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THE FOUNDATION AND THE SEAL

2 Timothy 2:19

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' — 2 Timothy 2:19.

THERE was a great deal in the Apostle Paul's last days to excuse despondency and sadness. For himself he was poor, and a prisoner, lonely and old, looking forward to the near approach of a bloody death. For the gospel and the Church the outlook was black too. Evil had already begun to lift its head, and was threatening to increase. So this, his last letter, is full of gloomy vaticinations, but in it there is none of the pessimism that belongs to old people, none of the despondency which so often seizes upon leaders of thought and action when they come to the end of their lives, and see how little they have done, and how threateningly the clouds are gathering. But throughout, side by side with the clearest perception of evil symptoms and growing dangers, there is unconquerable confidence.

This text is a remarkable illustration of that. He has just been speaking about errors that are threatening to flood the Church, and he speaks with very grave and vehement words. And then all at once with this 'nevertheless' he, as it were, swings right round, and his whole soul leaps up in the glad confidence that, whatever may happen, and whatever has to be abandoned, and whoever may go away, 'the foundation of God stands sure.' So he heartens up his young brother Timothy, who seems to have been of a great deal softer stuff than the old man, and bids him be of good cheer and quit himself like a man.

The words of my text, then, seem to me to be very precious to us in regard to the widest interests of Christianity, and in regard to our own individual standing, especially in times like those in which our lot is cast; times of transition, when a great deal is going that past generations used to think sacred, and a great many timid people are trembling for the Ark of God; and a great many old people like me are thinking that the old gospel is in danger of passing away from the face of the earth. 'Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure.' So let me just say a word or two about this text.

I. Look at this joyous confidence of the old man, side by side with the clearest perceptions of encircling dangers.

The 'foundation,' in the New Testament, is generally Jesus Christ Himself. Here the metaphor is used in a somewhat different fashion. The 'foundation' in the present case is not a part of a building, but the whole building, conceived of as being founded by God. 'The foundation of God' is, in other words, that which is founded by God — that is to say, the whole house, whatever that may be, which he himself has 'established on the tops of the mountains.' And you will find that that explanation is borne out by the fact that in the very next verse the Apostle speaks about 'the house,' which he also meant when he spoke of the foundation of God. Of course that 'house' is, in one aspect, the Church, but the Church not as a mere institution or external organisation, but as being the witness to the gospel. It is that, and the Christ who is the gospel, which stands firm, whatever may happen. There is a great deal of idolatry of the Church. What makes it precious, and what makes it eternal, is the message that is committed to its charge.

Now it seems to me to be of very prime importance that this joyous confidence, calm and assured, should be the habitual temper of us all. The more distinctly and clearly we apprehend, and the more painfully we feel the perils, the imperfections, and the threatening errors of the present, the more should we take our stand upon this one truth, that what God has founded is indestructible, and, standing there, we may look all round the three hundred and sixty degrees of the horizon, and no matter what formidable dangers may arise, and hurry across, darkening the sea like the thunder-clouds in the heavens, we may be sure that no tempest can break which will damage the ship that carries Christ and His fortunes. Man may go, 'nevertheless'; errors may arise, 'nevertheless'; Churches, individuals, may become unfaithful, 'nevertheless'; candlesticks may be removed, lights quenched, communities may be honeycombed by worldliness, if the salt may lose its savour, 'nevertheless that which is founded by God stands sure.' The history of the past tells us that. Why, it is the miracle of miracles that Christian people having been what they have been, and being what they are, the Church of God has not been annihilated long, long ago. Why is it? Only because that which it bears and He who is in it are indestructible, and whilst the envelope may be changed, the central Truth and the living Person who is in the Church, in spite of all its corruptions and infirmities, cannot die, nor be suppressed nor removed.

So, brethren, standing firmly as we may upon this rock of a Church indestructible, because of the immortal Christ who is in it and the eternal

gospel which is committed to it, it does not become us to have our hearts in our mouths at every change that may be passing, and that must necessarily pass, upon the external organisation, which is subject, like other institutions, to time and change. What can go, let it go. It is the dead leaves that are blown off the trees. Men make breakwaters with endless pains, and deposit great blocks of concrete that they think will fling back the wildest waves in vain spray, and a winter storm comes, and one wave puts out its tongue and licks up the whole structure, and it is a mass of ruins. Yes; and the same storm that smashed the breakwater runs up harmlessly on the humble sand which God has made to be His breakwater, and which has the power to say to the wildest tempest: 'Here shall thy proud waves be stayed.' Much may go, 'nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure.' So do not be frightened out of your wits — that is to say, out of your confidence — by 'higher criticism' and 'advanced views,' and right-hand defections and left-hand corruptions, and the failures of communities that call themselves churches to live up to the height of their responsibilities, or at the approach of new ways of looking at old truths. And do not fancy that because the cart that carries the ark jogs, and the oxen stumble, there is any harm coming to the ark. 'The foundation of God standeth sure.' So let us welcome change of all that is human in the doctrine, and polity, and practice of God's Church, and never mind what becomes of men-made creeds, and men-made ceremonies, and men-made churches. What is of God will stand. Let us be glad when 'the things that can be shaken' are 'removed,' that 'the things which cannot be shaken' may stand all the more firmly.

II. Notice here the divine side of the guarantee of this confidence.

'The firm foundation of God stands'; and then the Apostle goes on, in a very picturesque fashion, 'having this seal.' That is a mixture of metaphors which makes a rhetorician's hair stand on end. Paul does not mind about mingling metaphors. You cannot very well seal a foundation, but the idea in his mind is that of the confirmation, the guarantee, the pledge of the confidence that he has just been expressing. He goes on to expand the metaphor. The seal has two inscriptions on it, like the obverse and reverse of a coin, or like two sentences which might be written on the two lintels of a door. The one gives the divine and the other the human sides of the guarantee.

As for the former, the divine, it is, 'The Lord knoweth them that are His.' 'The Lord' here is, I take it, Christ. And what is the guarantee that is contained in these words? If you seek for the explanation of that phrase in its deepest, most blessed, most courage-giving sense, listen to diviner words than Paul's. 'I know My sheep, and am known of Mine, as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the

Father.' That knowledge is not the mere divine attribute of omniscience, which may have in it consolation, or may not, but it is something far more tender, close, gracious, and strength-giving than the bare thought of an all-seeing eye. The 'knowledge' which Jesus has of His sheep is a knowledge based upon, and perfected in, closest love and tenderest sympathy, and of which that ineffable communion from the depths of eternity, in which the Father knoweth the Son, and the Son knoweth the Father, and the two knowledges intertwine and interflow into one sacred, and, to us, inconceivable bond, is the example. Thus close, though we cannot say so close; thus tender, though we cannot say so tender; thus loving, though we cannot say so loving, is the bond of that knowledge which unites Jesus Christ to every soul that belongs to Him. And with that guarantee of a knowledge which means the closest union that is possible, the individuality of the two united persons being preserved, surely there comes, floated, as it were, like some precious treasure in a cedar ark upon the surface of that ocean of divine knowledge, the assurance that such a knowledge will guard against all evil and all danger its peaceful and happy objects. If the Lord thus 'knows them that are His,' the knowledge will be a wall of fire round about them, as well as a glory in the midst of them.

That knowledge means, then, protection and care. He will not lose what belongs to Him. He is not such a careless Owner as that a sheep may stray out of the fold and the Shepherd never notice it. He is not such a careless Householder as that from His purse there may drop, and into some dusty corner may roll away, a coin, and He not know that He has lost one of the pieces. He is not such a heartless Brother as that the younger brother may go away into the far-off land and there be starving, and the Brother's heart at home have no pangs and no sense of separation. But He 'knows them that are His,' and, knowing them, He holds them with the grip of tenacious possession as well as of tender love.

So there is the deep, the sure, the divine guarantee that the foundation standeth firm. So, brethren, it is wise for us to look at the dangers, to be fully aware of the perils, to be tremblingly conscious of our own weakness,

but it is folly and faithlessness to look at the danger so exclusively, or to feel our own weakness so keenly as that either one or the other, or both of them combined, shall obscure to our sight the far greater and confidence-giving truth of the knowledge, the sympathy, and the extended protecting hand, of our Brother and our Lord. We belong to Him if we have yielded our hearts to Him, and He will not 'suffer His Holy One to see corruption,' here or hereafter. If you look down from the narrow ledge of the Alpine arête to the thousand feet of precipice on either side of the two or three inches where you have your footing you will get giddy and fall. If you look up you will walk steadily. Do not ignore the danger, nor presumptuously forget your own weakness, but remember 'when I said my foot slippeth Thy mercy held me up.' Recognise the slippery ice and the feeble foot, and couple with them the other thought, 'The Lord knoweth them that are

His.'

III. Now, lastly, here we have the human side of the guarantee.

The reverse of the coin, the other side of the foundation bears, deep-cut, this inscription: 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity,' and the two inscriptions are always to be held together. Look how they fit one another. The one is a promise; the other is a commandment. The one says a deep thing about God; the other says a plain thing about us. It is of no use going up into the heights of 'the Lord knoweth them that are His,' unless you also come down to the simple teaching, 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' The Jews believed the first of these two inscriptions, and it was all their religion; look what wild work it made of them and their morality, and their whole nation. There have been plenty of Christian people who have been so absorbed in the contemplation of 'unconditional election,' 'eternal predestination,' 'final perseverance,' and all the rest of the theological formularies that have been spun out of these words, that they have forgotten the other side altogether. And so there has been licence, and a presumptuous building upon a supposed past; there has been a contempt for the 'outsiders,' and the driving of a coach and six through the plainest teachings of common righteousness and morality. And the only way to keep 'the Lord knoweth them that are His' from being a minister of sin is, in the same breath, to say, 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'

To name the Name of Christ is the same as to say that you are His. And if you are, the best proof that you do belong to Jesus Christ is your living the life of plain, practical righteousness, and putting away from yourself everything that is evil. People talk about looking into themselves for evidences of their being 'saved,' as they say. I would rather take your neighbour's opinion as to whether you are saved or not than yours; and you will be far more likely to come to the possession of calm assurance that you do belong to Jesus Christ, if your assurance is based upon this, 'I am living as He would have me to do.' That is the infallible sign that you are His. That homely, pedestrian righteousness, down amongst the commonplaces of daily life, and the little things of it, that, and not emotions, however soaring; not aspirations, however ardent; not the consciousness of communion apart, however deep and sweet, is the sign that we are Christ's. However necessary all these things are, still they are necessary mainly as means to an end, and the end of all the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and of all these joys and experiences of the individual Christian soul, is to make us live righteously, soberly, godly, in this present world. And the more we do thus live, the more we shall get, not only the consciousness of belonging to Jesus Christ, but the help by which we shall be able to stand.

