

Maclaren on 1 Chronicles

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Alexander Maclaren

1 Chronicles 4:23 The King's Potters

'There they dwelt with the king for his work.'— 1 Chronicles 4:23

In these dry lists of names which abound in Chronicles, we now and then come across points of interest, oases in the desert, which need but to be pondered sympathetically to yield interesting suggestions. Here for example, buried in a dreary genealogical table, is a little touch which repays meditating on. Among the members of the tribe of Judah were a hereditary caste of potters who lived in 'Netaim and Gederah,' if we adhere to the Revised Version's text, or 'among plantations and hedges' if we prefer the margin. But they are also described as dwelling 'with the king.' That can only mean on the royal estates, for the king himself resided in Jerusalem. He, however, held large domains in the territory of Judah, on some of which these ceramic artists were settled down and followed their calling. They were kept on the royal estates and kept in comfort, not needing to till, but fed and cared for, that they might be free to mould, out of common clay, forms of beauty and 'vessels meet for the master's use.' Surely we may read into the brief statement of the text a meaning of which the writer of it never dreamt, and see in the description of these forgotten artisans, a symbol of our Christian relations to our Lord and of our life's work.

I. We, too, dwell with the King.

The Davidic king was in Jerusalem, and the potters were 'among plantations and hedges,' yet in a real sense they 'dwelt with the king,' though some of them might never have seen his face or trod the streets of the sacred city. Perhaps now and then he came to visit them on his outlying domains, but they were always parts of his household. And have we,

Christ's servants, not His gracious parting word: 'I am with you always'? True, we are not beside Him in the great city, but He is beside us in His outlying domains, and we may be with Him in His glory, if while we still outwardly live among the 'plantations and hedges' of this life, we dwell in spirit, by faith and aspiration, with our risen and ascended Lord. If we so 'dwell with the King,' He will dwell with us, and fill our humble abode with the radiance of His presence, 'making that place of His feet glorious.' That He should be with us is supreme condescension, that we should be with Him is the perfection of exaltation. How low He stoops, how high we can rise! The vigour of our Christian life largely depends on our keeping vivid the consciousness of our communion with Jesus and the sense of His real presence with us. How life's burdens would be lightened if we faced them all in the strength of the felt nearness of our Lord! How impossible it would be that we should ever feel the dreary sense of solitude, if we felt that unseen, but most real, Presence wrapping us round! It is only when our faith in it has fallen asleep that any earthly good allures, or any earthly evil frightens us. To be sure, in our thrilling consciousness, that we dwell with Jesus is an impenetrable cuirass that blunts the points of all arrows and keeps the breast that wears it unwounded in the fray. The world has no voices which can make themselves heard above that low sovereign whisper: 'I am with you always, even to the end of the world'—and after the end has come, then we shall be with Him.

But we find in this notice a hint that leads us in yet another direction. They 'dwelt with the king' in the sense that they were housed and cared for on his lands. And in like manner, the true conception of the Christian life is that each of us is 'a sojourner with Thee,' set down on Christ's domains, and looked after by Him in regard to provision for outward wants. We have nothing in property, but all is His and held by His gift and to be used for Him. The slave owns nothing. The patch of ground which he cultivates for his food and what grows on it, are his master's. These workmen were not slaves, but they were not owners either. And we hold nothing as our own, if we are true to the terms on which it is given us to hold.

So if we rightly appreciate our position as dwelling on the King's lands, our delusion of possession will vanish, and we shall feel more keenly the pressure of responsibility while we feel less keenly the grip of anxiety. We are for the time being entrusted with a tiny piece of the royal estates. Let us not strut about as if we were owners, nor be for ever afraid that we shall not have enough for our needs. One sometimes comes on a model village close to the gates of some ducal palace, and notes how the lordly owner's honour prompts its being kept up to a high standard of comfort and beauty. We may be sure that the potters were well lodged and looked after, and that care for their personal wants was shifted from their shoulders to the king's. So should ours be. He will not leave His servants to starve. They should not dishonour Him and disturb themselves by worries and cares that would be reasonable only if they had no Provider. He has said, 'All things are given to Me of My Father,' and He gives us all that God has given Him.

II. We dwell with the King for His work.

The king's potters had not to till the land nor do any work but to mould clay into vessels for use and beauty. For that purpose they had their huts and bits of ground assigned

them. So with us, Christ has a purpose in His provision for us. We are set down on His domains, and we enjoy His presence and providing in order that, set free from carking cares and low ends, we may, with free and joyous hearts, yield ourselves to His joyful service. The law of our life should be that we please not ourselves, nor consult our own will in choosing our tasks, nor seek our own profit or gratification in doing them, but ever ask of Him: 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' and when the answer comes, as come it will to all who ask with real desire to learn and with real inclination to do His will, that we 'make haste and delay not, but make haste to keep His commandments.' The spirit which should animate our active lives is plainly enough taught us in that little word, they 'dwelt with the king for his work.'

Nor are we to forget that, in a very profound sense, dwelling with the King must go before doing His work. Unless we are living continually under the operation of the stimulus of communion with Jesus, we shall have neither quickness of ear to know what He wishes us to do, nor any resolute concentration of ourselves on our Christ-appointed tasks. The spring of all noble living is communion with noble ideals, and fellowship with Jesus sets men agoing, as nothing else will, in practical lives of obedience to Jesus. Time given to silent, retired meditation on that sweet, sacred bond that knits the believing soul to the redeeming Lord is not lost with reference to active work for Jesus. The meditative and the practical life are not antagonistic, but complementary, Mary and Martha are sisters, though sometimes they differ, and foolish people try to set them against each other.

But we must beware of a common misconception of what the King's work is. The royal potters did not make only things of beauty, but very common vessels designed for common and ignoble uses. There were vessels of dishonour dried in their kilns as well as vessels 'meet for the master's use.' There is a usual and lamentable narrowing of the term 'Christian work,' to certain conventional forms of service, which has done and is doing an immense amount of harm. The King's work is far wider in scope than teaching in Sunday-schools, or visiting the sick, or any similar acts that are usually labelled with the name. It covers all the common duties of life. A shallow religion tickets some selected items with the name; a robuster, truer conception extends the designation to everything. It is not only when we are definitely trying to bring others into touch with Jesus that we are doing Him service, but we may be equally serving Him in everything. The difference between the king's work and the poor potters' own lay not so much in the nature as in the motive of it, and whatever we do for Christ's sake and with a view to His will is work that He owns, while a regard to self in our motive or in our end decisively strikes any service tainted by it out of the category.

