul points to the proper effects of the gift of God, as the ground of his counsel That Spirit does not infuse cowardice, which blenches at danger or shrinks from duty, as probably Timothy was tempted to do; but it breathes 'power' into the weak, enabling them to do and bear all things, and 'love,' which makes eager for service to God and man, at whatever cost, and 'self-control,' which curbs the tendencies to seek easy tasks and to listen to the

voices within or without whispering ignoble avoidance of the narrow way. Surely this exhortation in its most general form should come to all young hearts, and summon them to open their doors for the entrance of that Divine Helper who will make them strong, loving, and masters of themselves.

III. The second exhortation in 2 Timothy 3:14-17, like the first, presupposes Timothy's previous Christian character, and draws some of its persuasive force from his home and the dear ones there — an argument which, no doubt, Paul knew would tell on such a clinging, affectionate nature. We note the double reason for steadfastness—the teachers, and the early beginning of the knowledge of the truth. It is thought a sign of independence and advancement by many young people nowadays to fling away their mother's faith, just because it was hers, and taught them by her when they were infants. The fact that it was is no bar against investigation, nor against the adoption of other conclusions, if needful; but in the present temper of men, it is well to remember that it creates no

presumption against a creed that some white-haired Lois, or some tender mother Eunice has striven to engrave it on the young heart.

But the great reason adduced for steadfast grip of the truth is that the 'sacred writings' (by which are to be understood the Old Testament) have power, as Timothy had experience, to give a wisdom which led to salvation, and to 'furnish' a Christian, especially the Christian teacher, for 'every good work.' In either of the two usually adopted renderings of verse 16, the divine origin of Scripture and its value for the manifold processes for perfecting character are broadly asserted. That origin and these uses are unaffected by variety of view as to the methods of inspiration or by critical researches. It will always be true that the Bible is the chief instrument employed by the Spirit of power and of love and of self-control to mould our characters into beauty of holiness. He who has that Spirit in his heart and the Scriptures in his hands has all he needs.

The one exhortation for such is to 'abide in' what he has received. That counsel as given to Timothy was probably directed chiefly against temptations very unlike those which attack us. But the spirit of it applies to us. It enjoins no irrational conservatism, scowling at all new thoughts, but it bids us aim at keeping up our personal hold of the central truths of Christ's incarnation, sacrifice, and gift of the Divine Spirit, which hold is

slackened by worldliness and carelessness twenty times for once that it is so from intellectual dissatisfaction with the principles of Christianity.

Timothy was relegated, not only to his early memoriam, but to his own experience. He had not only learned these things from revered lips, but had been 'assured of' them by the response they had found and the effects they had produced in himself. That is the deepest ground of our holding fast by the gospel, and it is one we may all have. 'He that believeth hath the witness in himself,' and may wait with equanimity while the dust of controversy clears off, for he 'knows in whom he has believed,' and what that Saviour has done for and in him;

WHAT KIND OF MEN CHRIST MAKES

2 Timothy 1:7

'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.' — 2 Timothy 1:7

THE parts which we should naturally have expected Paul and Timothy to fill are reversed in this letter. 'Paul the aged,' a prisoner, and soon to be a martyr, might have been expected to receive encouragement and consolation. But Timothy seems to have been of a somewhat weak and timid nature, and this letter of the dying man is one long trumpet-blast to stir his courage. My text is the first of the 'soul-animating strains' which he blows. In it the Apostle would have his down-hearted young companion and helper remember what God has given him by the laying on of Paul's hands. Whether the word 'spirit' in my text be regarded as meaning the Divine Spirit which is given, or the human spirit in which that divine gift is received, the qualities enumerated in the text are those which that Divine Giver creates in that human recipient by His indwelling presence; or to put it into shorter words, my text tells us what sort of people Christianity has a tendency to make, and it tells us, too, how it sets about making them.

The enumeration is by no means intended to be either complete or scientific. It is meant to embrace, mainly, the points which Timothy wanted most. And so it dwells predominantly on the stronger, 'manly virtues,' as men complacently call them. 'God hath not given us the spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind,' which last word does not stand precisely upon a level with the other three, but rather expresses the notion of self-control.

I think I shall best, in the few remarks that I offer you, bring out the meaning of the words before us if I simply follow the Apostle's rough and ready enumeration, and try to learn what he says about each of these points.

I. The first thing, then, that he would have us understand is that Christ makes fearless men.

'God hath not given us the spirit of cowardice.' Now, of course, courage or timidity are very largely matters of temperament. But then, you know, the very purpose of the gospel is to mend temperaments, to restrain, and to stimulate, so as that natural defects may become excellences, and

excellences may never run to seed and become defects. So whilst we have to admit that religion is not meant to obliterate natural distinctions in character, we must also remember that we insufficiently grasp the intention of the gospel which we say we believe unless we realise that it is meant to deal with the most deeply rooted defects in character, to make the crooked things straight, and the rough places plain.

So I venture to say that any man who lives in the realisation of the truths which the gospel reveals, and in the use of the gifts which the gospel communicates, will (whatever his natural disposition of apprehensiveness) be stiffened into a fearless man; and be no longer a reed shaken with the wind, but a brazen pillar, and an iron wall, amidst all dangers and enemies.

One sometimes feels as if nothing but clear-sightedness were needed to drive men into insanity. When you think of the possibilities of every life, and of the certainties of every life, of what may come to any of us, any time, and of what must come to all of us one time, the wonder is that men live without a perpetual tremor of heart, and do so largely manage to ignore the evils that ring them round. Think of our relation to God, think of what must be the result of the collision of the perfectly righteous will of His with our wayward rebellions; of what must be the consequence — if there be a God at all, and if there be such a thing as retributive acts on His part — when He sets us down to drink of the brew that we have brewed, and to reap the harvest that we have sown. Surely, 'he troubled, ye careless ones,' is His exhortation of wisdom to men.

And then if we bring in all the other possibilities which to many of us have become in some measure past experiences, but still hang threatening on our horizon, like the half-emptied clouds of a thunderstorm, that is sure to come back again, dread seems to be wisdom. For what have we that we shall not have to part with? What do we that will not disappoint in the fruit? What dangers are there possible to humanity, concerning which you and I can say we know that 'when the overflowing scourge passes by it will not reach us'? None! none!

You may remember having seen a gymnast that used to roll a ball up a spiral with the motion of his feet. That is how we are set to roll the ball of our fortunes and prosperities up the twisting ascent, and at every moment there is the possibility of its hurtling down in ruin, and one day it certainly will. So is there anything more empty and foolish than to say to a man whose relations with God are not right, whose command of the world is so

uncertain, as it surely is, and who has frowning before him the grim certainties of loss and sorrow and broken ties, and empty houses and empty hearts, and disappointments, and pillow stuffed with thorns, and souls wounded to the very quick, and, last of all, a death which has a dim something behind it that touches all consciences — to say to such a man 'Don't be afraid'? If he is not a fool he ought to be.

But then Paul comes in and says, 'God hath not given us the spirit of cowardice.' No, because He has given us the only thing that can exorcise that demon. He has given us the good news of Himself, whereby His name becomes our dearest hope instead of our ghastliest doubt. He has given us the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance and hallowing in Jesus Christ, whereby all the things whereof our consciences — which do 'make cowards of us all' — are afraid, are rectified, and some of them swept out of existence. He has given us truths which only need to be grappled and laid upon our hearts and minds to make us brave. He has assured us that 'all things work together for good,' that He Himself will never leave us. And the Master who spoke on earth so often, and in so many connections, His meek and sovereign encouragement, 'Fear not!' speaks it from the heavens to all that trust Him. 'He laid His hand upon me, and said, "Fear not!" I am the first and the last,' from whom all changes originate, by whom all events are directed, unto whom all things tend. Therefore, whosoever is wedded to Him need fear no evil, for nothing that does not hurt Christ can harm Him,

II. Christ makes strong men.

'He hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power.' Again we have to remember a previous remark as to temperament. There are differences among us in this respect. Some of us, of course, are naturally far more facile, sensitive and yielding than others; some of us have natural force denied to our brethren. These differences will remain, and yet 'the weakest may be as David,' and although the weakest shall be made strong, the strongest shall be stronger still, 'as the angel of God.' The difference between the hind and front ranks will remain, but the whole battalion, as it were, will be shifted forwards.

Let me remind you how a condition of all that is worth doing and being is the cultivation of strength of will and of moral nature. To be weak is to be wicked nine times out of ten. I believe that the bulk of men that go wrong, that 'go to the devil,' as you say, do it, not so much because of a bias towards evil as of a fatal feebleness that is incapable of resistance; and I know of nothing that is more needed to be dinned into the ears — especially of the young who have their chances before them yet — than this truth: the man that cannot say 'No!' is doomed to say 'Yes!' to all bad things that may solicit him. To be weak is to be wicked in such a world as we live in; and many of you know how fatally, facilely, and feebly you have yielded, for no other reason than because the temptation was there and you were not man enough to stop your ears to it, and let it hum past you without touching you. What is the reason why half the men in the world that are drunkards are so?

Pure weakness. And so you may go all round the circle of vices and you will find that weakness is ordinarily wickedness, and it is, always misery. As Milton's Satan tells us, to be 'weak is to be miserable, doing or suffering.' And it is generally failure, as witness the experience of thousands of men who have come into this city and been beaten in the race.

How then is a man to get strength? Brethren, I do not want to exalt the gospel of Jesus Christ by depreciating other and lower means by which feeble natures may get a dose of steel into their system. There are such ways, and they do help men. But if you want to have a power within you that will enable you to 'stand foursquare to every wind that blows,' believe me the surest way of getting it is by faith in Jesus Christ, to open your hearts to the entrance into them of that 'strong Son of God' who sends His mighty Spirit into every spirit that will accept it, to be the source of uncreated and triumphant strength. If we would only keep near to Jesus Christ, and live with hearts open for the influx of His great communications, we should need nothing else to make us strong for all service, against all temptation, in the midst of all suffering. There is a gift offered to every one of us in the gospel of Jesus Christ which will make our weakness into strength. A piece of sponge put into a so-called petrifying well is turned into a mass solid as iron by the infiltration of stony particles. So our yielding softness may be converted into firmness which will resist every pressure if we receive into our hearts the grace which Christ gives. He who is strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, and he only, is truly strong. If then you want power learn where it is stored. —

'His strength was as the strength of ten,

Because his heart was pure.'