So, dear brethren, my one last word to you is, hold these two things ever together in your minds and thoughts. 'What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.' You have a right to be confident, because, far deeper than, and prior to, anything that you do, there are the knowledge, the love, the sympathy, and the outstretched hand of the loving and upholding Saviour. But you have only the right to the confidence based upon his knowledge of you, if that confidence is working in you a departing from iniquity. If you know that you are trying, in your poor way, to do that, and that you are trying to do it for His sake, and because you think that you are His, then, whatever may happen to others, whatever may befall some of the outworks of your faith or belief, whatever changes may impend, you may be sure of this, that 'the foundation of God standeth sure,' and that, weak as we are, building upon Him who is the foundation, we shall be able to resist all the assaults of evil

Only remember, that Christ Himself has told us that many would come to Him and say, 'Lord! Lord! have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?' And He will say unto them,

'Depart from Me, I never knew you,' and the proof that He never did is that He has to address them as 'Ye that work iniquity'

THE GREAT HOUSE AND ITS VESSELS

2 Timothy 2:20, 21

'But In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. 21. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.' — 2 Timothy 2:20, 21

OUR text begins with a 'but.' It, therefore, suggests something which may seem to contradict or to modify what has gone before. The Apostle has been speaking about what he calls the 'foundation of God,' or the building founded by God, whereby he means the Church. He has been expressing triumphant confidence that, as thus founded, it is indestructible, whatever dangers may threaten or defections may weaken it. But the very contemplation of that grand ideal suggests darker thoughts. He carries on his metaphor, for the 'great house' is suggested by 'the foundation of God,' and yet the two things do not refer to precisely the same object. The building founded by God which stands fast, whatever happens, is what we call in our abstract way, the 'invisible Church,' the ideal community or aggregate of all who are truly joined to Jesus Christ. The great house is what we call the visible Church, the organisation, institution, or institutions comprising those who profess to be thus joined. The one is indestructible, as founded by God; the other is not, being made by men, and composed of heterogeneous elements.

This heterogeneousness of its elements is suggested by the further metaphor, of the vessels of different materials, value, and use. The members of the Church are the various vessels. When we come down from the heights of ideal contemplation to face the reality of the Church as an organisation in the world, we are confronted with this grave fact, that its members are some of them 'gold and silver,' some of them 'wood' and 'earth.' And that fact modifies the triumphant confidence already uttered, and imposes upon us all very plain duties. So I wish to look now at the three things that are suggested to me here. First, a grave fact as to the actual condition of the Church as an organised institution; second, an inspiring possibility open to us all; and, lastly, a plain direction as to the way by which the possibility may become a reality.

I. Then we have here a grave fact as to the actual condition of the Church as an organised institution.

'In a great house there are vessels of gold and silver.' There they stand, ranged on some buffet, precious and sparkling, and taken care of; and away down in kitchens or sculleries there are vessels of wood, or of cheap common crockery and pottery. Now, says Paul, that is like the Church as we have to see it in the world. What is the principle of the distinction here? At first sight one might suppose that it refers to the obvious inequality of intellectual and spiritual and other gifts or graces bestowed upon men; that the gold and silver are the more brilliantly endowed in the Christian community, and the wood and the earth are humbler members who have less conspicuous and less useful service to perform. But that is not so. The Bible never recognises that distinction which the world makes so much of, between the largely and slenderly endowed, between the men who do what are supposed to be great things, and those who have to be content with humbler service. Its principle is, 'small service is true service whilst it lasts,' and although there are diversities of operation, the man who has the largest share of gifts stands, in Heaven's estimate, no whit above the man who has the smallest. All are on the one level; in God's great army the praise and the honours do not get monopolised by the general officers, but they come down to the privates just as abundantly, if they are equally faithful.

And then another consideration which shows us that it will not do to take gold and silver on the one hand, and wood and earth on the other, as marking the cleavage between the largely and the slenderly endowed members of the Church, is the fact that the way to get out of the one class and into the other, as we shall have to see presently, is by moral purity and not by the increase of intellectual or other endowments. The man that cleanses himself comes out of the category of 'wood' and 'earth,' and passes into that of 'gold and silver.' Thus the basis of the distinction, the ground of classification, lies altogether in goodness or badness, purity or impurity,

worthiness or unworthiness. They who are in the highest degree pure are the 'gold and silver.' They who are less so, or not at all so, are the 'wooden' and the 'earthen' vessels. The same line of demarcation is suggested in another passage which employs several of the same phrases and ideas that are found in my text. We read in it about the foundation which is laid, and about the teachers building upon it various elements. Now these elements, on the one hand 'gold, silver, and precious stones,' and on the other hand 'wool, hay, and stubble,' may be the doctrines that these teachers proclaimed, or perhaps they may be the converts that they brought in. But in any case notice the parallelism, not only in regard to the foundation, but in regard to the distinction of the component parts of the structure — 'gold and silver,' as here, and the less valuable list headed, as here, by 'wood; and then, by reason of the divergence of the metaphor, 'hay and stubble,' in the one case, and 'earthenware' in the other. But the suggestion of both passages is that the Church, the visible institution, has in it, and will always have in it, those who, by their purity and consistency of Christian life, answer to the designation of the gold and the silver, and those who, by their lack of that, fall into the other class, of wooden and earthen vessels.

Of course it must be so. 'What act is all its thought had been?' Every ideal, when it becomes embodied in an institution, becomes degraded; just as, when you expose quicksilver to the air, a non-transparent film and scum creeps across the surface. The 'drag-net' in one of Christ's parables suggests the same idea, There are no meshes that ever man's knitting-needle has formed that are fine enough to keep out the bad, as the Church necessarily includes both sets of people.

I do not need to dwell upon the question as to whether in these least worthy members of that community are included people that have some faint flickering light of God in their hearts, real though very imperfect Christians, or whether it means only those who are nominally, and not at all really, joined to the Lord. The parting lines between these two classes are very evanescent and very slight; and it is scarcely worth while calling them two classes at all. But only let me remind you that this recognition of the necessary intermingling of unworthy and worthy professors in every Christian Church is no reason for us Nonconformists departing from our fundamental principle that we should try to keep Christ's Church clear, as far as may be, of the intrusion of unworthy members. The Apostle is not speaking about the conditions that ought to be imposed as precedent to connection with the visible Church, but he is speaking about the evil, whatever the conditions may be, that is sure to attach to it. It attaches to this community of ours here, which, in accordance with New Testament usage, we have no hesitation in calling a Church. We try to keep our communion pure; we do not succeed; we never shall succeed. That is no reason why we should give up trying. But in this little house there are 'vessels of gold and silver,' and 'vessels of wood and earth, and some to honour and some to dishonour.'

But whilst this necessity is no reason for indiscriminate admission of all manner of people into the Christian Church, it is a reason for you that are in it not to make so much as some of you do of the fact that you are in, and not to trust, as some of you do, to the mere nominal, external connection with the 'great house.' You may be in it, but you may be down in the back premises, and one of the vessels that have no honourable use. Lay that to heart, dear friends. It is not for me to apply general principles to individual cases, but I may venture to say that, like every true pastor of a Christian community, I cannot help seeing that there are names of people on Our rolls who have a name to live and are dead.

II. Now, secondly, here we have an inspiring possibility open to us all.

On certain conditions any man may be 'a vessel unto honour,' by which, of course, is meant that the vessel — that is to say, the man — gets honour.

And how does he get it? By service. If you will look at the passage carefully, you will see that after this general designation of 'a vessel unto honour,' there follow three characteristics of the vessel, which taken together make its honour. I shall speak about them in detail presently, but in the meantime let me point out how here there is embodied the great principle of the New Testament that the true honour is service. 'It shall not be so among you; he that is chief amongst you let him be your servant.' Just as Jesus Christ, 'knowing that He came from God and went to God, and that the Father had given all things into His hand, laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself, and washed the disciples' feet,' so we, if we desire honour and prominence, must find it in service; and if we have by God's gift, and the concurrence of circumstances, possessions or resources of mind, body, or estate, which make us prominent and above our brethren, we are thereby the more bound to utilise all that we have, and all that we are, for His service. If a man is ambitious let him remember this that service is honour, use is dignity, and there are none other.

But now turn for a moment to these three characteristics which are here set forth as constituting the honour of the vessels of gold and silver. The first is 'sanctified,' or as it might perhaps better be expressed, consecrated. For, as I suppose many of us know, the idea of sanctification or holiness is not the moral purity which goes along with the expression in our thoughts, but that which is the root of all evangelical purity — via, the yielding of ourselves to God. Consecration is the beginning of purity, and consecration is honour. No man stands higher, in the true Legion of Honour of the Heavens, than he who bears on his breast and in his heart, not a knot of ribbon, but the imprint of a bloody Cross, and for the sake of that yields himself, body, soul, and spirit to God's service. The vessels that are devoted are the sacrificial vessels of the Temple, which are sacred beyond the golden cups of household use, and yet the commonest domestic utensils may become honourable by virtue of their being thus consecrated. So one of the old prophets.

using the same metaphor as my text, with a slightly different application, says that in the day when the Kingdom of God assumes its perfect form upon earth, every pot in Jerusalem shall be as the bowls of the altar, and on the very horse-bells shall be written, 'Consecrated to the Lord.' The vessel unto honour must be sanctified.

Then again, 'meet for the master's use.' On the great buffet in the banqueting hall, the cup in the centre, that belongs to the householder, and is lifted to his glowing lips, is the most honourable of all. Every Christian man amongst us may be used by the Christ, and may — more wonderful still! — be useful to Christ. That is condescension, is it not? You remember how, when He would, in modest prophetic pomp, once for all assert in public His claim to be the King of Israel, He sent two of His servants 'into the village over against' them with this message, 'The Lord hath need of him,' the humble ass. Jesus Christ needs you to carry out His purposes, to be His representatives and the executors of His will, His viceroys and servants in this world. And there is no honour higher than that I, for all my imperfections and limitations, with all my waywardness and slothfulness, should yet be taken by Him, and made use of by Him. Brother I have you any ambition to be used by Jesus, and to be useful to Jesus? And are you of any use to Him? Have you ever been? The questions are for our own hearts, in the privacy of communion with God. I leave them with you.