We are to hallow all our deeds by drawing the motive for them from the King and by laying the fruits of them at His feet. Thus, and only thus, will the most 'secular' actions be sanctified and the narrowest life be widened to contain a present Christ.

There are subsidiary motives which may legitimately blend with the supreme one. The potters would be stimulated to work hard and with their utmost skill when they thought of how well they were paid in house and store for their work. We have ample reasons for dedicating our whole selves to Jesus when we think of His gift of Himself to us, of His

wages beforehand, of His joyful presence with His eye ever on us, marking our purity of motive and our diligence.

There is a final thought that may well stimulate us to put all our skill and effort into our work. The potters' work went to Jerusalem. It was for the king. What can be too good for him? He will see it, therefore let us put our best into it. And we shall see it too, when we too enter 'the city of the great King.' Jars that perhaps were wrought by these very workmen of whom we have been speaking turn up to-day in the excavations in Palestine. So much has perished and they remain, speaking symbols of the solemn truth that nothing human ever dies. Our 'works do follow us.' Let us so live that these may be 'found unto praise and honour and glory' at the appearing of 'the King.'

1 Chronicles 6:32 David's Choristers

'They stood in their office, according to their order.'— 1 Chronicles 6:32

This brief note is buried in the catalogue of the singers appointed by David for 'the service of song in the house of the Lord.' The waves of their choral praise have long ages since ceased to eddy round the 'tabernacle of the tent of meeting,' and all that is left of their melodious companies is a dry list of names, in spite of which the dead owners of them are nameless. But the chronicler's description of them may carry some lessons for us, for is not the Church of Christ a choir, chosen to 'shew forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light'? We take a permissible liberty with this fragment, when we use it to point lessons that may help that great band of choristers who are charged with the office of making the name of Jesus ring through the world. Now, in making such a use of the text, we may linger on each important word in it and find each fruitful in suggestions which we shall be the better for expanding in our own meditations.

We pause on the first word, which is rendered in the Authorised and Revised Versions 'waited,' and in the margin of the latter 'stood.' The former rendering brings into prominence the mental attitude with which the singers held themselves ready to take their turns in the service, the latter points rather to their bodily attitude as they fulfilled their office. We get a picture of the ranked files gathered round their three leaders, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan. These three names are familiar to us from the Psalter, but how all the ranks behind them have fallen dim to us, and how their song has floated into inaudible distance! They 'stood,' a melodious multitude, girt and attent on their song, or waiting their turn to fill the else silent air with the high praises of Jehovah, and glad when it came to their turn to open their lips in full-throated melody.

Now may we not catch the spirit of that long vanished chorus, and find in the two possible renderings of this word a twofold example, the faithful following of which would put new vigour into our service? We are called to a loftier office, and have heavenly harmonies entrusted to us to be made vocal by our lips, compared with which theirs were poor. 'They waited on' their office, and shall not we, in a higher fashion, wait on our ministry, and suffer no inferior claims to block our way or hamper our preparedness to discharge it? To

let ourselves be entangled with 'the affairs of this life,' or to 'drowse in idle cell,' sleepily letting summonses that should wake us to work sound unheeded and almost unheard, is flagrant despite done to our high vocation as Christians. 'They also serve who only stand and wait,' but not if in their waiting their eyes are straying everywhere but to their Master's pointing hand or directing eye. The world is full of voices calling Christ's folk to help; but what a host of so-called Christians fail to hear these piteous and despairing cries, because the noise of their own whims, fancies, and self-centred desires keeps buzzing in their ears. A constant accompaniment of deafness is constant noises in the head; and the Christians who are hardest of hearing when Christ calls are generally afflicted with noises which are probably the cause, and not merely an accompaniment, of their deafness. For indeed it demands no little detachment of spirit from self and sense, from the world and its clamant suitors, if a Christian soul is to be ready to mark the first signal of the great Conductor's baton, and to answer the lightest whisper, intrusting it with a task for Him, with its self-consecrating 'Here am I. Send me.'

It used to be said that they who watched for providences never wanted providences to watch for; it is equally true that they who are on the watch for opportunities for service never fail to find them, and that ears pricked to 'hear what God the Lord shall speak,' summoning to work for Him, will not listen in vain. Paul saw in a vision 'a man of Macedonia' begging for his help, and 'straightway' he concluded that 'God had called' him to preach in Europe. Happy are these Christian workers who hear God's voice speaking through men's needs, and recognise a divine imperative in human cries!

May we not see in the attitude of David's choristers as they sang, hints for our own discharge of the tasks of our Christian service? There was a curse of old on him who did the work of the Lord 'negligently,' and its weight falls still on workers and work. For who can measure the harm done to the Christian life of the negligent worker, and who can expect any blessing to come either to him or to others from such half-hearted seeming service? The devil's kingdom is not to be cast down nor Christ's to be builded up by workers who put less than their whole selves, the entire weight of their bodies, into their toil. A pavior on the street brings down his rammer at every stroke with an accompanying exclamation expressing effort, and there is no place in Christ's service for dainty people who will not sweat at their task, and are in mortal fear of over-work. Strenuousness, the gathering together of all our powers, are implied in the attitude of Heman and his band as they 'stood' in their office. Idle revelers might loll on their rose-strewn couches as they 'sing idle songs to the sound of the viol and devise for themselves instruments of music, like David,' but the austerer choir of the Temple despised ease, and stood ready for service and in the best bodily posture for song.

The second important word of the text brings other thoughts no less valuable and rich in practical counsel. The singers in the Temple stood in their 'office,' which was song. Their special work was praise. And that is the highest task of the Church. As a matter of fact, every period of quickened earnestness in the Church's life has been a period marked by a great outburst of Christian song. All intense emotion seeks expression in poetry, and music is the natural speech of a vivid faith. Luther chanted the Marseillaise of the

Reformation, 'A safe stronghold our God is still,' and many another sweet strain blended strangely with the fiery and sometimes savage words from his lips. The Scottish Reformation, grim in some of its features as it was, had yet its 'Gude and Godly Ballads.' At the birth of Methodism, as round the cradle at Bethlehem, hovered as it were angel voices singing, 'Glory to God in the highest.' A flock of singing birds let loose attends every revival of Christian life.

The Church's praise is the noblest expression of the Church's life. Its hymns go deeper than its creeds, touch hearts more to the quick, minister to the faith which they enshrine, and often draw others to see the preciousness of the Christ whom they celebrate. How little we should have known of Old Testament religion, notwithstanding law and prophets, if the Psalter had perished!

