

1 Thessalonians Sermons-Alexander Maclaren

FAITH, LOVE, HOPE, AND THEIR FRUITS

'Your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope. — 1 Thessalonians 1:3

THIS Epistle, as I suppose we all know, is Paul's first letter. He had been hunted out of Thessalonica by the mob, made the best of his way to Athens, stayed there for a very short time, then betook himself to Corinth, and at some point of his somewhat protracted residence there, this letter was written. So that we have in it his first attempt, so far as we know, to preach the Gospel By the pen. It is interesting to notice how, whatever changes and developments there may have been in him thereafter, all the substantial elements of his latest faith beam out in this earliest letter, and how even in regard to trifles we see the germs of much that came afterwards. This same triad, you remember, 'faith, hope, charity,' recurs in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, though with a very significant difference in the order, which I shall have to dwell upon presently.

The letter is interesting on another account. Remembering that it was only very short time since these Thessalonians had turned from idols to serve the living God, there is something very beautiful in the overflowing generosity of commendation, which never goes beyond veracity, with which he salutes them. Their Christian character, like seeds sown in some favoured tropical land, had sprung up swiftly; yet not with the dangerous kind of swiftness which presages decay of the growth. It was only a few days since they had been grovelling before idols, but now he can speak of 'your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope'... and declare that the Gospel 'sounded out' from them — the word which he employs is that which is technically used for the blast of a trumpet — 'so that we need not to speak anything.'

Rapid growth is possible for us all, and is not always superficial.

I desire now to consider that pair of triads — the three foundation-stones, and the three views of the fair building that is reared upon them.

I. THE THREE FOUNDATION STONES

That is a natural metaphor to use, but it is not quite correct, for these three — faith, love, hope — are not to be conceived of as lying side by side. Rather than three foundations we have three courses of the building here; the lowest one, faith; the next one, love; and the top one, hope. The order in 1 Corinthians is different, 'faith, hope, charity,' and the alteration in the sequence is suggested by the difference of purpose. The Apostle intended in 1 Corinthians to dwell at some length thereafter on 'charity,' or 'love.' So he puts it last to make the link of connection with what he is going to say. But here he is dealing with the order of production, the natural order in which these three evolve themselves. And his thought is that they are like the shoots that successive springs bring upon the bough of a tree, where each year hem its own growth, and the summit of last year's becomes the basis of next. Thus we have, first, faith; then, shooting from that, love; and then, sustained by both, hope. Now let us look at that order.

It is a well-worn commonplace, which you may think it not needful for me to dwell upon here, that in the Christian theory, both of salvation and of morals, the basis of everything is trust. And that is no arbitrary theological arrangement, but it is the only means by which the life that is the basis both of salvation and of righteousness can be implanted in men. There is no other way by which Jesus Christ can come into our hearts than by what the New Testament calls 'trust,' which we have turned into the hard, theological concept which too often glides over people's minds without leaving any dint at all — 'faith.'

Distrust is united with trust. There is no trust without, complementary to it, self-distrust. Just as the sprouting seed sends one little radicle downwards, and that becomes the root, and at the same time sends up another one, white till it reaches the light, and it becomes the stem, so the underside of faith is self-distrust, and you must empty yourselves before you can open your hearts to be filled by Jesus. That being so, this self-distrustful trust is the beginning of everything. That is the alpha of the whole alphabet, however glorious and manifold may be the words into which its letters are afterwards combined.

Faith is the hand that grasps. It is the means of communication, it is the channel through which the grace which is the life, or, rather, I should say, the life which is the grace, comes to us. It is the open door by which the angel of God comes in with his gifts. It is like the petals of the flowers, opening when the sunshine kisses them, and, by opening, laying bare the depths of their calyxes to be illuminated and coloured, and made to grow by the sunshine which itself has opened them, and without the presence of which,

within the cup, there would have been neither life nor beauty. So faith is the basis of everything; the first shoot from which all the others ascend.

Brethren, have you that initial grace? I leave the question with you. If you have not that, you have nothing else.

Then again, out of faith rises love. No man can love God unless he behoves that God loves him. I, for my part, am old-fashioned and narrow enough not to believe that there is any deep, soul-cleansing or soul-satisfying love of God which is not the answer to the love that died on the Cross. But you must believe that, and more than believe it; you must have trusted and cast yourselves on it, in the utter abandonment of self-distrust and Christ-confidence, before there will well up in your heart the answering love to God. First faith, then love. My love is the reverberation of the primeval voice, the echo of God's. The angle at which the light falls on the mirror is the same as the angle at which it is reflected from it. And though my love at its highest is low, at its strongest is weak: yet, like the echo that is faint and far, feeble though it be, it is pitched on the same key, and is the prolongation of the same note as the mother-sound. So my love answers God's love, and it will never answer it unless faith has brought me within the auditorium, the circle wherein the voice that proclaims 'I love thee, my child,' can be heard.

Now, we do not need to ask ourselves whether Paul is here speaking of love to God or love to man. He is speaking of both, because the New Testament deals with the latter as being a part of the former, and sure to accompany it. But there is one lesson that I wish to draw.

If it be true that love in us is thus the result of faith in the love of God, let us learn how we grow in love. You cannot say, 'Now I will make an effort to love.' The circulation of the blood, the pulsations of the heart, are not within the power of the will. But you can say, 'Now I will make an effort to trust.' For faith is in the power of the will, and when the Master said, 'Ye will not come unto me,' He taught us that unbelief is not a mere intellectual deficiency or perversity, but that it is the result, in the majority of cases — I might almost say in all — of an alienated will

Therefore, if you wish to love, do not try to work yourself into a hysteria of affection, but take into your hearts and minds the Christian facts, and mainly the fact of the Cross, which will set free the frozen and imprisoned fountains of your affections, and cause them to flow out abundantly in sweet water. First faith, then love; and get at love through faith. That is a piece of practical wisdom that it will do us all good to keep in mind.

Then the third of the three, the topmost shoot, is hope. Hope is faith directed to the future. So it is clear enough that, unless I have that trust of which I have been speaking, I have none of the hope which the Apostle regards as flowing from it.

But love has to do with hope quite as much, though in a different way, as faith has to do with it. For in the direct proportion in which we are taking into our hearts Christ and His truth, and letting our hearts go out in love towards Him and communion with Him, will the glories beyond brighten and consolidate and magnify themselves in our eyes.

The hope of the Christian man is but the inference from his present faith, and the joy and sweetness of his present love. For surely when we rise to the heights which are possible to us all, and on which I suppose most Christian people have been sometimes, though for far too brief seasons; when we rise to the heights of communion with God, anything seems more possible to us than that death, or anything that lies in the future, should have power over a tie so sweet, so strong, so independent of externals, and so all-sufficing in its sweetness. Thus we shall be sure that God is our portion for ever, in the precise degree in which, by faith and love, we feel that 'He is the strength of our hearts,' to-day and now. So, then, we have the three foundation-stones.

And now a word or two, in the second place, about...

II. THE FAIR BUILDING WHICH RISES ON THEM.

I have already half apologised for using the metaphor of a foundation and a building. I must repeat the confession that the symbol is an inadequate one. For the Apostle does not conceive of the work and labour and patience which are respectively allocated to these three graces as being superimposed upon them, as it were, by effort, so much as he thinks of them as growing out of them by their inherent nature. The work is 'the work of faith,' that which characterises faith, that which issues from it, that which is its garment, visible to the world, and the token of its reality and its presence.

Faith works.

It is the foundation of all true work; even in the lowest sense of the word we might almost say that. But in the Christian scheme it is

eminently the underlying requisite for all work which God does not consider as busy idleness. I might here make a general remark, which, however, I need not dwell upon, that we have here the broad thought which Christian people in all generations need to have drummed into their heads over and over again, and that is that inward experiences and emotions, and rotates of mind and heart, however good and precious, are so mainly as being the necessary foundations of conduct. What is the good of praying and feeling comfortable within, and having 'a blessed assurance,' a 'happy experience,' 'sweet communion,' and so on? What is the good of it all, if these things do not make us 'live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world'? What is the good of the sails of a windmill going whirling round, if the machinery has been thrown out of gear, and the great stones which it ought to actuate are not revolving? What is the good of the screw of a steamer revolving, when she pitches, clean above the waves? It does nothing then to drive the vessel onwards, but will only damage the machinery. And Christian emotions and experiences which do not drive conduct are of as little use, often as perilous, and as injurious. If you want to keep your 'faith, love, hope,' sound and beneficial, set them to work. And do not be too sure that you have them, if they do not crave for work, whether you set them to it or not.

'Your work of faith.'

There is the whole of the thorny subject of the relation of faith and works packed into a nutshell. It is exactly what James said and it is exactly what a better than James said. When the Jews came to Him with their externalism, and thought that God was to be pleased by a whole rabble of separate good actions, and so said, 'What shall we do that we might work the works of God?' Jesus said, 'Never mind about Works. This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent,' and out of that will come all the rest. That is the mother tincture; everything will flow from that. So Paul says, 'Your work of faith.'

Does your faith work? Perhaps I should ask other people rather than you. Do men see that your faith works; that its output is different from the output of men who are not possessors of a 'like precious faith'? Ask yourselves the question, and God help you to answer it.

Love labours.

Labour is more than work, for it includes the notion of toil, fatigue, difficulty, persistence, antagonism. Ah! the work of faith will never be done unless it is the toil of love. You remember how Milton talks about the immortal garland that is to be run for, 'not without dust and sweat.' The Christian life is not a leisurely promenade. The limit of our duty is not ease of work. There must be toil. And love is the only principle that will carry us through the fatigues, and the difficulties, and the oppositions which rise against us from ourselves and from without. Love delights to have a hard task set it by the beloved, and the harder the task the more poignant the satisfaction. Loss is gain when it brings us nearer the beloved.

And whether our love be love to God, or its consequence, love to man, it is the only foundation on which toil for either God or man will ever permanently be rested. Do not believe in philanthropy which has not a bottom of faith, and do not believe in work for Christ which does not involve in toil. And be sure that you will do neither, unless you have both these things: the faith and the love.

And then comes the last. Faith works, love toils, hope is patient. Is that all that 'hope' is? Not if you take the word in the narrow meaning which it has in modern English; but that was not what Paul meant.

He meant something a great deal more than passive endurance, great as that is. It is something to be able to say, in the pelting of a pitiless storm, 'Pour on! I will endure.' But it is a great deal more to be able, in spite of all, not to bate one jot of heart or hope, but 'still bear up and steer right onward'; and that is involved in the true meaning of the word inadequately rendered 'patience' in the New Testament. For it is no passive virtue only, but it is a virtue which, in the face of the storm, holds its course; brave persistence, active perseverance, as well as meek endurance and submission.

'Hope' helps us Both to bear and to do. They tell us nowadays that it is selfish for a Christian man to animate himself, either for endurance or for activity, By the contemplation of those great glories that lie yonder. If that is selfishness, God grant we may all Become a great deal more selfish than we are! No man labours in the Christian life, or submits to Christian difficulty, for the sake of going to heaven. At least, if he does, he has got on the wrong tack altogether. But if the motive for Both endurance and activity be faith and love, then hope has a perfect right to come in as a subsidiary motive, and to give strength to the faith and rapture to the love. We cannot afford to throw away that hope, as so many of us do — not perhaps, intellectually, though I am afraid there is a very considerable dimming of the clearness, and a narrowing of the place in our thoughts, of the hope of a future Blessedness, in the average Christian of this day — but practically we are all apt to lose sight of the recompense of the reward. And if we do, the faith and love, and the work and toil, and the patience will suffer. Faith will relax its grasp, love will cool down its fervour; and there will come a film over Hope's blue eye, and she will not see the land that is very far off. So, dear brethren, remember the sequence, 'faith, love, hope,' and remember the issues, 'work, toil, patience.'

GOD'S TRUMPET

'From you sounded out the word of God.' — 1 Thessalonians 1:3.

This is Paul's first letter. It was written very shortly after his first preaching of the Gospel in the great commercial city of Thessalonica. But though the period since the formation of the Thessalonian Church was so brief, their conversion had already become a matter of common notoriety; and the consistency of their lives, and the marvellous change that had taken place upon them, made them conspicuous in the midst of the corrupt heathen community in which they dwelt. And so says Paul, in the text, by reason of their work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope, they had become ensamples to all that believe, and loud proclaimers and witnesses of the Gospel which had produced this change.

The Apostle employs a word never used anywhere else in the New Testament to describe the conspicuous and widespread nature of this testimony of theirs. He says, 'The word of the Lord sounded out' from them. That phrase is one most naturally employed to describe the blast of a trumpet. So clear and ringing, so loud, penetrating, melodious, rousing, and full was their proclamation, by the silent eloquence of their lives, of the Gospel which impelled and enabled them to lead such lives. A grand ideal of a community of believers!

If our churches to-day were nearer its realisation there would be less unbelief, and more attraction of wandering prodigals to the Father's house. Would that this saying were true of every body of professing believers! Would that from each there sounded out one clear accordant witness to Christ, in the purity and unworldliness of their Christlike lives!

I. This metaphor suggests the great purpose of the Church.

It is God's trumpet, His means of making His voice heard through all the uproar of the world. As the captain upon the deck in the gale will use his speaking-trumpet, so God's voice needs your voice. The Gospel needs to be passed through human lips in order that it may reach deaf ears. The purpose for which we have been apprehended of Christ is not merely our own personal salvation, whether we understand that in a narrow and more outward, or in a broader and more spiritual sense. No man is an end in himself, but every man, though he be partially and temporarily an end, is also a means. And just as, according to the other metaphor, the Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven, each particle of the dead dough, as soon as it is leavened and vitalised, becoming the medium for transmitting the strange, transforming, and living influence to the particle beyond, so all of us, if we are Christian people, have received that grace into our hearts, for our own sakes indeed, but also that through us might be manifested to the darkened eyes beyond, and through us might drop persuasively on the dull, cold ears that are further away from the Divine Voice, the great message of God's mercy. The Church is God's trumpet, and the purpose that He has in view in setting it in the world is to make all men know the fellowship of the mystery and that through it there may ring out, as by some artificial means a poor human voice will be flung to a greater distance than it would otherwise reach, the gentle entreaties, and the glorious proclamation, and the solemn threatenings of the Word, the Incarnate as well as the written Word, of God.

Of course all this is true, not only about communities, but it is true of a community, just because it is true of each individual member of it. The Church is worse than as 'sounding brass,' it is as silent brass and an untinkling cymbal, unless the individuals that belong to it recognise God's meaning in making them His children, and do their best to fulfil it. 'Ye are my witnesses,' saith the Lord. You are put into the witness-box; see that you speak out when you are there.

