

Maclaren on Hebrews Pt2

RELATED RESOURCES

Hebrews Commentaries 1

Hebrews Commentaries 2

Alexander Maclaren Sermons on Hebrews - Pt
1

Alexander Maclaren Sermons on Hebrews - Pt
2

Alexander Maclaren Sermons on Hebrews - Pt
3

Alexander Maclaren Sermons on Hebrews - Pt
4

Alexander Maclaren Sermons on Hebrews - Pt
5

Alexander Maclaren Sermons on Hebrews - Pt
6

F B Meyer on Hebrews

C H Spurgeon on Hebrews Pt 1

C H Spurgeon on Hebrews Pt 2

C H Spurgeon on Hebrews Pt 3

C H Spurgeon on Hebrews Pt 4

Alexander Maclaren Sermons on The Epistle to the Hebrews Part 2

Hebrews 4:3 The Rest of Faith

'We which have believed do enter into rest...' — Hebrews 4:3

'Do enter' — but on a hundred gravestones you will read 'He entered into rest' on such and such a day, as a synonym for 'He died.' It is strange that an expression which the writer of this Epistle takes pains to emphasise as referring to a present experience should, by common consent, in popular use, have been taken to mean a future blessing. If nominal Christians had found more frequently that their faith was strong enough to produce its natural effects, they would not have so often misunderstood our writer. He does not say, 'We, when we die, shall enter into rest,' but 'We who have believed do enter.'

It is a bold statement, and the experience of the average Christian seems to contradict it. But if the fruit of faith is repose; and if we who say we have faith are full of unrest, the best thing we can do is not to doubt the saying, but to look a little more closely whether we have fulfilled its conditions.

'We which have believed do enter into rest.'

I. So, then, the first thing to be noted here is the present rest of faith.

I say 'faith' rather than 'belief,' because I wish to emphasise the distinction between the Christian notion of faith, and the common notion of belief. The latter is merely the acceptance of a proposition as true; and that is not enough to bring rest to any soul, though it may bring rest to the understanding. It is a great pity, though one does not quite see how it could have been avoided, that so frequently in the New Testament, to popular apprehension, the depth of the meaning of that one requirement of faith is obscured because it is represented in our version by the word 'believe,' which has come to be appropriated to the mere intellectual act. But if you will notice that the writer of this Epistle uses two other words as interchangeable with 'belief,' you will understand the depth of his meaning better. Sometimes he speaks of our 'confidence' — by which he means precisely the same thing. Sometimes he speaks of our 'obedience' — by which he means precisely the same thing. So there is an element of voluntary submission implied, and there is an element of outgoing confidence implied in the word. And when he says, 'We which have believed do enter into rest,' he does not mean 'We which acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, But we who, acknowledging, let our hearts go out to Him in trust, and our wills bow down before Him in obedience and submission. We thereby do enter into rest.' Carry with you these two thoughts, then — 'confidence' and 'obedience' — as indispensable elements in the New Testament conception of faith, and then you can understand the great saying of my text.

Trust brings rest, for the trust which grasps Jesus Christ, not only intellectually, but with the reliance of the whole nature upon Him to do for me that which my understanding believes that He will do — that trust brings rest because it sweeps away, as the north wind does the banded clouds on the horizon, all the deepest causes of unrest. These are our perverted relation to God, and the alienation of our hearts from Him. Brother! there is no rest deep as life which does not flow from rejoicing confidence in Christ's great sacrifice by which the innermost source of conflict and disturbance in our souls has been dealt with. Most of us are contented if there be a superficial appearance of calm, like the sunny vineyard on the slopes of a volcano, whilst in the heart of it sulphurous fires are bubbling and boiling, and will burst out some day. What is the worth of a tranquillity which only survives on condition of our ignoring the most patent and most operative fact in our lives? It is only when you shuffle God out of your consciousness, and when you wink hard so as not to see the facts of your own moral condition and sinfulness, or when you sophisticate yourself into illogical and unreasonable diminution of the magnitude and gravity of your sins, that some of you know a moment's rest. If the curtain were once drawn aside, and we were brought face to face with the realities of heaven and the realities of our own characters, all this film of apparent peace would break and burst, and we should be left to face the trouble that comes whenever a man's relation with God is, consciously to himself, perverted and wrong. But trust brings rest; rest from the gnawing of conscience, rest from the suspicion of evil consequences resulting from contact with the infinite divine righteousness, rest from all the burden of guilt, which is none the less heavy because the man appears to be unconscious of it. It is there all the same. 'We which have believed do enter into rest,' because our trust brings about the restoration of the true relation to God and the forgiveness of our sins. Trust brings rest, because it casts all our burdens on another. Every act of reliance, though it does not deliver from responsibility, delivers from anxiety. We see this even when the object of our trust is but a poor creature like ourselves. Husbands and wives who find settled peace in one another; parents and children; patrons and protected, and a whole series of other relationships in life, are witnesses to the fact that the attitude of reliance brings the actuality of repose. A little child goes to sleep beneath its mother's eye, and is tranquil, not only because it is ignorant but because it is trustful. So if we will only get behind the shelter, the blast will not blow about us, but we shall be in what they call on the opposite side of the Tweed, in a word that is music in the ears of some of us — a 'lown place,' where we hear not the loud winds when they call. Trust is rest; even when we lean upon an arm of flesh, though that trust is often disappointed. What is the depth of the repose that comes not from trust that leans against something supposed to be a steadfast oak, that proves to be a broken reed, but against the Rock of Ages? We which have 'believed do enter into rests' Trust brings repose, because it effects submission. The true reason for our restlessness in this world is not that we are 'pelted by the pitiless storm' of change and sorrow. A grief accepted loses most of its power to sadden, and all its power to perturb. It is not outward calamities, but a rebellious will that troubles us. The bird beats itself against the wires of its cage, and wounds itself, whereas if it sat still in its captivity it might sing. So when we trust we submit; and submission is the mother of peace. There is no other consolation worth naming for our sorrows, except the consolation that comes from submission. When we accept them, lie still, let him strike home and kiss the rod, we shall be at rest.

Trust brings repose, because it leads to satisfied desires. We are restless because each object that we pursue yields but a partial satisfaction, and because all taken together are inadequate to our needs. There is but one Person who can fill the heart, the mind, the will, and satisfy our whole nature. No accumulation of things, be they ever so precious, even if they are the higher or more refined satisfactions of the intellect, can ever satisfy the heart. And no endless series of finite persons is sufficient for the wants of any one of the series, who, finite as he is, yet needs an infinite satisfaction. It must be a person that shall fill all the cavities and clefts of our hearts, and, filling them, gives us rest. 'My soul thirsteth for God,' though I misinterpret its thirst, and, like a hot dog upon a road, try to slake my thirst by lapping at any puddle of dirty water that I come across in my path. There is no satisfaction there. It is in God, and in God only, that we can find repose.

Some of us may have seen a weighty acknowledgment from a distinguished biologist lately deceased which strikes me as relevant

to this thought.

Listen to his confession: 'I know from experience the intellectual distractions of scientific research, philosophical speculation, and artistic pleasures, but am also well aware that even when all are taken together, and well sweetened to taste, in respect of consequent reputation, means, social position, etc., the whole concoction is but as light confectionery to a starving man ... It has been my lot to know not a few of the foremost men of our generation, and I have always observed that this is profoundly true.' That is the testimony of a man who had tried the highest, least material forms of such a trust. And I know that there is an 'amen' to it in every heart, and I lift up opposite to all such experiences the grand summary of Christian experience: 'We which have believed do enter into rest.'

II. Note, secondly, the energy of work which accompanies the rest of faith.

There is a good deal said in the context — a difficult context, with which we are not concerned at present, about the analogy between a man's rest in God and God's own rest. That opens wonderful thoughts which I must not be tempted to pursue, with regard to the analogy between the divine and the human, and the possible assimilation, in some measure, of the experiences of the creature with those of the Creator. Can it be that, between a light kindled and burning itself away while it burns, and fire which burns and is not consumed, there is any kind of correspondence? There is, however dim the analogy may be to us. Let us take the joy and the elevation of that thought, 'My peace I give unto you.'

But the main point for which I refer to this possible analogy is in order to remind you that the rest of God is dealt with in Scripture as being, not a cessation from work, but the accomplishment of a purpose, and satisfaction in results. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,' said Jesus Christ. And modern speculation puts the same thought in a more heathenish fashion when it says 'preservation is continual creation.' Just as God rests from His creative work, not as if either needing repose or holding His hand from further operation, but as satisfied with the result; just as He rests in work and works in rest, so Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God in eternal indisturbance and repose, in token that He has fulfilled His work on earth. But He is likewise represented as standing at the right hand of God in attitude to help His servants, and as evermore working with them in all their toils.

In like manner we shall much misconceive the repose of faith, if we do not carry with us the thought that that repose is full of strenuous toil. Faith brings rest. Yes! But the main characteristic of Christian faith is that it is an active principle, which sets all the wheels of holy life in more vigorous motion, and breathes an intenser as well as calmer and more reposeful activity into the whole man. The work of faith is quite as important as the rest of faith. It works by love, and the very repose that it brings ought to make us more strenuous in our toil. We are able to cast ourselves without anxiety about ourselves, and with no distraction of our inner nature, and no weakening of power in consequence of the consciousness of sin, or of unconscious sin — into the tasks which devolve upon us, and so to do them with our might. The river withdrawn from all divided channels is gathered into the one bed that it may flow with power, and scour before it all impurities. So the man who is delivered from restlessness is quickened for work, and even 'in his very motion there is rest.' It is possible to blend together in secret, sweet, indissoluble union these two partial antitheses, and in the midst of the most strenuous effort to have a central calm, like the eye of the storm which whirls in its wild circles round a centre-point of perfect repose. It is possible, at one and the same time, to be dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and feeding our souls with that calm that broods there, and to be up to the ears in business, and with our hands full of pressing duties. The same faith which ushers us into the quiet presence of God in the centre of the soul, pushes us into the forefront of the battle to fight, and into the world's busy workshop to labour.

So the rest which is Christian is a rest throbbing with activity; and, further, the activity which is based on faith will deepen repose, and not interrupt it. Jesus Christ distinguished between the two stages of the tranquillity which is realised by His true disciples, for He said 'Come unto Me... and I will give you rest' — the rest which comes by approach to Him in faith from the beginning of the approach, rest resulting from the taking away of what I have called the deepest cause of unrest. There is a second stage of the disciples' action and consequent peace; 'Take My yoke upon you... and ye shall find rest' — not 'I will give' this time — 'ye shall find' — in the act of taking the yoke upon your necks — 'rest to your souls.' The activity that ensues from faith deepens the rest of faith.

III. Lastly, to consider the future perfecting of the present rest.

In a subsequent verse the writer uses a different word from that of my text to express this idea; and it is rather unfortunate for the understanding of the progress of the thought that our version has kept the same expression in both cases. 'There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God' — which follows a few verses after my text — had better have been rendered, 'There remaineth the keeping of a Sabbath to the people of God'; although probably the writer is pointing to the same facts there as in my text, yet he introduces a metaphor which conveys more clearly than the text does the idea of an epoch of rest following upon a week of toil.

So I may venture to say that the repose of faith which is experienced here, because the causes of unrest are taken away, and a

new ally comes into the field, and our wills submit, and our desires are satisfied, is but the germ of that eternal Sabbath day to which we look forward. I have said that the gift spoken of here is a present thing; but that present thing bears in all its lineaments a prophecy of its own completion. And the repose of a Christian heart in the midst of life's work and worry is the best anticipation and picture, because it is the beginning, of the rest of heaven.

That future, however it may differ from this present, and how much it differs none know except those who are wrapt in its repose, is in essence the same. Yonder, as here, we become partakers of rest through faith. There, as here, it is trust that brings rest. And no change of bodily environment, no change of the relations between body and spirit, no transference of the man into new conditions and a new world will bring repose, unless there is in him a trust which grasps Jesus Christ. Faith is eternal, and is eternally the minister of rest. Heaven is the perfecting of the highest and purest moments of Christian experience.

So, Christian men and women, the more trust the more rest. And if it be so that going through this weary world you have but little confirmation of the veracity of the great saying of my text, do not fancy that it is a mistake. Look to your faith and see that it is deepened.

And let us all, dear friends, remember that not death but faith brings present repose and future perfecting. Death is not the porter that opens the gate of the kingdom. It is only the usher that brings us to the gate, and the gate is opened by Him 'who openeth and no man shutteth; and who shutteth and no man openeth.' He opens to them who have believed, and they enter in and are saved. 'Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.'

><>><>><>

Hebrews 4:9, 10 Entrance Into God's Rest

'There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10. For He that is entered into His rest, He also hath ceased from His own works, as God did from His.' — Hebrews 4:9, 10

WE lose much of the meaning of this passage by our superficial habit of transferring it to a future state. The ground of the mistake is in the misinterpretation of that word 'remaineth'; which is taken to point to the 'rest,' after the sorrows of this life are all done with. Of course there is such a rest; but if we take the context of the passage, we cannot but recognise this as the truth that is taught here, that faith, and not death, is the gate to participation in Christ's rest — that the rest remained over after Moses and Judaism, but came into possession under and by Christ.

For the main scope of the whole passage is the elucidation of one of the points in which the writer asserts the superiority of Christ to Moses, of Christianity to Judaism. That old system, says he, had in it for its very heart a promise of rest; but it had only a promise.

It could not give the thing that it held forth. It could not, by the nature of the system. It could not, as is manifest from this fact — that years after they had entered into possession of the land, years after the promise had been first given, the Psalmist represents the entrance into that rest as a privilege not yet realised, but waiting to be grasped by the men of day whose hearts were softened to hear God's voice. David's words clearly, to the mind of the writer of the epistle, show that Canaan was not the promised 'rest.' David treats it as being obtained by obedience to God's Word; and as not yet possessed by the people, though they had the promised land. He treats it as then, in his own 'day,' still but a promise, and a promise which would not be fulfilled to his people if they hardened their hearts. All this carries the inference that the Mosaic system did not give the 'rest' which it promised. Hence, says the author of the Hebrews, that 'rest' held forth from the beginning, gleaming before all generations of the Jewish people, but to them only a fair vision, remains unpossessed as yet, but to be possessed. God's word has been pledged. He has said that there shall be a share in His rest for His people. The ancient people did not get it. What then? Is God's promise thereby cancelled? 'They could not enter in because of unbelief,' but the unbelief of man shall not make the faith of God without effect. Therefore, as the eternal promise has been given, and they counted themselves unworthy, the divine mercy which will find some to enter therein, and will not be balked of its purposes, turns to the Gentiles; and the 'rest' provided for the Jews first, but unaccepted by them, remains for all who believe to partake.

And, still further, the writer establishes the principle that the rest promised to the Jew remains yet to be inherited by the Christian, on a second ground: 'For,' says he, in the tenth verse of the chapter, 'for He that is entered into His rest, He also has ceased from His own works, as God did from His.' How is that a proof? It is not a proof that there is a rest for us, if you interpret it as people generally do. But it is so if you give to it what seems to be the correct interpretation — by referring it to Christ and Christ's heavenly condition. 'He that has entered into His rest — that is Jesus Christ, 'He has ceased from His own works' — His finished work of redemption — 'as God did from His' His finished work of creation. And there is the great proof that there is a rest for us: not only because Judaism did not bring it, but because Christ hath gone up on high. We have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens. Christ our Lord has entered into His rest — parallel with the divine tranquillity after Creation. And seeing that He

possesses it, certainly we shall possess it if only we hold fast by Him. 'There remains a rest' — proved by the fact that Christ hath gone into it, and carrying the inference, 'Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.'

We find here, then, three main points. First, the divine rest, God's and Christ's. Secondly, this divine rest, the pattern of what our life on earth may become. And lastly, this divine rest, the prophecy of what our life in heaven shall assuredly be.

I. In the first place, then, we have here the divine rest.

'He hath ceased from His own works, as God did from His.' The writer is drawing a parallel between God's ceasing from His creative work and entering into that Sabbath rest when He saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good; and Christ's ceasing from the work of redemption, and passing into the heavens to the Sabbath of His everlasting repose.