And it is true, in a very deep sense, that we shall do more for Christ and men by voicing our own deep thankfulness for His great gifts and speaking simply our valuation of, and our thankfulness for, what we draw from Him than by any other form of so-called Christian work. We can offend none by saying: 'We have found the Messiah,' and are adoringly glad that we have. The most effectual way of moving other souls to participate in our joy is to let our joy speak. 'If you wish me to weep,' your own tears must not be held back, and if you wish others to know the preciousness of Christ, you must ring out His name with fervour of emotion and the triumphant confidence. We are the 'secretaries of God's praise,' as George Herbert has it, for we have possession of His greatest gift, and have learned to know Him in loftier fashion than Heman's choristers dreamed of, having seen 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,' and tasted the sweetness of redeeming love. The Apocalyptic seer sets forth a great truth when he tells us that he first heard a new song from the lips of the representatives of the Church, who could sing, 'Thou wast slain and didst redeem us to God with Thy blood,' and then heard their adoration echoed from 'many angels round about the throne,' and finally heard the song reverberated from every created thing in heaven and earth, in the sea and all deep places. A praising Church has experiences of its own which angels cannot share, and it sets in motion the great sea of praise whose surges break in music and roll from every side of the universe in melodious thunder to the great white throne. Without our song even angel voices would lack somewhat.

**'God said, "A praise is in Mine ear;
There is no doubt in it, no fear:
Clearer loves sound other ways:
I miss My little human praise."'**

The song of the redeemed has in it a minor strain that gives a sweetness far more poignant than belongs to those who cannot say: 'Out of the depths I cried unto Thee.' 'The sweetest songs are those which tell of saddest thought,' and recount experiences of conquered sin and life springing from death.

But it is also true that no kind of Christian service will be effectual, if it lacks the element of grateful praise as its motive and mainspring. Perhaps there would be fewer complaints

of toiling all night and wearily hauling in empty nets, if the nets were oftener let down not only 'at Thy word' but with glad remembrance of the fishermen's debt to Jesus, and in the spirit of praise. When all our work is a sacrifice of praise, it is pleasing to God and profitable to ourselves and to others. If we would oftener bethink ourselves, and herald every deed with a silent dedication of it and of ourselves to Him who died for us, we should less often have to complain that we have sowed much and brought back little. A pinch of incense cast into the common domestic fire makes its flame sacrificial and fragrant.

The last important word of the text is also fertile in hints for us. The singers stood in their office 'according to their order.' That last expression may either refer to rotation of service or to distribution of parts in the chorus. They did not sing in unison, grand as the effect of such a song from a multitude sometimes is, but they had their several parts. The harmonious complexity of a great chorus is the ideal for the Church. Paul puts the same thought in a sterner metaphor when he tells the Colossian Christians that he joys 'beholding your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ,' where he is evidently thinking of the Roman legion with its rigid discipline and its solid, irresistible, ranked weight. Division of function and consequent concordant action of different parts is the lesson taught by both metaphors, and by the many modern examples of the immense results gained in machinery that almost simulates vital action, and by organizations for great purposes in which men combine. The Church should be the highest example of such combination, for it is the shrine of the noblest life, even the life of its indwelling Lord. Every member of it should have and know his place. Every Christian should know his part in the great chorus, for he has a part, even if it is only that of tinkling the triangle in the orchestra or beating a drum. That division of function and concordance of action apply to all forms of the Church's action, and are enforced most chiefly by the great Apostolic metaphor of the body and its members. Paul did not delight in 'uniformity.' Inferiors calling themselves his successors have often aimed at enforcing it, but nature has been too strong for them, and the hedge will grow its own way in spite of pedants' shears. 'If the whole body were an eye, where the hearing?' The monotony of a church in which uniformity was the ideal would be intolerable. The chorus has its parts, and the soprano cannot say to the bass, 'I have no need of you,' nor the bass to the tenor, 'I have no need of thee.'

So let us see that we find our own place, and see that we fill it, singing our own part lustily, and not being either confused or made dumb because another has other notes to sing than are written on our score. Let us recognise unity made more melodious by diversity, the importance of the humblest, and 'having gifts differing according to the grace given unto us let us wait on our ministry,' and stand in our office according to our order.

1 Chronicles 12:33 Drill and Enthusiasm

'[Men that] could keep rank, they were not of double heart.'— 1 Chronicles 12:33

These words come from the muster-roll of the hastily raised army that brought David up to Hebron and made him King. The catalogue abounds in brief characterizations of the qualities of each tribe's contingent. For example, Issachar had 'understanding of the times.' Our text is spoken of the warriors of Zebulun, who had left their hills and their flocks in the far north, and poured down from their seats by the blue waters of Tiberias to gather round their king. They were not only like their brethren expert in war and fully equipped, but they had some measure of discipline too, a rare thing in the days when there were no standing armies. They 'could keep rank,' could march together, had been drilled to some unanimity of step and action, could work and fight together, were an army, not a crowd, and not only so, but also 'they were not of double heart.' Each man, and the whole body, had a brave single resolve; they had one spirit animating the whole, and that was to make David king, an enthusiastic loyalty which made them brave, and a discipline which kept the courage from running to waste.

I take, then, this text as bringing before us two very important characteristics which ought to be found in every Christian church, and without which no real prosperity and growth is possible. These two may be put very briefly: organization and enthusiastic devotion. These are both important, but in very different degrees. Organization without valor is in a worse plight than valor without organization. The one is fundamental, the other secondary. The one is the true cause, so far as men are concerned, of victory, the other is but the instrument by which the cause works. There have been many victories won by undisciplined valor, but disciplined cowardice and apathy come to no good.

These two have been separated and made antagonistic, and churches are to be found which glory in the one, and others in the other. Some have gone in for order, and are like butterflies in a cabinet all ticketed and displayed in place, but a pin is run through their bodies and they are dead; and others have prided themselves on unfettered freedom, and been not an army, but a mob. The true relation, of course, is that life should shape and inform organization, and organization should preserve, manifest and obey life. There must be body to hold spirit, there must be spirit to keep body from rotting.

I. Organization.

This is not the strong point of Nonconformist churches. We pride ourselves on our individualism, and that is all very well. We believe in direct access of each soul to Christ, that men must come to Him one by one, that religion is purely a personal matter, and the firmness with which we hold this tends to make us weak in combined action. It cannot be truthfully denied that both in the relations of our churches to one another, and in the internal organization of these, we are and have been too loosely compacted, and have forgotten that two is more than one plus one, so that we are only helping to redress the balance a little when we insist upon the importance of organization in our churches.

