



Expositions of Holy Scripture

2 Peter

ALEXANDER MACLAREN



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By

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Introduction

Alexander MacLaren (1826-1910) is ranked among the expert expositors of the 19th century. His life was passionately devoted to the study of Scripture and to the pulpit ministry. His career was marked by faithful commitment to both his church community and to the integrity of the Baptist tradition. His writings and reputation were world renown, and his skill with the English language ability to handle the biblical languages has inspired students of holy Scripture for decades. Even to this day, Maclaren is considered to be a prime exemplar of expository preaching.

The sermons included in the 32 volumes of *Exposition of Holy Scripture* cover 64 of the 66 books included in the Protestant canon of Scripture. The 1500+ sermons are arranged in canonical order making this collection an expository commentary on most of the Bible. Maclaren's unique ability to handle the original languages of Scripture and his skilled writing style draw the reader deep into the life of holy Scripture.

2 Peter

Like Precious Faith: 2 Peter 1:1

PETER seems to have had a liking for that word ‘precious.’ It is not a very descriptive one; it does not give much light as to the quality of the things to which it is applied; but it is a suggestion of one-idea value. It is interesting to notice the objects to which, in his two letters—for I take this to be his letter—he applies it. He speaks of the trial of faith as being ‘precious.’ He speaks (with a slight modification of the word employed) of Jesus Christ as being ‘to them that believe, precious.’ He speaks of the ‘precious’ blood of Christ. These instances are in the first epistle. In this second epistle we have the words of my text, and a moment after, ‘exceeding great and precious promises.’ Now look at Peter’s list of valuables; ‘Christ, Christ’s blood, God’s promises, our Faith, and the discipline to which that faith is subjected.’ These are things that the old man had found out to be of worth.

But then there is another word in my text that must be noted, ‘like precious.’ It brings into view two classes, to one of which Peter himself belongs—‘us’ and ‘they.’ Who are these two classes? It may be that he is thinking of the immense difference between the intelligent and developed faith of himself and the other Apostles, and the rudimentary and infantile faith of the recent believers to whom he may be speaking. And, if so, that would be beautiful, but I rather take it that he is tacitly contrasting in his own mind the difference between the Gentile converts as a whole, and the members of the Jewish community who had become believers in Jesus Christ, and that he is repeating the lesson that he had learned on the housetop at Joppa, and had had further confirmed to him by the experience of Caesarea, and that he is really saying exactly what he said when he defended himself before the Council in Jerusalem: ‘Seeing that God had given unto them the like gift that he did unto us, who was I, that I should withstand God?’ And so, he looks out over all the Christian community, and ignores ‘the middle wall of partition,’ and says, ‘Them that have obtained like precious faith with us.’ I wish very simply to try to draw out the thoughts that lie in these words, and cluster round that well-worn and threadbare theological expression and Christian verity of ‘faith’ or ‘trust.’

I. And the First Thing That I Would Desire to Point You to Is, What We Learn Here as To the Object of Faith.

Now those of you who are using the Revised Version will notice that there is a very slight, but important, alteration there, from the rendering in the old translation. We read in the latter: ‘Like precious faith with us through the righteousness’ and that is a meaning that might be defended. But the Revised Version says, and says more accurately as far as the words go, and more truly as far as Christian thought goes, ‘them that have obtained like precious faith with us in the righteousness.’ Now, I daresay, it will occur to us all that that is a departure from the usual form in which faith is presented to us in the New Testament, because there, thank God! we are clearly taught that the one thing which faith grapples is not a thing but a Person. Christian faith is only human trust turned in a definite direction. Just as our trust lays hold on one another, so the object of faith is, in the deepest analysis, no doctrine, no proposition, not even a Divine fact, not even a Divine promise, but the Doer of the fact, and the Promiser of the promise, and the Person,

Jesus Christ. When you say, 'I trust so-and-so's word!' what you mean is, 'I trust him, and so I put credence in his word.' And Christianity would have been delivered from mountains of misconception, and many a poor soul would have felt that a blaze of light had come in upon it, if this had been clearly proclaimed, and firmly apprehended by preachers and by hearers, that the object of trust is the living Person, Jesus Christ, and that the trust which grapples us to Him is essentially a personal relation entered into by our wills and hearts far more than by our heads.