II. Another point that this figure may suggest is, the sort of sound that should come from the trumpet.

A trumpet note is, first of all, clear. There should be no hesitation in our witness; nothing uncertain in the sound that we give. There are plenty of so-called Christian people whose lives, if they bear any witness for the Master at all, are like the notes that some bungling learner will bring out of a musical instrument: hesitating, uncertain, so that you do not know exactly what note he wants to produce. How many of us, calling ourselves Christian people, testify on both sides; sometimes bearing witness for Christ; and alas! alas! oftener bearing witness against Him. Will the trumpet, the instrument of clear, ringing, unmistakable sounds, be the emblem of your Christian testimony? Would not some poor scrannel-pipe, ill-blown, be nearer the mark? The note should be clear.

The note should be penetrating. There is no instrument, I suppose, that carries further than the ringing clarion that is often heard on the field of battle, above all the strife; and this little church at Thessalonica, a mere handful of people, just converted, in the very centre of a strong, compact, organised, self-confident, supercilious heathenism, insisted upon being heard, and got itself made

audible, simply by the purity and the consistency of the lives of its members. So that Paul, a few weeks, or at most a few months, after the formation of the church, could say, 'From you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia,' your own province and the one next door to it, 'but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad.' No man knows how far his influence will go. No man can tell how far his example may penetrate. Thessalonica was a great commercial city. So is Manchester. Hosts of people of all sorts came into it as they come here. There were many different circles which would be intersected by the lives of this Christian church, and wherever its units went they carried along with them the conviction that they had turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.

And so, dear brethren, if our witness is to be worth anything it must have this penetrating quality. There is a difference in sounds as there is a difference in instruments. Some of them carry further than others. A clear voice will fling words to a distance that a thick, mumbling one never can attain. One note will travel much further than another. Do you see to it that your notes are of the penetrating sort.

And then, again, the note should be a musical one. There is nothing to be done for God by harshness; nothing to be done by discords and gangling; nothing to be done by scolding and rebuke. The ordered sequence of melodious sound will travel a great deal further than musical, plain speech. You can hear a song at a distance at which a saying would be inaudible. Which thing is an allegory, and this is its lesson, — Music goes further than discord; and the witness that a Christian man bears will travel in direct proportion as it is harmonious, and gracious and gentle and beautiful.

And then, again, the note should be rousing. You do not play on a trumpet when you want to send people to sleep; dulcimers and the like are the things for that purpose. The trumpet means strung-up intensity, means a call to arms, or to rejoicing; means at any rate, vigour, and is intended to rouse. Let your witness have, for its utmost signification, 'Awake! thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light.'

III. Then, still further, take another thought that may be suggested from this metaphor, the silence of the loudest note.

If you look at the context, you will see that all the ways in which the word of the Lord is represented as sounding out from the Thessalonian Church were deeds, not words. The context supplies a number of them. Such as the following are specified in it: their work; their toil, which is more than work; their patience; their assurance; their reception of the word, in much affliction with joy in the Holy Ghost; their faith to Godward; their turning to God from idols, to serve and to wait.

That is all. So far as the context goes there might not have been a man amongst them who ever opened his mouth for Jesus Christ. We know not, of course, how far they were a congregation of silent witnesses, but this we know, that what Paul meant when he said, 'The whole world is ringing with the voice of the word of God sounding from you,' was not their going up and down the world shouting about their Christianity, but their quiet living like Jesus Christ. That is a louder voice than any other.

Ah! dear friends! it is with God's Church as it is with God's heavens; the 'stars in Christ's right hand' sparkle in the same fashion as the stars that He has set in the firmament. Of them we read: 'There is neither voice nor language, their speech is not heard'; and yet, as man stands with bared head and hushed heart beneath the violet abysses of the heavens, 'their line' (or chord, the metaphor being that of a stringed instrument) 'is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.' Silent as they shine, they declare the glory of God, and proclaim His handiwork. And so you may speak of Him without speaking, and though you have no gift of tongues the night may be filled with music, and your lives be eloquent of Christ.

I do not mean to say that Christian men and women are at liberty to lock their lips from verbal proclamation of the Saviour they have found, but I do mean to say that if there was less talk and more living, the witness of God's Church would be louder and not lower; and men would take knowledge of us, that we had been with Jesus'; and of Jesus, that He had made us like Himself.

IV. And so, lastly, let me draw one other thought from this metaphor, which I hope you will not think fanciful playing with a figure; and that is the breath that makes the music if the Church is the trumpet, who blows it? God! It is by His Divine Spirit dwelling within us, and breathing through us, that the harsh discords of our natural lives become changed into melody of praise and the music of witness for Him. Keep near Christ, live in communion with God, let Him breathe through you, and when His Spirit passes through your spirits their silence will become harmonious speech; and from you 'will sound out the word of the Lord.'

In a tropical country, when the sun goes behind a cloud, all the insect life that was cheerily chirping is hushed. In the Christian life, when the Son of Righteousness is obscured by the clouds born of our own carelessness and sin, all the music in our spirit ceases, and no more can we witness for Him. A scentless substance lying in a drawer, with a bit of musk, will become perfumed by contact, and will bring the fragrance wherever it is carried. Live near God, and let Him speak to you and in you; and then He will speak

through you. And if He be the breath of your spiritual lives, and the soul of your souls, then, and only then, will your lives be music, the music witness, and the witness conviction. And only then will there be fulfilled what I pray there may be more and more fulfilled in us as a Christian community, this great word of our text, 'from you sounded out,' clear, rousing, penetrating, melodious, 'the word of the Lord,' so that we, with our poor preaching, need not to speak anything.

WALKING WORTHILY

'Walk worthy of God.' — 1 Thessalonians 2:12.

HERE we have the whole law of Christian conduct in a nutshell. There may be many detailed commandments, but they can all be deduced from this one.

We are lifted up above the region of petty prescriptions, and breathe a bracing mountain air. Instead of regulations, very many and very dry, we have a principle which needs thought and sympathy in order to apply it, and is to be carried out by the free action of our own judgments.

Now it is to be noticed that there are a good many other passages in the New Testament in which, in similar fashion, the whole sum of Christian conduct is reduced to a 'walking worthy' of some certain thing or other, and I have thought that it might aid in appreciating the many-sidedness and all-sufficiency of the great, principles into which Christianity crystallises the law of our life, if we just gather these together and set them before you consecutively.

They are these: we are told in our text to 'walk worthy of God.' Then again, we are enjoined, in other places, to 'walk worthy of the Lord,' who is Christ. Or again, 'of the Gospel of Christ.' Or again, 'of the calling wherewith we were called.' Or again, of the name of 'saints.' And if you put all these together, you will get many sides of one thought, the rule of Christian life as gathered into a single expression — correspondence with, and conformity to, a certain standard.

I. And first of all, we have this passage of my text, and the other one to which I have referred, 'Walking worthy of the Lord,' by whom we are to understand Christ. We may put these together and say that the whole sum of Christian duty lies in conformity to the character of a Divine Person with whom we have loving relations.

The Old Testament says: 'Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.' The New Testament says: 'Be ye imitators of God, and walk in love.' So then, whatever of flashing brightness and infinite profundity in that divine nature is far beyond our apprehension and grasp, there are in that divine nature elements — and those the best and divinest in it which it is perfectly within the power of every man to copy.

In there anything in God that is more Godlike than righteousness and love? And is there any difference in essence between a man's righteousness and God's; — between a man's love and God's? The same gases make combustion in the sun and on the earth, and the spectroscope tells you that it is so. The same radiant brightness that flames burning in the love, and flashes white in the purity of God, even that may be reproduced in man.

Love is one thing, an the universe over. Other elements of the bond that unites us to God are rather correspondent in us to what we find in Him Our concavity, so to speak, answers to His convexity; our hollowness to His fulness; our emptiness to His all-sufficiency. So our faith, for instance, lays hold upon His faithfulness, and our obedience grasps, and bows before, His commanding will But the love with which I lay hold of Him is like the love with which He lays hold on me; and righteousness and purity, howsoever different may be their accompaniments in an infinite and uncreated Nature from what they have in our limited and bounded and progressive being, in essence are one. So, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy'; 'Walk in the light as He is in the light,' is the law available for all conduct; and the highest divine perfections, if I may speak of pre-eminence among them, are the imitable ones, whereby He becomes our Example and our Pattern.

Let no man say that such an injunction is vague or hopeless. You must have a perfect ideal if you are to live at all by an ideal. There cannot be any flaws in your pattern if the pattern is to be of any use. You aim at the stars, and if you do not hit them you may progressively approach them. We need absolute perfection to strain after, and one day — blessed be His name — we shall attain it. Try to walk worthy of God and you will find out how tight that precept grips, and how close it fits.

The love and the righteousness which are to become the law of our lives, are revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Whatever may sound impracticable in the injunction to imitate God assumes a more homely and possible shape when it becomes an injunction to follow Jesus. And just as that form of the precept tends to make the law of conformity to the divine nature more blessed and less hopelessly above us, so it makes the law of conformity to the ideal of goodness less cold and unsympathetic. It makes all the

difference to our joyfulness and freedom whether we are trying to obey a law of duty, seen only too clearly to be binding, but also above our reach, or whether we have the law in a living Person whom we have learned to love. In the one case there stands upon a pedestal above us a cold perfection, white, complete, marble; in the other case there stands beside us a living law in pattern, a Brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; whose band we can grasp; whose heart we can trust, and of whose help we can be sure. To say to me: 'Follow the ideal of perfect righteousness,' is to relegate me to a dreary, endless struggling; to say to me, 'Follow your Brother, and be like your Father,' is to bring warmth and hope and liberty into all my effort. The word that says, 'Walk worthy of God,' is a royal law, the perfect law of perfect freedom.

Again, when we say, 'Walk worthy of God,' we mean two things — one, 'Do after His example,' and the other, 'Render back to Him what He deserves for what He has done to you.' And so this law bids us measure, by the side of that great love that died on the Cross for us all, our poor imperfect returns of gratitude and of service. He has lavished all His treasure on you; what have you brought him back? He has given you the whole wealth of His tender pity, of His forgiving mercy, of His infinite goodness. Do you adequately repay such lavish love? Has He not 'sown much and reaped little' in all our hearts? Has He not poured out the fulness of His affection, and have we not answered Him with a few grudging drops squeezed from our hearts? Oh! brethren! 'Walk worthy of the Lord,' and neither dishonour Him by your conduct as professing children of His, nor affront Him by the wretched refuse and remnants of your devotion and service that you bring back to Him in response to His love to you.

II. Now a word about the next form of this all embracing precept.

The whole law of our Christian life may be gathered up in another correspondence, 'Walk worthy of the Gospel' (Philippians 1:27), in a manner conformed to that great message of God's love to us.

That covers substantially the same ground as we have already been going over, but it presents the same ideas in a different light. It presents the Gospel as a rule of conduct. Now people have always been apt to think of it more as a message of deliverance than as a practical guide, as we all need to make an effort to prevent our natural indolence and selfishness from making us forget that the Gospel is quite as much a rule of conduct as a message of pardon.

It is both by the same act. In the very facts on which our redemption depends lies the law of our lives.

What was Paul's Gospel? According to Paul's own definition of it, it was this: 'How that Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.' And the message that I desire now to bring to all you professing Christians is this: Do not always be looking at Christ's Cross only as your means of acceptance. Do not only be thinking of Christ's Passion as that which has barred for you the gates of punishment, and has opened for you the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven. It has done all that; but if you are going to stop there you have only got hold of a very maimed and imperfect edition of the Gospel. The Cross is your pattern, as well as the anchor of your hope and the ground of your salvation, if it is anything at all to you. And it is not the ground of your salvation and the anchor of your hope unless it is your pattern. It is the one in exactly the same degree in which it is the other.

So all self-pleasing, all harsh insistence on your own claims, all neglect of suffering and sorrow and sin around you, comes under the lash of this condemnation: 'They are not worthy of the Gospel.'

And all unforgivingness of spirit and of temper in individuals and in nations, in public and in private matters, that, too, is in flagrant contradiction to the principles that are taught on the Cross to which you say you look for your salvation. Have you got forgiveness, and are you going out from the presence-chamber of the King to take your brother by the throat, for the beggarly coppers that he owes you, and say: 'Pay me what thou owest!' when the Master has forgiven you all that great mountain of indebtedness which you owe Him? Oh, my brother! if Christian men and women would only learn to take away the scales from their eyes and souls; not looking at Christ's Cross with less absolute trustfulness, as that by which all their salvation comes, but also learning to look at it as closely and habitually as yielding the pattern to which their lives should be conformed, and would let the heart-melting thankfulness which it evokes when gazed at as the ground of our hope prove itself true by its leading them to an effort at imitating that great love, and so walking worthy of the Gospel, how their lives would be transformed! It is far easier to fetter your life with yards of red-tape prescriptions — do this, do not do that — far easier to out-pharisee the Pharisees in punctilious scrupulosities, than it is honestly, and for one hour, to take the Cross of Christ as the pattern of your lives, and to shape yourselves by that.

One looks round upon a lethargic, a luxurious, a self-indulgent, a self-seeking, a world-besotted professing Church, and asks: 'Are these the people on whose hearts a cross is stamped?' Do these men — or rather let us say, do we live as becometh the Gospel which proclaims the divinity of self-sacrifice, and that the law of a perfect human life is perfect self-forgetfulness, even as the secret of the divine nature is perfect love? 'Walk worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.'

III. Then again, there is another form of this same general prescription which suggests to us a kindred and yet somewhat different standard.

We are also bidden to bring our lives into conformity to, and correspondence with, or, as the Bible has it, 'to walk worthy of, the

calling wherewith we are called' (Ephesians 4:1).

God summons or invites us, and summons us to what? The words which follow our text answer, 'Who calleth you into His own kingdom and glory.' All you Christian people have been invited, and if you are Christians you have accepted the invitation; and all you men and women, whether you are Christians or not, have been and are being invited and summoned into a state and a world (for the reference is to the future life), in which God's will is supreme, and all wills are moulded into conformity with that, and into a state and a world in which all shall — because they submit to His will — partake of His glory, the fulness of His uncreated light.

That being the aim of the summons, that being the destiny that is held out before us all, ought not that destiny and the prospect of what we may be in the future, to fling some beams of guiding brightness on to the present?