And first of all—remember the principles in subordination to which our organization must be framed.

What are we united by? Common love and faith to Christ, or rather Christ Himself. 'One is

your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.' So there must be nothing in our organization which is inconsistent with Christ's supreme place among us, and with our individual obedience to Him. There are to be no 'lords over God's heritage' in the Church of Christ. There are churches in which the temptation to be such affects the official chiefly, and there are others, with a different polity, in which it is chiefly a Diotrephes, who loves to have pre-eminence. Character, zeal, social station, even wealth will always confer a certain influence, and their possessors will be tempted to set up their own will or opinions as dominant in the Church. Such men are sinning against the very bond of Christian union. Organization which is bought by investing one man with authority, is too dearly purchased at the cost of individual development on the individual's own lines. A row of clipped yew-trees is not an inspiring sight.

And yet again what are we organised for? Not merely for our own growth or spiritual advantage, but also, and more especially, for spreading faith in Christ and advancing His glory. All our organization, then, is but an arrangement for doing our work, and if it hinders that, it is cumbrous and must be cut away or modified, at all hazards. Ecclesiastical martinets are still to be found, to whom drill is all-important, and who see no use in irregular valour, but they are a diminishing number, and they may be recommended to ponder the old wise saying: 'Where no oxen are, the crib is clean, but much increase is by the strength of the ox.' If the one aim is a 'clean crib' the best way to secure that is to keep it empty; but if a harvest is the aim, there must be cultivation, and one must accept the consequences of having a strong team to plough. The end of drill is fighting. The parade-ground and its exercising is in order that a corps may be hurled against the enemy, or may stand unmoved, like a solid breakwater against a charge which it flings off in idle spray, and the end of the Church's organization is that it may move en masse, without waste, against the enemy.

But a further guiding principle to shape Christian organization is that of the Church as the body of Christ. That requires that there shall be work for every member. Christ has endowed His members with varying gifts, powers, opportunities, and has set them in diverse circumstances, that each may give his own contribution to the general stock of work. Our theory is that each man has his own proper gift from God, 'one after this manner, and another after that.' But what is our practice? Take any congregation of Christian people in any of our churches, and especially in the Free Churches of which I know most, and is there anything like this wide diversity of forms of service, to which each contributes? A handful of people do all the work, and the remainder are idlers. The same small section are in evidence always, and the rest are nowhere. There are but a few bits of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope, they take different patterns when the tube is turned, but they are always the same bits of glass.

There needs to be a far greater variety of forms of work for our people and more workers in the field. There are too few wheels for the quantity of water in the river, and, partly for that reason, the amount of water that runs waste over the sluice is deplorable. There is a danger in having too many spindles for the power available, but the danger in modern church organization is exactly the other way.

Every one should have his own work. In all living creatures, differentiation of organs increases as the creature rises in the scale of being, from the simple sac which does everything up to the human body with a distinct function for every finger. It should not be possible for a lazy Christian to plead truly as his vindication that 'no man had hired' him. It should be the Church's business to find work for the unemployed.

The example in our text should enforce the necessity of united work. David's levies could keep rank. They did not let each man go at his own rate and by his own road, but kept together, shoulder to shoulder, with equal stride. They were content to co-operate and be each a part of a greater whole. That keeping rank is a difficult problem in all societies, where individual judgments, weaknesses, wills, and crotchets are at work, but it is apt to be especially difficult in Christian communities, where one may expect to find individual characteristics intensified, a luxuriant growth of personal peculiarities, an intense grip of partial aspects of the great truths and a corresponding dislike of other aspects of these, and of those whose favourite truths they are. One would do nothing to clip that growth, but still Christians who have not learned to subordinate themselves in and for united work are of little use to God or man. What does such united work require? Mainly the bridling of self, the curbing of one's own will, not insisting on forcing one's opinions on one's brother, not being careful of having one's place secured and one's honour asserted. Without such virtues no association of man could survive for a year. If the world managed its societies as the Church manages its unity, they would collapse quickly. Indeed it is a strong presumption in favour of Christianity that the Churches have not killed it long ago. Vanity, pride, self-importance, masterfulness, pettishness get full play among us. Diotrephes has many descendants to-day. A cotton mill, even if it were a co-operative one, could not work long without going into bankruptcy, if there were no more power of working together than some Christian congregations have. A watch would be a poor timekeeper, where every wheel tried to set the pace and be a mainspring, or sulked because the hands moved on the face in sight of all men, while it had to move round and fit into its brother wheel in the dark.

Subordination is required as well as co-operation. For if there be harmonious co-operation in varying offices, there must be degrees and ranks. The differences of power and gift make degrees, and in every society there will be leaders. Of course there is no commanding authority in the Churches. Its leaders are brethren, whose most imperative highest word is, 'We beseech you.'

Of course, too, these varieties and degrees do not mean real superiority or inferiority in the eye of God. From the highest point of view nothing is great or small, there is no higher or lower. The only measure is quality, the only gauge is motive. 'Small service is true service while it lasts.' He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward. But yet there are, so far as our work here is concerned, degrees and orders, and we need a hearty and ungrudging recognition of superiority wherever we find it. If the 'brother of high degree' needs to be exhorted to beware of arrogance and imposing his own will on his fellows, the 'brother of low degree' needs not less to be exhorted to beware of letting envy and self-will hiss and snarl in his heart at

those who are in higher positions than himself. If the chief of all needs to be reminded that in Christ's household preeminence means service, the lower no less needs to be reminded that in Christ's household service means pre-eminence.

So much, then, for organization. It is perfectly reconcilable with democracy that is not mob-ocracy. In fact, democracy needs it most. If I may venture to speak to the members of the Free Churches, with which I am best acquainted, I would take upon myself to say that there is nothing which they need more than that they should show their polity to be capable of reconciling the freest development of the individual with the most efficient organization of the community. The object is work for Christ, the bond of their fellowship is brotherly union with Christ. Many eyes are on them to-day, and the task is in their hands of showing that they can keep rank. The most perfect discipline in war in old times was found, not amongst the subjects of Eastern despots who were not free enough to learn to submit, but amongst the republics of Greece, where men were all on a level in the city, and fell into their places in the camp, because they loved liberty enough to know the worth of discipline, and so the slaves of Xerxes were scattered before the resistless onset of the phalanx of the free. The terrible legion which moved 'altogether when it moved at all,' and could be launched at the foe like one javelin of steel, had for its units free men and equals. There needs freedom for organization. There needs organization for freedom. Let us learn the lesson. 'God is not the author of confusion, but of order, in all churches of saints.'