There is part of the secret. But how is the heart to be made pure? By the entrance into it of the purifying Christ. Christ makes fearless and strong men.

III. Christ makes loving men.

'Tis excellent to have a giant's strength 'Tis tyrannous to use it like a giant!'

And power ever tends to be tyrannous. The consciousness of strength is ever apt to degenerate into insolence, uncharitableness, want of sympathy with, and contempt for, weakness. And so, very beautifully, side by side with power, Paul puts love. There are some great moral teachers of this generation, and of the last, whose whole teaching has been fatally vitiated, for this amongst other reasons, because they lost sight of the fact that the strongest thing in the universe is love. But Paul, not a philosopher, and not in the least degree trying to set forth scientifically the relations or the limitations of the virtues that he speaks about, like a skilful painter, instinctively knows what tint will best bring up the one that is laid beside it, or like some jeweller with an eye to effect, understands how to dispose the stones in his bracelet, that the cool green of the emerald may be set off by, and set off, the flashing red of the ruby and the deep blue of the sapphire. So he says, Christ makes strong men, but He makes loving men too. 'Quit you like men, be strong. Let all your deeds be done in charity.' And cultivate no strength for yourselves, nor admire any in others, in which power is divorced from pity and tenderness.

I need not remind you of the one sovereign way by which Jesus Christ in His gospel wins men from that self-centred absorption in which they live, and which is the root of all sin, into that love which is the child of faith and the parent of all virtue. There is only one thing that makes men loving, and that is that they should be loved. And Jesus Christ, the incarnate Love, and Lover of all our souls, comes to us and shows us His hands and His side, and says, 'God — I in Him and He in Me — so loved the world, as these wounds tell.' We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. Christ makes us love Him because He assures us that we are loved by Him.

IV. And lastly, Jesus Christ makes self-governing men.

I need not trouble you with any vindication of the rendering which for 'sound mind,' substitutes 'self-control.' I need only, in a word, ask you to

consider how manifestly we are made so as to need the exercise continually of firm and resolute self-government. We have tastes and desires rooted in the flesh, and others, of which the gratification is perfectly legitimate, but which to make the guides of life, or to gratify without stint and without restraint, is ruinous. Blind passions are not meant to guide seeing reason; but if reason be the eye it is meant to guide the blind. And the men who live 'by nature,' which is a polite way of saying 'live by the worst half of their nature, and their animal passions,' are sure to land before long in the ditch.

We have only to look at ourselves and see how there are in us a whole clamorous mob of desires, like nine-days' kittens, with their eyes shut and their mouths open, yelping for their sustenance; and, further, to mark how in each man there is a voice that says, 'Thou shalt, thou shalt not; thou oughtest, thou oughtest not' — we need only, I say, look at ourselves to know that he is meant to coerce and keep well down under hatches all these blind propensities and desires, and to set sovereign above them a will that cannot be bribed, a reason that will not be deceived, and a conscience that will be true to God. Govern yourselves, or you will come all to pieces.

Yes, and what is the use of saying that to men who cannot govern themselves, whose very disease is that they cannot; and who cry out often and often, sometimes before they have gone wrong and sometimes afterwards, 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this

death?’ It is no use to tell a discrowned and deposed monarch to rule his kingdom. The mischief is that it is in full revolt, and he has no soldiers behind him. As Bishop Butler says, ‘If conscience had power, as it has authority, it would govern the world.’ But authority without power is but a jest. So it is no good for conscience to give forth proclamations that are worth no more than the paper that they are written on, when my will has been talked over or enfeebled, and my desires and passions have got the bit between their teeth, and are tearing down the road to the inevitable collision.

Brethren, there is only one thing that will give complete self-command. If you make trial, I will guarantee that it will not fail. Trust to Jesus Christ; ask Him to govern, and He will help you to control yourselves. That is the noblest conquest that any man can make. ‘Every man is a king, and crowns himself when he puts on his own hat,’ says our quaint moralist. Wherever you are master, be you master inside your own soul. And that you may, be the servant of Him who alone will make you master of yourself and of the

world. In Christ the most timid may ‘wax valiant in fight,’ the ‘weakest may be made strong,’ the most self-centred heart be opened for love which is peace and joy, and the wildest revolt in the little kingdom within may be subdued. If we will only go to Him, and trust Him with ourselves, and live in true communion with Him, and in patient exercise of the gifts that He bestows, then He will say to us as of old, ‘Fear not! My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ His love will kindle answering flames in us; and He who brought the raging maniac, whom no chains could bind, to sit quietly at His feet, will give us authority over the one city which we have to govern, and will make the flesh the servant of the emancipated and enfranchised spirit.

A QUIET HEART

2 Timothy 1:12

‘... I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.’
— 2 Timothy 1:12.

THERE is some ambiguity in the original words of this text, lying in that clause which is translated in our Bibles — both Authorised and Revised — ‘that which I have committed unto Him.’ The margin of the Revised Version gives as an alternative reading, ‘that which He hath committed unto me.’ To a mere English reader it may be a puzzle how any words whatever could be susceptible of these two different interpretations. But the mystery is solved by the additional note which the same Revised Version gives, which tells us that the Greek is ‘my deposit,’ or I might add another synonymous word, ‘my trust.’

Now you can see that ‘my trust’ may mean either something with which I trust another, or something with which another trusts me. So the possibility of either rendering arises. It is somewhat difficult to decide between the two. I do not purpose to trouble you with reasons for my preference here. Suffice it to say that, whilst there are strong arguments in favour of the reading ‘that which He has committed unto me,’ I am inclined to think that the congruity of the whole representation, and especially the thought that this ‘trust,’ whatever it is, is something which God has to keep, rather than which Paul has to keep, shuts us up to the adoption of the rendering which stands in our Bibles.

Adopting it, therefore, though with some hesitation, the next question arises, What is it that Paul committed to God? The answer to that is, himself, in all his complex being, with all his fears and anxieties, during the whole duration of his existence. He has done what another Apostle exhorts us to do, ‘committed the keeping of his soul to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.’ Now that was a long past act at the time when Paul wrote this letter. And here he looks back upon life, and sees that all the experiences through which he has passed have but confirmed the faith which he rested in God before the experiences, and that, with the axe and the block almost in sight, he is neither ashamed of his faith, nor dissatisfied with what it has brought him.

I. Notice, then, in the first place, ‘the deposit’ of faith.

You observe that the two clauses of my text refer to the same act, which in the one is described as ‘In whom I have trusted’; and in the other as ‘committing something to Him.’ The metaphor is a plain enough one. A man has some rich treasure. He is afraid of losing it, he is doubtful of his own power to keep it; he looks about for some reliable person and trusted hands, and he deposits it there. That is about as good a description of what the New Testament means by ‘faith’ as you will get anywhere.

You and I have one treasure, whatever else we may have or not have; and that is ourselves. The most precious of our possessions is our own individual being.

We cannot ‘keep’ that. There are dangers all round us. We are like men travelling in a land full of pickpockets and highwaymen, laden with gold and precious stones. On every side there are enemies that seek to rob us of that which is our true treasure — our own souls. We cannot keep ourselves. Slippery paths and weak feet go ill together. The tow in our hearts, and the fiery sparks of temptation that are flying all round about us, are sure to come together and make a blaze. We shall certainly come to ruin if we seek to get through life, to do its work, to face its difficulties, to cope with its struggles, to master its temptations, in our own poor, puny

strength. So we must look for trusty hands and lodge our treasure there, where it is safe.

And how am I to do that? By humble dependence upon God revealed, for our faith's feeble fingers to grasp, in the person and work of His dear Son, who has died on the Cross for us all; by constant realisation of His divine presence and implicit reliance on the realities of His sustaining hand in all our difficulties, and His shielding protection in all our struggles, and His sanctifying spirit in all our conflicts with evil. And not only by the realisation of His presence and of our dependence upon Him, nor only by the consciousness of our own insufficiency, and the departing from all self-reliance, but as an essential part of our committing ourselves to God, by bringing our wills into harmony with His will. To commit includes to submit.

'And, oh, brother! if thus knowing your weakness, you will turn to Him for strength, if the language of your hearts be

***'Myself I cannot save,
Myself I cannot keep,
But strength in Thee I surely have,
Whose eyelids never sleep.'***

And if thus, hanging upon Him, you believe that when you fling yourself into necessary temptations, and cope with appointed heavy tasks, and receive on your hearts the full blow of sore sorrows, He will strengthen you and hold you up; and if with all your hearts you bow, and you say, 'Lord! keeping me is Thy business far more than mine; into Thy hands I commit my spirit,' be sure that your trust will not be disappointed.

Notice, further, about this deposit of faith, how Paul has no doubt that he has made it, and is not at all afraid to say that he has. Ah! there are plenty of you professing Christians who have never got the length which all Christian people should arrive at, of a calm certainty in the reality of your own faith. Do you feel, my brother, that there is no doubt about it, that you are trusting upon Jesus Christ? If you do, well; if the life confirms the confidence. But whilst the deepened certitude of professing Christians as to the reality of their own faith is much to be desired, there is also much to be dreaded the easy-going assurance which a great many people who call themselves Christians have of the reality of their trust, though it neither bows their wills to God's purposes, nor makes them calm and happy in the assurance of His presence. The question for us all is, have we the right to say 'I have committed myself to Him'? If you have not, you have missed the blessedness of life, and will never carry your treasure safely through the hordes of robbers that lurk upon the road, but some day you will be found there, lying beggared, bleeding, bruised. May it be that you are found there before the end, by the merciful Samaritan who alone can bind up and lead to safety.

IX. Now note, secondly, the serenity of faith.

What a grand picture of a peaceful heart comes out of this letter, and its companion one to the same friend, written a little before, but under substantially the same circumstances! They are both full of autobiographical details, on which some critics look with suspicion, but which seem to me to bear upon their very front the token of their own genuineness.