I need not dwell at any length upon a matter which, after all speech, remains for us but very dimly intelligible — the rest of God. 'My rest' — that rest belongs necessarily to the Divine Nature. It is the deep tranquillity of a nature self-sufficing in its infinite beauty, calm in its everlasting strength, placid in its deepest joy, still in its mightiest energy; loving without passion, willing without decision or change, acting without effort; quiet, and moving everything; making all things new, and itself everlasting; creating, and knowing no diminution by the act; annihilating, and knowing no loss though the universe were barren and unpeopled. God is, God is everywhere, God is everywhere the same, God is everywhere the same infinite, God is everywhere the same infinite love and the same infinite self-sufficiency; therefore His very Being is rest. And yet that image that rises before us, statuesque, still in its placid tranquillity, is not repellent nor cold, is no dead marble likeness of life. That great ocean of the Divine Nature which knows no storm nor billow, is yet not a tideless and stagnant sea. God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He loves. God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He wills. God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He acts. Mystery of mysteries, passing all understanding! And yet He says, 'They shall enter into My rest!' Now I believe, and I hope you believe, that the rest of Christ is like the rest of God, even in respect of this Divine and Infinite Nature. 'He hath ceased from His works, as God did from His.' Jesus Christ is 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' Whatsoever you can predicate of the settled tranquillity, and stable, necessary, essential repose of a divine nature, that you can predicate of Christ our Redeemer, of Christ the Son of God.

But still further. Besides that deep and changeless repose which thus belongs to the Divine Nature, there is the other thought which perhaps comes more markedly out in the passage before us — that of a rest which is God's tranquil ceasing from His work, because God has perfected His work. When we read in the Old Testament, that at the end of the creative act, God rested upon the Sabbath day, and blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, of course the thought that comes into view is not that of a divine nature wearied with toil and needing repose, but that of a divine nature which has fully accomplished its intent, expressed its purpose, done what it meant to do, and rests from its working because it has embodied its ideal in its work. It is the proclamation, 'This creation of Mine is all that I meant it to be — finished and perfect'; not the acknowledgment of an exhaustion of the creative energy which needs to reinvigorate its strength by repose after its mighty effort. The rest of God is the expression of the perfect divine complacency in the perfect divine work.

And, in like manner, as after that creative act there came the Sabbath, when He saw that it was all very good, and the morning stars sang together for joy;—so after the mightier new-creative act of redemption, the Christ, who is divine, ceased and held His hand, not because Bethlehem and Calvary had wearied Him, not because after pain He needed rest, not because the Cross had tasked His powers, and His suffering had strained His nature; but because all that had to be done was done, and He knew it—because redemption was completed. The Sabbath on which God rested from His work, and the new Sabbath on which Christ rose from the dead, the conqueror of death, the destruction of sin, are parallel in this, that in either case the work was done, that in either case the Doer needed no repose after His finished task. And just as God, full of all the energy of being, operated unspent after creation, needed not that rest for His refreshment, but took it as the pledge and proclamation to the universe that all was done; so Christ, unwearied and unwounded from His dreadful close and sore wrestle with sin and death, sprung from the grave to the skies, and rests — proclamation and token to the world that His work is finished, that the Cross is enough for the race for ever more, that all is complete, and man's salvation secured. As God hath ceased from His works, Christ hath ceased from His.

Still further: this divine tranquillity — inseparable from the Divine Nature, the token of the sufficiency and completeness of the divine work — is also a rest that is full of work. When Christ was telling the Jews the principles of the Sabbath day, He said to them: 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' The creative act is finished and God rests; but God, in resting, works; even as God, in working, rests. Preservation is a continued creation. The energy of the divine power is as mightily at work here now sustaining us in life, as it was when He flung forth stars and systems like sparks from a forge, and willed the universe into being. God rests, and in His rest, up to the present hour and for ever, God works. And, in like manner, Christ's work of redemption, finished upon the Cross, is perpetually going on. Christ's glorious repose is full of energy for His people. He intercedes above. He works on them, He works through them, He works for them. The rest of God, the divine tranquillity, is full of work. There, then, is a parallel: the rest of the Father, who ceased from His work of creation, and continueth His work of preservation, is parallel with that of the Son, who ceased

from His work of sacrifice, and continueth His work of intercession and of sanctifying. These two are one. 'My rest' is the rest of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Father. That still communion and that everlasting repose are a prophecy for our lives, brethren. The ancient promise, long repeated, has come sounding down through the echoing halls of the centuries, and rings in our ears as fresh as when first it was spoken, 'There remaineth a rest for the people of God,' they shall enter into the stillness and the secret of His tranquillity!

II. Then, in the second place, the text gives us, The rest of God and of Christ as the pattern of what our earthly life may become.

Like Christ, like God — can it be? It can be, with certain differences; but oh! the differences drop into insignificance when we think of the resemblances. Whether a man is capable of knowing absolute truth or not, he is capable of coming into direct and personal contact with the absolute Reality, the Truth of Truth. And whether here below we can know anything about God as He is or not, this at all events the New Testament teaches us, that we can come to be like Him — like Him in the substance of our souls; like Him — copy of His perfections; like Him — shadow and resemblance of some of His attributes. And here lies the foundation for the belief that we can 'enter into His rest.' We cannot possess that changeless tranquillity which knows no variations of purpose or of desire, but we can possess the stable repose of that fixed nature which knows one object, and one alone. We cannot possess that energy which, after all work, is fresh and unbroken; but we can possess that tranquillity which in all toil is not troubled, and after all work is ready for yet greater service. We cannot possess that unwavering fire of a divine nature which burns in love without flickering, which knows without learning, which wills without irresolution and without the act of decision; but we can come to love deeply, tranquilly, perpetually, we can come to know without questioning, without doubts, without darkness, in firm confidence of stable assurance, and so know with something like the knowledge of Him who knows things as they are; and we can come to will and resolve so strongly, so fixedly, so wisely, that there shall be no change of purpose, nor any vacillation of desire. In these ways, in shadow and copy, we can resemble even the apparently incommunicable tranquillity which, like an atmosphere that knows no tempests, belongs to and encircles the throne of God.

But, still further: faith, which is the means of entering into rest, will — if only you cherish it — make your life no unworthy resemblance of His who, triumphant above, works for us, and, working for us, rests from all His toil. Trust Christ! is the teaching here. Trust Christ! and a great benediction of tranquil repose comes down upon thy calm mind and upon thy settled heart. Trust Christ! and so thy soul will no longer be like 'the sea that cannot rest,' full of turbulent wishes, full of passionate desires that come to nothing, full of endless meanings, like the homeless ocean that is ever working and never flings up any product of its work but yeasty foam and broken weeds; — but thine heart shall become translucent and still, like some land-locked lake, where no winds rave nor tempests ruffle; and on its calm surface there shall be mirrored the clear shining of the unclouded blue, and the perpetual light of the sun that never goes down. Trust Christ! and rest is thine — rest from fear, rest from toil and trouble, rest from sorrow, rest from the tossings of thine own soul, rest from the tumults of thine own desires, rest from the stings of thine own conscience, rest from seeking to work out a righteousness of thine own. Trust Christ, cease from 'thine own works,' forsake thine own doings, and abjure and abandon thine own righteousness; and though God's throne be far above thee, and the depth of that Being be incommunicable to and uncopiable by thee, yet a divine likeness of His still, and blessed, and unbroken repose shall come down and lie — a solid and substantial thing — on thy pure and calmed spirit. 'There remaineth a rest for the people of God.' Say then, my Lord rests and my Father: I Will trust Him; I will rest in the Lord, and He shall keep me in perfect peace, because my mind is stayed on Him.

III. Finally: This divine rest is not only a pattern of what our earthly life may become, but it is a prophecy of what our heavenly life shall surely be.

I have said that the immediate reference of the passage is not to a future state. But that does not exclude the reference, unless, indeed, we suppose that the Christian's life on earth and his condition in heaven are two utterly different things, possessing no feature in common. The Bible presents a directly reverse notion to that. Though it gives full weight to all the differences which characterise the two conditions, yet it says, There is a basis of likeness between the Christian life on earth and the Christian life in heaven, so great as that the blessings which are predicated of the one belong to the other. Only here they are in blossom, sickly often, putting out very feeble shoots and tendrils; and yonder transplanted into their right soil, and in their native air with heaven's sun upon them, they burst into richer beauty, and bring forth fruits of immortal life. Heaven is the earthly life of a believer glorified and perfected. If here we by faith enter into the beginning of rest, yonder through death with faith, we shall enter into the perfection of it.

We cannot speak wisely of that future when we speak definitely of it. All that I suggest now as taught us by this passage is, that heaven will be for us, rest in work and work that is full of rest. Our Lord's heaven is not an idle heaven. Christ is gone up on high, having completed His work on earth, that He may carry on His work in heaven; and after the pattern and likeness of His glory and of His repose, shall be the repose and glory of the children that are with Him. He rests from His labours, and His works do follow Him. He sitteth at the right hand of God 'expecting' — waiting patiently and in the confidence of assured triumph, 'till His enemies

become His footstool.' But yet the dying martyr saw his Lord standing, not sitting, ready to help, and bending over him to welcome; and though He has ascended, and left the work of spreading the gospel to be done on earth, 'the Lord works with us' from His throne, nor is untouched by our troubles, nor idle in our toils. All the rest of that divine tranquillity, is rest in rapid, vigorous, perpetual motion. Ay, it is just as it is with physical things: the looker-on sees the swiftest motion as the most perfect rest. The wheel revolves so fast that the eye cannot discern its movements. The cataract foaming down from the hillside, when seen from half-way across the lake, seems to stand a silent, still, icy pillar. The divine work, because it is such work, is rest — tranquil in its energy, quiet in its intensity; because so mighty, therefore so still! That is God's heaven, Christ's heaven.

The heaven of all spiritual natures is not idleness. Man's delight is activity. The loving heart's delight is obedience. The saved heart's delight is grateful service. The joys of heaven are not the joys of passive contemplation, of dreamy remembrance, of perfect repose; but they are described thus, 'They rest not day nor night.' 'His servants serve Him, and see His face.'

Yes, my brother, heaven is perfect 'rest.' God be thanked for all the depth of unspeakable sweetness which lies in that one little word, to the ears of all the weary and the heavy laden. God be thanked, that the calm clouds which gather round the western setting sun, and stretch their unmoving loveliness in perfect repose, and are bathed through and through with unflashing and tranquil light, seem to us in our busy lives and in our hot strife like blessed prophets of our state when we, too, shall lie cradled near the everlasting, unsetting Sun, and drink in, in still beauty of perpetual contemplation, all the glory of His face, nor know any more wind and tempest, rain and change. Rest in heaven — rest in God! Yes, but work in rest! Ah, that our hearts should grow up into an energy of love of which we know nothing here, and that our hands should be swift to do service, beyond all that could be rendered on earth, — that, never wearying, we should for ever be honoured by having work that never becomes toil nor needs repose; that, ever resting, we should ever be blessed by doing service which is the expression of our loving hearts, and the offering of our grateful and grieved spirits, joyful to us and acceptable to God, — that is the true conception of 'the rest that remaineth for the people of God.' Heaven is waiting for us — like God's, like Christ's — still in all its work, active in all its repose. See to it, my friend, that your life be calm because your soul is fixed, trusting in Jesus, who alone gives rest here to the heavy laden. Then your death will be but the passing from one degree of tranquillity to another, and the calm face of the corpse, whence all the lines of sorrow and care have faded utterly away, will be but a poor emblem of the perfect stillness into which the spirit has gone. Faith is the gate to partaking in the rest of God on earth. Death with faith is the gate of entrance into the rest of God in heaven.

><>><>><>

Hebrews 4:11 Man's Share in God's Rest

'Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the mine example of unbelief.' — Hebrews 4:11.

WITH this simple, practical exhortation, the writer closes one of the most profound and intricate portions of this Epistle. He has been dealing with two Old Testament passages, one of them, the statement in Genesis that God rested after His creative work; the other, the oath sworn in wrath that Israel should not enter into God's rest. Combining these two, he draws from them the inferences that there is a rest of God which He enjoys, and of which He has promised to man a share; that the generation to whom the participation therein was first promised, and as a symbol of that participation, the outward possession of the land, fell by unbelief, and died in the wilderness; that the unclaimed promise continued to subsequent generations and continues to this day. All the glories of it, all the terrors of exclusion, the barriers that shut out, the conditions of entrance, the stringent motives to earnestness, are one in all generations. Surface forms may alter; the fundamentals of the religious life, in the promise of God, and the ways by which men may win or miss it, are unchangeable.

And so the reiterated appeal comes to us with its primeval freshness, saying, after so long a time, 'Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

We have, then, in the words before us, these three things — the rest of God; the barriers against, and the conditions of, entrance; and the labour to secure the entrance.

I. Note then, first, the rest of God.

Now it is quite possible that the Psalmist, in the passage on which our text foos itself, may have meant by 'My rest' nothing more than repose in the land, which rest was God's since He was the giver of it. But it seems more probable that something of the same idea was floating in his mind, which the writer of this Epistle states so expressly and strongly — viz., that far beyond that outward possession there is the repose of the divine nature in which, marvellous as it may seem, it is possible for a man, in some real fashion, to participate.

What, then, is the rest of God? The 'rest' which Genesis speaks about was, of course, not repose that recruited exhausted strength, but the cessation of work because the work was complete, the repose of satisfaction in what we should call an accomplished ideal.

And, further, in that august conception of the rest of God is included, not only the completion of all His purpose, and the full correspondence of effect with cause, but likewise the indisturbance and inward harmony of that infinite nature whereof all the parts co-operant to an end move in a motion which is rest.

And, further, the rest of God is compatible with, and, indeed, but another form of, unceasing activity. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,' said the Master; though the works were, in one sense, finished from the foundation of the world.

Now can we dare to dream that in any fashion that solemn, divine repose and tranquillity of perfection can be reproduced in us? Yes! The dewdrop is a sphere, as truly as the sun; the rainbow in the smallest drop of rain has all the prismatic colours blended in the same harmony as when the great iris strides across the sky. And if man be made in the image of God, man perfected shall be deiform, even in the matter of his apparently incommunicable repose. For they who are exalted to that final future participation in His life will have to look back, too, upon work which, stained as it has been in the doing, yet, in its being accepted upon the altar on which it was humbly laid, has been sanctified and greatened, and will be an element in their joy in the days that are to come. 'They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them' — not for accusation, nor to read to them bitter memories of incompleteness, but rather that they may contribute to the deep repose and rest of the heavens. In a modified form, but yet in reality, the rest of God may be possessed even by the imperfect workers here upon earth.

And, in like manner, that other aspect of the divine repose, in the tranquillity of a perfectly harmonious nature, is altogether, and without restriction, capable of being reproduced, and certain in the future to be reproduced in all them that love and trust Him, when the whole being shall be settled and centred upon Him, and will and desires and duty and conscience shall no more conflict. 'Unite my heart to fear Thy name,' is a prayer even for earth. It will be fully answered in heaven, and the souls made one through all their parts shall rest in God, and shall rest like God.

And further, the human participation in that divine repose will have, like its pattern, the blending without disturbance of rest with motion. The highest activity is the intensest repose. Just as a light, whirled with sufficient rapidity, will seem to make a still circle; just as the faster a wheel moves the more moveless it seems to stand; just as the rapidity of the earth's flight through space, and the universality with which all the parts of it participate in the flight, produce the sensation of absolute immobility. It is not motion, but effort and friction, that break repose; and when there is neither the one nor the other, there will be no contrariety between activity and rest; but we shall enjoy at once the delights of both without the wear and tear and disturbance of the one or the languor of the other.

This participation by man in the rest of God, which has its culmination in the future, has its germ in the present. For I suppose that none of the higher blessings which attach to the perfect state of man, as revealed in Scripture, do so belong to that state as that their beginnings are not realised here. All the great promises of Scripture, except those which may point to purely physical conditions, begin to be fulfilled here in the earnest of the inheritance. And so, though toil be our lot, and work against the grain, beyond the strength, and for merely external objects of passing necessity, may be our task here, and the disturbance of rest through sorrows and cares is the experience of all, yet even here, as this Epistle has it, 'we who have believed do enter into rest.' The Canaan of the Jew is treated by the writer of this Epistle as having only been a symbol and outward pledge of the deeper repose to which the first receivers of the promise were being trained, if they had been faithful, to look forward and aspire; and the heaven that awaits us, in so far as it is a place and external condition, is in like manner but a symbol and making manifest to sense of the spiritual verity of union with God and satisfaction and rest in Him.

II. So look, secondly, at the barriers against, and the conditions of, entrance into that rest.

My text says, 'Lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.' Now it is to be observed that in this section, of which this is the concluding hortatory portion, there is a double reason given for the failure of that generation to whom the promise was addressed to appropriate it to themselves; and that double representation has been unfortunately obscured in our Authorised Version by a uniform rendering of two different words. Sometimes, as here in my text, we find that the word translated 'unbelief' really means disobedience; and sometimes we find that it is correctly translated by the former term. For instance, in the earlier portions of the section, we find a warning against 'an evil heart of unbelief.' The word there is correctly translated, Then we find again, 'To whom He 'sware in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest; but unto them that believed not,' where the word ought rather to be 'them that were disobedient.' And in the subsequent verse we find the 'unbelief' again mentioned. So there are not one but two things stated by the writer as the barriers to entrance — unbelief and its consequence and manifestation as well as root, disobedience.