II. Enthusiastic devotion.

These men came to bring David up to Hebron with one single purpose in their hearts. They had no sidelong glances to their own self-interest, they had no wavering loyalty, they had no trembling fears, so we may take their spirit as expressing generally the deepest requirements for prosperity in a church.

The foundation of all prosperity is a passion of personal attachment to Christ our King.

Christ is Christianity objective. Love to Christ is Christianity subjective. The whole stress of Christian character is laid on this. It is the mother of all grace and goodness, and in regard to the work of the Church, it is the ardour of a soul full of love to Jesus that conquers. The one thing in which all who have done much for Him have been alike in that single-hearted devotion.

But such love is the child of faith. It rests upon belief of truth, and is the response of man to God. Dwelling in the truth is the means of it. How our modern Christianity fails in this strong personal bond of familiar love!

Consider its effect on the individual.

It will give tenacity of purpose, will brace to strenuous effort, will subdue self, self-regard, self-importance, will subdue fear. It is the true anesthetic. The soldier is unconscious of his wounds, while the glow of devotion is in his heart and the shout of the battle in his

ears. It will give fertility of resource and patience.

Consider its effect on the community.

It will remove all difficulties in the way of discipline arising from vanity and self which can be subdued by no other means. That flame fuses all into one glowing mass like a stream that pours from the blast furnace. What a power a church would be which had this! It is itself victory. The men that go into battle with that one firm resolve, and care for nothing else, are sure to win. Think what one man can do who has resolved to sell his life dear!

Consider the worthlessness of discipline without this.

It is a poor mechanical accuracy. How easy to have too much machinery! How the French Revolution men swept the Austrian martinets before them! David was half-smothered in Saul's armour. On the other hand, this fervid flame needs control to make it last and work. Spirit and law are not incompatible. Valor may be disciplined, and the combination is irresistible.

And so here, till we exchange the close array of the battlefield for the open ranks of the festal procession on the Coronation day, and lay aside the helmet for the crown, the sword for the palm, the breastplate for the robe of peace, and stand for ever before the throne, in the peaceful ranks of 'the solemn troops and sweet societies' of the unwavering armies of the heavens who serve Him with a perfect heart, and burn unconsumed with the ardors of an immortal and ever brightening love, let us see to it that we too are 'men that can keep rank and are not of double heart.'

1 Chronicles 22:6-16 David's Prohibited Desire and Permitted Service

Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the Lord God of Israel. 7. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God: 8. But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight. 9. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. 10. He shall build an house for My name; and he shall be My son, and I will be his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever. 11. Now, my son, the Lord be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of the Lord thy God as He hath said of thee. 12. Only the Lord give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the Lord thy God, 13. Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfil the statutes and judgments which the Lord charged Moses with concerning Israel: be strong, and of good courage; dread not, nor be

dismayed. 14. Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared and thou mayest add thereto. 15. Moreover, there are workmen with thee in abundance, hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work. 16. Of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron, there is no number. Arise, therefore, and be doing, and the Lord be with thee.'— 1 Chronicles 22:6-16

This passage falls into three parts. In verses 6-10 the old king tells of the divine prohibition which checked his longing to build the Temple; in verses 11-13 he encourages his more fortunate successor, and points him to the only source of strength for his happy task; in verses 14-16 he enumerates the preparations which he had made, the possession of which laid stringent obligations on Solomon.

I. There is a tone of wistfulness in David's voice as he tells how his heart's desire had been prohibited.

The account is substantially the same as we have in 2 Samuel 7:4-16, but it adds as the reason for the prohibition David's warlike career. We may note the earnestness and the motive of the king's desire to build the Temple. 'It was in my heart'; that implies earnest longing and fixed purpose. He had brooded over the wish till it filled his mind, and was consolidated into a settled resolve. Many a musing, solitary moment had fed the fire before it burned its way out in the words addressed to Nathan. So should our whole souls be occupied with our parts in God's service, and so should our desires be strongly set towards carrying out what in solitary meditation we have felt borne in on us as our duty.

The moving spring of David's design is beautifully suggested in the simple words 'unto the name of the Lord my God.' David's religion was eminently a personal bond between him and God. We may almost say that he was the first to give utterance to that cry of the devout heart, 'My God,' and to translate the generalities of the name 'the God of Israel' into the individual appropriation expressed by the former designation. It occurs in many of the psalms attributed to him, and may fairly be regarded as a characteristic of his ardent and individualizing devotion. The sense of a close, personal relation to God naturally prompted the impulse to build His house. We must claim our own portion in the universal blessings shrined in His name before we are moved to deeds of loving sacrifice. We must feel that Christ 'loved me, and gave Himself for me,' before we are melted into answering surrender.

The reason for the frustrating of David's desire, as here given, is his career as a warrior king. Not only was it incongruous that hands which had been reddened with blood should rear the Temple, but the fact that his reign had been largely occupied with fighting for the existence of the kingdom showed that the time for engaging in such a work, which would task the national resources, had not yet come. We may draw two valuable lessons from the prohibition. One is that it indicates the true character of the kingdom of God as a

kingdom of peace, which is to be furthered, not by force, but in peace and gentleness. The other is that various epochs and men have different kinds of duties in relation to Christ's cause, some being called on to fight, and others to build, and that the one set of tasks may be as sacred and as necessary for the rearing of the Temple as the other. Militant epochs are not usually times for building. The men who have to do destructive work are not usually blessed with the opportunity or the power to carry out constructive work. Controversy has its sphere, but it is mostly preliminary to true 'edification.' In the broadest view all the activity of the Church on earth is militant, and we have to wait for the coming of the true 'Prince of peace' to build up the true Temple in the land of peace, whence all foes have been cast out for ever. To serve God in God's way, and to give up our cherished plans, is not easy; but David sets us an example of simple-hearted, cheerful acquiescence in a Providence that thwarted darling designs. There is often much self-will in what looks like enthusiastic perseverance in some form of service.

II. The charge to Solomon breathes no envy of his privilege, but earnest desire that he may be worthy of the honour which falls to him.

Petitions and exhortations are closely blended in it, and, though the work which Solomon is called to do is of an external sort, the qualifications laid down for it are spiritual and moral. However 'secular' our work in connection with God's service may be, it will not be rightly done unless the highest motives are brought to bear on it, and it is performed as worship. The basis of all successful work is God's presence with us, so David prays for that to be granted to Solomon as the beginning of all his fitness for his task.

