

Tried by Fire by F B Meyer-2

TRIED BY FIRE EXPOSITIONS OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER BY F. B. MEYER, B. A.

- PART 1 - 1 Peter 1:1-2:10
- PART 2 - 1 Peter 2:11-4:2
- PART 3 - 1 Peter 4:3-5:10

XI. THE PRECIOUS CORNER STONE

"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe He is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the Word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."-1Peter 2:4-10.

PETER, "surnamed Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone," has much to say about his Master as the stone; and weaves together into a beautiful mosaic the many allusions which convey this aspect of his character and work, sparkling as jewels on the page of Scripture.

In the hieroglyphed chamber in Egypt, where Jacob lay a-dying, his mind reverted to the massive stones which were strewn over his native land, and which on one occasion had figured so strangely in his dreams; and he spake of the coming Shepherd as being the "Stone of Israel." Moses in his swan-song, when bidding the people ascribe greatness to God, alleged as the reason, "He is the Rock." And David, in the last of his Psalms, opened his exquisite delineation of the true King by saying, "The Rock of Israel spake to me."

New interest was given to the same thought by an incident which is said to have occurred in the building of Solomon's Temple. The stones were shaped at a distance from the sacred site, that no sound of chisel or stone-saw might be heard during the building of that house for God. As the palm of the desert, or the oak of the forest, grows noiselessly into perfect maturity and beauty, so did that noble pile crown the summit of Zion. But on one occasion a stone was brought up by the straining oxen, which refused to fit into any of the rising walls. And, after repeated attempts to dispose of it, it was placed by itself in a retired spot, and was soon forgotten, perhaps even covered by a luxuriant growth of weeds. At last, as the building neared completion, it was discovered that a stone of special form would be required to knit two walls, and fill a particular corner. The need suggested the forgotten and rejected bit of masonry, which was lying still where it had been discarded. "The stone which the builders refused became the head-stone of the corner."

This incident is said to have suggested that reference of the venerable Psalm, which is quoted by the Lord as applying to Himself, and is referred to in at least two other places in the New Testament besides this (Psa. 118:22; Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20).

In a slightly different form, the same thought re-appears in Isaiah. The men of his time were full of the project of a foreign alliance as the best means of bolstering up the kingdom, just then in dire peril of dissolution, through internal dissension and threatening invasion. God, by the mouth of his prophet, compared the attempt, and the peace it gave, to making a covenant with death, and a hiding-place of lies, and foretold the breaking of a storm, in which none of these devices should avail to shield their inventors. And then, in answer to the dread with which his own people foreboded the fury of that hail, and the overflowing of those waters, He said that He would lay in Zion, for a foundation, "a stone--a tried stone--a precious corner stone, a sure foundation"; and that He who believed should not make haste.

Daniel adds one further link to the chain of holy thought, when he likens the kingdom of God to the quarrying of a mighty stone in

some lone mountain rent. Though no hands are engaged upon it, it assumes shape, disintegrates itself from its rocky home, and begins to roll down the mountain side crushing everything obstructing its path. If that stone is for a moment still, and a man falls over it, he is broken and maimed. It is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence." If, on the other hand, it falls on some passer-by, it grinds him to powder. In many a highland valley, standing out amid the green grass, on which the sheep peacefully browse in summer, there are mighty masses of rock which have leapt from the face of the overhanging cliffs. Woe to any man who had been standing beneath at the moment of their fall! Battered--demolished--ground to powder. These are solemn words. But they are adapted from the prophecies of Daniel by the Master himself (Da 2:34; Matt. 21:44).

1. LET US TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPTION OF THE PARAGRAPH.

It is full of changing metaphor; image piled on image; thought sliding into thought, and rising in noble sequence to a pitch of sublime magnificence. On a massive bed of Rock, there lies a Stone, which is fitted to be a bond of union, joining lines of building, which had run in opposite directions, making "both one." It is not only a stone, it is a corner stone (Eph. 2:20).

Behold that stone! God looks on it with his sevenfold omniscience; and his hands have engraved on it rare symbols of mystery and beauty, such as no skilled human hand could design (Zech. 3:9). The carved lily work of Jachin and Boaz even could not vie with that heavenly workmanship. How manifestly is this stone both elect and precious. Jesus was elect before all worlds, as the organ of creation, the channel of redemption, the head of the new race, the foundation-stone of the Church. And as to his dignity and worth, He is beyond all price, the pearl of inestimable value, the Koh-i-noor of heaven, the fairest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely, the jewel of God's heart.

Next: there might be imagined an altercation among the builders Though the stone lies there ready to their hand, they deliberately reject God's prepared foundation. Some are inclined to admire the carving, or to praise the situation selected for it. But more criticise it, or deride it, or account it as only suitable to carry part of their scaffolding. And so after some discussion, the builders, wise in their own judgment, pass away. "Disallowed indeed of men"! And then, without foundations, they begin an erection, which is built on a seam of sand, and is destined to stand as an unfinished monument of their folly.

But God's purpose cannot be foiled. If men will not build on his foundation, yet there shall still stand on it a structure to his eternal praise. Here is a marvel indeed! For, lo! the stone lives. "A living stone." "It is full of eyes." Nay, more, it is attractive as magnetized iron: it draws to itself other stones, dead, heavy, hard, which are lying all around; and as one after another they slowly approach it, they also begin to live. "To whom coming, a living stone, ye also, as living stones. But even here the marvel does not stay. As in the prophet's vision, bone after bone disentangled itself from the heaps of the slain, and built itself up into the order and symmetry of the human frame, so here stone follows stone, as if gathered by unseen hands, and together they build up a house, the fabric of which is not material, but spiritual; because, as the stones have passed into life, they have dropped their grosser nature, and have become etherealized into a spirituality of essence, befitting the constituent parts of "a spiritual house." God's home is not in the high and lofty place of the heavens, nor in any house built by man, but in the structure composed of saved and saintly spirits, once gross material, dead as stones, but now, by contact with Jesus Christ, made pure, holy, and, in the deepest sense, spiritually minded. "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."

But in such a temple there must be priests; and in this also the Divine purpose cannot fail. Those who were once but as the rubble of the hillside, are not only constituted part of a spiritual fabric, but by a rapid change in the thought, they are represented as performing priestly functions, an holy priesthood, clad in the appointed garments for holiness and beauty. And since a priesthood must have somewhat to offer, and these occupants of the true temple cannot appear before the altar or tread the inner shrine, with empty hands, there are sacrifices prepared: yet (and the thought changes once more) these sacrifices are not material any more than they need to be propitiatory, since the one all-sufficient sacrifice for sin has been offered once for all; but they are spiritual, and consist in the consecrated lives and jubilant praises of those who have been raised from the dust to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God, by Jesus Christ.

Nor is that all: those who are thus associated with Christ are identified with Him in the esteem and love of God. In the one verse, we are told that our Lord is precious in the esteem of the Father--his beloved; his darling; his only one. But in the original Greek of a following verse, correctly rendered in the R.V., this preciousness is assigned to us; for you therefore which believe is the preciousness. Not only is Jesus precious to us, as our beloved and our friend, but his worth and beauty in the mind of God are passed on to us who believe; so that our dull common natures flash in the excellence of his loveliness. Yes, and we are changed into his likeness from glory to glory. Thus the fishermen of Galilee are discovered in the lowest tier of the foundations of the New Jerusalem, as precious stones. And what is true of them is in a measure true of us all. Iron touches magnetized iron and becomes magnetic. Stones touch the Stone and become jewels. Thus God manufactures his stores of precious stones, the facets of which, cut here in pain, shall flash for ever in the light of his own glory yonder.

And now, ere we turn away, let us look once more at the disobedient and disbelieving builders. Some of them have stumbled over

the Divine preparation, and are hopelessly maimed; others wander out on to the dark mountains, where they will meet with many a disaster, falling down precipices, or being otherwise overtaken with death. And their proud building shall stand as a second Babel, for the laughter of the world. They are "confounded" indeed: a fate which is impossible for those who build on God's elect foundation. Alas that men should abuse the very means which God had prepared for their salvation and blessedness!

2. THE PERSONAL APPLICATION.

Ye are an elect race (R.V.).--

There are elect races in the world, standing in the sunlit circle of civilization, not for themselves only, but for others. The larger the privilege, the greater the responsibility. This is the Divine method of government through the selection of nations or races, which are specially gifted and endowed, that they may be better qualified to help and save their fellows. And the position of the Israelite nation, to whom pertained "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants," was expressly entrusted to them, that through them God might bless all the nations of the earth. But during the present period of rejection the Christian Church has been summoned to this glorious work of becoming the channel for the Divine blessing to mankind.

A royal priesthood.--These two offices were jealously kept apart in Israel, and when Uzziah attempted to combine them he was driven from the Temple with the brand of leprosy on his brow. But in Christ they blend. "He is a priest upon his throne" (Zech. 6:13). And all his followers are constituted kings and priests (Rev. 1:6). As priests we worship in near proximity to God; as kings we rule over men with a rule born of love, which blesses and saves.

An holy nation.-- This expression, like the former, comes from the ancient covenant into which God entered with Israel at Sinai (Exod. 19:6). Israel failed in keeping it, and, as a nation, they have been temporarily cast aside; but the individuals, whether Jews or Greeks, who have accepted Christ, constitute in their hosts another nation, which, as an innumerable multitude, lives throughout the world, obeying a higher morality, citizens of the city which can never pass away.

A people far God's own possession.--Love yearns for proprietorship; nor can the heart of God be satisfied unless it can speak of some as its own. Oh, happy they who have obeyed his summons, and have made a complete surrender of themselves to Him! He has already taken them for his own possession. Enclosed as a garden; tilled as a field; inhabited as a home; guarded, kept, used, loved, with an emphasis none others know. Nor is there anything in God Himself which is not at the disposal of those who hold nothing back from Him.

How can we repay Him for all that He has done for us--when we compare what we are, with what we were? Once in darkness, now in marvellous light. Once not included among the people of God, now accounted as part of them. Once without hope of mercy, now the happy recipients of untold mercy. What shall we say? Is it not our duty to praise Him, not only with our lips, but in our lives, casting our crowns at his feet, and hearing our part in the song of adoration, which from all creation breaks around his throne? Let us show forth his praise.

XII. THE PLEA FOR A BLAMELESS LIFE

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."--1Peter 2:11-12.

We now pass from the more purely doctrinal to the practical. All the Apostles begin their Epistles by laying adamant foundations of Gospel truth, on which they erect a superstructure of exhortations to practical Godliness. Perhaps this division is less noticeable in the writings of the Apostle Peter than in those of his "beloved brother Paul." Still there is clearly a transition at this point. The sermon that has no personal application is a failure. Doctrine without precept tends to dry speculation. Precept without doctrine tends to a sapless formalism, destitute of power.

How tenderly these exhortations are expressed! It is not easy to realize that Peter, the strong rock-man, is speaking here. But years of sorrow have done their work, in mellowing and toning the roughness of his character. And there is a gentleness in his voice, as he beseeches his dearly beloved readers, which must have been one of the strongest persuasives to the life for which he pleaded. This plea for a blameless life must have gone home with double effect, because the shaft was winged with feathers drawn from love's gentle breast. The force of the expression is the greater, because it is not often that we find Peter pleading thus. Christian love does not always require the use of tender and effusive expressions. There is always a danger of their losing their meaning and power through incessant repetition; but there are occasions, especially when we yearn for the welfare of others, at which, though we might

be bold enough to enjoin them that which is convenient, yet, for love's sake, we rather beseech them.

Fleshly lusts are enumerated in detail in several passages of the Word of God (Gal. 5:19-21). Lust is inordinate desire--the desire for too much of a good thing, or for any of a bad one. Fleshly lusts are those which seek their gratification through the avenues of the physical nature with which God has endowed us. We are all provided with certain natural instincts and desires, which have been implanted for right and useful purposes, and are innocent and right when regulated by the will of God. But these natural appetites are constantly fretting against restraint, yearning for unlawful gratification, seething and foaming as the sea-waves against a harbour bar. If you yield to them; if you love anything outside the circle of God's will; if you follow your own wild instincts, irrespective of the self-restraint demanded by conscience; if you indulge any one side of your nature out of the due balance and equilibrium of the whole; if you allow an undue monopoly of taste or thought in one direction--then beware! You need especially to be on your guard against the fleshly lusts of which the Apostle speaks.

They war against the soul--That word "war" is full of meaning. It gives the idea of the march of an army against a city, as of the Greeks to surround and capture Troy--an assault which began with open war and ended by the stratagem of the wooden horse, from which the armed warriors descended into the heart of the city at dead of night. Of course we should all admit that excessive indulgence in any appetite injures the body, and especially the organs through which the sin against the whole fabric has been committed. But we may not all realize how destructive these fleshly lusts are to the inner life. They attack and conquer it, and lead it into captivity, impairing its energies sully its purity, lowering its tone, and cutting off the locks of moral strength. Remember then, when tempted to yield to some unholy prompting, even though you only indulge the thought or wish, that you are exposing yourself to a certain diminution of spiritual force, which will inevitably cripple your endeavours, and show itself in failure and defeat. No act of sensual indulgence is possible without inevitable injury to our true selves. It may be forgiven, and put away, through the forgiveness of God, by the blood of Jesus; but the soul can never be quite what it would have been had the temptation been overcome, and the grace of self-restraint exercised.

How many there are around us, eminently fitted by their gifts, to lead the hosts of God, who, like Samson, grind in the prison-house, making pastime for their foes, because they have been mastered by appetites which they should have controlled, as the horseman his fiery steed! Is there not a deep spiritual truth in the notion of the savage warrior, that the strength of a fallen foe enters the arm which has smitten him to the dust? Indulge the flesh--and you are weak. Curb it by self-restraint--and you are strong.