'Ready for every good work.' The habit of service will grow. A man that is consecrated, and being used by Jesus Christ, will become more and more useful all round. It ought to be our ambition to be men-of-all-work to our Lord. There is great danger of our all yielding to natural limitations, as we suppose them, and confining ourselves to what we take to be our role. It is all right that that should be the prominent part of our ministry in the world. But let us beware of the limitations and the onesidedness that attaches to us, and be ready for the distasteful work, for the uncongenial work, for the work to which our natural fastidiousness and temperaments do not call us. Let us, as I say, try to be many-sided, and to stand with our loins girt and

our lamps burning, and our wills held well down, and say ' Lord! what wouldst Thou have me to do? Here am I; send me.'

III. Now a word about the last point that is here, and that is the plain direction as to the way in which this possibility may become a reality for us all.

'If a man purge himself from these.' These; whom? The ' vessels to dishonour.' Get out of that class. And how? By purifying yourselves. So, then, there is no necessity of any sort which determines the class to which we belong except our own earnestness and effort. You remember our Lord's other parable of the four sowings in four different soils. Was there any unconquerable necessity which compelled the wayside soil to be hard and beaten, or the rocky one to be impermeable, or the thorny one to be productive only of thorns and briars? Could they not all have become good soil? And why did they not? Because the men that they represented did not care to become so. And in like manner there is no reason why the earthen pot should not become gold, or the wooden one silver, or the silver one gold — ay! or the gold silver, or the silver wood, or the wood earth. Paul was an earthen vessel, and he became 'a chosen vessel' of gold. Judas was a vessel of silver, and he became s vessel of earth, and was dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel. So you can settle your place. How do you settle it? By purity. Character makes us serviceable. Christ's kingdom is more helped, His purposes advanced, His will furthered, by holy lives than by shining gifts. And whether you can do much for Him by the latter or no, you can do more for Him by far by means of the former. And you can all have that if you will.

Only notice that purity which makes serviceable, and therefore honourable, and is capable of degrees as between silver and gold, is to be won by our own efforts. 'If a man therefore shall purify himself.' I know, of course, that whoever has honestly set himself, for Christ's sake, to the task of purifying himself, very soon finds out that he, with his ten thousand, cannot beat the king that comes against him with twenty thousand; and if he is a wise man he sends an embassy, not to the enemy, but to the Emperor, and says, 'Come Thou and help me.' If we try to purify ourselves, we are necessarily thrown back upon God's help to do it. But there must be the personal effort, and that effort must go mainly, I think, in the direction of effort to grasp and hold by faith and obedience the Divine Life which come into us and purifies us; and in the other direction of effort to apply to every part of our character and conduct the divine help which we bring to our aid by our humble faith.

So, brethren, we can, if we will, purify ourselves, and we shall do it most surely when we fall back upon him, and say, 'Give me the power — that I may perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.'

Some of us are vessels in another house. But Christ has bound the strong man and spoiled his goods, and taken from him all the armour in which he trusted, and the vessels which he used. And if we will only take Christ's liberation, and cast ourselves on His grace and power, then we shall be lifted from the dark and doleful house of the strong man, and set in the great house of the great Lord. Yield not your members as instruments of unrighteousness, but yield yourselves unto God, and your members as instruments of righteousness to Him.

FORM AND POWER

‘Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.’ — 2 Timothy 3:5.

IN this, his last letter and legacy, the Apostle Paul is much occupied with the anticipation of coming evils. It is most natural that the faithful watchman, knowing that the hour of relieving guard was very near at hand, should eagerly scan the horizon in quest of the enemies that might approach when he was no longer there to deal with them. Old men are apt to take a gloomy view of coming days, but the frequent references to the corruptions of the Church which occur in this letter are a great deal more than an old man’s pessimism. They were warnings, which were amply vindicated by the history of the post-apostolic age of the Church, which was the seed-bed of all manner of corruptions, and they point to permanent dangers, the warning against which is as needful for us as for any period.

The Apostle draws here a very dark picture of the corrupt forms of Christianity, the advent of which he tremblingly anticipated. I do not mean to enter at all upon the dark catalogue of the vices which he enumerates, except to point out that its beginning and the middle and the end are very significant. It begins with ‘lovers of self’ — that is the root of all forms of sin. In the centre there stands ‘lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God’; and at the end, summing up the whole, are the words of our text, ‘having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.’

I do not suppose that these words need much explanation. ‘Godliness,’ in the New Testament, means not only the disposition which we call piety, but the conduct which flows from it, and which we may call practical religion. The form or outward appearance of that we all understand. But what is the ‘denying the power thereof?’ It does not consist in words, but in deeds. In these latter epistles we find ‘denying’ frequently used as equivalent to abjuring, renouncing, casting off. For instance, in a passage singularly and antithetically parallel to that of my text, we read ‘denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,’ which simply means throwing off their dominion. And in like manner the denial here is no verbal rejection of the principles of the gospel, which would be inconsistent with the notion of still retaining the form of godliness; but it is the practical renunciation of the power, which is inherent in all true godliness, of moulding the life and character — the practical renunciation of that even whilst preserving a superficial, unreal appearance of being subject to it.

This, then, being the explanation, and the rough out. line of the state of things which the Apostle contemplates as hurrying onwards to corrupt the Church after his departure, let us look at some of the thoughts connected with it.

I. Observe the sad frequency of such a condition.

Wherever any great cause or principle is first launched into the world, it evokes earnest enthusiasm, and brings men to heroisms of consecration and service. And so when Christianity was first launched, there was less likelihood of its attracting to itself men who were not in earnest, and who were mere formalists. But even in the Apostolic Church there were an Ananias and a Sapphira, a Simon Magus, and a Demas. As years go on, and primitive enthusiasms die out, and the cause which was once all freshly radiant and manifestly heaven-born becomes an earthly institution, there is a growing tendency to gather round it superficial, half-and-half adherents. What, soever is respectable, and whatsoever is venerable, and whatsoever is customary will be sure to have attached to it a mass of loose and nominal adherents; and the gospel has had its full share of such.

I was talking not very long ago to a leading man belonging to another denomination than my own; and he quietly, as a matter of course said, ‘Our communicants are so many hundred thousands. I reckon that a quarter of them, or thereabouts, are truly spiritual men!’ and he seemed to think that nobody would question the correctness of the calculation and the proportion. Why, ‘Christendom’ is largely a mass of pagans masquerading as Christians.

And every church has its full share of such people; loose adherents, clogs upon all movement, who bring down the average of warmth like the great icebergs that float in the Atlantic and lower the temperature of the summer all over Europe. They make consecration ‘eccentric’; they make consistent, out-and-out Christian living ‘odd,’ ‘unlike the ordinary thing,’ and they pull down the spirituality of the Church almost to the level of the world. Every communion of so-called Christian men has its full share of these. The same thing applies to us, and every Church of God on the face of the earth has a little core of earnest Christians, who live the life, and a great envelope and surrounding of men who, as my text says, have the form of godliness, and practically deny the power thereof. Widespread, and all but universal, this condition of things is. And so let each of us say, ‘Lord! Is it I?’

II. Think, next, of the underground working of this evil

These people about whom Paul is speaking in my text were, I suppose, mostly, though by no means exclusively, conscious pretenders to what they did not possess. But the number of hypocrites, in the full sense of the word, is amazingly small, and the men whom you would brand as most distinctly so, if you came to talk to them, would amaze you to find how entirely ignorant they were of the fact that they were dramatising and pretending to piety, and that there was next to no reality of it in them. A very little bit of gold, beaten out very thin, will cover over, with a semblance of value, an enormous area. And men beat out the little modicum of sincerity that they have so very thin that it covers, and gives a deceptive appearance of brilliancy and solidity to an enormous amount of

windy flatulence and mere pretence. Hypocrites, in the rude, vulgar sense of the word, are, I was going to say, as rare as, but I will say a great deal rarer than, thoroughgoing and intensely earnest and sincere Christians. These men, the precursors of Gnostic heresies and a hundred others, had no notion that their picture was like this, and if they had been shown Paul's grim catalogue they would have said, 'Oh! a gross caricature, and not the least like me.' And that is what a great many other men do as well.

But it is an unconscious hypocrisy, an unconscious sliding away from the basis of reality on to the slippery basis of pretence and appearance that I want to say a word or two about. The worse a man is, the less he knows it. The more completely a professing Christian has lost his hold of the substance and is clinging only to the form, the less does he suspect that this indictment has any application to him. The very sign and symptom of spiritual degeneracy and corruption is unconsciousness, as the great champion of Israel, when his locks were cropped in Delilah's lap, went out to exercise his mighty limbs as at other times, and knew not, till he vainly tried feats which their ebbing strength was no longer equal to perform, that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. The more completely a man's limbs are frost-bitten the more comfortable and warm they are, and the less does he know it. If a man says, 'Your text has no sort of application to me,' he thereby shows that it has a very close application to him.

I need say little about the reasons for this unconsciousness. We are all accustomed to take very lenient views, when we take any at all, of our own character; and the tendency of all conduct is to pull down conscience to the level of conduct, and to vindicate that conduct by biased decisions of a partial conscience. And so I have no doubt that there are people thinking how well my words fit some other man from whom there has, without their knowing it, ebbed away, by slow, sad drops, almost all the lifeblood of their Christianity, like some great tree that stands in the woods, fair to appearance, with solid bole and widespread leafage, and expanded branches, and yet the heart is out of it; and when the tempest comes and it falls, everybody can look into the hollow trunk and see that for years it has been rotten.

Brethren, the underground enemies of our Christian earnestness are far more dangerous than the apparent and manifest antagonists; and there are many men amongst us who would repel with indignation a manifest assault against their godliness, who yield without resistance, and almost without consciousness, to the sly seductions of unsuspected evil. The arrow that flies in darkness is more deadly than the pestilence that wasteth at noonday.

III. Further, notice the ever-operating causes that produce this condition.

I suppose that one, at any rate, of the main examples of this 'form' was participation in the simple worship of the primitive Church. And although the phrase by no means refers merely to acts of worship, still that is one of the main fields in which this evil is manifest. Many of us substitute outward connection with the Church for inward union with Jesus Christ. All external forms have a tendency to assert themselves, and to detain in themselves, instead of helping to rise above themselves, our poor sense-ridden natures. How many of us are there whose religion consists very largely in coming to this place, standing up when other people sing, seeming to unite in prayer and praise, perhaps participating in the sacred rites of the Church; but having most of their religion safely locked up in their pews along with their hymn-books when they leave the chapel, and waiting for them quietly, without troubling them, until next Sunday! We need outward forms of worship. It is a sign of our weakness that we do, but they are so full of danger that one sometimes wishes that they could be broken up and made fluent, and, at least for a time, that something else could be substituted for them.