Next, David recalls to his son God's promise concerning him, that it may hearten him to undertake and to carry on the great work. A conviction that our service is appointed for us by God is essential for vigorous and successful Christian work. We must have, in some way or other, heard Him 'speak concerning us,' if we are to fling ourselves with energy into it.

The petitions in verse 12 seem to stretch beyond the necessities of the case, in so far as building the Temple is concerned. Wisdom and understanding, and a clear consciousness of the duty enjoined on him by God in reference to Israel, were surely more than that work required. But the qualifications for God's service, however the manner of service may be concerned with 'the outward business of the house of God,' are always these which David asked for Solomon. The highest result of true 'wisdom and understanding' given by God is keeping God's law; and keeping it is the one condition on which we shall obtain and retain that presence of God with us which David prayed for Solomon, and without which they labour in vain that build. A life conformed to God's will is the absolutely indispensable condition of all prosperity in direct Christian effort. The noblest exercise of our wisdom and understanding is to obey every word that we hear proceeding out of the mouth of God.

III. There is something very pathetic in the old king's enumeration of the treasures which, by the economies of a lifetime, he had amassed.

The amount stated is enormous, and probably there is some clerical error in the numbers

specified. Be that as it may, the sum was very large. It represented many an act of self-denial, many a resolute shearing off of superfluities and what might seem necessities. It was the visible token of long years of fixed attention to one object. And that devotion was all the more noble because the result of it was never to be seen by the man who exercised it.

Therein David is but a very conspicuous example of a law which runs through all our work for God. None of us are privileged to perform completed tasks. 'One soweth and another reapeth.' We have to be content to do partial work, and to leave its completion to our successors. There is but one Builder of whom it can be said that His hands 'have laid the foundation of this house; His hands shall also finish it.' He who is the 'Alpha and Omega,' and He alone, begins and completes the work in which He has neither sharers nor predecessors nor successors. The rest of us do our little bit of the great work which lasts on through the ages, and, having inherited unfinished tasks, transmit them to those who come after us. It is privilege enough for any Christian to lay foundations on which coming days may build. We are like the workers on some great cathedral, which was begun long before the present generation of masons were born, and will not be finished until long after they have dropped trowel and mallet from their dead hands. Enough for us if we can lay one course of stones in that great structure. The greater our aims, the less share has each man in their attainment. But the division of labour is the multiplication of joy, and all who have shared in the toil will be united in the final triumph. It would be poor work that was capable of being begun and perfected in a lifetime. The labourer that dug and levelled the track and the engineer that drives the locomotive over it are partners. Solomon could not have built the Temple unless, through long, apparently idle, years, David had been patiently gathering together the wealth which he bequeathed. So, if our work is but preparatory for that of those who come after, let us not think it of slight importance, and let us be sure that all who have had any portion in the toil shall share in the victory, that 'he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.'

1 Chronicles 28:1-10 David's Charge to Solomon

'And David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that ministered to the king by course, and the captains over the thousands, and captains over the hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons, with the officers, and with the mighty men, and with all the valiant men, unto Jerusalem. 2. Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: 3. But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for My name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood. 4. Howbeit the Lord God of Israel chose me before all the house of my father to be king over Israel for ever: for He hath chosen Judah to be the ruler; and of the house of Judah, the house of my father; and among the sons of my father He liked me to make me king over all Israel: 5.

And of all my sons, (for the Lord hath given me many sons), he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel. 6. And He said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build My house and My courts: for I have chosen him to be My son, and I will be his father. 7. Moreover I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do My commandments and My judgments, as at this day. 8. Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the Lord, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever. 9. And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever. 10. Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it.’— 1 Chronicles 28:1-10

David had established an elaborate organization of royal officials, details of which occupy the preceding chapters and interrupt the course of the narrative. The passage picks up again the thread dropped at chapter xxiii. 1 . The list of the members of the assembly called in verse 1 is interesting as showing how he tried to amalgamate the old with the new. The princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, represented the primitive tribal organization, and they receive precedence in virtue of the antiquity of their office. Then come successively David's immediate attendants, the military officials, the stewards of the royal estates, the 'officers' or eunuchs attached to the palace, and the faithful 'mighty men' who had fought by the king's side in the old days. It was an assembly of officials and soldiers whose adherence to Solomon it was all-important to secure, especially in regard to the project for building the Temple, which could not be carried through without their active support. The passage comprises only the beginning of the proceedings of this assembly of notables. The end is told in the next chapter; namely, that the Temple-building scheme was unanimously and enthusiastically adopted, and large donations given for it, and that Solomon's succession was accepted, and loyal submission offered by the assembly to him.

David's address to this gathering is directed to secure these two points. He begins by recalling his own intention to build the Temple and God's prohibition of it. The reason for that prohibition differs from that alleged by Nathan, but there is no contradiction between the two narratives, and the chronicler has already reported Nathan's words (chap. xvii. 3 , etc.), so that the motive which is ascribed to many of the variations in this book, a priestly desire to exalt Temple and ritual, cannot have been at work here. Why should there not have been a divine communication to David as well as Nathan's message? That hands reddened with blood, even though it had been shed in justifiable war, were not fitted to build the Temple, was a thought so far in advance of David's time, and flowing from so spiritual a conception of God, that it may well have been breathed into David's spirit by a divine voice. Sword in one hand and trowel in the other are incongruous,

notwithstanding Nehemiah's example. The Temple of the God of peace cannot be built except by men of peace. That is true in the widest and highest application. Jesus builds the true Temple. Controversy and strife do not. And, on a lower level, the prohibition is for ever valid. Men do not atone for a doubtful past by building churches, founding colleges, endowing religious or charitable institutions.

The speech next declares emphatically that the throne belongs to David and his descendants by real 'divine right,' and that God's choice is Solomon, who is to inherit both the promises and obligations of the office, and, among the latter, that of building the Temple. The unspoken inference is that loyalty to Solomon would be obedience to Jehovah. The connection between the true heavenly King and His earthly representative is strongly expressed in the remarkable phrase: 'He hath chosen Solomon ... to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of Jehovah,' which both consecrates and limits the rule of Solomon, making him but the viceroy of the true king of Israel. When Israel's kings remembered that, they flourished; when they forgot it, they destroyed their kingdom and themselves. The principle is as true to-day, and it applies to all forms of influence, authority, and gifts. They are God's, and we are but stewards.