And what a picture it is that they give! He is 'Paul the aged'; old, if not in years — and he probably was not an old man by years — yet old in thought and care and hardships and toils. He is a prisoner, and the compulsory cessation of activity, when so much was to be done, might well have fretted a less eager spirit than that which burned in his puny frame. He is alone, but for one faithful friend; and the bitterness of his solitude is increased by the apostasy of some and the negligence of many. He is poor and thinly clad; and he wants his one cloak 'before winter.' He has been before the emperor once, and though he 'was delivered from the mouth of the lion' then, he knows that he cannot expect to put his head into the lion's mouth a second time with impunity, and that his course is run. He has made but a poor thing of life; he has disappointed all the hopes that were formed of the brilliant young disciple of Gamaliel, who was bidding fair to be the hammer of these heretical Christians. And yet there is no tremor nor despondency in this, his swan-song. It goes up in a clear burst of joyful music. It is the same spirit as that of the Psalmist: 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us.' And serenely he sits there, in the midst of dangers, disappointments, difficulties, and struggles, with a life behind him stuffed full of thorns and hard work and many a care, and close before him the martyr's death, yet he says, with a flash of legitimate pride, 'I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have trusted, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.'

My brother, you must have Paul's faith if you are to have Paul's serenity. A quiet committal of yourself to God, in all the ways in which I have already described that committal as carried out, is the only thing which will give us quiet hearts, amidst the dangers and disappointments and difficulties and conflicts which we have all to encounter in this world. That trust in Him will bring, in the measure of its own depth and constancy, a proportionately deep and constant calm in our hearts.

For even though my faith brought me nothing from God, the very fact that I have rolled my care off my shoulders on to His, though I had made a mistake in doing it, would bring me tranquillity, as long as I believed that the burden was on His shoulders and not on mine. Trust is always quiet. When I can say, 'I am not the master of the caravan, and it is no part of my business to settle the route, I have no responsibility for providing food, or watching, or anything else. All my business is to obey orders, and to take the step

nearest me and wait for the light,' then I can be very quiet whatever comes. And if I have cast my burden upon the Lord, I am not delivered from responsibility, but I am delivered from harassment. I have still tasks and duties, but they are all different when I think of them as His appointing. I have still difficulties and dangers, but I can meet them all with a new peacefulness if I say, 'God is Master here, and I am in His hands, and He will do what He likes with me.' That is not the abnegation of will, it is the vitalising of will. And no man is ever so strong as the man who feels 'it is God's business to take care of me; it is my business to do what He tells me.'

That, dear friends, is the only armour that will resist the cuts and blows that are sure to be aimed at you. What sort of armour do you wear? Is it of pasteboard painted to look like steel, like the breastplates and helmets of actors upon the stage in a theatre? A great deal of our armour is. Do you get rid of all that make-believe, and put on the breastplate of righteousness, and for a helmet the hope of salvation, and, above all, take the shield of faith; and trust in the Lord whate'er betide, and you will stand against all assaults. Paul's faith is the only recipe for securing Paul's serenity.

And then, further, note how this same quiet committal of himself into the loving hands of his Father — whom he had learned to know because he had learned to trust His Son — is not only the armour against all the dangers and difficulties in life, but is also the secret of serene gazing into the eyes of close death. Paul knew that his days were nearly at an end; he was under no illusions as to that, for you remember the grand burst of confidence, even grander than this of my text, in this same letter, with which he seems to greet the coming of the end, and exclaims, with a kind of Hallelujah! in his tone, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. And there is nothing left for me now, now when the struggles are over and the heat and dust of the arena are behind me, but, panting and victorious, to receive the crown.' He knows that death is sure and near; and yet in this same letter he says, 'I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion, and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and save me into His everlasting kingdom.' Did he, then, expect to escape from the headsman's block? Was he beginning to falter in his belief that martyrdom was certain? By no means. The martyrdom was the deliverance. The striking off of his head by the sharp axe was the 'saving of him into the everlasting kingdom.' His faith, grasping Jesus Christ, who abolished death, changes the whole aspect of death to him; and instead of a terror it becomes God's angel that will come to the prisoner and touch him, and say, 'Arise!' and the fetters will fall from off his feet, and the angel will lead him through 'the gate that opens of its own accord,' and presently he will find himself in the city. That is to say, true confidence in God revealed in Jesus Christ is the armour, not only against the ills of life, but against the inevitable ill of death. It changes the whole aspect of the 'shadow feared of man'

Now I know that there is a danger in urging the reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ on the ground of its preparing us for death. And I know that the main reasons for being Christians would continue in full force if there were no death; but I know also that we are all of us far too apt to ignore that grim certainty that lies gaping for us, somewhere on the road. And if we have certainly to go down into the common darkness, and to tread with our feet the path that all but two of God's favourites have trod, it is as well to look the fact in the face, and be ready. I do not want to frighten any man into being a Christian, but I do beseech each of you, brethren, to lay to heart that you will have to grapple with that last enemy, and I ask you, as you love your own souls, to make honest work of this question, Am I ready for that summons when it comes, because I have committed my soul, body, and spirit into His hands, and I can quietly say, 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in the grave, nor wilt Thou suffer Thy servant to see corruption'?

Paul's faith made him serene in life and victorious over death; and it will do the same for you.

III. So note, further, the experience of faith.

In the first clause of our text the Apostle says: — 'I know whom I have trusted.' And it is because he knows Him that therefore he is persuaded that 'He is able to keep.'

How did Paul know Him? By experience. By the experience of his daily life. By all these years of trial and yet of blessedness through which he had passed; by all the revelations that had been made to his waiting heart as the consequence and as the reward of the humble faith that rested upon God. And so the whole past had confirmed to him the initial confidence which knit him to Jesus Christ.

If you want to know the worth of Christian faith, exercise it. We must trust, to begin with, before experience. But the faith that is built upon a lifetime is a far stronger thing than the tremulous faith that, out of

darkness, stretches a groping hand, and for the first time lays hold upon God's outstretched hand. We hope then, we tremblingly trust, we believe on the authority of His word. But after years have passed, we can say, 'We have heard Him ourselves, and we know that this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

Further, none who truly commit themselves to God ever regret it. Is there anything else of which you can say that? Is there any other sort of life that never turns out a disappointment and bitterness and ashes in the mouth of the man that feeds upon it? And is it not something of an evidence of the reality of, the Christian's faith that millions of men are able to stand up and say, 'Lo! we have put our confidence in Him and we are not ashamed?' 'This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles. They looked unto God and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.' You cannot share in the conviction, the issue of

experience which a Christian man has, if you are not a Christian. My inward evidence of the reality of the Gospel truth, which I have won because I trusted Him when I had not the experience, cannot be shared with anybody besides. You must 'taste' before you 'see that the Lord is good' But the fact that there is such a conviction, and the fact that there is nothing on the other side of the sheet to contradict it, ought to weigh something in the scale. Try Him and trust Him, and your experience will be, as that of all who have trusted Him has been, 'that this hope maketh not ashamed.'

IV. Lastly, note here the goal of faith.

'Against that day.' The Apostle has many allusions to that day in this final letter. It was evidently, as was natural under the circumstances, much in his mind. And the tone of the allusions is remarkable. Remember what Paul believed that day was — a day when he 'and all men would stand before the judgment' bar of an omniscient and all-righteous, Divine Judge, to receive 'the deeds done in the body.' A solemn thought and a firm conviction, and a profound impression as to that day, were in his mind. And in the face of all this, he says, 'I know that He will keep this poor soul of mine against that day.'

Ah, my brother! it is easy for you to shuffle out of your thoughts the judgment-seat before which we must all stand, and so to be quiet. It is easy for you to question, in a so-called intellectual scepticism, the New Testament revelations as to the future, and so to be quiet. It is easy for you

to persuade yourselves of the application there of another standard of judgment than that which Scripture reveals, and to say, 'If I have done my best God will not be hard upon me,' and so to be quiet. But, supposing that that certain tribunal blazed upon you; supposing that you could not get rid of the thought that you were to stand there, and supposing that you realised, further, the rigidity of that judgment, and how it penetrates to the discerning of the thoughts and intents of the heart, would you be quiet then? Should you be quiet then?

This man was. How? Why? Because, in patient trust, he had put his soul into God's hands, and a lifetime had taught him that his trust was not in vain.

If you want like peace in life, like victory in death, like boldness in the Day of Judgment, oh, dear friend! — friend though unknown — let me plead with you to seek it where Paul found it, and where you will find it, in simple faith on God manifest in His Son.

'SOUND WORDS'

2 Timothy 1:12

Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.' — 2 Timothy 1:12.

ANY great author or artist passes, in the course of his work, from one manner to another; so that a person familiar with him can date pretty accurately his books or pictures as being in his 'earlier' or 'later' style So there is nothing surprising in the fact that there are great differences between Paul's last writings and his previous ones. The surprising thing would have been if there had not been such differences. The peculiarities of the so-called three pastoral Epistles (the two to Timothy, and the one to Titus) are not greater than can fairly be accounted for by advancing years, changed circumstances, and the emergence of new difficulties and enemies.

Amongst them there are certain expressions, very frequent in these letters and wholly unknown in any of Paul's other work. These have been pounced upon as disproving the genuineness of these letters, but they only do so if you assume that a man, when he gets old, must never use any words that he did not use when he was young, whatever new ideas may have come to him. Now, in this text of mine is one of these phrases peculiar to these later letters — 'sound words.' That phrase and its parallel one, 'sound doctrine,' occur in all some half-dozen times in these letters, and never anywhere else. The expression has become very common among us. It is more often used than understood; and the popular interpretation of it hides its real meaning and obscures the very important lessons which are to be drawn from the true understanding of it, lessons which, I take leave to think, modern Christianity stands very sorely in need of. I desire now to try to unfold the thoughts and lessons contained in this phrase.

I. What does Paul mean by a 'form of sound words'? I begin the answer by saying that he does not mean a doctrinal formula. The word here rendered 'form' is the same which he employs in the first of the letters to Timothy, when he speaks of himself and his own conversion as being 'a pattern to them that should hereafter believe.' The notion intended here is not a cut-and-dried creed, but a body of teaching which will not be compressed within the limits of an iron form, but will be a pattern for the lives of the men to whom it is given. The Revised Version has 'the pattern; and not 'the form.' I take leave to think that there were no creeds in the

apostolic time, and that the Church would probably have had a firmer grasp of God's truth if there had never been any. At all events the idea of a cast-iron creed, into which the whole magnificence of the Christian faith is crushed, is by no means Paul's idea in the word here. Then, with regard to the other part of the phrase — 'sound words' — we all know how that is generally understood by

people. Words are supposed to be 'sound,' when they are in conformity with the creed of the critic. A sound High Churchman is an entirely different person from a sound Nonconformist. Puritan and Sacramentarian differ with regard to the standard which they set up, but they use the word in the same way, to express theological statements in conformity with that standard. And we all know how harshly the judgment is sometimes made, and how easy it is to damn a man by a solemn shake of the head or a shrug of the shoulders, and the question whether he is 'sound.'

