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## Alexander Maclaren Sermons on The Epistle to the Hebrews Part 4

### Hebrews 10:30 How to Own Ourselves

**‘Them that believe to the saving of the soul.’ — Hebrews 10:30**

THE writer uses a somewhat uncommon word in this clause, which is not altogether adequately represented by the translation ‘saving.’ Its true force will be apparent by comparing one or two of the few instances in which it occurs in the New Testament. For example, it is twice employed in the Epistles to the Thessalonians; in one case being rendered, ‘God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain’ (or, more correctly, to the obtaining of) ‘salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ’; and in another, ‘called to the obtaining of glory through Jesus Christ.’ It is employed twice besides in two other places of Scripture, and in both of these it means ‘possession.’ So that, though practically equivalent to the idea of salvation, there is a very beautiful shade of difference which is well worth noticing.

The thought of the text is substantially this — those who believe win their souls; they acquire them for their possession. We talk colloquially about ‘people that cannot call their souls their own.’ That is a very true description of all men who are not lords of themselves through faith in Jesus Christ. ‘They who believe to the gaining of their own souls’ is the meaning of the writer here.

And I almost think that we may trace in this peculiar expression an allusion, somewhat veiled but real, to similar words of our Lord's. For He said, when, like the writer in the present context, He was encouraging His disciples to steadfastness in the face of difficulties and persecutions, 'In your patience' — in your persistent adherence to Me, whatever might draw you away, — 'ye shall win' — not merely possess, as our Bible has it, and not a commandment, but a promise — 'in your patience ye shall win your souls.' Whether that allusion be sustainable or no matters comparatively little; it is the significant and beautiful thought which underlies the word to which I wish to turn, and to present you with some illustrations of it.

### **I. First, then, if we lose ourselves we win ourselves.**

All men admit in theory that a self-centred life is a blunder. Jesus Christ has all moralists and all thoughtful men wholly with Him when He says, 'He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life shall find it.' There is no such way of filling a soul with enlargement and blessedness and of evolving new powers and capacities as self-oblivion for some great cause, for some great love, for some great enthusiasm. Many a woman has found herself when she held her child in her arms, and in the self-oblivion which comes from maternal affections and cares has sprung into a loftier new life. Many a heart, of husband and wife, can set its seal to this truth, that the blessedness of love is that it decentralises the soul, and substitutes another aim for the wretched and narrow one that is involved in self-seeking. And even if we do not refer to these sacred heights of maternal or of wedded love, there are many other noble counterpoises to the do-grading influence of self-absorption, which all men recognise and some men practise. Whoever has once tasted the joy and rapture of flinging himself into some great enthusiasm, and has known how much fuller life is when so inspired than in its ordinary forms, needs no words to convince him that the secret of blessedness, elevation, and power, if it is to be put into one great word, must be put into this one, 'self-oblivion.'

But whilst all these counterpoises to the love of self are, in their measure and degree, great and noble and blessed, not one of them, nor all of them put together, will so break the fetters from off a prisoned soul and let it out into the large place of utter and glad self-oblivion as the course which our text enjoins upon us when it says: If you wish to forget yourselves, to abandon and lose yourselves, fling yourselves into Christ's arms, and by faith yield your whole being, will, trust, purposes, aims, everything — yield them all to Him; and when you can say, 'We are not our own,' then first will you belong to yourselves and have won your own souls.

There is nothing except that absolute departure from all reliance upon our own poor powers, and from all making of ourselves our centre and aim in life, which gives us true possession of ourselves. Nothing else is comparable to the talismanic power of trust in Jesus Christ. When thus we lose ourselves in Him we find ourselves, and find Him in ourselves.

I believe that, at bottom, a life must either spin round on its own axis, self-centred and self-moved, or else it must be drawn by the mass and weight and mystical attractiveness of the great central sun, and swept clean out of its own little path to become a satellite round Him. Then only will it move in music and beauty, and flash back the lustre of an unfading light. Self or God, one or other will be the centre of every human life.

It is well to be touched with lofty enthusiasms; it is well to conquer self in the eager pursuit of some great thought or large subject of study; it is well to conquer self in the sweetness of domestic love; but through all these there may run a perverting and polluting reference to myself. Affection may become but a subtle prolongation of myself, and study and thought may likewise be tainted, and even in the enthusiasm for a great cause there may mingle much of self-regard; and on the whole there is nothing that will sweep out, and keep out, the seven devils of selfishness except to yield yourselves to God, drawn by His mercies, and say, 'I am not my own; I am bought with a price.' Then, and only then, will you belong to yourselves. II. Secondly if we will take Christ for our Lord we shall be lords of our own souls.

I have said that self-surrender is self-possession. It is equally true that self-control is self-possession; and it is as true about this application of my text as it was about the former, that Christianity only says more emphatically what moralists say, and suggests and supplies a more efficient means of accomplishing the end which they all recognise as good. For everybody knows that the man who is a slave to his own passions, lusts, or desire is not his own master. And everybody knows that the man who is the sport of circumstance, and yields to every temptation that comes sweeping round him, as bamboos bend before every blast; or the man who is guided by fashion, conventionality, custom, and the influence of the men amongst whom he lives, and whom he calls 'the world,' is not his own master. He 'dare not call his soul his own.'

What do we mean by being self-possessed, except this, that we can so rule our more fluctuating and sensitive parts as that, notwithstanding appeals made to them by external circumstances, they do not necessarily yield to these? He possesses himself who, in the face of antagonism, can do what is right; who, in the face of temptation, will not do what is wrong; who can dare to be in the right with one or two; and who is not moulded by circumstances, howsoever they may influence him, but reacts upon them as a hammer, and is not as an anvil. And this superiority over the parts of my nature which are meant to be kept down, and this assertion of independent power in the face of circumstances, and this freedom from the dominion of cliques and parties and organs

of opinion and loud voices round us, this is best secured in its fulness and completeness by the path which my text suggests.

Trust in Jesus Christ, and let Him be your Commander-in-chief, and you have won your souls. Let Him dominate them, and you can dominate them. If you will give your wills into His hands, He will give them back to you and make you able to subdue your passions and desires. Put the reins into Christ's hands and say, 'Here, O Lord, guide Thou the horses and the chariot, for I cannot coerce them, but Thou canst.' Then He will come and bring a new ally in the field, and cast a new weight into the scale, and you will no longer be the slave of the servile and inferior parts of your nature; nor be kicked about, the football of circumstances; nor be the echo of some other body's views, but you will have a voice of your own, and a will of your own, and a soul of your own, because you have given them to Christ, and He will help you to control them. Such a man — and I verily believe, from the bottom of my heart, such a man only — in the fullest sense, is

**'Free from slavish bands,  
Of hope to rise, or fear to fall;  
Lord of himself, though not of lands;  
And having nothing, yet hath all.'**

What does some little rajah, on the edge of our great Indian Empire, do when troubled with rebels whom he cannot subdue? He goes and makes himself a feudatory of the great central power at Calcutta, and then down comes a regiment or two, and makes very short work of the rebellion that the little kinglet could do nothing with. If you go to Christ and say to Him, 'Dear Lord, I take my crown from my head and lay it at Thy feet. Come Thou to help me to rule this anarchic realm of my own soul,' you will win yourself.

### **III. Thirdly, if we have faith in Christ we acquire a better self.**

The thing that most thoughtful men and women feel, after they have gone a little way into life, is not so much that they want to possess themselves, as that they want to get rid of themselves — of all the failures and shame and disappointment and futility of their lives. That desire may be accomplished. We cannot strip ourselves of ourselves by any effort. The bitter old past keeps living on, and leaves with us seeds of weakness and memories that sometimes corrupt, and always enfeeble: memories that seem to limit the possibilities of the future in a tragic fashion. Ah, brethren! we can get rid of ourselves; and, instead of continuing the poor, sin-laden, feeble creatures that we are, we can have pouring into our souls the gift most real — though people nowadays, in their shallow religion, call it mystical — of a new impulse and a new life. The old individuality will remain, but new tastes, new aspirations, aversions, hopes, and capacities to realise them may all be ours, so that 'if any man be in Christ he is a new creature'; and in barter for the old garment he receives the robe of righteousness. You can lose yourselves, in a very deep and earnest sense, if, trusting in Jesus Christ, you open the door of the heart to the influx of that new life which is His best gift. Faith wins a better self, and we may each experience, in all its fulness and Blessedness, the paradox of the apostle when he said, 'I live' now, at last, in triumphant possession of this better life: 'I live' now — I only existed before — 'yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' And with Christ in me I first find myself.

### **IV. Lastly, if by faith we win our souls here, we save them from destruction hereafter.**

I have said that the word of my text is substantially equivalent to the more frequent and common expression 'salvation'; though with a shade of difference, which I have been trying to bring Out. And this substantial equivalence is more obvious if you will note that the text is the second member of an antithesis of which the first is, 'we are not of them which draw back into perdition.'

So, then, the writer sets up, as exact opposites of one another, these two ideas — perdition or destruction on the one hand, and the saving or winning of the soul on the other. Therefore, whilst we must give due weight to the considerations which I have already been suggesting, we shall not grasp the whole of the writer's meaning unless we admit also the thought of the future. And that the same blending of the two ideas, of possession and salvation in the more usual sense of the word, was implied in the Lord's saying, of which I have suggested there may be an echo here, is plain if you observe that the version in St. Luke gives the text which I have already quoted: 'In your patience ye shall win your souls'; and that of St. Matthew, in the same connection, gives, instead, the saying, 'he that endureth' — which corresponds with patience — 'he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.'

So, then, brethren, you cannot be said to have won your souls if you are only keeping them for destruction, and such destruction is clearly laid down here as the fate of those who turn away from Jesus Christ.

Now, it seems to me that no fair interpretation can eject from that word 'perdition,' or 'destruction,' an element of awe and terror. However you may interpret the ruin, it is ruin utter of which it speaks. And I am very much afraid that in this generation eager discussions about the duration of punishment, and the final condition of those who die impenitent, have had a disastrous influence on a great many minds and consciences in reference to this whole subject, by making it rather a subject of controversy than a solemn truth to be pondered. However the controversies be settled, there is terror enough left in that word to make us all bethink ourselves.

I lay it on your hearts, dear friends — it is no business of mine to say much about it, but I lay it on your hearts and on my own; and I beseech you to ponder it. Do not mix it up with wholly independent questions as to what is to become of people who never heard about Jesus Christ. 'The Judge of all the earth will do right.' What this verse says applies to people that have heard about Him — that is, to you and me — and to people that do not accept Him — and that is some of us; and about them it says that they 'draw back unto perdition.'

Now, remember, the alternative applies to each of us. It is a case of 'either— or' in regard to us all. If we have taken Christ for our Saviour, and, as I said, put the reins into His hands and given ourselves to Him by love and submission and confidence, then we own our souls, because we have given them to Him to keep, 'and He is able to keep that which is committed to Him against that day.'

But I am bound to tell you, in the plainest words I can command, that if you have not thus surrendered yourself to Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, His intercession, His quickening Spirit, then I know not where you are to find one foothold of hope that upon you there will not come down the overwhelming fate that is darkly portrayed in that one solemn word.

Oh, brethren! let us all ponder the question, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'

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## Hebrews 10:34 A Better and an Enduring Substance

**Knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.' — Hebrews 10:34**

THE words 'in heaven' are probably no part of the original text, but have somehow or other crept in, in order to make more plain what some one supposed to be the reference of these words to the future inheritance of the saints. They, however, rather disturb than help the writer's thought. He is speaking of a present and not of a future possession. 'Ye have,' and not 'ye shall have,' a better and an 'enduring possession,' not in heaven, but here and now.

But even if these words be expelled from the text as disturbing the writer's thought, there still remains a variation in the reading of some importance. It is a very slight difference of form in the original, but the two meanings between which we have to choose are these: 'Knowing that ye have yourselves as a better and an enduring possession'; or, 'a better and an enduring possession for yourselves.' I am inclined rather to the former of the two, both from external authority and internal congruity, though the choice between them is difficult. But, if we accept this as the meaning of these words, we can gather from them important lessons, of which I ask your consideration.

### I. The true possession.

If we adopt the other reading, and take the words to mean that, in so far as we are truly resting on Jesus, we have for ourselves an inheritance or possession better than all external ones, the text will then be pointing to the old thought that God is the true joy and treasure of a man's soul. If, on the other hand, we may venture to adopt the other meaning, there is great depth and beauty in it, representing, as it does, the Christian as having himself as a treasure. It may strike one as strange, but a little consideration will show its truth and perfect harmony with the other thought, that God is the treasure of every soul which is not poor and in need of all things. 'A good man shall be satisfied from himself, says the Book of Proverbs, and that is no arrogant denial of the need for God, but completely accords with the devout acknowledgment, 'All my springs are in Thee.' In the very same chapter as our text we read: 'We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of their souls,' which might be more accurately rendered, 'to the acquisition as their own of their souls.' Remember, too, our Lord's words: 'In your patience ye shall acquire possession of your souls.' If we take these sayings into account, we need not hesitate to admit that, at all events, there is a great deal to be said for the somewhat remarkable expression in the text.

It just comes to this. No man possesses himself until he has given up himself. We only own ourselves when we have parted with ourselves. Until we have yielded ourselves in acts of dependent faith and rejoicing love and docile obedience unto God, we have no real possession of ourselves. He, and only he, who says, 'I give myself away to Thee,' gets himself back again sanctified, gladdened, ennobled, and on the way to be perfected by his surrender and God's reception.

We own ourselves only on condition of being Christian men. For, under all other circumstances and forms of life, the true self is domineered over and brought into slavery and dragged away from its proper bearings by storms and swarms of lusts and passions and inclinations and ambitions and senses. A man's flesh is his master, or his pride is his master, or some fraction of his nature is his master, and he himself is an oppressed slave, tyrannised over by rebellious powers. The only way to get the mastery of

yourselves, to be able to keep a tight hand upon all inferior parts of your nature, and to have that self-command and self-possession without which there is nothing noble in life, is to go to God and say, 'Oh, Lord! I cannot rule this anarchic being of mine. Do Thou take it into Thine hands. Here are the reins: do with me what Thou wilt.' Then you will be your own masters, not till then. Then you will own yourselves; till then, the devil and the world and the flesh, and the pomps and prides and passions and lusts and lazinesses that are in your nature will own you. But if we have exercised the faith which casts itself wholly upon God, we therein and thereby win God and our own selves also, and that is one of the meanings of 'saving our own souls.'

Or, to put it in another light, the only things worth calling treasures and possessions are true thoughts that we have learned from God; pure affections that go out to Him; yearning desires after Him, which, in their very yearning, bear the prophecy, and are to a large extent the foretaste, of their own fruition.

These are the things that make a man's treasure. The inner life of obedience, of love, of trust, the conscience cleansed, the will made plastic and docile, the heart filled with all pure and heavenward affections, aspirations that lift us above self and time, and bring us into the sweet and calm light of the Eternal Love whose name is God — these are the possessions which are worth possessing. And he, and only he, has such who has found them in lowly submission of his sinful self to Christ who has died that our spirits might be cleansed and given back unto us.