We need, however, to notice how this abstinence from unholy indulgence may be realized. And it may be helpful to remember the following points:--

(1) Let us understand that self-restraint is possible--It is quite true that we are children of a sinning race, and come into life with the taint of evil in us. This is not a matter for argument, but of each man's individual experience. Though the third chapter of Genesis and the first chapter of Romans had never been penned, we must have felt that somewhere there had been an awful lapse in the story of our race, or that it had been the sport of some malign fate. From the first there is in us all an hereditary tendency to gratify to excess the promptings of the natural appetite. Besides this we have deepened and intensified these inherited tendencies by our actual transgressions. There have been repeated yieldings, each one of which has nourished and fostered their strength. And we resemble an athlete, who has permitted himself to be bound around with threads of cotton, any of which could be snapped in a moment, but all of which together hold him like an iron chain.

But, notwithstanding this, it is true that no temptation can happen to us but such as is common to man--none with which God cannot deal. It would be impious to say that God has permitted evil to arrive at such a pitch that He cannot cope with it; or that there is any sin, usurping his throne in the inner realm, which He cannot quell.

It is immaterial how strong may be your inherited tendencies towards evil, or the habits which you have formed by successive acts of sin--God is able to give you deliverance, and to keep you from being overcome. It is possible even for you to abstain from the fleshly lusts which have been subjugating our soul, as Moabites and Philistines did the fair land of Israel in the days when the Judges ruled. Every command carries a promise at its heart; and this loving entreaty for a better, purer life hides a Divine undertaking that you shall yet be more than conqueror, putting your foot on flesh and self, and reigning where now you groan in slavery. Take heart! it is possible even for you to abstain from fleshly lusts, because God is able to keep.

(2) Choose death--There is a sense in which we all died in Jesus Christ our Lord, when on the cross He yielded up his spirit to his Father. There is also another sense in which we must die daily, in the constant denial of self. But, besides this, there must be one definite moment in each Christian's life when death is definitely chosen for all that is selfish, worldly, fleshly, and of the devil. This is surely the meaning of the Apostle, when he says, using a tense which signifies a definite past act: "They that are of Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof" (Gal. 5:24).

Too many of us never come to that point. We accept the incursions and reign of evil things too much as an inevitable experience to which we must ever be liable in this world. We yield, and repent, and curse ourselves, and yield again. Christians often speak of their

besetting sins as natural infirmities which they cannot help, but which must be borne as the diseases incident to childhood. There is too little of the rising up of a holy and almost fierce determination to be free.

Or if there be such a resolve, it often lacks completeness. It shuts the front door but not the back door of the nature, against the thought of possible indulgence. It leaves an almost invisible thread of communication between the soul and the evils of which it would fain be rid, and along it the contagion is still free to pass. And as long as there is the smallest flaw in the integrity of the soups purpose, there is no hope of deliverance. We must cut all connection, close every aperture, and abandon all thought of fleshly indulgence in every shape and form. In short, we must choose death.

Is not this the secret of your repeated failure? You have heard about the keeping power of Christ, and have appealed for it. But you have not been kept. You have been overcome in spite of your cries for help. And you will never get right until you go down into the grave where Jesus lay, and place yourself on that rough rocky niche, whilst the heavy stone shuts you away from all that you held dear. And when you count all things dross for his sake, you will win Christ. Through the grave you will come to the Easter dawn. Death will be the gate of life. Having been crucified with Christ, you will discover that his life will flow into you triumphantly.

With much earnestness do the pages of the New Testament appeal to us to come to this definite resolution. But especially is it the keynote of that marvellous sixth chapter of Romans, which appeals to us as having died with Christ, and as therefore being free from sin. Expressions are employed, from which we would have shrunk, as being too forcible, too extreme, in order to show how complete the deliverance is for those who have been with Christ in the likeness of his death. There is not the least doubt that our deliverance from the power of all fleshly lusts is in the precise measure in which we have embraced that idea of complete severance from them, which is suggested in the one final, all-severing, awful word --Death.

(3) Walk in the Spirit.--There are Christians who live in the Spirit, but who do not walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). The distinction is an obvious one. We live in the Spirit, because only in Him we share at all in the life of Christ, a life which is everlasting and Divine. But how few of us walk in the Spirit from hour to hour; pausing at each step, so that He may work or speak; looking to Him for guidance at each turn of the path; and adopting the track which He indicates, as by the cloud in old time, while moving over the desert sands!

But nothing less than this will suffice. "Walk in the Spirit," says the Apostle, "and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh? It is not enough to resolve to abstain: the mere resolution will not be sufficient to keep the door shut against the pressure of temptation. Ye must have something positive. Not the water of a negation, but the fire of a possession. The indwelling and pre-occupation of the Holy Spirit in his fulness can alone suffice for our need. And this can only be had by a reverent and perpetual communication being maintained between the soul and Him; as air must be pumped into the diver's helmet at every movement he makes on the ocean floor.

But when the soul is pervaded perpetually by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, it is easy to abstain. The soul loses its very taste for things in which it formerly delighted. It detects them when yet far distant, and shudders at their approach. Satisfied with the provision of the Father's house, it turns with disgust from the husks of the swine-trough.

The motives for this abstinence are more than sufficient.

(1) We are strangers and pilgrims--

Consider what you are.

If you were citizens of this world, then you might drive the stone trade with them, and follow the same lusts; but seeing you are chosen and called out of this world, and invested into a new society, made free of another country, it is very reasonable that there be this difference betwixt you and the world, that while they live as at home, your carriage be such as becomes strangers; not glutting yourselves with their pleasures, not surfeiting upon their delicious fruits, but living warily and soberly."

However gay or comfortable the hostelry may be, the traveller hastens homewards. It is not for him to entangle himself with the fascinations and allurements of the towns through which he goes. Indeed, he has no time to be allured; before the meshes of the net enwrap him he is gone. And the attractions of the beloved circle which await him so engage and monopolize his heart that he has no desire for the unholy baits which are offered to him. What then have we in common with fleshly lusts, when our citizenship is in heaven, whence we are looking for the Saviour?

(2) We must consider our influence on the world.

Our behaviour among the Gentiles must be honest, i.e., fair or beautiful, not only for our sake, but for theirs. Followers of Jesus must never be surprised to find themselves spoken of as evil doers. They called the Master "Beelzebub"; how much more will they malign the slaves of Christ's household! The most monstrous stories were circulated throughout the Roman Empire of the rites which Christians were said to perpetrate in their secret meetings; and on the ground of those stories they were punished with torture and death.

Such baseless charges are sometimes made still, and we must take care not to give any occasion for them in our behaviour. Nay, we must so live, that, in the day of crisis and trial, men may be compelled to acknowledge the worth of our religion, and to glorify God for having enabled us so to bear and suffer and endure.

There are arguments being burnt up in sick-chambers, and in the furnaces of trial through which Christians are called to pass, which silence detractors, and compel them to admit the presence of a strength, a patience, and a fortitude, for which their philosophy cannot account. And in many such cases has blasphemy been turned to adoration, and railing to praise.

With such motives to animate us, let us give a favourable response to this touching and earnest plea for a stainless and blameless life.

XIII. GOD'S SLAVES

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."--1Peter 2:13-16.

Peter is very remarkable to notice the frequency and earnestness with which the writers of the New Testament insist on the use of that word "slave," as describing their true relationship to God. It is the favourite designation of the Apostle Paul, "apostle and slave," and he even gloried in wearing the brand marks of the slavery of Jesus. Not only here, but in the first line of his Second Epistle, the Apostle Peter describes himself in the very same terms. And the Apocalyptic vision of the Apostle John rings with the word, touched with heavenly light, transfigured, glorified. That wondrous book is prepared for slaves; they are the sealed; they receive the rewards; they see God's face and bear his name upon their brows. Heaven takes our most dreaded terms, and makes them sparkle in its own light, till what had seemed the synonym of terror becomes the target of our noblest aims. The servants of the royal household are nobles.

All this is very singular. For the slavery which throve in the poisoned atmosphere of the pagan world was the most cruel and wicked thing that society has ever seen. The slavery of the Roman Empire was slavery at its worst. The slave was the absolute chattel of his owner, for purposes of crushing labour, bitter torture, degrading crime. There was no appeal, no hope of redress, no escape, except by the dread door of death. And yet it is this system which the sacred writers never weary of applying to our relationship to Jesus Christ. It presents them with an ideal which stirs their intensest enthusiasm.

It might have been expected that they would have attacked and denounced it, and grasped this thistle by the hand, to uproot it from the harvest field of the world. But this is not the Divine method. God does not deal with society as a whole, but with individuals one by one; not with the abuses, but with the spirit out of which they arise; not with politics, but with principles. It may be that the Apostles did not realize the certain effect of the work which they did. They went quietly forward, telling out the message of God's love, reminding men that in Christ there was neither slave nor master, insisting that their true position was determined, not by their outward condition, but by their inward temper. And in doing this they were creating a world in which slavery could not live. And perhaps some among us, who do not join in crusades against existing abuses, but concentrate all their energy to bringing individual souls from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, are really doing as much as others to purify and elevate society as a whole. You will best save the world by saving the individuals who go to make it up.

Instead of denouncing slavery they borrowed from it to indicate the disposition of their lives, and interwove it into the fabric of their discourses. And so it shone with a heavenly radiance, as clouds, drenched in the glow of the setting sun, lie along the horizon as bars of gold. It is on this fact, then, that we are God's slaves, that the Apostle founds the exhortations of this paragraph.

1. THE DIVINE DESPOTISM

This may seem a strong phrase. But it is exactly Scriptural. In the next Epistle, the word used of our Master is that from which our word "despot" was coined (2 Pet. 2:1). (Master in R.V.) And it will well serve our purpose, if it startles us into a recognition of the absoluteness of Christ's authority over his own.

We are too easy in our treatment of our Lord. We call Him Master and Lord, and we say well, for so He is: but we do not realize how much the term involves; nor do we do the things that He says. He is our Captain, and we have to go, or come, or do, not because we see the reasonableness of his commands, but because He utters them. He is our Owner, who has purchased us for a specific purpose, and whose intentions will be frustrated unless He receive from us absolute and exact obedience. He is the Founder of our order, and surely has a right to look for as much from us as the Jesuit demands of his "black-robed militia," each of

whom must be "as a staff in a blind man's hand." (Dr. Maclaren)

God hath exalted Him to be a Prince and a Saviour. We are too prone to reverse the order, and make Him a Saviour and a Prince. And we are apt to think much more of being saved by Him, than of doing as He bids. And it is because we know so little of Jesus as King that we experience so little of Him as Saviour.

It would do us good to again take the Gospels in hand, and carefully study them with the one object of noticing their incessant appeals for obedience. Everything in Christian life hinges on doing as we are told.

Ours not to reason why,

Ours not to make reply,

Ours but to do and die.

The rights of Jesus Christ to exercise this despotic authority are founded on many considerations, on which just now we may not dwell at length. He gave Himself for us; and his supreme gift of Himself for us demands the absolute surrender of ourselves to Him. The blood which He shed on Calvary is the price by which we have been bought; and we cannot be other than the property of our purchaser. His rights over us are also founded on the gift made by the Father to the Son, before all worlds, of those who, in the process of time, should come to Him. Besides all which, we have ourselves knelt at his feet professing our desire to be, ever, only, always his; not in part, but in the entire range of spirit, soul, and body. Who then can challenge his right to be despotic? Because He is what He is, in dignity, in character, in infinite grace, in superior knowledge, we may gladly and safely put the entire control of our lives into his hands, yielding an obedience which we care not give to any creature living, and obeying absolutely, blindly, dumbly.

2. THE EFFECT OF THIS CONCEPTION

"Submit."

See how absolutely the Apostle rivets the collar of obedience on the necks of these scattered saints. They might be disposed to hesitate in their submission to every ordinance of man; but he silences their remonstrances, and makes their yoke easy, by whispering, Submit, for the Lord's sake. They might demand why they should go on in patient well-doing amid the detraction and ignorant opposition of foolish men; but he forecloses every objection, by saying, So is the will of God. They might vaunt their freedom, as having been introduced into a new realm, the tidings of which were beginning to steal through the world, as the first faint breath of spring through the woods: but he met their argument by reminding them that, though they were free, they must not use their liberty as a veil for evil living, because they were the servants (lit. the slaves) of God.

There are wonderful contrasts in these words. Those who stand erect as the brothers of Christ in the presence of God, are bidden to submit to every ordinance of men. Those who avow their determination to live only in the will of God discover that will working through the appointments of foolish and ignorant men. The freemen of God are his slaves; and therefore the servants of men. So great, and full, and rich is that real life which we may live in communion with God, that we can afford to be very liberal in complying with the demands of the human institutions by which we are surrounded, so far as they do not clash with our allegiance to our Master and Lord.

There is great helpfulness in these words. Often, when submission is required of us to some arbitrary and imperious command, we are inclined to resent it: the blood flushes our face, lightning flashes in our eyes, and we are disposed to go off in a rage, saying, "Why should I do this thing?" Then the Master approaches us, saying, "Submit for my sake; do it because I wish it: gently remonstrate against the injustice if you will, and if your remonstrances are likely to avail; but if you cannot alter or amend it, be content to submit: I wish it to be so." This makes the sullen iron swim; changes Marah into Elim; and fills the lion with the sweetness of the honey-comb. Oh, do not complain, and fret, and chafe against men! Tell your griefs to your King. Wait patiently for Him; and He will set you free. Or, if not, then believe that his permissions are his appointments; and in bending your meek neck to the unwelcome yoke of human ordinances, be sure that you are performing his good pleasure. The talisman of victory in all such cases- the key to earth's best peace as it is to heaven's choicest boons- is found in the little words, "for the Lord's sake"

There is great reasonableness in these words. The world from the first hated the religion of Jesus, and professed to suspect it, as inimical to itself. It was a favourite charge against the early Christians that they were plotting the overthrow of the Empire, and the dethronement of Caesar, in favour of "one Jesus." Their private meetings were supposed to be convened for unlawful political purposes. It was therefore necessary that men's minds should be disabused of the impression that any violence subversive of existing society was contemplated.

For this purpose the early Christians were specially exhorted to conform, so far as they could, to the demands and usages of the people amongst whom they sojourned as pilgrims and strangers. They were to render to Caesar the things that were Caesar's. If they accepted the order, and safety, and privileges of a settled national and corporate life, they were to bear their quota of its cost,

and yield homage to the form of government which they found in vogue, agreeing to modify or alter it only by orderly and constitutional methods. They were therefore called upon to render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour. A quiet and peaceable life was to be their model; submission their law; well-doing their purpose. Thus, in the process of time, they would disarm prejudice, and conciliate their foes, by the exhibition of the graces of an inoffensive, tender, and beneficent life.