Now, all that is clean away from the apostolic notion of the word in question. If we turn to the other form of this phrase, which occurs frequently in these letters, 'sound doctrine,' there is another remark to be made. 'Doctrine' conveys to the ordinary reader the notion of an abstract, dry, theological statement of some truth. Now, what the Apostle means is not 'doctrine' so much as 'teaching'; and if you will substitute 'teaching' for 'doctrine' you get much nearer his thought just as you will get nearer it if for 'sound,' with its meaning of conformity to a three-logical standard, you substitute what the word really means, 'healthy,' wholesome, health-giving, healing. All these ideas run into each other. That which is in itself healthy is health-giving as food, and as a medicine is healing. The Apostle is not describing the teaching that he had given to Timothy by its conformity with any standard, but is pointing to its essential nature as being wholesome, sound in a physical sense; and to its effect as being healthy and health-giving. Keep hold of that thought and the whole aspect of this saying changes at once.

There is only one other point that I would suggest in this first part of my sermon, as to the Apostolic meaning of these words, and it is this: 'healing' and 'holy' are etymologically connected, they tell us. The healing properties of the teaching to which Paul refers are to be found entirely in this — its tendency to make men better, to produce a purer morality, a loftier goodness, a more unselfish love, and so to bring harmony and health into the diseased nature. The one healing for a man is to be holy; and, says Paul, the way to be holy is to keep a firm hold of that body of teaching which I have presented.

Now, that this tendency to produce nobler manners and purer conduct and holier character is the true meaning of the word 'sound' here, and not 'orthodox' as we generally take it, will be quite clear, I think, if you will notice how, in another part of these same letters, the Apostle gives a long catalogue of the things which are contrary to the health-giving doctrine. If the ordinary notion of the expression were correct, that catalogue ought to be a list of heresies. But what is it? A black list of vices — 'deceivers,' 'ungodly, sinners,' 'unholy,' 'profane,' 'murderers,' 'man-slayers,' 'whoremongers,' 'man-stealers,' 'liars,' 'perjured' persons. Not one of these refers to aberration of opinion; all of them point to divergences of conduct, and these are the things that are contrary to the healing doctrine. But they are not contrary, often, to sound orthodoxy. For there have been a great many imitators of that king of France, who carried little leaden images of saints and the Virgin in his hat and the devil in his heart. 'The form of sound words' is the pattern of healing teaching, which proves itself healing because it makes holy. Now, that is my first question answered.

II. Where Paul thought these healing words were to be found.

He had no doubt whatever as to that. They were in the message that he preached of Jesus Christ and His salvation. There and there only, in his estimation and inspired teaching, are such words to be found. The truth of Christ, His incarnation, His sacrifice, His resurrection, His ascension, the gift of His Divine Spirit, with all the mighty truths on which these great facts rest, and all which flow from these great facts, these, in the aggregate, are the health-giving words for the sickly world.

Now, historically, it is proved to be so. I do not need to defend, as if it were in full conformity with the dictates and principles of Christianity, the life and practice of any generation of Christian people. But this I do venture to say, that the world has been slowly lifted, all through the generations, by the influence, direct and indirect, of the great truths of Christianity, and that today the very men who, in the name of certain large principles which they have learned from the gospel, are desirous of brushing aside the old-fashioned gospel, are kicking down the ladder by which they climbed, and that, with all the imperfections, for which we have to take shame to ourselves before God, still the reflection of the perfect Imago which is cast into the world from the mirror of the collective

Christian conduct and character, though it be distorted by many a flaw in the glass, and imperfect by reason of many a piece of the reflecting medium having dropped away, is still the fairest embodiment of character that the world has ever seen. Why, what is the meaning of the sarcasms that we have all heard, till we are wearied of them, about 'the Nonconformist conscience'? The adjective is wrong; it should be 'the Christian conscience.' But with that correction I claim the sarcasms as unconscious testimony to the fact that the Christian ideal of character and conduct set forth, and approximately realised, by religious people, is far above the average morality of even a so-called Christian nation. And all that is due to the 'pattern of health-giving words.'

Now, the historical confirmation of Paul's claim that these health-giving words were to be found in his gospel is no more than is to be expected, if we look at the contents of that gospel to which he thus appeals. For there never has been such an instrument for regenerating individuals and society as lies in the truths of Christianity, firmly grasped and honestly worked out. Their healing power comes, first, from their giving the sense of pardon and acceptance. Brethren, there is nothing, as I humbly venture to affirm, that will go down to the fountain and origin of all the ills of man, except that teaching 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses.' That reality of guilt, that schism and alienation between man and God, must be dealt with first before you can produce high morality. Unless you deal with that central disease you do very little. Something you do; but the cancer

is deep-seated, and the world's remedies for it may cure pimples on the surface, but are powerless to extirpate the malignant tumour that has laid hold of the vitals. You must begin by dealing with the disease of sin, not only in its aspect as habit, but in its consequence of guilt and responsibility and separation from God, before you can bring health to the sick man.

And then, beyond that, I need not remind you of how a higher and more wholesome morality is made possible by these health-giving words, inasmuch as they set forth for us the perfect example of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as they bring into operation love, the mightiest of all powers to mould a life, inasmuch as they open up for us, far more solemnly and certainly than ever else has been revealed, the solemn thought of judgment, and of every man giving account of himself to God, and the assurance that 'whatsoever a man soweth here, that,' a thousand-fold increased in the crop, 'shall he also reap' in the eternities. In addition to the example of perfection in the beloved Christ, the mighty motive of love, the solemn urgency of judgment and retribution, the health-giving words bring to us the assurance of a divine power dwelling within us, to lift us to heights of purity and goodness to which our unaided feet can never, never climb. And for all these reasons the message of Christ's incarnation and death is the health-giving word for the world.

But, further, let me remind you that, according to the apostolic teaching, these healing and health-giving effects will not be produced except by that gospel. Some of you, perhaps, may have listened to the first part of my sermon with approbation, because it seemed to fit in with the general disparagement of doctrine prevalent in this day. Will you listen to this part too? I venture to assert that, although there are many men apart from Christ who have as clear a conception of what they ought to be and to do as any Christian, and some men apart from Christ who do aim after high and pure, noble lives, not altogether unsuccessfully, yet on the whole, on the wide scale, and in the long-run, if you change the 'pattern of health-giving words' you lower the health of the world. It seems to me that this generation is an object-lesson in that matter. Why is it that these two things are running side by side in the literature of these closing years of the century — viz., a rejection of the plain laws of morality, especially in regard of the relations of the sexes, and a rejection of the old-fashioned gospel of Jesus Christ? I venture to think that the two things stand to each other very largely in the relation of cause and effect, and that, if you want to bring back the world to Puritan morality, you will have to go back in the main to Puritan theology. I do not mean to insist upon any pinning of faith to any theological system, but this I am bound to say, and I beseech you to consider, that if you strike out from the 'pattern of health-giving words' the truth of the Incarnation, the sacrifice on the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the gift of the Spirit, the 'health-giving words' that you have left are not enough to give health to a fly.

III. Lastly, notice what Paul would have us do with these' health-giving words.'

'Hold fast the form.., in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus.' Now that exhortation includes three things. Your time will not allow me to do more than just touch them. First it applies to the understanding. 'Hold fast the teaching' by letting it occupy your minds Brethren, I am unwillingly bound to acknowledge my suspicion that a very large number of Christian people scarcely ever occupy their thoughts with the facts and principles of the gospel, and that they have no firm and intelligent grasp of these, either singly or in their connection. I would plead for less newspaper and more Bible; for less novel and more gospel. I know how hard it is for busy men to have spare energy for anything beyond their business and the necessary claims of society, but I would even venture to advise a little less of what is called Christian work, in order to get a little more Christian knowledge. 'Come ye yourselves apart into a solitary place,' said the Master; and all busy workers need that. 'Hold fast the health-giving words' by meditation, a lost art among so many Christians.

The exhortation applies next to the heart. 'Hold in faith and love.' If that notion of the expression, which I have been trying to combat, were the correct one, there would be no need for anything beyond familiarising the understanding with the bearings of the doctrinal truths. But Paul sees need for a great deal more. The understanding brings to the emotions that on which they fasten and feed. Faith — which is more than credence, being an act of the will — casts itself on the truth believed, or rather on the Person revealed in the truth; and love, kindled by faith, and flowing out in grateful response, and self-abandonment, are as needful as orthodox belief, in order to hold fast the health-giving words.

The exhortation applies, finally, to Character and conduct. Emotion, even when it takes the shape of faith and love, is as little the end of God's revelation as is knowledge. He makes Himself known to us in all the greatness of His grace and love in Jesus Christ, not that we may know, and there an end, nor even that knowing, we may feel, and there an end, though a great many emotional Christians seem to think that is all; but that knowing, we may feel, and knowing and feeling, we may be and do what He would have us do and be. We have the great river flowing past our doors. It is not only intended that we should fill our cisterns by knowledge, nor only bathe our parched lips by faith and love, but that we should use it to drive all the wheels of the mill of life. Not he that understands, nor he that glows, but he that does, is the man who holds fast the pattern of sound health-giving words.

The world is like that five-porched pool in which were gathered a great multitude of sick folks. Its name is the 'House of Mercy,' for so Bethesda means, tragically as the title seems to be contradicted by the condition of the cripples and diseased lying there. But this fountain once moved gushes up for ever; and whosoever will may step into it, and immediately be made whole of whatsoever

disease he has.

GOD'S STEWARDS

2 Timothy 1:14

'That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.' — 2 Timothy 1:14.

THE Apostle has just been expressing his confidence for himself that 'God is able to keep that which I have committed' unto him 'against that day.' Here, with intentional parallelism, he repeats the leading ideas and key-words of that great confidence, but in a wholly different connection. Whether we suppose that the rendering of our version in the twelfth verse is correct or no, there still remains the intentional parallelism between the two verses. In discoursing upon that twelfth verse, I gave reasons for adhering to the translation of our version and regarding the parallel as double. There are two committals. God commits something to us; we commit something to God. But whether that be so or no, there are, at all events, two keepings. God keeps, and we have to keep. And if, on the other hand, in both verses the Apostle speaks of a charge committed to men by God, then the contrasted parallel between the two keepings remains and is even increased, because then it is the same thing which God keeps and which we keep. So the whole connection between man's faithfulness and God's protection is suggested here. The true Christian life in its entirety may either be regarded as God's work or the believer's. We keep ourselves when we let God keep us, and God keeps us by making us able to keep ourselves.