Seeing that the purest and the simplest of forms may become like a dirty window, an obscuring medium which shuts out instead of lets in the light, it seems to me that the Churches are wisest which admit least of the dangerous element into their external worship, and try to have as little of form as may keep the spirit. I know that simple forms may be abused quite as much as elaborate ones. I know that a Quakers' meetinghouse is often quite as much a house of formal and not of real communion as a Roman Catholic cathedral. Let us remember how full of dangers they all, and always are. And let us be very sure that we do not substitute church membership, coming to church or chapel, going to prayer-meeting, teaching in Sunday-schools, reading devout books, and the like, for inward submission to the power.

Another cause always operating is the tendency which all action of every kind has to escape from the dominion of its first motives, and to become merely mechanical and habitual. Habit is a most precious ally of goodness, but habitual goodness tends to become involuntary and mechanical goodness, and so to cease to be goodness at all. And the more that we can, in each given case, make each individual act of godliness, whether it be in worship or in practical life, the result of a fresh approach to the one central and legitimate impulse of the Christian life, the better it will be for ourselves. All great causes, as I was saying a moment or two ago, tend to pass from the dominion of impulse into that of use and wont and mere routine, and our religion and practical godliness in daily life is apt to do that, as well as all our other actions.

And then, still further, there is the constant operation of earth and sense and daily duties and pressing cares, which war against the reality and completeness of our submission to the power of godliness. Grains of sand, microscopically minute in the aggregate, bury the temples and the images of the gods in the Nile Valley. The multitude of small cares and duties which are blown upon us by every wind have the effect of withdrawing us, unless we are continually watchful, from that one foundation of all, the love of Jesus Christ.

felt in our daily lives. Unless we perpetually tighten our hold, it will loosen, by very weariness of the muscles. Unless the boat be firmly anchored it will be drifted down the stream. Unless we take care, our Christian life and earnestness will ooze out at our fingertips, and we shall never know that it is gone. The world, our own weakness, our very tasks and duties, the pressure of circumstances, the sway of our senses, and the very habit of doing right — all of these may tend to make us mechanical and formal participators in the religious life, and unconscious hypocrites.

IV. So, lastly, let me point you to the discipline which may avert this evil.

First and foremost, I would say, let us cherish a clear and continual recognition of the reality of 'the danger Forewarned is forearmed. He that will take counsel of his own weakness, and be taught by God's Word how unreliable he himself is, and how strong the forces are which tend to throw his religion all to the surface, will thereby be, if not insured against the danger, at least made a great deal more competent to deal with it. 'Blessed is the man that feareth always,' and that knows how likely he is to go wrong unless he carefully seeks to keep himself right.

Rigid, habitual self-inspection, in the light of God's Word, is an all-important help to prevent this sliding of our Christian life into superficiality. If what I was saying about the unconsciousness of decline be at all true, then most eloquently and impressively does it say to us all, 'Watch! for we know not what may be going on underground unless we have a continual carefulness of inspection.' We should watch our own characters, the movement of our spiritual nature, and the effect and operation of our habits and of our participation in outward forms of Christianity; we should watch these as carefully as men in the tropics look into their beds and their clothing before they put them on, or get into them, for snakes and scorpions. In a country which is only preserved by the dykes from Being swallowed up by the sea, the minutest inspection of the rampart is the condition of security, and if there be a hole big enough for a mouse to creep through, the water will come in and make a gap wide enough to drown a province in a little while. And so, brethren, seeing that we have such dangers round about us, and that the most formidable of them all are powers that work in the dark, let us be very sure that our eyes have searched, as well as we can, the inmost corners of our lives, and that no lurking vermin lie beneath the unturned up stones.

And then, lastly, and as that without which all else is vain, let us make continual and earnest and contrite efforts day by day to renew and deepen our personal communion with Jesus Christ. He is the source of the power which godliness operates in our lives, and the closer we keep to Him the more it will flood our hearts and make us real, out-and-out Christians, and not shallow and self-deceived pretenders.

The tree that had nothing but leaves upon it hid its absence of fruit by its abundance of foliage. The Master came, as He comes to you and to me, seeking fruit, and if He finds it not He will perpetuate the barrenness by His blasting word, 'No fruit grow upon thee henceforward for ever.'

LIGHT AT EVENTIDE

2 Timothy 4:1-5; 16-18.

TIMOTHY does not appear to have been a strong man, either in body or mind, if we may judge from the exhortations and tonics which Paul felt it needful to administer in this letter. The young, gentle soul was more overwhelmed by Paul's trial and impending death than the heroic martyr himself was. Nothing shook that steadfast heart, and from the very grave's mouth he spoke brave encouragement.

Verses 1-5 are a rousing appeal to Timothy to fulfil his ministry. Embedded in it there is a sad prophecy of coming dark days for the Church, which constitutes, not a reason for despondency or for abandoning the work, but for doing it with all one's might. But the all-powerful motive for every Christian teacher, whether of old or young, is pressed on Timothy in the solemn thoughts that he works in the sight of God and of Jesus, and that he and those to whom he speaks, and whose blood may be laid to his charge, are to see him when he appears, and to stand at his judgment bar.

The master's eye makes diligent servants; the tremendous issues for speaker and hearer suspended on the preaching of the gospel, if they were ever burning before our inward vision, would make superfluous all other motives for straining every nerve and using every opportunity and power. How we should preach and teach and live if the great white throne and He who will sit on it were ever shining before us! Would not that sight burn up slothfulness, cowardice, perfunctory discharge of duty, mechanical repetition of scarcely felt words, and all the other selfishnesses and worldlinesses which sap our earnestness in our work.

The special duties enjoined are, first and foremost, the most general one to 'preach the word,' which is, indeed, a duty incumbent on all Christians; and then, subordinate to it, and descriptive of how it is to be done, the duty of persevering attention to that great life task — 'be instant'; that is, be at it, be always at it. But is not 'in season, out of season' an unwise and dangerous precept? Do we

not do more harm than good by thrusting gospel teaching down people's throats at unfitting times? No doubt tact and prudence are as needful as zeal, but perhaps they are rather more abundant at present than it, and at a time that looks out of season to a man who does not wish to hear of Christ at any time, or to one who does not wish to speak of Him at any time, may be 'in season' for the very reason that it seems out of season. Felix is not an infallible judge of 'a convenient season.' It would do no harm if Christian people 'obtruded' their religion a little more.

But the general work of 'preaching the word' is to be accompanied with special care over the life of believers, which is to be active in three closely connected forms. Timothy is, where needful, to 'convict' of sin; for so the word rendered 'reprove' means, as applied to the mission of the Comforter in <431608>John 16:8. 'Rebuke' naturally follows conviction, and exhortation, or, rather, consolation or encouragement, as naturally follows rebuke. If the faithful teacher has sometimes to use the lancet, he must have the balm and the Bandage at hand. And this triple ministry is to be 'with all longsuffering' and 'teaching.' Chrysostom beautifully comments, 'Not as in anger, not as in hatred, not as insulting over him,... as loving, as sympathising, as more distressed than himself at his grief.' And we may add, as letting 'the teaching' do the convicting and rebuking, not the teacher's judgment or tongue.

The prospect of dark days coming, which so often saddens the close of a strenuous life for Christ and the Church, shadowed Paul's spirit, and added to his burdens. At Ephesus he had spoken forebodings of 'grievous wolves' entering in after his death, and now he feels that he will be powerless to check the torrent of corruption, and is eager that, when he is gone, Timothy and others may be wise and brave to cope with the tendencies to turn from the simple truth and to prefer 'fables.'

The picture which he draws is true to-day. Healthful teaching is distasteful Men's ears itch, and want to be tickled. The desire of the multitude is to have teachers who will reflect their own opinions and prejudices, who will not go against the grain or rub them the wrong way, who will flatter the mob which itself the people, and will keep 'conviction' and 'rebuke' well in the background. That is no reason for any Christian teacher's being cast down, but is a reason for his buckling to his work, and not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God.

The true way to front and conquer these tendencies is by the display of an unmistakable self-sacrifice in the life, by sobriety in all things and willing endurance of hardship where needful, and by redoubled earnestness in proclaiming the gospel, which men need whether they want it or not, and by filling to the full the sphere of our work, and discharging all its obligations.

The final words in verses 16-18 carry on the triumphant strain. There had been some previous stage of Paul's trial, in his second imprisonment, of which we have no details except those here — when the Roman Christians and all his friends had deserted him, and that he had thus been conformed unto Christ's sufferings, and tasted the bitterness of friendship failing when needed most. But no trace of bitterness remained in his spirit, and, like his Lord, he prayed for them who had thus deserted him. He was left alone, but the Christ, who had borne his burden alone, died that none of His servants might ever have to know the same dreary solitude, and the absence of other comforters had made the more room, as well as need, for Him.

Paul's predecessor, Stephen, had seen Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Paul had an even more blessed experience; for Jesus stood by him, there in the Roman court, in which, perhaps, the emperors ate on the tribunal What could terrify him with that Advocate at his side?

But it is beautiful that the Apostle does not first think of his Lord's presence as ministering to his comfort, but as nerving him to 'fulfil His message.' The trial was to him, first, a crowning opportunity of preaching the gospel, and, no doubt, it gave him an audience of such a sort as he had never had. What did it matter even to himself what became of him, if 'all the Gentiles,' and among them, no doubt, senators, generals, statesmen, and possibly Nero, 'might bear'? Only as a second result of Christ's help does he add that he was rescued, as from between the very teeth of the lion. The peril was extreme; his position seemed hopeless, the jaws were wide open, and he was held by the sharp fangs, but Christ dragged him out. The true David delivered his lamb out of the lion's mouth.

The past is the prophecy of the future to those that trust in a changeless Christ, who has all the resources of the universe at command. 'That which hath been is that which shall be,' and he who can say 'he hath delivered from so great a death' ought to have no hesitation in adding 'in whom I trust that He will yet deliver me.' That was the use that Paul made of his experience, and so his last words are an utterance of unflinching faith and a doxology.

There appears to be an interesting echo of the Lord's Prayer in verse 18. Observe the words 'deliver,' 'from evil,' 'kingdom,' 'glory.' Was Paul's confidence disappointed? No; for surely he was delivered from every evil work, when the sharp sword struck off his head as he knelt outside the

walls of Rome. And Death was Christ's last messenger, sent to 'save him unto His heavenly kingdom,' that there he might, with loftier words than even he could utter on earth, ascribe to Him 'glory for ever. Amen.'