Men that are called to high functions prepare themselves therefor. If you knew that you were going away to Australia in six months, would you not be beginning to get your outfit ready? You Christian men profess to believe that you have been called to a condition in which you will absolutely obey God's will, and be the loyal subjects of His kingdom, and in which you will partake of God's glory. Well then, obey His will here, and let some scattered sparklers of that uncreated light that is one day going to flood your soul lie upon your face to-day. Do not go and cut your lives into two halves, one of them all contradictory to that which you expect in the other, but bring a harmony between the present, in all its weakness and sinfulness, and that great hope and certain destiny that blazes on the horizon of your hope, as the joyful state to which you have been invited. 'Walk worthy of the calling to which you are called.'

And again, that same thought of the destiny should feed our hope, and make us live under its continual inspiration. A walk worthy of such a calling and such a caller should know no despondency, nor any weary, heartless lingering, as with tired feet on a hard road. Brave good cheer, undimmed energy, a noble contempt of obstacles, a confidence in our final attainment of that purity and glory which is not depressed by consciousness of present failure — these are plainly the characteristics which ought to mark the advance of the men in whose ears such a summons from such lips rings as their marching orders.

And a walk worthy of our calling will turn away from earthly things. If you believe that God has summoned you to His kingdom and glory, surely, surely, that should deaden in your heart the love and the care for the trifles that lie by the wayside. Surely, surely, if that great voice is inviting, and that merciful hand is beckoning you into the light, and showing you what you may possess there, it is not walking according to that summons if you go with your eyes fixed upon the trifles at your feet, and your whole heart absorbed in this present fleeting world. Unworldliness, in its best and purest fashion — by which I mean not only a contempt for material wealth and all that it brings, but the sitting loose by everything that is beneath the stars — unworldliness is the only walk that is 'worthy of the calling wherewith ye are called.'

And 'if you hear that voice ringing like a trumpet call, or a commander's shout on the battlefield, into your ears, ever to stimulate you, to rebuke your lagging indifference; if you are ever conscious in your inmost hearts of the summons to His kingdom and glory, then, no doubt, by a walk worthy of it, you will make your calling sure; and there shall 'an entrance be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom.'

IV. And the last of the phases of this prescription which I have to deal with is this.

The whole Christian duty is further crystallised into the one command, to walk in a manner conformed to, and corresponding with, the character which is impressed upon us.

In the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans (verse 2), we read about a very small matter, that it is to be done 'worthily of the saints.' It is only about the receiving of a good woman who was travelling from Corinth to Rome, and extending hospitality to her in such a manner as became professing Christians; but the very minuteness of the details to which the great principle is applied points a lesson. The biggest principle is not too big to be brought down to the narrowest details, and that is the beauty of principles as distinguished from regulations. Regulations try to be minute, and, however minute you make them, some case always starts up that is not exactly provided for in them, and so the regulations come to nothing. A principle does not try to be minute, but it casts its net wide and it gathers various cases into its meshes. Like the fabled tent in the old legend that could contract so as to have room for but one man, or expand wide enough to hold an army, so this great principle of Christian conduct can be brought down to giving 'Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church at Cenchrea,' good food and a comfortable lodging, and any other little kindnesses, when she comes to Rome. And the same principle may be widened out to embrace and direct us in the largest tasks and most difficult circumstances.

'Worthily of saints' — the name is an omen, and carries in it rules of conduct. The root idea of 'saint' is 'one separated to God,' and the secondary idea which flows from that is 'one who is pure.'

All Christians are 'saints.' They are consecrated and set apart for God's service, and in the degree in which they are conscious of and live out that consecration, they are pure.

So their name, or rather the great fact which their name implies, should be ever before them, a stimulus and a law. We are bound to remember that we are consecrated, separated as God's possession, and that therefore purity is indispensable. The continual consciousness of this relation and its resulting obligations would make us recoil from impurity as instinctively as the sensitive plant shuts up its little green fingers when anything touches it; or as the wearer of a white robe will draw it up high above the mud on a filthy pavement, Walk 'worthily of saints' is another way of saying, Be true to your own best selves. Work up to the highest ideal of your character. That is far more wholesome than to be always looking at our faults and failures, which depress and tempt us to think that the actual is the measure of the possible, and the past or present of the future. There is no fear of self-conceit or of a mistaken estimate of ourselves. The more clearly we keep our best and deepest self before our consciousness, the more shall we learn a rigid judgment of the miserable contradictions to it in our daily outward life, and even in our thoughts and desires. It is a wholesome exhortation, when it follows these others of which we have been speaking (and not else), which bids Christians remember that they are saints and live up to their name.

A Christian's inward and deepest self is better than his outward life. We have all convictions in our inmost hearts which we do not work out, and beliefs that do not influence us as we know they ought to do, and sometimes wish that they did. By our own fault our lives but imperfectly show their real inmost principle. Friction always wastes power before motion is produced.

So then, we may well gather together all our duties in this final form of the all-comprehensive law, and say to ourselves, 'Walk worthily of saints.' Be true to your name, to your best selves, to your deepest selves. Be true to your separation for God's service, and to the purity which comes from it. Be true to the life which God has implanted in you. That life may be very feeble and covered by a great deal of rubbish, but it is divine. Let it work, let it out. Do not disgrace your name.

These are the phases of the law of Christian conduct. They reach far, they fit close, they penetrate deeper than the needle points of minute regulations. If you will live in a manner corresponding to the character, and worthy of the love of God, as revealed in Christ, and in conformity with the principles that are enthroned upon His Cross, and in obedience to the destiny held forth in your high calling, and in faithfulness to the name that He Himself has impressed upon you, then your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the painful and punctilious pharisaical obedience to outward commands, and all things lovely and of good report will spring to life in your hearts and bear fruit in your lives.

One last word — all these exhortations go on the understanding that you are a Christian, that you have taken Christ for your Saviour, and are resting upon Him, and recognising in Him the revelation of God, and in His Cross the foundation of your hope; that you have listened to, and yielded to, the divine summons, and that you have a right to be called a saint. Is that presumption true about you, my friend? If it is not, Christianity thinks that it is of no use wasting time talking to you about conduct.

It has another word to speak to you first, and after you have heard and accepted it, there will be time enough to talk to you about rules for living. The first message which Christ sends to you by my lips is, Trust your sinful selves to Him as your only all-sufficient Saviour. When you have accepted Him, and are leaning on Him with all your weight of sin and suffering, and loving Him with your ransomed heart, then, and not till then, will you be in a position to hear His law for your life, and to obey it. Then, and not till then, will you appreciate the divine simplicity and breadth of the great command to walk worthy of God, and the divine tenderness and power of the motive which enforces it, and prints it on yielding and obedient hearts, even the dying love and Cross of His Son. Then, and not till then, will you know how the voice from heaven that calls you to His kingdom stirs the heart like the sound of a trumpet, and how the name which you bear is a perpetual spur to heroic service and priestly purity. Till then, the word which we would plead with you to listen to and accept is that great answer of our Lord's to those who came to for a rule of conduct, instead of for the gift of life: 'This is the work of God, that ye should believe on Him whom He hath sent.'

SMALL DUTIES AND THE GREAT HOPE

1 Thessalonians 4:9. 'But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you...For yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.' —1 Thessalonians 5:1-2.

THIS letter was written immediately on the arrival of Silas and Timothy in Corinth (1 Thessalonians 3:6, 'even now'), and is all flushed with the gladness of relieved anxiety, and throbs with love. It gains in pathetic interest when we remember that, while writing it, the Apostle was in the thick of his conflict with the Corinthian synagogue. The thought of his Thessalonian converts came to him like a waft of pure, cool air to a heated brow.

The apparent want of connection in the counsels of the two last chapters is probably accounted for by supposing that he takes up, as they occurred to him, the points reported by the two messengers. But we may note that the plain, prosaic duties enjoined in

verses 7-12 lead on to the lofty revelations of the rest of the context without any sense of a gap, just because to Paul the greatest truths had a bearing on the smallest duties, and the vision of future glory was meant to shape the homely details of present work.

I. We need to make an effort to realise the startling novelty of 'love of the brethren' when this letter was written.

The ancient world was honeycombed with rents and schisms, scarcely masked by political union. In the midst of a world of selfishness this new faith started up, and by some magic knit warring nationalities and hostile classes and wide diversities of culture and position into a strange whole, transcending all limits of race and language. The conception of brotherhood was new, and the realisation of it in Christian love was still more astonishing. The world wondered; but to the Christians the new affection was, we might almost say, instinctive, so naturally and spontaneously did it fill their hearts.

Paul's graceful way of enjoining it here is no mere pretty compliment. The Thessalonians did not need to be bidden to love the brethren, for such love was a part of their new life, and breathed into their hearts by God Himself. They were drawn together by common relation to Jesus, and driven together by common alienation from the world. Occasions of divergence had not yet risen. The world had not yet taken on a varnish of Christianity. The new bond was still strong in its newness. So, short as had been the time since Paul landed at Neapolis, the golden chain of love bound all the Macedonian Christians together, and all that Paul had to exhort was the strengthening of its links and their tightening.

That fair picture faded soon, but it still remains true that the deeper our love to Jesus, the warmer will be our love to all His lovers. The morning glow may not come back to the prosaic noonday, but love to the brethren remains as an indispensable token of the Christian life. Let us try ourselves thereby.

II. What have exhortations to steady work to do with exhortations to increasing love?

Not much, apparently; but may not the link be, 'Do not suppose that your Christianity is to show itself only in emotions, however sweet; the plain humdrum tasks of a working man's life are quite as noble a field as the exalted heights of brotherly love.' A loving heart is good, but a pair of diligent hands are as good. The juxtaposition of these two commands preaches a lesson which we need quite as much as the Thessalonians did. Possibly, too, as we see more fully in the second Epistle, the new truths, which had cut them from their old anchorage, had set some of them afloat on a sea of unquiet expectation. So much of their old selves had been swept away, that it would be hard for some to settle down to the old routine. That is a common enough experience in all revivals, and at Thessalonica it was intensified by speculations about Christ's coming.

The 'quiet' which Paul would have us cultivate is not only external, but the inward tranquillity of a spirit calm because fixed on God and filled with love. The secret place of the Most High is ever still, and, if we dwell there, our hearts will not be disturbed by any tumults without. To 'do our own business' is quite a different thing from selfish 'looking on our own things,' for a great part of our business is to care for others, and nothing dries up sympathy and practical help more surely than a gossiping temper, which is perpetually buzzing about other people's concerns, and knows everybody's circumstances and duties better than its own. This restless generation, whose mental food is so largely the newspaper, with its floods of small-talk about people, be they politicians, ministers, or murderers, sorely needs these precepts. We are all so busy that we have no time for quiet meditation, and so much occupied with trivialities about others that we are strangers to ourselves. Therefore religious life is low in many hearts.

The dignity of manual labour was a new doctrine to preach to Greeks, but Paul lays stress on it repeatedly in his letters to Thessalonica. Apparently most of the converts there were of the labouring class, and some of them needed the lesson of Paul's example as well as his precept. A Christian workman wielding chisel or trowel for Christ's sake will impress 'them that are without.' Dignity depends, not on the nature, but on the motive, of our work. 'A servant with this clause makes drudgery divine.' It is permissible to take the Opinion of those who are not Christians into account, and to try to show them what good workmen Christ can turn out. It is right, too, to cultivate a spirit of independence, and to prefer a little earned to abundant, given as a gift or alms. Perhaps some of the Thessalonians were trying to turn brotherly love to profit, and to live on their richer brethren. Such people infest the Church at all times.

III. With what ease, like a soaring song-bird, the letter rises to the lofty height of the next verses, and how the note becomes more musical, and the style richer, more sonorous and majestic, with the changed subject! From the workshop to the descending Lord and the voice of the trumpet and the rising saints, what a leap, and yet how easily it is made! Happy we if We keep the future glory and the present duty thus side by side, and pass without jar from the one to the other!

The special point which Paul has in view must be kept well in mind. Some of the Thessalonians seem to have been troubled, not by questions about the Resurrection, as the Corinthians afterwards were, but by a curious difficulty, namely, whether the dead saints would not be worse off at Christ's coming than the living, and to that one point Paul addresses himself. These verses are not a general revelation of the course of events at that coming, or of the final condition of the glorified saints, but an answer to the question, What is the relation between the two halves of the Church, the dead and the living, in regard to their participation in

Christ's glory when He comes again? The question is answered negatively in verse 15, positively in verses 16 and 17.

But, before considering them, note some other precious lessons taught here. That sweet and consoling designation for the dead, 'them who sleep in Jesus,' is Christ's gift to sorrowing hearts. No doubt, the idea is found in pagan thinkers, but always with the sad addition, 'an eternal sleep.' Men called death by that name in despair. The Christian calls it so because he knows that sleep implies continuous existence, repose, consciousness, and awaking. The sleepers are not dead, they will be roused to refreshed activity one day.

We note how emphatically verse 14 brings out the thought that Jesus died, since He suffered all the bitterness of death, not only in physical torments, but in that awful sense of separation from God which is the true death in death, and that, because He did, the ugly thing wears a softened aspect to believers, and is but sleep. He died that we might never know what the worst sting of death is.

We note further that, in order to bring out the truth of the gracious change which has passed on death physical for His servants, the remarkable expression is used, in verse 14, 'fallen asleep through Jesus'; His mediatorial work being the reason for their death becoming sleep. Similarly, it is only in verse 16 that the bare word 'dead' is used about them, and there it is needed for emphasis and clearness. When we are thinking of Resurrection we can afford to look death in the face.

We note that Paul here claims to be giving a new revelation made to him directly by Christ. 'By (or, "in") the word of the Lord' cannot mean less than that. The question arises, in regard to verse 15, whether Paul expected that the advent would come in his lifetime. It need not startle any if he were proved to have cherished such a mistaken expectation; for Christ Himself taught the disciples that the time of His second coming was a truth reserved, and not included in His gifts to them. But two things may be noted. First, that in the second Epistle, written very soon after this, Paul

sets himself to damp down the expectation of the nearness of the advent, and points to a long course of historical development of incipient tendencies which must precede it; and, second, that his language here does not compel the conclusion that he expected to be alive at the second coming. For he is distinguishing between the two classes of the living and the dead, and he naturally puts himself in the class to which, at that time, he and his hearers belonged, without thereby necessarily deciding, or even thinking about, the question whether he and they would or would not belong to that class at the actual time of the advent.

The revelation here reveals much, and leaves much unrevealed. It is perfectly clear on the main point. Negatively, it declares that the sleeping saints lose nothing, and are not anticipated or hindered in any blessedness by the living. Positively, it declares that they precede the living, inasmuch as they 'rise first'; that is, before the living saints, who do not sleep, but are changed (1 Corinthians 15:51), are thus transfigured. Then the two great companies shall unitedly rise to meet the descending Lord; and their unity in Him, and, therefore, their fellowship with one another, shall be eternal.