Brethren, the realisation of this possession of ourselves depends on our faith. Stoics and moralists and lofty souled men in all ages have talked about the true possession of oneself, which comes by self-surrender and annihilation, but Christian faith realises the dream, and they only find the reality who pass towards it through the gate of trust in Jesus Christ. Then, and only then, will the old English poet's lovely picture be fulfilled, and the man's soul

**Made free from slavish bands, Of hope to rise, or fear to fall;  
Lord of himself, though not of lands; And having nothing, yet hath all.'**

## **II. Note, again, how here we hear asserted the superiority of this possession.**

It is 'better' in its essential quality. That does not need many words. Surely these possessions of heart and mind and will and desires all brought into fellowship with and filled by God are things more correspondent with the nature of man and his needs than any accumulation of outward possessions can ever be. And surely it is a plain piece of prose, and no exaggerated religious enthusiasm, which says, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.' Men call it mysticism. It is the very foundation of all true religion. The apprehension of union with God is the one thing that will satisfy the soul; the one thing that we need, without having, we cannot be wholly desolate, however dark may be our path, nor wholly solitary, however lonely may be our lot, nor utterly bereaved, however Blessings may be dragged from our hands; and without which we cannot be at rest, however compassed with stays and succours and treasures and friends; nor rich, however we may have Bursting coffers and all things to enjoy.

The possession which we tarry within us is better than any which we can gather round us. 'Surely he is disquieted in vain, he heapeth up treasures'— and the very fact that they need to be 'heaped,' and that that is all that he can do with them, shows the vanity of the disquiet that raked them together. Not what a man has, but what a man is, is his wealth.

And the better treasure is an enduring possession. That is the second element of its excellence. These things, the calm joys, the pure delights of still fellowship with God in heart and mind and will — these things have in them no seed of decay. These cannot be separated from their possessor by anything but his own unfaithfulness. There will never come the time when they shall have to be left behind. Use does not wear these out, but strengthens and increases them. The things which are destined 'to perish with the using' belong to an inferior category. All the best things are intended and destined to increase with the using, and this treasure, the more it is expended the fuller is the coffer, and the more we exercise the love, the communion, the obedience which make our true riches, the more do the riches increase. And then, when all other things drop from their nerveless hands; and 'His glory' — whose glory was in outward things — 'shall not descend after him,' we shall carry these treasures with us wherever we go, and find that they were the pledge of immortality.

## **III. My text, lastly, suggests to us the quiet superiority to earthly loss and change which the possession of this treasure involves.**

The writer is speaking to Christian men who have endured a great fight of afflictions, and he says of them, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, because you knew that you had this Better and enduring substance.' Joyfully! When you strike away the false you find the strength of the real ones becomes more conspicuous. And many and many a time we may experience, unless we waste our discipline and our sorrows, that the surest way to become richer towards God is to lose the earthly stays and supports. But whether that be so or no, he who sits in the centre, and has the light round him, need not mind much what storms are raging

without, and he whose inexpugnable fortress is within the depths of God may smile at all the hubbub and confusion down in the valley. If we possess this true treasure which lies at our doors, and may be had for the taking, we shall be like men in some strong fortress, with firm walls, abundant provisions, and a well in the courtyard, and we can laugh at besiegers 'His abiding place shall be the munitions of rocks; his bread shall be given him and his water shall be made sure.' We may be quiet and lofty, infinitely above the fear of chance and change, if we keep the firm hold which we may keep of the enduring riches which God brings with Him into our souls.

Some of you may be in circumstances which make such thoughts as these specially applicable, either because dark days may be threatening, or because the sunshine of prosperity may be dazzling some eyes and making them lose sight of their true wealth. To the one class the thought of my text is gathered up in the warning, 'Charge them that they trust not in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God.' And, to the other class, the text should quicken and consolidate the resolve, 'What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee. Thou art the strength of my heart, and mine inheritance for ever.'

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## Hebrews 11:6 Seeking God

**'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' — Hebrews 11:6**

THE writer has been pointing to the patriarch Enoch as the second of these examples of the power of faith in the Old Covenant; and it occurs to him that there is nothing said in Genesis about Enoch's faith, so he set about showing that he must have had faith, because he 'walked with God,' and pleased Him, and no man could thus walk with God, and please Him, unless he had come to Him, and no man could come to a God in whom he did not believe, and whom he did not believe to be waiting to help and bless him, when he did come. So the facts of Enoch's life show that there must have been in him an underlying faith. That is all that I need to say about the context of the words before us. I am not going to speak of the writer's argument, but only of this one aspect of the divine character which is brought out here. 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.'

### I. Now a word about the seeking.

Seek?' Do we need to seek? Not in the way in which people go in quest of a thing that they have lost and do not know where to find. We do not need to search; we do not need to seek.

The beginning of all our seeking is that God has sought us in Jesus Christ, and so we have done for ever with: 'Oh! that I knew where I might find Him.' We have done for ever with 'feeling after Him, if haply we might find Him.' That is all past. We have to seek, but let us never forget that we must have been found of Him, before we seek Him. That is to say, He must have revealed Himself to us in the fulness and reality and solid certainty of His existence and character, before there can be kindled in any heart or mind the desire to possess Him. He must have flashed His light upon the eye before the eye beholds; and He must have stimulated the desire by the revelation of Himself which comes before all desires, ere any of us will stir ourselves up to lay hold upon God. Ours, then, is not to be a doubtful search, hut a certain seeking, that goes straight to the place where it knows that its treasure is, just as a migratory bird will set out from the foggy and ice-bound shores of the north, and go straight through the mists and the night, over continents and oceans, to a place where it never was before, but to which it is led — God only knows how — by some deep instinct, too deep to be an error, and too persistent not to find its resting-place. That is how we are to seek. We are to seek as the flower turns its opening petals to the sunshine, making no mistake as to the quarter of the heaven in which the radiance is lodged. We have to seek, as the rootlet goes straight to the river, knowing where the water is, from which life and sap will come. Thus we have to seek where and what we know. Our quest is no doubtful and miserable hunting about for a possible good, but an earnest desire for a certain and a solid blessing. That is the seeking.

Let us put it into two or three plain words. The prime requisite of the Christian's seeking after God is as the writer here says, faith, I need not dwell upon that. 'Must believe that He is' — yes; of course. We do not seek after negations or hypotheses; we seek after a living Being. 'And that He is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him' — yes; if we were not sure that we should find what we wanted, we should never go to look for it. But, beyond all that, let me put three things as included in, and necessary to, the Christian seeking — desire, effort, prayer. We seek what we desire. But too many of us do not wish God, and would not know what to do with Him if we had Him, and would be very much embarrassed if it were possible for the full blessings which come along with Him, to be entrusted to our slack hands and unloving hearts. Brethren, we call ourselves Christians; let us be honest with ourselves, and rigid in the investigation of the thoughts of our own hearts. Is there a wish for God there? Is there an aching void in His absence, or do we shovel cartloads of earthly rubbish into our hearts, and thus dull desires that can be satisfied only with Him? These are not questions to which any one has a right to expect an answer from another; they are not questions that any Christian man can safely shirk answering to himself and to God. The measure of our seeking is actually settled by the measure of our desire.

Then effort, of course, follows desire as surely as the shadow comes after the substance, because the only purpose of our desires, in the constitution of our nature, is to supply the driving power for effort. They are the steam in the boiler intended to whirl round the wheels. And so for a man to desire a thing that he can do nothing whatever to bring about, is misery and folly. But for a man to desire, and not to work towards fulfilling his desire, is greater misery and greater stupidity. One cannot believe in the genuineness of those devout aspirations that one hears in people's prayers, who get up and wipe the dust off their knees, and go out into the world, and do nothing to bring about the fulfilment of their prayers. There is a great deal of that sort of desire amongst professing Christians in all churches, conventional utterances which are backed up and verified by no corresponding conduct. If we are seeking after God, we shall not let all the seeking effervesce in pious aspirations; it will get consolidated into corresponding action, and operate to keep thought and love directed towards Him, even amidst the trivialities, and legitimate duties, and great things of life. There will be effort to bring Him into connection with all our work; effort to keep by Him as we go about our daily tasks, if we are truly seeking after God.

And then, desire and effort being pre-supposed, there will come honest prayers, genuine prayers. 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found,' says the prophet, and immediately goes on to exhort us to 'call upon Him while He is near,' as one and the chief way of seeking Him. He is always near, closer to us than friends and lovers, closer to us than our eyes and hands, near in His Son and the Spirit, near to hear and to bless, near and desiring to be nearer, yea to be blended with our being and to dwell in us and we in Him. We have not only to desire His gift, and to work towards it, but to ask for it. Then, if we exercise these three activities of desire, effort, petition, we may truly say: 'When Thou saidst, "Seek ye My face," my heart said unto Thee, "Thy face, Lord! will I seek,"' and may go on, as the psalmist did, to offer the consequent prayer: 'Hide not Thy face from me,' in full assurance that He is found by every seeking soul So much for the seeking.

## **II. Now a word about the diligence in seeking.**

The writer uses a very strong expression, one word in the original, which is here adequately rendered, 'them that diligently seek Him.' Half-hearted seeking finds nothing. You sometimes say to your children, when you have set them to look for anything, and they come back and say they have not been able to find it, 'You do not know how to seek.' And that is true about a great many of us. Half and half desire, so that one eye is turned on earth, and the other lifted up now and then to heaven, does not bring us much. It will bring a little, but not the fulness of blessing which follows on whole-hearted, continuous, persevering seeking. If you hold a cup below a tap, in an unsteady hand, sometimes it is under the whole rush of the water, and sometimes is on one side, and it will be a long time before you get it filled. There will be much of the water spilled. God pours Himself upon us, and we hold our vessels with unsteady hands, and twitch them away sometimes, and the bright blessing falls on the ground and cannot be gathered up, and our cup is empty, and our lips parched. Interrupted seeking will find little; perfunctory seeking will find less. Conventional religion brings very little blessing, very little consciousness of the presence of God; and that is why so many who call themselves Christians, and are so, in a measure and in a sense, know so little of the joy of being found of God. They have sought but not sought diligently.

Now let us take the rebuke to ourselves, if we need it, and we all need it more or less. It is a very threadbare piece of Christian counsel, to be earnest in our seeking after God, but it is none the less needed because it is threadbare, and it would not be threadbare if it had not been so much needed. 'They that search diligently' — which is the real meaning of the words in the Book of Proverbs rendered, 'they that seek Me early' — 'shall find Me.'

## **III. So this brings me to the last thing here, the Rewarder and the reward.**

'He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' The best reward of seeking is to find the thing that you are looking for. So the best reward that God, the Rewarder, gives is when He gives Himself. There are a great many other good things that come to the diligently seeking Christian soul, but the best thing is that God draws near. Enoch sought God, came to God, and so he walked with God. The reward of his coming was continuous, calm communion, which gave him a companion in solitude, and one to walk at his side all through the darkness and the roughnesses, as well as the joys and the smoothnesses, of daily life.

Ah, brethren! there is no reward comparable to the felt presence in our own quiet hearts of the God who has found us, and whom we have found. And if we have that, then He becomes, here and now, the reward of the diligent search, and the reward of it to, day carries in itself the assurance of the perfect reward of the coming time. 'He walked with God, and... God took him.' That will be true of all of us. There is only one seeking in life that is sure to result in the finding of what we seek. All other search — the quest after the chief good — if it runs in any other direction, is resultless and barren. But there is one course, and one only, in which the result is solid and certain. 'I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, seek ye My face in vain.' If we seek He will be found of us, and so be our Rewarder and our reward.

## Hebrews 11:7 - Noah's Faith and Ours

**'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet. moved with fear, In. patrol an ark to the saving of his house.' — Hebrews 11:7**

THE creed of these Old Testament saints was a very short one, and very different from ours. Their faith was the very same. It is the great object of the writer of this Epistle, in this magnificent catalogue of the heroes of the faith, the muster roll of God's great army, to establish the principle that from the Beginning there has only been one kind of religion, only one way to God and that, however rudimentary and brief the articles of belief in those early days, the faculty by which these far-away believers lay hold on them, and its practical issues, were identical in them and in us, And that is a principle well worth getting into our minds, that the scope of the creed has nothing to do with the essence of the faith.

So we may look at this instance and discern in it. beneath all superficial differences, the underlying identities, and take this dim, half-intelligible figure of Noah, as he stands almost on the horizon of history, as being an example for us, in very vivid fashion, of the true object of faith, its operation in a two-fold fashion, and its vindication.

### I. Look first at Noah's faith in regard to its object.

If we think of the incident brought before us in these words, we shall see how the confidence with which Noah laid hold of a dim future, about which he knew nothing, except Because God had spoken to him, was, at bottom, identical with that great attitude of the soul which we call faith, as it is exercised towards Jesus Christ.

No doubt in this Epistle to the Hebrews, the aspect of faith by which it lays hold of the future and the unseen, is the one on which the writer's mind is mainly fixed. But notice, that whilst the near object, so to speak, to which Noah stretched out his hands, and of which he laid hold, was that coming catastrophe, with its certainties of destruction and of deliverance; there was only one reason why he knew anything about that, and there was only one reason why he knew or believed anything about it, and that was because he believed Him who had told him. So, at bottom, God who had revealed the unseen future to him was the object of his faith. He trusted the Person, therefore he believed in that Person's word, and therefore he had the assured realisation of things not seen as yet; and the future, so dim and uncertain to unaided eyes, became to him as certain as the past, and expectation as reliable as memory. His faith grasped the invisible things to come, only because it grasped the Invisible Person, who was, is, and is to come, and who lifted for him the curtain and showed him the things that should be. So is it with our faith; whether it lays hold upon a past sacrifice on Calvary, or upon a present Christ dwelling in our hearts, or whether it becomes telescopic, and stretches forward into the future, and brings the distant near, all its various aspects are but aspects of one thing, and that is personal trust in the personal Christ who speaks to us. What he says is a matter of secondary importance in this respect. The contents of God's revelation vary; the act by which man accepts them is always the same.

So the great question for us all is — do we trust God? Do we believe Him, and therefore accept His words, not only with the assent of the understanding, which of all idle things is the idlest, but do-we believe Him, revealing, commanding, promising, threatening, with the trust and affianced of our whole hearts? Then, and then only, can we look with quiet certainty into the dim future, which else is all full of rolling clouds, that sometimes shape themselves to our imaginations into the likeness of stable things, but alas! change and melt while we gaze. Only then can we front the solemn future, and say: 'I do not expect only, I know what is there.' My brother, if our faith is worth calling faith at all, it rests so absolutely and confidingly upon God, that His bare word becomes to us the infallible source of certitude with regard to all the shifting hours of time, and to the steadfast day of an eternity, whose change is blessed growth to an un-reached and undeclining noon.

And what was the future that loomed before this man? The coming of a destruction as certain as God, and the coming of a deliverance as complete as His love could make it. Never mind although Noah's outlook related but to a temporary catastrophe, and ours has reference to an eternal condition of things. That is a difference of no real moment. We have what Noah had, a definite, divine utterance, as the source of all our knowledge of what is coming. Both are alike in having two sides, one dark and menacing with a certain destruction, the other radiant and lustrous with as certain a deliverance. And now the question for each of us is, do I so believe God that that future is to me what it was to this man — far more real than these fleeing illusions that lie nearer me?