All that is being apprehended by the Christian Church to-day a great deal more clearly than it used to be when some of us were young. But we have the defects of our qualities. And this generation is accustomed far too lightly and superficially to say 'Oh! I do not care about doctrines. I cleave to the living Christ!' Amen! say I. But there is another question—What Christ is it that you are cleaving to? For our only way of knowing a person with whom we have no external acquaintance is by what we are told about him, and believe about him. And so, while we cannot assert too strongly that faith or trust in the living Christ, and not in a dogma, is the basis of real Christian life, we have need to be very definite and sure as to what Christ—which Christ—it is that we are trusting to? And there my text comes in, and tells us that faith is to grasp Christ as our righteousness; and another saying of the Apostle Paul's comes in, who for once speaks of faith as being faith not only in the Christ, but in 'His blood':—

'Jesus! Thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress.'

Brethren! you will not get beyond that. The Christ, trusting in whom we have life and salvation, is the Christ whose blood cleanses, Whose righteousness clothes us poor, sinful men. So, while proclaiming with all emphasis, and rejoicing to press it upon all my brethren, that salvation comes by personal trust in the Person, I supplement and fill out, not contradict, that proclamation, when I further say that the Person by trusting in whom we are saved, is the Jesus whose blood cleanses and whose righteousness becomes ours. That righteousness is, in our text, contemplated as God's, as being embodied in Christ's, that from Him it may be imparted to us, if we will fulfil the condition on which alone it can be ours, viz., faith. It becomes ours, by no mere imputation which has not a reality at the back of it, but because faith brings us into such a vital union with Jesus Christ as that His righteousness, or at least a spark from the central flame, becomes ours, not only in reference to our exemption from the burden of our guilt, but in reference to our becoming conformed to the image of His dear Son, and created anew in righteousness and holiness. The object of faith is Christ, the Christ whose blood and righteousness cleanses and clothes sinful souls.

II. Let Me Ask You to Look, In the Next Place, To What This Text Suggests to Us About the Worth of Christian Faith.

Peter calls it precious. Consider its worth as a channel. There is a very remarkable expression used in the Acts of the Apostles, 'The door of faith.' A door is of little value in itself, worth a few shillings at the most, but if it opens the way into a palace then it is worth something. And all the preciousness that there is in faith comes, not from its intrinsic value, but from the really precious things which it gives into our hands. Just as the dyer's hand may be tinged with royal purple, if

he has been working in it, or a woman's hand may be scented and made fragrant if she has been handling perfumes, so the hand of faith takes tint and fragrance from that with which it is conversant. It is precious because it is the channel by which all precious things flow into our hearts and lives. If Ladysmith is, as I suppose it is, dependent for its water supply on one lead pipe, the preciousness of that pipe is not measured by what it would fetch if it were put up to auction for its lead, but by that which flows through it, and without which Death would come. And my faith is the pipe by which all the water of life comes sparkling and rejoicing into my thirsty soul. It is the opening of the door 'that the King of Glory may come in'; it is the taking down of the shutters that the sunshine may blaze into the darkened chamber; it is the grasping of the electric wire that the circuit may be completed. God puts out His hand, and we lay hold of it. It is not the outstretched hand from earth, but the down-stretched hand from heaven that makes the tottering man stand. So, dear friends, let us understand that salvation does not come as the reward of faith, but that the salvation is in the faith, because faith is the channel by which all God's salvation pours into us. So, there is nothing arbitrary in the way of salvation, as some shallow thinkers seem to propose, and there is no reason in the question, 'Why does God make salvation depend upon faith?' God could not but make salvation depend upon faith, because there is no other possible way by which the blessings which are gathered together into that one great pregnant word 'salvation' could find their way into a man's heart but through the channel of his trust. Have you opened that channel? If you have not, you need not wonder it cannot be otherwise—that salvation does not come unto you.