I. Note then, first, our charge.

The Apostle is evidently thinking mainly of the gospel message which was entrusted to Himself and to Timothy. That is shown by the whole context. The previous verse is, 'Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.' And the same connection appears in the First Epistle to Timothy, where the same exhortation is repeated: 'Keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, which some professing have erred concerning the faith.' The same idea of the gospel as the deposit committed to the trust of Christian men lies in other words of the first epistle, where the Apostle speaks of the 'gospel of the glory of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.' And it crops up in other expressions of his, such as that he was 'put in trust of the gospel.' It also underlies the very common representation of himself and his colleagues as being 'stewards of the mysteries of God.' But all these expressions describe no prerogative of an apostle, or of a teaching office or order in the Church, but declare the solemn responsibility laid by the great gift bestowed upon all Christian men. Whosoever has accepted the message of salvation for himself is, ipso facto, put in charge of that message for carrying it to others. The trust which I place in the gospel makes the gospel a trust which is committed to me. And every believer, howsoever imperfect may be his grasp of the truth, howsoever narrow may be the sphere of his agency, has given into his hands this great charge, that the Word of God is committed to his trust.

You Christian people are responsible in this connection for two things, for the preservation of the truth and for the diffusion of the truth.

You are responsible for its preservation. Some of us, in a special manner, have it given to us in charge to oppose prevailing tendencies which rob the gospel of its glory and of its power, to try to preach it to men, whether they will hear or forbear, in its simplicity and its unwelcomeness, as well as in its sweetness and its graciousness. But for most of us, the responsibility for the preservation of the truth lies mainly in another direction, and we are bound to keep it for the food of our own souls, and to see that the atmosphere in which we live, and the prevailing tendencies around us, the worldliness, the selfishness, the absorption in the things seen to the exclusion of the things that are unseen and eternal, do not rob us of the treasure which we say that we value. See to it that you keep it as what you profess that it is, the anchor of your hope and the guide of all your lives, binding it upon the palms of your hands that all your work may be sanctified; writing it between your eyes that all your thoughts may be enlightened; and inscribing it on the posts of your doors and your gates that, whensoever you go forth to work, you may go out under its guidance, and when you come back to rest and solitude, you may bear it with you for your meditation and refreshment. The charge that is given to us is the preservation of God's Word, and the gospel which we have received we have received with this written upon it, 'Hold fast that which thou hast; let no man take thy crown.'

And then, further, all of us Christian people are responsible for the diffusion of that Word. It is given to us that we may spread it, and this is no exclusive prerogative of an apostolic class, or of an order of ministers or clergy in God's Church, but every Christian man and woman who has the Word is thereby bound to tell the Word faithfully.

And then, subordinately and connected with this, I may put another thought, that the reputation and character of our Master are committed to us to keep. People take their notions of Jesus Christ a great deal more from you than from the Bible, and the Christian Church is the true scripture which most men know best. The written revelation is often negated, or at all events neutralised, by the

representation which we Christians make of Christ. He has given into our hands His reputation, as if He said: 'Live so that men may know what sort of a Christ I am; and so set forth the spirit of life that was in Me that men may be led to believe that there is something in the truths and principles which make men like you.'

But there is a wider application legitimately to be given to the words of my text, on which I touch for a moment. The great trust which is committed to us all is ourselves; and in connection therewith we are responsible for two things — first, for the development of character; and second, for the exercise of capacity.

We are responsible for the development of character. We have to cut off and suppress, or, at least, to subordinate and regulate, a great deal within us in order that the true self may rise into sovereign majesty and power. We have to cultivate shy graces, unwelcome duties, sides of our character which are not naturally prominent. The faults that we have are not to be cured simply by the repression of them, but by the cultivation of their opposites. All this is given to us to do, and nobody can do it for us. We are stewards of many things, but the most precious gift of which we are stewards is this awful nature of ours, with possibilities that tower heaven-high, and evils that go down to the depths of hell, shut up within the narrow room of our hearts. The man who has himself put into his own hands can never want a field for diligent cultivation. And we are responsible for the use of capacities. God gives these to us that we may by exercise strengthen them. And so, brother, as a man, your natural self is your charge; as a Christian, the word which brings your 'better self, is that which is committed to you to keep.

II. Now, secondly, notice our keeping of our charge. The word rendered here 'to keep' rather means 'to guard' than to keep in the sense of preserving. 'Keeping' is the consequence of the 'guarding' which my text enjoins. We may get a picture which may help us to understand the drift of the apostolic exhortation, if I remind you of two of the uses of the word in its non-metaphorical sense in Scripture. It is the expression employed to describe the occupation of the shepherds on the upland slopes of Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. They were 'keeping watch over their flocks by night.' That is how you have to watch yourselves and the word that is committed to your care. Again, it is the word employed to describe the vigilant watchfulness of the sentry outside the prison gates where the apostles lay immured; or of the four quaternions of soldiers that had to take charge of Peter when he was chained to them. And that is how we have to watch, as the shepherd over his flock, as the sentry over the prison house, or as the guard over some treasure. So Christian men and women have to live, exercising all the care needful to prevent the stealing away some of the flock, the escape of some of the prisoners, the filching from them of some of their treasure. Let me expand the apostolic exhortation into two of three precepts.

Cultivate the sense of stewardship. It is a very hard thing for us to keep fresh the feeling that all which we are and have is given to us, and that not for ourselves, but for God. The beginning of evil is the weakening of that sense of responsibility, and the dawning of the dream that we are our own. The prodigal son's downfall began with saying, 'Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.'

And the next step came naturally after that: 'He gathered all together and went away into a far country.' And the next step came just as naturally after that: 'He wasted his substance in riotous living.'

If sense of stewardship and responsibility is weakened within us, the mainspring of all good is weakened within us, and we shall become self-willed, self-indulgent, self-asserting, God-forgetting. If we think that the talent or the pound is ours, we shall spend it for our own purposes, and that is 'waste.'

And is it not a sad commentary on the tendency of human nature to forget stewardship, and to lose the impression of responsibility, that that very word 'talents,' which is borrowed from Christ's parable, is used in common speech without the slightest sense that it suggests anything about stewardship, faithfulness, or reckoning? Let us, then, take care to cultivate the sense of responsibility.

Again, let us exercise unslumbering vigilance. A great political thinker says, 'The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.' The price of keeping the treasure that God has given us is the same. There are old legends of fabulous riches hid away in some rocky cave amongst the mountains, guarded by mythological creatures, of whom it is said that their eyes have no lids. They cannot shut them, and they never sleep. And that is what Christians need to be, with lidless, wide-opened, vigilant eyes; watching ever against the evils that are ever around us, and the robbers who are ever seeking to drag the precious deposit from our hands. Live to watch, and watch that you may live.

Then, again, familiarise yourselves with the truth which you have in charge. I am not half so much afraid that intellectual doubts and the formulated conscious disbelief of this generation will affect Christian people, as I am afraid of the unconscious drift sweeping them away before they know. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has a solemn figure in regard of this matter. He says: 'Let us take the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should drift past them.' And that is exactly what befalls Christian men and women who do not continually renew their familiarity with God's Word and the gospel to which they trust. Before they know where they are, the silent-flowing, swift stream has swept them down, and the truths to which they fancied they were anchored are almost invisible on the far horizon. For one man who loses his Christianity by yielding to the arguments of the other side there are ten who lose it by evaporation. 'As thy servant was busy here and there,' was the lame excuse of the man in the

Old Testament for letting his prisoner run away, 'he was gone!' And God knows how he has gone and Where he went.

That is true about a great many who are professing Christian people. The Word has slipped out of their hands, and they do not know how, nor exactly when it escaped from their slack fingers. If you will put plucked flowers into a glass without any water you cannot but expect them to wither; and if you will refrain from refreshing your belief and your trust by familiarity with the truths of the gospel, and by meditating upon these, you cannot wonder that they should shrivel up and lose their sweetness for you. Keep that word hid in your hearts that you sin not against Him and it.

And then, further, exercise your gifts. The very worst way to keep the talent is to keep it in a napkin. The man who buried it in the earth, and then dug it up and presented it to his lord, did not know how much weight it

had lost by rust and decay while it was hidden away. For though gold does not rust, the gold of the talent that we possess does; and the sure way to make our gifts dwindle is that we neglect to use them. It seems an odd way to keep corn, to fling it broadcast out of a basket over the fields, but 'there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.' Live your faith; let what you believe be the guide of your practice; increase your grasp upon it by meditation and by prayer, use your capacities, exercise your faculties, and they will grow, and you will be strong.

III. Lastly, note our Ally in our keeping of our charge.

'Through the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.' Then all is to be done, not in our own strength, but in the strength of the great indwelling Guest and Helper. So, then, there arise two thoughts from this.

The one is that we keep ourselves best when we give ourselves to God to keep us. The Apostle has just been doing that for himself, and he now would exhort Timothy to do the same. Our faith brings this great Ally into the field. If we commit to God what God has committed to us, then, as the patriarch, upon his dangerous and doubtful path, beheld in the heavens above him the camp of the angels hovering over his little camp, so, if we commit the keeping of ourselves and of all our responsibility in connection with God's work, to Him, we too may be sure that 'the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him,' and that He will keep us. Then there will be a fourth in the furnace like unto the Son of Man, and no fire shall consume anything but the bonds of those who, in the very fire, trust themselves to the strong hands of God. We best keep ourselves when we give ourselves to God to keep.

But another thought here is that God keeps us by enabling us to keep ourselves. 'Through the Holy Spirit that dwelleth in us' — so His protection is no mere outward wall of defence around us, nor any change of circumstances which may avert danger, but it is the putting within us of a divine life-principle which shall mould our thoughts, regulate our desires, reinforce our weakness, and be in us a power that shall preserve us from all evil. God fights for us, not in the sense of fighting instead of us, but in the sense of fighting by our sides when we fight. A faith which says, 'God will take care of me,' and does not take care of itself, is no faith, but either hypocrisy or self-deceived presumption. Faith will intensify effort instead of leading to shirk it; and the more we trust Him, the more we should ourselves work. We keep ourselves when God keeps us; God keeps us

when we keep ourselves. Both things are true, and therefore our fitting temper is the double one of self-distrusting confidence and of earnest diligence.