That great hope helps us to bridge the dark gorge of present separation. It leaves unanswered a host of questions which our lonely hearts would fain have cleared up; but it is enough for hope to hold by, and for sorrow to be changed into submission and anticipation. As to the many obscurities that still cling to the future, the meaning and the nature of the accompaniments, the shout, the trumpet, and the like, the way of harmonising the thought that the departed saints attend the descending Lord, with whom they dwell now, with the declaration here that they rise from the earth to meet Him, the question whether these who are thus caught up from earth to meet the Lord in the air come back again with Him to earth, — all these points of curious speculation we may leave. We know enough for comfort, for assurance of the perfect reunion of the saints who sleep in Jesus and of the living, and of the perfect blessedness of both wings of the great army. We may be content with what is clearly revealed, and be sure that, if what is unrevealed would have been helpful to us, He would have told us. We are to use the revelation for comfort and stimulus, and we are to remember that 'times and seasons,' are not told us, nor would the knowledge of them profit us.

Paul took for granted that the Thessalonians remembered the Lord's word, which he had, no doubt, told them, that He would come 'as a thief in the night.' So he discourages a profitless curiosity, and exhorts to a continual vigilance. When He comes, it will be suddenly, and will wake some who live from a sinful sleep with a shock of terror, and the dead from a sweet sleep in Him with a rush of gladness, as in body and spirit they are filled with His life, and raised to share in His triumph.

SLEEPING THROUGH JESUS

'Them also which sleep in Jesus' — 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

THAT expression is not unusual, in various forms, in the Apostle's writings. It suggests a very tender and wonderful thought of closeness and union between our Lord and the living dead, so close as that He is, as it were, the atmosphere in which they move, or the house in which they dwell. But, tender and wonderful as the thought is, it is not exactly the Apostle's idea here. For, accurately

rendered — and accuracy in regard to Scripture language is not pedantry — the words run, ‘Them which sleep through Jesus.’

Now, that is a strange phrase, and, I suppose, its strangeness is the reason why our translators have softened it down to the more familiar and obvious ‘in Jesus.’ We can understand living through Christ, on being sacred through Christ, ‘but what can sleeping through Christ mean? I shall hope to answer the question presently, but, in the meantime, I only wish to point out what the Apostle does say, and to plead for letting him say it, strange though it sounds. For the strange and the difficult phrases of Scripture are like the hard quartz reefs in which gold is, and if we slur them over we are likely to lose the treasure. Let us try if we can find what the gold here may be.

Now, there are only two thoughts that I wish to dwell upon as suggested by these words. One is the softened aspect of death, and of the state of the Christian dead; and the other is the ground or cause of that softened aspect.

I. First, then, the softened aspect of death, and of the state of the Christian dead.

It is to Jesus primarily that the New Testament writers owe their use of this gracious emblem of sleep. For, as you remember, the word was twice upon our Lord’s lips; once when, over the twelve-years-old maid from whom life had barely ebbed away, He said, ‘She is not dead, but sleepeth’; and once when in regard of the man Lazarus, from whom life had removed further, He said, ‘Our friend sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep.’ But Jesus was not the originator of the expression. You find it in the Old Testament, where the prophet Daniel, speaking of the end of the days and the bodily Resurrection, designates those who share in it as ‘them that sleep in the dust of the earth.’ And the Old Testament was not the sole origin of the phrase. For it is too natural, too much in accordance with the visibilities of death, not to have suggested itself to many hearts, and been shrined in many languages. Many an inscription of Greek and Roman date speaks of death under this figure; but almost always it is with the added, deepened note of despair, that it is a sleep which knows no waking, but lasts through eternal night.

Now, the Christian thought associated with this emblem is the precise opposite of the pagan one. The pagan heart shrank from naming the ugly thing because it was so ugly. So dark and deep a dread coiled round the man, as he contemplated it, that he sought to drape the dreadfulness in some kind of thin, transparent veil, and to put the buffer of a word between him and its hideousness. But the Christian’s motive for the use of the word is the precise opposite. He uses the gentler expression because the thing has become gentler.

It is profoundly significant that throughout the whole of the New Testament the plain, naked word ‘death’ is usually applied, not to the physical fact which we ordinarily designate by the name, but to the grim thing of which that physical fact is only the emblem and the parable, viz., the true death which lies in the separation of the soul from God; whilst predominately the New Testament usage calls the physical fact by some other gentler form of expression, because, as I say, the gentleness has enfolded the thing to be designated.

For instance, you find one class of representations which speak of death as being a departing and a being with Christ; or which call it, as one of the apostles does, an ‘exodus,’ where it is softened down to be merely a change of environment, a change of locality. Then another class of representations speak of it as ‘putting off this my tabernacle,’ or, the dissolution of the ‘earthly house’ — where there is a broad, firm line of demarcation drawn between the inhabitant and the habitation, and the thing is softened down to be a mere change of dwelling. Again, another class of expressions speak of it as being an ‘offering,’ where the main idea is that of a voluntary surrender, a sacrifice or libation of myself, and my life poured out upon the altar of God. But sweetest, deepest, most appealing to all our hearts, is that emblem of my text, ‘them that sleep.’ It is used, if I count rightly, some fourteen times in the New Testament, and it carries with it large and plain lessons, on which I touch but for a moment. What, then, does this metaphor say to us?

Well, it speaks first of rest. That is not altogether an attractive conception to some of us. If it be taken exclusively it is by no means wholesome. I suppose that the young, and the strong, and the eager, and the ambitious, and the prosperous rather shrink from the notion of their activities being stiffened into slumber. But, dear friends, there are some of us like tired children in a fair, who would fain have done with the weariness, who have made experience of the distractions and bewildering changes, whose backs are stiffened with toil, whose hearts are heavy with loss. And to all of us, in some moods, the prospect of shuffling off this weary coil of responsibilities and duties and tasks and sorrows, and of passing into indisturbance and repose, appeals. I believe, for my part, that, after all, the deepest longing of men — though they search for it through toil and effort — is for repose. As the poet has taught us, ‘there is no joy but calm.’ Every heart is weary enough, and heavy laden, and labouring enough, to feel the sweetness of a promise of rest:

‘Sleep, full of rest from head to foot, Lie still, dry dust, secure of change.’

Yes! but the rest of which our emblem speaks is, as I believe, only applicable to the bodily frame. The word ‘sleep’ is a transcript of

what sense enlightened by faith sees in that still form, with the folded hands and the quiet face and the closed eyes. But let us remember that this repose, deep and blessed as it is, is not, as some would say, the repose of unconsciousness. I do not believe, and I would have you not believe, that this emblem refers to the vigorous, spiritual life, or that the passage from out of the toll and moil of earth into the calm of the darkness beyond has any power in limiting or suspending the vital force of the man.

Why, the very metaphor itself tells us that the sleeper is not unconscious. He is parted from the outer world, he is unaware of externals. When Stephen knelt below the old wall, and was surrounded by howling fanatics that slew him, one moment he was gashed with stones and tortured, and the next 'he fell on sleep.' They might howl, and the stones fly as they would, and he was all unaware of it. Like Jonah sleeping in the hold, what mattered the roaring of the storm to him? But separation from externals does not mean suspense of life or of consciousness, and the slumberer often dreams, and is aware of himself persistently throughout his slumber.

Nay! some of his faculties are set at liberty to work more energetically, because his connection with the outer world is for the time suspended.

And so I say that what on the hither side is sleep, on the further side is awaking, and that the complex whole of the condition of the sainted dead may be described with equal truth by either metaphor; 'they sleep in Jesus'; or, 'when I awake I shall be satisfied with Thy likeness.'

Scripture, as it seems to me, distinctly carries this limitation of the emblem. For what does it mean when the Apostle says that to depart and to be with Christ is far better? Surely he who thus spoke conceived that these two things were contemporaneous, the departing and the being with Him. And surely he who thus spoke could not have conceived that a millennium-long parenthesis of slumberous unconsciousness was to intervene between the moment of his decease and the moment of his fellowship with Jesus. How could a man prefer that dormant state to the state here, of working for and living with the Lord? Surely, being with Him must mean that we know where we are, and who is our companion.

And what does that text mean: 'Ye are come unto the spirits of just men made perfect,' unless it means that of these two classes of persons who are thus regarded as brought into living fellowship, each is aware of the other? Does perfecting of the spirit mean the smiting of the spirit into unconsciousness? Surely not, and surely in view of such words as these, we must recognise the fact that, however limited and imperfect may be the present connection of the disembodied dead, who sleep in Christ, with external things, they know themselves, they know their home and their companion, and they know the blessedness in which they are lapped.

But another thought which is suggested by this emblem is, as I have already said, most certainly the idea of awaking. The pagans said, as indeed one of their poets has it, 'Suns can sink and return, but for us, when our brief light sinks, there is but one perpetual night of slumber.' The Christian idea of death is, that it is transitory as a sleep in the morning, and sure to end. As St. Augustine says somewhere, 'Wherefore are they called sleepers, but because in the day of the Lord they will be reawakened?'

And so these are the thoughts, very imperfectly spoken, I know, which spring like flowers from this gracious metaphor 'them that sleep' — rest and awaking; rest and consciousness.

II. Note the ground of this softened aspect.

They 'sleep through Him.' It is by reason of Christ and His work, and by reason of that alone, that death's darkness is made beautiful, and death's grimness is softened down to this. Now, in order to grasp the full meaning of such words as these of the Apostle, we must draw a broad distinction between the physical fact of the ending of corporeal life and the mental condition which is associated with it by us. What we call death, if I may so say, is a complex thing — a bodily phenomenon plus conscience, the sense of sin, the certainty of retribution in the dim beyond. And you have to take these elements apart. The former remains, but if the others are removed, the whole has changed its character and is become another thing, and a very little thing.

The mere physical fact is a trifle. Look at it as you see it in the animals; look at it as you see it in men when they actually come to it. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is painless and easy, and men sink into slumber. Strange, is it not, that so small a reality should have power to cast over human life so immense and obscuring a shadow! Why? Because, as the Apostle says, 'the sting of death is sin,' and if you can take the sting out of it, then there is very little to fear, and it comes down to be an insignificant and transient element in our experience.

Now, the death of Jesus Christ takes away, if I may so say, the nimbus of apprehension and dread arising from conscience and sin, and the forecast of retribution. There is nothing left for us to face except the physical fact, and any rough soldier, with a coarse, red coat upon him, will face that for eighteenpence a day, and think himself well paid. Jesus Christ has abolished death, leaving the mere shell, but taking all the substance out of it. It has become a different thing to men, because in that death of His He has exhausted the bitterness, and has made it possible that we should pass into the shadow, and not fear either conscience or sin or judgment.

In this connection I cannot but notice with what a profound meaning the Apostle, in this very verse, uses the bare, naked word in reference to Him, and the softened one in reference to us. 'If we believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again, even so them also which sleep.' Ah! yes! He died indeed, bearing all that terror with which men's consciences have invested death. He died indeed, bearing on Himself the sins of the world. He died that no man henceforward need ever die in that same fashion, His death makes our deaths sleep, and His Resurrection makes our sleep calmly certain of a waking.

So, dear 'brethren, I would not have you ignorant concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope.' And I would have you to remember that, whilst Christ by His work has made it possible that the terror may pass away, and death may be softened and minimised into slumber, it will not be so with you — unless you are joined to Him, and by trust in the power of His death and the overflowing might of His Resurrection, have made sure that what He has passed through, you will pass through, and where He is, and what He is, you will be also.

Two men die by one railway accident, sitting side by side upon one seat, smashed in one collision. But though the outward fact is the same about each, the reality of their deaths is infinitely different. The one falls asleep through Jesus, in Jesus; the other dies indeed, and the death of his body is only a feeble shadow of the death of his spirit. Do you knit yourself to the Life, which is Christ, and then 'he that believeth on Me shall never die,'

THE WORK AND ARMOR OF THE CHILDREN OF THE DAY

Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet the hope of salvation.' — 1 Thessalonians 5:3.

This letter to the Thessalonians is the oldest book of the New Testament. It was probably written within something like twenty years of the Crucifixion; long, therefore, before any of the Gospels were in existence. It is, therefore, exceedingly interesting and instructive to notice how this whole context is saturated with allusions to our Lord's teaching, as it is preserved in these Gospels; and how it takes for granted that the Thessalonian Christians were familiar with the very words.

For instance: 'Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night' (ver. 2). How did these people in Thessalonica know that? They had been Christians for a year or so only; they had been taught by Paul for a few weeks only, or a month or two at the most. How did they know it? Because they had been told what the Master had said: 'If the goodman of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up'

And there are other allusions in the context almost as obvious 'The children of file light.' Who said that? Christ, in His words: 'The children of this world are wiser than the children of light.' 'They that sleep, sleep in the night, and if they be drunken, are drunken in the night.' Where does that metaphor come from? 'Take heed lest at any time ye be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.' 'Watch, lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping!'

So you see all the context reposes upon, and presupposes the very words, which you find in our present existing Gospels, as the words of the Lord Jesus. And this is all But contemporaneous, and quite independent, evidence of the existence in the Church, from the Beginning, of a traditional teaching which is now preserved for us in that fourfold record of His life.

Take that remark for what it is worth; and now turn to the text itself with which I have to deal in this sermon. The whole of the context may Be said to be a little dissertation upon the moral and religious uses of the doctrine of our Lord's second coming. In my text these are summed up in one central injunction which has preceding it a motive that enforces it, and following it a method that ensures it. 'Let us be sober'; that is the centre thought; and it is buttressed upon either side by a motive and a means. 'Let us who are of the day,' or 'since we are of the day, — be sober.' And let us be it by 'putting on the breastplate and helmet of faith, love, and hope.' These, then, are the three points which we have to consider.

I. First, this central injunction, into which all the moral teaching drawn from the second coming of Christ is gathered — 'Let us be sober.'

Now, I do not suppose we are altogether to omit any reference to the literal meaning of this word. The context seems to show that, by its reference to night as the season for drunken orgies. Temperance is moderation in regard not only to the evil and swinish sin of drunkenness, which is so manifestly contrary to all Christian integrity and nobility of character, but in regard to the far more subtle

temptation of another form of sensual indulgence — gluttony. The Christian Church needed to be warned of that, and if these people in Thessalonica needed the warning I am quite sure that we need it. There is not a nation on earth which needs it more than Englishmen. I am no ascetic, I do not want to glorify any outward observance, but any doctor in England will tell you that the average Englishman eats and drinks a great deal more than is good for him. It is melancholy to think how many professing Christians have the edge and keenness of their intellectual and spiritual life blunted by the luxurious and senseless table-abundance in which they habitually indulge. I am quite sure that water from the spring and barley-bread would be a great deal better for their souls, and for their bodies too, in the case of many people who call themselves Christians. Suffer a word of exhortation, and do not let it be neglected because it is brief and general. Sparta, after all, is the best place for a man to live in, next to Jerusalem.