Consider its worth as a defense. The Apostle in one place speaks about 'the shield of faith.' But there is nothing in the belief that I am safe to make me safe. It is very often a fatal blunder. All depends upon that or Him, to which or whom I am trusting for my safety. Put yourself beneath the true Shield—'The Lord God is a sun and shield'—and then you will be safe. Your way of running into the strong tower which alone, with its massive walls, protects us from all danger and from all sin, is by trusting Him.

Just as light things on a ship's deck have to be lashed in order to be secured and lie still, you and I have to lash ourselves to Jesus Christ; then, not by reason of the lashings, but by reason of Him, we are fastened and secured.

Consider the worth of faith as a means of purifying. This very Apostle, in his great speech in Jerusalem, when vindicating the reception of the Gentiles into the Church, spoke of God as having purified their hearts by faith.' And here again, I say, there is no cleansing power in the act of trust. Cleansing power is in that which, by the act of trust, comes into my heart. Faith is not simple receptivity, not mere passive absorbing of what is given, but it is the active taking by desire as well as by confidence. And when we trust in Jesus Christ, His blood and righteousness, there flows into our hearts that Divine life which, like a river turned into a dung-heap, will sweep all the filth before it. You have to get the purifying power by faith. Ay! and you have to utilize the purifying power by effort and by work. 'What God hath joined together, let not men put asunder.'

III. Now, Lastly, Note the Identity of Faith.

'Like precious,' says Peter, and, as I said, there may be defended a double application of the word, and two sets of pairs of classes may be supposed to have been in his mind. I do not discuss which of these may be the case, only I would suggest to you that from this beautiful

gathering together of all the diversities of the Christian character, conception, and development into one great whole, we are taught that the one thing that makes a Christian is this trust. That is the universal characteristic; that is uniform, whatever may differ. Ah! how much and how little it takes to make a Christian. 'Only faith?' you say. Yes, thank God! not this, or that, not rites, not anything that a priest can do to you. Not orthodoxy; not morality; these will come, but trust in Christ and His blood and righteousness. England is a Christian country; is it? This is a Christian congregation; is it? You are a Christian; are you? Are you trusting in that Christ? If you are not; no! though you be orthodox up to the eyebrows, and though seven or seven hundred sacraments may have been given to you, and though you be a clean-living man—all that does not make a Christian, but this does—'Like precious faith with us in the righteousness of God and our Savior.'

Again, this great thought of the identity or uniformity of the one characteristic may suggest to us how Christian faith is one, under all varieties of form. There never has been in the Christian Church again, notwithstanding all our deplorable divisions and schisms, such a tremendous cleft as there was in the primitive Church between the Jewish and Gentile components thereof. But Peter flings this flying bridge across that abyss, and knits the two sides together, because he knows that away out yonder, amongst the Gentiles, and here in the little circle of the Jewish believers, there was the one faith that unifies all.

So, dear friends, there should be the widest charity, but no vagueness; for the Christian faith in Him which unifies and bridges over all differences, mental and theological, is the Christ by whose blood we are cleansed, with whose righteousness we are made righteous.

Again, from the same thought flows the other, of the identity of the uniform characteristic, at all stages of development or maturity. The mustard-seed and the tree, 'which is greater than all herbs,' have the same life in them. And the feeblest, tremulous little spark in some heart, just kindled, and scarcely capable of sustaining itself, is one with the flame leaping heaven-high, which lights up and cleanses the whole soul. So, for those in advance, humility, and for those in the rear, hope. And something more than hope, for if you have the feeblest beginning of tremulous trust, you have that which only needs to be fostered to make you like Jesus Christ. Look at what follows our text: 'Add to your faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge,' and so on, through the whole linked series of Christian graces. They all come out of that trust which knits us to Him who is the source of them all. So, you and I are responsible for bringing our faith to the highest development of which it is capable.