When Noah walked the earth and saw his contemporaries busy with buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, how fantastic and unreal their work must have seemed to him, when behind them he saw blazing a vision, which he alone of all that multitude believed.



Do not let us fancy that we have faith if these near trifles are to us the great realities, and the distance is dim, and unsubstantial, and doubtful, hidden in mist and forgotten. The years that stretched between the divine utterance and its fulfilment were to this man as nothing, and for him the unseen was the reality, and the seen was the shadowy and phantasmal. And that is what faith worth calling the name will always do for men. Ask yourselves the question if your dim apprehension of that future, in either of its aspects, is anything so vivid as the certitude which blazed ever before the eye of this man. One of our old English writers says, 'If the felicities of another world were as closely apprehended as the joys of this, it were martyrdom to live.' That may be an exaggeration, but surely, surely there is something wrong in men who call themselves believers in God and His word, to whom the things seen and temporal are all or nearly all important, and the trifles an inch from their eyes are big enough to shut out heaven and all its stars. II. Still further, notice Noah's faith in its practical effects.

If faith has any reality in us at all, it works. If it has no effect it has no existence. The writer points out two operations of this confidence in God which, through belief in His word, leads to a realisation of a remote and unseen future. The effects are two-fold; First on Noah's disposition, faith produced appropriate emotion, excited by the belief in the coming deluge; he was 'moved with fear.' Then, secondly, through emotion, faith influenced conduct — he 'prepared an ark.' This is the order in which faith ever works.

If real and strong, it will first affect emotion. By 'fear' here we are not merely to understand, though possibly it is not to be excluded, a dread of personal consequences, but much rather the sweet and lofty emotion which is described in another part of this same book by the same word: 'Let us serve Him with reverence and with godly fear.' It is the fear of pious regard, of religious awe, of reverence which has love blended inseparably with it, and is not merely a tremulous apprehension of some mischief coming to me. Noah had no need for that self-regarding 'fear,' inasmuch as one half of his knowledge of the future was the knowledge of his own absolute safety. But reverence, the dread of going against his Father's will, lowly submission, and all analogous and kindred sentiments, are expressed by the word.

Such holy and blessed emotion, which has no torment, is the sure result of real faith. Unless a man's faith is warm enough to melt his heart, it is worth very little. A faith unaccompanied by emotion is, I was going to say worse, at any rate it is quite as bad, as a faith which is all wasted in emotion. It is not a good thing when all the steam roars out through an escape pipe; it is perhaps a worse thing when there is no steam in the boiler to escape. It is easy for people that have not any religion to scoff at what they suppose to be the fanatical excess of emotion which some forms of religious belief develop, I, for my part, would rather have the extremest emotion than a dead cold orthodoxy, that believes everything and feels nothing. There is some hope in the one; the other is only fit to be buried. Do not be afraid of feeling which is the child of faith. Be very much more afraid of a religion that leaves your heart beating just exactly at the same rate that it did before you took the truth into it. I am very, very sure that there is no road, between a man's faith and his practice, except through his heart, and that, as the Apostle has it in a somewhat different form of speech, meaning, however, the same thing that I am now insisting upon, 'faith worketh by love.' Love is the path through which creed travels outward to conduct.

So we come to the second and more remote effect of faith. Emotion will lead to action. 'Moved with fear he prepared an ark.' If emotion be the child of faith, conduct is the child of emotion. Noah's faith, then, led him to a line of action that separated him from the men around him; and it led him to a protracted labour in preparation for a remote end, for the coming of which he had no guarantee except what he believed to be God's word. Commentators calculate that there were a hundred and twenty years between the time of the divine command and the Flood. Think of how this man, for all that long while, set himself to his task, and how many clever speeches would be made, proving that he was a fool, and how many witty gibes would come showering around his head like hail. But he kept steadily on, on a line of conduct which made him singular, and which had regard only to that result a hundred and twenty years off.

Now, is that what you and I are doing? Does our faith so shape our lives that whatever we are about, there is still regard to that far-off future? If you meet a man in the street, hurrying somewhere to welcome a friend expected to arrive from a far-off land, and you detain him in conversation, as you speak he is impatient, keeps looking over your shoulder down the road to see if there is any sign of his coming. That is how we should be acting here — doing our work and sticking to our tasks, but ever letting expectation and desire carry us onwards to that great future, which has already set out from the throne in Eternity, and is speeding towards us even now. Let that future, dear brethren, stand so clear before each of us, that it shall shape our whole work in the present. We shall mould all our lives with reference to it, if we are wise. For what we make our present, that will our future be. The smaller ends for which men live, and the nearer futures which they struggle towards, lose no jot of their worth by being regarded as but means to that far greater end. Rather, time is only redeemed from triviality, when it is seen to be the preparation for eternity, and earth is never so fair and good as when we discern and use it as the vestibule of heaven Never mind being singular. He is the wise man whose vision reaches as far as his existence, and whose earthly life has for the end of its effort, to please Christ and be found in Him.

**III. And so, lastly, let me point to Noah's faith, in regard to its vindication.**

'He condemned the world.' 'The world' thought him wasting life foolishly. No doubt there were plenty of witty and wise things said about him.

'Prudent, far-sighted, practical men' would say, 'How fanatical! What a misuse of energies and opportunities'; and so forth. And then, one morning, the rain began, and continued, and for forty days it did not stop, and they began to think that perhaps, after all, there was some method in his madness. Noah got into his ark, and still it rained, and I wonder what the wits and 'practical men,' that had treated the whole thing as moonshine and folly, thought about it all then, with the water up to their knees. How their gibes and jests would die in their throats when it reached their lips! And so, my dear friends, the faith of the poor, ignorant old woman that up in her garret lives to serve Jesus Christ, and to win an eternal crown, will get its vindication some day, and it will be found out then which was the

'practical' man and the wise man, and all the witty speeches and smart sayings will seem very foolish, even to their authors, when the light of that future shines on them. And the old word will come true once more, that the man who lives for the present, and for anything bounded by Time, will have to 'leave it in the midst of his days,' and 'at his latter end shall be a fool,' whilst the 'foolish' man who lived for the future, when the future has come to the present, and the present has dwindled away into the past, and sunk beneath the horizon, shall be proved to be wise, and shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.

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## Hebrews 11:9, 10 The City and the Tent

**'Dwelling in tabernacles..., for he looked for a city.' — Hebrews 11:9, 10**

THE purpose of the great muster-roll of the ancient heroes of Judaism in this chapter is mainly to establish the fact that there has never been but one way to God. However diverse the degrees of knowledge and the externals, the essence of religion has always been the same. So the writer of this Epistle, to the great astonishment, no doubt, of some of the Hebrews to whom it was addressed, puts out his hand, and claims, as Christians before Christ, all the worthies of whom they were nationally so proud. He is speaking here about the three patriarchs. Whether he conceives them to have all lived on the earth at one time or no, does not trouble us at all 'By faith,' says he, 'Abraham sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise,' because, 'he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whom builder' — or rather Architect — 'and maker' — or rather Builder — 'is God.'

Now, of course, the writer gives a considerable extension of the meaning to the word 'faith'; and in his use one aspect of it is prominent, though by no means exclusively so — viz., the aspect which looks to the unseen and the future, rather than that which grasps the personal Christ. But this is no essential difference from the ordinary New Testament usage; it is only a variation in point of view, and in the prominence given to an element always present in faith. What he says here, then, is substantially this — that in these patriarched lives we get a picturesque embodiment of the essential substance of all true Christian living, and that mainly in regard of two points, the great object which should fill mind and heart, and the consequent detachment from transitory things which should be cultivated.

'He looked for a city,' and so he was contented to dwell in a movable tent. That is an emblem containing the essence of what our lives ought to be, if we are truly to be Christian. Let us, then, deal with these two inseparable and indispensable characteristics of the life of faith.

### **I. Faith will behold the Unseen City, and the vision will steadfastly fill mind and heart.**

As I have remarked, the conception of faith presented in the Epistle is slightly different from that found in other parts of the New Testament. It is but slightly different, for, whether we say that the object of our faith is the Christ, 'Whom having not seen we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice,' or whether we say that it is the whole realm and order of things beyond the grave and above the skies where He is and which He has made our native land, makes in reality very little difference. We come at last to the thought of personal reliance on Him by whose word and by whose resurrection and ascension only we apprehend, and by whose grace and power and love only we shall ever possess that unseen futurity. So we may fairly say that whilst, no doubt, it is true that the living Christ Himself — and no heaven apart from Him, nor any future apart from Him, nor any thing of His, apart from Him, though it be a cross, but the living Christ Himself is the true object of faith, yet that conception of its object includes the view of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the 'city which has the foundations,' should, because it is all clustered round Him who is its King, Be the object that fills our minds and hearts.

I am not going to discuss the details of what this writer supposes to have been the animating principle and aim of that ancient patriarch's life. It matters nothing at all for the power of his example whether we suppose that Abraham looked forward to the

realisation of this unseen ideal city in this life or no, for the effect of it upon him would be exactly the same whichever of the two alternatives may have been the case. It matters nothing as to whether Abraham believed in the realisation in that land over which he wandered, of the perfect order of things, or whether he had caught some glimpse, which is very unlikely, of it as reserved for a future beyond the grave. In either case, he lived for and by an unseen and future condition of things. It is beautiful to notice how the writer here, in his picturesque and simple words, puts many blessed ideas as to that future. We may, perhaps, make these a little more clear, but I am afraid we shall make them much more weak, by taking them out of the metaphorical form.

'The City' — then there is only one. 'The City' — then the object of our hope, ought to be, and is, if we understand it aright, a perfect society, in which the 'sojourners and pilgrims,' like the patriarch, and his little band of children and attendants, who wandered lonely up and down the world, will all be gathered together at last; and, instead of the solitude of the march, and the undefended weakness of the frail encampment, there will be the conjoined gladness and security of an innumerable multitude. 'The City' is the perfection of society, and all of us who live in the world, alone after all communion, and separated from each other by the awful mystery of personal being, and by many another film beside, may hope to understand, as we never shall do here, what the meaning of the little word 'together' is when we get there. 'He looked for the city.'

'The city which hath the foundations' — then the object of faith is a stable thing, which knows no fluctuations, feels no changes, fears no assault, can never be subjected to violence, nor ever crumple into dust. 'The city which' hath the foundations' — here and now we have to build, if we build at all, more or less like the foolish man in the Master's parable, upon sand. It is the condition of our earthly life. We have to accept, and to make the best of it. But, oh! those who have learned most the agony of change and the misery of uncertainty are those who have been best disciplined to grasp at and lay up in their hearts the large consolation and encouragement hived in that designation, 'the city which hath the foundations.'

The city, 'whose Architect' — for the word rendered 'Builder' should be so translated — 'is God.' It is the accomplishment of His plan, which, in modern language, is called the realisation of His ideal. I like the old-fashioned Biblical language better — 'the city whose Architect is God.' He planned, and, of course, there follows upon that 'whose Maker or actual Builder is' — the same as the Planner. Architects put their drawings into the hands of rude workmen, and no completed work of man's hands corresponds to the fair vision that dawned on its designer when it took definite shape in His mind.

That is another of the laws of our earthly life which we have to make the best of — that we design grand buildings when we begin, and, when we have finished our lives, and look back upon what we have built, it is a mean and incomplete structure at the best. But God's working drawings get built; His plans are all wrought out in an adequate material; and everything that was in the divine mind once exists in outward fact in that perfect future.

So, inasmuch as the city is a state of perfect society, of stability, is planned by God, and brought about by Him at last, it is to be possessed by us on condition of fellowship with Him. Does it not seem to you to be infinitely unimportant whether this old patriarch thought that what he was looking for was to be builded upon the hills and plains of Canaan or not? That he had the vision is the thing. Where it was to be accomplished was of small moment. We do not know where the vision is to be accomplished any more than Abraham did. We do not know whether here, on this old earth, renovated by some cosmic change, or whether in some region in space, though beyond the stars, perfected spirits shall dwell, and it does not matter. That we should have the vision is the main thing. The where, the when, the how of its fulfilment are of no manner of practical importance, and people who busy themselves about such questions, and think that therefore they are cultivating the spirit that my text suggests, make a woful mistake.

But let me press on you, dear brethren, this one simple thought, that the average type of Christian life and experience to-day is wofully lacking in that clear vision of the future. Partly it comes, I suppose, from certain peculiarities in the trend of thought and way of looking at things that are fashionable in this generation. We hear so much about Christianity as a social system, and about what it is going to do in this world, which perhaps it was necessary should be stated very emphatically, in order to counterpoise the too great silence upon such subjects in past times, that preaching about the future life strikes a hearer as unfamiliar, and probably some of my audience have been feeling as if I were carrying them into misty regions far away from, and little related to, the realities of life. But, dear brethren, from my heart I believe that one very operative cause of the undeniable feebleness of Christian life, which is so largely manifested round us — and it is for each of us to say whether we participate in it — is due to this, that, somehow or other, there has come in the mind of great masses of Christian people a fading away of that blessed vision of the city, for which we ought to live. You scarcely hear sermons nowadays about the blessedness of a future life. What you hear about it is, how well for this life it is to be a Christian man.

No doubt godliness 'hath promise of the life that now is,' and that side of the gospel cannot be too emphatically set forth. But it may be disproportionately presented, as I venture to think that, on the whole, it is being presented now. Therefore there is the more need for consciously endeavouring to cultivate the habit of looking beyond the mists of the present to the gleaming battlements and spires of the city. Let us polish the glasses of our telescopes, and use them not only for distances on earth's low levels, but to bring the stars nearer. So shall we realise more of the present good and power of faith, when it is allowed its widest and noblest range.

## II. Faith consequently leads to willing detachment from the present order of offerings.

'He dwelt in tabernacles,' that is, he lived a nomad life in his tents. He and his son and grandson — three generations of long lives — proved the depth, solidity, and practical power of their faith in the promise of the city by the remarkable persistence of their refusal to be absorbed in the settled population of the land. Recent discoveries have shown us, and discoveries still to be made, I have no doubt, will show still more, what a highly organised and developed civilisation prevailed in Canaan when these wanderers from the East came into it, with their black camels'-hair tents. They were almost as much out of place, and as noticeably unique, by such a life in Canaan then, as gypsies are in England, and the reason why they would not go into Hebron, or any other of the populous cities which were closely studded in the land, was that 'they looked for the City.' It was better for them to dwell in tents than in houses.

The clear vision of that great future impresses on us the transiency of the present. We shall know that what we live in is but as a tent that is soon to be struck, even while some of our fellow-lodgers may fancy it to be a house that will last for ever.

The illusion of the permanence of this fleeting show creeps over us all, in spite of our better knowledge, and has to be fought against. The world, though it seems to be at rest, is going faster than any of the objects in it which are known to be in motion. We are deceived by the universality of the movement of which all things partake, and to us it seems rest. If there comes friction, and now and then a collision, we find out how fast we are going. And then there come misery, and melancholy, and lamentations about the brevity of life, and the awfulness of change, and all these other commonplaces that are the stock-in-trade of poetasters, but which cut with such surprise and agony into our own hearts when we experience them. But, brethren, to be convinced of the transiency of life, by reason of the clearness of the vision of the permanence of the heavens, is blessedness and not misery, and is the only way by which a man can bear to say to himself, 'My days are as a hand-breadth,' and not fling down his tools and fall into sadness, from feeling that life is as futile as frail. To recognise that nothing continues in one stay, and to see nothing else that is permanent, is the greatest misery that is laid upon man. But to feel, 'Thou art from everlasting to everlasting, and Thy kingdom endureth through all generations and I belong to it,' makes us regard with equanimity, and sometimes with solemn satisfaction, the passing away of all the transient, 'that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.' 'He looked for a city'; so, 'he dwelt in tents.'