It is very beautiful to remark how literally these precepts were obeyed Tertullian contrasts the early Christians with the heathen. These delighted in the bloody gladiatorial shows of the amphitheatre, whereas a Christian was excommunicated if he went to it at all. When the pagans deserted their nearest relatives in the plague, Christians ministered to the sick. When Gentiles left their dead unburied on the field of battle, and cast their wounded into the streets, the disciples hastened to relieve their sufferings. Thus they muzzled the ignorance of foolish men. The tide began to turn. The more microscopic (1Peter 2:12) was the inspection of the world, the more evident was it that a new and blameless character was abroad. Pliny admitted in his letter to the Emperor Trajan that there was no cause of blame in the followers of the new religion, "save a perverse and extravagant superstition." And the holy example of the primitive believers is cited by Merivale as one of the four causes of the conversion of the Roman empire.

But, of course, there are limits to the application of these words--Our first service must always be to God. And when the demands of the king or his governors clash with the commands of the Supreme, there is no longer place for submission, but for refusal. Instantly the soul recognizes that there is no room for vacillation. Indecision is not to be thought of. The Apostles, who were the first to advocate obedience to existing authority, were also the very first to exclaim, when that authority was intruding into the realm of conscience: "We must obey God rather than men." And they accepted the consequences to the bitter dregs.

The two kingdoms need not clash. We may obey God in submitting to the ordinances of men. We may do well in Caesar's empire, without contravening our allegiance to Christ. Nay, more, we shall be better citizens to Caesar, because we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. But when Caesar steps over the line of the material and outward into the spiritual and eternal, there must be persistent refusal, though we rot in gaol (jail) as a consequence. But even then we are God's freemen, because his slaves.

3. THE FOURFOLD APPLICATION

Honour all men. Perhaps value or esteem would better render the force of the original word. They were to manifest such a kindly interest in all men as would arise from a recognition of the worth of each. There is some worth in the most worthless. In each human being there is something which, in the eye of God, is of infinite value: a lost money-piece which has rolled away into the dust, but is worth sweeping the house to find. Put the most degraded in one scale, and the weight of a world of gold in the other, and the world would kick the beam. The blood of the Son of God is its only equivalent. Let us try to view men as God does, so shall we fulfil this injunction.

Love the brotherhood.--Love is not sentiment, but self-sacrifice; not liking every one necessarily, but making others, instead of self, the pivot of our living. And this is the spirit which we should show to all who own the same Fatherhood, and therefore belong to the same Brotherhood.

Fear God.--True love expels the fear that hath torment, and begets godly fear that dreads to cause Him pain. And every step of growth in holiness is measured by the increase of this fear, as the rise of the Nile is measured by the breadth of territory over which it spreads itself. "Love persuades a man," says Leighton, "purely for the goodness and loveliness of God, to fear to offend Him, though there were no interest at all in it of a man's own personal misery or happiness."

Honour the king.--Respect human institutions. That lesson lay at the beginning of this paragraph, and it is repeated at its close; and, surely, if so much is said of honour for an earthly monarch, much more might be urged on the behalf of the claims of the King of kings. Oh that men would honour Him, with the honour they give to the Father! He is worthy to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing; for He was slain, and has redeemed us to God by his blood. Let us honour Him with no stinting love.

Those who give themselves most absolutely to God, are given back by Him most completely to live for others. Christ does make us members of another sphere; but at the same time He bids us, for His sake, to take a warm and living interest in all that touches human life around.

XIV. TAKING THINGS PATIENTLY

"What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God."--1 Peter 2:20.

The servants here addressed were the household servants and slaves, so largely employed in the great establishments of that age. Wealth and position made special boast of the vast number of dependents that were maintained. Life was held cheaply enough; and when a slave was once purchased, he cost little to keep. The Roman empire swarmed with bondmen; and they became her ruin.

It is not surprising that large numbers of these poor creatures fled to the shelter of the Christian Church, as the outcast seeks fire and food. There at least was liberty for the captives, and love and equality between slave and owner, master and serf. The purchase of the soul of the slave had cost the Son of God an equal amount of suffering with that He had endured for the wealthiest. The love that bent over the hut where an Onesimus sheltered, was as strong and tender as that which pleaded with a Philemon. The heaven which awaited the dying Lazarus, was as fair as that which beckoned a martyr Apostle. And so there was in the Gospel a marvellous fascination for the slave; and if we may found any conclusion on the fact that large portions of the Epistles are addressed to them, and that some of the noblest passages are written for their special benefit, we must admit not only that they were to be found on the church rolls, but that the sacred writers entertained towards them a strong and tender sympathy.

The one message which the Spirit of God had for them, and which is so often repeated on these pages, may be gathered up in the words: Submit; endure; be subject; take it patiently.

We must remember that they were not able to give notice and leave at their will. Wherever they could do this, without blame, and without detriment to the trust committed to them by God or man, they were at perfect liberty to do so. "If thou mayest be made free, use it rather" (1 Cor. 7:21). But this was seldom possible. For the most part they had no alternative but to stay where they were till death released them. It was to such that these special exhortations came.

There is a great restlessness among employees throughout society. Servants giving notice. Young people trying to better themselves. Men changing from situation to situation. As a rule, there is not much gained, even in a worldly point of view, from successive changes. It is the steady plodding life which most quickly leads to success and comfort. Still, there is no sin in making a change, if it be not made simply from selfish motives, or with an eye to worldly advantage. When the Christian testimony has been clearly given, and perhaps clearly rejected; when our presence is rather an irritant to ungodliness than a persuasive to Christ; when we feel able to ask God clearly to open another door for us, and He has done as we request; when it is possible to take another position without compromising the interests committed to our care; when we can do better for the kingdom of Christ by a change--then there is assuredly no reason against it.

But in many cases, as with these household servants, there is no honourable way out of a position in which God seems to have wedged us. We may be in daily contact with grinding tyranny; with almost unbearable cruelty; with an envenomed tongue; with an irritating, captious, trying temper, never satisfied, never pleased--a child with the mother; a nurse with an invalid; an apprentice with an employer; a woman with her husband--in some position which cannot be altered, and where the obligation, once entered upon, must be borne to the end. Here then is the unfailing Divine recipe: when reviled, do not revile again; when buffeted though doing well, do not retaliate; when unjustly accused or punished, be still and take it patiently. And out of all this will come a life which shall not only be like His life who hath set us an example, but which shall also exert a remedial and saving influence on the most violent opposers of his Gospel, while it mounts up to God as an odour of a sweet smell, eliciting his smile of loving approbation. Two lines of action are here referred to.

1. BUFFETED FOR FAULTS

We have all made mistakes, and know what it is to be reprimanded or punished. But under such circumstances we have had no just ground for complaint: and our true policy when so situated must be not to excuse ourselves, nor to cast the blame on others or on our circumstances; not to flash forth with indignant words; but to take it patiently--or if speaking, to confess our wrong, and ask to be forgiven.

In this the royal Psalmist has set us a memorable example. When he was slowly descending the long slope of Olivet towards the Jordan, there came out a man of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, "and as David and his men went by the way, he went along on the hill's side over against them, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust." And Abishai chafed at it, and asked permission to quench his abuse in blood. "No," said the king, "let him curse; because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David."

It was as though he felt that his sin demanded public reprimand, and he meekly accepted the permission of God as his appointment. In such a spirit as this should we bear all buffeting which comes to us for our faults. Be still. Sit alone and keep silence. Put your mouth in the dust. Give your cheek to him that smiteth you. The Lord will not cast you off for ever; He will take you again to Himself. Only remember there is nothing to glory over in this. It is your common duty. "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

2. BUFFETED, THOUGH DOING WELL.

Our superiors, or employers, may be froward, difficult to please, always finding fault; and, though we do our very best, we may meet with nothing but buffeting and rebuke. Still, we are to take it patiently.

There is no harm in quietly and temperately explaining the untruth or the unreasonableness of the accusation; or in showing how we have striven to do our best. When our Master was accused of casting out devils by collusion with their prince, He showed how unreasonable the charge was; and when smitten with the palm of the hand, He said: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?" It is open for us to give a soft answer like this; but if it do not turn away wrath, we must "take it patiently."

Be sure that your patience is not mean-spirited cowardice.--There is no virtue in that. But let it arise from conscience toward God. Offer your soul's patient endurance to God upon that altar which sanctifies the gift; and the motive which prompts the sacrifice will be precious in his sight. "This is thankworthy." "This is acceptable with God." And the Greek might bear such a rendering as this: God says, Thank you. Yes, so it is. If in some great house some poor servant, or if in a school some persecuted child, will dare, for God's sake, to choke back the passionate outburst of indignation, and to endure grief, suffering wrongfully, there is a thrill of delight started through the very heart of God, and from the throne God stoops to say, Thank you. The hero-explorer may be thanked by his country and his Queen; but the weakest and obscurest saint may receive the thanks of the Almighty.

We may cultivate this grace of patience by many considerations.--Though that particular allegation may be wrong, yet there have been many occasions in our lives when we have received more praise or thanks than were our due. Balance one against the other. And such is the evil of our hearts, that the germs of sins, which have been wrongly imputed to us, are latent, and only await the opportunity of breaking out; they would have broken out before, but for the grace of God. Besides, does not this desire to receive the praise and esteem of all betoken a very worldly heart? Why should we want human applause? If we had our deserts, instead of one buffet in a life of caresses, we should have but one caress in a storm of buffetings. If the sinless, guileless Saviour was dumb as a sheep before its shearers amid the torrents of abuse that beset Him, surely it becomes us to be still, for there are plenty of causes for rebuke in us, to justify the worst things ever said against us, and many worse than these. Our ease is like that of a criminal who had better bear quietly a sentence for a crime he has not committed, lest by too much outcry he induce investigation into a list of offences, which are not charged against him, because not known.

And in addition, let us think tenderly of the condition of our persecutors.--Alas, for them! How sad, how pitiable are they. Surely they need pity rather than wrath, mercy more than vehemence. Perhaps our uncomplaining meekness may touch them as no words of indignation would; as the sighs and agonies of the early martyrs were pricks and goads in the consciences of their persecutors, driving them to the Lord.

Moreover, it is after all but a small thing to be judged by man.--If he praise, what does it amount to? If he blame, what is it but a puff of smoke, a blank cartridge, a meteor exploding in the air? Life at the longest is short. Eternity is near, even at the doors. And the kiss of God, as we step across the threshold of his presence-chamber, will make us even thankful to have been put into such circumstances of rebuke as enabled us to win so large a reward.

And is it for a moment to be supposed that God will not vindicate us? Of course He will. "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto Him? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." "He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness." "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." We can afford, then, to give place unto wrath, since He has said, "Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense." Let us commit ourselves, as Jesus did, to Him who judgeth righteously, and we shall find that He will clear us and cause our enemies to bite the dust, as when Haman led Mordecai in triumph through the streets of Shushan.

3. THE INDUCEMENTS TO PATIENT ENDURANCE.

(1) As we have already seen, God says, Thank you.--And those thanks will be heard one day by the raptured soul, as it stands almost dazed in his presence. "When did I aught to deserve all this?" And in answer, many a trivial and forgotten incident of Christian gentleness and meekness under misrepresentation and rebuke, will be recalled. "This, soul, I beheld in thee; and it made Me glad. Welcome! and well done!"

(2) For this we were called.--Not to be happy, or saved, or glorified, but to suffer as Jesus suffered. He was the Master of the house, but they spat on Him, smote Him, derided and crucified Him; yet He threatened not. And we have been called to live His life. To make his meaning clear, the Apostle uses words which children could follow. When the Greek schoolmaster taught writing, he made his letters faintly, and the scholar wrote over his outlines. This is the Apostle's thought, and we have been called to repeat each line and turn and curve of the Master's life, so that the world may ever have a living copy of His life before its eyes. "Leaving an example."

(3) We know we are on the right way for our home.--Our Master has gone through the world, leaving traces of his path behind Him; as in the dense bush of Australia a man will blaze the trunks or snap the twigs, that those who follow may find the way. So, as

we encounter hatred and rebuke--not for our misdeeds but because we belong to Christ--and are able to bear it patiently, we are sure that we are on His track; which leads down into the grave, and through it to the Resurrection lawns, and up the Ascension steeps, to the banks of the river of water of life, where they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

And is this patience possible? Not to your unaided efforts; but as the gift of the God of Patience through the Holy Ghost. Thrice we are told of the patience of Jesus, who bore threat and wrong without a word of retaliatory threat. Oh, marvellous grace! And it was wrought out by Him, not for Himself alone, but for all who believe. It awaits our appropriation. Let us claim it in all moments of irritation and calumny, saying with Robert Hall, "Calm me, Lamb of God, calm me!" or whispering softly, "Thy patience, Lord!" So may God the Holy Spirit direct you into the patience of Jesus Christ!

XV. THE FOOTPRINTS OF THE FLOCK

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sill, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." 1 Peter 2:21-25

STRAY SHEEP!

Can you not see them? They have broken through some narrow opening in the fence; have wandered afar to browse on the sweet grass that enticed them forth; have been scared and driven by dogs, broken into smaller and ever smaller companies, till at last they wander alone, or fall into pits, or lie feebly bleating with exposure and fatigue, the easy prey of lion or wolf. Far from the fold; torn, wounded, driven; panting with alarm; splashed and dragged with filth; certain to perish, unless rescued by the shepherd. Such were all of us. "We were as sheep going astray."

How shall we ever sufficiently adore the Good, Great, and Chief Shepherd of souls, that He did not leave us to our hapless fate, but came after us--down mountain rent, through thorny brake, over jagged flints, seeking until He found us, and, laying us upon his shoulders, brought us back. We "are now returned." Safe sheltered in his fold. Listening for Him to call us by our name. Bearing his name branded on us. Not dreading to be put forth to new duties, trials, or temptations, because so sure that "when He putteth forth his own sheep, He goeth before them; and his sheep follow Him." But this following of the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls involves suffering. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps." It becomes us to mark well those footprints, as they lead down into the dark valley, ere they climb upward to the Resurrection and Ascension heights.