Alas! alas! are we not all like this very Apostle, who, in an ecstasy of trust and longing, ventured himself on the wave, and as soon as he felt the cold water creeping above his knees lost his trust, and so lost his buoyancy, and was ready to go down like a stone? He had so little faith, that he was beginning to sink; he had so much that he put out his hand—a desperate hand it was—and cried, 'Lord, save me!' And the hand came, and that steadied him, and bore him up till the water was beneath the soles of his feet again. 'Lord! I believe; help Thou my unbelief!'

Man Summoned by God's Glory and Energy: 2 Peter 1:3

'I KNEW thee,' said the idle servant in our Lord's parable, 'that thou wert an austere man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou hadst not strewed. I was afraid, and went and hid my talent in the earth.' Our Lord would teach us all with that pregnant word the great truth that if once a man gets it into his head that God's principal relation to him is to demand, and to command, you will get no work out of that man; that such a notion will paralyze all activity and cut the nerve of all service. And the converse is as true, namely, that the one thought about God, which is fruitful of all blessing, joy, spontaneous, glad activity, is the thought of Him as giving, and not of demanding, of bestowing, and not of commanding. Teach a man that he is, as the book of James has it, 'the giving God,' and let that thought soak into the man's heart and mind, and you will get any work out of him. And only when that thought is deep in the spirit will there be true service.

Now that is the connection in which the words of my text come; for they are laid as the broad foundation of the great commandment that follows: 'Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to your virtue knowledge,' and so on, all the round of the ladder by which the Apostle represents us as climbing up to God. The foundation of this injunction is—God has given you everything. You have got it to begin with, and so do you set yourselves to work, and see that you make the thing that is yours your own, and incorporate into your being and into the very substance of your soul, and work out in all the blessed activities of a Christian life, the gifts that His royal and kingly hand has bestowed upon you. Take for granted that God loves you and gives you His whole self, and work on in the fulness of His possessed gift.

That is the connection of the words before us. I take them just as they lie in our passage, dealing first of all with this question—God's call to you and me; how it is done. Now I do not know if I can venture to indulge any remarks about Biblical criticism, but you will perhaps bear with me just for a moment whilst I say that the people who know a great deal more about such subjects than either you or I, agree with one consent that the proper way of reading this verse of my text is not as our Bible has it: 'Him that has called us to glory and virtue,' but 'Him that hath called us by—by his own glory and virtue.' Do you see the difference? In one case the language expresses the things in imitation of the Divine nature to which God summons you and me when He calls us. That is how our Bible has taken it; but the deeper thought still is the things in that Divine nature and activity itself which constitute His great summons and invitation of men to His side; and these are the two, whatever they might be, which the Apostle here describes in that rather peculiar and unusual language for Scripture, 'Who has called us by His own glory and His own virtue.' I venture to dwell on these two points for a moment or two.

Now, first of all, God's glory. Threadbare and consequently vague as the expression is in the minds of a great many people who have heard it with their ears ever since they were little children, God's glory has a very distinct and definite meaning in Scripture, and all starts, as I think, from the Old Testament use of the expression, which was the distinct specific name for the supernatural light that lay between the cherubim, and brooded over the ark on the mercy-seat.