And the converse, of course, follows. If the barrier be a shut door of unbelief, plated with disobedience, like iron upon an oak portal, then the condition of entrance is faith, with its consequence of submission of will, and obedience of life.

Notice the important lessons that are given by this alternation of the two ideas of faith and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. Disobedience is the root of unbelief. Unbelief is the mother of further disobedience. Faith is submission, voluntary, within a man's own power. If it be not exercised the true cause lies deeper than all intellectual ones, lies in the moral aversion of his will and in the pride of independence, which says, 'Who is Lord over us?' Why should we have to depend upon Jesus Christ? And as faith is obedience and submission, so faith breeds obedience, and unbelief leads on to higher-handed rebellion. The two interlock each other, foul mother and fouler child; and with dreadful reciprocity of influence the less a man trusts the more he disobeys, the more he disobeys the less he trusts.

But, then, further, note the respective influence of these two — faith and unbelief; and the other couple, obedience and disobedience, in securing entrance to the rest. Now I desire to bring into connection with this duality of representation, which, as I have said, pervades this section of our letter, our Lord's blessed words, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn' of Me 'and ye shall find rest.' There again, we have the double source of rest, and by implication the double source of unrest. For the rest which is given, and the rest which is found, that which ensues from coming to Christ, and that which ensues from taking His yoke upon us and learning of Him, are not the same. But the one is the rest of faith, and the other is the rest of obedience.

So, then, consider the repose that ensues from faith, the unrest that dogs unbelief. When a man comes to Christ, then, because Christ enters into him, he enters into rest. There follow the calming of the conscience and reconciliation with God, there is the beginning of the harmonising of the whole nature in one supreme and satisfying love and devotion. These things still the storm and make the incipient Christian life in a true fashion, though in a small measure, participant of the rest of God.

People say that it is arbitrary to connect salvation with faith, and talk to us about the 'injustice' of men being saved and damned because of their creeds. We are not saved for our faith, nor condemned for our unbelief, but we are saved in our faith, and condemned in our unbelief. Suppose a man did not believe that prussic acid was a poison, and took a spoonful of it and died. You might say that his opinion killed him, but that would only be a shorthand way of saying that his opinion led him to take the thing that did kill him. Suppose a man believes that a medicine will cure him, and takes it, and gets well. Is it the drug or his opinion that cures him? If a certain mental state tends to produce certain emotions, you cannot have the emotions if you will not have the state. Suppose you do not rely upon the promised friendship and help of some one, you cannot have the joy of confidence or the gifts that you do not believe in and do not care for. And so faith is no arbitrary appointment, but the necessary condition, the only condition possible, in the nature of things, by which a man can enter into the rest of God. If we will not let Christ heal our wounds, they must keep on bleeding; if we will not let Him soothe our conscience, it must keep on pricking; if we will not have Him to bring us nigh, we must continue far off; if we will not open the door of our hearts to let Him in, He must stop without. Faith is the condition of entrance; unbelief bars the door of heaven against us, because it bars the door of our hearts against Him who is heaven.

And then, in like manner, obedience and disobedience are respectively conditions of coming into contact or remaining untouched by the powers which give repose. Submission is tranquillity. What disturbs us in this world is neither work nor worry, but wills unconformed to our work, and unsubmitive to our destiny. When we can say, 'Thy will be done,' then some faint beginnings of peace steal over our souls, and birds of calm sit brooding even on the yet heaving deep. The ox that kicks against the pricks only makes its hocks bloody. The ox that bows its thick neck to the yoke, and willingly pulls at the burden, has a quiet life. The bird that dashes itself against the wires of its cage bruises its wings and puts its little self into a flutter. When it is content with its limits, its song comes back. Obedience is repose; disobedience is disturbance, and they who trust and submit have entered into rest.

III. Now, lastly, a word about the discipline to secure the entrance.

That is a singular paradox and bringing together of opposing ideas, is it not, Let us labour to enter into rest? The paradox is not so strong in the Greek as here, but it still is there. For the word translated 'labour' carries with it the two ideas of earnestness and of diligence, and this is the condition on which alone we can secure the entrance, either into the full heaven above, or into the incipient heaven here.

But note, if we distinctly understand what sort of toil it is that is required to secure it, that settles the nature of the diligence. The main effort of every Christian life, in view of the possibilities of repose that are open to it here and now, and yonder in their perfection, ought to be directed to this one point of deepening and strengthening faith and its consequent obedience.

You can cultivate your faith, it is within your own power. You can make it strong or weak, operative through your life, or only partially, by fits and starts. And what is required is that Christian people should make a business of their godliness, and give

themselves to it as carefully and as consciously and as constantly as they give themselves to their daily pursuits. The men that are diligent in the Christian life, who exercise that commonplace, prosaic, pedestrian, homely virtue of earnest effort, are sure to succeed; and there is no other way to succeed. You cannot go to heaven in silver slippers. But although it be true that heaves is a gift, and that the bread of God is given to us by His Son, the old commandment remains unrepealed, and has as direct and stringent reference to the inward Christian life as to the outward. 'In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread,' though it be at the same time bread that is given thee. And how are we to cultivate our faith? By contemplating the great object which kindles it. Do you do that?

By resolving, with fixed and reiterated determinations, that we will exercise it. 'I will trust and not be afraid.' Do you do that? By averting our eyes from the distracting competitors for our interest and attention, in so far as these might enfeeble our confidence. Do you do that? Diligence; that is the secret — a diligence which focuses our powers, and binds our vagrant wills into one strong, solid mass, and delivers us from languor and indolence, and stirs us up to seek the increase of faith as well as of hope and charity. Then, too, obedience is to be cultivated. How do you cultivate obedience? By obeying — by contemplating the great motives that should sway and melt, and sweetly subdue the will, which are all shrined in that one saying.

'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price,' and by rigidly confining our desires and wishes within the limits of God's appointment, and religiously referring all things to His supreme will. If thus we do, we shall enter into rest.

So, dear friends, the path is a plain enough one. We all know it. The goal is a clear enough one. I suppose we all believe it. What is wanted is feet that shall run with perseverance the race that is set before us. The word of my text which is translated 'labour,' is found in this Epistle in another connection, where the writer desires that we should show 'the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.' It is also caught up by one of the other apostles, who says to us, 'Giving all diligence, add to your faith' the manifold virtues of a practical obedience, and so 'the entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' A more authoritative voice points us to the same strenuous effort, for our Lord has said, 'Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you,' and when the listeners asked Him what works He would have them do, He answered, bringing all down to one, which being done would produce all others, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.'

So if we labour to increase our faith, and its fruits of obedience, with a diligence inspired by our earnestness which is kindled by the thought of the sublimity of the reward, and the perils that seek to rob us of our crown, then, even in the wilderness, we shall enter into the Promised Land, and though the busy week of care and toil, of changefulness and sorrow, may disturb the surface of our souls, we shall have an inner sanctuary, where we can shut our doors about us and enjoy a foretaste of the Sabbath-keeping of the heavens, and be wrapped in the stillness of the rest of God.

><>><><>

Hebrews 4:16 The Throne of Grace

'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.'
— Hebrews 4:16

IN the context are three great exhortations which bear a very remarkable and distinct relation to each other: 'Let us labour to enter into rest'; 'Let us hold fast our profession'; Let us come boldly to the throne of grace.

It is a hard thing to labour to enter into rest. How is it to be done? The second exhortation helps us to answer, 'Let us hold fast our profession,' which being translated into other words, is this: our true way of labour is to cling in faith to Him whom we acknowledge; but knowing the weakness of our own hearts, and how they waywardly fluctuate and pass away from the one confidence and happiest trust, it is with profound wisdom that the ultimate injunction is held out for the foundation of all — 'Let us come to the throne of grace.' There we get the strength that will enable our slack and benumbed fingers to grasp again the thing we hold. There we shall get that fresh grip of Christ which will quicken us for the labour of entering into rest. And so this portion of exhortation interposed between the doctrinal and theological parts of this letter is addressed to every one in the Christian profession. I ask you, then, to look at this exhortation, which covers the whole ground of Christian duty and strength.

Now, first, here is a very remarkable and beautiful expression — 'the throne of grace.' Grace, of course, as I do not need to explain, is the New Testament word for the undeserved favour and loving regard of God to man considered as weak, sinful, and unworthy; it is love which has its own motive, apart from any regard to worthiness in the object upon which it falls. Grace is its own real impulse and motive, and grace is set in Scripture as the opposite of desert; it is of grace, not of works, and so forth. It is set as the antagonist of sin and unrighteousness and all evil, and so runs up to the idea that it expresses the unmerited, self-originated, loving regard of God to us poor miserable creatures, who, if dealt with on the ground of right and retribution, would receive something very

different indeed. But my text says the throne of grace is the throne of God. I wonder if it is too picturesque to take that word grace here as a kind of synonym of God? Think of the figure that was in the writer's mind, as being that grace itself was the occupant of the throne, that there she sits, regal, sovereign, enthroned in the heart of the universe, queen of all things, and giving from her full and generous hand to every creature all that which the creature requires. And then if we take the more prosaic notion — which perhaps is the safer one — and think that the metaphor is not that grace is queen and sovereign, but only that the throne is based and established, as it were, in grace, out of which this undeserved love flows in broad, full streams. Even if we take the metaphor thus, we come to the same thought, that whatever else there may be in the divine nature, the ruling sovereign element in Deity is unmerited love and mercy and kindly regard to us poor, ignorant, sinful creatures, which keeps pouring itself out over all the world. God is King, and the kingly thing in God is infinite grace.

Then we can scarcely but bring into connection with this grand idea the other phases which the Old Testament gives to the same thought. Read such words as these: — 'Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne' — 'God sitteth on the throne of His holiness' — 'The throne of Thy glory.' Yes, the throne of justice and of judgment. White and sparkling — cold and repellent. The throne of glory — flashing and dazzling, coruscating and blinding, glittering and shimmering — ready to smite the diseased eye. The throne of Thy holiness. Yes, lofty, far up there, towering above us in its pure completeness, and we poor creatures, being ourselves blinded and dazed, and far away from Him, down amidst the lowlands and materialities, and all that majesty in the heavens — the justice and judgment, the holiness and glory — all that is only the envelope and wrappage, the living centre and heart of it is a pure, lambent glow of tenderness, and the throne is truly the throne of grace. The 'throne' gives us all ideas of majesty, sovereignty, dominion, infinitude, greatness. The thought that it is 'the throne of grace' sheathes all these in the softest, tenderest, most blessed folds of love — unmerited, free, spontaneous — simply because He is God, and not on account of any goodness in us. Bearing in mind this great conception of true love, ruling, dominant, the sovereign element in the divine nature, let us ask, How do we reach it? Are we warranted in believing it? Read the verses that come before: 'For we have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.' Turn that doctrinal statement into a statement of principle and it just comes to this: that our certitude that God's throne is a throne of love and grace, is all involved in, dependent upon, and built upon, the work of Christ, the High Priest of our profession. That is to say, not 'thank God' that His work makes God's throne a throne of grace — that is not the teaching of the Scripture — but that He, as High Priest, and, therefore, as the revealer to us of God as He is, shows us in His life and death, in the gentleness of His character, in the tenderness of His compassion, in the depth of His sympathy on earth, in the tenderness that touched the little children in their innocence and the harlots in their filth, and in the death He died upon the Cross for the sake of the world — the very heart of God is cut open, as it were, and the two halves fall apart as when we cut some rich fruit to lay bare the inmost pulp. God is manifested to us, God declares Himself to us, in the sympathy of the humanity, in the life, in the death upon the Cross; and the Priest, in His sacrifice, and by His sacrifice, shows us that between the cherubim throned above the mercy-seat shimmers the Shekinah of power, with its white centre of love and peace. And then, on the other side, that same great thought of the priesthood of Christ influences this conception of the throne of God in another fashion still; for, as it seems to me, there is no understanding of the depth and meaning of the work of Jesus Christ, our Lord, unless we heartily accept this, that His great sacrifice for us, in which mainly He is the Priest of our profession, is the means and channel and medium and condition through which all the love of God expresses itself to the world, and has communicated to sinful man all His goodness and all His pity and His tenderness, supplying all our necessities, and is all things to us through Christ our Lord. Seen through Him the throne is white with tenderness; flowing through Him from the throne proceeds the river of the water of life, and so, in both ways, the throne of grace is such by reason of the priesthood of Christ.

Look for a moment, in the next place, at the temper and disposition with which we come to this throne. 'Let us come boldly.' Now boldly is a somewhat incongruous word; it neither conveys the original, nor does it correspond to our sense of propriety. The thought would be far more beautiful and far more naturally represented by a more literal translation — 'Let us come with frank confidence' to the throne of grace. The word literally means, if we go to the etymology of it, speaking everything. You can easily understand how naturally that becomes an expression for the unembarrassed, unrestrained full out-pouring of a heart. You cannot pour out your heart in the fullest confidence to a person you do not respect, but if you get with some one you entirely trust, how swiftly the words flow. and how very easy it is to tell out the whole heart. Just so with this great word of the writer of this Epistle, descriptive of the temper and disposition with which men are to go to God — with confidence, full, cheerful, and unembarrassed, and which expresses itself in full trust, exactly as one of the old Psalms says — 'Ye people, pour out your heart before Him.' Yes, let it all flow out, just as you would do to husband or wife, or lover, or friend, or the chosen companion to whom we can tell everything. Ah, but there is no such person — there is nobody, not a soul, could stand the turning inside out of a man! There is no one able to do it to another, even supposing the other could bear it! But my text says 'come,' and is so gentle in its love, so strong in its grace, sweetly wooing us to the freest and frankest outpourings of all our hearts before the throne. Let us then come with confidence, because Jesus' work as our High Priest is in the writer's mind. You remember the vision in the Revelation where the seer beholds the angel coming with a censer, and he takes incense from off the golden altar, and he goes on to say, that this much incense was offered in the censer with prayers of saints. That is a picturesque and graphic representation of this same idea; my poor cry, the devotions of my trembling, unfaithful heart, the halting, limping approach of my sluggish spirit, these go along with, and are offered

through, that Great High Priest.

‘Let the much incense of Thy prayer On my behalf ascend.’

Truly we have a loving High Priest; let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace. Let us not use as a mere empty form those words ‘for Christ’s sake,’ but let us remember that these words do hold the very secret of all acceptable approach to God, and that no man cometh to the Father but by Me. There is reason enough, God knows, in your heart and mine, and in our poor, miserable, wretched, conventional, formal chatterings called prayers, for diffidence and distrust. Well, then, let us fully look that fact in the face, entertain untremblingly the fullest consciousness of the insufficiency and unworthiness of all we do, and all we are, and all we feel, and all we seek, and then wrenching ourselves away as it were from the contemplation of our own selves, which only land us in diffidence and despair, let us turn to Him, that we may have boldness and confidence in our access to the feet of Him who is our Great High Priest, passed into the heavens, and who now sits on the ‘throne of grace.’

And now, lastly, a word about the issue and result of this confidence of access to the throne of grace, the throne of spontaneous love. ‘That we may obtain mercy,’ says the writer, ‘and find grace to help in time of need.’ It is noteworthy, I think, to consider that the writer here is evidently thinking, not about a communion with God which is not prayer, but a communion with God which, on our side, is the lifting up of an empty hand, and on His side the bestowing a large, full gift. There is no fellowship with God possible on the footing of what people call ‘disinterested communion.’ No, we have always to go to Him to get something from Him. The question is, What do we expect to get? My text tells us, not the temporal blessings, not the answers to foolish desires, not the taking away of thorns in the flesh, but mercy and grace to help — inward and spiritual blessings. But what are these? Well, I don’t know whether it is too nice or too microscopic criticism to say that I seem to see a difference between obtaining mercy and finding grace. I take it grace is used in what I call its secondary sense, not meaning so much the love of God unmerited, but rather signifying the consequences of that love in the gifts bestowed upon us, and you know that is a usage of the word common in the New Testament, thus making the word into a plural, ‘graces’ — the manifold gifts that love bestows upon us. So that, I take it, this word is here used in the secondary sense, and if that be so, we may shape a difference between the two phrases, ‘obtaining mercy’ and ‘finding grace.’