Dear brother, we travel on a dangerous road. We never can tell from behind what rock a gun barrel may be levelled at us, or where the highwayman may swoop down upon us to rob us of our treasure. That is no country to travel through carelessly, in loose order, with our gun upon another horse away at the back of the caravan, and we ourselves straying hither and thither gathering flowers, or seeking easy places to walk in; but it is a land in which we must be unslumberingly vigilant, and screw ourselves up to all effort. And it is a country in which we shall certainly be robbed unless we commit ourselves unto Him who alone is able to keep us from falling.

'Still let me guard the holy fire, And still stir up Thy gift in me.'

If we say, in life and in death, 'Father! into Thy hands I commit my spirit,' then we may be humbly, but not idly confident that the old promise will be fulfilled to us:

'The Lord will keep thee ever more.'

THE TRUE AIM OF LIFE — PLEASING CHRIST

2 Timothy 2:4.

'No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.' — 2 Timothy 2:4.

PAUL had enough to do to infuse some of his own vigour into the feebler nature of Timothy. If we may judge from the prevailing tone of the Apostle's letters to him, his young assistant lacked courage and energy; was easily beaten down, needed tonics for the 'often infirmities' of his mind as well as of his body. The delicate ingenuity with which this letter accumulates all conceivable encouragements for the drooping heart that was to take up the old lion-heart's nearly finished work, is very beautiful. One topic of encouragement is conspicuous by its absence. There is no rosy painting of the Christian life, or of a Christian teacher's life, as easy or pleasant to flesh and blood. On the contrary, none of Paul's letters give more emphatic utterance to the fact that suffering is the law of both.

That is wise; for the best way to brace people for difficult work and hardship is to tell them fairly what they will have to face. It will act as a filter and Gideon's test, no doubt, but it will only filter out impure matter, and it will evoke latent enthusiasm; for there is always fascination to generous natures or fervent disciples in the thought of danger and toil, undertaken for a beloved cause or favourite pursuit. Boys are made sailors by the stories of wreck and hardship told them to keep them ashore.

So Paul encourages 'son Timothy' by putting before him all the toil and the peril which are the conditions of the work to which he has set his hand. In this context we have a number of illustrations and analogies, according to all of which self-denial and persistent work are indispensable. The wrestler has not only to brace every limb in his struggle till the muscles stand out like whipcord, but he has to abide by the laws of the arena. The farmer has to exercise long patience, and to labour hard in the field and wild weather, before he can sit down and eat of the fruit of the harvest. The soldier has not only to take his life in hand, but to abandon his civil pursuits and make the pleasure of his commander the law of his life. The diligence of other people in their worldly callings may well put us to shame; and if that is not enough, our own diligence in the one half of our life may shame our laziness in the other. All fire there, and all ice here !

Ready for any sacrifice of time and pains in that, grudging every such sacrifice in this!

Our text constitutes the first of that series of illustrative metaphors, each of which adds something of its own to the general idea. In it we have a whole series of striking thoughts suggested, which can be but very imperfectly worked out in the brief space at our disposal.

I. The first thing that strikes one in the words is their grand statement of the all-comprehensive life's aim of the Christian soldier.

There is savagery and devilry enough about the soldiers' trade to make it remarkable that it should be so constantly chosen to illustrate the life of the servants of the Prince of Peace. But there are grand qualities brought out in warfare, which need but to be transferred to their most worthy object; and for the sake of these, the metaphor is used here. The one great peculiarity of military discipline is prompt, unquestioning obedience. Wheresoever inferiors may discuss their superiors' will, or reason on the limits of obedience, or allow themselves a margin of delay, all that is mutiny in the army, and short and sharp work will be made of it, if it appear. 'Their's not to reason why,' but to do what they are bid, when they are bid, as they are bid. Their only standard of duty is their commander's will, and men have been shot as mutineers for doing grand deeds of heroism contrary to orders. The highest guerdon of courage and faithfulness is the general's praise, and men have gladly flung away their lives for a smile or a 'well done' from some Alexander or Napoleon, counting the gain far greater than the price paid.

Such an attitude towards a fellow-man makes men machines, and yet there is something in that absolute obedience and out-and-out submission to authority very noble in itself, and going a long way to ennoble even warfare. To obey may be bad or good, according to the master and the service; but obedience is fitting for a man, and there can be no attainment of the highest dignity, beauty, or force of character in lawless 'self-pleasing, but only in willing submission to a law and a lawgiver, discerned by the will to be authoritative, by the conscience to be morally good, and by the heart to be love-worthy. If, then, we can find one ruler, leader, and commander of the people, whose authority is rightfully supreme, whose commands coincide with our highest wisdom and lead to our purest felicity, to obey him must lift a life into dignity. Then we have found the secret which will make little things great, and great things small; which will dignify all life, and make the most absolute service the truest freedom, the kingliest rule.

So our text lays hold of the great central peculiarity of Christian morals, when it makes pleasing Christ to be the great, all-comprehensive aim of the Christian soldier. It is this which makes the law of morality, as re-fashioned by Christianity, altogether new and blessed. How entirely different a thing it is to give a poor, feeble, solitary man a living, loving Lord to serve and to please, and to set him down before a cold, impersonal 'ideal'; and say to him, 'There! live up to that, or it will be the worse for you.' The gospel sets forth Jesus Christ as the Pattern and Law of duty, in whom all the statuesque purity of the marble is changed into the warm, breathing flesh and blood of a brother. It sets Him forth as the power for duty, who stoops down from His height to reach forth a helping hand to us poor strugglers in the bogs at the mountain's foot, while Law but looks on with pure and icy eyes at our flounderings, and counts the splashes on our dress. It sets Him forth as the Motive for duty, who draws us to what is right by 'the cords of love and the bands of a man,' while the world's morality knows only how to appeal either to low motives of whips and pay,

or to fine-spun considerations of right and obligation that melt like October's morning ice before the faintest heat of temptation. Finally, it sets Him forth as the Reward of obedience, teaching us that the true recompense of well-doing lies in pleasing Him, and that to win a smile, an 'honourable mention,' from the General, life itself would be wisely paid.

Such are the great characteristics of Christian morality. Everything clusters round a living Person. All the coldness and remoteness and powerlessness which incurably weaken all law, whether it be that of a statute-book, or of conscience, or of moralists, are changed into their very opposites. Christ is duty; Love is law. Christ is power; Christ is impulse. Christ is motive; Christ is reward. Therefore the hearts and wills that found no attraction, nor owned any constraining authority in any tables of stone or any voice of conscience or any systems of ethics, yield glad obedience to Him who makes His law love; and feeble hands are strengthened to do His will by His own power breathed into them; and the hope of recompense is freed from selfishness when its highest object is His word of praise and His look of pleasure? This, and this alone, is the morality that will work. This is the new thing in Christianity, not so much the contents of the conception of duty, though even these have been changed, but the new form in which Duty appears, in a Person who being what all men should be, is the new power for its fulfilment which He brings, and the new motive whose touch moves all our conduct.

How much more powerful this thought of pleasing Christ is, as a motive, than that of a bare Theism, needs scarcely be named. 'Thou, God, seest me' grandly restraining and stimulating as it is, may easily become a trembling before 'the great Taskmaster's eye,' or may fade into a very dim thought of a very far-off God. But when we think that the divine eye which rests upon us wept over the sinful city, and sought the denier with the look of sorrowing reproach, untarnished by one glitter of anger, we need not fear His knowledge, nor doubt that He is as near to each of us, as glad at our obedience, and as grieved by our hardness of heart, as ever He was to the little group that lived on His smile long ago. It is no remote God whom we have to please, but our very Brother, the Captain of the Lord's host, who knows all the conditions of the fight.

The thought implies the reality of Christ's present knowledge of each of us. Who, then, is this, who is supposed to know so accurately the true characters — not only the actions, but the motives which determine the worth of the actions — of men in every age and country to the world's end? Who can exercise such an office, and be the centre of such observance, but One only? This must be God manifest in the flesh. Else it is stark nonsense for people, nineteen centuries after His death, to think of pleasing Him; and it is blasphemy worse than nonsense, to set aside all other law and commandments in order to take our duty from His life, and our reward from His approbation. But when we see in Christ the Word made flesh, then it is reasonable to believe that He knoweth the hearts of all men, and reasonable to 'labour that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him.'

Such singleness of aim contributes in many ways to make life blessed and noble. It simplifies motives and aims, because, instead of being dragged hither and thither by smaller attractions, and so having our days broken up into fragments, we have one great object which can be pursued through all the variety of our occupations, making them all co-operant to one end — and there is blessedness in that. It lifts us above many temptations, which cease to be temptations to a heart intent on pleasing Christ, as glacial plants and animals fled to the north when cosmic changes put an end to the ice age in England. It delivers from care for men's judgment, for the opinion of the crowd matters very little to the soldier whose fame is to be praised by his commander. It gives energy for work, and turns hard, dry duty into a joy, for it is ever blessed to toil for One we love, and the work that is done with love for its motive, and with the hope of giving Him pleasure for its inspiration, will not be wearisome, though it may be long; nor grievous, though it may be hard. Freedom and dignity, and happiness and buoyancy, all flow from this one transfiguring thought, that the one all-sufficient aim for life is — pleasing Christ, the Captain of the Lord's host.

II. But our text employs a significant form of speech to designate Jesus Christ: 'Him who hath called him to be a soldier'; or as the Revised Version has it, 'enrolled him as a soldier.'

And that phrase is used, I suppose, instead of the simple name, in order to bring out the reference to the great act of Christ's, on which the duty of making His pleasure our sovereign aim rests.

In old-world times when war broke out each chief would summon his clansmen to his standard and enrol them as his force. To raise a troop was the act of the leader, who then took command of the men he had raised, and did so because he had raised them. Christ has enrolled us as His soldiers, and because He has done so, he has the right of command.