The word signifies specifically and originally the glory of God, and irradiation of a material, though supernatural, symbol of His Divine and spiritual presence. Very well, lay hold of that material picture, for God teaches us as we do our children, with pictures. Take the symbol and lift it up into the spiritual region, and it is just this: the glory of God in its deepest meaning is the irradiation and the perpetual pouring out and out and out from Himself, as the rays of the sun stream out from its great orb, pouring out from Himself the light and the perfectness and the beauty of His own self-revelation. And I think we may fairly translate and paraphrase the first words of my text into this: God's great way of summoning men to Himself is by laying out His love upon them and letting the fulness of that ineffable and uncreated light, in which is no darkness at all, stream into the else blinded and hopeless lives and hearts of men. Then the other side of the Apostle's thought seems to me—if we will only strip it of the threadbare technicalities associated with it—as great and wonderful, God's glory and God's virtue. A heathenish kind of smack lingers about that word, both as applied to men and as applied to God, and so seldom found in the New Testament; but meaning here, as I venture to say, without stopping to show it—meaning here substantially the same thing that we mean by that word energy or power. You know old women in country places talk about the virtues of plants. They do not mean by this the goodness of plants, but they mean the occult powers which they suppose them able to put forth. We read in one of the gospels that our Lord Himself said at one singular period of His life that virtue had gone out of Him, meaning thereby not goodness but energy. So, I think we get a sufficient equivalent to the Apostle's meaning if for the second two words of my text we read, 'He hath called us by the glory, the raying out of his love, and He hath called us by the activity and the energy, the power in action of His great and illustrious Spirit.' So, you see these two things, the light that streams out of an energy which is born of the streaming light. These two things are really at bottom but one, various aspects of one idea. Modern physicists tell us that all the activity in the system comes from the sun, and in the higher region all the activity comes from the sun, and there is no mightier force in the physical universe than the sunlight. Lightnings are vulgar, noisy, and limited in contrast. The all-conquering force is the light that streams out, and so says Peter in his vivid picturesque way—not meaning the mere talk of philosophy or theology—the manifestation of the glory of God is the mightiest force in the whole universe. It is not like the play of the moonbeam upon an iceberg, ineffectual, cold, merely touching the death without melting or warming it, but it rays out like the sun in the heavens, and the work done by the light is mightier than all our work. By His glory, and by the transcendent energies which reside in that illustrious manifestation of the uncreated light, God summons men to Himself. Well, if that is anything like fair exposition of the words before us, let me just ask you before I go further to stop on them for one moment. If I may venture to say so, put off your theological spectacles for a minute, and do not let us harden this thought down with any mere dogma that can be selected in the language of the creeds. Let us try and put it into words a little less hackneyed. Suppose, instead of talking about calling, you were to talk about inviting, summoning, beckoning; or I might use tenderer words still—beseeching, wooing, entreating; for all that lies in the thought. God summoning and calling, in that sense, men to Himself, by the raying out of His own perfect beauty, and the might with which the beams go forth into the darkness. Ah! is not that beautiful, dear brethren; that there is nothing more, indeed, for God to do to draw us to Himself than to let us see what He is? So perfectly fair, so sweet, so tender, so

strong, so absolutely corresponding to all the necessities of our beings and the hunger of our hearts, that when we see Him, we cannot choose but love Him, and that He can do nothing more to call wandering hearts back to the light and sweetness of His own heart than to show them Himself. And so, from all corners of His universe, and in every activity of His hand and heart and spirit, we can hear a voice saying, 'Son, give me thine heart.' 'Oh! taste and see that God is good.' 'Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee.'