I do not think I can put that better than by using a metaphor. The one expresses the heart of God, the other expresses the hand of God. We may obtain mercy as a suppliant coming boldly, confidently, frankly, with faith in the Great High Priest, to the throne of grace. There we get the full heart of God. I stand before Him in my filth, in my weakness, with conscience gnawing at me in the sense of many infirmities, many a sin and shortcoming and omission, and on the throne, if I may so say, is a shoot of tender love from God’s heart to me, and I get for all my weakness and sin pity and pardon, and find mercy of the Lord in that day. And then in getting the full heart of God, with all its divine abundance and pardoning grace and tender, gracious pity, I get, of course, the full hand of God to obtain mercy, and find grace, the bestowment of the needful blessings, the obtaining of grace in time of need, the right grace No blunders in the equipment with which He supplies us. He does not give me the parcel that was meant for you; there is no error in the delivery. He does not send His soldiers to the North Pole equipped for warfare in Africa. He does not give this man a blessing that the man’s circumstances would not require. No, no; blessed be God, He cannot err. We fall back upon the words that precede my text, ‘And there is no creature concealed from His sight, for all things are naked, and open to the eyes Of Him to whom we must give an account.’ That may be, and is terrible, unless we take it along with the other word, ‘We have not a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weakness.’ We see a divine omniscience shining upon us through the merits of the great High Priest, full of light and hope, and because all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him who is our High Priest; therefore the right grace will be most surely given to me to help me in time of need, or, as the words may perhaps be more vigorously and correctly translated, find grace for timely aid, grace punctually and precisely at the very nick of time, at the very exact time determined by heaven’s chronometer, not by ours. It will not come as quickly as impatience might think it ought, it will not come so soon as to prevent an agony of prayer, it will not come in time enough for our impatience, for murmuring, for presumptuous desires; but it will come in time to do all that is needed. Ah, and it will come before Peter has gone below the water, though not until Peter has felt the cold waves rise to his knees, and has cried out, ‘Lord, save me, I perish.’ ‘Master, he whom Thou lovest is sick,’ and He abode still two days in the same place where He was, and when He came, ‘Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died.’ ‘Said I not unto thee, that if thou didst believe thou shouldst see the glory of God.’ ‘God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, the Lord shall help her, and that right early.’ You remember the narrative of that great final battle on the plains of Waterloo. For long weary days brave men died by the thousands — the afternoon of the last day was wearing rapidly away, the thin red living line getting thinner and thinner, the squares smaller and smaller at each returning charge — but at last, just before the daylight faded, just before endurance could do no more, there comes old Blucher at last and gives the order, and the whole line bore down upon the enemy and scattered them. Ah, help came at the right time, not so soon but that the courage of our brave soldiers had been tested, but before despair had settled upon the ranks, and in time for a great and perfect victory. Oh, my friends, ‘Let us come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace for every time of need.’

Through waves and clouds and storms

**He gently clears thy way;
Wait thou His time — thy darkest night
Shall end in brightest day.'**

><>><>><>

Hebrews 5:7 Gethsemane

Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared.' — Hebrews 5:7

WE may take these great and solemn words as a commentary on the gospel narrative of Gethsemane. It is remarkable that there should be here preserved a detail of that agony which is not found in our Gospels. The strong crying and tears find no record in our evangelists, and so it would appear as though the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was not altogether dependent upon them for his knowledge of Christ's life. In any case here we have independent witness to the story of Christ's passion, and a very instructive hint as to the widespread and familiar knowledge of the story of our Lord's suffering, which existed at the very early date of this Epistle in the churches, so that it could be referred to in this far-off allusive way with the certainty that hearers would distinctly understand what the writer was speaking about. So we get a confirmation of the historical veracity of the narrative that is preserved in our Gospel. But the value of such words as these is their bearing upon far deeper things than that. They point to Gethsemane as showing us Christ, as the companion of our sorrows and supplications, as a pattern of our submissive, devout resignation, and as a lesson for us all how prayer is most truly answered. First, then, take that great thought of my text, the Christ as being our companion in sorrow and in supplication. 'In the days of His flesh — when He bore what I bear — in the days of His flesh He offered prayer and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death.' Now I do not dwell at any length upon the additional contribution to the vividness and solemnity of the picture given us in the detail of the text before us, but I want to refer for one moment, and I will do it as reverently as I can, to the unapproachable narrative, and to make this one remark about it, that all the three evangelists who are our source of knowledge of that scene in the garden of Gethsemane employ strange, and all but unexampled, words in order to express the condition of our Saviour's spirit then. Matthew, for instance, uses a word which, in our Bible, is translated 'He began to be very heavy.' Only once besides, as far as I know, is it employed in scripture, and it seems to mean something like 'On the very verge of despair.' And then Mark gives us the same singular expression, adding to it another one which is translated, 'sore amazed.' It has been suggested that a more adequate rendering would be 'began to be appalled,' and another suggestion has been, that it might be adequately rendered with the phrase 'that He began to be out of Himself.' Then comes Luke, with his word, which we have translated into English as 'agony.' And then there come Christ's own strange words, 'My soul is encompassed with sorrow almost up to the point of death.' That is not a proverb; I take that to be a literal fact that one more pang and the physical frame would have given way. Now, I do not point to these things in any spirit of curious investigation. I feel, I hope, 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' And yet I cannot help feeling that there is a tendency nowadays to say too little about the Gospel story of Christ's sufferings; it is a reaction, no doubt, and prompted by good motives; it is a reaction from the preaching of a former time, when men used these sacred narratives of our Lord's last days in the coarsest possible manner, and the climax of it is that horrible kind of preaching that Roman Catholic preachers used to indulge in — Passion sermons. And yet I cannot but feel that we are in danger of going to the other extreme and losing much by not sufficiently dwelling on the facts.

Then there is another point.. What is the meaning of that-what is the explanation of all the passion, and paroxysm of agony, and fear. and bloody sweat, and horror-stricken appeal? Is it not a very, very unheroic picture that? Is it not strangely unlike the spirit in which many men and women, who drew all courage from Christ, have gone to their death? Is not the servant above his master here, if you will think of a Latimer at the stake, or of many a poor unknown martyr that went to his death as to his bed, and set that side by side with the shrinking of Christ? Well, dear brethren, I know the attempt to explain the flood of sorrow, of dread, and horror of great darkness that wrapt the soul of Jesus Christ in these last moments, on psychological principles, and say it is a pure and lofty end, shrinking from death; but it seems to me the only explanation of it all is the good old one:

'The Lord hath made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all.'

And so with the weight of the sins and the sorrows of the world, He began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

And then, passing on, let me deal with the matter from another point of view, and remind you that, whatsoever there may be all His own and beyond that reach of common humanity, experienced in the solemn and awful hour, yet it is also the revelation of a companionship that never fails us in all our struggles, tears, and prayers. Oh, how different that makes our passage through the lonely experience of our human life! There are times in every life when all human affection and all human voices fail in the presence of a great sorrow, and when you feel that you must tread this path alone. Although loving hands are stretched out to me through the

darkness, and have grasped my own and helped me to stand, yet nothing will still the aching of the solitary heart except the thought of a Christ who has suffered it all already, and who, in the days of His flesh, offered up, with strong crying and tears, His prayer unto Him that was able to save. You remember the old Roman story — grand in its heroic simplicity — of the husband and the wife resolved to escape from the miseries of a tyrant-ridden world by suicide — which to them was less criminal than it is to us — and the wife first of all struck the dagger into her own heart, and drawing it out, embued with her own blood, hands it to her husband, with the dying words ‘Paetus! it is not painful.’ The sharp edge that strikes into your heart, brethren, has cut into Christ’s first, and the blade tintured with His blood inflicts only healing wounds upon us. He is our priest because He has gone before us on every road of sorrow and loss, and is ready to sustain us when it comes to our turn to tread it.

And so turn for a moment to the other conception that is here, viz., that the same solemn scene shows us Christ as being, not only our companion in sorrow and supplication, but our pattern of submissive reverence. The language of my text needs just one word of explanation in order to show where this lies. You observe it reads, ‘And was heard in that He feared.’ Now, these last words, ‘in that He feared,’ have always received two varying expositions, and, I suppose, always will receive them. The text fairly allows one or the other. They may either mean, ‘He was heard or delivered from the thing He dreaded’ — which you know is not true — or they may mean that He was heard by reason of His reverence and submission, or, if we may use such a word — a word that is not Scriptural and very modern — was heard because of His piety. And I suppose the latter was distinctly the meaning in the writer’s mind. Christ’s prayer was, ‘If it be possible,’ and His second prayer was, ‘If this cup may not pass from Me Thy will be done.’ He felt the reluctance of the flesh to enter upon the path of suffering, the perfectly natural human shrinking from all that lay before Him. But that shrinking never made His purpose falter, nor made Him lose His son-like dependence upon the Father’s will and submission to the Father’s will. And so there come out of that, large lessons that I can only just touch for a moment.

And the first of them is this: let us learn and be thankful for the teaching, that resignation, submission to all the burdens and pains and struggles and sorrows which life brings to us, does not demand the suppression of the natural emotions and affections of the flesh. Christ recoiled from the cup, but Christ’s submission was perfect. And so for us there are two ways. Inclination and duty will often draw us two different ways. Tastes and weaknesses will often suggest one thing, and the high sense of the path we ought to travel upon will suggest another. But the inclination must never be allowed to mount up into the region of the will and to make our purpose falter, or make us abandon that which we feel will be the rough path—Then there will be no sin in the fact that the flesh shrinks, as shrink it must, from the thing which duty demands we should do. Christ, the example of a perfect resignation, is an example of a will that mastered flesh. That is full of encouragement and strength to us in our time of need and conflict.

And then there is the other side of the same thought Not only does there often come into our life the struggle of duty and inclination, but there comes into our life sometimes the other straggle between submission and sorrow. In like manner there is no sin in the tear, there is no sin in the strong crying. It is meet that when His hand is laid heavy upon my heart, my heart should feel the pressure; it is meet that I should take into my consciousness and into my feeling the pain; and then it is meet that if I cannot do anything more — and I don’t think we can — I should at least try through my tears to say, ‘Not my will, but Thine’; and if I cannot do anything more, at least, ‘I was dumb, I opened not my mouth because Thou didst it.’

And the last point I touch upon is this, that according to the teaching of this commentary upon that solemn scene, our Lord in it sets before us the lesson of what the true answer to prayer is. ‘He prayed unto Him that was able to save Him from death,’ and says my text: ‘He was heard.’ Was He? How was He heard? He was heard in this. There appeared unto Him an angel from heaven strengthening Him. He was heard in this because His prayer was not ‘Let this cup pass,’ but His prayer was, ‘Thy will be done,’ and God’s will was done.

And so there comes out the true heart of all true prayer, ‘Thy will be done.’ And the true answer that We get is, not the lifting away of the burden, but the breathing into our hearts strength to bear it, so that it ceases to be a burden. Let us make our prayers not petulant wishes to get our own way, but lowly efforts to enter into God’s way and make His will ours, so shall come to us peace and strength, and a power adequate to Our need. The cup will be sweetened, and our lips made willing to drink it. Christ was heard, and Christ was crucified.

Learn the lesson that if, in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, we make. our requests known unto God, whatsoever other answer may be sent, or not sent, the real and highest answer will surely’ be sent, and the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

><>><>><>

Hebrews 6:7 A Field Which The Lord Hath Blessed

‘The earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is

dressed, receiveth blessing from God.— Hebrews 6:7

THIS is a kind of parable or allegory in which echoes of many scriptures are gathered up. The comparisons of the process of forming character to the growth of a plant, of divine influences to the rain, of the discipline of life to husbandry, of holy deeds to fruit, are common to all languages; and recall many sayings of lawgiver and prophets, as well as many of the parables of our Lord. Especially there seems to be allusion here to the two parables of the Sower and the field that brought forth wheat and tares. But the old illustrations appear here with a somewhat new setting. The writer extends his vision beyond the fact of growth and fruitfulness to that which precedes it and to that which follows it. For fruitfulness there must be the drinking in of the rain from heaven. And if there be fruitfulness, there will be God's blessing.

Then, further, in His estimate there are only two kinds of soil, one which bears wholesome fruits, and on which falls the perpetual dew of heaven's benediction, the other which brings forth thorns and briars, and on which fall the lightnings of a curse that burns it and its miserable crop. Both soils are typical of professing Christians; in one or other of them each of us finds His likeness.

I. So then consider, first, the eager reception of divine influences.

In these Eastern lands all that is wanted to turn the desert into a paradise is irrigation. In the human heart what is wanted to bring forth fruit is, first,

the reception of God's gifts and help. That goes dead in the teeth of a great deal of what we call 'culture,' and for want of believing it, and acting on it, much of the so-called culture is only elaborate vanity. It is no use trying to grow fruits in the desert until, as the men who made the Suez Canal did, you first of all bring the 'sweet water,' and then you will get your garden. Productivity, to use long words, begins with receptivity. You must first take in what God sends upon you before you can bring forth what God asks from you. The earth that 'drinketh in the rain' is the earth 'that bringeth forth the fruit.'

What is this rain that cometh oft, the reception of which is the indispensable preliminary to all true fruitfulness? If there be, as I suppose there is, some echo and reminiscence here of Isaiah's word about 'the rain coming down and the snow from heaven,' then the metaphor points to 'the Word of God that goeth forth out of His mouth.' And though I by no means take that to be the exclusive or even the principal application of the symbol, I cannot help dwelling upon that view for a moment. And in that aspect it comes to be this, if a Christian man wants to be fruitful let him begin by receiving, with interest and attention, into his heart the truth in God's word. One main reason for the defects of our modern Christianity is that the average Christian man cares so little about his Bible; and has no real deep grip of, nor absorbed interest in, the great truths that it sets forth. No man gets any good out of a book or of a truth to which he does not attend with awakened interest and quickened curiosity. Look how you read your newspapers, and how interested you are in some trashy fiction, and contrast that with the way in which you read your Bibles. Do you drink in this Word, do you long to know more of the deep harmonies, of the profound mysteries, of the flashing illumination which it brings to all hearts that long for it? Can you say 'I have desired Thy testimonies more than all hidden riches'? My brother, there will be but few and shrivelled and immature fruits upon our lives unless they are 'planted by the rivers of water,' that is to say, as the psalm interprets it, unless we 'meditate on His law day and night.'

But there is a wider application to be given, as I take it, to the figure. The rain 'which cometh oft upon' the fruit-bearing earth, is a symbol for the whole sum of divine influences affecting mind, heart, conscience, will, and the whole inner man. From God there is ever streaming down upon His world, and especially upon His Church, spiritual influences reducible to no external agency, which find their way into the inmost heart. These come, not like the inadequate symbol of my text, in occasional showers, but they come rather as the rays come from the sun, by continual pulsating outwards, and perpetual efflux. So the prime requisite for fruit-bearing is the eager reception of all God's influences upon our spirits.

I venture to put what I have to say about this matter into four simple precepts. Desire them; expect them; welcome them; use them. So we shall drink them in.

Desire them. If there is a continual flowing out from God, by reason of His very nature, of these gracious influences to enlighten and to strengthen and to purify, then to desire them is to possess them, and without desiring them there is no possession. The heart opens when it desires, and the water finds its way, as is the nature of water, into the narrowest chink that it meets as it flows. Wherever there is a tiny crack there will be a little stream, and the wider the opening the fuller the blessing. Desire brings God; and they whose hearts are opened are they whose hearts are filled. Do you want the rain that comes down? Have you any wish to be made any better than you are. Would it be inconvenient to you if there came to you the efflux of the divine power, that would make you ashamed of your present Christianity, and would lift you up into heights of consecration, of daily honesty, and transparent business purity which perhaps do not mark you at present? Dear brethren, if many Christian people would be honest with themselves they would more often find out that, in spite of all their prayers, which come from their, teeth outwards, they do not want

more of God's influences, and would feel it extremely inconvenient to be laid hold of by a sanctifying power that should deliver them from the sins that they like. Desire, and you possess.

Expect and you will get. God cannot disappoint, and never did disappoint, expectations which turn to Him with the consciousness of need and the yearning for supply. But we limit His gifts because we limit our expectations of them; and instead of widening these to the large infinitude of His bestowments, we shrink His bestowments to the miserable narrowness of our expectations. Suppose a king were to send out a proclamation that any man might come to his treasures, and take away as many sacks full of gold as he liked, and the more the better; do you think he would consider himself most honoured by the man that brought a wagon or by him who brought a basket? We bring our little vessels to the great fountain, and we put it to shame by the smallness of the expectations with which we meet the largeness of the promises. Expect the gift, and the gift will answer and vindicate — ay! and put to shame — your expectation. Desire them; expect them.