There is another side to that thought. The clear vision of that permanent future will detach us from the perishable present.

Now many difficult questions arise as to how far Christians should hold aloof from the order of things in which they dwell: and to a very large extent the application of the principle in detail must be left to each man for himself, in the presence of God. But this I am quite sure of, that in this generation the average Christian has a great deal more need to be warned against too great intermingling with than against too great separation from the present world. Abraham sets us an example beautifully comprehensive. He held cordial relations with the people amongst whom he dwelt. He was honoured by them as a prince; he was recognised by them as a servant of God. They knew his bravery. He did not scruple to draw the sword, and to fight in defence, not only of his kinsmen but of his heathen neighbours in Sodom. And yet nothing would induce him to come down from his tent, beneath the terebinth tree of Mamre, in the uplands. Everybody knew that his name was Abraham the Hebrew — the man from the other side. He carried out that name in his life.

Now, I am not going to lay down hard and fast rules — conventional regulations are the ruin of principles. But let us ask ourselves, 'Would anybody call me "the man from the other side," the man who belongs to another set of things altogether than this?' We have to work in the world; to trade in the world; to try to influence the world; to draw many of our enjoyments from it, in common with those who have no other enjoyments than those drawn from it. Of course, there is a great tract of ground common to the men of faith and the men of sense, and I am not urging false aloofness from any occupation, interest, duty, or enjoyment. But what I say is that, if we have the vision of the city clear before us, there will be no need to tell us not to make our home in Hebron or in Sodom.

Lot went down there when he had his choice — and he got what he wanted, pasturage for his cattle. But he also got what he did not want, destruction, and he lost what he did not care to keep, his share in the city. Abraham stayed on the heights, and up there he kept God, and a good conscience. Probably he did not make so much money as Lot did. Very likely Lot's flocks and herds were larger than his uncle's. But the one man from his height, through the clear air, could see far away the sparkling of the turrets of the city; and the other, down in the hot, steaming plains of Sodom, could see nothing but Sodom and the mountains behind it. Better to live on the heights with Abraham and God than down below with Lot, and wealth, and subterranean brimstone, and naphtha fires ready to burst forth. 'He looked for the city,' 'he dwelt in tents.'

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## Hebrews 11:13 The Attachments and Detachments of Faith

**'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.' — Hebrews 11:13 (R.V.)**

THE great roll-call of heroes of faith in this grand chapter goes upon the supposition that the living spirit of religion was the same in Old and in New Testament times. In both it was faith which knit men to God. It has often been alleged that that great word faith has a different signification in this Epistle from that which it has in the other New Testament writings. The allegation is largely true; in so far as the things Believed are concerned they are extremely different; but it is not true in so far as the person trusted, or in so far as the act of trusting are concerned. These are identical. It was no mere temporal and earthly promise on which the faith of these patriarchs was builded. They looked indeed for the land, but in looking for the land, they looked 'for the city which hath foundations'; and their future hopes had the same dim haze of ignorance, and the same questions unresolved about perspective and relative distances which our future hopes have; and their faith, whatever were its contents, was fundamentally the same out of a soul casting itself upon God, which is the essence of our faith in the Divine Son in whom God is made manifest. So with surface difference there is a deep-lying absolute oneness in the faith of the Old Testament and ours, in essential nature, in the Object which they grasp, and in their practical effects upon life.

Therefore, these words of my text, describing what faith did for the world's grey forefathers, have a more immediate bearing upon us than at first sight may appear, and may suggest for us some thoughts about the proper, practical issues of Christian faith in our daily lives.

**I. I take two or three of the points which come most plainly out from the words before us, and ask you to notice, in the first place, how faith fills eye and heart with the future.**

You will have observed that I have read my text somewhat differently from the form which it assumes in our Authorised Version. Observe that the words 'And were persuaded of them,' in our Old Version are a gloss, — no part of the original text. Observe, further, that the adverb 'afar off' is intended to apply to both the clauses: 'Having seen them,' and 'embraced them.' And that, consequently, 'embraced' must necessarily be an inadequate representation of the writer's idea; for you cannot embrace a thing that is 'afar off'; and to 'embrace the promises' was the very thing that these men did not do. The meaning of the word is here not embraced, but saluted or greeted; and the figure that lies in it is a very beautiful one. As some traveller topping the water-shed may see far off the white porch of his home, and wave a greeting to it, though it be distant, while his heart goes out over all the intervening, weary leagues; or as some homeward-bound crew catch, away yonder on the horizon, the tremulous low line that is home, and welcome it with a shout of joy, though many a billow dash and break between them and it, these men looked across the weary waste, and saw far away; and as they saw their hearts went out towards the things that were promised, because they 'judged Him faithful that had promised.' And that is the attitude and the act which all true faith in God ought to operate in us.

So, then, here are two things to think about for a moment. One, Faith's vision; the other, Faith's greeting.

People say, 'Seeing is believing.' I should be disposed to turn the aphorism right round, and to say, 'Believing is seeing.' For there is a clearer insight, and a more immediate, direct contact with the thing beheld, and a deeper certitude in the vision of faith than in the poor, purblind sight of sense, all full of illusions, and which has no real possession in it of the things which it beholds. The sight that faith gives is solid, substantial, clear, certain. If I might so say, the true exercise of faith is to stereoscope the dim ghostlike realities of the future, and to make them stand out solid in relief there before us. And he who, clasping the hand, and if I might so say, looking through the eyes, of God, sees the future, in humble acceptance of His great words of promise, in some measure as God sees it — has a source of knowledge, clear, immediate, certain, which sense with its lies and imperfections, is altogether inadequate even to symbolise. The vision of Faith is far deeper, far more real, far more correspondent to the realities, and far more satisfying to the eye that gazes, than is any of the sight of sense. Do not you be deceived or seduced by talk that assumes to be profound and philosophical, into believing that when you venture your all upon God's word, and doing so say, 'I know, and behold mine inheritance,' you are saying more than calm reason and common-sense teaches us. We have the thing, and we see it, if we believe Him that in His word shows it to us,

Well, then, still further, there is suggested that this vision of faith, with all its blessed clearness and certitude and sufficiency, is not a direct perception of the things promised, but only a sight of them in the promise. And does that make it less blessed? Does the astronomer, who sits in his chamber, and when he would most carefully observe the heavens, looks downwards on to the mirror of the reflecting telescope that he uses, feel that he sees the starry lights less clearly and less really than when he gazes up into the abyss itself and sees them there? Is not the reflection a better and a more accurate source of knowledge for him than even the direct observation of the sky would be? And so, if we look down into the promise, we shall see, gleaming and glittering there, the starry points which are the true images adapted to our present sense and power of reception of the great invisible lights above. God be thanked that faith looks to the promises and not to the realities, else it were no more faith, and would lose some of its blessedness.

And then, still further, let me remind you that this vision of faith varies in the measure of our faith. It is not always the same. Refraction brings up sometimes, above the surface of the sea, a spectral likeness of the opposite shore, and men stand now and then upon our southern coasts, and for an hour or two, in some conditions of the atmosphere, they see the low sandhills of the French or the Belgian coast, as if they were at arm's length. So faith, refracting the rays of light that strike from the Throne of God, brings up the image, and when it is strong the image is clear, and when it flags the image 'fades away into the light of common day'; and where there glowed the fair outlines of the far-off land, there is nothing but a weary wash of waters and a solitary stretch of sea.

My brother! do you see to it that this vision of faith is cultivated by you. It is hard to do. The pressure of the present is terribly strong; the chains of sense that hold us are very adamant and thick; but still it is possible for us to cultivate the faculty of beholding, and to train the eye to look into that telescope that pries into distant worlds, and brings eternal glories near. No pair of eyes can look the one at a thing near, and the other at a thing afar off; at least if they do the man squints. And no soul can look so as to behold the unseen glories if its eye be turned to all these vanities here. Do- you choose whether you shall, like John Bunyan's man with the muckrake, have your eyes fixed upon the straws and filth at your feet, or whether you will look upwards and see the crown that is glittering there just above your head, and ready to drop upon it. 'These all in faith saw the promises.'

Yes! And when they saw them they greeted them. Their hands and their hearts went out, and a glad shout came to their lips as they beheld the fair vision of all the wonder that should be. And so faith has in it, in proportion to its depth and reality, this going out of the soul towards the things discerned. They draw us when we see them,

One of our seventeenth-century prose writers says: — 'Were the happiness of the next world as closely apprehended as felicities of this, it were a martyrdom to live.' It is true. If we see, we cannot choose but love. Our vision will break into desire, and to behold is to yearn after. Oh, Christian men and women! do we know anything of that going out of the soul, in a calm transport of deliberate preference to the things that are unseen and eternal. It is a sharp test of the reality of our Christian profession; do not shrink from applying it to yourselves.

## **II. And now in the next place, we see here how faith produces a sense of detachment from the present, 'They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.'**

The writer is, no doubt, referring to the words of Abraham when he stood up before the Hittites, and asked for a bit of ground to lay his Sarah in — 'I am a stranger and a sojourner with you'; and also to Jacob's words to Pharaoh, 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years.' These utterances revealed the spirit in which they looked upon the settled order in the midst of which they dwelt, They felt that they were not of it, but belonged to another.

Now there are two different kinds of consciousness that we are strangers and sojourners here. There is one that merely comes from the consideration of the natural transiency of all earthly things, and the shortness of human life. There is another that comes from the consciousness that we belong to another kingdom and another order. A 'stranger' is a man who, in a given constitution of things, in some country with a settled government, owes allegiance to another king, and belongs to another polity. A 'pilgrim' or a 'sojourner' is a man who is only in the place where he now is for a little while. So the one of the two words expresses the idea of belonging to another state of things, and the other expresses the idea of transiency in the present condition.

But the true Christian consciousness of being 'a stranger and a sojourner' comes, not from any thought that life is fleeting and ebbing away, but from the better and more blessed operation of the faith which reveals the things promised, and knits me so closely to them that I cannot but feel separated from the things that are round about me. Men who live in mountainous countries, be-it Switzerland, or the Highlands, or anywhere else, when they come down into the plains, pine and fade away sometimes, with the intensity of the 'Heimweh,' the homesickness which seizes them. And we, if we are Christians, and belong to the other order of things, shall feel that this is not our native soil, nor here the home in which we would dwell Abraham could not go to live in Sodom, though Lot went; and he and his son and grandson kept themselves outside of the organisation of the society in the midst of which they dwelt, because they were so sure that they belonged to another. Or, as the context puts it, they 'dwelt in tents because they looked for the City.' It is only sad, disheartening, cutting the nerve of much activity, destroying the intensity of much joy, drawing over life the pall of a deep sadness for a man to say, 'Seventy years are a hand- breadth. I am a stranger and a sojourner.' But it is an ally of all noble, intense, happy living that a man should say, 'My home is with God. I am a stranger and a sojourner here.' The one conviction is perfectly consistent with even desperate absorption in present things. 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,' is quite as legitimate a conclusion from the consciousness of human frailty, as, 'Let us live for heaven, for to-morrow we die.' It all depends upon what is the source and occasion of this consciousness, whether it shall make us bitter, and shall make us cling to the perishable thing all the more because it is going so soon, or whether it shall lift us up above all these transient treasures or sorrows and fill our hearts with the glad conviction, 'I am a citizen of no mean city, and therefore here I am but a stranger.'

My brother! does your faith lessen the bonds that bind you to earth? Does it detach you from the things that are seen and temporal,

or is your life ordered upon the same maxims and devoted to the pursuit of the same objects, and gladdened by the same transitory and partial successes, and embittered by the same fleeting and light afflictions which rule and sway the lives that are rooted only in earth as the tempest sways the grass on the sandhills? If so, what business have we to call ourselves Christians? If so, how can we say that we live by faith when we are so blind, and so incapable of seeing afar off, that the smallest trifle beside us blots out from our vision, as a fourpenny piece held up against your eyeball might do the sun itself in the heavens there. True faith detaches a man from this present, If your faith does not do that, look into it and see where the falsity of it is. III. And, lastly, my text brings out the thought of how this same faith triumphs in the article of death. 'These all died in faith.'

That is a very grand thought as applied to those old patriarchs, that just because all their lives long God had done nothing for them of what He had promised, therefore they died believing that He was going to do it. All their disappointments fed their faith. Because the words on which they had been leaning all their lives had not come to a fulfilment, therefore they must be true. That is a strange paradox, and yet it is the one which filled these men's hearts with peace, and which made the dying Jacob break in upon his prophetic swan-song, at the close, with the verse which stands in no relation to what goes before it, or what comes after it. 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.' 'These all died in faith' just because they had not 'received the promises.'

So, dear brethren, for us the end of life may have a faith nurtured by disappointments, made more sure of everything because it has nothing; certain that He calls into existence another world to redress the balance of the old, because here there has been so much of bitterness and weariness and woe. And our end like theirs may be an end beatified by a clear vision of the things that 'no man hath seen, nor can see'; and into the darkness there may come for us, as there came of old to another, an open heaven and a beam of God's glory smiting us on the face and changing it into the face of an angel And so there may come for us all in that article and act of death, a tranquil and cheerful abandonment of the life which has been futile and frail, except when thought of as the vestibule of heaven. Some men cling to the vanishing skirts of this earthly life, and say, 'I will not let thee go.' And others are able to say, 'Lord, I have waited for Thy salvation.' 'Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.'

'These all died in faith'; and the sorrows and disappointments of the past made the very background on which the bow of promise spanned the sky, beneath which they passed into the Promised Land. 'These all died in faith'; with a vision gleaming upon the inward sense which made the solitude of death bliss, and with a calm willingness 'to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.'

Choose whether you will live by sense and die in sorrow, or whether you will live by the faith of the Son of God, and die to enter 'the City which hath foundations,' which He has built for them that love Him, and which even now, 'in seasons of calm weather,' we can see shining on the hill top far away.

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## Hebrews 11:14 Seek The Fatherland

**'They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a Country. —Hebrews 11:14**

WHAT things? Evidently those which the writer has just been saying that the patriarchs of old 'said,' as stated in the previous words — 'They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon earth.' The writer has in his mind, no doubt, some of the beautiful incidents of the Book of Genesis; especially, I suppose, that very touching one where Abraham is standing up by the side of his dead, in the presence of the sons of Herb, and begs from them for the first time a little piece of land that he could call his Own. He tells them that he is a stranger and a sojourner amongst them, and wants 'the field and the cave that is therein' in which to bury his dead. Or he may be thinking of the no less touching incident, when Jacob, in his extreme old age, tells the King of Egypt that the days of the years of his pilgrimage have been few and evil, not having attained to the years of his father.