But great and wonderful as such a thought seems to be when we look at it in the freshness which belongs to it, do you suppose that that was all that Peter was thinking about? Do you think that a wide, general, and if you leave it by itself, vague utterance like that which I have been indulging in, would give all the specific precision and fulness of the meaning of the word before us? I think not. I fancy that when this Apostle wrote these words he remembered a time long, long ago, when somebody stood by the little fishing-cobble there, and as the men were up to their knees in slush and dirt, washing their nets, said to them, 'Follow Me.' I think that was in Peter's estimate God's call to him by God's glory and by God's virtue. And so, I pause there for a moment to say that all the lustrous pouring out of light, all that transcendent energy of active love, is not diffused nebulous through a universe; it is not even spread in that sense over all the deeds of His hand; but whilst it is everywhere, it has a focus and a center and a fire. The fire is gathered into the Son, Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ in His manhood and in His Deity; Jesus Christ in His life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and kingly reign. The whole creation, as this New Testament proclaims Him to us, is God's glory and God's virtue, whereby He draws men to Himself. I cannot stay to dwell on that thought as I should be glad to do. Let me just remind you of the two parts into which it splits itself up; and I commend it, dogmatically as I have to state it in such an audience as this—I commend it to the multitudes of young men here present. The highest form of the Divine glory is Jesus Christ, not the attributes with which men clothe the Divinity, not those abstractions which you find in books of theology. All that is but the fringe of the glory. And I tell you, dear friends, the living white light at the center and heart of all the radiance of the flame is the light of life which is conveyed into the gentle Christ. As the Apostle John has it, 'We beheld His glory.' Yes, and taking and binding together the two words which people have so often treated against each other, 'We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,' the highest light in Him that says, 'I am the light of the world'—very light of very light. As a much-maligned document has it, 'very light of very light,' the brightness of His glory, the irradiation of His splendor, and the express image of His person. And as the light so the power. Christ the power; power in its highest, noblest form, the power of patient gentleness and Divine suffering; power in its widest sweep, 'unto every one that believeth'; power in its most wondrous operation, 'the power of God unto salvation.' So, I come to you, I hope, with one message on my lips and in my heart. If you want light, look to Christ. If you want to behold that unveiled face, the glory of the Lord, turn to Him, and let His sunshine smite you on the face as the light smote Stephen, and then you can say, 'He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father.' My brother, the highest, noblest, perfect, and, as I believe, final form in which all God's glory, all God's energy, are gathered together, and make their appeal to you and me, was when a Galilean peasant stood up in a little knot of forgotten Jews and said to them, and through them to you and me, 'Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' He calls by His glory and by His virtue.

Now still further. Confining myself as before to the words as they lie here in this text, let me ask you to think, and that for a moment or two only, on the great and wondrous purpose which this Divine energy and light had in view in summoning us to itself. His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and all things that pertain to godliness. Look at that! One of the old Psalms says: 'Gather my saints together unto me, those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice; assemble them all before my throne, and I will judge my people.' Is that the last and final revelation of God's purpose of drawing men to Him? Is that why He sends out His heralds and summons through the whole intelligent creation? Nay, something better. Not to judge, not to scourge, not to chastise, not to avenge. To give. This is the meaning of that summons that comes out through the whole earth, 'Come up hither,' that when we get there we may be flooded with the richness of His mercy, and that He may pour His whole soul out over us in the greatness of His gifts. This is God, and the perpetual activity summoning men to Himself that there He may bless them. He makes our hearts empty that He may fill them. He shapes us as we are that we may need Him and may recreate ourselves in Him. He says, 'Bring all your vessels and I will fill them full.' Now look in this part of my subject at what I may venture to call the magnificent confidence that this Peter has in the—what shall I say?—the encyclopaedical—if I may use a long word—and universal character of God. All things that pertain to life, all things that pertain to godliness. And somebody says, 'Yes, that is tautology, that is saying the same thing twice over in different language.' Never mind, says Peter, so much the better, it will help to express the exuberant abundance and fulness. He takes a leaf out of his brother Paul's book. He is often guilty when he speaks of God's gifts of that same sin of tautology, as for instance, 'Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding, abundantly, above all'—there are four of them—'all that we can ask or think.' Yes, in all forms language is but faint and feeble, weak and poor in the presence of that great miracle of a love that passeth knowledge and that we may know the heights and depths. And so, says our Apostle, 'All things that pertain to life, all things that pertain to godliness.' The whole circle all round, all the 360 degrees of it, God's love will come down and lie on the top of it as it were, superimposed, so that there should not be a single gift where there is a flaw or a defect. Everything you want of life, everything you want for godliness. Yes, of course, the gift must bear some kind of proportion to the giver. You do not expect a millionaire to put down half a crown to a subscription list if he gives anything at all. And God says to you and me, 'Come and look at My storehouses, count if you can those golden vases filled with treasure, look at those massive ingots of bullion, gaze into the vanishing distances of the infiniteness of My nature and of My possessions, and then listen to Me. I give thee Myself—Myself, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God. All things that pertain to life, all things that pertain to godliness. But I cannot pass on from this part of my subject without venturing one more remark. It is this: I do not suppose it is too minute, verbal criticism. This great encyclopaedical gift is represented in my text, not as a thing that you are going to get, Christian men and women, but as a thing that you have gotten. And any of you that are able to test the correctness of my assertion will see I have thought the form of language used in the original is such as to point still more specifically than in our translation, to someone definite act in the past in which all that fulness of glory and virtue of life and godliness was given to us men. Is there any doubt as to what that is? We talk sometimes as if we had to ask God to give us more. God cannot give you any more than He gave you nineteen hundred years ago. It was all in Christ.