(1) The sufferings incident to the common lot of men:--"Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." "Work is but one half of life; suffering is the other. There is a hemisphere of the world in the sunshine of work; but there is another in the shadow of suffering." All suffer, either in body or soul; in themselves or their families; from what they have or have not; through the malice of their fellows; the malevolence of wicked spirits; or their own follies and mistakes.

In all such sufferings, except the last, Jesus suffered. Whatever is meant by hunger, thirst, weariness, poverty, and toil, physical weakness and suffering, bereavement with its prostrating anguish, He knew. These things are common to man. Enduring these he earns his bread. Through these his character is formed. By these he acquires the mastery of nature. And because the Lord was found in fashion as a man, He bowed his royal head to endure them. Though Maker and Monarch of all, He chose the mendicant's empty purse, the outcast's fare, the exile's bed, that no child of Adam should be able to boast of an excess or peculiarity of suffering, in the feeling of which He could not be touched. "He was made like unto his brethren."

(2) There are also sufferings peculiar to Christ as Mediator and Saviour:--The Apostle lays stress on these as the necessary foundation of our relationship to God. He "suffered for us"; and the preposition unmistakably denotes that He took upon Himself the curse and consequence of our sin, relieving us of it for evermore. And then as if to emphasize the work of mediation and substitution more emphatically, the Apostle quotes again from that great evangelic prophecy of Isaiah in which the Spirit of Christ testified so clearly beforehand of the sacrificial aspect of the Redeemer's sufferings (Isa. 53.).

He bore our sins:--It is a sacrificial word. As of old the Jew "leaned hard" on the head of the victim destined to die for him, and the innocent lamb bare the burden, dying beneath its load, so did Jesus bear our sins in his own body on the tree. It was not the anticipation of approaching physical torture which bowed Him so low in Gethsemane, or pressed the bloody sweat from Him, as the feet of the peasant press the grapes in the autumn vintage. It was the foreboding of the pressure of our sins, which already began to crush his heart, and which broke it on the cross. No sufferer has ever experienced sorrow like this. There has been nothing like it in the history of the ages; nor will it admit of repetition. "Once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice

of Himself." In one of Adam's race alone has this tragedy of love been possible: that the sins of untold myriads should "meet on Him," and so be expiated and put away for evermore (Isa. 53:6, marg.)

We must not linger long over the phrase which emphasizes the gift of his own body to the work of our redemption. That body so purely born, which must have been a fair casket for the holy jewel it contained; which in the Jordan waters was first identified in outward seeming with the weight of human sin, though in itself without sin; which was the very shrine and home of God, who had prepared it for Him; which was the vehicle for so many blessed words and deeds of ministry--that body was made a sin-offering, and, so to speak, was burnt in fire without the camp, as the bodies of the bulls and goats under the Levitical law. Nor must we stay to compare that tree with the wood which Isaac carried on his strong young shoulders to Moriah's brow. It is enough to know that it has taken deep root in our world, and is filling it with its spreading branches, beneath which even the fowls of the air are finding shelter--the true tree of life, whose fruits drop on all lands, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

But there is yet one consideration which claims our attention ere we pass on. Those sufferings, utterly unique and unapproachable by us, which rear themselves amid all compeers, in lonely and unapproachable grandeur, have for ever absolved us from having to bear the righteous penalty of the broken moral laws of God's government. We may have to bear the natural consequences and penalties of our wrong-doings. The converted drunkard, though forgiven and delivered from the penalty of God's wrath, will yet carry to his grave the marks and traces of his excess; though even these may be transmuted into blessings by the near presence of our Lord. Out of the eater will come forth meat, and out of the strong, sweetness; but, as for the eternal, governmental, and judicial consequences of our sins, these have been borne for us, and have been exhausted in the sufferings of our blessed Lord. In the person of Jesus, the great God took them home to Himself, and put them away for ever. Because He has suffered them, we need not suffer them; because He has borne them, we need not bear them; because the stripes fell thick and heavily on Him, they need never fall on us. "By his stripes ye were healed."

The slaves whom the Apostle was addressing understood full well the meaning of "stripes." The Greek word means the weal left by a stripe. From the grave the Saviour came, bearing the weal's of many stripes, wound-marks in hands and feet and side; but those bruises and wounds tell a story which makes our hearts leap with joy. When the Great Shepherd, raised through the blood of the everlasting covenant, met his timid followers in the upper room, He bade them behold the print of the nails, and the scar in his side. "Then were the disciples glad." And as we consider the Lamb, "as it had been slain," and discern those precious memorials of his finished work on our behalf, we too may break forth into new songs, like those in heaven. Those stripes are the price of our redemption, the evidence of our purchase, the sign-manual of pardon. Let us then appropriate these triumphant words, and the whole verse of which they form the appropriate close; and let each of us dare to say, not because we feel it, but because we accept it as the word of God, which cannot be broken: "He was wounded for my transgressions; He was bruised for my iniquities; the chastisement of my peace was upon Him; and with his stripes I am healed."

But the death of our Lord Jesus has a double aspect.--

It looks first towards the justice of God, to which it rendered an adequate equivalent for our many sins. This was altogether independent of us, for whom it was given. But it also looks towards man in the effect it produces on those who rightly apprehend it. "That we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." There is a remarkable coincidence of testimony between this statement and that in Rom. 6. Indeed, in these words we strike one of the main seams of Scripture teaching. In the sight of God, we are reckoned as being so identified with our Lord that what is predicated of Him is also true of us. Dead in his death. Raised in his resurrection. Seated with Him in his glory. And it should be the purpose and aim of our life to realize by faith in actual practice and experience all that is ours in the mind and purpose of God. Ye died: reckon yourselves dead. Ye are risen: set your affection on things above. Ye are seated in heavenly places: walk worthy of your high calling. By the grace of God, there should be a perpetual deadness to every appeal that comes from the flesh, the world, or the devil; and an ever fuller response to the inspirations and appeals which come from the Spirit of God to a life of righteousness.

The mediatorial sufferings of Christ do thus involve some suffering to us. Because we must submit to daily death; we must take up our cross and follow Him; we must sow ourselves, falling into the ground to die. A perpetual self-denial; a setting up of the cross in our lives; a conformity to his death; a drinking of his cup; a baptism into his sufferings--all these are the indispensable conditions of that salvation from the love and power of sin which He has wrought out for us. But in no deeper sense can we follow in his steps as the Substitute, Mediator, Reconciler, and High Priest of men.

(3) The sufferings of the sinless Man.--That He was sinless was universally attested. No lamb or heifer was ever so searched for blemishes as was He. Judas, who knew Christ's innermost history, declared that he had "betrayed innocent blood." Pilate repeatedly insisted that he could find no fault in Him at all. And the only charge that the priests could substantiate against Him was his assumption of Deity. "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." He did not say, Yea and Nay; but all the promises of God in Him were yea, and, through Him, amen. He was the true and faithful Witness.

And how lovely was his silence before his accusers. Silent before the Sanhedrim, whilst the false witnesses hopelessly involved

themselves. Silent before Herod, so that from entering his halls to leaving them, no word escaped his lips--emblem of the silence of God to those whose natures are closed to Him. Silent before Pilate, except when that poor craven soul gave expression to thoughts and questionings which surged up from its very depths. Silent in the Palace-hall. Silent in the Praetorium. Silent on the cross, save in words of blessing and prayer.

But how inevitable it was that holiness like His, even though so still and uncomplaining, which did not strive, nor cry, nor lift up, nor cause its voice to be heard in the streets, should come into collision with the spirit of his time; and in that collision suffer bitterly! As the shining of the sun brings out the poisonous fumes of the stagnant pool, so did the presence of Jesus among men stir up the evil of human hearts; and that evil must in itself have been a cause of awful suffering to one so sensitive, so delicate, so holy as He was. The keener the appreciation of musical harmonies, the intenser must ever be the agony of a discordant note.

Sum up, if you can, the ingredients of suffering in Christ's cup. That the race with which He stood in such close identification was so steeped in sin that He was compelled to breathe our polluted atmosphere, all the more terrible, in contrast with that of the world from which He had come, as the foul miasma of a fetid court or room is the more distressing to those who have just entered it from the fresh outer air; that He was misrepresented and misunderstood and held guilty of sins against the divinest traditions of his people; that He was treated as a madman, and as possessed of weakened intellect; that He was obliged to endure the contradiction of sinners against Himself; that He was opposed and hated by those whom He yearned to save; that He was exposed to the temptations of men and devils--are not all these footprints of suffering flecked with blood, which substantiate the frequent references of this eye-witness to the sufferings of Christ?

In all this He has left us an example that we should follow in his steps. It is inevitable that we should pass through many of the same experiences. The Christ-life in us must pass through the same stages of development, and meet with the same treatment, as it did in Him. The world is not more friendly than in the long past to the Master's spirit; and in proportion as we are animated by it shall we be brought into the same collision with the spirit of human society, and suffer from its incongruity to the holiest instincts of the soul.

Expect to be reviled and buffeted, misunderstood and misrepresented; cast out and crucified, as He was. The sheep cannot expect to fare better than the Shepherd; nay, they know that they are on his track, when constrained to follow in his footprints of suffering and sorrow. But the end will be glorious, when the whole flock are gathered on the hills of eternity. If we died, we shall also live, with Him. If we suffer, we shall also reign, with Him. "Ye are they which have continued with Me in my temptations; and I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father hath appointed unto Me."

XVI. WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE HOME

"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives: while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered."---1 Peter 3:1-7.

THERE were pure and virtuous homes in the old classic world, of which the fragrant memory lingers to this day. Who can forget Panthea, who, as her husband left her to fight under the renowned Cyrus, said?--"If ever there was a woman that regarded her husband more than her own soul, I am that woman." Who can forget the refusal of Cornelia to accept one of her many and even royal suitors, because she insisted that her marriage with her noble husband, Titus Gracchus, was not annulled by his death? Who will be untouched by that exquisite description from the hand of the great Pliny, who, speaking of his wife, said?--"She loves me, the surest pledge of her virtue; and adds to this a wonderful disposition to learning, which she has acquired from her love to me. She reads my writings, studies them, and even gets them by heart. You would smile to see the concern she is in when I have a cause to plead; and her joy when it is over. She finds means to have the first news brought her of the success I meet with in court. She accompanies my verses with the lute, with no master but love, the best of instructors. Her affection is not founded on my worth or person; but she is in love with the immortal part of me."

But these were isolated instances, canonized in history because so exceptionally rare. The poets and historians of the Roman Empire paint in the blackest colours the utter disregard of the marriage tie; the abominable and shameless immorality which sapped the foundations of the State, and led with inevitable exactness to its fall. These descriptions are more than substantiated by the revelations of the wails of Pompeii. Into such a world of stygian darkness, lit by a few stars, came the religion of our Lord, and

among its very first creations was that of the family and the home. For these, its earliest and most precious gifts to the age of its inception, and to all ages, mankind must ever own itself indebted to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus.

Even the Jewish people had become grossly lax in their notions of the obligations of wedded love. The rabbis permitted divorce on the most trivial pretexts. If the husband were not pleased with his wife's behaviour, or if she spoilt his food in cooking, or were stricken with a grievous bodily affliction, he might put her away. It was held indeed that this facility was a special privilege granted to Israel, but not to other nations. That such was the state of society brings into startling emphasis the words of Christ, who repeatedly went back to the primeval institution of marriage, one woman for one man, and insisted that these two must live together in the home, in a relationship which could only be dissolved by death or by unfaithfulness.

It is necessary that these words of Christ and his Church should again speak in the ears of the world. The growing revolt of the classes and the masses from the simplicities of Christianity is being followed closely by an increasing disregard of the ties of marriage and the bonds of home. How rapidly the business of the divorce courts is increasing. We must have, forsooth, looser divorce laws. We must not be too puritanic. We must admit with Strauss that the New Testament contains "ascetic" notions concerning marriage; that the Sermon on the Mount is deficient in the knowledge of human nature; that the scientific method is in collision with the Biblical ideal. And we are asked to condone the offences of certain great thinkers and brilliant writers of our time against the sacrament of marriage, as if their genius relieved them of moral obligation, or put them under some special regime.

From such lamentable laxity, which is doing so much to dislodge from its position the key-stone of our national greatness, little heeding the lessons of the past, or realizing the full measure of disaster which must crown the success of its endeavour, we turn with relief to the high, pure, and divine conception of the place of woman in the Christian home, her adorning, and her treatment.

1. HER POSITION

It is true that she is bidden to be in subjection. But then we must also remember the peculiar circumstances under which these Epistles were written, and the revolution which was afoot.

Women had been degraded for centuries, as they are degraded now throughout the Orient, and where Christianity has not come--supposed to be destitute of souls; the drudge and slave, or toy; a piece of property, valuable or not, as the case might be. But, like a ray of dawn, there came the teaching of the Gospel. Woman was declared to be the helpmate of man, taken not from his head or feet, but from his side, to be his companion. In Christ was neither male nor female. The Holy Spirit showed no partiality in his operations, but endowed the women of the early Church equally with the men. The Lord Himself had admitted women to the inner circle of his blessed friendship, and had called out their noblest attributes. Before the eyes of the world there hung the memory of the Virgin Mother; of the women who ministered to Him; of those who broke their alabaster boxes on his person; of those who were last at his cross, first at his grave. The miracle at the peasants marriage was a sign of the Master's smile on this holy rite. And, as these visions passed before the retina of woman's heart, she responded to the call of Jesus with glad delight; she flung herself at his feet with the rapturous cry, "Rabboni"; she pressed into his Church, where she was welcome; and there was a danger lest in the new-found ecstasy she might break loose from those sacred obligations which were as old as Paradise, and which no Gospel could sever or relax. Christ had not come to destroy the primeval rite, but to fulfil, and to show that it was a pattern of that eternal and indissoluble union into which He enters with his Church.