But, passing from that, let us turn to the higher subject with which the Apostle is here evidently mainly concerned. What is the meaning of the exhortation 'Be sober'? Well, first let me tell you what I think is not the meaning of it. It does not mean an unemotional absence of fervour in your Christian character.

There is a kind of religious teachers who are always preaching down enthusiasm, and preaching up what they call a 'sober standard of feeling' in matters of religion. By which, in nine cases out of ten, they mean precisely such a tepid condition as is described in much less polite language, when the voice from heaven says, 'Because thou art neither cold nor hot I will spue thee out of My mouth.' That is the real meaning of the 'sobriety' that some people are always desiring you to cultivate. I should have thought that the last piece of furniture which any Christian Church in the twentieth century needed was a refrigerator! A poker and a pair of bellows would be very much more needful for them. For, dear brethren, the truths that you and I profess to believe are of such a nature, so tremendous either in their joyfulness and beauty, or in their solemnity and awfulness, that one would think that if they once got into a man's head and heart, nothing but the most fervid and continuous glow of a radiant enthusiasm would correspond to their majesty and overwhelming importance. I venture to say that the only consistent Christian is the enthusiastic Christian; and that the only man who will ever do anything in this world for God or man worth doing is the man who is not sober, according to that coldblooded definition which I have been speaking about, but who is all ablaze with an enkindled earnestness that knows no diminution and no cessation.

Paul, the very man that is exhorting here to sobriety, was the very type of an enthusiast all his life. So Festus thought him mad, and even in the Church at Corinth there were some to whom in his fervour, he seemed to be 'beside himself' (2 Corinthians 5:13).

Oh! for more of that insanity! You may make up your minds to this; that any men or women that are in thorough earnest, either about Christianity or about any other great, noble, lofty, self-forgetting purpose, will have to be content to have the old Pentecostal charge flung at them: — 'These men are full of new wine!' Well for the Church, and well for the men who deserve the taunt; for it means that they have learned something of the emotion that corresponds to such magnificent and awful verities as Christian faith converses with.

I did not intend to say so much about that; I turn now for a moment to the consideration of what this exhortation really means. It means, as I take it, mainly this: the prime Christian duty of self-restraint in the use and the love of all earthly treasures and pleasures.

I need not do more than remind you how, in the very make of a man's soul, it is clear that unless there be exercised rigid self-control he will go all to pieces. The make of human nature, if I may say so, shows that it is not meant for a democracy but a monarchy.

Here are within us many passions, tastes, desires, most of them rooted in the flesh, which are as blind as hunger and thirst are. If a man is hungry, the bread will satisfy him all the same whether he steals it or not; and it will not necessarily be distasteful even if it be poisoned. And there are other blind impulses and appetites in our nature which ask nothing except this: — 'Give me my appropriate gratification, though all the laws of God and man be broken in order to get it.'

And so there has to be something like an eye given to these blind beasts, and something like a directing hand laid upon these instinctive impulses. The true temple of the human spirit must be built in stages, the broad base laid in these animal instincts; above them, and controlling them, the directing and restraining will; above it the understanding which enlightens it and them; and supreme over all the conscience with nothing between it and heaven. Where that is not the order of the inner man you get wild work. You have set 'beggars on horseback,' and we all know where they go! The man who lets passion and 'inclination guide is like a steam-boat with all the furnaces banked up, with the engines going full speed, and nobody at the wheel. It will drive on to the rocks, or wherever the bow happens to point, no matter though death and destruction lie Beyond the next turn of the screw. That is what you will come to unless you live in the habitual exercise of rigid self-control.

And that self-control is to be exercised mainly, or at least as one very important form of it, in regard to our use-and estimate of the

pleasures of this present life. Yes! it is not only from the study of a man's make that the necessity for a very rigid self-government appears, but the observation of the conditions and circumstances in which he is placed points the same lesson. All round about him are hands reaching out to him drugged cups. The world with all its fading sweet comes tempting him, and the old fable fulfils itself — Whoever takes that Circe's cup and puts it to his lips and quaffs deep, turns into a swine, and sits there imprisoned at the feet of the sorceress for evermore!

There is only one thing that will deliver you from that fate, my brother. 'Be sober,' and in regard to the world and all that it offers to us — all joy, possession, gratification — 'set a knife to thy throat if thou be a man given to appetite.' There is no noble life possible on any other terms — not to say there is no Christian life possible on any other terms — but suppression and mortification of the desires of the flesh and of the spirit. You cannot look upwards and downwards at the same moment. Your heart is only a tiny room after all, and if you cram it full of the world, you relegate your Master to the stable outside. 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' 'Be sober,' says Paul, then, and cultivate the habit of rigid self-control in regard to this present. Oh! what a melancholy, solemn thought it is that hundreds of professing Christians in England, like vultures after a full meal, have so gorged themselves with the garbage of this present life that they cannot fly, and have to be content with moving along the ground, heavy and languid. Christian men and women, are you keeping yourselves in spiritual health by a very sparing use of the dainties and delights of earth? Answer the question to your own souls and to your Judge.

II. And now let me turn to the other thoughts that He here.

There is, secondly, a motive which backs up and buttresses this exhortation. 'Let us who are of the day' — or as the Revised Version has it a little more emphatically and correctly, 'Let us, since we are of the day, be sober.' 'The day'; what day? The temptation is to answer the question by saying — 'of course the specific day which was spoken about in the Beginning of the section, "the day of the Lord," that coming judgment by the coming Christ.' But I think that although, perhaps, there may be some allusion here to that specific day, still, if you will look at the verses which immediately precede my text, you will see that in them the Apostle has passed from the thought of 'the day of the Lord' to that of day in general. That is obvious, I think, from the contrast he draws between the 'day' and the 'night,' the darkness and the light. If so, then, when he says 'the children of the day' he does not so much mean — though that is quite true — that we are, as it were, akin to that day of judgment, and may therefore look forward to it without fear, and in quiet confidence, lifting up our heads because our redemption draws nigh; But rather he means that Christians are the children of that which expresses knowledge, and joy, and activity. Of these things the day is the emblem, in every language and in every poetry. The day is the time when men see and hear, the symbol of gladness and cheer all the world over.

And so, says Paul, you Christian men and women belong to a joyous realm, a realm of light and knowledge, a realm of purity and righteousness. You are children of the light; a glad condition which involves many glad and noble issues. Children of the light should be brave, children of the light should not be afraid of the light, children of the light should be cheerful, children of the light should be buoyant, children of the light should be transparent, children of the light should be hopeful, children of the light should be pure, and children of the light should walk in this darkened world, bearing their radiance with them; and making things, else unseen, visible to many a dim eye.

But while these emblems of cheerfulness, hope, purity, and illumination are gathered together in that grand name — 'Ye are the children of the day,' there is one direction especially in which the Apostle thinks that that consideration ought to tell, and that is the direction of self-restraint. 'Noblesse oblige!' — the aristocracy are bound to do nothing low or dishonourable. The children of the light are not to stain their hands with anything foul. Chambering and wantonness, slumber and drunkenness, the indulgence in the appetites of the flesh, — all that may be fitting for the night, it is clean incongruous with the day.

Well, if you want that turned into pedestrian prose — which is no more clear, but a little less emotional — it is just this: You Christian men and women belong — if you are Christians — to another state of things from that which is lying round about you; and, therefore, you ought to live in rigid abstinence from these things that are round about you.

That is plain enough surely, nor do I suppose that I need to dwell on that thought at any length. We belong to another order of things, says Paul; we carry a day with us in the midst of the night. What follows from that? Do not let us pursue the wandering lights and treacherous will-o'-the-wisps that lure men into bottomless bogs where they are lost. If we have light in our dwellings whilst Egypt lies in darkness, let it teach us to eat our meat with our loins girded, and our staves in our hands, not without bitter herbs, and ready to go forth into the wilderness. You do not belong to the world in which you live, if you are Christian men and women; you are only camped here. Your purposes, thoughts, hopes, aspirations, treasures, desires, delights, go up higher. And so, if you are children of the day, be self-restrained in your dealings with the darkness.

III. And, last of all, my text points out for us a method by which this great precept may be fulfilled: 'Putting on the breastplate of faith

and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation.'

That, of course, is the first rough draft occurring in Paul's earliest Epistle, of an image which recurs at intervals, and in more or less expanded form in other of his letters, and is so splendidly worked out in detail in the grand picture of the Christian armour in the Epistle to the Ephesians.

I need not do more than just remind you of the difference between that finished picture and this outline sketch. Here we have only defensive and not offensive armour, here the Christian graces are somewhat differently allocated to the different parts of the armour. Here we have only the great triad of Christian graces, so familiar on our lips — faith, hope, charity. Here we have faith and love in the closest possible juxtaposition, and hope somewhat more apart. The breastplate, like some of the ancient hauberks, made of steel and gold, is framed and forged out. of faith and love blended together, and faith and love are more closely identified in fact than faith and hope, or than love and hope. For faith and love have the same object — and are all but contemporaneous. Wherever a man lays hold of Jesus Christ by faith, there cannot but spring up in his heart love to Christ; and there is no love without faith. So that we may almost say that faith and love are but the two throws of the shuttle, the one in the one direction and the other in the other; whereas hope comes somewhat later in a somewhat remoter connection with faith, and has a somewhat different object from these other two. Therefore it is here slightly separated from its sister graces. Faith, love, hope — these three form the defensive armour that guard the seal; and these three make self-control possible. Like a diver in his dress, who is let down to the bottom of the wild, far-weltering ocean, a man whose heart is girt by faith and charity, and whose head is covered with the helmet of hope, may be dropped down into the wildest sea of temptation and of worldliness, and yet will walk dry and unharmed through the midst of its depths, and breathe air that comes from a world above the restless surges.

And in like manner the cultivation of faith, charity, and hope is the best means for securing the exercise of sober self-control.

It is an easy thing to say to a man, 'Govern yourself!' It is a very hard thing with the powers that any man has at his disposal to do if, As somebody said about an army joining the rebels, 'It's a bad job when the extinguisher catches fire!' And that is exactly the condition of things in regard to our power of self-government. The powers that should control are largely gone over to the enemy, and become traitors.

'Who shall keep the very keepers?' is the old question, and here is the answer: — You cannot execute the gymnastic feat of 'erecting yourself above yourself' any more than a man can take himself by his own coat collar and lift himself up from the ground with his own arms. But you can cultivate faith, hope, and charity, and these three, well cultivated and brought to bear upon your daily life, will do the governing for you. Faith will bring you into communication with all the power of God. Love will lead you into a region where all the temptations round you will be touched as by an Ithuriel spear, and will show their foulness. And hope will turn away Your eyes from looking at the tempting splendours around, and fix them upon the glories that are above.

And so the reins will come into your hands in an altogether new manner, and you will be able to be king over your own nature in a fashion that you did not dream of before, if only you will trust in Christ, and love Him, and fix your desires on the things above.

Then you will be able to govern yourself when you let Christ govern you. The glories that are to be done away, that gleam round you like foul, flaring tallow-candles, will lose all their fascination and brightness, by reason of the glory that excelleth, the pure starlike splendour of the white inextinguishable lights of heaven.

And when by faith, charity, and hope you have drunk of the new wine of the kingdom, the drugged and opiate cup which a sorceress world presents, jewelled though it be, will lose its charms, and it will not be hard to turn from it and dash it to the ground.

God help you, brother, to be 'sober,' for unless you are 'you cannot see the kingdom of God!'

WAKING AND SLEEPING

Jesus Christ, who died for us that, whether we wake or sleep we should live together with Him.' — 1 Thessalonians 5:10.

IN these words the Apostle concludes a section of this, his earliest letter, in which he has been dealing with the aspect of death in reference to the Christian—There are two very significant usages of language in the context which serve to elucidate the meaning of the words of our text, and to which I refer for a moment by way of introduction.

The one is that throughout this portion of his letter the Apostle emphatically reserves the word 'died' for Jesus Christ, and applies to Christ's followers only the word 'sleep.' Christ's death makes the deaths of those who trust Him a quiet slumber. The other is that the antithesis of waking and sleep is employed in two different directions in this section, Being first used to express, By the one term, simply physical life, and by the other, physical death; and secondly, to designate respectively the moral attitude of Christian watchfulness and that of worldly apathy to things unseen and drowsy engrossment with the present.

So in the words immediately preceding my text, we read, 'let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and Be sober.' The use of the antithesis in our text is chiefly the former, But there cannot be discharged from one of the expressions, 'wake,' the ideas which have just been associated with it, especially as the word which is translated 'wake' is the same as that just translated in the sixth verse, 'let us watch.' So that here there is meant By it, not merely the condition of life but that of Christian life — sober-minded vigilance and wide-awakeness to the realities of being. With this explanation of the meanings of the words before us, we may now proceed to consider them a little more minutely.

I. Note the death which is the foundation of life.

Recalling what I have said as to the precision and carefulness with which the Apostle varies his expressions in this context; speaking of Christ's death only by that grim name, and of the death of His servants as being merely a slumber, we have for the first thought suggested in reference to Christ's death, that it exhausted all the bitterness of death- Physically, the sufferings of our Lord were not greater, they were even less, than that of many a man. His voluntary acceptance of them was peculiar to Himself. But His death stands alone in this, that on His head was concentrated the whole awfulness of the thing. So far as the mere external facts go, there is nothing special about it. But I know not how the shrinking of Jesus Christ from the Cross can be explained without impugning His character, unless we see in His death something far more terrible than is the common lot of men. To me Gethsemane is altogether mysterious, and that scene beneath the olives shatters to pieces the perfectness of His character, unless we recognise that there it was the burden of the world's sin, beneath which, though His will never faltered, His human power tottered. Except we understand that, it seems to me that many who derived from Jesus Christ all their courage, bore their martyrdom better than He did; and that the servant has many a time been greater than his Lord. But if we take the Scripture point of view, and say, 'The Lord has made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all,' then we can understand the agony beneath the olives, and the cry from the Cross, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?'