The address to the assembly ends with the exhortation to these leaders to 'observe,' and not merely to observe, but also to 'seek out' God's commandments, and so to secure to the nation, whom they could guide, peaceful and prosperous days. It is not enough to do God's will as far as we know it; we must ever be endeavouring after clearer, deeper insight into it. Would that these words were written over the doors of all Senate and Parliament houses! What a different England we should see!

But Solomon was present as well as the notables, and it was well that, in their hearing, he should be reminded of his duties. David had previously in private taught him these, but this public 'charge' before the chief men of the kingdom bound them more solemnly upon him, and summoned a cloud of witnesses against him if he fell below the high ideal. It is pitched on a lofty key of spiritual religion, for it lays 'Know thou the God of thy fathers' as the foundation of everything. That knowledge is no mere intellectual apprehension, but, as always in Scripture, personal acquaintanceship with a Person, which involves communion with Him and love towards Him. For us, too, it is the seed of all strenuous discharge of our life's tasks, whether we are rulers or nobodies, and it means a much deeper experience than understanding or giving assent to a set of truths about God. We know one another when we summer and winter with each other, and not unless we love one another, and we know God on no other terms.

After such knowledge comes an outward life of service. Active obedience is the expression of inward communion, love, and trust. The spring that moves the hands on the dial is love, and, if the hands do not move, there is something wrong with the spring. Morality is the garment of religion; religion is the animating principle of morality. Faith without works is dead, and works without faith are dead too.

But even when we 'know God' we have to make efforts to have our service correspond with our knowledge, for we have wayward hearts and obstinate wills, which need to be

stimulated, sometimes to be coerced and forcibly diverted from unworthy objects. Therefore the exhortation to serve God 'with a perfect heart and with a willing mind' is always needful and often hard. Entire surrender and glad obedience are the Christian ideal, and continual effort to approximate to it will be ours in the degree in which we 'know God.' There is no worse slavery than that of the half-hearted Christian whose yoke is not padded with love. Reluctant obedience is disobedience in God's sight.

David solemnly reminds Solomon of those 'pure eyes and perfect judgment,' not to frighten, but to enforce the thought of the need for whole-hearted and glad service, and of the worthlessness of external acts of apparent worship which have not such behind them. What a deal of seeming wheat would turn out to be chaff if that winnowing fan which is in Christ's hand were applied to it! How small our biggest heaps would become!

The solemn conditions of the continuance of God's favour and of the fulfilment of His promises are next plainly stated. God responds to our state of heart and mind. We determine His bearing to us. The seeker finds. If we move away from Him, He moves away from us. That is not, thank God! all the truth, or what would become of any of us? But it is true, and in a very solemn sense God is to us what we make Him. 'With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the perverse Thou wilt show Thyself froward.'

The charge ends with recalling the high honour and office to which Jehovah had designated Solomon, and with exhortations to 'take heed' and to 'be strong, and do it.' It is well for a young man to begin life with a high ideal of what he is called to be and do. But many of us have that, and miserably fail to realise it, for want of these two characteristics, which the sight of such an ideal ought to stamp on us. If we are to fulfil God's purposes with us, and to be such tools as He can use for building His true Temple, we must exercise self-control and 'take heed to our ways,' and we must brace ourselves against opposition and crush down our own timidity. It seems to be commanding an impossibility to say to a weak creature like any one of us, 'Be strong,' but the impossible becomes a possibility when the exhortation takes the full Christian form: 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.'

1 Chronicles 29:30 The Waves of Time

'The times that went over him.'— 1 Chronicles 29:30

This is a fragment from the chronicler's close of his life of King David. He is referring in it to other written authorities in which there are fuller particulars concerning his hero; and he says, 'the acts of David the King, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer ... with all his reign and his might, and the times that went over him, and over all Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries.'

Now I have ventured to isolate these words, because they seem to me to suggest some very solemn and stimulating thoughts about the true nature of life. They refer, originally, to the strange vicissitudes and extremes of fortune and condition which characterized, so dramatically and remarkably, the life of King David. Shepherd-boy, soldier, court

favourite, outlaw, freebooter and all but brigand; rebel, king, fugitive, saint, sinner, psalmist, penitent—he lived a life full of strongly marked alternations, and ‘the times that went over him’ were singularly separate and different from each other. There are very few of us who have such chequered lives as his. But the principle which dictated the selection by the chronicler of this somewhat strange phrase is true about the life of every man.

I. Note, first, ‘the times’ which make up each life.

Now, by the phrase here the writer does not merely mean the succession of moments, but he wishes to emphasize the view that these are epochs, sections of ‘time,’ each with its definite characteristics and its special opportunities, unlike the rest that lie on either side of it. The great broad field of time is portioned out, like the strips of peasant allotments, which show a little bit here, with one kind of crop upon it, bordered by another little morsel of ground bearing another kind of crop. So the whole is patchy, and yet all harmonizes in effect if we look at it from high enough up. Thus each life is made up of a series, not merely of successive moments, but of well-marked epochs, each of which has its own character, its own responsibilities, its own opportunities, in each of which there is some special work to be done, some grace to be cultivated, some lesson to be learned, some sacrifice to be made; and if it is let slip it never comes back any more. ‘It might have been once, and we missed it, and lost it for ever.’ The times pass over us, and every single portion has its own errand to us. Unless we are wide awake we let it slip, and are the poorer to all eternity for not having had in our heads the eyes of the wise man which ‘discern both time and judgment.’ It is the same thought which is suggested by the well-known words of the cynical book of Ecclesiastes—‘To every thing there is a season and a time’—an opportunity, and a definite period—‘for every purpose that is under the sun.’ It is the same thought which is suggested by Paul’s words, ‘As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men. In due season we shall reap if we faint not.’ There is ‘a time for weeping and a time for laughing, a time for building up and a time for casting down.’ It is the same thought of life, and its successive epochs of opportunity never returning, which finds expression in the threadbare lines about ‘a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune,’ and neglected, condemns the rest of a career to be hemmed in among creeks and shallows.