Now, while there are many ways by which our Lord summons us to His service, we shall, I think, be true to the usual current of New Testament representations, if we see here mainly a reference to the great act by which He draws us to Himself. The fiery cross used to be the signal which summoned the tribesmen to the fray. So Christ's men are summoned by the Cross. His great work for us, His life of sympathy and sorrow, His death of sacrifice and shame, His resurrection of glory — these are the call which He sends out to all the world, to gather loving souls to His side whom He may honour by using as His servants and soldiers. The Cross is the magnet by which He will 'draw all men unto Him'; or in other words, the one power which will draw men away from a life of self and sin, and hearten them to fight against the evils in themselves and the world which they used to serve, is the fact of Christ's death, believed and rested on. This, and this alone, changes our tastes and makes us deserters from our old colours, to take service under a new

Commander. That mighty and unspeakable proof of Love will bend our hearts to obedience when nothing else will, and the voice of endless pity for us, and awful suffering for our sake, which sounds out from Christ on the Cross, is His heart-reaching call to us all to enlist in His service. The message of the Cross is not only a message of forgiveness

and blessedness for ourselves, but it is as a trumpet-note of defiance to all the powers of evil, and a call to us to take our part in the fight, which in one aspect was finished when He overcame by death, but in another will last till that far-off future day when He that is called King of kings shall ride forth, followed by all the armies of those who on earth were his soldiers, to fight the last fight, and win the final victory.

He has given Himself wholly for us, therefore He has absolute right of authority over us. Not merely because of His divine nature, not merely because, as we believe, He has been from the beginning the divine agent of all creation and of all providence, but because of His great love and of His utter and bitter sacrifice for us men, does He possess the right to their absolute obedience. His dominion is a dominion founded on suffering; the many crowns are twined round the crown of thorns, as the iron crown of Monza has for foundation a bit of iron said to be a nail of the cross beaten into a circlet, and covered now with gold and jewels. Nothing but entire self-surrender for us can warrant entire authority over us, and only He who tasted death for every man has the right to assume the captainship over men. He gave Himself for us, therefore are we to give ourselves to Him. He dies for us, and then living, turns to us with, 'Will you not serve Me?' We owe Him lives, souls — all. They are ours by the purchase of His exceeding bitter pains and death. Surely we shall not refuse His summons to service, which is also a merciful invitation to joy and blessing, but yield ourselves to the attraction of His cross and the magic of His love. Let Him take the command of your lives, and give Him all the secret springs of nature and desire to control. He has called you to be His soldiers, and your plain duty is to please Him. 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,' and most chiefly by that chiefest mercy, the sacrifice of Christ, 'that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God.'

III. Finally, the text brings prominently forward the discipline of abstinence which this warfare requires.

In Paul's time there were no standing armies, but men were summoned from their ordinary avocations and sent into the field. When the hasty call went forth, the plough was left in the furrow, and the web in the loom; the bridegroom hurried from his bride, and the mourner from the bier. All home industries were paralysed while the manhood of the nation were in the field. That state of things suggests the language here. The word rendered 'that warreth' might be more vividly translated, as the Revised

Version has it, 'on service' — the idea being that as long as a man is on a campaign, he can do nothing else but soldiering. When peace is proclaimed, he may go back to farm or merchandise; but in the field, he has but one thing to do — and that is to fight, He will scarcely win the general's good word on other things.

What, then, is the corresponding Christian duty? Of course our text, though originally spoken in reference to Christian teachers' devotion to their work, is not to be confined to them. The sort of work which a Timothy or a Paul may have to do may be peculiar to their offices, but the spirit in which it is to be done, and the conditions of faithfulness, are the same for all doers of all sorts of work for Christ. If the apostle and the teacher need non-entanglement 'with the affairs of this life,' all Christians need it just as much.

Now it is to be noticed that the parallel of the soldier on service and the Christian in his warfare fails in this one respect: that the soldier had to abandon entirely all other occupation, even the most needful and praiseworthy, because he could not both do them and fight; but the abandonment of the affairs of this life is not necessary for us, because occupation with them is not incompatible with our Christian warfare. Nay, so far from that, these 'affairs' furnish the very fields on which a large part of that warfare to be waged. If these are abandoned, what is left to fight about? What is our Christian warfare but the constant struggle with evil in ourselves and temptation in the world; the constant effort to bring all the activities of our spirits and hands under the power of Christ's law, and to yield our whole selves, in heart, mind, will, and deed, to Him? How then can that warfare be waged, and that ennobling self-surrender achieved, but by the heroic, patient effort to deal with all the affairs of this life in a Christ-like temper, and to Christ-pleasing ends? The Christian who abandons any of these is much liker the frightened deserter who runs from his post, and may expect a stern rebuke, if nothing worse, than the faithful soldier, whose face will one day brighten beneath the smile of his chief.

We must put stress on that word 'entangled,' if we would rightly understand this saying. It is not occupation with the things of life, but entanglement in them, that is fatal to the possibility of pleasing the King. The metaphor is plain enough, and vivid enough. As some poor struggling fish in the meshes of a net vainly beats its silver scales off, and gasps out its life, and swims no more in the free deep; or as some panting forest creature is checked in its joyous bounding, and, tangled in the half-seen snares, only tightens the cords by its wild plunging; or as some strong swimmer is caught in the long, brown seaweed which clings to his limbs till it drags him under and drowns; so men are snared and caught and strangled by these multitudinous cords and filaments of earthly things. The fate of Jonah befell, many a professing Christian, who, if he know what had really come to him, might cry with him, 'The weeds are wrapped about my head.'

We are not bound to abandon the affairs of this life, but we are called upon to prevent their interfering with our warfare. If we are

caught in the thicket whilst we are pressing on to the fight, out with the billhooks and hew it down. It may be full of pretty peeps, where there are shade and singing-birds; but if it stands in our way, it has to be grubbed up. 'If thy right eye cause thee to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for thee.'

And that interference can easily be detected, if we honestly wish to do so. Does a certain thing — some legitimate, or even praiseworthy occupation, or possession, the exercise of some taste or accomplishment, some recreation, some companionship-clog my feet when I ought to march; clip my wings when I ought to soar; dim my eyes when I ought to gaze on God? Then no matter what others may do about it, my plain duty is to give it up. It is entangling me. It is interfering with my warfare, and I must cut the cords. I can only do so by entire abstinence. Perhaps I may get stronger some day, and be able to use it as not abusing it; but I cannot venture on that at present. So go it must. I judge nobody else, but whoever may be able to retain that thing, whatever it be, without slackening hold on Christ, I cannot.

So, brethren, if you find that legitimate occupation and affairs are absorbing your interests, and interfering with your clear vision of God, and making you less inclined and less apt to high thoughts and noble purposes, to lowly service and to Christ-like life, your safety lies in at once shaking off the venomous beast that has fastened on you into the fire. Unless the occupation be a plain duty, a post where the Captain has set you as sentry, and which it would be fiat disobedience to forsake, leave it at any cost, if you would keep your Christian integrity.

But if you have to stand to your post, perilous though it be, lift your heart to Him who can neutralise the poison, and who will so pour health into the veins of His servants, that, in the execution of His commands, 'they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.'

The affairs of this life must not entangle us; that is the one indispensable condition to pleasing Him. That they may not, they must always be rigidly subordinated, and used as helps to our higher life. Sometimes, when they cannot be so used, they must be abandoned altogether. Each must settle that for himself. Only let us make it our one great purpose in life that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him; and that single, lofty motive will breathe unity into our life, and giving us clear, sure insight into good and evil, will instruct us, by the instinct of hearts and wills tuned to harmony to His, to shun the evil and cleave strenuously to the good. So living, ever looking to His face to catch His smile as our highest reward, it will not be hard to give up anything that hinders the light of His countenance shining upon us. So surrendering, we may hope to be His obedient, and therefore in highest reality, His victorious soldiers. So fighting, we may possess in our hearts the assurance that His wonderful mercy accepts even our poor service as well-pleasing in His sight, and may lay ourselves How, in peace on the field where we seem to ourselves to have berne ourselves so badly and been so often beaten, with the wondrous hope to keep us company in the grave, that when the triumph comes, and our King goes up as conqueror, we, even we, shall follow, and receive from His lips the praise, and from His face the smile, which make the highest heaven of reward for all Christ's soldiers.

A FAITHFUL GOD

2 Timothy 2:13.

'He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself.' — 2 Timothy 2:13.

I HAVE chosen this text, not as intending to deal with it only, so much as with the great thought to which it gives such emphatic expression. The faithfulness of God is a familiar enough phrase, but I suspect that the depth and scope of the thought are not as familiar as the words. It is employed in Scripture in many ways, and with many different applications of exhortation and encouragement. Like a prism held at right angles to the light, the thought flashes out different tints according as the rays impinge upon it. It is a favourite with Paul He speaks it in his very first letter, and here, in his last, after a lifetime spent in testing God, he comes back to it. He had proved it in a thousand dangers and struggles, and now, when he has all but done with earth, he' sets to his seal that God is true. But all the other New Testament writers employ the expression likewise, and I have thought that it may be profitable to gather together the various aspects and applications of this great truth in Scripture, and so to draw out, if we may, some of .the lofty thoughts and treasures of strength and hope which are shrined in it.

I. Let me ask the question what the faithfulness of God means. Now when we speak of one another as 'faithful,' we mean that we adhere to our word; that we keep faith with men, that we discharge the obligations of our office or position, and that so we are trustworthy. We mean just the same things when we speak about the faithful God.

I suppose that the first thought that occurs to most of us when God is called faithful is that it means that He keeps His promise. That, of course, is included in the idea, but it is very noteworthy that this, which to most of us is the only meaning of the expression, is rarely its meaning in the New Testament. Out of all the cases in which the phrase occurs it only twice has reference to God's fulfilment of His spoken words; and these two instances both occur in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we read: 'He is faithful that

promised,' and 'She judged Him faithful that promised.' Now it is a great truth that out of the darkness God has spoken; that, like some constitutional monarch, He has declared the principles of His government, and so has bound Himself by articulate expressions to follow out these in His dealings. He is not a despot; He is a King who has laid down the law to which He Himself will adhere. His promises hang out over the troubled stream of life, like boughs from the trees on the bank, for His half-drowned children to grasp at and to hold by.