Welcome them. There is a vulgar old proverb that says, 'Put out your tubs when it is raining.' Be sure that when the gift is falling you fling your hearts wide for its acceptance. Such welcome will not be given unless there be a profound sense of need, an almost painful consciousness of deficiency and failure, and unless there be above all a firm and confident expectation and faith in His bestowments. If we desired eagerly the coming of the blessing, how our hearts would leap when the blessing came. It should be a tree of life, as the Book of Proverbs says about hopes fulfilled. But alas! alas! the bulk of professing average Christians-of this day are liker the soaked and saturated soil of this summer, which takes in no more of the rain that falls, but lets it stagnate on the surface. Everybody that has ever watered a dry garden knows how the liquid treasure sinks in, and how every particle of earth seems to have a mouth to grasp it, and to make it its own. Do you welcome in that fashion, my brother, God's gifts so lavishly bestowed upon you, or do you let them lie on the surface stagnating and unprofitable as far as you are concerned? Desire them; expect them; welcome them.

Use them. Because in using them you will use them up, and that will leave room for more; and 'unto him that hath shall be given.' And he that has faithfully utilised the smallest measure of God's gift to him, receives a larger; just as you trust your children with halfpence before you trust them with shillings, and proportion the amount you have put in their hands to what you have seen of the wisdom of their use of the smaller amount.

So, dear friends, to sum it all up, here is the condition of all fruit-bearing. The prime characteristic of a Christian heart ought to be this hungering and thirsting after larger bestowments of God's influences. Alas! alas! for the professing Christians who are impervious to the rain that comes oft upon them. For God's gifts are never inoperative. In countries where the timber has been unwisely felled, and the hillside stripped, the rain has nothing to lay hold of, and nothing to do, and it sweeps down the mountain side in a tawny torrent, bearing away the little superfluous soil that still clings to the rocks, and after a while these stand up gaunt and bare, neither sunshine nor rain can stimulate vegetation on their naked precipitous face, but only crumble them into slow decay. So either we are welcoming God's influences into our hearts, and turning rain into fruit, or they are denuding the soil still more, and making us yet more infertile. The land that drinketh in the rain bears the fruit; the land that does not is thereby cursed into more barren barrenness.

II. Now note secondly, and only a word about that, the tillage.

My text speaks of 'them for whom' (not as our Authorised Version has it, 'by whom') it is dressed. And possibly there may be a distinction between those, whoever they may be, who are supposed to receive the fruit of the field, and those who carry on the labour of cultivation. If so, we should have a parallel thought to the many both in the Old and in the New Testament which represent God's ministers and messengers as being labourers in His vineyard. But more probably the distinction between the owner and the labourers is neglected in our text, and we are simply to think of the 'dressing' as referring to another department of the divine operations. God not only pours upon us as from above these gracious skyey influences, which are to be received into our hearts, but He deals with us in our daily life, by external providences and discipline. So the text reminds us of 'My Father is the husbandman,' and of Paul's word, 'Ye are God's husbandry,' and the tillage that is here spoken of is the whole sum of the external circumstances of our lives, as contrasted with the rain, that represents the whole sum of the spiritual influences brought to bear upon us within.

There is the true point of view from which to look on life. It is God's husbandry. The ploughshare has a very sharp edge, and it is dragged with unsparing accuracy in the straight, deep furrow; and it cuts through stiff soil, and sometimes turns up and divides hidden treasures that lie beneath. Nobody likes to have his fallow ground broken up; nobody likes to have the ploughshare of sorrow driven through the little warm nest that lay below the surface; nobody likes the discipline, but it is God's husbandry. If there were no ploughing, if there were no harrows with their cruel multiplied teeth to be dragged clean across quivering hearts, there would not be any harvest. Do not let us misunderstand the meaning of our sorrows. God by them is 'dressing' His own fields, and let us take care that, when we are thinking of the means by which He seeks to promote our fertility, we do not forget to set by the

side of the gracious rain that distills from the heavens the better discipline that is exercised upon the earth.

III. Thirdly, note the fruitfulness.

There is only one crop from a man's nature which God dignifies with the name of fruit. The rest, be it what it may, is thorns and thistles. One of the apostles talks about 'the unfruitful fruit of darkness.' Darkness has plenty of work; has it not? There are abundant results, some of them very satisfactory, very beautiful, very desirable, in a number of ways, from the lives of men who do not take in these divine influences. Are we not to call them fruit? Is every human life, except a life of consistent godliness and lowly faith manifested in works, a barren life? So the Bible says. And that cuts very sharp, and goes very deep, and rebukes a great many of us.

Culture is all very well. Refinement, education, business prosperity, taste, affection, etc., are all right in their places. If they come from, and are rooted in, faith in Jesus Christ, and obedience therefore to God's will, they are fruit; if they do not, they are thorns, wild grapes and not true ones. The only thing that a man does that is worth calling fruit, because it is the only thing that will last, and the only thing that corresponds to his capacities and responsibilities, is that which he does for the sake of, and by the strength of, the dear Lord that loved him, and gave Himself for him. That is fruit; all the rest is sham — nothing but leaves.

Again, notice that great thought, that the deeds of a poor man, who has taken in these divine influences, are a harvest meet for, and acceptable to, the owner; or, to put it into words without metaphor, God delights in, and in some sense feeds upon, the righteous deeds of His children. That great thought is put in many ways and in many places in Scripture. 'He came, being hungered, seeking fruit,' on the fig-tree. 'An odour of a sweet smell' — another metaphor expressing the same idea — 'acceptable to God.' In the old ritual there was the singular institution of what we call the 'shewbread,' the 'bread of the face,' as the Hebrew means, which was spread before God, and lay there in the sanctuary, typical of the righteous deeds of His children, which were offered up to Him. In the same sense my text speaks of 'fruit meet for those for whom it is dressed' — such a crop as corresponds to the desires of the owner, and to the care and husbandry that He has lavished upon His field.

A farmer is proud if the produce of his farm is taken for the royal table. Can there be a loftier conception of the possible greatness of the poorest, lowliest Christian service than this, that it is 'meet for the Master's use'; and that even He will find delight in partaking of it? And does not Jesus Christ say the same thing to us in other language when He says from heaven, 'If any man open the door, I will come in and will sup with him' — 'He shall provide the meal, he shall spread the table, and I will partake of that which he brings.' It is the highest motive that can be brought to bear upon us, to make our deeds, for His dear sake, pure and noble and lofty, that thereby they become, in His infinite mercy, not unworthy to be offered to Him, and capable of ministering delight to His heart. And it is a test, too, for if your work is not meet for Christ to accept, it is not meet for you to do.

IV. Lastly, mark the blessing from God.

My text is spoken in immediate connection with the statement of the writer's purpose, to lead his hearers from the elements to the perfection of Christian truth. Such progress he considers the proper result of the earlier stages, and the statement of that principle is embodied in the metaphor of my text. Stripping it of its figure, it comes to this, that in the narrower view righteousness gives an insight into truth, and in the wider view, that fruitfulness is rewarded by progress in the Christian life. I have no time, nor is there need, to dwell upon the elements of this blessing from God; let me put what I have to say in just two or three sentences.

The fruitfulness which is the result of the reception of the divine influences has for its consequence the Blessing which is more of these divine influences, therefore more fruitfulness and consequently more work. Faithfulness in the use of the less leads on to the assured possession of the greater, as is true in all regions of life, as is true as between earth and heaven, and as is true in the growth of the Christian soul here below. And as the reception of the blessing makes capable of a larger blessing, so the larger reception of these divine influences results in larger fruitfulness. The reward of fertility is greater fertility, and that is the highest reward that God can give us for it. It is the reward that makes heaven, for that is a sphere in which, with larger capacities, we shall bring forth nobler results of service and of character. The plant that is here an exotic is taken there into its native soil, and spreads a broader branch, and opens a greener leaf, and bends down boughs laden with richer and more abundant fruit, and in the fruit is neither spot nor blemish nor any such thing. The blessing of God is, most of all, the larger communication of His own sweet and precious influences, and consequently the growing fruitfulness which brings growing glory to Him, and growing gladness to ourselves. The reward for work is more work, and a wider sphere for nobler service. Add to that the consciousness of God's smile reflected in the quiet of an unaccusing conscience, and the tranquillity that comes from a submissive will and unselfish consecration, and we have at least some of the elements of that 'blessing from God.'

So, dear friends, there is a picture of what is possible for every one of us. We may all make our lives like what the Pentateuch describes the land of Israel as being, 'a land which drinketh in of the water of the rain of heaven, a land which the Lord thy God careth for, for the eyes of the Lord thy God are on it continually.' If we receive the influences we shall bring forth the fruit, and we shall get the blessing.

Hebrews 6:9 The Queen and the Virgins that Follow Her

'But, Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you. and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.' — Hebrews 6:9.

THE writer has been describing, in very stern and solemn words, the fate of apostates, and illustrating it by the awful metaphor of the earth which... 'beareth thorns and briars,' and which is, therefore, 'rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.' Then he softens, and knowing that rebukes are never so pointed as when the arrow is feathered by love, he changes his voice. 'But, beloved' — they needed to be assured that all the thundering and lightning did not mean anger, but affection — 'we are persuaded better things of you, and those things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.' Wherever, then, salvation is, certain other things will also be.

Now, of course, it is clear that the word salvation is not here used to mean the ultimate, complete deliverance from all evil of sorrow or sin, and the ultimate, complete endowment with all good of joy and holiness, but for that earlier stage of itself — which unfortunately, too often is supposed to be all that is needed, and to be sure to last, if once possessed, whether diligently tended or left neglected — the initial gifts which are received by a convert in the very beginning of his Christian career, viz., the assurance of divine forgiveness, and the establishment of a new relation between him and God. It is that initial and incomplete salvation of which the writer is here thinking. And, he says, it does not come alone. Like a planet set in the heavens, with moons that circle round it; like a diamond set in a cluster of precious stones; like some queen with her train of attendants, when that incipient salvation comes into a soul, it comes companioned by other blessings that are its natural and necessary attendants and accompaniments. And what are these? The whole context is full of instruction as to what they are. We can gather them all up into the one metaphor fruitfulness; or to put away the metaphor, we can gather them all up into the one phrase, 'a holy life.' That, or these — for the one phrase, 'a holy life,' will break up and effloresce into all manner of beautifulnesses and goodnesses — are 'the things that accompany salvation.'

It is plain that the possession of 'salvation' is sure to lead to that result. For it is something more than a judge's pardon; it is a Father's forgiveness, and even if it were nothing more than forgiveness, it would, as such, set in operation new emotions and aims in the child's heart and will. God's forgiveness does not only take away guilt, but breaks the power of sin. But surely the faintest dawn of salvation brings a new life which has affinities for all righteousness and every form of goodness, and brings the forgiven man under the influence of new motives, drawn from his blessed new experience of the 'mercies of God,' and strongly impelling him to that grateful, happy yielding of himself as a living sacrifice, from which whatsoever things are lovely and of good report are sure to spring, as naturally as rare exotics will, even in our northern cold, when the right temperature is maintained in the conservatory. The initial salvation sets us in new relations with God; it puts into us a new life, infantile and needing much care in its feebleness, no doubt, but still capable of growth to power and maturity, and even in infancy like the new-born Hercules, able to strangle the serpents. The initial salvation turns us in a new direction, changes our estimate of things to be pursued and avoided, gives new standards, new aims, new desires, new power to reach these aims, to satisfy these desires. 'If any man be in Christ' — even if he has but this moment entered, and has gone but a step or two in — 'he is a new creature; old things are passed away, all things have become new.' Simultaneous with the rapturous new assurance that God loves and forgives, come the inclination towards, and possibility of, a new life of holiness. It is for the most part an undeveloped possibility, and will need much careful tending, and much fencing off of infantile diseases, and much discipline, before it comes to a 'perfect man' after the pattern of Jesus; but the life is there, and, with fair play, will come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. 'Salvation' never enters alone, but ever is attended by a train of fair virgins.

Now, from this thought of the primacy of salvation and the subordinate place of its certain accompaniments, important practical results follow. One of these is what we Christians need to have perpetually recalled to our minds, namely, that the way to increase our possession of the accompaniments is to increase our possession of the central blessing which they accompany, and therefore that the true course for us to pursue, if we would live that. holy life which accompanies salvation, is to seek to increase, first, our possession of those primary experiences that constitute salvation the sense of the divine favour, the consciousness of the forgiving and reconciling love of God, and to strive to increase that faith, by which a fuller tide of salvation will flow into our more widely opened hearts. Begin with that with which God begins; seek to have more of the divine salvation; that is the best way to get more of the graces that accompany it. Welcome the entrance of the queen, and her train of attendants, in all the variety of their sweet loveliness and feminine graces, will follow her. 'The things that accompany salvation' are best secured by making sure, and increasing our conscious possession of, the salvation which they accompany. To aim at possessing the graces of character which are the results of conscious enjoyment of salvation, without that enjoyment, is like the folly that would begin building a house at the roof-tree. Such graces may be partially produced without 'salvation,' but they are but like artificial flowers in comparison with the sweet children of the dew and sun, and have no fragrance and no life.

But another needful lesson is that the best test and evidence of our being saved, men and women, is our manifesting in our lives these certain attendants on salvation. We should be very sceptical of the genuineness of any profession of being 'saved,' whether made by ourselves or by others, which is not manifestly accompanied by these, its inevitable consequences and attendants. The pure heart, the clean hands, the truth-speaking tongue, the loving disposition, the integrity in business, the control of one's own dispositions and tempers and tastes and appetites, and all these other fair traits of character which are the constituents of a holy life, the manifold rays which melt into the one white light of holiness — these things are the only tokens for the world, and the principal tests for myself, of the reality of my salvation. They are not the only tests for us. Thank God, Christian men do not need to take only the indirect method of determining the genuineness of their faith and love by examining their outward lives. They can say, 'I have felt, I know and Thou knowest, that I love Thee.' As to others, our only way of knowing whether the watch is going, is to note whether the hands are travelling round the dial, but for ourselves, we may have direct consciousness of our emotions, being, as it were, inside the watch case and aware of its working. Yet, since we can hoodwink ourselves about our inward state, and inspection of ourselves is always difficult, and its results apt to be biased by what we wish to find within, we have all much need to check our judgments of ourselves, especially in regard to our faith and love, which are the conditions of our possessing salvation, by the test of our actions, which we are less liable to misconstrue, and which will often tell us unwelcome, but wholesome truth.

We shall be wise if we habitually test our Christian emotion by our conduct in the rough road of daily life, and if we gravely suspect the depth and genuineness of all feeling, however sweet and lofty it seems, which does not come out into action. If our Christian experience is worth anything, it will drive the wheels of self-sacrificing duty. It takes tons of pitchblende to make a drachm of radium, and it needs much experience of the possession of salvation, and many precious and secret inward emotions in order to produce the life of self-sacrifice which is the ultimate test of the worth of our religion. If these certain accompaniments are wanting, or are sparse and lacking in radiance in our lives, it is high time that we asked ourselves very seriously what the worth to us is of a salvation that does not produce in us 'the things that accompany salvation.'

But the text suggests another thought to which we may now turn. It is that where these accompaniments of initial salvation are present, further salvation will follow. The whole of the context, including my text itself, goes upon the principle that whilst a holy life, or, to put it into other words, 'good works,' is, or are, the accompaniments of the initial salvation, they are the causes of a fuller salvation. For look what follows, and look what preceded our text. 'The earth which drinketh in the rain' — that is step number one and that drinking in of the rain is the initial act of faith which opens thirstily for the entrance of the initial salvation. Then follows — 'and bringeth forth herbs' — that is the second step, and corresponds to the holy life of which I have been speaking; and finally comes 'receiveth a blessing from God,' which corresponds to a fuller salvation. After the text we read: 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love' which implies a promise of rich reward. That is to say, if we have these accompaniments, and do our very best to make them conspicuous and continuous and more thoroughly the mainsprings of our actions, then we shall receive a fuller salvation, just because we have thus sought to appropriate and re-develop the consequences in our conduct of the partial salvation with which we were started at first. Salvation is a great word which in Scripture is presented in many aspects. Sometimes it is spoken of as a thing in the past experience of the Christian; sometimes it is spoken of as a thing which he is progressively realising throughout his life: 'The Lord added to the Church daily such as were being saved'; sometimes it is spoken of as an experience which is reserved for the future, 'receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls,' in that life beyond.