Through all the variety of human occupations, each moment comes to us with its own special mission, and yet, alas! to far too many of us the alternations do not suggest the question, what is it that I am hereby called upon to be or to do? what is the lesson that present circumstances are meant to teach, and the grace that my present condition is meant to force me to cultivate or exhibit? There is one point, as it were, upon the road where we may catch a view far away into the distance, and, if we are not on the lookout when we come there, we shall never get that glimpse at any other point along the path. The old alchemists used to believe that there was what they called the ‘moment of projection,’ when, into the heaving molten mass in their crucible, if they dropped the magic powder, the whole would turn into gold; an instant later and there would be explosion and death; an instant earlier and there would be no effect. And so God’s

moments come to us; every one of them—if we had eyes to see and hands to grasp—a crisis, affording opportunity for something for which all eternity will not afford a second opportunity, if the moment be let pass. ‘The times went over him,’ and your life and mine is parceled out into seasons which have their special vocation for and message to us.

How solemn that makes our life! How it destroys the monotony that we sometimes complain of! How it heightens the low things and magnifies the apparently small ones! And how it calls upon us for a sharpened attention, that we miss not any of the blessings and gifts which God is meaning to bestow upon us through the ministry of each moment! How it calls upon us for not only sharpened attention, but for a desire to know the meaning of each of the hours and of every one of His providences! And how it bids us, as the only condition of understanding the times, so as to know what we ought to do, to keep our hearts in close union with Him, and ourselves ever standing, as becomes servants, girded and ready for work; and with the question on our lips and in our hearts, ‘Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do? and what wouldst Thou have me to do now?’ The lesson of the day has to be learned in a day, and at the moment when it is put in practice.

II. Another thought suggested by this text is, the Power that moves the times.

As far as my text represents—and it is not intended to go to the bottom of everything—these times flow on over a man, as a river might. But is there any power that moves the stream? Unthinking and sense-bound men—and we are all such, in the measure in which we are unspiritual—are contented simply to accept the mechanical flow of the stream of time. We are all tempted not to look behind the moving screen to see the force that turns the wheel on which the painted scene is stretched. But, Oh! how dreary a thing it is if all that we have to say about life is, ‘The times pass over us,’ like the blind rush of a stream, or the movement of the sea around our coasts, eating away here and depositing its spoils there, sometimes taking and sometimes giving, but all the work of mere eyeless and purposeless chance or of natural causes.

Oh, brethren! there is nothing more dismal or paralyzing than the contemplation of the flow of the times over our heads, unless we see in their flow something far more than that.

It is very beautiful to notice that this same phrase, or at least the essential part of it, is employed in one of the Psalms ascribed to David, with a very significant addition. He says, ‘My times are in Thy hand.’ So, then, the passage of our epochs over us is not merely the aimless flow of a stream, but the movement of a current which God directs. Therefore, if at any time it goes over our heads and seems to overwhelm us, we can look up through the transparent water and say, ‘Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me,’ and so I die not of suffocation beneath them. God orders the times, and therefore, though, as the bitter ingenuity of Ecclesiastes, on the lookout for proofs of the vanity of life, complained, in a one-sided view, as an aggravation of man’s lot, that there is a time for everything, yet that aspect of change is not its deepest or truest. True it is that sometimes birth and sometimes death, sometimes joy and sometimes sorrow, sometimes

building up and sometimes casting down, follow each other with monotonous uniformity of variety, and seem to reduce life to a perpetual heaping up of what is as painfully to be cast down the next moment, like the pitiless sport of the wind amongst the sandhills of the desert. But the futility is only apparent, and the changes are not meant to occasion 'man's misery' to be 'great upon him,' as Ecclesiastes says they do. The diversity of the 'times' comes from a unity of purpose; and all the various methods of the divine Providence exercised upon us have one unchanging intention. The meaning of all the 'times' is that they should bring us nearer to God, and fill us more full of His power and grace. The web is one, however various may be the pattern wrought upon the tapestry. The resulting motion of the great machine is one, though there may be a wheel turning from left to right here, and another one that fits into it, turning from right to left there. The end of all the opposite motions is straight progress. So the varying times do all tend to the one great issue. Therefore let us seek to pursue, in all varying circumstances, the one purpose which God has in them all, which the Apostle states to be 'even your sanctification,' and let us understand how summer and winter, springtime and harvest, tempest and fair weather, do all together make up the year, and ensure the springing of the seed and the fruitfulness of the stalk.

III. Lastly, let me remind you, too, how eloquently the words of my text suggest the transiency of all the 'times.'

They 'passed over him' as the wind through an archway, that whistles and comes not again. The old, old thought, so threadbare and yet always so solemnizing and pathetic, which we know so well that we forget it, and are so sure of that it has little effect on life, the old, old thought, 'this too will pass away,' underlies the phrase of my text, How blessed it is, brethren! to cherish that wholesome sense of the transiency of things here below, only those who live under its habitual power can fairly estimate. It is thought to be melancholy. We are told that it spoils joys and kills interest, and I know not what beside. It spoils no joys that ought to be joys. It kills no interests that are not on other grounds unworthy to be cherished. Contrariwise, the more fully we are penetrated with the persistent conviction of the transiency of the things seen and temporal, the greater they become, by a strange paradox. For then only are they seen in their true magnitude and nobility, in their true solemnity and importance as having a bearing on the things that are eternal. Time is the 'ceaseless lackey of eternity,' and the things that pass over us may become, like the waves of the sea, the means of bearing us to the unmoving shore. Oh! if only in the midst of joys and sorrows, of heavy tasks and corroding cares, of weary work and wounded spirits, we could feel, 'but for a moment,' all would be different, and joy would come, and strength would come, and patience would come, and every grace would come, in the train of the wholesome conviction that 'here we have no continuing city.'

Cherish the thought. It will spoil nothing the spoiling of which will be a loss. It will heighten everything the possession of which is a gain. It will teach us to trust in the darkness, and to believe in the light. And when the times are dreariest, and frost binds the ground, we shall say, 'If winter comes, can spring be far behind?' The times roll over us, like the seas that break upon some isolated rock, and when the tide has fallen and the

vain flood has subsided, the rock is there. If the world helps us to God, we need not mind though it passes, and the fashion thereof.

But do not let us forget that this text in its connection may teach us another thought. The transitory 'times that went over' Israel's king are all recorded imperishably on the pages here, and so, though condensed into narrow space, the record of the fleeting moments lives for ever, and 'the books shall be opened, and men shall be judged according to their works.' We are writing an imperishable record by our fleeting deeds. Half a dozen pages carry all the story of that stormy life of Israel's king. It takes a thousand rose-trees to make a vial full of essence of roses. The record and issues of life will be condensed into small compass, but the essence of it is eternal. We shall find it again, and have to drink as we have brewed when we get yonder. 'Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.' 'There is a time to sow,' and that is the present life; 'and there is a time to gather the fruits' of our sowing, and that is the time when times have ended and eternity is here.