But great as that thought of our God's fulfilment of His every word is, it does not go half way down to the depths of meaning in the New Testament use of the expression 'the faithful God.' For my text witnesses to a deeper meaning. He cannot deny Himself.' That is Paul's notion of the faithfulness of God; that His nature and character constitute for Him, if I may so say, a solemn obligation; that He is His own law; that He is bound by what He is, and that He never can be, in the smallest degree, anything contradictory to, or falling beneath, the level of His own equable, consistent, and uniform Self. As God, He must be true to the character of goodness and wisdom which the very name of God brings with it. We drop below our best selves; contradictory impulses and thoughts fight in our nature; the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. No man is always himself; God is always Himself. We are like the little brooks that are dried in drought and swelled in spate, are parched in summer and frozen in winter, but this great river is always bank-full, and always clear and always flowing. This ocean is tideless and has no ebb or flood; and you can look down into its deepest depths, and as far as the vision of the eye can go, all is clear and pure, and where vision fails, it is not that the ocean is dark but that the sense is limited. So John says, in his infantile-angelic way, with a simplicity that is sublime, 'God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' The sun has spots; it has, as astronomers tell us, a photosphere, an envelope that gives light, but possibly its core is black and dark. But that is not so with the true Light. 'God is faithful; He cannot deny Himself.'

Then there is another deep thought in the word which is recurrent in the various applications of the expression throughout the New Testament — that God's faithfulness implies that He is true, not only to His words, not only to Himself, but also to the trend and drift, so to speak, of His past acts. That thought is applied in the New Testament in two different ways. Peter says to the troubled disciples to whom he was writing, 'Commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.' The fact of having made creatures binds God to certain obligations in regard to them, and He will discharge them. The other application of the idea of God's faithfulness is in reference to His past acts bearing on man's redemption. We find verses like these: 'Faithful is He that calleth you';

'God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son; The thought there is that, by the fact of His redeeming work, God has come under certain obligations to the persons who yield to the invitation that is wrapped up in the message and gifts of Christ and of Christ's Spirit, and that He will faithfully discharge these.

II. Now, then, carry these three simple thoughts with you — faithful to His word, faithful to Himself, faithful to His past-and let us ask, in the second place, what does this faithfulness guarantee?

What does His faithfulness as Creator guarantee to the creature whom He has made?

It guarantees, first, that the faithful Creator will care for His creature's well-being. Creation is not merely a work of power, nor merely a necessary process, as some people seem to think. It is the outcome of the love of God, and so the wise psalmist says, 'To Him that made great lights; for His mercy endureth for ever.' He came forth, and poured Himself, as it were, into beings because His name is Love, and having thus created, He recognises the obligations under which He has thereby come. The smallest microscopic animal, because it has the mysterious gift of life, has a claim on God; and He is bound — I was going to say to do His utmost, but all that He does is His utmost — to care for that creature's well-being. The birds lay their eggs, and hatch their young, and then let these go as they will. Men sometimes forget the duties of parents and the responsibilities that are involved therein; but God the Creator lets us plead His faithfulness with Him, and turn round to Him and say, 'Thou hast made me; therefore-I bring in 'my hand Thine own bill, with Thine own name to it. Pay it, O God!' 'Commit the keeping of your souls to Him as to a faithful Creator.'

Especially does this conception of His faithfulness to His past in creation guarantee to us that all desires implanted by Him will be satisfied, and all needs created by Him will be supplied. Our wishes, when they are right, are prophecies of our possessions. God has put no craving in a man's heart which He does not mean to fill. Remember the homely old proverb: 'He never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them.' And if in thy heart there are longings which thou knowest are not sinful, be sure that these are veiled prophets of a divine gift. All these necessities of ours, all these hungry desires, all these sometimes painful thirsts of the soul that we try to slake at muddy and broken cisterns — all these are meant to take us straight to God. They are like the long indentations of the coast on our western shores, openings by which the flashing waters may run far inland and bathe the roots of the everlasting hills. So when God gives us a desire, He binds Himself to fulfil it. The world is a bewildering and unanswerable riddle and mystery, and human life is one long misery, unless we believe and know that because He is the faithful Creator no man need hunger with a ravening desire after food that is not provided, nor need any man thirst with a thirst that there is no water anywhere to slake.

Again, his great thought of the divine faithfulness as Creator guarantees that our tasks shall be proportioned to our strength. So Paul uses the thought in one tender sentence, when he says 'God is faithful; who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.' Or as the psalmist has it in his sweet words, 'He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.' Nothing above our power

will ever be laid upon us. Careless and cruel drivers load their horses beyond their strength, and the patient drudge pulls until it drops. Unwise engineers put too much pressure on their boilers, or try to get too much work out of their engine. But God knows how much pressure the hearts that He makes can stand, and what is the utmost weight of the load that we can lift; and He will not be less merciful and faithful to His creatures than is the merciful man to his Beast. He is the faithful Creator who recognises His obligations to care for the works of His own hands, who will satisfy their desires, and supply the needs that He has made, who will shape their burdens according to the strength of their shoulders.

And if we turn to the other side of the thought, and ask what is guaranteed by God's calling of us in Christ Jesus, then we get three answers.

The first thing that is guaranteed is forgiveness. The Apostle John, in words that are often misunderstood, grasps the thought of God's faithfulness in this application when he says, 'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Since Christ has come, and has died in order that men might be pardoned and cleansed, God's faithfulness is implicated in God's pardoning mercy; and He would neither be faithful to His promises, nor to His past act in Christ's mission, nor to the invitation and call that He has sounded in our ears, unless, when we obeyed that call, we entered into the full possession of His pardoning grace. So the gentle, tender attribute of Mercy becomes solemn, and stately, and eternal, when it is regarded as the outcome of His faithfulness. In some tropical forests you will find strong tree-trunks out of which spring the most radiant and ethereal-looking blossoms. So the fair flower of forgiving mercy springs from the steadfast bole of the divine faithfulness. He is 'Just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus'

Again, God's faithfulness guarantees the progressive perfecting of Christian character. That is the application of the thought which is most frequent in Paul's letters. We find it, for instance, in the passage where the prayer that the saints in Thessalonica might be 'preserved, body, soul, and spirit, blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus,' is, by the Apostle, based on the words 'faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.' And a similar collocation of ideas is found in other passages, which I need not quote to you now. The progressive perfecting of the Christian life is guaranteed by the thought of the faithfulness of God. He does not begin a work and then get disgusted with it, or turn to something else, or find that His resources will not avail to work it out to completion-That is how we do. He never stops till He ends. As the prophet says about another matter, 'His hands have laid the foundation of the house; His hands shall also finish

it.'

I remember a place on our coasts where some man, who had not calculated his resources, nor the strength of the ocean, began to build a breakwater' and sea-walls, and to-day the blocks of dislodged concrete are lying in wild confusion on the beach, and the victorious waves break over them at every tide, and laugh at the abortive design. None that look on God's work will ever have the right to say, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' There are no half-completed failures in God's workshop. Only you have to keep yourself under His influences. It is useless to talk about the 'final perseverance of the saints,' unless you remember that only they who continuously yield themselves to God are continuously the subjects of His cleansing and hallowing grace, If they do, the progressive perfecting of those upon whom He has begun to work is sure. Like some patient artist, He lays touch upon touch on the canvas, or smites piece after piece off the marble, till the ideal is realised, and stands there before Him. Like some patient seamstress, He works needful after needful of varying colours of silk on the tapestry, until the whole pattern is accomplished. 'He is faithful; He also will do it.'

But again, that conception of the divine faithfulness guarantees ultimate blessedness. That thought is always taken in connection with the preceding one, in the various passages to which reference has just been made. Paul

says in another place, basing his assurance on the same thought of the divine faithfulness; 'He will confirm you unto the day of the Lord Jesus.' And so we have to think that just because God is faithful, therefore the Christian life here on earth, because it is so much and because it is so little, because of its devotion and because of its selfishness, bears in itself the prophecy of a time when all that is here checked tendency shall become triumphant realisation; and when the plant that here was an exotic, and did put forth buds, though poor and pale compared with what it would give in its natural soil, shall be transplanted into the higher house, and there shall blossom for evermore. God is a liar unless heaven is to complete the experiences of earth. If these poor natures of ours at their best here were all that Christ had won by the travail of His soul, do you think He would be satisfied? Certainly not. We need heaven to vindicate the faithfulness of God.

III. And now one word is all that I can spare on what I meant to make the last point of my sermon, and that is, what attitude in us corresponds to the faithfulness of God?

I need only quote one of the expressions in the Epistle to the Hebrews to give the answer, 'Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, for He is faithful that promised.' Our faith corresponds with and is the answer to God's faithfulness. As with two instruments tuned to the same pitch, when a note is struck on the one, the chords of the other vibrate it back again, so God's

faithfulness should awake the music of answering faith in our responsive and vibrating hearts. If He is worth trusting let us trust Him.

But, further, unwavering faith is the only thing that truly corresponds to unchanging faithfulness. Build rock upon rock, and since He is faithful, do not answer his steadfast faithfulness with a tremulous and vacillating confidence. What would you think of a man that had given to him some magnificent site on which to rear a fortress; some impregnable crag which he might crown with a sure defence; if, on the top of it, instead of rearing granite walls that might match their foundation, he should run up some hasty shelter of lath and plaster, or of fluttering canvas, and so think that he had adorned, when he had insulted the rock on which he built. Make your faith to match God's faithfulness, and 'commit the keeping of your souls to Him in welldoing, as unto a faithful Creator, leaving all things in His hands, and trusting them absolutely unto Him.

Imitate the faithfulness in such fashion as you may. Paul in one place says, 'As God is faithful, our word to you was not yea and nay.' It does not become a man who is trusting to the faithful God to be shifty and unreliable in his own utterances and manifestations to men.

Let us turn away from the illusions of vain hope, from all doubtful refuges, from all the fleeting defences and treasures that earth can give. Why should we build upon a sandbank when we can build on the Rock of Ages? Why should we trust mere wealth, creaturely love, success, to do for us what only the faithful God can do? All these deceive or betray or fail or pass. They are unworthy of trust. 'God is faithful'; Christ is 'the faithful and true witness.' 'This is the faithful saying... that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' If we will join ourselves to the faithful God and accept the faithful saying of His faithful witness, our hearts will be calm, our lives will be steadied, we shall be delivered from the misery of leaning on props which, like rotten branches, break beneath our weight. On earth we shall attain growing completeness, and shall pass thence to that per-letting in the day of the Lord Jesus which the faithful God, by His words, by His great redeeming act, and by His present workings on us, has bound Himself to give us. There we may hope to hear the wondrous welcome, which points to our assimilation to Him in whom we trust: 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'