Further, I would notice that this death is by the Apostle set forth as being the main factor in man's redemption. This is the first of Paul's letters, dating long before the others with which we are familiar. Whatever may have been the spiritual development of St. Paul in certain directions after his conversion — and I do not for a moment deny that there was such — it is very important to notice that the fundamentals of his Christology and doctrine of salvation were the same from the beginning to the end, and that in this, his first utterance, he lays down, as emphatically and clearly as ever afterwards he did, the great truth that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died on the Cross, thereby secured man's redemption. Here he isolates the death from the rest of the history of Christ, and concentrates the whole light of his thought upon the Cross, and says, There! that is the power by which men have been redeemed. I beseech you to ask yourselves whether these representations of Christian truth adhere to the perspective of Scripture, which do not in like manner set forth in the foreground of the whole the awning death of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Then note, further, that this death, the fountain of life, is a death for us. Now I know, of course, that the language here does not necessarily involve the idea of one dying instead of, but only of one dying on behalf of, another. But then I come to this question, In what conceivable sense, except the sense of bearing the world's sins, and, therefore, mine, is the death of Jesus Christ of advantage to me? Take the Scripture narratives. He died by the condemnation of the Jewish courts as a blasphemer; by the condemnation of the supercilious Roman court — cowardly in the midst of its superciliousness — as a possible rebel, though the sentencer did not believe in the reality of the charges. I want to know what good that is to me? He died, say some people, as the victim of a clearer insight and a more loving heart than the men around Him could understand. What advantage is that to me?

Oh, brethren I there is no meaning in the words 'He died for us' unless we understand that the benefit of His death lies in the fact that it was the sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and that, therefore, He died for us.

But then remember, too, that in this expression is set forth, not only the objective fact of Christ's death for us, but much in reference to the subjective emotions and purposes of Him who died. Paul was writing to these Thessalonians, of whom none, I suppose, except possibly a few Jews who might be amongst them, had ever seen Jesus Christ in the flesh, or known anything about Him. And yet he says to them, 'Away across the ocean there, Jesus Christ died for you men, not one of whom had ever appealed to His heart through His eyes.'

The principle involved is capable of the widest possible expansion. When Christ went to the Cross there was in His heart, in His purposes, in His desires, a separate place for every soul of man whom He embraced, not with the dim vision of some philanthropist, who looks upon the masses of unborn generations as possibly beneficially affected by some of his far-reaching plans, but with the individualising and separating knowledge of a divine eye, and the love of a divine heart, Jesus Christ bore the sins of the world because He bore in His sympathies and His purposes the sins of each single soul. Yours and mine and all our fellows' were there. Guilt and fear and loneliness, and all the other evils that beset men because they have departed from the living God, are floated away

‘By the water and the blood
From Thy wounded side which flowed’

and as the context teaches us, it is because He died for us that He is our Lord, and because He died for every man that He is every man's Master and King.

II. Note, secondly, the transformation of our lives and deaths affected thereby.

You may remember that, in my introductory remarks, I pointed out the double application of that antithesis of waking or sleeping in the context as referring in one case to the fact of physical life or death, and in the other to the fact of moral engrossment with the slumbering influences of the present, or of Christian vigilance. I carry some allusion to both of these ideas in the remarks that I have to make.

Through Jesus Christ life may be quickened into watchfulness. It is not enough to take waking as meaning living, for you may turn the metaphor round and say about a great many men that living means dreamy sleeping. Paul speaks in the preceding verses of ‘others’ than Christians as being asleep, and their lives as one long debauch and slumber in the night. Whilst, in contrast with physical death, physical life may be called ‘waking’; the condition of thousands of men, in regard to all the higher faculties, activities, and realities of being, is that of somnambulists — they are walking indeed, but they are walking in their sleep. Just as a man fast asleep knows nothing of the realities round him; just as he is swallowed up in his own dreams, so many walk in a vain show. Their highest faculties are dormant; the only real things do not touch them, and their eyes are closed to these. They live in a region of illusions which will pass away at cock-crowing, and leave them desolate. For some of us here living is only a distempered sleep, troubled by dreams which, whether they be pleasant or bitter, equally lack roots in the permanent realities to which we shall wake some day. But if we hold by Jesus Christ, who died for us, and let His love constrain us, His Cross quicken us, and the might of His great sacrifice touch us, and the blood of sprinkling be applied to our eye-balls as an eye-salve, that we may see, we shall wake from our opiate sleep — though it may be as deep as if the sky rained soporifics upon us — and be conscious of the things that are, and have our dormant faculties roused, and be quickened into intense vigilance against our enemies, and brace ourselves for our tasks, and be ever looking forward to that joyful hope, to that coming which shall bring the fulness of waking and of life.

So, you professing Christians, do you take the lessons of this text? A sleeping Christian is on the high road to cease to be a Christian at all. If there be one thing more comprehensively imperative upon us than another, it is this, that, belonging, as we do by our very profession, to the day, and being the children of the light, we shall neither sleep nor be drunken, but be sober, watching as they who expect their Lord. You walk amidst realities that will hide themselves unless you gaze for them; therefore, watch. You walk amidst enemies that will steal subtly upon you, like some gliding serpent through the grass, or some painted savage in the forest; therefore, watch. You expect a Lord to come from heaven with a relieving army that is to raise the siege and free the hard-beset garrison from its fears and its toilsome work; therefore, watch. ‘They that sleep, sleep in the night.’ They who are Christ's should be like the living creatures in the Revelation, all eyes round about, and every eye gazing on things unseen and looking for the Master when He comes.

On the other hand, the death of Christ will soften our deaths into slumber. The Apostle will not call what the senses call death, by that dread name, which was warranted when applied to the facts of Christ's death. The physical fact remaining the same, all that is included under the complex whole called death, which makes its terrors, goes, for a man who keeps fast hold of Christ who died and lives. For what makes the sting of death? Two or three things. It is like some poisonous insect's sting, it is a complex weapon. One side of it is the fear of retribution. Another side of it is the shrinking from loneliness. Another side of it is the dread of the dim darkness of an unknown future. And all these are taken clean away. Is it guilt, dread of retribution? ‘Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me.’ Is it loneliness? In the valley of darkness ‘I will be with thee. My rod and My staff will comfort thee.’ Is it a shrinking from the dim unknown and all the familiar habitudes and occupations of the warm corner where we have lived? ‘Jesus Christ has brought immortality to light by the Gospel.’ We do not, according to the sad words of one of the victims of modern advanced thought, pass by the common road into the great darkness, but by the Christ-made living Way into the everlasting light. And so it is a misnomer to apply the same term to the physical fact plus the accompaniment of dread and shrinking and fear of retribution and solitude and darkness, and to the physical fact invested with the direct and bright opposites of all these.

Sleep is rest; sleep is consciousness; sleep is the prophecy of waking. We know not what the condition of those, who sleep in Jesus

may be, but we know that the child on its mother's breast, and conscious somehow, in its slumber, of the warm place where its head rests, is full of repose. And they that sleep in Jesus will be so. Then, whether we wake or sleep does not seem to matter so very much.

III. The united life of all who live with Christ.

Christ's gift to men is the gift of life in all senses of that word, from the lowest to the highest. That life, as our text tells us, is altogether unaffected by death. We cannot see round the sharp angle where the valley turns, but we know that the path runs straight on through the gorge up to the throat of the pass — and so on to the 'shining table-lands whereof our God Himself is Sun and Moon.' There are some rivers that run through stagnant lakes, keeping the tinge of their waters, and holding together the body of their stream undiverted from its course, and issuing undiminished and untarnished from the lower end of the lake. And so the stream of our lives may run through the Dead Sea, and come out below none the worse for the black waters through which it has forced its way. The life that Christ gives is unaffected by death. Our creed is a risen Saviour, and the corollary of that creed is, that death touches the circumference, but never gets near the man. It is hard to believe, in the face of the foolish senses; it is hard to believe, in the face of aching sorrow. It is hard today to believe, in the face of passionate and ingenious denial, but it is true all the same, Death is sleep, and sleep is life.

And so; further, my text tells us that this life is life with Christ. We know not details, we need not know them. Here we have the presence of Jesus Christ, if we love Him, as really as when He walked the earth. Ah! more really, for Jesus Christ is nearer to us who, having not seen Him, love Him, and somewhat know His divinity and His sacrifice, than He was to the men who companied with Him all the time that He went in and out amongst them, whilst they were ignorant of who dwelt with them, and entertained the Lord of angels and men unawares. He is with us, and it is the power and the privilege and the joy of our lives to realise His presence. That Lord who, whilst He was on earth, was the Son of Man which is in heaven, now that He is in heaven in His corporeal humanity is the Son of God who dwells with us. And as He dwells with us, if we love Him and trust Him, so, but in fashion incapable of being revealed to us, now does He dwell with those of whose condition this is the only and all-sufficing positive knowledge which we have, that they are 'absent from the body; present with the Lord.'

Further, that united life is a social life. The whole force of my text is often missed by English readers, who run into one idea the two words 'together with.' But if you would put a comma after 'together,' you would understand better what Paul meant. He refers to two forms of union. Whether we wake or sleep we shall live all aggregated together, and all

aggregated 'together' because each is 'with Him.' That is to say, union with Jesus Christ makes all who partake of that union, whether they belong to the one side of the river or the other, into a mighty whole. They are together because they are with the Lord.

Suppose a great city, and a stream flowing through its centre. The palace and all pertaining to the court are on one side of the water; there is an outlying suburb on the other, of meaner houses, inhabited by poor and humble people. But yet it is one city. 'Ye are come unto the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.' We are knit together by one life, one love, one thought; and the more we fix our hearts on the things which those above live among and by, the more truly are we knit to them. As a quaint old English writer says, 'They are gone but into another pew in the same church.'

We are one in Him, and so there will be a perfecting of union in reunion; and the inference so craved for by our hearts seems to be warranted to our understandings, that that society above, which is the perfection of society, shall not be lacking in the elements of mutual recognition and companionship, without which we cannot conceive of society at all. 'And so we shall ever be with the Lord.'

Dear friends, I beseech you to trust your sinful souls to that dear Lord who bore you in His heart and mind when He bore His cross to Calvary and completed the work of your redemption. If you will accept Him as your sacrifice and Saviour, when He cried 'It is finished,' united to Him your lives will be quickened into intense activity and joyful vigilance and expectation, and death will be smoothed into a quiet falling asleep. 'The shadow feared of man,' that strikes threateningly across every path, will change as we approach it, if our hearts are anchored on Him who died for us, into the Angel of Light to whom God has given charge concerning us to bear up our feet upon His hands, and land us in the presence of the Lord and in the perfect society of those who love Him. And so shall we live together, and all together, with Him.

EDIFICATION

'Edify one another.' — 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

I DO not intend to preach about that clause only, but I take it as containing, in the simplest form, one of the Apostle's favourite metaphors which runs through all his 'letters, and the significance of which, I think, is very little grasped by ordinary readers.

'Edify one another.' All metaphorical words tend to lose their light and colour, and the figure to get faint, in popular understanding. We all know that 'edifice' means a building; we do not all realise that 'edify' means to build up. And it is a great misfortune that our Authorised Version, in accordance with the somewhat doubtful principle on which its translators proceeded, varies the rendering of the one Greek word so as to hide the frequent recurrence of it in the apostolic teaching. The metaphor that underlies it is the notion of building up a structure. The Christian idea of the structure to be built up is that it is a temple. I wish in this sermon to try to bring out some of the manifold lessons and truths that lie in this great figure, as applied to the Christian life.

Now, glancing over the various uses of the phrase in the New Testament, I find that the figure of 'building,' as the great duty of the Christian life, is set forth under three aspects; self-edification, united edification, and divine edification. And I purpose to look at these in order.

I. First, self-edification.

According to the ideal of the Christian life that runs through the New Testament, each Christian man is a dwelling-place of God's, and his work is to build himself up into a temple worthy of the divine indwelling. Now, I suppose that the metaphor is such a natural and simple one that we do not need to look for any Scriptural basis of it. But if we did, I should be disposed to find it in the solemn antithesis with which the Sermon on the Mount is closed, where there are the two houses pictured, the one built upon the rock and standing firm, and the other built upon the sand. But that is perhaps unnecessary.

We are all builders; Building up — what? Character. ourselves. But what sort of a thing is it that we are building? Some of us pigsties, in which gross, swinish lusts-wallow in filth; some of us shops; some of us laboratories, studies, museums; some of us amorphous structures that cannot be described. But the Christian man is to be building himself up into a temple of God. The aim which should ever burn clear before us, and preside over even our smallest actions, is that which lies in this misused old word, 'edify' yourselves.

The first thing about a structure is the foundation And Paul was narrow enough to believe that the one foundation upon which a human spirit could be built up into a hallowed character is Jesus Christ. He is the basis of all our certitude. He is the anchor for all our hopes. To Him should be referred all our actions; for Him and by Him our lives should be lived. On Him should rest, solid and inexpugnable, standing foursquare to all the winds that blow, the fabric of our characters. Jesus Christ is the pattern, the motive which impels, and the power which enables, me to rear myself into a habitation of God through the Spirit. Whilst I gladly acknowledge that very lovely structures may be reared upon another foundation than Him, I would beseech you all to lay this on your hearts and consciences, that for the loftiest, serenest beauty of character there is but one basis upon which it can be rested. 'Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.'

Then there is another aspect of this same metaphor, not in Paul's writings but in another part of the New Testament, where we read: 'Ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith.' So that, in a subordinate sense, a man's faith is the basis upon which he can build such a structure of character; or, to put it into other words — in regard to the man himself, the first requisite to the rearing of such a fabric as God will dwell in is that he, by his own personal act of faith, should have allied himself to Jesus Christ, who is the foundation; and should be in a position to draw from Him all the power, and to feel raying out from Him all the impulses, and lovingly to discern in Him all the characteristics, which make Him a pattern for all men in their building.

The first course of stone that we lay is Faith; and that course is, as it were, mortised into the foundation, the living Rock He that builds on Christ cannot build but by faith. The two representations are complementary to one another, the one, which represents Jesus Christ as the foundation, stating the ultimate fact, and the other, which represents faith as the foundation, stating the condition on which we come into vital contact with Christ Himself.

Then, further, in this great thought of the Christian life being substantially a building up of oneself on Jesus is implied the need for continuous labour. You cannot build up a house in half an hour. You cannot do it, as the old fable told us that Orpheus did, by music, or by wishing. There must be dogged, hard, continuous, life-long effort if there is to be this building up. No man becomes a saint per saltum. No man makes a character at a flash. The stones are actions; the mortar is that mystical, awful thing, habit; and deeds cemented together by custom rise into that stately dwelling-place in which God abides. So, there is to be a life-long work in character, gradually rearing it into His likeness.

The metaphor also carries with it the idea of orderly progression. There are a number of other New Testament emblems which set forth this notion of the true Christian ideal as being continual growth. For instance, 'first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear,' represents it as resembling vegetable growth, while elsewhere it is likened to the growth of the human body. Both of these

are beautiful images, in that they suggest that such progressive advance-sent is the natural consequence of life; and is in one aspect effortless and instinctive.