A PRISONER'S DYING THOUGHTS

2 Timothy 4:6-8

'I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. — 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

PAUL'S long day's work is nearly done. He is a prisoner in Rome, all but forsaken by his friends, in hourly expectation of another summons before Nero. To appear before him was, he says, like putting his head into 'the mouth of the lion.' His horizon was darkened by sad anticipations of decaying faith and growing corruptions in the Church. What a road he had travelled since that day when, on the way to Damascus, he saw the living Christ, and heard the words of His mouth!

It had been but a failure of a life, if judged by ordinary standards. He had suffered the loss of all things, had thrown away position and prospects, had exposed himself to sorrows and toils, had been all his days a poor man and solitary, had been hunted, despised, laughed at by Jew and Gentile, worried and badgered even by so-called brethren, loved the less, the more he loved. And now the end is near. A prison and the headsman's sword are the world's wages to its best teacher. When Nero is on the throne, the only possible place for Paul is a dungeon opening on to the scaffold. Better to be the martyr than the Caesar!

These familiar words of our text bring before us a very sweet and wonderful picture of the prisoner, so near his end. How beautifully they show his calm waiting for the last hour and the bright forms which lightened for him the darkness of his cell! Many since have gone to their rest with their hearts stayed on the same thoughts, though their lips could not speak them to our listening ears. Let us be thankful for them, and pray that for ourselves, when we come to that hour, the same quiet heroism and the same sober hope mounting to calm certainty may be ours.

These words refer to the past, the present, the future. 'I have fought — the time of my departure is come — henceforth there is laid up.'

I. So we notice, first, the quiet courage which looks death full in the face without a tremor.

The language implies that Paul knows his death hour is all but here. As the Revised Version more accurately gives it, 'I am already being offered' — the process is begun, his sufferings at the moment are, as it were, the initial steps of his sacrifice — 'and the time of my departure is come.' The tone in which he tells Timothy this is very noticeable. There is no sign of excitement, no tremor of emotion, no affectation of stoicism in the simple sentences. He is not playing up to a part, nor pretending to be anything which he is not. If ever language sounded perfectly simple and genuine, this does.

And the occasion of the whole section is as remarkable as the tone. He is led to speak about himself at all, only in order to enforce his exhortation to Timothy to put his shoulder to the wheel, and do his work for Christ with all his might. All he wishes to say is simply, do your work with all your might, for I am going off the field. But having begun on that line of thought, he is carried on to say more than was needed for his immediate purpose, and thus inartificially to let us see what was filling his mind.

And the subject into which he subsides after these lofty thoughts is as remarkable as either tone or occasion. Minute directions about such small matters as books and parchments, and perhaps a warm cloak for winter, and homely details about the movements of the little group of his friends immediately follow. All this shows with what a perfectly unforced courage Paul fronted his fate, and looked death in the eyes. The anticipation did not dull his interest in God's work in the world, as witness the warnings and exhortations of the context. It did not withdraw his sympathies from his companions. It did not hinder him from pursuing his studies and pursuits, nor from providing for small matters of daily convenience. If ever a man was free from any taint of fanaticism or morbid enthusiasm, it was this man waiting so calmly in his prison for his death.

There is great beauty and force in the expressions which he uses for death here. He will not soil his lips with its ugly name, but calls it an offering and a departure. There is a widespread unwillingness to say the word 'Death.' It falls on men's hearts like clods on a coffin. So all people and languages have adopted euphemisms for it, fair names which wrap silk round its dart and somewhat hide its face. But there are two opposite reasons for their use — terror and confidence. Some men dare not speak of death because they dread it so much, and try to put some kind of shield between themselves and the very thought of it, by calling it something less dreadful to them than itself. Some men, on the other hand, are familiar with the thought, and though it is solemn, it is not altogether repellent to them.

Gazing on death with the thoughts and feelings which Jesus Christ has given them concerning it, they see it in new aspects, which take away much of its blackness. And so they do not feel inclined to use the ugly old name, but had rather call it by some which reflect the gentler aspect that it now wears to them. So 'sleep,' and 'rest' and the like are the names which have almost driven the other out of the New Testament — witness of the fact that in inmost reality Jesus Christ 'has abolished death,' however the physical portion of it may still remain master of our bodies.

But looking for a moment at the specific metaphors used here, we have first, that of an offering, or more particularly of a drink offering, or libation, 'I am already being poured out.' No doubt the special reason for the selection of this figure here is Paul's anticipation of a violent death. The shedding of his blood was to be an offering poured out like some costly wine upon the altar, but the power of the figure reaches far beyond that special application of it. We may all make our deaths a sacrifice, an offering to God, for we may yield up our will to God's will, and so turn that last struggle into an act of worship and self surrender. When we recognise His hand, when we submit our wills to His purposes, when 'we live unto the Lord,' if we live, and 'die unto Him,' if we die, then Death will lose all its terror and most of its pain, and will become for us what it was to Paul, a true offering up of self in thankful worship. Nay, we may even say, that so we shall in a certain subordinate sense be 'made conformable unto His death' who committed His spirit into His Father's hands, and laid down His life, of His own will. The essential character and far-reaching effects of this sacrifice we cannot imitate, but we can so yield up our wills to God and leave life so willingly and trustfully as that death shall make our sacrifice complete.

Another more familiar and equally striking figure is next used, when Paul speaks of the time of his 'departure.' The thought is found in most tongues. Death is a going away, or, as Peter calls it (with a glance, possibly, at the special meaning of the word in the Old Testament, as well as at its use in the solemn statement of the theme of converse on the Mountain of Transfiguration), an Exodus. But the well-worn image receives new depth and sharpness of outline in Christianity. To those who have learned the meaning of Christ's resurrection, and feed their souls on the hopes which it warrants, Death is merely a change of place or state, an accident affecting locality, and little more. We have had plenty of changes before. Life has been one long series of departures. This is different from

the others mainly in that it is the last, and that to go away from this visible and fleeting show, where we wander aliens among things which have no true kindred with us, is to go home, where there will be no more pulling up the tent-pegs, and toiling across the deserts in monotonous change. How strong is the conviction, spoken in this name for death, that the essential life lasts on quite unaltered through it all! How slight the else formidable thing is made! We may change climates, and for the stormy bleakness of life may have the long still days of heaven, but we do not change ourselves. We lose nothing worth keeping when we leave behind the body, as a dress not fitted for home, where we are going. We but travel one more stage, though it be the last, and part of it be in pitchy darkness. Some pass over it as in a fiery chariot, like Paul and many a martyr. Some have to toil through it with slow steps and bleeding feet and fainting heart; but all may have a Brother with them, and, holding His hand, may find that the journey is not so hard as they feared, and the home from which they shall remove no more, better than they hoped when they hoped the most.

II. We have here, too, the peaceful look backwards. There is something very noteworthy in the threefold aspect under which his past life presents itself to the Apostle who is so soon to leave it. He thinks of it as a contest, as a race, as a stewardship. The first image suggests the tension of a long struggle with opposing wrestlers who have tried to throw him, but in vain. The world, both of men and things, has had to be grappled with and mastered. His own sinful nature and especially his animal nature has had to be kept under by sheer force, and every moment has been resistance to subtle omnipresent forces that have sought to thwart his aspirations and hamper his performances. His successes have had to be fought for, and everything that he has done has been done after a struggle. So is it with all noble life; so will it be to the end.

He thinks of life as a race. That speaks of continuous advance in one direction, and more emphatically still, of effort that sets the lungs panting and strains every muscle to the utmost. He thinks of it as a stewardship. He has kept the faith (whether by that word we are to understand the body of truth believed or the act of believing) as a sacred deposit committed to him, of which he has been a good steward, and which he is now ready to return to his Lord. There is much in these letters to Timothy about keeping treasures entrusted to one's care. Timothy is bid to 'keep that good thing which is committed to thee,' as Paul here declares that he has done. Nor is such guarding of a precious deposit confined to us stewards on earth, but the Apostle is sure that his loving Lord, to whom he has entrusted himself, will with like tenderness and carefulness 'keep that which he has committed unto Him against that day.' The confidence in that faithful Keeper made it possible for Paul to be faithful to his trust, and as a steward who was bound by all ties to his Lord, to guard His possessions and administer His affairs. Life was full of voices urging him to give up the faith. Bribes and threats, and his own sense-bound nature, and the constant whispers of the world had tempted him all along the road to fling it away as a worthless thing, but he had kept it safe; and now, nearing the end and the account, he can put his hand on the secret place near his heart where it lies, and feel that it is there, ready to be restored to his Lord, with the thankful confession, 'Thy pound hath gained ten pounds.'

So life looks to this man in his retrospect as mainly a field for struggle, effort, and fidelity. This world is not to be for us an enchanted garden of delights, any more than it should appear a dreary desert of disappointment and woe. But it should be to us mainly a palaestra, or gymnasium and exercising ground. You cannot expect many flowers or much grass in the place where men wrestle and run. We need not much mind though it be bare, if we can only stand firm on the hard earth, nor lament that there are so few delights to stay our eyes from the goal. We are here for serious work; let us not be too eager for pleasures that may hinder our efforts and weaken our vigour, but be content to lap up a hasty draught from the brooks by the way, and then on again to the fight.

Such a view of life makes it radiant and fair while it lasts, and makes the heart calm when the hour comes to leave it all behind. So thinking of the past, there may be a sense of not unwelcome lightening from a load of responsibility when we have got all the stress and strain of the conflict behind us, and have at any rate not been altogether beaten. We may feel like a captain who has brought his ship safe across the Atlantic, through foul weather and past many an iceberg, and gives a great sigh of relief as he hands over the charge to the pilot, who will take her across the harbour bar and bring her to her anchorage in the landlocked bay where no tempests rave any more forever.

Prosaic theologians have sometimes wondered at the estimate which Paul here makes of his past services and faithfulness, but the wonder is surely unnecessary. It is very striking to notice the difference between his judgment of himself while he was still in the thick of the conflict, and now

when he is nearing the end. Then one main hope which animated all his toils and nerved him for the sacrifice of life itself was 'that I might finish my course with joy.' Now in the quiet of his dungeon, that hope is fulfilled, and triumphant thoughts, like shining angels, keep him company in his solitude. Then he struggled, and wrestled, touched by the haunting fear lest after that he has preached to others he himself should be rejected. Now the dread has passed, and a meek hope stands by his side.