Now, this experience or possession, call it which you like, or state of spirit and heart, which has its roots in the past, and is being developed all through the Christian life, and is to be perfected in the future world, has for one chief cause of its progressive increase in our own consciousness, a holy life. And if we, as good ground, are trying 'to bring forth herbs meet for Him by whom it is dressed,' we shall be like the earth softened by the rain, and smiling with harvest, on which God smiles down in the sunshine of His approval, and which He visits with His benediction. We shall possess a fuller salvation. A firmer grasp of the great truths which bring salvation when received, and of all their consequences of peace and joy, and spiritual elevation and calm, a closer union with Jesus, a larger endowment of the Spirit, will 'follow our faithful attempts to 'perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord,' and so to possess, and to present, more of 'the things that accompany salvation.' Good works are a cause of a fuller salvation.

The most fruitful Christians need to be warned against possible barrenness and apostasy.

'We are persuaded better things of you, beloved' — but yet, though persuaded, the writer felt that he must 'thus speak.' For we never get beyond the risk of fruitlessness. We never get beyond the need of effort to resist the tendencies that draw us away. We never get beyond the need of warnings. It is always safe for us to look at the field that is bristling 'with briars and thorns, and is high unto cursing.' Therefore the warning note is sounded, and it is sounded, thank God! in order that what it points to as possible, may never be actual for any of us.

We all need warning, but those of us who, like myself, are set to give it sometimes, have to remember that it loses all its force unless it is manifestly the warning of love. 'Beloved I persuaded,' as we are, 'of better things of you,' it yet is our solemn duty thus to

speaking, that thus it may never be with any of you. And it is the less likely to be the case with any of us that we shall bear but 'thorns and briars,' the more we remember that it is possible for us all, and will be possible until the very end.

><>><>><>

Hebrews 6:11 Sure and Certain Hope

'We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.' — Hebrews 6:11.

MANY of us have seen a picture in which the artist paints 'Hope' as a pale, fragile figure, blind, and bent, wistfully listening to the poor music which her own finger draws from a broken one-stringed lyre. It is a profoundly true and pathetic confession. So sad, languid, blind, yearning, self-beguiled is Hope, as most men know her.

Put side by side with that the figure which an unknown sculptor has carved on one of the capitals of the ducal palace in Venice, where Hope lifts up praying hands and a waiting, confident face to a hand stretched out towards her from a glory of sunbeams. Or set by the side of the picture our own great poet's picture —

'Upon her arm a silver Anchor lay, On which she leaned ever, as befell; And ever up to Heaven as she did pray, Her steadfast eyes were bent, nor swerved other way.'

Who does not feel the contrast between the two conceptions? What makes the difference? The upward look. When Hope is directed heavenwards she is strong, assured, and glad.

My text speaks of the certitude and the blessedness of Christian hope, and of the discipline by which it is to be cultivated.

I. Let us look then, first, at the certainty of Christian hope.

Universal experience tells us that hope means an anticipation which is less than sure. Hopes and fears are bracketed together in common language, as always united, like a double star, one black and the other brilliant, which revolve round a common axis, and are knit together by invisible bands. But if we avail ourselves of the possibilities in reference to the future, which Christianity puts into our hands, our hope may be no less certain than our memory, and even more sure than it. For the grounds on which Christian men may forecast their future as infinitely bright and blessed, as the possession of an inheritance incorruptible, as absolute and entire conformity to the likeness of God, which is peace and joy, are triple, each of them affording certitude.

The Christian hope is built on no mere projection of our longings into a hypothetical and questionable future. It is no mere deduction from probabilities, from guesses. It is no mere child of a wish, but it rests, immovable, on these three solid pillars — an eternal God to whom all Time is subject, a past fact and a present experience.

It rests upon the eternal God to whom all the future is certain and upon His faithful word, which makes it as certain to us. In the Old Testament God is 'the Hope of Israel,' and the devout heart's language is, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait; and in His word do I hope.' In the New, Christ is our hope; and, as the context here tells us, the two immutable things, God's promise and His oath, lay the foundation for unshaken confidence. And not only so, but our hope further rests on a past fact: 'He hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' The one real proof that when we paint heaven we are not painting mist and moonshine is the fact that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. Men before Him have hoped and feared, and said: 'Perhaps it may be; "I am afraid it is," or "I hope it is";' but there is all the difference in the world between saying, 'A man can possibly live again'; or 'he may probably live again'; or, he will, I believe, live again'; and saying, 'a Man has lived again, and having died has risen.' There were many reasons for believing in America before Columbus came back and said, 'I have been there.' And there are many reasons, no doubt, that may incline sanguine spirits and wearied spirits and desiring spirits, and even sin-stricken and guilty spirits, to anticipate a life beyond, which shall be a hope or a dread; but there is only one ground upon which men can say. 'We know that it is not cloud-land, but solid earth'; and that is, that our Brother has come back from the bourne from which 'no traveller returns'; that He thereby has shown us all, not by argumentation but by historical fact, that to die is not to cease to be; that to die draws after it the resurrection of the body. We lift our eyes to the heavens, and though 'the cloud receive Him out of our sight,' hope, which is better than vision, pierces the cloud and travels straight on to the throne whilst He bends from His crowned glory and says:

'Because I live ye shall live also.'
'Our everlasting hopes arise
Above the ruinable skies,'

and they are built upon no dreams of our own, nor is the music drawn from the lyre by our poor fingers, but they are built on the steadfast word of the eternal God, to whom past, present, and future are one; and they are built on the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And then, still further, the Christian hope is based, not only on these two strong pillars, but on a third — namely, on present experience.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, has, in two different places, a very interesting and instructive genealogy, if I might so call it, of Christian hope; and in both places (the fifth and the fifteenth chapters) he traces the hope of the Christian to a double and apparently opposite source. He says: 'Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' And in the similar passage, in the other chapter, he speaks about being filled with 'joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope.' So then, there he traces the Christian hope to the present experience of forgiveness, and of access by faith into present grace; or, as he puts it in briefer words in the other place, to the present experience of 'joy and peace in believing.'

But there is another side to our experience which likewise issues in hope.

'And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience,' — brave endurance, and that brave endurance of ours, inasmuch as it is something beyond our own reach and strength, works in us the proof of a divine power operating upon us; and that proof of a divine power operating upon us produces in us hope, and hope 'makes not ashamed.' That is to say, the dark as well as the bright side of the Christian experience, its sorrows as well as its joys, the burdens which have been borne, the trials which we have survived, demonstrate to us that we are not left to fight alone, but that a mighty hand is ever around us, and a gracious arm holding us up, and therefore all these darker and sadder moments of the Christian life do likewise tend towards the enkindling in the spirit of a 'hope that maketh not ashamed.'

So, both by reason of what we experience of peace and joy, and by reason of what we experience of trial, disaster, difficulty borne, and unwelcome duties done, in the might of God, we are entitled to say — we know that a rest remains, where trouble is done with, and all that was here tendency shall be perfected, and the divine and immortal elements of joy and peace shall enfold themselves completely in our happy experience. You can tell a cedar of Lebanon, though it is not yet bigger than a dandelion, and know what it is coming to. You can tell the infant prince. And the joy and peace of faith, feeble and interrupted as they may be in our present experience, have on them the stamp of supremacy and are manifestly destined for dominion over our whole nature. They are indeed experiences 'whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality.' I have often seen in rich men's greenhouses some exotic plant grown right up to the roof, which had to be raised in order to let it go higher. The Christian life here is plainly an exotic, growing where it cannot attain its full height, and it presses against the fragile over-arching glass, yearning upwards to the open sky and the throne of God. So, because we can love so much and do love so little, because we can trust thus far and do trust no more, because we have some spark of the divine life in us, and that spark so contradicted and thwarted and oppressed, there must be somewhere a region which shall correspond to this our deepest nature, and the time must come when the righteous, who here shone but so dimly, shall 'blaze forth like the sun in

the Kingdom of the Father.'

Blessed it is that this guiding torch of Christian hope can be kindled from both of these sources. We can light it both with the sunbeams of joy and peace, focused in the burning glass of faith, and with a spark struck by the sharp collision of the hard steel and flint, in the night of sorrow. Thus all the experience of a believing soul is evidence of the certainty of the Christian hope.

Brethren! do not trust yourselves to a hope that is less than certitude, nor grovel along these low levels, concerning which the warning is always to be repeated: 'Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what the day may bring forth,' but aspire and lift your hope to heaven, then you may be sure that 'To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.'

II. Now let me say a word in the next place as to the assurance of the Christian hope.

Certainty is one thing, and assurance is another. A man may have the most firm conviction based upon the most unsubstantial foundation. His expectation may have no roots to it, and yet the confidence with which he cherishes the expectation may be perfect. There may be entire assurance without any certainty; and there may be what people call objective certainty with a very tremulous and unworthy subjective assurance.

But the only temper that corresponds to and is worthy of the absolute certainties with which the Christian man has to deal is the temper of unwavering and assured confidence. Do not disgrace the sure and steadfast anchor by fastening a slim piece of packthread to it that may snap at any moment. Do not build flimsy structures upon the reek and put up upon such a foundation canvas shanties that any puff of wind may sweep away. If you have a staff to lean upon which will neither give, nor warp, nor crack, whatever stress is put upon it, see that you lean upon it, not with a tremulous finger, but with your whole hand. The wavering,

hesitating, half and half confidence with which a large number of us grasp the absolute certainties of our hope, is a degradation to the hope and a disgrace to the hoper. There is nothing that is worthy of certitude but assurance; and he who knows that his hope is not vain ought to make a conscience of having a response to the outward certainty in the inward unwavering confidence. But so far is that from being the case that there is a type of Christian life, not so common nowadays, perhaps, as it used to be, which makes a merit of not being sure, and takes it as the sign of Christian humility not to venture on saying, 'I know in whom I have believed and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him.'

O dear friends! these dim expectations, clouded all over with earthly doubts and indifference, those languid hopes with which we lift scarcely interested and almost incredulous eyes to the crown, are the opprobrium of our Christianity, and the weakness of our whole lives.

Be sure of this, that the more certain the assurance of hope, the more calm and sober it will be. It is the element of uncertainty in anticipation that makes it feverish. When it is fully confident and grasps the thing that it knows is coming, the pulse throbs no faster nor more irregularly, though, thank God I far more fully, by reason of the blessed hope. If we want to live in 'sober certainty' of coming bliss, and calmed, and steadied, and made ready for all service, endurance, and suffering, by the brightness of our hope, we must see to it that it is not dim and wavering, but sure and steadfast, certain as God, as the history of Christ, as the present. It is certain. Make it assured.

Let me remind you further that this assured hope is permanent. 'The full assurance unto the end,' my text says. 'Unto the end.' How many a lighthouse that you and I once steered towards is behind us now! As we get older, how many of the aims and hopes that drew us on have sunk below the horizon! And how much less there is left for us people with grey hairs in our heads and years on our backs to hope for, than we used to think there was! But, dear brethren, what does it matter though the sea be washing away the coast on one side the channel if it is depositing fertile land on the other? What does it matter though the earthly hopes are becoming fewer and those few graver and sadder, if the one great hope is shining brighter? Winter nights are made brilliant by keener stars than soft summer evenings show, and the violet and red and green streamers that fill the northern heavens only come in the late year. So it is well and blessed for us if, when the leaves fall, we see a wider sky; and if, as hope dies for earth, it revives and lives again for heaven. 'The full assurance of hope to the end.'

III. Lastly, note here the culture of this certitude of hope.

My text is an exhortation to all Christian people 'to show the same diligence' in order to such an assurance. The same diligence as what? The same diligence as they had shown 'in their work and labour of love towards God's name.' That is to say, the people to whom my Epistle was sent had been extremely diligent and vigorous in what I may call practical Christianity. The writer wants them to be as diligent in reference to the emotional and experimental side of Christianity. Now, that fits a good many of us. The fashionable type of a Christian to-day is a worker. By common consent theology seems put into the background, and by almost as common consent there is comparatively little said about what our fathers used to call, experimental religion,' feelings, emotions, inward experiences, but everything is drive, drive, drive at getting people to work. God forbid that I should say one word against that. But 'we desire that ye should show the same diligence' as in your mission-halls and schools and various other benevolent operations, in cultivating the emotions and sentiments — yes, and the doctrinal beliefs of the Christian life, or else you will be lopsided Christians.

Further, did it ever occur to you, Christian people, that your hope was a thing to be cultivated, that you ought to set yourselves to distinct and specific efforts for that purpose? Have you ever done so? How is it to be done? What I was saying a few minutes ago as to its grounds carries the answer to that question. Get into the habit of meditating upon the objects towards which it is directed, and the grounds on which it is built. If you never lift your eyes to the goal you will never be drawn towards it. If you never think about heaven it will have no attraction for you. If you never go over the basis of your hope your hope will get dim, and there will be little realisation or Hiring power in it. I believe that the great bulk of nominal Christians in England to-day rarely think about their future certainties, and, more rarely still, test their foundation and see that it stands firm. No wonder, then, that hope so seldom lends her light, and that such dim one, to shine upon their paths.

Let me say, lastly, in the matter of practical advice, that this cultivation of the assurance of hope is largely to be effected by pruning the wild luxuriance and earth-ward-stooping tendrils of our hope. The Apostle Peter has a wise word: — 'Gird up the loins of your mind; be sober, and hope to the end.' That is to say, the perfection of Christian anticipation and assurance is only possible as the result of effort, and rigid abstinence from many earthly treasures. If you want the tree to grow high, nip the side shoots and the leader will gain strength. If you desire that your hope should ever be vigorous you must be abstinent from, or temperate in, earthly things. Neither love nor hope can serve two masters; and if you are always occupied in forecasting earthly good, you will have little faculty left over, out of which to weave the far fairer fabric of eternal blessedness. If you pluck the wing feathers out of your hope, by your worldliness, by your selfishness, by your sin, it will be like some free forest bird, caught, clipped, and condemned to the barn-yard, only going about there picking up corn, instead of rising to heaven with its song.

Dear brethren, God has given every one of us this great and strange faculty of forecasting the future. Surely He gave it to us for some better purpose than that we should taste our earthly pleasures twice, or be impelled along our worldly course by a series of illusions. If you keep it flown on the low levels of the contingent and the perishable and the temporal, and send it out only to bring you hack tidings from the world, it will play you false; and you will find out that the disappointments of realised hopes are often as bitter as the disappointments of unfulfilled ones.

Do not be slaves of that pale, sad maiden with the blinded eyes and the broken lyre. Do not listen to the singing in your own ears and mistake it for heavenly music. There is one region where your hope can expatiate among certainties. Grasp Christ and you will then lift expectant eyes that will not look in vain to the Hand that reaches to you out of the blaze of the sunbeams, and is laden with blessednesses for the present which are sure promises for the future. The Christian man alone is certain of what he anticipates; and he alone will have to say 'The half hath not been told me.' For all others 'their hope shall be cut off, and their trust shall be as a spider's web.'

><>><>><>

Hebrews 6:12 Slothfulness and Its Cure

'That ye be not slothful, but followers of Him who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' — Hebrews 6:12

THIS is the end of a sentence, and the result of something that has been stated before. What is that? 'We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.' Diligence is the opposite of slothfulness, and the former is to be cultivated that the latter may not overtake us. But it is 'the same diligence,' and that expression raises the question — The same as what? Now the writer has just been praising his readers for 'their work of faith and labour of love' which they showed in ministering to the saints. And then he says, in effect, 'I wish that you took as much trouble to cultivate your own Christian graces as you do to help other people in regard to these outward matters, for then there would be no fear of your becoming slothful, and you would be treading in the steps of those that have gone before, and who now inherit the promises.'