This was the origin of the command to be in subjection. It was, primarily, addressed to those who since their marriage had become Christians. There was considerable hesitancy in the early Church, as to their duty under such circumstances. "Should they leave their husbands?" "Should they alter their behaviour to them?" "Should they assume any superiority?" "No," said the Apostles, "stay where you are, however painful your position, and uncongenial your surroundings, and trying your husband's conduct. Be chaste, gentle, loving, submissive, winsome, so that hearts may be softened, which have never heard a word of Gospel preaching, and may be won by the beauty of your holy and unselfish lives."

Of course, where true love subsists between husband and wife, and where both are Christians, such a command as this is hardly needed. There is no room for subjection, where there are no masterful commands; no standing up for rights; no jealous strife for independence. The sensitive instincts of love define exactly, as no words could do, the respective position of husband and wife; and, altogether apart from such an injunction as this, it is perhaps rather the nature of woman's love to yield, to lean on one stronger than itself, and to give itself away in deeds of loving ministry.

If all Christian women would live like this, there would be less need of preaching to their unconverted husbands. "Without a word, they would be won by the conversation of their wives." Won! "A soul converted is gained to itself, gained to the pastor or friend or wife or husband who sought it, and gained to Jesus Christ; added to his treasury, who thought not his own precious blood too dear to lay out for this gain." And what more precious guerdon could reward a wife's chaste and God-fearing behaviour than to know that her husband was to be a jewel in her crown, won for her Lord!

There is nothing here for those who desire to marry out of the Lord. They are clearly forbidden to be unequally yoked with

unbelievers; and they will find, to their cost, how bitter a thing it is to disobey a distinct command. No hope is held out of either winning the other, where from the first God's Word has been set at naught. But where conversion has taken place after marriage in the case of one partner, there is every reason to cherish hope for the other.

Oh, brokenhearted women, disappointed and of sorrowful spirit, ready to despair, disposed to abandon heart and hope, be not weary in well-doing; be yours the love that never faileth; remember that, in dark places, you are to exemplify that love for the sake of the dear Master, who is looking on and will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able to bear; dare to trust Him for the future, and believe that God will yet give you your dearest who sail in the ship with you over the stormy waves.

What a lesson is here for all! We cannot all preach by lip; but we can by life. And such preaching is mighty in results; whilst the effect of it abides long after the life has passed from view into the ministries of the upper sanctuary.

2. HER ADORNING

It does not seem that the Apostle forbids plaiting the hair, or wearing of gold, any more than he does the putting-on of apparel. Religion does not consist in the presence or absence of these things. If we wear them, we are not better; if we abjure them, we are not worse. It makes surely very little difference to the Saviour whether we dress in silk or calico, in colours or drab. The one law is--to dress as becomes the station in which He has placed us, and in such a way as not to attract notice to ourselves.

Of course if a certain style of dress is associated only with the worldly and irreligious; or if it exercises an injurious effect on those who minutely watch and exaggerate what they see in us; or if it attracts excessive remark, and makes us self-conscious--we do well to discard it, and lay it aside. But where this is not the case, it is well to keep moderately in the wake of custom and usage, lest we attract as much attention by our prudery as our pride, and so minister to our accursed love of singularity. But it is very pitiful when the Christian conscience becomes morbid on these points. Some are so constantly questioning what dress their Lord would have them wear, that they miss much of his company. Of course, we ought to select our attire under his eye, asking for his guidance in our choice, and his grace to indicate his taste for us. Surely the Master has a right to say what his slaves should wear, and how they should spend his money! And He will indicate his will in the gentlest and most delicate manner. Cast the responsibility more utterly on Him, and then occupy yourselves much more with Himself than with your attire, so occupied with Him as to be almost oblivious of it.

The great point with each of us should be: Were is my adorning? If it be without, then indeed we are in evil case. But if it be within--in the hidden man of the heart, in the cultivation of a meek and quiet spirit--we may leave outward matters to shape themselves very much as they may; and they will cease to attract an undue share of our attention or thought. Great is he, says Seneca, who enjoys his earthenware as if it were plate; and not less great is the man to whom all his plate is no more than earthenware. Plenty are there whose outward body is richly decked, but whose inner being is clothed in rags; whilst others, whose garments are worn and threadbare, are all glorious within. It is a solemn question: What are our garments in the sight of God? Do we know anything of this meek and quiet spirit, so precious in his esteem, so restful and blessed amid the tumult of the world?

The clue to its possession seems hidden in the suggestion that the holy women in the old time trusted in God. Turn your heart towards God; and the result will show itself in such wholesomeness of behaviour, such consistency in well-doing, such freedom from sudden fear, as will commend the Gospel, and attract the smile of God.

3. HER TREATMENT

These words to husbands may well be extended by the addition of the words spoken to them in the Epistle to the Ephesians, in which they are bidden to love their wives as Christ has loved the Church, nourishing and cherishing them as their own body.

But three striking and beautiful suggestions are made here which will suffice:--

(1) Give honour to the wife as the weaker vessel.--All bear on their nature the touch of the great Potter's moulding hand; but some are stronger than others, and in Christ's code the obligation to consider the other always rests with the stronger. Politeness, high-breeding, chivalry, courtesy--these are mimicked in society; but their original types are found only, where Christianity has wrought her perfect work. No man can fully acquire them until this Gospel is written in his heart; they pass from within outwards, not from without inwards. And many who have never been admitted to so-called good society are God's own gentle people.

(2) Remember that you are heirs together of the grace of life There is no such union as that of those who are wedded in the love of God, and to whose love his love gives depth and meaning and a touch of infinitude. Of a relationship like this we may well repeat the motto on Charles Kingsley's grave, summing up a life of exquisite married bliss: we love; we loved, we will love. Let thoughts of the common grace of life attempt and ennoble your relations.

(3) See that your prayers be not hindered.--There is no test so subtle as a good man's prayers. When he kneels before his God, He will know in a moment whether or not he has contracted defilement during the preceding hours; and, if so, where. And he is bidden to leave his gift at the altar, and go to seek reconciliation, ere he returns to offer it. Whatever then arises in the hour of prayer,

and breathes on the mirror of the heart, is thereby proved to be injurious and wrong, and must be put away. Whatever makes husband and wife unable to pray together alone, or at the family altar, must be dealt with mercilessly as a hindrance. And if only we are faithful and true in these daily particulars of conduct, our prayers will not only be unhindered but helped, and we shall gain such conceptions of the love of Christ to us, amid all our failures and imperfections, as will make the wedding bells ring out a perpetual chime of love within our hearts, and we shall understand another phase of his love which passeth knowledge.

There is nothing which tests us so much as the daily discipline of the home life. It is much easier to stand amid a crowded assembly calling Christians to entire consecration, than, on the following morning, to bring those lofty principles to bear on the small details of the breakfast-table, when the radiant light of the Transfiguration Mount has been exchanged for the grey of an autumn day-break, and the excitement of the crowds for the simple presence of wife and child. It is not so difficult to live like saints where we are set free from the ordinary friction and responsibilities of daily life, and surrounded by those who interpose as many pillows of loving consideration as possible between us and anything which would fret and annoy us. At the same time, if our religion breaks down here it breaks down utterly. If we are not right, so far as in us lies, with our nearest, it is very questionable if we are right with God. Love to God involves love to man. And if we do not love with a warm, sunny, attractive, and unselfish love those who live within our home circle, we may gravely question whether we have tasted of the love of God. For even if we have come to the end of our love we may become the channels through which His love may, flow down to bless and save.

XXVII. THE CHRISTIAN TEMPER

"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren; be pitiful; be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." 1 Peter 3:8-12.

In his Life of Frederick the Great, Carlyle describes in a few graphic touches the Moravian town of Herrnhut; and, after remarking on the religious atmosphere which brooded over the place, he says, "Herrnhut is a Sabbath petrified; a Calvinistic Sabbath done into stone." It is a high eulogium.

But every visitor to that unique settlement has been arrested by the careful accuracy with which the principles of their religion and theology have been exemplified to the minutest details in the lives of its inhabitants.

But it were a still greater marvel to find in any community under heaven a complete embodiment of these marvellous injunctions. All of one mind; cemented into a holy unity by a common sympathy. Ministering to the saints. Pitiful to the weak, erring, and poor. Courteous to equals. Calm and forgiving under abuse and injury. Seeking peace. Living under the smile of God. Where in all the world can we discover such a community of Christians? It were a fair vision, worth going far to see. A temple to Love. An abode of heavenly bliss. An oasis in the desert. A snatch of celestial harmony amid the jarring discords of human selfishness. The New Jerusalem descending from God out of heaven, Yet nothing less than this is the Christian ideal, as it is also that which our Lord died to secure. And it would well become us, if, without waiting for others, each one would adopt the injunctions of these verses as the binding rule and regulation of daily life. This would be our worthiest contribution to the convincing of the world, and to the coming of the kingdom of our Lord. And it would spread.

And does not the Apostles' use of the word finally teach us that all Christian doctrine is intended to lead up to and inaugurate that life of love, the bold outlines of which are sketched in these words? Let us not be content with considering the mighty stones of truth laid by this wise Master Builder in the foundations; but let us pass up, and into the temple based upon them, where the Shekinah dwells above the mercy-seat, so that we may catch its glow upon our faces, and bear it forth into the world.

1. THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE

"Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another." This oneness of mind does not demand the monotony of similarity, but unity in variety. Not the oneness of a hop-pole, or of a pile of hop-poles; but of the plant which, with tendril, leaf, and fruit, rears itself aloft in the summer air. Not the oneness of a brick, or of a pile of bricks; but of the house, in which so many different materials and contrivances combine to shelter human life. Not the oneness of a child; but of a family of children who differ in age, character, temperament, and chosen pursuits, but are one in love and tender sympathy.

We shall never be of one mind in the sense of all holding the same opinions; but we may be all of one mind when, beneath diversities of opinion, expression, and view, we are animated by a common devotion to Christ; a common loyalty to the great underpinning facts of Redemption; and a common love to all who hold the Head, though they may differ from us in an infinite variety

of minor considerations.

The Church of Rome never caught this idea. Its only conception of the oneness of Christ's disciples was a vast uniformity, a system in which every one should utter the same formularies, worship in the same postures, and belong to the same ecclesiastical order. And its leaders did their best to realize their dream. They sought to exterminate divergence of view by fire, and sword, and torture. They spread their network through the world. And just before the dawn of the Reformation they seemed to have succeeded. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Europe reposed in the monotony of almost universal uniformity under the almost universal supremacy of the Papacy. Rome might almost have adopted the insolent boast of the Assyrian of prophecy: "As one gathereth eggs, so have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped." And what was the result? There is but one answer possible. The deep sleep of death. And it must always be so. Life abhors uniformity. And whenever you force this marvellous being into your cast-iron mould, you not only destroy its grace and beauty, but you kill it.

There is variety in the human body, from eyelash to foot, from heart to blood disc, from brain to quivering nerve fibre; yet in all this variety each one is conscious of an indivisible unity. There is variety in the tree: the giant arms that wrestle with the storm, the far-spreading roots that moor it to the soil, the myriad leaves through which the winds make music, the cones or nuts which it flings on the forest floor; yet in all this it is one. There is variety in the Bible--variety of authorship, of style, of age, from the bulrush ark to the break of the sapphire waves of the Aegean about Patmos; yet for all this the sixty-six tractlets which compose the Bible are always bound up in one cover, because composing one book. So with Christians. There may be, and must be, infinite varieties, and shades of thought and work; but, notwithstanding all, there is a oneness which needs not to be created, for it is already consummated, but which must be recognized and kept. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Many folds, but one flock. Many stones, but one breastplate. Many temperaments, but one family. Many minds, but one mind.

Much of the controversy of the present day arises from failure to recognize the almost infinite variety of the human mind. No two persons look at the same thing in the same way, or give the same version of an incident or a tale. Each colours it with the tint of personal idiosyncrasy, just as each object in nature borrows from sunlight its especial hue. Start a dozen devout, deeply-taught men to formulate any doctrine of the faith; whilst each holds the fact, no two will express it in precisely the same way. We must distinguish between facts and views of facts. Men may not think alike, and yet be of the same mind.

If we would obey this injunction of being "all of one mind," let us think more often of the things in which we agree than of those in which we differ. All are loved with the same love; bought by the same blood; born of the same Spirit; members of the same body; animated by the same life; subject to the same hopes and fears, afflictions and vicissitudes; drawing our daily sustenance from the same supplies; destined for the same home. How many and close are the bonds of our relationship! Surely it becomes us to have great compassion one toward another: correcting each other, if need be, privately, or before the Church, with no desire for self-exaltation, but with eager loyalty for the glory of God; putting the best construction on points of difference; viewing everything in the light of the Master's glory; and trying to be more animated by that loving, tender, compassionate spirit, which enabled Him to bear so long with the misunderstanding, strife, and stupidity, of the men whom He had chosen to form the inner circle of his earthly life.

2. FOUR SPECIFIC APPLICATIONS

(1) To fellow-Christians. Love as brethren.--"Love" is not identical with "like." Providence does not ask us whom we would like to be our brethren--that is settled for us; but we are bidden to love them, irrespective of our natural predilections and tastes. You say--That is impossible. But remember that true love does not necessarily originate in the emotions, but in the will; it consists not in feeling, but in doing; not in sentiment, but in action; not in soft words, but in noble and unselfish deeds.

Love changes the pivot and centre of life from self to another. Before she flings her magic spell upon us, we are self-contained and self-centred, bending all our energies to our self-aggrandisement, compelling all streams to flow into the Dead Sea of our own interest. But when we love, a marvellous transformation passes over us. We think more often of the beloved than of ourselves. We find our plans, contrivings, activities, all ennobled and transfigured by our one consideration of what will please and help and bless that choice spirit which has gathered to itself the threads of our life, weaving them after its own sweet will, and threading them with blessedness, as black-lettered pages may be illumined by scrolls of gold and colour. With such love should we love our fellow-Christians.

Do not begin with trying to love every one at once. We do not best descend from generals to particulars; but ascend from particulars to generals. Begin with those nearest to you in the church and the home, or in the little religious coterie with which you are wont to mix. It is through the love of individuals that we come to love the whole.