What is this change of feeling but an instance of what, thank God, we so often see, that at the end the heart, which has been bowed with fears and self-depreciation, is filled with peace? They who tremble most during the conflict are most likely to look back with solid satisfaction, while they who never knew a fear all along the course will often have them surging in upon their souls too late, and will see the past in a new lurid light, when they are powerless to change it. Blessed is the man who thus feareth always. At the end he will have hope. The past struggles are joyful in memory, as the mountain ranges, which were all black reek and white snow while we toiled up their inhospitable steep, lie purple in the mellowing distance, and burn like fire as the sunset strikes their peaks. Many a wild winter's day has a fair, cloudless close, and lingering opal hues diffused through all the quiet sky. 'At eventide it shall be light.' Though we go all our lives mourning and timid, there may yet be granted us ere the end some vision of the true significance of these lives, and some humble hope that they have not been wholly in vain.

Such an estimate has nothing in common with self-complacency. It co-exists with a profound consciousness of many a sin, many a defeat, and much unfaithfulness. It belongs only to a man who, conscious of these, is 'looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,' and is the direct result, not the antagonist, of lowly self-abasement, and contrite faith in Him by whom alone our stained selves and poor broken services can ever be acceptable. Let us learn too that the only life that bears being looked back upon is a life of Christian devotion and effort. It shows fairer when seen in the strange cross lights that come when we stand on the boundary of two worlds, with the white radiance of eternity beginning to master the vulgar oil lamps of earth, than when seen by these alone. All others have their shabbiness and their selfishness disclosed then. I remember ones seeing a mob of revellers streaming out from a masked ball in a London theatre in the early morning sunlight; draggled and heavy-eyed, the rouge showing on the cheeks, and the shabby tawdriness of the foolish costumes pitilessly revealed by the pure light. So will many a life look when the day dawns, and the wild riot ends in its unwelcome beams.

The one question for us all, then, will be, Have I lived for Christ, and by Him? Let it be the one question for us now, and let it be answered, Yes. Then we shall have at the last a calm confidence, equally far removed from presumption and from dread, which will let us look back on life with peace, though it be full of failures and sins, and forward with humble hope of the reward which we shall receive from His mercy.

III. The climax of all is the triumphant look forward. 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.'

In harmony with the images of the conflict and the race, the crown here is not the emblem of sovereignty, but of victory, as indeed is almost without exception the case in the New Testament. The idea of the royal dignity of Christians in the future is set forth rather under the emblem of association with Christ on His throne, while the wreath on their brows is the coronal of laurel, 'meed of mighty conquerors,' or the twine of leaves given to him who, panting, touched the goal. The reward, then, which is meant by the emblem, whatever be its essence, comes through effort and conflict. 'A man is not crowned, except he strive.'

That crown, according to other words of Scripture, consists of 'life,' or 'glory' — that is to say, the issue and outcome of believing service and faithful stewardship here is the possession of the true life, which stands in union with God, in measure so great, and in quality so wondrous that it lies on the pure locks of the victors like a flashing diadem, all ablaze with light in a hundred jewels. The completion and exaltation of our nature and characters by the illapse of 'life' so sovereign and transcendent that it is 'glory' is the consequence of all Christian effort here in the lower levels, where the natural life is always weakness and sometimes shame, and the spiritual life is at the best but a hidden glory and a struggling spark. There is no profit in seeking to gaze into that light of glory so as to discern the shapes of those who walk in it, or the elements of its lambent flames. Enough that in its gracious beauty transfigured souls move as in their native atmosphere. Enough that even our dim vision can see that they have for their companion 'One like unto the Son of Man.' It is Christ's own life which they share; it is Christ's own glory which irradiates them.

That crown is 'a crown of righteousness' in another sense from that in which it is 'a crown of life.' The latter expression indicates the material, if we may say so, of which it is woven, but the former rather points to the character to which it belongs or is given. Righteousness alone can receive that reward. It is not the struggle or the conflict which wins it, but the character evolved in the struggle, not the works of strenuous service, but the moral nature expressed in these. There is such a congruity between righteousness and the crown of life, that it can be laid on none other head but that of a righteous man, and if it could, all its amaranthine flowers would shrivel and fall when they touched an impure brow. It is, then, the crown of righteousness, as belonging by its very nature to such characters alone.

But whatever is the essential congruity between the character and the crown, we have to remember too that, according to this Apostle's constant teaching, the righteousness which clothes us in fair raiment, and has a natural right to the wreath of victory, is a gift, as truly as the crown itself, and is given to us all on condition of our simple trust in Jesus Christ, If we are to be 'found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless,' we must be 'found in Him, not having our own righteousness, but that which is ours through faith in Christ.' Toil and conflict and anxious desire to be true to our responsibilities will do much for a man, but they will not bring him that righteousness which brings down on the head the crown of life. We must trust to Christ to give us the righteousness in which we are justified, and to give us the righteousness by the working out of which in our life and character we are fitted for that great reward. He crowns our works and selves with exuberant and unmerited honours, but what he crowns is His Own gift to us, and His great love must bestow both the righteousness and 'the crown.'

The crown is given at a time called — by Paul 'at that day,' which is not the near day of his martyrdom, but that of His Lord's appearing. He does not speak of the fulness of the reward as being ready for him at death, but as being 'henceforth laid up for him in heaven.' So he looks forward beyond the grave. The immediate future after death was to his view a period of blessedness indeed, but not yet full. The state of the dead in Christ was a state of consciousness, a state of rest, a state of felicity, hut also a state of expectation- To the full height of their present capacity they who sleep in Jesus are blessed, being still in His embrace, and their spirits pillowed on His heart, nor so sleeping that, like drowsy infants, they know not where they lie so safe, but only sleeping in so much as they rest from weariness, and have closed their eyes to the ceaseless turmoil of this fleeting world, and are lapped about for ever with the sweet, unbroken consciousness that they are 'present with the Lord.' What perfect repose, perfect fruition of all desires, perfect union with the perfect End and Object of all their being, perfect exemption from all sorrow, tumult, and sin can bring of blessedness, that they possess in over measure unfaillingly. And, in addition, they still know the joy of hope, and have carried that jewel with them into another world, for they wait for 'the redemption of the body,' in the reception of which, 'at that day,' their life will be filled up to a yet fuller measure, and gleam with a more lustrous 'glory.' Now they rest and wait. Then shall they be crowned.

Nor must self-absorbed thoughts be allowed to bound our anticipations of that future. It is no solitary blessedness to which Paul looked forward Alone in his dungeon, alone before his judge when 'no man stood by' him, soon to be alone in his martyrdom, he leaps up in spirit at the thought of the mighty crowd among whom he will stand in that day, on every head a crown, in every heart the same love to the Lord whose life is in them all and makes them all one. So we may cherish the hope of a social heaven. Man's course begins in a garden, but it ends in a city. The final condition will be the perfection of human society. There all who love Christ will be drawn together, and old ties, broken for a little while here, be reknit in yet holier form, never to be sundered more.

Ah, friends, the all-important question for each of us is how may we have such a hope, like a great sunset light shining into the western windows of our souls? There is but one answer — Trust Christ. That is enough. Nothing else is. Is your life built on Jesus Christ? Are you trusting your salvation to Him? Are you giving Him your love and service? Does your life bear looking at to-day? Will it bear looking at in death? Will it bear His looking at in Judgment?

If you can humbly say, To me to live is Christ, then is it well Living by Him we may fight and conquer, may win and obtain. Living by Him, we may be ready quietly to lie down when the time comes, and may have all the future filled with the blaze of a great hope that glows brighter as the darkness

thickens. That peaceful hope will not leave us till consciousness fails, and then, when it has ceased to guide us, Christ Himself will lead us, scarcely knowing where we are, through the waters, and when we open our half-bewildered eyes in brief wonder, the first thing we see will be his welcoming smile, and His voice will say, as a tender surgeon might to a little Child waking after an operation, 'It is all over.' We lift our hands wondering and find wreaths on our poor brows. We lift our eyes, and lo! all about us a crowned crowd of conquerors,

'And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which we have loved long since, and lost awhile,'

DEMAS, LUKE, MARK

'Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.... 11. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me the ministry.' — 2 Timothy 4:10, 11

THIS last of Paul's letters is written, as is generally supposed, in his second imprisonment, and very near his martyrdom. The condition in which it represents him is remarkably contrasted, in several respects, with the conditions of his first imprisonment, as shown in the letters dating from that period. In these — in two of them, at all events — we find him surrounded by troops of friends, among whom the same three names as occur in my text appear as united with him in loyal confidence, and joining with him in greetings to his correspondents. Here they are again, but under what different circumstances! 'Demas hath forsaken me... Only Luke is with me. Take Mark' — who is also absent — 'and bring him with thee.' The lonely Apostle has none of the Old Guard around him, except the faithful Luke, and he longs, before he dies, to see once more the familiar faces, and to be ministered to once more by accustomed and tender hands. That touch of humanity brings him very near us.

But what I have chosen my texts for is the sharp contrast which the three prominent names in them present in their attitude to the Apostle — Demas the renegade, Mark the restored runaway, Luke, the ever steadfast and faithful companion- Now of course these three men's relation to Jesus Christ was not identical with their relation to Paul. But at the same time their relation to Paul, one has little doubt, fluctuated with their relation to Jesus. It is scarcely possible to believe that the first of them would have done so base an act as to abandon the Apostle at the very crisis of his fate, unless his attachment to Jesus had become slender, nor that Mark's love to his Lord had not cooled when he 'went not with Paul and Barnabas to the work.' I take these three names as representations of three different types of character and spiritual experience, and I wish to look at the three portraits in succession; only I venture to alter the order in which they appear in the text. First, then —

I. Demas the renegade.

We know nothing of him except that in the letters of the earlier imprisonment his name appears, honoured by Paul with the designation of his ' fellow-worker,' evidently admitted into the inner circle, living in amity and close communion with the other members of it, trusted and honoured, a man of some maturity and advancement, and now guilty of the base act of leaving the Apostle. How deeply that wounded Paul's sensitive heart the language of our text sufficiently shows. It is a sad fate that all the world should know that fact, and only that, about Demas, that he should be cursed and condemned to such an immortality, and go down through the ages branded with ' he hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.' He was not a monster, but just a man like the rest of us; and he came to his bad eminence by a very well-trodden and familiar path. He 'hath forsaken me, having loved this present world' — that is to say, he was a religious man who had not religion enough to resist the constant attractions and seductions of this present, and because he loved it, in one or other of its forms — wealth, ease, comfort, a whole skin, reputation, or whatever it may have been — more than he loved Paul's Master, he turned his back upon principle, friendship, honour, duty, everything noble, and buried himself in the far-off Thessalonica. There are a great many Demases amongst us, and a great many different kinds of Thessalonicas to which we run. But we are all exposed to that same danger, and so we may well look at this one soul that fell under its spell, and was too weak to resist its pertinacious solicitations, and say to ourselves: 'Lord, is it I?'