That is to say, there are a good many Christian people who spend a good deal more pains and effort upon the less central and deep things of Christian conduct than they do upon the keeping of the centre and mainspring of all in active operation. Some of us need the hint — 'Look after your own Christian graces as diligently as you do after works of benevolence'

I. Note here, then, first, a danger that still threatens all Christians.

The words of my text in our Authorised Version are somewhat inadequately translated, and the first clause would much more truly read, 'that ye become not slothful' than that 'ye be not slothful.' The same somewhat peculiar word, which is here rendered 'slothful,' is employed a little before in the letter, where the writer is excusing himself for not entering upon some deep truths, because he says to his readers, 'You have become dull of hearing.' It is the same word that is employed here, and we might paraphrase the meaning somewhat thus: 'You have become dull of hearing; take care lest you become dull all through. The palsy has begun in your ears, and it will spread to your eyes and your hands and your heart before long, if you do not 'mind.' The first sign of a growing torpor and indifference in the Christian life generally lies here — in carelessness in accepting the teaching of Christian truth. The ear becomes dull, and the whole man follows suit, and becomes languid. And this danger of becoming 'slothful,' not so much in the sense of not working, as of being dull and torpid, inert, having no feeling, having no active energy in the inner life; half asleep, paralysed — this is the danger that hangs ever over all of us, and is only to be faced victoriously in one way, and that is the way which the writer of this Epistle here points out — namely, by unslumbering diligence and continual watchfulness against the creeping on of this subtle palsy. As surely as friction will stop a train, unless there is the perpetual repetition of the impulse that drives it, as surely as the swing of the pendulum will settle into a vertical position, drawn by the gravitation of the earth, unless the mainspring urges it on moment by moment, so surely will the most vigorous, cheery, active Christian character gradually become duller and duller, until it settles down into a condition indistinguishable from death, except on condition of unslumbering vigilance and constant effort. We are all tending to become slothful, sluggish, and we may overcome the tendency if, and only if, we set ourselves with all our hearts to do it. If you take a ladleful of molten metal out of a blast furnace, and set it down on the ground and leave it, in half an hour's time there is a scum on the top and its temperature has lowered, I know not how many degrees, and presently all heat will have gone from it. No warmth, no depth of feeling, no firmness of resolution, no joy of clear faith will last of itself. We have to keep the flame alight and alive. 'We desire that every one do use the same diligence that ye become not' — as you certainly will if you do not use it — 'sluggish, or torpid Christians.'

II. The next point here is the way by which that tendency can be victoriously faced and overcome.

It was by 'faith and patience' that all the men of old had reached the true land of promise and entered on the inheritance of the saints in light. And these are still the means by which the ever-present pressure of that tendency to become slothful is to be

overcome. Now it is important to remember that in this Epistle 'faith' predominately means that faculty by which we lay hold of the unseen, and realise future blessings as our own. So it is used in the great eleventh chapter, in which the writer, as it were, reads the muster-roll of the heroes of the faith in order to establish his contention that the bond between God's saints and Him has always been one and the same — namely, faith. Of course, that shade of meaning of the word rises up quite naturally from the other aspect in which it is most frequently used in the New Testament — viz., the reliance upon Jesus Christ, for He Himself is for us the revealer of things unseen, and the certifier and assurer of the things hoped for in the future. But the predominant reference of the word in this letter is, as I say, to the attitude of mind by which we grasp the unseen, and make the future blessings which God premises to us our own by anticipation. And, says the writer, that faith which thus stretches out a long arm through the mists to lay hold of the solidities that are beyond the mists, that faith is the means by which we shall most effectually ward off the tendency to sluggishness and inertness, which will otherwise get the better of us all.

The word here employed for patience is not the ordinary one used for that virtue, which means chiefly perseverance in a given course of conduct in spite of many difficulties, and pressures of sorrows and troubles. But the word employed here is the same which is often rendered 'long-suffering.' This 'patience' is not to be regarded as something added to faith, but rather, it is the characteristic result of faith. The faith which, although the vision tarries, waits, and is not shaken, though many days may pass and we seem little nearer the realisation of our hopes; an obstinate, persistent, long-lasting confidence and realisation of the unseen and future good is what the writer recommends to us here as the sovereign antidote, which by our own efforts we may secure, against the tendency to slumber and to death. By faith which is long-breathed, and can live below the water for a long time, believing in the blue heavens that are above, a faith which is patient, we shall overcome the tendency to torpor, deepening to death, as in the case of a man who goes to sleep in a snowstorm.

So, dear brethren, we come to a very familiar thought rather duty of Christian men and women, systematically and consciously to cultivate for themselves the habit of realising the unseen, living in the presence of the solemn realities yonder. Oh! if we walked through this illusory and passing world of ours with that great white throne and Him who sits upon it ever blazing before us, do you think we would go to sleep then? If we cultivated the sense of belonging to that unseen order of things, and being but lodgers and strangers, passers-by for a night here, should we be able to fall asleep as we do? The man that goes to bed in a hotel, and says, 'I am going away by express train in the middle of the night' does not fall into a very sound sleep. If we realised, as we ought to do, where our affinities are, of what country we are really the citizens, to whom we belong, and where the things are that really are, then we should find it hard to be slothful and easy to march strenuously on the road that God marks out for us. Cultivate the habit of consciously realising that you are strangers and sojourners here, and 'declare plainly that you seek a country,' and seek it, not as those who may, perchance, not succeed in their quest, seek it, not as those do who are looking for a thing that is lost, and perhaps Will never be found, but seek it, as, indeed, the original plainly expresses, as those to whom that land of their search is the land of their nativity to which they belong, their fatherland, the mother-country of them all.

So let us cultivate not only the habit of thus realising the unseen, but of living in the conscious possession, even now, of the great things that God has promised for us. And let us see to it, dear friends, that that faith holds out with patience, and lasts all the long weary days, as they seem to us according to our poor measure of time, which may yet intervene between the present moment and our reaching home. The look-out man at the bow of the ship, as he gazes out on an empty ocean and sees not a sail nor anything but the long wash of the waves running to and indenting the horizon, gets drowsy. But let a little tip of white show itself away out on the blue, and all his senses are alert in a moment. If we clearly and constantly saw where we are going and what is coming to us, the salvation that is 'being borne' toward us, we should not sleep any more. Therefore, let us give diligence to cultivate the patient faith which will keep us awake. III. Lastly, note the encouragement to the effort of faith.

'Be ye' imitators of those who through faith and patience — these two graces which yet are one — 'inherit the promises.' The writer probably includes among these inheritors the sainted dead of the old Covenant, of whom he says in chapter 2. that they 'died in faith, not having received the promise,' and any of the new Covenant who had passed into the other world. And he declares, by the strong language of my text, which is even stronger in the original by the use of a present participle, the present blessedness of all the departed saints. They do now inherit the promises. The metaphor is drawn, consciously or unconsciously, from the old story of Israel's possession of the Promised Land, and so suggests all the ideas of rest, of the wanderings being over, of victory, of peace, of society, of each man having his portion of the great land which belongs to all, which that story naturally brings with it, And for us there may come the encouragement of looking to those dear ones that have gone before us, knowing that they 'stand in their lot' in the

Canaan of God, and that we, too, may stand in ours. And so from the thought of their present blessedness in their present inheritance, we may gather cheer, whilst we struggle and tramp along the wilderness road. And, again, we may gather encouragement not only from the thought of where and how their wanderings have ended, but from the remembrance of the path that they trod. We have no strange road to walk, but one beaten by holy feet from the beginning, and plain for us too. They have passed along the King's highway, and having passed, and having entered into their rest, they remain as witnesses that it is 'the right way to the city of habitation.'

But we have to look higher than to them, and to take for our encouragement not only the pattern of all the pilgrims that have gone before us, but that of the Lord of the march, the 'Breaker,' who is gone up before us, and 'looking off' from the cloud of witnesses, to 'look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, who trod the road, every step of it, and left footprints not unstained with blood in which we may plant our poor feet, 'having left us an example that we should follow in His steps.'

><>><><>

Hebrews 6:18 Fleeing and Clinging

'We... who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.' Hebrews 6:18.

THE name of Christian was invented by outsiders. It is very seldom used in the New Testament, and then evidently as a designation by which Christ's followers were known to others; and not as one employed by themselves. They spoke of each other as 'disciples,' 'believers,' 'saints,' 'brethren,' or the like. Sometimes they used more expanded names, of which my text is an example. It sets forth part of the characteristics of those whom the world knew as 'Christians.' Now that the name has been adopted by the Church and has lost a good deal of its original force in many minds, this description may serve to teach what is one essential feature in the description of a Christian. He is one Who has 'fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before' him. That strikes a good many off the list, does it not? Not birth, nor baptism, nor acceptance of a creed, nor association with a community makes a Christian, but the personal act of fleeing for his life and grasping the horus of the altar.

I confine myself to the plain, evangelical teaching, the acceptance in heart and life of which makes a man a Christian, whilst nothing else does. I want to ask you all-or, rather, I pray, that my poor words may help you to ask yourselves, and not rest till you have answered the question 'Have I, thus, my very own self, fled for refuge to the hope that is set before me?' An old divine said, 'Preachers should preach, not for sharpening wits, but for saving souls.' And that is what I want, God helping me, to try to do.

I. First of all, then, let me put a plain statement, and you will forgive the sharpness of the form in which I put it, because I want it to stick — You need a refuge.

There is nothing sadder than the strange power which men have of blinking the great facts of their own condition and of human life. I know few things that seem to me more tragic, and certainly none that are more contemptible, than the easy-going, superficial optimism, or the easy-going superficial negligence, with which hosts of people altogether slur over, even if they do not deny, the plain fact that every man and woman of us stands here in this world, though compassed by many blessings, and in the enjoyment of much good, and having many delights flowing into our lives, and being warranted in laughter and mirth, — still stands like an unsheltered fugitive in the open, with a ring of enemies round about that may close in upon him. Self-interest seems often to be blind, and in many, I am sure, of my hearers, it is blind to the plainest and largest truths' with reference to themselves, their necessities, and their conditions. Ah, dear friends! after all that we say about the beauty, and the brightness, and the joyfulness of life, and the beneficence of God, we live in a very stern world. There are evils that may come, and there are some that certainly will come. You young people — thank God for it, but do not abuse it — are buoyant in hope, and take short views, and are glad, where older folk who have learned what life is generally have sober estimates of its possibilities, and our radiant visions have toned down into a very subdued grey. Sorrow, disappointment, broken hopes, hopes fulfilled and disappointed — and, that is worst of all — losses, inevitable partings when the giant-shrouded figure of Death forces its way in at the rose-covered portal, in spite of the puny effort of Love to keep it out, sicknesses, failures in business, griefs of many kinds that I cannot touch, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and all the ills that flesh is heir to, these lie wafting somewhere on the road for every one of us. Are you going to stand in the unsheltered plain, a mark for all these? Do you think you can front them in your own strength? Are you able, calmly and soberly, remembering the possibilities that lie in the black clouds over your head, to say, 'Pour on! I will endure?' Nay, verily; you need a refuge.

You carry your own worst danger buttoned up in your own waistcoats and gowns; you hear about with you in your hearts, in your passions, in your desires, a vase of combustibles amidst the sparks of a volcano, so to speak. And any one of these that fill the air may drop into it, and bring about a conflagration. No man that has measured himself, the irritability of his nerves, the excitability of his passions, the weakness of his will, and its ugly trick of going over to the enemy at the very critical moment of the fight, But, if he is a wise man, will say, 'I need something stronger than myself to fall back upon, I need some damp cloth or other to be laid over the magazine of combustibles in my heart. I need a refuge from myself.'

You carry — no matter whence it came, or how it was developed; that is of no consequence, you have got it — you carry a conscience that is not altogether silent in any man, I suppose, and that certainly is not altogether dead in you. Its awful voice speaks many a time in the silence of the night, and in the depth of your own heart, and tells you that there are evil things in your past, and a page black in your biography which you can do nothing to cancel or to erase the stains from, or to tear out. 'What I have written I have written.' And so long as memory holds her place and conscience is not shattered altogether, there needs no other hell

to make the punishment of the evildoer. You need a refuge from the stings of the true indictments of your own consciences.

Your conscience is a prophet. It is not, nowadays, fashionable to preach about the Day of Judgment — more's the pity, I think. We say that every one of us shall give an account of ourselves to God. Have you ever tried to Believe that about yourself, and to realise what it means? Think that all, down to the cozy depths that we are ashamed to look at ourselves, will be spread out before the 'pure eyes and perfect judgment of the all-judging' God. O brother! you will need a refuge 'that you may have boldness before Him in the Day of Judgment.' These things that I have been speaking about, external ills, ungoverned self, the accusations of conscience, which is the voice of God, and that future to which we are all driving as fast as we can — these, things are truths. And, being truths, they should enter in, as operative facts, into your lives. My question is, have they done so?

You need a refuge; have you ever calmly contemplated the necessity? Oh I do not let that dogged ignorance of the facts bewitch you any longer. Do not let the inconsequent levity that cannot see an inch beyond its nose hide from you the realities of our own condition. People in the prisons, during the September massacres of the French Revolution, used to amuse themselves — although the tumbrils were coming for some of them to-morrow morning, and the headsman was waiting for them — used to amuse themselves as if they were free, and got up entertainments with a ghastly mockery of joy. That is something like what some of us do. One has seen a mule going down an Alpine pass, ambling quite comfortably along, with one foot over a precipice, and a thousand feet to fall if it slips. That is how some of us travel along the road. Sheep will nibble the grass, stretching their stupid necks a little bit further to get an especially succulent tuft on the edge of the cliffs, with eight hundred feet and a crawling sea at the bottom of it to receive them if they stumble. Do not be like that. 'Be ye not as the horses or the mules that have no understanding,' but look the facts in the face, and do not be content till you have acted as they prescribe.

II. You have the refuge that you need.

The writer of this Epistle describes it in my text as being 'the hope set before us.' Now, by 'hope' there, he obviously means, not the emotion, but the object upon which it is fixed. For it is something 'set before' him — that is to say, external to him, and on which, when it is set before him, he can lay an appropriating hand, so that by the hope here is meant the thing hoped for. That, of course, is a very common usage, in which we transfer the name of a feeling to the thing that excites it. So people talk about such and such a thing being their 'dread.' Or, affection gives its own name to its objects, and speaks about or to them as my love, my joy, my delight, in token of the completeness with which the heart has gone out to, and rests on, the thing which is thus identified, transported, as it were, with the emotion which grasps it. In like manner here it is the thing that Christians have laid hold of which is called 'the hope set before us.'

In the context — that thing set Before men as the object of hope is the great and faithful promise of God, confirmed by His oath long ago, to the ancient patriarchs, the promise of divine blessings and of a future inheritance. And, says the writer, away down here, in the very latest ages, we have the very same solid substance to grasp and cling to that Abraham of old had. For God said to him, 'Blessing I will bless thee,' and He says it to us; and that is a 'refuge.' God said to him, 'Thou shalt have a land for an inheritance,' and He says it to us, and that is a refuge. The presence of God, and the promise of a blessed inheritance, are the elements of the hope of which the writer is speaking. Then, in his rapid way, he crowds figure upon figure, and, not content with the two of my text, the asylum and the strong stay, he adds a third, and likens this hope to the anchor of the soul, giving steadfastness and fixity to the man who clings, being in itself 'sure' so that it will not break, and 'steadfast' so that it will not drag. He goes on to say that this object of hope enters 'into that within the veil.' But notice that in the very next verse he speaks of some one else who entered within the veil — viz., Jesus Christ. So, as in a dissolving view, you have, first the figure of Hope, as the poets have painted her, calm and radiant and smiling; and then that form melts away, and there stands instead of the abstraction Hope, the person Jesus Christ. Which, being translated into plain words, is just this, the refuge is Christ, Christ, our hope. Mark, further, how the writer describes our Lord there as our forerunner and priest.

Now that exposition of the context opens out into important thoughts. Jesus Christ is our hope and refuge, because He is our priest. Ah, dear brethren! all other enemies and ills are tolerable, and a man may make shift to bear them all without God, though he will bear them very imperfectly, but the deepest need of all, the most threatening enemy of all, can only be dealt with and overcome by the gospel which proclaims the priest whose death is the abolition of death, whose sacrifice is the removal of sin, who 'has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, and by whose stripes we are healed.' I pray you to recognise this fact, that there is no other way by which Christ can be a refuge and the hope of the world, than by His first dealing triumphantly with the fact of sin, which is the tap-root of all sorrows. It is because that dear Lord has died for every one of us, because in Him we have 'redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins'; because, with Him on our side, we need not fear the accusations of conscience, nor have a fearful looking for of judgment, that He, and He only, is the refuge for the whole of this sinful world. Is He your refuge? and do you know Him as your priest? The acceptance and sufficiency of His sacrifice is witnessed by the fact that He has entered within the veil, and because thus He has entered He is for us our only hope, our all-sufficient refuge.

I need not remind you, I suppose, too, how utterly different all the inevitable ills and sorrows of this mortal life become when we lay

hold on Him, and find shelter there. 'A man shall be a refuge from the storm and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.' We can bear sickness, and sorrows, and disappointments and failures and partings and all grief, and the arrow-heads are blunted, or, at all events, the poison is wiped off the barbs when we have Christ for our refuge and our friend.