You say that this is your difficulty, and that there are Christians in your immediate circle, whom you cannot get on with. Here, then, is my advice. Do not try to feel love, but will to love. Tell the dear Master that you are willing to love, or willing to be made willing to love, but that He must create the grace of love within your breast. Ask Him to pour the tides of his love through your heart, that He may love through you; and you shall finally catch the glow and grace of his tenderness. Offer Him your lips, that by them He may

Speak the words you cannot utter; and your hand, that by it He may do the gentle deeds of ministry which you cannot bring yourself to perform. Your confessions of inability will bring out the assurances of his all-sufficiency. What you cannot do, He can and will do through you. All things are possible to Him, and will be to you if you believe in Him. Begin, then, to do what you know you ought to do, and would do, if you felt love. Do it because it is right; do it for Christ's sake; do it expecting the Lord to work in and through you - and you will find ere long that streams of Divine tenderness have commenced to flow through the channels of your being, long choked with silt and debris. And love thus practically learnt to one fellow-believer, will open your heart to all.

(2) To the weak and erring. Be pitiful!-Oh for the compassion of our blessed Lord! How often it breaks out in the Gospel narrative to the unshepherded sheep, to the hungry multitudes, and to the afflicted who sought his aid! It is so much easier to scourge, rebuke, criticise, and condemn, than to pity and heal. We must not condone sin, or allow ourselves to think lightly of that which has cost God so much, and which is the object of his wrath. But we may discriminate between sin and the sinner, between disease and the sufferer; and, whilst we give no quarter to the one, we may be very merciful to the other.

Think of thine own sins. How near thou hast been to the precipice, how much thou owest to the grace of God! The measure of thy debt was ten thousand talents; but it has been freely forgiven. And thy provocation to sin may have been less urgent, thy passions less fiery, thy opportunities less frequent, thy temper less persistent. And who can estimate the blackness of darkness in which the transgressor is tossed, despair at the helm, whilst the waves rush past to break in thunder on the rocks close by! Such may be the lot of one near thee! Be pitiful! Consider thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Refrain speech and action till thou knowest all.

(3) To equals. Be courteous!-The courtesies of Christianity should be more inward and constant than those of the world. Be ready to take the least comfortable seat, to move up to the end of the pew, or to give up your comfortable corner. Do not sit down at the extreme end of a meeting-room, compelling late-comers to have the discomfort of passing to the front before the eyes of all, much to the distraction of the leader. Let others sit while you stand. Do not push and crowd as you come in or go out. Step back to let women and children and invalids pass by. Let the manners of your Father's court be always evident in your deportment, that men may feel that you come of a noble line, and learn that Christianity produces not simply the heroism of a great occasion, but the thousand minute courtesies of daily living.

(4) To enemies. Do not retaliate!-"Not rendering evil for evil, but contrariwise blessing." The old law of "an eye for an eye" is repealed, in favour of that nobler legislation which bids us do good to those that hate us, and pray for them who spitefully use and persecute us. Let us be like the rock on the wilderness march, which when smitten yielded water to the thirsty hosts.

We can afford to do this; for we have been called to inherit such a blessing that, though we give it away with both hands, in spendthrift prodigality, we can never exhaust it. Besides, this is the policy of living a calm, good, and blessed life. He that loves life, and would see good days, must keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from guile. The man who is always vindicating himself and standing up for his rights, will be perpetually in a ferment, and will miss the cream of life, which rises when all is still. But, better than all, our God will see to us, protecting and delivering us. Not a blow reaches us which He does not notice. Not a threat which He does not hear. He will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. He will put an arrest on the enemy when his purpose is accomplished. And then, from out the cloud, He will look upon the armies of our foes, and discomfit them, and overthrow them in the heart of the sea. "His face is against them that do evil."

XVIII. SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

"Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed flint falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing." 1 Peter 3:13-17.

TWICE in this paragraph we meet the word suffer; and in each case it is associated with that special kind of suffering which is inflicted on the innocent and holy by those who hate the light flung in on their own darkness, and who desire to extinguish it if they may.

The Incarnation led inevitably to the cross. Any attentive student of human nature who stood with Jesus on the threshold of his life, and heard Him speak or saw Him act, must have been convinced that there was but one fate reserved for such a one as He was. And though the acts of love and power which marked his busy days--as the silver bells which made music at every movement of Israel's high priest--averted the crisis for some few months, it came; as from the first it was evident that it must come. Amid every sign of vehement hatred, the Lamb of God was led to his death; hurried out of the world as millions of his followers have been since. From Bethlehem the road lay straight to Calvary

And what was true of the Son of God in his human flesh is true of each incarnation of Him in our hearts and lives. Where, by the Holy Spirit, He enters into the nature of those who consecrate themselves wholly to Him, and begins to live freely and mightily within them, He will not only manifest much of the grace and power of his own human life, but He will also come into collision with the prejudices and interests of worldly and evil men, incurring as of old their most virulent dislike, and probably their violent resistance.

THE ORIGIN OF PERSECUTION

We cannot analyze at length all the causes of the inevitable dislike which the world feels towards the Christian. They are many, and obvious. For instance: The man of God should be an embodied conscience. The one endeavour of ungodly men is to drown the remonstrances of conscience. For this they plunge into gaiety, or business, or exploration; for this they hurry from scene to scene; for this they studiously avoid all that savours of God or his claims. But in a holy life they meet with a devout and constant recognition of those claims, coupled with a faithful endeavour to fulfil them. There is an embodiment of righteousness without them, which arouses into instant and unwelcome activity those convictions of their duty which they have done their best to quell. There is the pride of heart which resents superiority in another. There is the envy which grudges the influence that goodness always attracts. There is the malice which broods over the contrast that purity presents to impurity, until the fact of its doing so bulks as a positive injury. All these strong passions of the unrenewed heart, like Pilate and Herod of old, become friends in their common antagonism to the saintliness which intrudes upon their privacy and menaces their peace.

Besides, there is always an aggressiveness in true Christianity which arouses strong resistance. We readily admit that, in one aspect, it does not strive, nor cry, nor lift up, nor cause its voice to be heard. Soft as the zephyr which scarcely stirs the bearded wheat; light as the tread of the morning; gentle as distilling dew-drops--does the religion of Jesus spread onwards over the world. And yet it endangers crafts; undermines profitable but nefarious trades; steals away customers from the devil's shrines; attacks vested interests; and turns the world upside down. A tiresome, annoying, gain-sapping thing is pure and undefiled religion; and the devil's servants have a bad time of it when the Puritan reigns, or the Revival sweeps as a prairie fire through the community. "If we let Him alone, all men will believe on Him; and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."

Have we not here the clue to the subsidence of persecution in our days? True, each age has its peculiar discipline; and ours is cursed by a soft, luxurious worldliness, which is most hostile to the manifestation of strong and heroic principle. But is not there too great a contrast between our lives and those of our forefathers? Where is the saintliness of living, the zeal for souls, the uncompromising rebuke of evil, the sturdy adherence to principle at all costs, which littered the Alpine summits with the bones of slaughtered saints, and lit the fires of Smithfield? If these virtues were more generally embodied in the daily practice of the majority, as they are in that of a small minority of professing Christians, can there be much doubt as to the issue? Men might not adopt the barbarous expedients of former days, for even in this they unconsciously do homage to Jesus of Nazareth; but they would find some other method of ridding themselves of the unwelcome protests of holy lives against the selfishness and evil of their own condition.

Ah, it is one of the most terrible rebukes that Incarnate Love can administer, when it says of any now, as it did of some in the days of his flesh: "The world cannot hate you." Not to be hated by the world; to be loved and flattered and caressed by the world--is one of the most terrible positions in which a Christian can find himself. "What bad thing have I done," asked the ancient sage, "that he should speak well of me?" The absence of the world's hate proves that we do not testify against it that its works are evil. The warmth of the world's love proves that we are of its own. The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God (John 7:7; 15:19; James 4:4).

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE PERSECUTED

"Blessed are ye." A beatitude caught from the lips of Jesus, and ringing but again in our next chapter (Matt. 5:10 and 1 Pet. 4:14). Blessedness is a higher thing than happiness, and is consistent with the most trying circumstances. But what a universal testimony has been given to that blessedness shining from the faces and breathing from the lips of those who have suffered for righteousness' sake!

A recent writer has culled the words from dying martyr-testimonies; and they testify to this inner blessedness. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord," said one martyr, as he was condemned to die.

This prison very sweet to me
Hath been since I came here;
And so would also hanging be.
If Thou didst then appear

Sang Bunyan in Bedford Gaol (Jail), his eyes dazzled with frescoes painted by angel hands on the damp walls. "Methinks they strew roses at my feet," said another, as the faggots were lighted about him.

And wherein does this blessedness consist? It comes through the inner possession by the spirit of that heavenly temper, which is inspired by the Spirit of God, and is close akin to Him, and is in itself blessedness. It comes through the enforced constraint laid upon the soul to seek its delight and rapture in the love and friendship of Christ, the Friend of the persecuted, who is always nearest to those who are most like Him in suffering, because most like in character and life. It comes through the glad consciousness of being on the path trodden already by prophets and righteous men, who have gone through flood and flame, but who have overcome, and are set down with Christ on his throne. It comes because the Spirit of glory and of God rests brooding in the heart. It comes because the exceeding great reward beckons from on high.

There are many gates into blessedness. It stands four-square; and, judging from our Lord's words, it has two gateways on each side, so that no life is so far away or obscure, but it may enter in and dwell there. Choose you which gate you will! And if you are not able to lay claim to poverty of spirit, or mercifulness, or purity in heart, then dare to do well at all costs; pursue patiently the path of lofty integrity and blameless purity; bear the suffering which will inevitably fall to your lot with uncomplaining patience and fortitude--and there will be administered to you a blessed and abundant entrance into that kingdom of blessedness which is already established on earth, standing with its sapphire walls and gates amid the erections of men, unstained by their pollutions, as it is unseen by any but purged eyes. "If ye suffer for righteousness sake, blessed are ye."

THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE PERSECUTED

(1) Be not afraid. There seems here a reminiscence on Peter's part of words heard long before: "Be not afraid of them that kill the body; and after that have no more that they can do." "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." No pallor on your face. No clammy sweat on your brow. No quiver through your frame.

How may we obtain this lion-heart, which knows no fear in the presence of our foes? There is but one answer possible. Expel fear by fear. Drive out the fear of man by the fear of God. "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." These words come back to us from a very stormy era in Jewish history. "It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." And the Lord spake to Isaiah his servant, "with a strong hand," saying, Do not join in this panic-stricken cry, or seek to meet confederacy by confederacy; fear ye not their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. And He shall be for a sanctuary (Isa. 7-8.).

How often we see fear expel fear! The fear of being burnt will nerve a woman to let herself down by a water-pipe from the upper storeys of a house in flames. The fear of losing her young will inspire the timid bird to throw herself before the steps of man, attracting his notice from them to herself. The fear of the whip will expel the horse's dread of the object at which it has taken fright. Oh for that Divine habit of soul which so conceives of the majesty, and power, and love of God, that it dares not sin against Him, but would rather brave a world in arms than bring a shadow over his face! "So did not I," said a sincere and noble man, "because of the fear of God." And when a man so fears God as that he fears to sin against Him, he will find God to be a sanctuary into which he may retreat, and enjoy an inviolable defence. "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in his pavilion. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me."

(2) Be ready always with a reason for your hope--We are not always to be talking about our faith, but proving it by divine deeds. But when men, seeing the fruits of our faith, begin to inquire as to its ground and reason, we should always be ready to give them a satisfactory reply.

How remarkable it is, in opposition to many of the contradictory voices of our time, to meet with this clear insistence on the sweet reasonableness of the Christian's hope! The Bible does not appeal to a blind credulity. Many of its statements are above reason; but none of them are against it. God's continuous appeal is contained in the inspired summons, "Come, let us reason together, saith the Lord." The reasonings of pride will be assuredly puzzled and non-plussed; but those of meekness will find abundant scope for adoring wonder and assured conviction, in the mighty depths of the thoughts of God.

Young people, the Bible has nothing to fear from the exercise of your reason! It is not possible that the God who built up your brains and endowed you with that marvellous faculty of reason will ever do violence to one of his noblest gifts. Reasoning was a favourite pursuit with the greatest of the Apostles. But reason must ever hold the torch to faith: she must be the handmaid to collect materials for the sanctified judgment; the analyst to test and separate and re-combine and think over again, as Kepler said, the first thoughts of God. Where reason is the servant of a reverent and holy spirit, as in Newton or Faraday, or the Magi who knelt before the infant Saviour, it is the glory and boast of man. The mistake of so many is not in the exercise of reason, but in putting reason in its wrong place. If you put reason on the throne of your inner life, you may profess to see; but you will be blind. But if you enthrone faith and hope, whilst reason waits their bidding and obeys their behest, you will be wiser than foe, or teacher, or grey-haired sage (Psa. 119:98-100).

Let us have a reason for our faith, based on personal experience, or observation, or the study of evidence, or of fulfilled prophecy;

or, above all, wrought by the Holy Spirit in our hearts; and, though we need not be ever obtruding it, let us never flinch from stating it when asked. And let us give our reasons, or conduct our arguments, in a temper which shall be the best evidence of the divine character of our faith. Let there be meekness toward the face of man, and reverential fear toward the face of God--the temper of those who confess that, at the best, they are but children, gathering a few shells on the shores of the boundless ocean of truth, which sweeps far away to the horizon where eternity and infinity blend.

(3) Have a flood conscience.--The Apostle Paul also speaks much of conscience, and of the necessity of perpetually exercising ourselves to have a conscience void of offence toward God and man. It is well to obey these repeated commands. The Christian, who faithfully follows the inner voice, and conforms in all things to its behests, will not be far wrong. A "good conscience" implies a "good conversation" in Christ.