The writer points to these declarations, and reads into them what he was entitled to read into them, something more than a mere acceptance of the external facts of the speakers' condition, as wanderers in the midst of a civilization to which they did not belong. He sees gleaming through the primary force of the words the further hope which the patriarchs cherished, though it was, as it wore, latent in the nearer hope of an earthly inheritance — viz., that of the city which hath foundations, and the country which they could call their own.

Although the writer is not adducing those patriarchs as being patterns for us, but is only establishing his great thesis that they lived by faith in a future blessing, as we ought to do, still we may take the words of my text, with a permissible amount of violence, as appropriate to all of us who call ourselves Christians. 'They who say such things do hereby declare plainly,' and by their lives should declare more plainly still, 'that they are seeking a country.'

**I. Note, then, first of all, the remarkable representation here given of that future for which Christians look, as being their**

## **native land.**

The word of our text is very inadequately rendered in our Authorized Version as merely 'a country.' Fully and etymologically rendered, it would be 'the fatherland.' Whether we choose to adopt that somewhat un-English expression or no, at all events, the idea conveyed is that these men, having come out from Mesopotamia, and being wanderers, in their goat's-hair tents, in the midst of the fenced cities of Canaan, were thereby seeking for a land which was their native land, their home, the place to which they felt that they belonged far more truly than to the land from which they came out, or to the land in which they were for the moment wandering. That is the idea that I would enforce as needful for all true and noble Christian living, the recognition that our true home, the country and the order with which we are connected by all our deepest and most real affinities, the land where, and where only, we shall feel at rest, and surrounded by familiar things and loved persons, is that land which lies beyond the flood.

We do not belong, and should feel that we do not belong, to the place and order where we happen to stand to-day. This present and the order of things here should be for us either like that Aram Naharaim, 'the Syria between the two rivers,' the dust of which Abraham had shaken from off his feet; or it should be like that rotten though splendid civilization into the midst of which He came, and of which He sternly refused to enrol Himself as a citizen. Our home is where Jesus Christ is, and there is something profoundly wrong in us unless we feel that that, and not this, is our native soil, and that there, and not here, is the place to which we belong.

Our colonists on the other side of the world, though they have never seen England, talk about 'going home.' And so we, inhabitants of this outlying colony of the great city, ought to look across the flood, and sometimes catch a sight of those bright realms beyond, and always feel that they are really our native land. 'They that say such things declare plainly' that they are not citizens here, but belong yonder.

## **II. Then, mark again, the other parallel which may be drawn between these men's attitude and ours, in that their whole career was a seeking the true Fatherland.**

Again, our translation is inadequate because it does not give the energetic force of the word that is rendered 'seek.' It was not a seeking, on the part of the patriarchs, in the sense of looking for an unseen thing, or searching about to find an undiscovered one. That was all done for them by God. They had not to seek in that unsatisfactory and disturbing sense, but they had to seek, in the sense of projecting their desires onwards to the blessing that God held out in His hand for them, and letting their faith grasp the promise and their thoughts expatiate in the future, which was as sure to them as the present, because God had made it. The word for seeking in the original is very emphatic. It implies the going out of longings and yearnings and thoughts to something which is there, to be grasped and laid hold of. Thank God we have not to seek our native soil as wanderers who may perchance fail in our quest, and die at last homeless. It is brought to us, and certified to us by the divine veracity, sealed to us by the divine faithfulness, reserved for us by the divine power, made possible for us by the divine forgiving mercy. But still we have to seek, letting our hearts go out towards that good land, letting our thoughts play about it and become familiar with it, letting our desires tend towards it, and ever, in all the dusty ways of daily life, and amidst all the distractions of monotonous and recurring duties, keeping our heads above the mist and looking into the clear blue, where we may see the vision of the certain future.

The management and discipline of our thoughts is included in that seeking, and I am afraid that that is a part of Christian culture woefully neglected by the average Christian of this day. If we consider the comparative magnitude of the future and the present, and the certain issue of the present in the future, are our thoughts of it such as common-sense would make them? Is that 'land that is very far off' a frequent ordinary subject of contemplation by us, in the midst of the hurry and bustle of our daffy life? Or have we let the glasses of the telescope of hope get all dimmed and dirty; and when we do polish them up, do we use them to look at the stars with, or at the earth and its beauties? Whither do my anticipations of the future tend? Is my hope shortsighted or longsighted? Is it only able to see the things on this side the river, or can it catch any of the glories beyond? Our fault is not in not living enough in the future, but in the selection of the future in which we live. 'We are saved by hope,' if we rightly direct the hope. We are ruined by hopes when they are cribbed, cabined, and confined to this miserable present. Brother! do you seek your home by the cultivation of the contemplation of it and the desire for it, and so almost emulate the divine prerogative and call things that are not as though they were?

Oh! how different our lives would be if we walked in the light of that great hope, and how different everything here would be if we regarded all here as auxiliary and subsidiary to that.

Above all, if it were true of us, as it ought to be in accordance with our profession of being Christians, that we seek a country, should we think about death as we do? Should we drape it in such ugly forms? Should we shrink from it as most of us, I fear, do as a dread and an enemy and a disaster? No doubt there is, and there always will be. a natural shrinking; but the man who can say



that to die is to be with Christ, and who sets that thought ever before him, will be helped over the dark gulf; and the shrinking will be turned, if not into desire at least into calm scorn of the last enemy, the encounter with whom does not diminish his longing to be with his Lord.

These are heights, of Christian feeling so far above most of us that we are tempted to think them unreal and fantastic; but they are the heights to which we should naturally rise, if once we realised the greatness, the blessedness, the certainty of that hidden hope above. Dear friends, if we look onwards to our own end, are we only or chiefly conscious of a cold thrill of recoil and repulsion? Let us ask ourselves if our feeling corresponds to our profession that Christ is our life, and that where He is is our heaven and our hope.

### **III. Lastly, notice the unmistakable witness of profession and life which we are to bear.**

'They declare plainly.' They make it absolutely and unmistakably manifest, says the writer, that they seek a country. It did not need that Abraham should stand up before the sons of Heth and say, 'I am a pilgrim and a sojourner amongst you.' They all knew it. There was his tent outside the city walls, and a strange life that little tribe of people, he and his followers, lived, wandering up and down the land and refusing to settle themselves anywhere. They lived a life unlike that of the people among whom they dwelt, We know that in these early days there were fenced cities, outside the walls of which they dwelt, and there all the evidences of a highly developed and advanced civilization existing in the land. These patriarchs lived like gypsies in the country, roaming everywhere but rooted nowhere; and the reason they so lived was that they 'looked for a city which hath foundations.'

'Yes! the man, before the eyes of whose faith there is ever shining that permanent state of blessed union with Jesus Christ and of sweet society with all the good, can afford to recognise the things that are seen as transient, as they must be. He will be in no danger of mistaking the fleeting shows for eternal realities. If we are looking for the city we shall dwell in tabernacles; and the more our faith grasps the permanent realities beyond, the more will our experience realise the transitoriness of the things here by our sides.

The very fact that men call themselves Christians is a declaration that they are seeking for a city. Do you act up to your declaration? Is your Christianity a matter of lip or of life? Have you pitched your tents outside the city to confirm your declaration that you do not belong to this community? And do you live as in it, but not of it?

Our outward lives ought to make most distinctly manifest that we are citizens of the heavens, and that will be made manifest by abstinence from a great deal. There are many things, right enough in themselves, which are not expedient, and therefore not right, for a Christian man to do, if they fasten him down to this present. And you will have to cut yourselves loose from a good deal to which otherwise it would be permissible for you to be attached, if you intend to rise towards God; and whatever we do like other people, we shall have to do from a manifestly different temper or spirit. Two men may engage in precisely the same occupation. For instance, there may be two tellers at one side of a bank counter, or two depositors on the other, doing exactly the same things, and yet one of them may do them so as to 'declare plainly,' even in that act, 'that he is seeking a country,' and that he is not wholly swallowed up in the love and high estimate of worldly wealth. The motive from which, the end towards which, the help by which, the accompanying thoughts with which, we do our daily, secular work, may hallow it, and make it express our heavenly-mindedness, as completely as if we went apart on the mountain, and held communion in prayer and praise with God.

We do not want 'plain' declarations by so-called religious acts, still less by religious professions, half as much as we do plain declarations by an obviously Christian way of doing secular things, and living the daily life of men upon earth. Remember the illustration from the conduct of the very men of whom my text speaks. I said that they kept themselves aloof from the civilisation around them. That requires modification to be a full statement of the case. They threw themselves into it, when necessary, with all energy. Lot went down to Sodom because it offered good grazing land. He behaved just as many professing Christians handle the world, going down amongst the slime-pits and the scoundrels for the sake of making a little money out of them — whilst Abraham stopped on the more barren pastures of the hills, with freedom, security, and holiness. When Lot got what he deserved, and was involved in the disaster of the city that he had made his home, Abraham did not say, 'It is a very sad thing, but Lot must get himself out of the difficulty.' He buckled on his sword and armed his followers, turning himself into a soldier for the time being, and promptly gave chase to the robbers, following them all through the night, along the whole length of the Holy Land, and pounced upon them, routing them, as they lay in fancied security, and liberating their prisoner, who was the captive of his own lust and covetousness much more sadly than of the Eastern marauders.

And so, the detachment from the present, which is needful for Christian men, is to be combined with the most energetic discharge of the duties which we owe to ourselves and to those around us, and especially to be combined with the most diligent work for those who have fallen captive to the snares of the world which we, by His mercy, have been able to escape. And he will best manifest, and most plainly declare, that he seeks a country who seeks most earnestly to hallow all ordinary life, and to do the work, here and now, which God prescribes for him: There is an old story about a question being put to some good man who was fond of

playing chess.

'What would you do if, when you were at the chess-board, you were told that Jesus Christ was coming?' 'Finish the game' was the wise answer. There is another story about a scene in the American House of Representatives in its early time. A great darkness came on during the sitting, and some timid souls began to think that the last day was at hand. The President said, 'Bring candles and let us go on with the debate.' If the Master is coming, we are best found doing our work. Yes! Best doing our work, if it is His work. And all our work may be His if it is done for His sake and in His strength.

Christian. men and women! see to it that there be no ambiguity about your position, no mistaking your nationality, and that in your life, without ostentation, without offensively forcing your religion upon peoples' notice, you declare plainly that you, at any rate, seek your native home.

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## Hebrews 11:16 The Future Which Vindicates God

**'Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city.'** — Hebrews 11:16

THESE are bold words. They tell us that unless God has provided a future condition of social blessedness for those whom He calls His, their life's experience on earth is a blot on His character and administration. He needs heaven for His vindication. The preparation of the City is the reason why He is not 'ashamed to be called their God.' If there were not such a preparation, He had need to be ashamed. Then my text, further, by its first word 'wherefore,' carries our thoughts back to what has been said beforehand; and that is, 'They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly.' Therefore God 'is not ashamed of them,' as the Revised Version has it, with a fuller rendering, 'to be called their God.' That is to say, the attitude of the men who look ever forward, through the temporal, to the things unseen and eternal, is worthy of their relation with Him, and it alone is worthy. And if people professing to be His, and professing that He is theirs, do not so live, they would be a disgrace to God, and He would be ashamed to own them for His.

So there are two lines of thought suggested by our text; two sets of obligations which are deduced by the writer of this Epistle from that solemn name — 'The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' The one set of obligations refers to Him; the other to us. There are, then, three things here for our consideration — the name; what it pledges God to do; and what it binds men to seek. Let me ask you to look at these three things with me.

### **I. First of all, then, regard the significance of the name round which the whole argument of our verse turns.**

The writer lays hold of that wonderful designation, by which the God of the whole earth knit Himself, in special relationship of unity and mutual possession, to these three poor men — Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he would have us ponder that name, as meaning a great deal more than the fact that these three were His worshippers, and that He was their God, in the sense in which Moloch was the God of the Phoenicians; Jupiter, the god of the Romans; or Zeus of the Greeks. There is a far deeper and sacred relation involved than that. 'The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob' means not only that His name was in some measure known as a designation, and in some measure honoured by external worship, by the patriarchs, but it involved much in regard to Him, and much in regard to them. It is the name which He took for Himself, not which men gave to Him, and, therefore, it expresses what He had made Himself to these men. That is to say, the name implies a direct act of self-revelation on the part of God. It implies condescending approach and nearness of communion. It implies possession, mutual and reciprocal, as all possession of spirit by spirit must be. It implies still more wonderfully and profoundly that, just as in regard to the relations between ourselves, so, in regard to the loftiest of all relations, God owns men, and men possess God, because, on both sides of the relationship, there is the same love. Other forms of connection between men and God differ from this deepest of all in that the attitude on the one side corresponds to, but is different from, the attitude on the other. If we think of God as the object of trust, on His side there is faithfulness, on our side there is faith. If we think of Him as the object of adoration, on His side there is loftiness, on our side there is lowliness. If we think of Him as the Supreme Governor, His commandment is answered by our obedience. But if we think of Him as ours, and of ourselves as His, the bond is identical on either part. And though there be all the difference that there is between a drop of dew and the boundless ocean, between the little love that refreshes and bedews my heart, and the great abyss of the same that lies, not stagnant though calm, in His, yet my love is like God's, and God's love is like mine. And that is the deepest meaning of the name, 'the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob': — mutual possession based upon common and identical love.

And then, of course, in so far as we are concerned, the name carries with it the most blessed depths of the devout life, in all its sacredness of intimacy, in all its sweetness of communion, in all its perfectness of dependence, in all its victory over self, in all its triumphant appropriation, as its very own, of the common and universal good. It is much to be able to say 'Our God, our help in

ages past.' It is more to be able to say 'My Lord and my God.' And that appropriation deprives no other of his possession of God. I do not rob you of one beam of the sunshine when it irradiates my vision. We take in of the common land that which belongs to us, and no other man is the poorer or has the less for his. My God is thy God; and when we each realise our individual and personal relation 'to Him, as expressed by these two little words, then we are able to say, in close union, 'Our God, the God and Father of us all.' So much, then, for the name.

## **II. Now a word or two, in the second place, as to what that name pledges God to do.**

He is 'not ashamed' of it, 'for He hath prepared for them a city.' Now I do not need to enter at all upon the question as to whether the three patriarchs to whom my text has original reference had any notion of a future life. It matters nothing where or how they thought that that coming blessing towards which they were ever looking was to be realised. The point of the text is that, in any case, they were servants of a future promised to them by God, as they believed, and that that future shaped their whole life.

Think of what their life was. How all their days, from the moment when Abraham left his home, to the moment when the dying Jacob said, with a passion of unfulfilled expectancy, which yet had in it no hesitancy or doubt or rebuke, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord,' that future shaped their whole career! And then, if the end of all was that they lay down in the dust and died, having been lured on from step to step by dazzling illusions dangled before them, which were nothing but dreams, what about the God who did it? and what about their relation to Him! Would there be anything in such a God deserving to be worshipped, Might He not be ashamed of 'being called their God' if that was all that they got thereby? God needs the City for His own vindication.

Now that seems to be a daring way of putting it, but it is only another form of expressing a very plain thought, that the facts of the religious life here on earth are such as necessarily do involve a future of blessedness, and a heaven.