And because He is our forerunner, and has passed within the veil, as the context says so impressively, 'for us,' we are emancipated, further, from the fear of death; and the dread of what lies beyond, and are emboldened to lift even eyes that weep tears of penitence and a face that is suffused with the blush of conscious unworthiness; and to behold within the veil the pledge of our entrance there in the person of Jesus Christ. So, brethren, for all the ills that flesh can bear, for all that sin entails, for the gnawings of our own conscience, and for the judgments of future retribution, we can betake ourselves to that Saviour and say with quiet confidence, 'I have made the Lord my refuge, no evil shall befall me, nor any plague come nigh my dwelling.'

III. Lastly, I have said, you need a refuge. You , have the refuge you need. Let me put my last word into, not a command, but an entreaty — flee to it.

The writer, as I have occasion to remark, Mends two vivid metaphors here, the one of a fugitive unsheltered in the open, surrounded by foes, the other of a man grasping some strong stay. Look at the two pictures.

'Fled for refuge.' There probably is an allusion here to the Israelitish institution of the cities of refuge for the manslayer. But whether there be or not, the scene brought before us is that of a man flying for his life with the pursuer clattering at his heels, and his lance-point within a yard of the fugitive's back. Grass will not grow under that man's feet; he will not stop to look at the flowers by the road. The wealth of South Africa, if it were spread before him, would not check his headlong flight. It is a race for life. If he gets to the open gate he is safe. If he is overtaken before he reaches it he is a dead man. The moment he gets within the portal the majesty of law compasses him about, and delivers him from the wild justice of revenge. Surely, the urgency of flight and the folly of the hesitation and delay that mark some of us are vividly brought out by the metaphor. 'By and by,' kills its tens of thousands. For one man 'that says,' I am not a Christian, and, what is more, I never intend to be,' there are a dozen that say, 'Tomorrow! tomorrow!' 'Let me sow my wild oats as a young man; let me alone for a little while. I am busy at present; when I have a convenient season I will send for Thee' What would have become of the man-slayer if he had curled himself up in his cloak, and lain down beside his victim, and said, 'I am too tired to run for it?' He would have been dead before morning.

A rabbi's scholar, as the Jewish traditions tell us, once said to him, 'Master! when shall I repent?' 'The day before you die,' said the Rabbi. The scholar said, 'I may die today.' Then said the Rabbi, 'Repent to; day.' 'Choose you this day' whether you will stand unsheltered out there, exposed to the pelting hustling of the pitiless storm, or will flee to the refuge and be saved.

Look at the other picture, 'to lay hold of the hope.' Perhaps the allusion is to the old institution of sanctuary, which perhaps existed in Israel, and at any rate was well known in ancient times. When a man grasped the horns of the altar he was safe. If so, the two metaphors may really blend into one; the flight first, and then the clutching to that which, so long as the twining fingers could encompass it, would permit no foe to strike the fugitive. This metaphor speaks of the fixity of the hold with which we should grasp Jesus Christ by our faith. The shipwrecked sailor up in the rigging, with the wild sea around him, and the vessel thumping upon the sand, will hold on, with frozen fingers, for hours, to the shrouds, knowing that if he slips his grasp the next hungry wave will sweep him away and devour him. And so you should cling to Jesus Christ, with the consciousness of danger and helplessness, with the tight grasp of despair, with the tight grasp of certain hope. Brother! have you fled; do you grasp?

I remember reading of an inundation in India, when a dam, away up in a mountain gorge, burst at midnight. Mounted messengers were sent down the glen to gallop as hard as they could, and rouse the sleeping villagers. Those who rose and fled in an instant were in time to reach the high ground, as they saw the tawny flood coming swirling down the gorge, laden with the wrecks of happy homes and many a corpse. Those who hesitated and dawdled were swept away by it. My message to you, dear friends, is, 'Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain. Escape to the mountains lest thou be consumed.'

><>><><>

Hebrews 6:19 The Anchor of the Soul

'Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast and which entereth into that within the veil.' — Hebrews 6:19

THERE is something very remarkable in the prominence given by Christianity to hope as an element in the perfect character. The New Testament is, one may say, full of exhortations to 'hope perfectly.' It is regarded as one of the three virtues which sum up all Christian goodness. Nay! In one place the Apostle Paul lays upon it the whole weight of our salvation, for he says 'we are saved by hope.'

Now this great prominence given to the exercise of this faculty seems to correspond with the will of God as expressed in our nature, for man is a creature obstinate in his hope. But it seems to be strangely at variance with the value of hope as attested by experience; for who does not know that most hopes are false; and that whether they be disappointed or fulfilled, they betray.

The world is full of complaints of the fallacies of hope. Poets and moralists are sure of a response when they touch that chord; and it sometimes seems to us as if elaborate provision were made in our nature for deluding us into activity and tempting us along toll-some paths, to gather a handful of mist at the end, and then to say in our bitterness, 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit.'

But yet 'God never sends mouths but He sends meat to feed them'; and if there be in a man a faculty so obstinate and strong as this, there must be somewhere a reality which it can grasp; and, grasping, can be freed from all its miseries and mistakes.

So my text tells us where that is, and tells us further how ennobling and steady an ally of all great and blessed things hope is in a man, when it is rightly fixed on the right objects. The metaphor of my text is unique in Scripture, though it be common in other places. Only here do we find the familiar thought that hope is 'the anchor of the soul.' I take that metaphor as the guiding thought in my words now; and ask you to consider the anchor; the anchorage, or holding-ground; the cable; and the steadfastness of the ship so anchored in all storms.

I. Consider, then, first, the force of this metaphor of the anchor.

Now it seems to me that the very figure requires us to suppose that hope here means, not the emotion but the object on which it is fixed. The same interpretation is necessarily suggested by the context; for the previous verse speaks about 'a hope set before us,' and about our 'laying hold upon it.' So that here, at all events, the hope is something external to ourselves which is proposed to us, and which we can grasp.

An anchor is outside the ship; and that which steadies us cannot be a part of ourselves, must be something external to us, on which our fluttering and mutable emotions can repose and be still.

Nor is it at all unusual, either in Scripture or in common speech, that we should employ the name of the emotion to express the object which the emotion grasps. For instance, people say to one another, 'my love,' 'my comfort,' and we talk about God as 'our fear' and 'our dread,' and Scripture speaks of Christ as our hope; in all which phrases the person who excites the emotion is described by the name of the emotion.

And so, I take it, is the ease here. The hope which we possess, and which, outside of us, we being fastened to it, makes us steadfast and secure, is, at bottom, Jesus Christ Himself. This hope, says my text, 'has entered within the veil.' Well I read on. 'Whither the Forerunner is for us entered.' When He passed within the veil our hope passed within it, and went with Him. For He is not only the foundation, but He is the substance of our hope. He is the thing hoped for, and in the deepest interpretation, all our future is the personal Christ; and every blessed anticipation that can fill a human heart with gladness is summed up in this, 'that I may be found in Him,' and made partaker of that Saviour whom to possess is fruition and eternal life. He is the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, and entering within the veil Notice further the characteristics ascribed to this anchor and hope. 'Sure and steadfast.' These two words express diverse qualities of the hope. A sure anchor is one which does not drag. It is not too light for the ship that rides by it. It has found a firm ground, its flukes are all right, and it belch. It does not deceive. The ship's crew may trust to it. An anchor which is steadfast, or, as the original word might be rendered, 'firm,' is one that will not break, but is strong in its own substance, made of good tough iron, so that there is no fear of the shank snapping, whatever strain may be put upon it. We may then say, generally, that this object of the Christian hope is free from all the weaknesses. and imperfections which cleave and cling to other objects. Take just a sentence or two in illustration of that.

Our earthly hopes, what are they? Only the products of our own imaginations, or the reflection of our wishes projected on the dim screen of the future, with no more substance in them than the shadows from a magic-lantern thrown on to the sheet. Or even if they be the reasonable result of calculation, they still have no existence. But there, says my text, is a hope which is a real thing, and has a present existence. It has 'entered into that within the veil,' as the literal anchor is dropped through the depths of the sea and lost to sight, so by an incongruous and yet forcible blending of metaphor the text tells us this anchor is carried aloft, into the azure depths, and there lost to sight, is fastened as it were to the very throne of God. All the universe being the temple, and a thin veil being stretched between us in the outer court and that Holy of Holies, the Christ, who is our hope, has passed with.. in the veil, and is verily there, separated from us and yet close by. A veil is but a thin partition. We can hear the voices on the other side of a woollen curtain, we can catch the gleams of light through it, A touch will draw it aside. So we float in the midst of that solemn unseen present which is to us the future; and all the brightest and grandest objects of the Christian man's anticipation have a

present existence and are real; just on the other side of that thin curtain that parts us from them. A touch, and it rattles on its rings and we stand in the blaze of the fruition. This hope is not an imagination, not the projection of wishes upon the dim curtain of the future, not the child of calculation, but a present reality within arm's length of us all.

Then, again, earthly hopes are less than certainties. This one is a certainty, We may make the future as sure as the past. Hope may be as veracious as memory. It is not so with our ordinary anticipations; we all feel that when we say we hope we are admitting an element of dread as well as of hope into our anticipations. And so, however hope may smile there is always a touch of terror in her sweet eyes. As one of our great poets has described her, she carries a jewelled cup of richest wine, but coiled at the bottom of it a sleeping serpent. Possibilities that it may be otherwise are an integral part of all the uncertain hopes of earth, make it a torture often, and always dim its lustre and its gladness.

But certitude is a characteristic of the Christian hope. It is 'sure,' as my text has it, and we can say, not, 'I trust it may,' but, 'I know it will.' Is it not something to be able to look forward into the dim unknown, and to feel that whilst much there is mercifully hidden, far more and that the best in the future is manifest as history, and certain as the fixed past. To the Christian resting upon Christ it is no presumption, but the simplest duty to feel 'to-morrow,' and the to-morrow after that, and all the to-morrows, including the unsetting day of eternity 'shall be as yesterday, and much more abundant.'

Then again, earthly hopes, whether disappointed or fulfilled, betray, or rather, I might say, are disappointed even whilst they are fulfilled. We paint the future as if it contained but the one thing on which for the time being we have set our hopes. And we do not remember that when we reach the accomplishment of the expectation, life will have a great many other things in it than the fulfilled expectation, and all the old commonplaces, and annoyances, and imperfections will still be there. So ever, the thing chased is more than the thing won. Like some bit of sea-weed, as long as it lies there in the ocean moving its filmy fronds to the wave, it expands and is lovely. Grasp it, and draw it out, and it is a bit of ugly slime in your hand. So possession never realises the dream of hope.

But here, the half hath not been told us. 'Eye hath not seen it,..., neither hath entered into the heart of man,' in his loftiest anticipations, the transcendent realisation of the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him.

II. And now turn to the other points in this text.

Look at the anchorage, or holding-ground, that is to say, the reasons or the grounds on which these great objects become objects of hope to us.

Why is it that I may without presumption, and that I must, unless I would fall beneath my obligations, expect to be for ever like Jesus Christ? Why, here is the anchorage. 'God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.' Or, to put it into other words, God's solemn utterance of His will guaranteed to us by God's putting all the majesty of His own being into pawn for the fulfilment of His promise is the ground on which we rest. There is the anchorage. Nothing can touch that. If we cleave to Jesus Christ we have anchored ourselves in the fastnesses of the divine nature. We have struck the roots of our hopes deep into the very being of God; and all that is majestic, all that is omnipotent, all that is tender, all that is immutable in Him goes to confirm to my poor heart the astounding expectation that whatsoever Christ is I shall become, and that wheresoever Christ is there will also His servant be. Oh! how this rock- foundation on which we may build makes all the other foundations upon which men rest their ruinable hopes seem wretched and transitory. Cursed be the man — and he is cursed, that is, wretched and miserable in the act — 'Cursed be the man that maketh flesh his arm, and whose hope is in man. Blessed be the man whose hope is in the Lord his God, and whose trust the Lord is.' This anchorage is safe in all weathers, and none that ever sheltered there have been driven on the iron-bound leeward rocks.

III. Again, still keeping the metaphor of the text, notice the cable.

The anchor is of no use unless it be fastened by a strong hawser or chain. All the faithfulness of the divine nature, and all the grandeur of the promises which Christ gives and is, are naught to us unless we attach ourselves to them by setting our hopes there. I have been speaking to you about the vanity, the disappointing misery of earthly hope. Those show that the obstinate faculty which, in spite of them all, persists is as plainly meant to be attached to Jesus Christ as the great iron chain that you see lying on the deck is obviously intended to be the anchor-chain. You are able to anticipate the future, and God has given you the ability in order that it may grapple you to your Lord and Master, by whom alone you will be lords of the future, and it be filled with peace. To do that, to attach yourselves thus to Jesus Christ by a persistent and triumphant hope is not an easy thing.

It means, first of all, detachment. You must get away from these lower and earthly anticipations of the paltry and immediate future on this side the grave, which fill so much of your onward gaze, if your eye is to see clearly that nobler future further ahead which is its legitimate and its only object. The habit of Christian hope needs diligent cultivation and strenuous effort. I think that there are few

things that Christian men and women need to be exhorted to more earnestly than this that they should not waste upon the mean anticipations of to-morrow that wonderful faculty by which they may knit themselves to the most glorious and blessed realities in the remotest future. The wings of hope were given, not that we might flutter near the earth, but that we might rise to God. The clear eye that looks before was given us not that we should limit our vision to the near, but that we might send it forward to the most distant horizon. Do not let yourselves be so absorbed by anticipations of what you are going to do and where you are going to be tomorrow that you have no leisure to think of what you are going to do and where you are going to be through the eternities. We run our eyes along the low levels of earth, and we too seldom lift them to the great white summits that ring round the little plain on which our day is passed. Christian men and women, you are saved by hope. Live in the continual contemplation of that blessed future, and Him who makes it; and, according to the old exhortation *sursum corda*, 'up with your hearts' and your hopes, and fasten them to the anchor of your souls which hath entered within the veil.

IV. And now, lastly, a word as to the steadfastness of the ship that rides in any storm by thin anchor.

Hope is not usually a masculine faculty, nor one that on the whole is the ally of the stronger and nobler virtues. It does no doubt impel to action, and he that has ceased to hope has ceased to strive; but also, and quite as often, its effect is to disturb and flutter rather than to steady, to make impatient, to unfit for persistent application and toilsome service, to set the blood dancing through the veins, so that the hand can scarcely be kept steady. But this 'Christian hope, if we rightly take the measure of it, and understand it, is an ally of all great, steadfast, calm, patient virtue.

For one thing it will put all the present in its true subordination. Just as when a man's eye is fixed upon the reddening dawn of the morning sky, all the trees and objects between him and it are toned down into one uniform blackness, so when we have that great light shining beyond the earthly horizon all the colours of the objects between us and it will be less garish, and they will dwindle into comparative insignificance. It is not so hard to bear sorrow when the light of a great hope makes the endurance but for a little moment, and the exceeding and eternal weight of glory more conspicuous than it. It is not so hard to do duty when a great hope makes action for the time sublime, and makes difficulties dwindle and hardships sweet. It is not so hard to resist temptations when temptations have had their dazzling light dimmed by the greater brightness of the hope revealed. He that has anchored himself to Christ may be calm in sorrow and triumphant over temptation. Whatsoever winds may blow he may ride safe there, and however frowning may be the iron-bound rocks a cable's length off, if he has cast out his anchor at the stern he may quietly wait for the day in the assurance that no shipwreck is possible for him. Your hope will be the ally of all, dignity, patience, victory, will steady the soul and make it participant, in some measure, of its own steadfastness and security.

And just as sailors sometimes send the anchor ahead that they may have a fixed point towards which to warp themselves, so, if our anchor is that Christ who has passed into the heavens, He will draw us, in due time, whither He Himself has gone. A calm steady hope fixed upon the enthroned Christ, our fore-runner, and the pattern of what we shall be if we trust Him, will make us steadfast and victorious in all our sorrows, Burdens, changes, and temptations. Without it life is indeed as 'futile then as frail,' and our only 'hope of answer' to its torturing problems, or of 'redress' of its manifold pains is 'Behind the veil, behind the veil.' Such a hope knits us to the true stay of our souls, and is a cord not easily Broken. As for men's hopes fixed on earth, they are fragile and filmy as the spiders' webs, which, in early autumn mornings, twinkle dewy in every copse, and are gone by midday.

My brother! you have this great faculty; what do you do with it, and where do you fix it? You have a personal concern in that future, whether you think about it and like it or not. What is your hope for that future, and what is the ground of your hope? Let me beseech you, fasten the little vessel of your life to that great anchor, Christ, who has died, and who lives for you. And then, though the thread between you and Him be but slender and fragile, it will not be a dead cable, but a living nerve, along which His own steadfast life will pour, making you steadfast like Himself, and at last fulfilling and transcending your highest hopes in eternal fruition of His own blessedness.