There are many kinds of conscience spoken of in Scripture, but this epithet flood is very comprehensive. Do my readers know what a good conscience is? It is a conscience which is purged from dead works (Heb. 9:4); sprinkled with the blood of Christ (Heb. 10:22), borne witness to by the Holy Ghost (Rom. 9:1): whilst a joy, which is full of glory, wells up within it (2 Cor. 1:12); and as a calm, unruffled lake of peace it reflects the cloudless heaven of God's good pleasure above. Such a conscience is a good companion for our days, and a good bedfellow for our nights. Every effort should be made to preserve its integrity. And when life is moulded by such an inward influence, it will live down all misrepresentation and slander; it will outshine all the mists of envy and malice which have obscured its earliest beams; it will falsify false reports. Detractors shall be ashamed at the triumphant answer made to their accusations by the unblemished beauty of a holy Christian life; whilst those that love God shall take heart. "The righteous shall see it, and rejoice; and all iniquity shall stop her mouth."

Let all who are persecuted possess their souls in patience. Suffering comes to all men; but if we must suffer, it is a thousand times better to suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing. Even here and now it is fraught with blessedness: but who can estimate the exceeding and eternal weight of glory which awaits each member of the noble army of martyrs --from Jesus Christ, who, before Pontius Pilate, witnessed the good confession, to the least in his kingdom who has stood up for Him unmoved, amid the mockery of schoolfellows, or the taunts of a group of shop mates?

XIX. THE SUBSTITUTIONARY WORK OF CHRIST

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."--1 Peter 3:18.

CHRIST suffered! That is the key-note. These believers were suffering--suffering for well-doing. Suffering for conscience' sake. And they were in heaviness through manifold trials. So the Apostle reminds them that Christ also suffered. How sweet is that little word also! Caesar was wont to cheer his troops by addressing them as fellow-soldiers. Such is the force of this word. Are you homeless? Christ also had not where to lay his head. Are you poor? Christ also for our sakes became poor. Are you tempted? Christ also hath suffered, being tempted.

But Christ's sufferings are unique! Though He was righteous, He suffered as no other one has for sins; for it is clearly taught here that He suffered as a substitute, "the Just for the unjust."

It is quite true, as we are so often told, that the death of the Lord Jesus has had a great moral effect upon men, revealing the love of God, teaching the law of self-sacrifice, showing how keenly sin makes itself felt in the holy sensitive nature of eternal love. But, besides this subjective side of our Saviour's death, there is another, an objective one. He has not only done something towards men, softening and moving them to thoughts of unselfishness, and deeds of heroism, to which otherwise they must have been for ever strangers; but He has done something also toward the satisfaction of the great laws of the Divine nature, which make for righteousness. And if He had not done the latter, his work in the former had been in vain. It was not enough to touch men, there must be a public reparation made to that violated law, of which both Scripture and conscience speak. So only could penitent sinners be accepted.

It is not necessary that men should understand the philosophy of the Atonement in order to be saved by it. No doubt, thousands have been saved by it who had an erroneous conception of its true significance, in some or even many of its aspects. Certainly our comfort and assurance become stronger in proportion to the clearness and Scripturalness of our views about the death of our Saviour. Still, our salvation does not depend on the accuracy of our intellectual conceptions; but on our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as a Saviour, who through death and resurrection has acquired the power to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, their great High Priest.

The substitutionary character of the death of Christ is woven into the texture of Scripture, as the cross into a venerable minster. You cannot eradicate it without destroying the edifice which it underlies. Men must distort the plain meaning of words, ere they can

succeed in its elimination from the sacred page.

As we study the Levitical law, we find substitution in every sacrifice. What else is implied in the care to have a stainless victim; in the imposition of hands; in the confession of guilt on the innocent head; in the death of the guiltless, while the guilty goes to his home free? What other truth is taught in the constant reiteration of phrases like that which accosts us in these words--phrases caught from the lips of the Master Himself, who spoke of his life being given a ransom for many? What else can explain the marvellous arguments of the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians? If only the masses of Christian people would read the Bible for themselves, instead of reading so many books about the Bible, they would be compelled to admit that the Scriptures are unanimous in attesting the substitutionary character of the sufferings of Jesus. He died for us. He bore our guilt and shame, our curse and penalty. He took to Himself the penal consequences of human sin, and put them away for ever.

But, in proclaiming this doctrine, let us avoid certain misstatements.

(1) Let us beware of representing God as loving men only in consequence of Christ's death--This is as illogical as it is unscriptural. For it is one of the postulates of all true thinking--that God is; that God is the same; that God is the same Infinite Being, the I AM, the same in the yesterday of the past, and in the to-morrow of the future, as in the to-day of the present. But if the death of Christ be represented as having pacified an inexorable and avenging Deity, causing Him to love those who else must have withered under his relentless hate, it makes Him other than He was, and the Divine nature must have suffered a change, which is unthinkable and inadmissible.

The death of Christ is due to the love of God. God gave his Son because He so loved the world. The cross is the expression of a love which is older than the oldest star; more ancient than the most venerable elder who stands in the zenith light of heaven; long as eternity, vast as infinity, deep as the being of God. In this was manifested the love of God, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

(2) Let us also beware of making too great a division in the Divine government between God's righteousness and his love There is no collision in God. The nature of God is not defined as righteousness, but as love. If it had been defined as righteousness, it is doubtful if love could have been included. But being defined as love, righteousness is of course included. And there is no collision in God between the two, for his righteousness is a fruit and offspring of his love. He must be righteous, because He is love. He loves; and, therefore, as the Judge of all the earth, He must do right.

It would not be consistent with love if He were to let sin go unnoticed or unpunished; or if He were to allow the moral law to fall into disuse; or if He were to permit us to set at defiance those promptings of our conscience which even we approve. Is it love, which with easy good nature suffers children to do as they list, unrebuked and unrestrained? Is it love to allow murder and lust and rapine to curse a nation of unoffending subjects without an attempt to bring the wrongdoers to justice? Is it love to a man himself to permit him to go on unchecked in a course of ceaseless evil? To ask these questions is to answer them. Love involves Righteousness, and the insistence on the maintenance of right. And in the cross of Jesus there is no variance between the attributes of God. Mercy and truth met together; righteousness and peace kissed each other.

But when men demand that we should refuse to believe in substitution because God is love, and therefore as not requiring an answer to the demands of his justice, we reply that, because He is love, therefore He must be just; He must maintain his law; He must exact penalty in respect of the violation of the demands of his righteousness; He must act in the moral sphere as He ever acts in the natural, in allowing law to secure its requisitions and demands when it has been set at nought.

(3) Let us beware of dissociating the persons of the blessed Trinity in the work of atonement.--The death of Christ is sometimes so stated as if He stepped in between God and man, and did something on the prompting of his own heart, apart altogether from the Father. And then, of course, the objection arises, Why did God make or permit the innocent One to suffer?

But it must never be forgotten that the death of the cross was the act of the whole Deity. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." "Christ, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself to God." "My Father, which dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works." The Son did nothing of Himself: and how much less could He have wrought his greatest work apart from his Father! He was only translating into human guise and language acts and deeds which He saw his Father do.

And so in the cross we find the eternal God taking to Himself the consequences of human sin; Himself becoming the propitiation for the sin of the world; bearing it Himself; pressed under it as a cart is pressed under sheaves; and putting it away.

This cannot be unjust. It would be unjust to take a good boy and make him suffer for a naughty one; but it cannot be unjust for Brunson Alcott to suffer himself the penalty which should be borne by the boys who have broken the regulations of his school. It cannot be unjust for one to substitute his life for another--else some of the noblest deeds of human history must be expunged.

Yes, reader, you may take this home as yours, and say, thankfully: God has suffered for me in the person of Jesus, the Just for the

unjust. You may never have thanked Him, or availed yourself of the benefits of his death, as a man might leave bank-stock to accumulate unclaimed; you may even secure for yourself eternal condemnation by shutting out the love and light of God, and electing to live in the darkness of selfishness and godlessness. And yet it is true that out of his great love the eternal God has done something for you which He never did for angels, and which might make you blessed for ever.

(4) Let us beware of suggesting that Christ has ceased to suffer.--There is a sense, of course, in which our Saviour suffered for sins once. The direct work of substitution was accomplished on the cross, and was definitely concluded when Jesus cried, "it is finished!" The Resurrection proves that the work of propitiation is an accomplished fact.

But we must not suppose that Jesus has passed into an unsuffering heaven. He still suffers in each of his members. He is crucified afresh when we yield to wilful sins. He travails in birth until his kingdom come. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. How can He be at rest, whilst his beloved are tossing in the storm, and the members of his bride are not complete? And through his sufferings blessing is accruing; they cannot be in vain: we shall see all soon; meanwhile let us bear fellowship with Him in his anguish, drinking of his cup, that we may share his glory.

We stand now on the verge of a mysterious and difficult passage; but this much is true and clear, that Christ suffered for us to bring us to God. Let us understand that, through faith in Him, we are made one with Him, and stand where He does in the very presence of God. "Made nigh by the blood of the cross." Let us in private prayer, or at the Lord's table, remember that nothing brings us so near as those precious sufferings. And, whenever we feel estranged and distant, let us betake ourselves to the cross; and, sitting there, meditate on those wounds, till we are brought again into rapturous fellowship with our God, our Light, our Love, our exceeding Joy. And then from our sure fellowship with God we may dare to look out on all mysteries, not trying to explain God by the mystery, but the mystery by what we, in our own happy fellowship, know God to be. To whom be glory for ever!

XX. THE DAYS OF NOAH

"Put To death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit, in which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which aforetime were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a-preparing, wherein few--that is, eight--souls were saved through water: which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism; not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ: who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." 1 Peter 3:18-22 (R. V.).

IT would be unwise to load these pages with laboured references to the various and conflicting interpretations which have been put upon this difficult and much-debated passage. It appears better, after much studying of them, to take the words as they stand, and seek to set forth in clear outline the thought which seems to have been in the Apostle's mind; so far at least as the present writer conceives of it.

The main idea is of course a comparison between the experiences of our Lord and those of his suffering followers. The sacred writer was striving to the utmost to sustain and comfort them under the severe stress of persecution through which they were passing. "Take heart," he seems to say, "your sufferings are not exceptional; they run in the Divine family; even our Master was not exempt from them: He also suffered in the flesh; but his sufferings did not stay his blessed ministry; nay, they even augmented his sphere of usefulness; "He was quickened in spirit," in which also He went forth to herald his accomplished work in regions to which, but for death, He had not obtained access. So shall it also be with you. Your sufferings shall not clip your wings, but add to your powers of flight. The things which happen to you shall fall out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel; and it is through death that you must pass up to share his glorious resurrection and imperial power.

1. AN HISTORICAL FACT

"Put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit, in which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which aforetime were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah."

In one of Isaiah's most splendid passages, the king of Babylon, having fallen at last before that mightier Monarch who comes with equal foot to the hut of the peasant and the palace of the king, is depicted as a thin, pale ghost entering the abodes of the departed. And as he comes, the shades of the kings of the nations and chiefs of the peoples stir themselves, and with thin voices accost him in tones of withering sarcasm: "Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? Is this the man that made the earth to tremble?--that did shake kingdoms?"

But surely the abodes of the departed were stirred after another fashion when the Son of God, having welcomed the dying thief to Paradise, refused to rest there after the strain of his long conflict and agony, but started forth to spend the brief interval until his

resurrection in proclaiming with herald voice the wondrous news of accomplished redemption. This is surely the emphatic teaching, not of this passage only, but also of that marvellous announcement of the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians: "He descended into the lower parts of the earth," a phrase which was constantly used among the Jews for the nethermost abyss, the unseen Hadean world, the abode of the departed. On such testimony as this, the Church in all ages has affirmed, He descended into Hell (the word Hell, of course, standing, as it does so often on the page of Scripture, for Hades). We do not know the full burden of our Master's message there. It is not declared; and all our surmisings must fall short of the reality. All that we need to notice is that the word employed of his ministry is carefully chosen, and only includes the work of a herald, as distinguished from that of an evangelist.

It may be asked why He preached only to those who were disobedient in the days of Noah? Why were his messages confined to these? Were there not many more who had been disobedient at other periods of the world's sad story? But none of these are excluded. The sacred writer does not say that the Lord addressed no others, but that He certainly addressed these. And our attention is thus focussed on them, because it was his desire to guide our thoughts to a comparison, already forming in his mind, and casting its shadow over his words, and which would draw lessons from the days of Noah for our own.

Are we then to think that these spirits had another chance, and swarmed, as the mediaeval artists loved to depict, in rejoicing crowds after Christ into Paradise? There is nothing of this sort in these words. And it is a mistake to trust to inference in a case so utterly removed from human cognizance and experience. The Bible turns our thought from speculation about the future to life in the living present. "What is that to thee? follow thou Me!"

All that we need to concern ourselves with now is this fragment which Peter has handed down to us from the posthumous sayings of Christ, when He taught them for forty days, and "spoke to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." We must clearly understand that Christ's death did not stop his usefulness, but that He ministered still; just as Joseph, when cut off from his duties in the palace, ministered to his fellow-prisoners, proclaiming to one his deliverance and to another his doom.

2. A CONFESSION

The story of the Flood seems to have made a great impression on the mind and heart of the Apostle; and the event is constantly on his lips (2 Peter 2:5; 3:5-6). And here he follows closely on the words of his Master, who compared the days of Noah with those of the Son of Man.

We need not stay to describe in detail the days which were before the Flood, or the condition of the old world. Its course was precisely similar to that of the world around us still "They ate; they drank; they married, and were given in marriage." The arts and sciences were richly cultivated. Gigantic engineering and architectural works must have abounded, or it would have been impossible to construct such a marvellous vessel as the ark. Refinement and civilization, side by side with abnormal and horrid crimes. The giddy pursuit of pleasure; the eager search for wealth; the lawless gratification of evil propensity; the reckless disregard of the claims of God; the rush of the torrent of evil and unholiness, in spite of the remonstrances and pleadings of the grey-headed preacher for a hundred years. All these are what we see today around us in confused and grievous manifestation.

And there is as little need to describe the new world into which Noah and his children stepped down from the mountain slopes on which their ark grounded. How delicious the balmy air, the green grass carpeting the earth, the luxuriant growth of vegetation from the soil enriched and fructified by the alluvial deposit of the waters! It was a world from which sin, and crime, and evil, had been purged, and Creation seemed already to anticipate the vision of the seer: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea."