But then you have to supplement that emblem with others, and there comes in sharp contrast to it the metaphor which represents the Christian progress as being warfare. There the element of resistance is emphasised, and the thought is brought out that progress is to be made in spite of strong antagonisms, partly to be found in external circumstances, and partly to be found in our own treacherous selves. The growth of the corn or of the body does not cover the whole facts of the case but there must be warfare in order to growth.

There is also the other metaphor by which this Christian progress, which is indispensable to the Christian life, and is to be carried on, whatever may oppose it, is regarded as a race. There the idea of the great, attractive, but far-off future reward comes into view, as well as the strained muscles and the screwed-up energy with which the runner presses towards the mark. But we have not only to fling the result forward into the future, and to think of the Christian life as all tending towards an end, which end is not realised here; but we have to think of it, in accordance with this metaphor of my text, as being continuously progressive, so as that, though unfinished, the building is there; and much is done, though all is not accomplished, and the courses rise slowly, surely, partially realising the divine Architect's ideal, long before the head-stone is brought out with shoutings and tumult of acclaim. A continuous progress and approximation towards the perfect ideal of the temple completed, consecrated, and inhabited by God, lies in this metaphor.

Is that you, Christian man and woman? Is the notion of progress a part of your working belief? Are you growing, fighting, running, building up yourselves more and more in your holy faith? Alas! I cannot but believe that the very notion of progress has died out from a great many professing Christians.

There is one more idea in this metaphor of self-edification, viz., that our characters should be being modelled by us on a definite plan, and into a harmonious whole. I wonder how many of us in this chapel this morning have ever spent a quiet hour in trying to set clearly before ourselves what we want to make of ourselves, and how we mean to go about it. Most of us live by haphazard very largely, even in regard to outward things, and still more entirely in regard to our characters. Most of us have not consciously before us, as you put a pattern-line before a child learning to write, any ideal of ourselves to which we are really seeking to approximate. Have you? And could you put it into words? And are you making any kind of intelligent and habitual effort to get at it? I am afraid a great many of us, if we were honest, would have to say, No! If a man goes to work as his own architect, and has a very hazy idea of what it is that he means to build, he will not build anything worth the trouble. If your way of building up yourselves is, as Aaron said his way of making the calf was, putting all into the fire, and letting chance settle what comes out, nothing will come out better than a calf. Brother! if you are going to build, have a plan, and let the plan be the likeness of Jesus Christ. And then, with continuous work, and the exercise of continuous faith, which knits you to the foundation, 'build up yourselves for an habitation of God.'

II. We have to consider united edification.

There are two streams of representation about this matter in the Pauline Epistles, the one with which I have already been dealing, which does not so often appear, and the other which is the habitual form of the representation, according to which the Christian community, as a whole, is a temple, and building up is a work to be done reciprocally and in common.

We have that representation with special frequency and detail in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where perhaps we may not be fanciful in supposing that the great prominence given to it, and to the idea of the Church as the temple of God, may have been in some degree due to the existence, in that city, of one of the seven wonders of the world, the Temple of Diana of the Ephesians.

But, be that as it may, what I want to point out is that united building is inseparable from the individual building up of which I have been speaking.

Now, it is often very hard for good, conscientious people to determine how much of their efforts ought be given to the perfecting of their own characters in any department, and how much ought to be given to trying to benefit and help other people. I wish you to notice that one of the most powerful ways of building up myself is to do my very best to build up others. Some, like men in my position, for instance, and others whose office requires them to spend a great deal of time and energy in the service of their fellows, are tempted to devote themselves too much to building up character in other people, and to neglect their own. It is a temptation that we need to fight against, and which can only be overcome by much solitary meditation. Some of us, on the other hand, may be tempted, for the sake of our own perfecting, intellectual cultivation, or improvement in other ways, to minimise the extent to which we are responsible for helping and blessing other people. But let us remember that the two things cannot be separated; and that there is nothing that will make a man more like Christ, which is the end of all our building, than casting himself into the service of his fellows

with self-oblivion.

Peter said, 'Master! let us make here three tabernacles.' Ay! But there was a demoniac boy down below, and the disciples could not cast out the demon. The Apostle did not know what he said when he preferred building up himself, by communion With God and His glorified servants, to hurrying down into the valley, where there were devils to fight and broken hearts to heal Build up yourselves, by all means; if you do you will have to build up your brethren. 'The edifying of the body of Christ' is a plain duty which no Christian man can neglect without leaving a tremendous gap in the structure which he ought to rear.

The building resulting from united edification is represented in Scripture, not as the agglomeration of a number of little shrines, the individuals, but as one great temple. That temple grows in two respects, both of which carry with them imperative duties to us Christian people. It grows by the addition of new stones. And so every Christian is bound to seek to gather into the fold those that are wandering far away, and to lay some stone upon that sure foundation. It grows, also, by the closer approximation of all the members one to another, and the individual increase of each in Christ-like characteristics. And we are bound to help one another therein, and to labour earnestly for the advancement of our brethren, and for the unity of God's Church. Apart from such efforts our individual edifying of ourselves will become isolated, the results one-sided, and we ourselves shall lose much of what is essential to the rearing in ourselves of a holy character. 'What God hath joined together let not man put asunder.' Neither seek to build up yourselves apart from the community, nor seek to build up the community apart from yourselves

III. Lastly, the Apostle, in his writings, sets forth another aspect of this general thought, viz., divine edification.

When he spoke to the elders of the church of Ephesus he said that Christ was able 'to build them up.' When he wrote to the Corinthians he said, 'Ye are God's building.' To the Ephesians he wrote, 'Ye are built for an habitation of God through the Spirit.' And so high above all our individual and all our united effort he carries up our thoughts to the divine Master-builder, by whose work alone a Paul, when he lays the foundation, and an Apollos, when he builds thereupon, are of any use at all.

Thus, dear brethren, we have to base all our efforts on this deeper truth, that it is God who builds us into a temple meet for Himself, and then comes to dwell in the temple that He has built.

So let us keep our hearts and minds expectant of, and open for, that Spirit's influences. Let us be sure that we are using all the power that God does give us, His work does not supersede mine. My work is to avail myself of His. The two thoughts are not contradictory. They correspond to, and fill out, each other, though warring schools of one-eyed theologians and teachers have set them in antagonism. 'Work out.., for it is God that worketh in.' That is the true reconciliation. 'Ye are God's building; build up yourselves in your most holy faith.'

If God is the builder, then boundless, indomitable hope should be ours. No man can look at his own character, after all his efforts to mend it, without being smitten by a sense of despair, if he has only his own resources to fall back upon. Our experience is like that of the monkish builders, according to many an old legend, who found every morning that yesterday's work had been pulled down in the darkness by demon hands. There is no man whose character is anything more than a torso, an incomplete attempt to build up the structure that was in his mind — like the ruins of half-finished palaces and temples which travellers came across sometimes in lands now desolate, reared by a forgotten race who were swept away by some unknown calamity, and have left the stones half-lifted to their courses, half-hewed in their quarries, and the building gaunt and incomplete. But men will never have to say about any of God's architecture, He 'began to build and was not able to finish.' As the old prophecy has it, 'His hands have laid the foundation of the house, His hands shall also finish it.' Therefore, we are entitled to cherish endless hope and quiet confidence that we, even we, shall be reared up into an habitation of God through the Spirit.

What are you building? 'Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone.' Let every man take heed what and how and that he buildeth thereon.

CONTINUAL PRAYER AND ITS EFFECTS

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks. — 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

THE peculiarity and the stringency of these three precepts is the unbroken continuity which they require. To rejoice, to pray, to give thanks, are easy when circumstances favour, as a taper burns steadily in a windless night; but to do these things always is as difficult as for the taper's flame to keep upright when all the winds are eddying round it. 'Evermore' — 'without ceasing' — 'in

everything' — these qualifying words give the injunctions of this text their grip and urgency. The Apostle meets the objections which he anticipates would spring to the lips of the Thessalonians, to the effect that he was requiring impossibilities, by adding that, hard and impracticable as they might think such a constant attitude of mind and heart, 'This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' So, then, a Christian life may be lived continuously on the high level; and more than that, it is our duty to try to live ours thus.

We need not fight with other Christian people about whether absolute obedience to these precepts is possible. It will be soon enough for us to discuss whether a completely unbroken uniformity of Christian experience is attainable in this life, when we have come a good deal nearer to the attainable than we have yet reached. Let us mend our breaches of continuity a good deal more, and then we may begin to discuss the question whether an absolute absence of any cessation of the continuity is consistent with the conditions of Christian life here.

Now it seems to me that these three exhortations hold together in a very striking way, and that Paul knew what he was about when he put in the middle, like the strong central pole that holds up a tent, that exhortation, 'Pray without ceasing.' For it is the primary precept, and on its being obeyed the possibility of the fulfilment of the other two depends. If we pray without ceasing, we shall rejoice evermore and in everything give thanks. So, then, the duty of continual prayer, and the promise, as well as the precept, that its results are to be continual joy and continual thanksgiving, are suggested by these words.

I. The duty of continual prayer.

Roman Catholics, with their fatal habit of turning the spiritual into material, think that they obey that commandment When they set a priest or a nun on the steps of the altar to repeat Ave Marias day and night. That is a way of praying without ceasing which we can all see to be mechanical and unworthy. But have we ever realised what this commandment necessarily reveals to us, as to what real prayer is? For if we are told. to do a thing uninterruptedly, it must be something that can run unbroken through all the varieties, of our legitimate duties and necessary occupations, and absorptions with the things seen, and temporal. Is that your notion of prayer? Or do you fancy that it simply means dropping down on your knee, and asking God to give you, some things that you very much want? Petition is an element in prayer, and-that it shall be crystallised into words is necessary sometimes; but there are prayers-that never get' themselves uttered, and I suppose that the deepest and truest communion with-God: is voiceless. and wordless. 'Things which it was not possible for a man to utter,' was Paul's description of what he saw stud felt, when he was most completely absorbed, in, and saturated with, the divine glory. The more we understand what prayer is, the less we shall feel that it depends upon utterance. For the essence of it is to have heart and mind filled with the consciousness of God's presence; and to have the habit of referring everything to Him, in the moment when we are doing it, or when it meets us. That, as I take it, is prayer. The old mystics had a phrase, quaint, and in some sense unfortunate, but very striking, when, they spoke about 'the practice of the presence of God.' God is here always, you will. say; yes, He is, and to open the shutters, and to let the light always in, into every. corner of my heart, and every detail of my life that is what Paul means by 'Praying without ceasing.' Petitions? Yes; but something higher than petitions — the consciousness of being in touch with the Father, feeling that He is all round us. It was said about one mystical thinker that he was a 'God-intoxicated man.' It is an ugly word, but it expresses a very deep thing; but let us rather say a God-filled man, He who is such 'prays always.'

But how may we maintain that state of continual devotion, even amidst the various and necessary occupations of our daily lives? As I said, we need not trouble ourselves about the possibility of complete attainment of that ideal. We know that we can each of us pray a great deal more than we do, and if there are regions in our lives into which we feel that God will not come, habits that we have dropped into which we feel to be a film between us and Him, the sooner we get rid of them the better. But into all our daily duties, dear friends, however absorbing, however secular, however small, however irritating they may be, however monotonous, into all our daily duties it is possible to bring Him.

'A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine,
Who sweeps a room, as by Thy laws,
Makes that and the calling fine.'

But if that is our aim, our conscious aim, our honest aim, we shall recognise that a help to it is words of prayer. I do not believe in silent adoration, if there is nothing but silent; and I do not believe in a man going through life with the conscious presence of God with him, unless, often, in the midst of the stress of daily life, he shoots little arrows of two-worded prayers up into the heavens, 'Lord! be with me.'

'Lord! help me.' 'Lord! stand by me now'; and the like. 'They cried unto God in the battle,' when some people would have thought

they would have been better occupied in trying to keep their heads with their swords. It was not a time for very elaborate supplications when the foemen's arrows were whizzing round them, but 'they cried unto the Lord, and He was entreated of them.' 'Pray without ceasing.'

Further, if we honestly try to obey this precept we shall more and more find out, the more earnestly we do so, that set seasons of prayer are indispensable to realising it. I said that I do not believe in silent adoration unless it sometimes finds its tongue, nor do I believe in a diffused worship that does not flow from seasons of prayer. There must be, away up amongst the hills, a dam cast across the valley that the water may be gathered behind it, if the great city is to be supplied with the pure fluid. What would become of Manchester if it were not for the reservoirs at Wood-head away among the hills? Your pipes would be empty. And that is what will become of you Christian professors in regard to your habitual consciousness of God's presence, if you do not take care to have your hours of devotion sacred, never to be interfered with, be they long or short, as may have to be determined by family circumstances, domestic duties, daily avocations, and a thousand other causes. But, unless we pray at set seasons, there is little likelihood of our praying without ceasing.

II. The duty of continual rejoicing.

If we begin with the central duty of continual prayer, then these other two which, as it were, flow from it on either side, will be possible to us; and of these two the Apostle sets first, 'Rejoice evermore.'

This precept was given to the Thessalonians, in Paul's first letter, when things were comparatively bright with him, and he was young and buoyant; and in one of his later letters, when he was a prisoner, and things were anything but rosy coloured, he struck the same note again, and in spite of his 'bonds in Christ' bade the Philippians 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.' Indeed, that whole prison-letter might be called the Epistle of Joy, so suffused with sunshine of Christian gladness is it. Now, no doubt, joy is largely a matter of temperament. Some of us are constitutionally more buoyant and cheerful than others. And it is also very largely a matter of circumstances.

I admit all that, and yet I come back to Paul's command: 'Rejoice evermore.' For if we are Christian people, and have cultivated what I have called 'the practice of the presence of God' in our lives, then that will change the look of things, and events that otherwise would be 'at enmity with joy' will cease to have a hostile influence over it. There are two sources from which a man's gladness may come, the one his circumstances of a pleasant and gladdening character; the other his communion with God. It is like some river that is composed of two affluents, one of which rises away up in the mountains, and is fed by the eternal snows; the other springs on the plain somewhere, and is but the drainage of the surface-water, and when hot weather comes, and drought is over all the land, the one affluent is dry, and only a chaos of ghastly white stones litters the bed where the flashing water used to be. What then? Is the stream gone because one of its affluents is dried up, and has perished or been lost in the sands? The gushing fountains away up among the peaks near the stars are bubbling up all the same, and the heat that dried the surface stream has only loosened the treasures of the snows, and poured them more abundantly into the other's bed. So 'Rejoice in the Lord always'; and if earth grows dark, lift your eyes to the sky, that is light. To one walking in the woods at nightfall 'all the paths are dim,' but the strip of heaven above the trees is the brighter for the green gloom around. The organist's one hand may be keeping up one sustained note, while the other is wandering over the keys; and one part of a man's nature may be steadfastly rejoicing in the Lord, whilst the other is feeling the weight of sorrows that come from earth. The paradox of the Christian life may be realised as a blessed

experience of every one of us: a surface troubled, a central calm; an ocean tossed with storm, and yet the crest of every wave flashing in the sunshine. 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.'