I need not, I suppose, dwell for more than just in a sentence upon the first plain way in which this truth may be illustrated — namely, that nothing but a future life of blessedness, such as we usually connote by the simple name 'heaven,' saves God's veracity and the truthfulness of His promises. If we believe that the awful silence of the universe has ever been broken by a divine voice; if we believe that God has said anything to men — apart, I mean, from the revelation of Himself made by our nature and in our daily experience — we must believe that He has promised a life to come. And unless such a life do await those who, humbly and with many faults and imperfections, have yet clung to Him as theirs, and yielded themselves to Him as His possession, then

**'The pillared firmament is rottenness,  
And earth's base built on stubble.'**

Let God be true and every man a lie. Unless there is a heaven, He has flashed before us an illusion like that which has tempted many a wanderer into the bog to perish. He has fooled us with a mirage, which at the distance looked like palm-trees and cool, flashing lakes, and when we reach it is only burning sand, strewn with bleached bones of the generations that have been cheated before us. 'God is not ashamed... for He hath prepared a city.'

But, then, there is another thought, closely connected with the preceding, and yet capable of being dealt with separately, and that is that there is a blot ineffaceable on the divine character unless the desires which He Himself has implanted have a reality corresponding to them. That is true, of course, in the most absolute sense, in regard to all the physical necessities and yearnings which the animal nature possesses. In all that region God never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them; and need is the precursor and the prophecy of supply. So it is in regard to the whole creation; so it is in regard to that in us which we share in common with them. Care never irks the full-fed beast. No ungratified desires torture the frame of the short-lived creatures. 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of air have their roosting-places'; and all beings dwell in an environment absolutely corresponding to their capacities, and fitted to satisfy their necessities. But amongst 'them stalks the exile of creation, man; blessed, though he sometimes thinks he is cursed, with longings which the world has nothing to satisfy; and with ideals which are never capable of realisation amidst the imperfections and fleetingnesses of time. And is that to be all? If so, then God is a tyrant and not a god, and there is little to love in such a character, and He might be ashamed, if He is not, to have made men like that, so ill-fitted for their abode, and to have bestowed upon them the possibility of imagining that to which realisation shall be for ever denied.

And if that is true in regard of many of the desires of life, apart altogether from religion, it becomes still more manifestly and eminently true in regard of Christian experience and devout emotions. For if there is any one thing which an acceptance of Christianity in the heart and life is sure to do, it is to kindle and make dominant longings, yearnings rising sometimes to pain, which the world is utterly unable to satisfy. Is it ever to be so? Then, oh then, better for us that we should never have known that name; better for us that we had nourished a blind life within our brains; better for us that we had never been born. But 'He hath prepared for them a city,' where wishes shall be embodied, and the ideal shall be reality, and desires shall be fulfilled, and everything that has dwelt, silently and secretly, in the chambers of the imagination shall come forth into the sunlight. Morning dreams are proverbially

true. 'We are not of the night, nor of the darkness: we are the children of the day,' and our dreams are one day to pass into the sober certainty of waking bliss.

Then there is another thought still, and that is that it would be a blot ineffaceable on the divine character if all the discipline of life were to have no field in the future on which its results could be manifested. These three poor men were schooled by many sorrows. What were they all for? For the City. And in like manner the facts of our earthly life and our Christian experiences are equally inexplicable and confounding unless beyond these dim and trifling things of time there lie the sunlit and solemn fields of eternity, in which whatsoever of force, valor, worthiness, manhood, we have made our own here shall expiate for ever more.

I do not mean that life is so sad and weary that we need to call another world into existence to redress the irlante of the old. I think that is only very partially true, for we are always apt in such considerations to minimize the pleasures on the whole, and to exaggerate the pains on the whole, of the earthly life. But I mean that the one true view of all that befalls us here on earth is discipline; and that discipline implies an end for which it is applied, and a realm in which its results are to be manifested. And if God carefully trains us, passes us through varieties of condition, in order to evolve in us a character conformed to His will; puts us to the long threescore years and ten of the apprenticeship, and then has no workshop in which to occupy us afterwards, we are reduced to a state of utter intellectual bewilderment, and life is an inextricable tangle and puzzle.

You may go into certain prehistoric depots, where you will find lying by thousands flint weapons which have been carefully chipped and shaped and polished, and then, apparently, left in a heap, and never anything done with them. Is the world a great cemetery of weapons prepared and then tossed aside like that? We need a heaven where the faithfulness of the servant shall be exchanged for the joy of the Lord, and he that was faithful in a few things shall be made ruler over many things.

### III. And now a word about my last thought; and that is, what this name binds Christian people to seek.

My text in its former part says, 'They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.' If Abraham, instead of stopping under the oak tree at Mature, had gone down into Sodom with Lot, and taken up his quarters there; or if he had become a naturalized citizen of Hebron, and struck up alliances with the children of Heth, would the Sodomites or the Hebronites or the Hittites have thought any the better of him therefore? As long as he kept apart from them, he witnessed to the promise, and God looked upon him and blessed him. But if, professing to look for 'the city which hath the foundations,' he had not been content to dwell in tabernacles, God would have been ashamed of him to be called his God.

Translate that into plain English, and it is this. As long as Christian people live like pilgrims and strangers, they are worthy of being called God's, and God is glad to be called theirs. And as long as they do so, the world will know a religious man when it sees him, and, though it may not like him, it will at least respect him. But a secularized Church or individuals who say that they are Christians, and who have precisely the same estimates of good and evil as the world has, and live by the same maxims, and pursue the same aims, and never lift their eyes to look at the City beyond the river, these are a disgrace to God and to themselves, and to the religion which they say they profess.

I cannot but feel — and feel, I think, in growing degree — that one main clause of the woful feebleness of our average Christianity is that our hopes and visions of the City which hath the foundations have become dim, and that, to a very large extent, the thoughts of 'the rest that remaineth for the people of God' is dormant in the minds of the mass of professing Christian people.

Oh, dear friends! if we will yield to that sweet, strong appeal that is made to us in the frame, and, feeling that God is ours and we are His, will turn our hearts and thoughts more than, alas! we have done, to that blessed hope, Jesus will not be ashamed to call us brethren, nor God be ashamed to be called our God. Let us beware that we are not ashamed to be called His, nor to 'declare plainly that we seek a country.'

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## Hebrews 11:24-27 The Faith of Moses

**'By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the of Pharaoh's daughter; 25. Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; 26. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. 27. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible. — Hebrews 11:24-27**

I HAVE ventured to take these verses as a text, not with the idea of expounding their details, or even of touching many of the large questions which they raise, but for the sake of catching their general drift. They are the writer's description of two significant instances in the life of the great Lawgiver of the power of faith. He deals with both in the same fashion. He first tells the act, then he analyses its spring in the state of feeling which produced it, and then he traces that state of feeling to certain external facts which were obvious to the faith of Moses. 'The Great Refusal,' by which he flung up his position at the court of Pharaoh, and chose to

identify himself with his people, is the one. His flight from Egypt to the solitudes of Horeb is the other. The two acts are traced to the states of feeling or opinion in Moses. The former came from a choice and an estimate. 'He chose to suffer with the people of God'; and he 'esteemed the reproach... greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.' The latter in like manner came from a state of feeling. He 'forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.' What underlay the choice, the estimate, the courage? 'He had respect,' or more literally and forcibly, 'he looked away to the recompense of the reward.' He saw 'Him who is invisible.' So, an act of vision which disclosed him a future recompense and a present God was the basis of all. And from that act of vision there came states of mind which made it easy and natural to choose a lot of suffering and humiliation, and to turn away from all the glories and treasures and wrath of Egypt.

That is to say, we have here two things — what this man saw, and what the vision did for his life, and I wish to consider these two. The same sight is possible for us; and, if we have it, the same conduct will certainly follow.

### **I. Note then, first, what this man saw.**

Two things, says the writer. 'He looked away to the recompense of the reward,' and he saw God. Now I need not remind you, I suppose, that these two objects of real vision correspond to the two elements of faith which the writer describes in the first verse of our chapter, where he says that it is 'the substance of things hoped for'; to which corresponds 'the recompense of the reward,' and 'the evidence of things not seen; to which answers Him who is invisible.'

Now, that conception of faith, as having mainly to do with the future and the unseen, is somewhat different superficially from the ordinary notion of faith, set forth in the New Testament, as being trust in Jesus Christ. But the difference is only superficial, and arises mainly from a variety in the prominence given to the elements which both conceptions have in common. For the faith which is trust in Jesus Christ is directed towards the unseen, and includes in itself the realisation of the future. And the faith which is vivid consciousness of the invisible world, and realisation of a coming retribution, finds them both most clearly and most surely in that Lord 'in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice,' and anticipate the future 'end of our faith' even the salvation of our souls. So we may take these two points that emerge from our text, and look at them as containing for our present purpose a sufficient description of what our faith ought to do for us.

There must be, first, then, a vivid and resolute realisation of future retribution. Now, note that this same expression, a somewhat peculiar one, 'the recompense of the reward,' is found again in this letter in directly the opposite reference from that which it has here. In the second chapter of the Epistle we read that 'every transgression and disobedience shall receive its just recompense of reward.' Both recompense by punishment and by blessedness are included in the word, so that its meaning is the exact requital of good or evil by a sovereign judge.

And that is the very purpose which faith has for one of its chief functions, to burn in the conviction on our slothful minds — that all that is round about us is at once cause and consequence; that life is a network of issues of past actions, and of progenitors of future ones; that nothing that a man does ever dies; that

**'Through his soul the echoes roll,  
And grow for ever and for ever'**

that 'whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.' Character is the result of actions. Condition is largely, if not altogether, dependent upon conduct and upon character. And, just as the sandstone cliffs were laid down grain by grain by an evaporated ocean, and stand eternal when the waters have all vanished, so whatever else you and I are making of, and in, our lives, we are making permanent cliffs of character which will remain when all the waves of time have foamed themselves away.

That process, which is going on moment by moment all through our lives, Christian faith follows beyond the grave. It works right up to the edge of the grave as everybody can see, and many a man's last harvest of the seed that he sowed to the flesh is his, when laid a Corrupted corpse into his coffin. But does it stop there? The world may say, 'We know not.' Christian faith overleaps the gulf and sees the process going on more intensely and unhindered in the life yonder. We are like signalmen in their isolated boxes. They pull a lever, and the points a quarter of a mile away are shifted. The man does not see what he has done, but he has done it all the same. And when his time for travelling comes, he will find that he has determined the course on which he must run by the actions that were done here.

And so, brethren, this conviction, not merely as being a selfish looking for a peaceful and blessed heaven, as some people try to vulgarise the conception, but as being the thrilling consciousness that every deed has its issues, and is to be done, or refrained from, in view of these, this is what is meant by the word of my text: 'he looked away' to the recompense of reward.

Now remember that such a vision clear and definite before a man, substantial and solid and continuous enough to become a

formative power in his life, and even to determine its main direction, is only realisable as the result of very special and continuous effort. The writer of the letter employs a singular and a strong word, which I have tried to English by the phrase 'looking off unto the recompense.' He turned away by a determined effort of resolution, averting his gaze from other things in order to fix it on the far off thing. One use of the tube of the telescope is to shut out cross lights, and concentrate the vision on the far off object, looked at undisturbed. Unless we can thus shut off on either side these dazzling and bewildering brilliances that dance and flicker round us, we shall never see clearly that solemn future and all its infinite possibilities of sorrow or of blessedness. The eye that is focused to look at the things on the earth cannot see the stars. When the look-out man at the bow wants to make sure whether that white flash on the horizon is a sun-smitten sail or a breaker, he knits his brows and shades his eyes with his hand, and concentrates his steady gaze till he sees. And you and I have to do that, or the most real things in the universe, away yonder in the extreme distance, will be problematical and questionable to us. Oh, brother! our Christian lives would be altogether different if we made the resolve and kept it, to fix our gaze on 'the recompense of the reward.'

Then the next thing that this man saw, says my text, was 'Him who is invisible.'

Now I do not suppose that there is any reference there to the miraculous manifestations of a divine presence which were given to the lawgiver, for these came long after the incidents which are being dealt with in my text. True! he saw God face to face amidst the solitudes and the sanctities of Sinai. But that is not at all what the writer is thinking about here. He is thinking about the vision which was given to Moses, in no other fashion than it may be given to us, if we will have it, the sight of God to the 'inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude,' and ministers strength to our lives, in solitude or in society. The conscious realisation of God's presence in our minds and hearts and wills, and the whole trembling and yet rejoicing inner man, aware that God is near, are what is meant by this vision of Him. The realisation of His presence continually, the sight of Him in nature, so that every bush burns with a visible deity, and every cloud is the pillar in which He moves for guidance, the realisation of His presence, in history, in society, operating all changes and working round us, and in us, and on us — this is the highest result of a true religious faith.

And it is worthy to be called sight. For not the vision of the eye is the source of the truest certitude, but the vision of the inward spirit. A man may be surer of God than he is of the material universe that he touches and handles and beholds. The vision that a trustful heart has of God is as real, as direct, and, I venture to say, more assured, than the knowledge which is brought to us through sense.

And such a vision ought to be, and will be if we are right, no disturbing or unwelcome thought, but a delight and a strength. A prisoner in a solitary cell sometimes goes mad because he knows that somewhere in its walls there is a peep-hole at which, at any moment, the eye of a gaoler may be on the watch. But the loving heart that yearns after God has nothing but joy in the otherwise awful thought, 'If I take the wings of the morning, Thou art there. If I fly to the uttermost parts of the west, there I meet Thee.' 'If I make my bed in the grave, Thou art there. Thou hast beset me behind and before.' Brethren, either our ghastliest doubt or our deepest joy is, 'Thou, God, seest me.' 'When I awake I am still with Thee.'

## **II. And now, secondly, notice what the vision did for this man.**

I cannot do more than touch very lightly upon the various points that are involved here. But I would have you notice in general that the writer masses the enemies of a noble life, which Moses overcame by this sight, in three general classes — pleasures, treasures, dangers. The faith of Moses lifted him above ignoble pleasures, saved him from coveting fleeting possessions, armed him against mere corporeal perils. And these three — delights, rules, dangers, may be roughly said to be the triple-headed Cerberus that bars our way. Let us look how the vision will help to overcome them all.

This sight will take the brightness out of ignoble and fleeting pleasures. Moses had the ball at his foot, Jewish legends tell us that the very crown was intended to be placed on his head. However that may be, a life of luxurious ease, of command over men, accompanied by the half deification which in old days hedged a king, were his for the taking; and he turned from them all. He did not choose suffering: but he chose to be identified with the people of God, though he knew that thereby he was electing a life of sorrow and of pain. The world has seen no nobler act than that when he passed through the gates of Pharaoh's palace, the fragments of whose glorious architecture we still wonder at, and housed himself in the dark reed huts where the slaves dwelt.