But surely that old world is very significant of the old life into which we are born by nature; and that new world of the new life into which we enter in regeneration. And the Flood of water, through which Noah passed from the old into the new, bearing him onwards on its broad and swelling bosom, from evil and familiar scenes into new and ecstatic surroundings, is a type of the blessed experience of which the Epistles so often speak; when believers through faith in Jesus pass out of the old life of selfishness and death, into the glorious new life of resurrection blessedness; when they sit with Christ in the Heavenlies; when they reckon themselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God; sharing the spirit of the Saviour's death, and of his resurrection: at such times they may be said to repeat the experience of the patriarch, when he passed from the old world into the new.

The early Church was accustomed to set forth this spiritual experience by the outward act of immersion in water. Believers, in confession that they had passed from their previous life of sin into the blessed life of fellowship with the risen Saviour, were buried under water in the likeness of his death, and were lifted again above the water in the likeness of his resurrection. The water in the pool or river might thus be compared to the waters of Noah's Flood, because through each there was a passage from the old to the new, just as in the grave of Jesus there was a passage from the more limited life of the flesh into the freer life of the spirit. "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Baptism, indeed, has no sacramental efficacy; but there

are no trifles in the kingdom of God; and obedience to a mere outward rite may make a world of difference between the uneasiness of an evil conscience and the answer of a good one.

3. AN ANALOGY

We have now seen three facts. First, that Christ's suffering did not hinder his heralding his finished work. Second, that He heralded it to the spirits who in Noah's day were disobedient. Third, that we are like Noah, and Christ, too, in having passed through the waters of death: not the death of the body; but the death of the spirit to its former tastes and delights, because it has entered so fully into the meaning of Christ's death, and into participation with his new life.

What then? Since we have entered into this new and blessed life, are we to be indifferent to those who belong to the old world and life from which we profess to have passed away? Nay, that cannot be; the very metaphors on which we have been dwelling exclude such a thought, and banish it from our serious consideration. In the light of these analogies it cannot be tolerated for a moment.

Of course it would have made the analogy more complete if it could have been said that Noah, after the Flood, had continued preaching to his old companions. But that could not have happened. Yet the same purpose was served, though with a slight change in the person of the herald. For Jesus, whose death and burial were symbolized in the Flood, of whom Noah was a type, and with whose death we are identified, went to these self-same spirits, and spake with them. It was equivalent to Noah going; nay, it was better. Certainly the spirit of Noah's ministry was fully realized in that of his great Antitype.

In my opinion, then, the drift of this passage is to show that it becomes us to herald the tidings of the cross to the old companions of our former life; we are, as it were, to go back to them across the waters of the death-flood, not to live again in that world which we have abjured, but to declare the glad tidings of salvation.

Yes, and even their persecution of us should not hinder our efforts for their salvation. Indeed, we shall probably discover that our very sufferings will loose our tongues and enlarge our opportunities. In the stocks we may so sing praise that the prisoners may hear. In Caesar's house, our bonds for Christ will be manifest in all the palace. In our martyrdoms we shall light fires which shall flame up over the world, and shall never be put out.

Noah's Flood makes us think, not only of that symbolic death which is as much the theme of Rom. 6 as of this passage, but of that literal death, which these believers had to face in the form of martyrdom, and which, unless the Lord come first, we too must experience. But in whatever form death comes to the believer, whether in the acts of daily self-denial, or in the definite abjuring of some form of evil, or in the dissolution of this natural body, it may be met calmly and joyfully, because it is always followed by resurrection.

Through death we follow our Master's steps, which lead to the upland lawns through the valley of the shadow of death. Let us fix our constant gaze on his resurrection, which is a type of ours also, as He takes his place on the right hand of God, "having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." We shall share that power only in proportion as we are willing to share his death.

XXI. ONE WITH HIM IN DEATH

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."--1 Peter 4:1-2.

THE rest of his time in the flesh!" Who can tell how long that may be for any one of us? Shorter to some of us than we think; but, in a sense, short to all. The sands run swiftly through life's hour-glass. The shadow hastens to go down upon the dial. The waves eat away so quickly the dwindling shoal of land which crumbles beneath us. And the years, with inexorable pressure, lay their hands on us, and urge us to flee towards the goal. Such thoughts were much in the Apostle's mind. In the next Epistle, he says, "the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly" (R.V.).

The Christian finds nothing in such thoughts to make him sad. Every milestone marks the growing nearness of his home. The waves cannot be crossed too swiftly by the eager traveller who impatiently counts the hours that interpose between him and the embrace of wife or child. Before us lie the ages of eternity. Hark to the murmur of their waves, as the trained ear catches the beat of the ocean's music, borne on the night breeze! Ages filled with a blessedness of personal enjoyment and rapturous ministry which defy tongue to tell or heart to picture. The dim outlines already sketched stir the heart with ecstasy; but what will the completed picture be, when God fills in the details with his own hand! Take heart, fellow-sufferers and fellow-workers, our redemption draweth nigh. Day is breaking. "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed?"

But the blessed future must not divert our thoughts from the duties to be discharged during the rest of the time which we are to spend in the flesh. We must not be dreamers, but warriors. We must fill our shortening days with strenuous endeavour; like the weary toiler who hastens with redoubled energy to finish the garment at which she has been working with sore fingers, because the only candle she can afford is burning low, and must soon flicker out. There is therefore a noise of war in this verse. To arms! To arms! Arm yourselves with the same mind; and when we ask What mind? we are told to arm ourselves with the mind that took Jesus to his death.

In a venerable old church at Innsbruck, famous for containing the tomb of the great Emperor Maximilian, there is a magnificent bronze statue of Godfrey of Boulogne, the illustrious crusader. His head is covered with a helmet, and on the helmet rests a crown of thorns. Of course, there was a meaning in the mind of the artist other than that with which we now invest the strange conjunction. He doubtless designed to represent the sacred cause for which that helmet was donned. But we may discover an apt symbol of the teaching of our Apostle, who unites in these verses the armour of the Christian soldier, and the recollection of Christ's suffering in the flesh.

This witness of the sufferings of Christ first takes us to the cross; and after gazing reverently on that spectacle of love, we are brought to a point where two ways diverge. And the only way of discovering and maintaining the right path is to imbibe the spirit of that wondrous death; and to glory in the cross of Christ. In hoc signo vinces. And thus we shall "no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."

1. DIVERGENT PATHS

(1) On the one side the broad way, trodden by so many feet, of indulgence of the flesh "The lusts of men." Lust is appetite run wild. There is no harm in any natural appetite, considered in itself. Each is implanted in us for wise and necessary purposes. Man is made as a self-acting machine; and he is not only reminded of necessary duties by the whirr of the alarm, but is driven to perform them by the goad of hungry appetites on the one hand, and by the attraction of satisfied appetites on the other.

But appetite has been spoilt by the Fall. It has become disturbed in its action, so that it does not now work as God intended it to do, when He made man, and pronounced his nature very good. When man fell, appetite broke from the enfeebled grasp of the will, and began to seek after its own gratification, irrespective of those necessary uses and legitimate bounds which had been assigned by the Creator's love and wisdom. And so all down the ages, the appetites of man's nature have treated the Imperial will as the barons of the middle ages often treated their Liege Sovereign, whom they practically set at nought, following their own wild and lawless ways. And the mischief of this revolt has been manifested by the way in which the lawlessness of the flesh has infected the mind; so that mind and heart have followed its leadings towards unnatural and excessive indulgence, and men have "fulfilled the desires (or lusts) of the flesh and of the mind."

These habits have descended to us from the generations which have preceded us. Each one of us is therefore born into the world, subject to the action of appetites which are no longer in the same pure and holy state in which they came from the Creator's hand, but are biased strongly in the direction of lawless and unholy manifestation. And if we obey their promptings, as so many do, we become their slaves; sink to the level of the brute creation, which know no law but that of appetite; and come under the wrath of God (Eph. 2:3).

Now, what we need is, not that these appetites should be eradicated--but that they should be controlled; kept only for necessary uses; deprived of all those evil gratifications which have become to them a second nature. Never in this life will they lose the capability of desiring unholy gratification; but those desires, passing as a momentary thrill through our being, and failing to attract or master the will, are not necessarily sins; and it is clearly possible to live in the flesh, which is very sensitive and susceptible to evil suggestion, and yet not to gratify its demands in a single iota beyond the limits of the will and law of God.

This is what the Gospel promises. Not that we should be deprived of any part of our nature. Not that we should never feel the thrill of temptation, and the tendency on the part of our flesh to respond. Not that we should even reach a condition in which it would be impossible to sin. But that the unholy confederacy between the flesh and the spirit should be broken, so that whatever may be the passing spasms of the flesh in the direction of unlawful gratification, they may not be accepted or permitted by the moral nature--the will--the regal individuality of man.

(2) What a glorious contrast to the will of the flesh is "the will of God!" To do this will Jesus came to earth. To do this was, as He said, his "meat?" It was the fire-cloud that lit his pathway; the yoke in carrying which He found rest; the Urim and Thummim, which dimmed or shone with heavenly guidance. There is no course more safe or blessed than to live in the will of God. God's will is good will. Where the will of God lies across the wilderness pathway, there flowers bloom, and waters gush from rocks of flint. Sometimes the flesh rebels against it, because it means crucifixion and self-denial: but under the rugged shell the sweetest kernel nestles; and none know the ecstasy of living save those who refuse the broad, easy road of the lusts of men, to climb the steep, upward path of doing the will of God from the heart.

2. THE SECRET AND POWER OF SELF-DENIAL

It is not easy to refuse that broad, easy road. No effort is required to take it. Life tends to roll easily and luxuriously down its gentle slopes. The stream insensibly bears the boat, gaily decked with flags, and filled with careless or idle pleasure-seekers, toward the fatal rapids. What is the secret which shall lead a man to say "No" to self; to turn a deaf ear to its solicitations; and to face the steep ascent? And, supposing he has the desire to resist, what power is there strong enough to enable him to stem the torrent, beating and seething against him at every stroke?

The answer is found in the cross of our blessed Lord.--"Christ suffered in the flesh." "The pious contemplation of his death will most powerfully kill the love of sin in the soul, and kindle an ardent hatred to it. The believer--looking on Jesus as crucified for him, and wounded for his transgressions; and taking in deep thoughts of his spotless innocency, which deserved no such thing, and of his matchless love, which yet endured it all for him--will then naturally think: Shall I be a friend to that which was his deadly enemy? Shall sin be sweet to me, which was so bitter to Him; and that for my sake? Shall I ever lend it a good look, or entertain a favourable thought of that which shed my Lord's blood? Shall live in that for which He died, and died to kill in me? Oh, let it not be!

All this is true; and yet there is a truth beneath. It must never be forgotten that Christ died "in the likeness of sinful flesh." He died, not only for sin, but to condemn sin in the flesh. In his death an entire break was made between the life which He had lived in contact with sin, though Himself sinless, and that other life which He spends on the resurrection side of death. And since we are viewed in the mind and purpose of God, as having died with Him in his death, and being raised in his resurrection, we must also regard ourselves as having passed out of the life in which flesh and sense reign supreme, into that other life where they are for ever left behind, and have no foothold or abode. "In that He died, He died unto sin once; in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Let us take high ground in dealing with the solicitations and promptings of the flesh. Let us meet every thrill of passion with the complete indifference, the stony silence, of death. Let us say, as fashionable people are wont to say of acquaintances whom they do not wish to see, I am not at home to them. Let us treat them, as Peter treated his Lord, whom for many months he had known as his bosom friend, and yet denied him, saying, I know not the man.

And so, when strong desires come through our bodies, and strive to send evil thoughts and passions through the heart and will, they will find the fire-proof iron door slammed suddenly in their face, so that the dread contagion may not spread. The flesh may have its desires; but the cleansed heart will refuse to yield to them. And thus the flesh will be crucified and mortified with its affections and lusts, and the conscience kept void of offence.

This power of refusing to harbour or consider the unholy promptings of the flesh is a very blessed one. But it is not of man, nor to be built up by holy resolution or endeavour. It is the power of God in man; the life of the risen Jesus; the grace of the Holy Spirit, who strives against the flesh, so that we may not do the things that otherwise we would (Gal. 5:17, R.V.). Realize that as one with Christ you have, in the mind of God, died. Deliberately choose that death at once and for evermore as your portion and lot. Then look to the Holy Spirit to put the sentence of death into daily and hourly execution. And you will find that, though the flesh still lives, it will no longer govern you; but the Spirit of God will govern it through you, robbing it of power, and keeping it so utterly in subjection that you may be tempted to think that it is changed in nature. This, however, will be a mistake, for if the Spirit's power is relaxed for only an instant, the old fatal habits will re-assert themselves, and if persisted in will work with more than their former force.

3. A STIRRING INJUNCTION

"Arm yourselves with the same mind." Drink into the spirit of Christ's death till it be repeated in you, and you die to the flesh as He died to it. Thus shall be repeated the ancient legend of the stigmata, which grew in the flesh of the saint engaged perpetually in meditating on the wounds of Christ. And every time you dare to refuse the lawless strivings of self, you will enter more into the meaning of his death and of his resurrection. Let us resolutely put this piece of celestial armour on. It will need resolution and determination, as the first shocks of battle will be trying and terrible. But victory is sure. And though there will be no cessation in the temptation, there will be cessation in the yielding to it, which is sin: "For he that has died is freed from sin" (Rom. 6:7, R.V.). And in time the bodily desires, long thwarted, will give less and less trouble, as if they were weary of the incessant defeat.

"Wouldst thou then have much power against sin, and much increase of holiness, let thine eye be much on Christ; set thine heart on Him; let it dwell in Him, and be still with Him. When sin is likely to prevail, go to Him, tell Him of the insurrection of his enemies, and thy inability to resist, and desire Him to suppress them, that they may gain nothing by their stirring but some new wound. If thy heart begin to move towards sin, lay it before Him: the beams of his love shall eat out that fire of those sinful lusts. Wouldst thou have thy pride, and passions, and love of the world killed, go sue for the virtue of his death, and that shall do it. Seek his spirit--the spirit of meekness, humility, and Divine love. Look on Him, and He shall draw thy heart heavenwards, and unite it to Himself, and make it like Himself. And is not that the thing thou desirest?"