III. Lastly, the duty of continual thankfulness. That, too, is possible only on condition of continual communion with God. As I said in reference to joy, so I say in reference to thankfulness; the look of things in this world depends very largely on the colour of the spectacles through which you behold them.

'There's nothing either good or bad
But thinking makes it so.'

And if a man in communion with God looks at the events of his life as he might put on a pair of coloured glasses to look at a landscape, it will be tinted with a glory and a glow as he looks. The obligation to gratitude, often neglected by us, is singularly, earnestly, and frequently enjoined in the New Testament. I am afraid that the average Christian man does not recognise its importance as an element in his Christian experience. As directed to the past it means that we do not forget, but that, as we look back, we see the meaning of these old days, and their possible blessings, and the loving purposes which sent them, a great deal more clearly than we did whilst we were passing through them. The mountains that, when you are close to them, are barren rock and cold snow, glow in the distance with royal purples. And so if we, from our standing point in God, will look back on our lives,

losses will disclose themselves as gains, sorrows as harbingers of joy, conflict as a means of peace, the crooked things will be straight, and the rough places plain; and we may for every thing in the past give thanks, if only we 'pray without ceasing.' The exhortation as applied to the present means that we bow our wills, that we believe that all things are working together for our good, and that, like Job in his best moments, we shall say, 'The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the Name of the Lord.' Ah, that is hard. It is possible, but it is only possible if we 'pray without ceasing,' and dwell beside God all the days of our lives, and all the hours of every day. Then, and only then, shall we be able to thank Him for all the way by which He hath led us these many years in the wilderness, that has been brightened by the pillar of cloud by day, and the fire by night.

PAUL'S EARLIEST TEACHING

'I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.' 1 Thessalonians 5:27.

If the books of the New Testament were arranged according to the dates of their composition, this epistle would stand first. It was written somewhere about twenty years after the Crucifixion, and long before any of the existing Gospels. It is, therefore, of peculiar interest, as being the most venerable extant Christian document, and as being a witness to Christian truth quite independent of the Gospel narratives.

The little community at Thessalonica had been gathered together as the result of a very brief period of ministration by Paul. He had spoken for three successive Sabbaths in the synagogue, and had drawn together a Christian society, mostly consisting of heathens, though with a sprinkling of Jews amongst them. Driven from the city by a riot, he had left it for Athens, with many anxious thoughts, of course, as to whether the infant community would be able to stand alone after so few weeks of his presence and instruction. Therefore he sent back one of his travelling companions, Timothy by name, to watch over the young plant for a little while. When Timothy returned with the intelligence of their steadfastness, it was good news indeed, and with a sense of relieved anxiety, he sits down to write this letter, which, all through, throbs with thankfulness, and reveals the strain which the news had taken off his spirit.

There are no such definite doctrinal statements in it as in the most of Paul's longer letters; it is simply an outburst of confidence and love and tenderness, and a series of practical instructions. It has been called the least doctrinal of the Pauline Epistles. And in one sense, and under certain limitations, that is perfectly true. But the very fact that it is so makes its indications and hints and allusions the more significant; and if this letter, not written for the purpose of enforcing any special doctrinal truth, he so saturated as it is with the facts and principles of the Gospel, the stronger is the attestation which it gives to the importance of these. I have, therefore, thought it might be worth our while now, and might, perhaps, set threadbare truth in something of a new light, if we put this the most ancient Christian writing extant, which is quite independent of the four Gospels — into the witness-box, and see what it has to say about the great truths and principles which we call the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is my simple design, and I gather the phenomena into three or four divisions for the sake of accuracy and order.

I. First of all, then, let us hear its witness to the divine Christ.

Look how the letter begins. 'Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ.' What is the meaning of that collocation, putting these two names aide by side, unless it means that the Lord Jesus Christ sits on the Father's throne, and is divine?

Then there is another fact that I would have you notice, and that is that more than twenty times in this short letter that great name is applied to Jesus, 'the Lord.' Now mark that that is something more than a mere title of human authority. It is in reality the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament Jehovah, and is the transference to Him of that incommunicable name.

And then there is another fact which I would have you weigh, viz., that in this letter direct prayer is offered to our Lord Himself. In one place we read the petition, 'May our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way unto you,' where the petition is presented to both, and where both are supposed to be operative in the answer. And more than that, the word 'direct,' following upon this plural subject, is itself a singular verb. Could language more completely express than that grammatical solecism does, the deep truth of the true and proper divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? There is nothing in any part of Scripture more emphatic and more lofty in its unflinching proclamation of that fundamental truth of the Gospel than this altogether undoctinal Epistle.

The Apostle does not conceive himself to be telling these men, though they were such raw and recent Christians, anything new when he presupposes the truth that to Him desires and prayers may go. Thus the very loftiest apex of revealed religion had been imparted to that handful of heathens in the few weeks of the Apostle's stay amongst them. And nowhere upon the inspired pages of

the fourth Evangelist, nor in that great Epistle to the Colossians, which is the very citadel and central fort of that doctrine in Scripture, is there more emphatically stated this truth than here, in these incidental allusions.

This witness, at any rate, declares, apart altogether from any other part of Scripture, that so early in the development of the Church's history, and to people so recently dragged from idolatry, and having received but such necessarily partial instruction in revealed truth, this had not been omitted, that the Christ in whom they trusted was the Everlasting Son of the Father. And it takes it for granted that, so deeply was that truth embedded in their new consciousness that an allusion to it was all that was needed for their understanding and their faith. That is the first part of the testimony.

II. Now, secondly, let us ask what this witness has to say about the dying Christ.

There is no doctrinal theology in the Epistle to the Thessalonians, they tell us. Granted that there is no articulate argumentative setting forth of great doctrinal truths. But these are implied and involved in almost every word of it; and are definitely stated thus incidentally in more places than one. Let us hear the witness about the dying Christ.

First, as 'to the fact. 'The Jews killed the Lord Jesus.' The historical fact is here set forth distinctly. And then, beyond the fact, there is as distinctly, though in the same incidental fashion, set forth the meaning of that fact — God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us.

Here are at least two things — one, the allusion, as to a well-known and received truth, proclaimed before now to them, that Jesus Christ in His death had died for them; and the other, that Jesus Christ was the medium through whom the Father had appointed that men should obtain all the blessings which are wrapped up in that sovereign word 'salvation.' I need but mention in this connection another verse, from another part of the letter, which speaks of Jesus as 'He that delivereth us from the wrath to come.' Remark that there our Authorised Version fails to give the whole significance of the words, because it translates delivered, instead of, as the Revised Version correctly does, delivereth. It is a continuous deliverance, running all through the life of the Christian man, and not merely to be realised away yonder at the far end; because by the mighty providence of God, and by the automatic working of the consequences of every transgression and disobedience, that 'wrath' is ever coming, coming, coming towards men, and lighting on them, and a continual Deliverer, who delivers us by His death, is what the human heart needs. This witness is distinct that the death of Christ is a sacrifice, that the death of Christ is man's deliverance from wrath, that the death of Christ is a present deliverance from the consequences of transgression.

And was that Paul's peculiar doctrine? Is it conceivable that, in a letter in which he refers — once, at all events — to the churches in Judea as their 'brethren,' he was proclaiming any individual or schismatic reading of the facts of the life of Jesus Christ? I believe that there has been a great deal too much made of the supposed divergencies of types of doctrine in the New Testament. There are such types, within certain limits. Nobody would mistake a word of John's calm, mystical, contemplative spirit for a word of Paul's fiery, dialectic spirit. And nobody would mistake either the one or the other for Peter's impulsive, warm-hearted exhortations. But whilst there are diversities in the way of apprehending, there are no diversities in the declaration of what is the central truth to be apprehended. These varyings of the types of doctrine in the New Testament are one in this, that all point to the Cross as the world's salvation, and declare that the death there was the death for all mankind.

Paul comes to it with his reasoning; John comes to it with his adoring contemplation; Peter comes to it, with his mind saturated with Old Testament allusions. Paul declares that the 'Christ died for us'; John declares that He is 'the Lamb of God'; Peter declares that 'Christ bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' But all make one unbroken phalanx of witness in their proclamation, that the Cross; because it is a cross of sacrifice, is a cross of reconciliation and peace and hope, And this is the Gospel that they all proclaim, 'how that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' and Paul could venture to say, 'Whether it were they or I, so we' preach, and so ye believed.'

That was the Gospel that, took these heathens, wallowing in the mire of sensuous idolatry, and lifted them up to the elevation and the blessedness of children of God.

And if you will read this letter, and think that, there had been only a few weeks of acquaintance with the Gospel on the part of its readers, and then mark how the early and imperfect glimpse of it had transformed them, you will see where the power lies in the proclamation of the Gospel. A short time before they had been heathens; and now says Paul, 'From you sounded out the word, of the Lord, not only in Macedonia. and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything.' We do not need to tell you about 'love of the brethren,' for 'yourselves are taught of God to love one another, and my heart is full of thankfulness when I think of your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope.' The men had been transformed. What transformed them? The message of a divine and dying Christ, who had offered up Himself without spot unto God,

and who was their peace and their righteousness and their power.

III. Thirdly, notice what this witness has to say about the risen and ascended Christ.

Here is what it has to say: 'Ye turned unto God... to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead,' And again: 'The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout.' The risen Christ, then, is in the heavens, and Paul assumes that these people, just brought out of heathenism, have received that truth into their hearts in the love of it, and know it so thoroughly that he can take for granted their entire acquiescence in and acceptance of it.

Remember, we have nothing to do with the four Gospels here. Remember, not a line of them had yet been written. Remember, that we are dealing here with an entirely independent witness. And then tell us what importance is to be attached to this evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Twenty years after His death here is this man speaking about that Resurrection as being not only something that he had to proclaim, and believed, but as being the recognised and notorious fact which all the churches accepted, and which underlay all their faith.

I would have you remember that if, twenty years after this event, this witness was borne, that necessarily carries us back a great deal nearer to the event than the hour of its utterance, for there is no mark of its being new testimony at that instant, but every mark of its being the habitual and continuous witness that had been borne from the instant of the alleged Resurrection to the present time. It at least takes us back a good many years nearer the empty sepulchre than the twenty which mark its date. It at least takes us back to the conversion of the Apostle Paul; and that necessarily involves, as it seems to me, that if that man, believing in the Resurrection, went into the Church, there would have been an end of his association with them, unless he had found there the same faith. The fact of the matter is, there is not a place where you can stick a pin in, between the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the date of this letter, wide enough to admit of the rise of the faith in a Resurrection. We are necessarily forced by the very fact of the existence of the Church to the admission that the belief in the Resurrection was contemporaneous with the alleged Resurrection itself.

And so we are shut up — in spite of the wriggling of people that do not accept that great truth we are shut up to the old alternative, as it seems to me, that either Jesus Christ rose from the dead, or the noblest lives that the world has ever seen, and the loftiest system of morality that has ever been proclaimed, were built upon a lie. And we are called to believe that at the bidding of a mere unsupported, bare, dogmatic assertion that miracles are impossible. Believe it who will, I decline to be coerced into believing a blank, staring psychological contradiction and impossibility, in order to be saved the necessity of admitting the existence of the supernatural. I would rather believe in the supernatural than the ridiculous. And to me it is unspeakably ridiculous to suppose that anything but the fact of the Resurrection accounts for the existence of the Church, and for the faith of this witness that we have before us.

And so, dear friends, we come back to this, the Christianity that flings away the risen Christ is a mere mass of tatters with nothing in it to cover a man's nakedness, an illusion with no vitality in it to quicken, to comfort, to ennoble, to raise, to teach aspiration or hope or effort. The human heart needs the 'Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' And this independent witness confirms the Gospel story: 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.'

IV. Lastly, let us hear what this witness has to say about the returning Christ.

That is the characteristic doctrinal subject of the letter. We all know that wonderful passage of unsurpassed tenderness and majesty, which has soothed so many hearts and been like a gentle hand laid upon so many aching spirits, about the returning Jesus 'coming in the clouds,' with the dear ones that are asleep along with Him, and the reunion of them that sleep and them that are alive and remain, in one indissoluble concord and concourse, when we shall ever be with the Lord, and 'clasp inseparable hands with joy and bliss in over-measure for ever.' The coming of the Master does not appear here with emphasis on its judicial aspect. It is rather intended to bring hope to the mourners, and the certainty that bands broken here may be re-knit in holier fashion hereafter. But the judicial aspect is not, as it could not be, left out, and the Apostle further tells us that 'that day cometh as a thief in the night.' That is a quotation of the Master's own words, which we find in the Gospels; and so again a confirmation, so far as it goes, from an independent witness, of the Gospel story. And then he goes on, in terrible language, to speak of 'sudden destruction, as of travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.'

These, then, are the points of this witness's testimony as to the returning Lord — a personal coming, a reunion of all believers in Him, in order to eternal felicity and mutual gladness, and the destruction that shall fall by His coming upon those who turn away from

Him.

What a revelation that would be to men who had known what it was to grope in the darkness of heathendom, and to have new light upon the future!

I remember once walking in the long galleries of the Vatican, on the one side of which there are Christian inscriptions from the catacombs, and on the other heathen inscriptions from the tombs. One side is all dreamy and hopeless; one long sigh echoing along the line of white marbles — 'Vale! vale! in aeternum vale!' (Farewell, farewell, for ever farewell.) On the other side — 'In Christo, in pace, in spe.' (In Christ, in peace, in hope.) That is the witness that we have to lay to our hearts. And so death becomes a passage, and we let go the dear hands, believing that we shall clasp them again.

My brother! this witness is to a gospel that is the gospel for Manchester as well as for Thessalonica. You and I want just the same as these old heathens there wanted. We, too, need the divine Christ, the dying Christ, the risen Christ, the ascended Christ, the returning Christ. And I beseech you to take Him for your Christ, in all the fulness of His offices, the manifoldness of His power, and the sweetness of His love, so that of you it may be said, as this Apostle says about these Thessalonians, 'Ye received it not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, as the word of God.'