Now that same spirit, both in regard to choice and to estimate, must be ours, and will be ours, if we have any depth and reality of vision of the recompense and of the invisible God. For if you once let the light of these two solemn thoughts in upon the delights of earth, how poor and paltry, how coarse and ignoble, they look! Did you ever see the scenes of a theatre by daylight? What daubs; what rents; what coarse work! Let the light of the 'recompense' and of God in upon earthly delights, and how they shrivel, and dwindle, and disappear! Ah, brethren! if we would only bring our earthly desires to the touchstone of these two great thoughts, we should find that many a thing that holds us would slacken its grasp, and the fair forms, with their tiny harps, and their sweet songs that tempt us on the flowery island, would be seen for what they are — ravenous monsters whose guests are in the depths of hell. 'He had respect to the recompense of the reward,' and spurned ignoble pleasures. If you see the things that are, you will not be tempted with the things that seem.

And then, further, such a vision will help us to appraise at their true value earthly possessions.. I cannot enter upon the question of what the writer means precisely by that singular phrase, attributing to Moses 'the reproach of Christ.' Whether it implies the reproach borne for Christ, or like Christ, or by Christ, all which interpretations are possible, and have been suggested, need not concern us now. The point is that the twofold vision of which the writer is speaking, let in upon worldly possessions, reveals their emptiness and dressiness, as compared with the true riches.

There are old stories of men who in the night received from fairy hands gifts of gold in some cave, and when the daylight came upon them what had seemed to be gold and jewels was a bundle of withered leaves and red berries, already half corrupted and altogether worthless. There are many things that the world counts very precious which are little the fairy's gold. Nothing that can be taken from a man really belongs to him. The only real riches, correspond with his necessities, are those which, once possessed, are inseparable from his being, the riches of an indwelling God, and of a nature conformed to His.

And that effect of the vision of the unseen and the future, as bringing down to their true value all the wealth of Egypt and of the world, is a lesson which no man needs more than do we whose lives, and habits of thinking, are passed and formed in a commercial community, in which success means a fortune, and failure means poverty; in which the poor are tempted to look upon the possession of wealth as the only thing to be coveted, and the rich are tempted to look upon it as the one thing to be rejoiced over. Let the light of the future, and of God, ever shine upon your estimates of the worth of the world's wealth.

Lastly, such a vision will arm a man against all perils. I take it that 'forsaking Egypt' in my text refers to Moses' flight to Horeb. Now, in the book of Exodus that flight is traced to his fear. In my text it is traced to his courage. So, then, there may dwell in one heart fearing and not fearing. There may be dread, as there was with Moses, sufficient to impel him to flight, though not sufficient to induce him to abandon the purpose which made flight necessary. He was afraid enough to shelter himself. He was not afraid enough, by reason of dangers and difficulties, to fling up his mission. That is to say, the vision will not take away from a man natural tremors, nor will it blind him to real dangers and difficulties, but it will steady his resolve, and make him determined, though he may have to bow before the blast, to yield no jot of his convictions, nor fling away any of his confidence. He will flee to Horeb, if need be, but he will not cease to labour for the redemption of Israel. If we put our trust in God, and live in the continual realisation of future retribution, then, whilst we may prudently adapt our course so as to find a smooth bit of road to walk on, and to avoid dangers which may threaten, we shall never let these either shake our confidence in God, or alter our conviction of what He requires from us.

So I gather up all that I have been trying to say in the one word — the true way to make life noble is the old way, the way of faith. The sight of God, the vision of judgment will make earth's pleasures paltry, earth's treasures dross, earth's dangers contemptible. The way to secure that ennobling and strengthening vision to attend us everywhere, is to keep near to Jesus Christ, and to fix our hearts on Him. In communion with Him pleasures that perish will woo in vain, and possessions from which we must part will lose their worth, and perils that touch the body will cease to terrify; and through faith 'we shall be more than conquerors in Him that loved us.'

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## Hebrews 12:1, 2 The Cloud of Witnesses and Their Leader

**Compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,... looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith,' — Hebrews 12:1, 2**

WHAT an awful sight the rows above rows of spectators must have been to the wrestler who looked up at them from the arena, and saw a mist of white faces and pitiless eyes all directed on himself! How many a poor gladiator turned in his despair from them to the place where purple curtains and flashing axes proclaimed the presence of the emperor, on whose word hung his life, whose will could crown him with a rich reward!

That is the picture which this text brings before our eyes, as the likeness of the Christian life. We are in the arena; the race has to be run, the battle to be fought, All round and high above us, a mist, as it were, of fixed gazers beholds us, and on the throne is the Lord of life, the judge of the strife, whose smile is better than all crowns, whose downward-pointing finger seals our fate. We are compassed with a cloud of witnesses, and we may see Jesus the author and finisher of faith. Both of these facts are alleged here as encouragements to persevering, brave struggle in the Christian life. Hence we have here mainly two subjects for consideration, namely the relation between the saints who are gone and ourselves, and the encouragement derived from it; and the contrasted relation between Jesus and ourselves, and the encouragement derived from it.

I. The metaphor of the 'cloud of witnesses' is perhaps intended to express multitude, and also elevation. It may have been naturally

suggested by the thought of the saints of the Old Testament (of whom the previous chapter has been so nobly speaking) as exalted to heaven, and hovering far above and far away like the pure whitenesses that tower there. Raphael's great Sistine Madonna has for background just such a light mist of angel faces and adoring eyes all turned to the gentle majesty of the Virgin. There may also be blending in the writer's mind such a reference to the amphitheatre as we have already noticed, which certainly exists in the later portion of the context. But we must remember that tempting as it is to a hasty reader to deduce from the words the idea that the saints whose 'warfare is accomplished' look down on our struggles here, there is, at all events, no support to that idea in the word 'witnesses.' It is not used, as often in our speech, as equivalent to spectators, but means here exactly what it does in the previous chapter, namely, attesters or testifiers. They are not witnesses of us, but to us, as we shall see presently. It may, indeed, be that the thought of the heavenly spectators of our Christian course is implied in the whole strain of the passage, and of the imagery borrowed from the arena, which would certainly be incomplete if there were nothing to answer to the spectators, who, whether at Corinth or Rome, made so important a part in the scene.

We shall be going too far, I think, if we dogmatically assert, on the strength of a figure, that this context teaches a positive communion between earth and heaven of such a sort as that they who have 'overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of His testimony,' know about the struggles of us down here in the arena. Still, one feels that such an idea is almost needed to give full force either to the figure or exhortation. It does seem somewhat lame to say, 'You are like racers, surrounded with a crowd of witnesses, therefore run, only do not suppose that they really see you. If this be so, the glowing imagery certainly seems to receive a violent chill, and the flow of the exhortation to be much choked. Still we can go no further than a modest 'perhaps.'

But even as a 'may be,' the thought of such a knowledge stimulates. As all the thousand eyes of assembled Greece looked on at the runners, and all the dialects of its states swelled the tumult of acclaim which surged round the victor, so here the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, the festal gathering on Mount Zion, into relations with which this very chapter says we have come, may be conceived of as sitting, solemn and still, on the thrones around the central throne, and bending not unloving looks of earnest pity on the arena below where they too once toiled and suffered.

It may be that, before their eyes, who have been made wise by death, and who, standing within the 'sanctuary of God, understand the end' of life and life's sorrows, are manifest our struggles, as with Weary feet and drooping limbs we blunder on in the race. Surely there is love in heaven, and it may be there is knowledge, and it may be there is care for us. It may be that, standing on the serene shore beside the Lord, who has already prepared a meal for us with His own hands, they discern, tossing on the darkened sea, the poor little boats of us downhearted, unsuccessful toilers, who cannot yet descry the Lord, or the welcome which waits on the beach.

At all events the thought may come with cheer to our hearts, that, whether conscious of one another's mode of being or no, they in their triumph and we in our toils are bound together with real bonds. The thought, if not the knowledge, of their blessedness may be wafted down to us, just as the thought, if not the knowledge, of our labour may be in their restful souls. The hope of their tranquil shore may strengthen us that are far off upon the sea, though we cannot see more of it than the dim lights moving about, and catch an occasional fragrance in the air that tells of land, just as the memory of their stormy voyage mingles in their experience with their gladness because the waves be quiet, and God has brought them to their desired haven. Such thoughts may come with encouragement for the conflict, even if we hesitate to assert that the cloud of witnesses is a cloud of spectators. What, then, is the sense in which these heroes of the faith which the previous chapter has marshalled in a glorious bed-roll, are 'witnesses'? The answer will be found by observing the frequent occurrence of the word, and its cognate words, in that chapter. We read there, for instance, that the elders 'had witness borne to them' (verse 2, Revised Version); that Abel by the acceptance of his sacrifice, 'had witness borne to him that he was righteous,' 'God bearing witness in respect of his gifts' (verse 4, Revised Version); that Enoch 'had witness borne to him that he had been well pleasing unto God' (verse 5, Revised Version), and that the whole illustrious succession 'had witness borne to them through their faith' (verse 39, Revised Version). This witness borne to them by God is, of course, His giving to them the blessings which belong to a genuine faith, whether of conscious acceptance with God, or of inward peace and power, or of outward victory over sorrows and foes. But they become witnesses to us for God by the very same facts by which He makes Himself the witness of their faith, for they therein become proofs of the blessedness of true religion, visible evidences of God's faithfulness, and their histories shine out across the centuries testifying to us in our toils how good it is to trust in the Lord, and how small and transient are the troubles and hindrances that a life of faith meets. The calm stars declare the glory of God, and witness from age to age of His power, which keeps them every one from failing; and these bright names that shine in the heaven of His word proclaim His tender pity, and His rewarding love to all who, like them, fight the good fight. Like the innumerable suns that make up the Milky Way, they melt into one bright cloud that lies still and eternal above our heads and sheds a radiance on our dim struggles. So we have here brought out the stimulus to our Christian race from the faith and blessedness of these saints.

We have their history before us: we know what they were, and we have the 'end of their conversation' — that is, the issue or outcome of their manner of life — as the next chapter says. It was a hard fight, but it ended in victory. They had more than their share of sorrows and troubles, but 'the glory dies not, and the grief is past.' From their thrones they call to us words of cheer, and



point us to their tears turned into diamonds, to their struggles stilled in depths of repose, to their wounded brows crowned with light and glory.

They witness to us how mighty and divine a thing is a life of faith. Their human weakness was filled with the power of God. Tremblings and self-distrust and all the ills that flesh is heir to dwelt in them. Black doubts and sore conflicts were their portion. They, too, knew what we know, how hard it is to live and do the right. But they fought through, because a mightier hand was upon them, and God's grace was breathed into their weakness — and there they stand, victorious witnesses to us, that

whosoever will put his trust in the Lord shall have strength according to his need inbreathed into his uttermost weakness, and have One by his side in every furnace, like unto the Son of Man. They witness to us of companions in suffering, and the thought of them may come to a lonely heart wading in dark, deep waters, with the assurance that there is a ford, and that others have known the icy cold, and the downward rush of the stream, and have not been carried away by it. It is not a selfish thought that sometimes brings encouragement to a solitary sufferer, 'the same afflictions have been accomplished in your brethren.' It helps us to remember the great multitude who before us have come through the great tribulation and are before the throne. The cloud of witnesses testify how impotent is sorrow to harm, how strong to bless those who put their trust in God.

They witness to us of the faithfulness of God, who has led them, and upheld them, through all their conflicts, and has brought them to His side at last. That wondrous power avails for us, fresh and young, as when it helped the world's grey fathers. God refers us to their experiences, and summons them as His witnesses, for they will speak good of His name, and each of them, as they bend down from their seats around the arena, calls to us, 'O love the Lord, all ye His saints. I was brought low and He helped me.' So that we, taking heart by their example, can set ourselves to our struggles with the peaceful confidence, 'This God is our God for ever and ever.'

The word rendered 'witnesses' has a narrower meaning in later usage, according to which it comes to signify those who have sealed their testimony with their blood, in which sense it is transferred, untranslated, into English, in 'martyr.' What an eloquent epitome of the early history of the Church lies in that one fact! So ordinarily had the faithful confessor to die for his testimony that the very name had the thought of a bloody death inextricably associated with it. And if we for a moment think of that meaning, and look back to the long series of martyrs from the days of Stephen to the last Malagasy Christian or missionary, what solemn scorn of soft delights, and noble contempt of life itself may be kindled in our souls. Easy paths are appointed to us. We 'have not yet resisted unto blood.' Let us run our smoother race with patience, as we think of those who ran theirs with bleeding feet, and through the smoke of Smithfield or the dust of the arena beheld the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing ready to help, and so went to their death with the light from His face changing theirs into the same image.

But let us not forget that all these witnesses for God were imperfect men, whose imperfections are full of encouragement for us. Look at the names in that great muster-roll — Noah with his drunkenness, Jacob with his craft, Samson with his giant strength and giant passion, Jephtha with his savage faithfulness to a savage vow, David with his too well-known sins, and in them all not one name to which some great evil did not cling. There are quickly reached limits to the veneration with which we are to regard the noblest heroes and saints, and none of them are to be to us patterns, however we may draw encouragement from their lives, and in some respects follow their faith. Thank God for the shameful stories told of so many of them in the unmoved narrative of Scripture! They were men of common clay. The saints' halo is round the head of men and women like ourselves. We look at our own sins and shortcomings, and are ready to despair. But we may lift our eyes to the cloud of witnesses and for every evil of ours find a counterpart in the earthly lives of these radiant saints. Thinking of our own evil we may hopefully say, as we gaze on them, 'Such were some of ye, but ye are washed, and ye are sanctified.' Therefore I will not doubt but that He is able to keep me, even me, 'from falling, and to present me faultless before the presence of His glory.'

## **II. But we are not left to draw encouragement from the remembrance of men of like passions with ourselves only.**

The second of these clauses turns our thoughts to the contrasted relations between Christ and us, and the stimulus derived from it. 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.'

Our Lord is here very emphatically set in a place by Himself apart from all that cloud of witnesses, who in their measure are held forth as noble examples of faith. All these, the greatest names of old, are in one class, and He stands above them in a class of which He is the only member. There we see no other man save Jesus only. Whatever be the inference from that fact, the fact itself is plain. He is something to all the fighters in the lists which none of these are. Our eyes may profitably dwell on them, but we have to look higher than their serene seats, even to His throne, and the relation between us and Him is altogether unlike that which binds us to the holiest of these.

The names He bears in this context are noteworthy, 'the author and finisher of faith,' the former being the same word which, in Acts 3:15, is rendered 'prince' (of life), and in this Epistle (Hebrews 2:10), 'captain' (of salvation). Its meaning may perhaps be best given as 'leader.' All these others are the long files of the great army, but Christ is the Commander of the whole array. 'As Captain of the

Lord's host am I come up, said the man with the drawn sword, who stood before Joshua as he brooded outside the walls of Jericho over his task, and that armed angel of the Lord was He who, in the fulness of time, took our humanity that He might lead the many sons to glory. Not in order of time, but by the precedence of nature, is He the Leader and Lord of all who live by faith.

He is also the finisher, or more properly the perfecter of faith, inasmuch as He in His own life has shown it in its perfect form and power; inasmuch also as He gives to each of us, if we will have it, grace to perfect it in our lives; and inasmuch as, finally, He crowns and rewards it at last.

One more remark as to the force of the language here may be allowed. The word rendered 'looking' is an emphatic compound, and if full force be given to both its elements, we might read it 'looking away,' that is, turning our eyes from all other, even the grandest of these grand witnesses, to gaze on Christ alone.

All these details serve to bring out the unique position which our Lord holds, and the attitude in which we should stand to Him.