For there is nothing in human sin that is alien from any of us, and no depth of lapse and apostasy is so profound but that the tendencies towards it, and the possibilities of it, are in us, even us also. So let me translate into less well-worn words the language of the text which, for all its force, is so familiar that it does not appeal to us as it ought to do.

'This present world,' what is that? Well, it is Protean, as I have already hinted, in its shapes, and all manner of solicitations come from it, but we may say in general terms that it is the aggregate of 'things seen and temporal' which, subtle, and certainly corresponding to our own weakest sides, appealing to some of us in the shape of wealth, to some of us in the shape of earthly loves, to some of us in the shape of material advantages, to some of us in the form of the 'hollow wraith of dying fame,' to some of us in the nobler guise of scientific pursuits, lie confined within the limits of the phenomenal and the material, but to all of us being essentially the presentation of the visible, the material, the transient as the aim to strain after, and the good to count as our treasure.

Let us remember how persistent and how terribly strong the appeal of 'this present world' is to us all Its operation is continual upon us. Here it is, and we are in necessary connection with it, and it is our duty to be occupied with it, and it is cowardice to shirk the duty because of the peril that lies in it. You have to go to your business to-morrow morning, and I have to go to my books or my work; and the task for each of us is — and God knows how hard a task it is — to have our hearts in heaven whilst our hands are busy with the things around us. Christianity enjoins no false asceticism. There is little need to preach that to-day, but still it is to be remembered that it is duty to be occupied with the world, and fatal sin to love it, And just because it is so difficult to keep upon that knife-edge, so difficult to put all our pith and power into our occupation with material things, and yet never to be tempted into the love of them which fights against all nobleness of life, is it incumbent on me, over and over again, to reiterate to you and to myself the old threadbare commonplace, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.' Leave your mark on them, work on them diligently, and with all your heart, bend them to be your servants, and to help you to rise to the things above them, but on your soul's

peril keep clear of that bowing down before them, that trusting in them, that longing for them, that despair if you lose them, which together make up the love of the world, and the lust thereof which passes away. There is an enemy within the fortress who is always ready and eager to fling open the gates to the besiegers. For the things 'seen and temporal' correspond with, and have their ally in, the senses by which we are brought into contact with them. And unless there is a very strong religious impulse dominant in our minds, or to put it into more Christian words, unless 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us,' it cannot be but that we shall follow Demas, and run away to our Thessalonica, and leave Paul, and duty, and, Paul's Master, and duty's Source, behind us.

For, brethren, if once this love of the world, which is always soliciting each of us, gets a footing in our hearts, it is impossible — as impossible as it is for two bodies to occupy the same place at the same time — for the love of Christ, which is the love of God, to continue dominant there. There cannot be two masters. That is plain common sense. If my head is full of thoughts and schemes, concerned only with the fleeting illusory present, then there is no room in it for His serene, ennobling presence. If my hands are laden with pebbles, I cannot clasp the diamonds that are offered to me.

Unless you fling out the sand-bags the balloon will cleave to the earth, and unless we turn the world out of our hearts, it is no use to say to Him, 'Come! Lord Jesus.' There is no room for Him. And though He comes through the narrowest opening of the door of the soul, He will not come unless we have to some extent conquered the world, and the love of the world.

If I could get you to translate for yourselves the threadbare theological terminology of this text into the vital facts that it represents, I should thank God. Only, dear brethren, take this with you, either we forsake Christ because we love the world, or we forsake the world because we love Christ. On the one alternative we choose restlessness and feverish desires unsatisfied, and craving, all the misery of mistaking mist for land and cloud-wrack for solid ground; on the other, we choose all the blessedness of having set our love on that which satisfies, of having loved the worthiest, the best, the most loving. Which of the two shall we choose? It may be that the one choice shall mean, as it did for Paul, a prison cell and a martyrdom, and that the other may mean, as it did for Demas, comfort and safety, and many an unmistakably good thing, in some Thessalonica or other. But are we going to vote with Demas, or is it going to be Paul? Whether is it better to love the world, and get what the renegade presumably got for a time, or is it better to get what Paul speaks of in the words before my text, 'a crown of righteousness laid up for all them that love' — not the world — 'but His appearing.' like the martyr Apostle.

II. Now look at that other portrait, Mark, the restored runaway.

You remember the little that Scripture tells us about him, how he was chosen to be the personal attendant, private secretary, factotum, travelling agent, of Paul and Barnabas on their first journey, how his courage and faith lasted as long as the two missionaries were on familiar ground, on his native soil, in the island of Cyprus; and how when they crossed to the mainland both courage and faith oozed out at his finger ends, and he hurried back to his mother's house in Jerusalem. When Paul would go again with Barnabas, to visit the churches, the latter, with a relative's too great kindness which was cruelty, insisted on taking the runaway with them, and Paul, with hot indignation which was kinder than the misplaced affection of the uncle, steadfastly refused his consent. Then Barnabas and Mark slip out of the narrative and disappear, and long years pass during which we know nothing about them. But in time, somehow or other, things are made up; no doubt Mark was penitent. Therefore it was as right for Paul to forgive then, as it had been right for him before not to forgive.

It is very beautiful to notice that here he desires to have Mark for the very office which he had, in such shameful and cowardly fashion, flung up long years ago. For the book of Acts says, 'They had also John (Mark) to their minister,' and here Paul says, 'Bring him with thee, for he is profitable to

me for the ministry.' He was reinstating him in the very position which he had once abandoned.

Now what does Mark's restoration teach us? This great gospel, that from any departure, no matter how far, no matter with what aggravations attended, no matter for how long it has lasted, from any departure from duty and from Christ a man can come back. Those of us professing Christians who know ourselves best, and who fight most vigorously against the creeping encroachments of the love of the world, know best how often and how far we have yielded to them, and gone away from them. Brother, no matter how remote we have made ourselves from Him, we cannot travel beyond the reach of His seeking love. And the wisest thing we can do — and it is a possible thing for us all — is to go back to the beginning, and at the Cross to receive, what is never withheld, pardon for our lapses. Christ laid down the measure of human forgiveness when He said 'seventy times seven' — the two perfect numbers multiplied into themselves, and their product again multiplied by perfection; and are His love, and His placability, and His pardoning mercy less than that which He prescribed for us? Surely not. So we all may go back again, however far we have wandered, and must go back if we would not be swept into outer darkness for ever. The possibility of return, and, therefore, the blessed duty of repentance, is preached to all us imperfect Christians by this example before us.

I would also remind you how in the restored runaway, or rather in the Apostle's conduct to him, we see as I have already hinted, an

adumbration, because a consequence of the divine forgiveness. Paul trusted this unreliable man at last. As the Acts of the Apostles says, 'He thought it not good to take him with them who had departed from the work,' and his severity was an instrument of cure far more effectual than Barnabas' flaccid good nature. The shrug of the shoulders that overlooks transgression and says, 'Oh! it does not matter,' is a much more cruel and a much less curative thing than the hot indignation which says, 'No, you have been unworthy, and until you repent there is no restoration possible.' That is how God does with us, not because He loves us less, but because He loves us more, and because He seeks to make thorough work, and to purge the bosom of the perilous stuff which, unless it is purged, will ever keep us from union with Him. Inasmuch as the law of the divine forgiveness is here set forth in the severity towards the impenitent, and in the generous confidence towards the penitent, and the restoration to his old office, let us Christian people learn our duty to those who have gone astray, and how there is no surer way of helping them to be reliable and profitable than showing them that we trust them to be both.

Still further, from out of this second of our portraits, there comes the other lesson, that failure in a task may tend to make us successful in it hereafter. Mark shirked the ministry; he became 'profitable for the ministry.' That is to say, though all sin weakens, yet sin repented and sin cast out may strengthen, because it may drive us nearer to God, because it may lead us to deeper humility, because it may kindle a livelier flame of gratitude, the gas that drives the engine, and because it may set us upon closer examination of our own selves, and putting up barriers at the weak places where the enemy poured in like a flood. So for all these reasons, in a far higher sense than the poet meant it, we may make stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things. There is no fatal entail of sin upon us, by which the past is always to set the time and prescribe the measure for the future. The Israelites fought two battles, on the same field, against the same foes, the fights at Aphek against the Philistines. In one of them they were ignominiously routed and beaten from the field; and in the other, on the same spot, against the same enemy, with the same weapons, the same men triumphed; and reared upon the field a memorial alike of their present victory and of their past defeat, and called it the Stone of Help, saying, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.'

III. Lastly, we have here a third picture, that of the steadfast companion, Luke.

'Only Luke is with me,' and he had been with Paul for years, having joined him first at Troas, on the eve of his first missionary enterprise in Europe, having remained, as it appears, at Philippi whilst the Apostle traversed Greece, having rejoined him at Philippi on his return journey, travelled with him to Jerusalem, Caesarea, in a shipwreck, in Rome in the first imprisonment, presumably during the interval; and now again we find him Paul's only companion, in the second imprisonment. He is a type of the steadfast souls who never stray, but by patient continuance in communion with Paul's Lord, 'go from strength to strength,' until 'every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.' 'Abide with me,' says Paul's Master, and if we keep ourselves in the love of God, and resist the temptations to be drawn aside, steadfastly cleave unto the Lord, then the world will not have power over us, and we shall neither repeat the experience of the renegade, nor of the restored runaway, but find that day by day we grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord, and run with unwearied patience and perseverance the race that is set before us. A continuous development as the result of a quiet constancy of abiding with Jesus Christ is possible for us all. And if we do not come to it absolutely and with the completeness of the ideal, in our earthly experience, still we may approximate indefinitely towards it, and interruptions may become fewer and fewer and shorter and shorter, until what were broken dots, as it were, run into a continuous line, and we dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives.

Brethren! are we to be Demas? Are we to be Mark? Are we to be Luke? We may be all three. We have run away; we can go back; and thenceforward we can continue steadfast and immovable, cleaving to the Lord, and 'loving' — not the world, but — 'His appearing.'