Christ is the one perfect example of faith. We are familiar with the rest of His perfect example in regard to other graces of the Christian character, but we dwell less frequently than we ought on Him as having Himself lived a life of faith. Many orthodox believers so believe in Christ's divinity as to weaken their sense of the reality of His manhood, just as, on the other hand, a vivid apprehension of His manhood obscures to many the rays of His divinity. We lose much by not making very real to our minds that Jesus lived His earthly life by faith, that for Him as for us dependence on God, and humble confidence in Him, were the secret of peace, and the spring of power. This very Epistle, in another place, quotes the words of the psalm, 'I will put my trust in Him,' as the very inmost expression of Christ's life, and as one of the ways in which He proves His brotherhood with us. He, too, knows what it is to hang on God; and is not only in His divine nature the object, but in His true manhood the pattern of our faith.

And His pattern is perfect. In all others, even the loveliest of saints and most heroic of martyrs, the gem is marred by many a streak of baser material, but in Him is the one 'entire and perfect chrysolite.' That faith never faltered, never turned its gaze from the things not seen, never slackened its grasp of the things hoped, nor degenerated into self-pleasing, nor changed its attitude of meek submission. We may look to others for examples, but they will all be sometimes warnings as well, only to Jesus we may look continually and find unsullied purity and perfect faith.

He is more than example. He gives us power to copy His fair pattern. The influence of heroic, saintly lives may be depressing as well as encouraging. Despondency often creeps over us when we think of them. It is not models that we want, for we all know well enough what we ought to be, and an example of supreme excellence in morals or religion may be as hurtful as the unapproachable superiority of Shake-spears or Raphael may to a young aspirant. Perfect patterns will not save the world. They do not get themselves copied. What we want is not the knowledge of what we ought to be, but the will and the power to be it. And that we get from Christ, and from Him alone. He stretches out His hand to hold us up in our poor struggles. His grace and His peace come into our hearts, Looking to Him, His Spirit enters our spirits, and we live, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us. Models will help us little. They stand there like statues on their pedestals, pure marble loveliness; but in Christ the marble becomes flesh, and the lovely perfection has a heart to pity and a strong hand stretched out to help. So let us look away from all others, who can only give us example, to Him who can give us strength. Turn from the circling thrones to the imperial throne in the centre. We are more closely bound to Him who sits on it than to them. Look away from the cloud of witnesses to the sun of us, from whom, gazing, we receive warmth and light and life. They may teach us to fight, but He fights in us. They are patterns of faith. So is He, but He is also its object and its giver.

Christ is the imperial Rewarder of faith. At the last He will give the full possession of all which it has looked and hoped for, and will lift it into the nobler form in which, even in heaven, we shall live by faith. In that region where struggles cease, and sense and sight no longer lead astray, and we behold Him as He is, faith still abides, as conscious dependence and happy trust. It is perfected in manner, measure, and reward. And Christ is the giver of all that perfects it.

Let us, then, turn away our eyes from all beside, and look to Christ. He is the Reward as well as the Rewarder of our faith. As we look to Him we shall gain power for the fight, and victory and the crown. The gladiators in the arena lowered their swords to the emperor, before they fought, with the grim greeting 'Hail, Caesar! the dying salute thee.' So, in happier fashion, our Lord, who has Himself fought in the lists where we now strive. Then we shall have strength for the conflict, and when the conflict is drawing to its end and all else swims before our sight, and the din grows faint in our ears, we shall close our eyes in peace; and when we open them again, lo! the bloody field, and the broken sword, and the battered helm, have all disappeared, and we sit, crowned, and palm-bearing, at His side, hailed as victors, and lapped in sweetest rest for ever more!

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## Hebrews 12:1 The Christian Life a Race

## **'Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.' — Hebrews 12:1**

THE previous clauses of this verse bring before us the runner's position as 'compassed about with a cloud of witnesses,' and his preparation as 'laying aside every weight and... sin.' The text carries us a stage further in the metaphor, and shows us the company of runners standing ready, stripped, and straining at the starting-post, with the long course stretching before them.

The metaphor of the Christian life as a race is threadbare, so far as our knowledge is concerned, but it may be questioned if it has sunk deeply enough into the practice of any of us. It is a very noble one, and contains an ideal of the Christian life which it would do us all good to hold up by the side of our realisation of it. It might stimulate and it would shame us. What is the special note of that metaphor? Compare with the 'kindred one, equally well-worn and threadbare, of a journey or a pilgrimage. The two have much in common. They both represent life as changeful, continuous, progressive, tending to an end; but the metaphor of the race underscores, as it were, another idea, that of effort. The traveller may go at his Leisure, he may fling himself down to rest under a tree, he may diverge from the road, but the runner must not look askance, must not be afraid of dust or sweat, must tax muscle and lungs to the utmost, if, panting, he is to reach the goal and win the prize. So, very significantly, our writer here puts forward only one characteristic of the race. It is to be 'run with patience,' by which great word the New Testament means, not merely passive endurance, noble and difficult as that may be, but active perseverance which presses on unmoved, ay, and unhindered, to its goal in the teeth of all opposition.

But, whilst that is the special characteristic of the metaphor, as distinguished from others kindred to it, and of the ideal which it sets forth, I desire in this sermon to take a little wider sweep, and to try to bring out the whole of the elements which lie in this well-worn figure. I see in it four things: a definite aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced; a God-appointed path; a steady advance; and a strenuous effort. Now let us ask ourselves the question, Do they correspond to anything in my professing Christian life?

We have here, then

### **I. A definite aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced.**

Most men have aims, definite enough, in regard lower things, and if you ask the average man out of the ruck what he is living for, he will generally be able to answer curtly and clearly, or at any rate his life will show, even if he cannot put it into words. But all these are means rather than ends; 'I am living to make a big business.' 'I am living to make a fortune.' 'I am living to found a family.' 'I am living to learn a science, an art, a profession.' 'I am living for enjoy-merit,' etc., etc. Yes, and then suppose somebody perks up with the exceedingly inconvenient further question, 'Well, and what then?' Then, all that fabric of life-aims rushes down into destruction, and is manifest for what it is-altogether disproportionate to the man that is pursuing it. Such shabby, immediate aims are not worth calling so. But my text sets forth far beyond, and far above them, the one only goal which it is becoming, which it is natural which it is anything else than ludicrous, if it were not so tragical, that any man should be pursuing. And what is that mark? You can put it in a hundred different ways. Evangelical Christian people generally say salvation, and a great many so-called Evangelical Christian people have a very low, inadequate, and selfish idea of what they mean by the word. Let us put it in another form. The only aim that it is worthy of a man to live for, as his supreme and dominant one, is that he shall be completely moulded in character, disposition, nature, heart, and will into the likeness of Jesus Christ, who is the image of God, and that he shall pass into no Nirvana of unconsciousness, but into that blessed union with the divine nature, which is not absorption into it, or the Weakening of the individual, but the making a man tenfold more himself because he lives in God, as the taper plunged into the jar of oxygen, which burns the brighter for its surroundings, and unlike the taper, is unconsumed by burning. Thus the complete development of human character into the divine image, and the complete union of the human with the divine, is the aim that Christianity sets before us.

And that aim it becomes every one of us professing Christians clearly to apprehend, and keep ever in view as the thing to which we are not merely tending, but to which we are striving. Clearly apprehended, and eagerly embraced, this conception of the purpose of our lives must be if we are not to make them ignoble and conscious or unconscious hypocrisies. But remember that such an aim may be pursued through, and requires for its attainment, all those lower aims and ends which monopolise men's efforts without regard to anything beyond. What we want most is a Christianity which, recognising that great, supreme purpose, follows it persistently and doggedly through all nearer and lesser pursuits. We want our Christian principle to penetrate into all the tissues of our lives, and to bring there healing, purging, and quickening. And if we suppose that the greatest of all aims is contrary to any of these lesser ones, except such of them as are sinful, then we misapprehend both the highest blessedness and good of the nearest objects that are set before us, and still more fatally misapprehend the very genius and intention of that Christianity, which is not unworldliness but the secret of making the world and all its fading sweets subservient to this highest end.

Now, need I say one word as to the nobleness and blessedness of a life which is consistently and thoroughly ordered with a view to

this great aim? Think of the unity that thus will be blessedly breathed over all the else bewildering diversity of earthly conditions and occupations. As the moon gathers into one great tidal wave the heaped waters of the shoreless ocean, and mastering currents, and laughing at the opposing powers of the tempest, carries the watery wall round the earth, so the white, pure beam of that aim shining down on the confused welter of our earthly life will draw it all after itself. Think, too, of the power that comes into a life from this unity. A man of one aim is always formidable, and high above all other aims in its absorbing power is this one that a Christian man only deserves his name if he sets and keeps before him. Such a unity will, if I may so say, gather together the whole power of our nature, and bring it into a point, and it will heat it as well as concentrate it. If you take a bit of blunt iron, cold, and try to bore a hole in a ten-inch plank, you will make little progress; but if you sharpen it to a point, and heat it red-hot, then it will penetrate anything. So my life gathered up into one, and heated, by the very fact of its being concentrated, will pierce through all obstacles, and I shall be strong in the proportion in which 'this one thing I do,' and do it through all other things.

I need not remind you, either, of the blessedness which is involved in this unity of aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced, in so far as it will act as a test of all lower pursuits and objects. Wherever there comes a little rill of fresh water down upon the coral reef the creatures that build it die, and the reef disappears, and thus a great aim will kill all lower ones that work in the dark, creeping and crawling, and that are contrary to itself.

Further, this supreme aim is supremely blessed, because it will shine ever before us. There is a blessedness in having an object of pursuit which we never reach. It is better to steer straight to the pole-star, though we never get there, than to creep like the old mariners, from headland to headland, and leave behind us sinking on the backward horizon, purpose after purpose, hope after hope, aim after aim. Better to have it shining ahead. Let me point out the second idea contained in this metaphor, that of

## **II. A God-appointed path.**

The race is 'set before us.' Set before us by whom? The course is staked out and determined by the Judge of the games. And that may well be applied in two directions. My duties are appointed by God, and if only we realise that, and bring the thought of His will continually into connection with the smallest of the sets which circumstance, relationships, occupations and the like constitute our duties, how different they all become! It is an entirely different thing to say, 'Being where I am, I must do so-and-so'; or 'Right and wrong being what it is, I must do so-and-so; or to say,' This and that man prescribes 'so, and-so for me'; and to say, 'Thou hast prepared a path for us, and ordained that we should walk therein.' That elevates, that sweetens, that calms us, that smooths the road, makes the rough places plain and the crooked things straight. We want with the clear vision of the aim the equally clear and abiding persuasion that God has appointed the path. A modern thinker said that religion was morality touched by emotion. No, religion is morality transfigured into obedience to the law of God. Bring your duties into connection with His appointment, and they will all be easy; and when the path stretches gloomy before you, and it seems that you are called upon to do some hard thing, say: 'Created unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.'

Then there is the other thought that, as the duties are appointed by Him, so the circumstances are appointed, too. You know what they call an obstacle-race, in which the intention is to accumulate as many difficulties in the course as can be crowded into it; I fancy that is a good deal like the race that is set before all of us, by God's wisdom. There are many fences to be climbed, many barriers to be crept under, many deep ditches to be waded through, many bad bits of road studded with sharp points, through which we have to pick our way. We say as to ourselves, and as to our friends, 'What does it all mean?' And the answer is, 'He has set the race before for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness.'

Again, we have here the notion of

## **III. A steady progress.**

Continual advance is the very salt of the Christian life, and unless there be such progress there is something fatally wrong with the Christianity. An unprogressive Christianity is very apt to become a moribund and then a dead Christianity. Of course that is so because the aim of which I have been speaking is, in its very nature, inaccessible and yet capable of indefinite approximation. 'Alps upon Alps arise.' Neither in regard to the intellectual or spiritual apprehension of the deep things of God, nor in regard to the incorporation of His likeness into itself, will human nature ever be able to say, 'Lo, I have passed through the land, and know it all.' But an indefinite approximation to an eternally unreached point is a description of a geometrical figure, and it is the description of the Christian life. And, therefore, at no point must we stop, and at no point is it safe for us to say, 'I have apprehended and attained.' Our nature, quite as much as the divine nature towards which we tend, demands this continuous progress, for the human spirit is capable of an indefinite expansion, and the seed of the life kindred to God which is lodged in every believing soul, though it be at the beginning 'less than the least of all,' must grow into a great tree.

Ah, brethren! what a sad contrast to this unbroken progress our lives present to our own consciousness! How many Christian people there are who have almost lost sight of the notion, and have certainly ceased from the practice of an unbroken advance in either of the directions of which I have been speaking, likeness to God or communion with Him! Ask yourselves the question, 'Am I

further on than I was this day last year, this day ten years, this day twenty years?' The Japanese gardeners pride themselves on having the secret of dwarfing forest trees, and they will put an oak into a flower-pot; and there it is, only a few inches high, in age a patriarch, in height a seedling. And that is what a great many of you Christian people are doing, dwarfing the tree; even if you are not distorting it. And now the last thing that I point out here is

IV. The strenuous effort, I have already said a word or two about that as being the differentia, the special characteristic, of this metaphor. And I may just refer for one moment to the fact that the word rendered here 'race,' and quite rightly so rendered, literally means a contest — 'Let us run the contest that is set before us.' What does that say? Why, just this, that every foot of advance has to be fought; it is not merely 'running,' it is conflict as well. And then, pointing in the same direction, comes the selection in the text, which I have already touched upon, of the one qualification that is necessary — patient endurance, which suggests antagonism. Opposition — where does the opposition come from? The Apostle asked the Galatians that once. 'Ye did run well; what did hinder you?' And the answers are diverse: flowers by the roadside, golden apples flung across the course, siren voices tempting us, the force of gravity holding us back, the pressure of the wind on our faces. Yes, and my own self most of all That is what hinders, and that is what has to be fought against by myself. Effort, effort, effort is the secret of all noble life, in all departments, and it is the secret of advancing Christian life.

Now, let us understand aright the relations between the faith of which the New Testament makes so much and the effort of which this metaphor makes so much. A great many Christian people seem to fancy that faith supersedes effort. Not so! It stimulates and strengthens effort. If I trust, I receive the power to run, but whether I shall really run or not depends on myself. God gives the ability in Jesus Christ, and then we have to use the ability, and to turn it into an actuality. They have invented a movable platform at the Paris Exhibition, they tell me, on which a man steps, and having stepped upon it is lazily carried to his destination in the building without lifting a foot or moving a muscle. And some people seem to think that Christianity is a platform of that sort, a 'living way,' on which, if once they get, they may be as idle as they like, and they will reach their journey's end. Not so! Not so! By faith we enter on the race; through faith we receive the power that will make us able to run and not be weary, and to walk and not faint. But unless we run we shall not advance, and unless we advance we shall not attain. Understand, then, that faith is the basis of effort, and effort is the crown of faith. If we will thus trust ourselves to that Lord, and draw from Him the power which He is infinitely willing to give, then the great vision of the prophet will be fulfilled in our case, and we shall find stretching across the low, swampy levels of this world 'a highway,' and it shall be 'a way of holiness, and no ravenous beast shall come up therein, but the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'