PAUL'S DYING CONFIDENCE

2 Timothy 4:13.

The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly Kingdom: to Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.' — 2 Timothy 4:13.

If we leave out of notice for a moment the two or three salutations and personal messages which follow, these are the last words of Paul's last letter. So he disappears from history with this ringing cry of confidence upon his lips. There was enough in his circumstances to breed the very opposite disposition. He was half-way through his trial before Nero, and suspense, we all know, gnaws at the very roots of courage. He was all but absolutely certain that death was near, as he had said a minute before: 'I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is' nothing but the crown to look for. His heart was wrung by the desertion of friends; Demas had forsaken him, and when the pinch of his trial came, and his head was, as it were, in the lion's open mouth, none of his friends plucked up heart of grace to stand beside him. But in spite of all, indomitable courage and a bright flame of hope, that nothing could blow or batter out, burned in the Apostle's heart still. Therefore he rays, even while facing the block, 'the Lord will

deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto His everlasting Kingdom.' He is so sure of this that he brings his thanks beforehand — 'to whom be glory for ever and ever. The thing is as good as done; and so I render my praise.'

Note here a very striking trace and echo of —

I. Christ's words. I suppose you will often have observed that my text is a variation on the theme of the Lord's Prayer.

That said, 'Deliver us from evil'; Paul says, 'The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work.' That, according to one form of Matthew's version, ends with the doxology: 'Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen' Paul echoes that ascription of praise with his 'to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.' So we have here a little window through which we can see a wide prospect. For the gospels are later in date than Paul's letters, and the text shows that long before they were in existence the 'Lord's Prayer' was familiar, so that allusions to it were made tacitly, and would be recognised. This allusion is interesting in another point of view, in so far as it seems to prove that, in Paul's time, at any rate, the doxology was appended to the

Lord's Prayer; and that, therefore, the fuller form of that prayer with the doxology is more original than the truncated form without it.

But passing from such considerations, let us note this word of Paul's as an instance of how his mind was saturated with the Lord's utterances. So it should be with us. Christ's words should have so entered into the very substance of our minds and thoughts as that we give them freely forth again, in other shapes and in other connections; and the sweetness of them, like that of some perfume diffused through else scentless air, shall make all our words and thoughts fragrant. Do you so summer and winter with the Master's words that they suggest themselves spontaneously to you often when you scarcely know that they are His, and that you speak them, not with formal quotation marks in front and behind, but in that allusive fashion, which indicates familiarity and the free use, in other combinations, of the great truths which He has spoken?

Notice, too, that Paul turned the prayer into confidence. In the prayer his Master had taught him to say, 'Deliver us from evil.' He had offered the petition, and therefore he had no more doubt than he had of his own existence or of Timothy's, that, having asked, he would receive. Therefore he is sure that 'the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work.' Is that how you treat your prayers? Are they worth treating so? Are they offered with such confidence as that you have any right to be sure that they will be answered? Are they offered with such submission as that you may well be certain of it; and do you wait, as this Apostle did, quietly expecting to have the answers? And are your eyes anointed to see the answers in things that some people might take to be the contradictions of them? Unless we have so moulded our petitions into assurances there is something wrong with them. If we pray aright, 'Deliver us from evil,' there will rise up in our hearts the quiet confidence, 'the Lord will deliver me from every evil work.'

Here we have a beautiful illustration of the true use of —

II. Past experience.

Paul links two clauses together. He says, describing how these faint-hearted if not faithless friends had run away from him when the pinch of peril came, 'They all forsook me, but the Lord stood with me; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.' He looks back to that recent instance of Christ's protecting care and delivering might, and so he changes his tenses, and brings the light of the past to flood the darkness of the present, and to flash into the obscurity of the future, and he says, 'I was delivered.., and the Lord will deliver me, from every evil.'

He has the same collocation of thoughts, as you may remember in another place where, speaking of other kinds of deliverances, he says that the Lord 'delivered him from so great a death' — that was in the past — 'and doth deliver' — that is the thrilling consciousness that the same power is in the present as in the past; that to-day is no more prosaic and devoid of God than any yesterday; and then he adds, 'In whom we trust that He will deliver us.' Such is the true attitude for a Christian man. Experience is not meant only, as is too often its sole effect, to throw light upon the past, but also to flash a cheery beam on the else dim. future; just as the eastern sky will sometimes throw a hint of its own glory upon the western heaven. To a Christian, every yesterday is a prophecy of a to-morrow that will be like it, and God's past is a pledge for God's future.

If we, if we are truly trusting in Him, may have the prerogative which belongs to His children alone, of being absolutely certain that 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant,' For there is nothing in the past, nothing in the miracles of former generations, nothing in the great deeds by which God has vindicated HIS protecting care over His people in the days that are gone, and nothing in the mercies and blessings and deliverances and immunities which we ourselves have received that is not available for to-morrow's consumption. The psalmist said, 'As we have heard so have we seen, in the City of our God.' The deeds of ancient days were repeated in the prosaic present.

And that is as true about the individual life as it is about the corporate life of the community. All of us, looking back to what God has done for us, may find therein the basis of the surest confidence that all that is but a specimen and pledge of what He will do. Nobody else but a Christian has the right to say, 'I have had this, that, and the other good; therefore I shall have it.' Rather, alas! a man that

has wrenched himself away from God has to say sadly, 'I have had; therefore the likelihood is that I shall not have any more.'

Have you ever thought that the belief which we all have, and cannot get rid of, in the uniformity of nature, has no scientific basis? Everybody expects that the sun will rise to-morrow, and for a great many millions of years, perhaps the expectation is right; but there is coming a day when it will not rise. There is a last time — 'positively the very last' — for everything in

the world, and in the order of nature, and the expectation of permanence by which we guide our lives is, at bottom, absolutely unfounded, and yet there it is, and we have to act upon it. But you can give no rational explanation of it, and it will not always serve. There was once made a calculating machine. You turned a handle, and ground out a succession of numbers, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, etc., each increasing on the preceding by one. And after that had gone on for a long series the sequence was broken, and there came out a number which did not stand in the series at all. That is how God has made nature; grinding away for millions of years, and everything going in regular sequence; but then there comes a break, and the old order changeth. A day will come which is the last day. The sun will set and not rise again, and the world, and all there is in it, shall cease to be.

And as with nature, so with our little lives, and with the men that we trust to. We have no right to say, 'I have been delivered, and therefore shall be delivered,' unless we have the Lord, who is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever at the back of our confidence. For men's resources fail and men's dispositions change. If I have helped a man a hundred times, that is not a reason for my helping him the hundred and first time. I may get tired, or perhaps I have not the wherewithal, or circumstances alter. Continuity does not guarantee permanence. You can weary out the most patient patience, and chill the warmest love. And so we have to turn from all the limited and changeful grounds of confidence in ourselves, in others, in the order of things about us, and to acknowledge that we do not know what to-morrow is going to do for us. We have had a great many blessings, but the future may be beggared and bankrupt of them all, unless we can say, like Paul, 'the Lord delivered me, and the Lord will deliver me.' For His past is the parent and the prophecy of His present, and He does not let His resources be exhausted or His patience wearied or His love disgusted. Thou hast been with me in six troubles, says Job-art Thou tired of being with me? — 'in the seventh Thou wilt not forsake me.' Thy past is the revelation of Thine eternal Self, and as Thou hast been so Thou wilt be. Christ, as the Incarnation of Divinity, lives, if I might use such a phrase, in a region that is high above the tenses of our verbs, in one eternal now, far below which, Past, Present, and Future, as we know them, are like the little partitions in our fields, which from the mountain-top melt away into invisibility, and do not divide the far-reaching plain.

Travellers see, in deserted, ancient cities, half-hewn statues, with one part polished and the rest rough, and the block not detached from the native rock. They were meant to be carried by 'the subjects of some forgotten king to build up some unfinished and never-to-be-finished temple or palace. There are no half-finished works in God's workshop; no pictures begun and uncompleted in Christ's studio: and so we can go to Him with the old prayer of the psalmist: 'The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me. Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever; forsake not the work of Thine own hands.'

Lastly, we have here a great lesson of how —

III. A man close to death may think of it, 'The Lord will deliver me.'

Did He? 'The Lord will save me... into His everlasting kingdom.' Was that a mistake on Paul's part? Very soon after he wrote these words, perhaps even before the winter against the cold of which he asked Timothy to bring his one cloak that he had left at Troas, he was again brought before the Emperor, and then was led outside the walls of Rome, where a gorgeous church now bears his name, and there, according to tradition was decapitated. Yes; that was just what he expected. For, as I have already pointed out, a verse or two before my text says, 'I have finished my course.' And yet, with the certainty that Death was close by him, he lifts up this ringing song Of triumph, 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me into His heavenly Kingdom,' He expected that deliverance and saving into the Kingdom to be accomplished precisely by the fact of his death.

A man who has a firm grip of Christ's hand sees all things differently from him who has no such stay. If Jesus is standing by us, and strengthening us, we can look with a smile at the worst that Nero can do, and can tell even the executioner: 'You do not mean it; do you know what you are doing? You think you are inflicting evil upon me. You are delivering me from every evil.' Death is the great emancipator from all manner of evil, be it the evil of sorrows or the evil of their parent sins. And he who rightly understands the operation of that, the last of earthly incidents, understands that it is, in the fullest sense, the smiting off of his chains, and the lifting of him up high into a region where no malaria of evil can ever rise.

Death is not merely to be looked at on the side of what it takes a man away from, but on the side of what it introduces him to. 'He shall deliver me from every evil'; that is much, but it might be effected by crushing the man's consciousness and annihilating him. Bare exemption and escape from the ills that flesh is heir to are not all the choice gifts with which

Death-comes laden. In his bony left hand is the gift of deliverance from all evil. In his right there is the positive gift of participation in all good. 'He shall deliver me from evil, and shall save me into His everlasting Kingdom.' And so that grim form is the porter at the gate, who ushers the man who has hoped in Christ into the royalty of His presence.

Mark that here, for the only time in Scripture, we have the expression, the 'heavenly Kingdom.' Why? Because Paul knew and felt that he was in the Kingdom already, and so he could not say barely that Christ through death was going to save him into the Kingdom. He was already there, but just because he was, therefore the last enemy assumed this friendly and familiar form to him, and was sure to bring him into the heavenly form of the Kingdom, of whose earthly form he was already a subject. If — and only if — you are in the Kingdom here, can you quietly look forward and be sure that the Lord, when He sends His messenger, will send Him to do the double work of delivering you out of all evil, and ushering you into all glory of good.