Get a very vulgar illustration which is altogether inadequate for a great many purposes, but may serve for one. Suppose some man told you that there was a thousand pounds paid to your credit at a London bank, and that you were to get the use of it as you drew cheques against it. Well, the money is there, is it not? The gift is given, and yet for all that you may be dying, and half-dead, a pauper. I was reading a book only the other day which contained a story that comes in here. An Arctic expedition, some years ago, found an ammunition chest that Commander Parry had left fifty years ago, safe under a pile of stones. The wood of the chest had not rotted yet; the provisions inside of it were perfectly sweet, and good, and eatable. There it had lain all those years. Men had died of starvation within arm's length of it. It was there all the same. And so, if I might venture to vulgarize the great theme that I try to speak about, God has given us His Son, and in Him, all that pertains to life and all that pertains to godliness. My brother, take the things that are freely given to you of God.

And so that leads me to one last word, and it shall only be a word, in regard to what our text tells us of the way by which on our side we can yield to this Divine call, and receive this Divine fulness of gifts, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory. Through the knowledge! Yes, well there are two kinds of knowledge, are there not? There is the knowledge by which you know a book, for instance, on the subject of study, and there is the knowledge by which you know one another; and the kind of thing I mean when I say, 'I know mathematics,' is entirely different to what I mean when I say, 'I know John, Thomas,' or whoever he may be. And I venture to say that the knowledge, which is the condition of receiving the whole fulness of the glory and the whole fulness of the light, is a great deal more like the thing we mean when we talk of knowing one another than when we talk of knowing a book. That is to say, a man may have all the creeds and confessions of faith clear in his head, and yet none of the life, none of the light, none of the power, and none of the godliness. But if we know Him as our brother, know Him as our friend, our sacrifice, our Redeemer, Lord, all in all; know Him as our heaven, our righteousness, and our strength; if we know Him with the knowledge which is possession; if we know Him with the knowledge which, as the profoundest of the Apostles says, 'hath the truth in life'; if we know Him, see then, 'This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.'

Now, friends, my words are done. God is calling you. No, let us put it a little more definitely than that—God is calling thee. There is no speech nor language where His voice is not heard. His words are gone out to the end of the world, and have reached even thyself. He calls thee, oh! brother, sister, friend, that you and I may turn round to Him and say, 'When Thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' Amen.

Partakers of the Divine Nature: 2 Peter 1:4

'PARTAKERS Of the Divine nature.' These are bold words, and may be so understood as to excite the wildest and most presumptuous dreams. But bold as they are, and startling as they may sound to some of us, they are only putting into other language the teaching of which the whole New Testament is full, that men may, and do, by their faith, receive into their spirits a real communication of the life of God. What else does the language about being 'the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty' mean? What else does the teaching of regeneration mean? What

else mean Christ's frequent declarations that He dwells in us and we in Him, as the branch in the vine, as the members in the body? What else does 'he that is joined to the Lord in one spirit' mean? Do not all teach that in some most real sense the very purpose of Christianity, for which God has sent His Son, and His Son has come, is that we, poor, sinful, weak, limited, ignorant creatures as we are, may be lifted up into that solemn and awful elevation, and receive in our trembling and yet strengthened souls a spark of God? 'That ye may be partakers of the Divine nature' means more than 'that you may share in the blessings which that nature bestows.' It means that into us may come the very God Himself.

I. So I Want You to Look with Me, First, At This Lofty Purpose Which Is Here Presented as Being the Very Aim and End of God's Gift in The Gospel.

The human nature and the Divine are both kindred and contrary. And the whole Bible is remarkable for the emphasis with which it insists upon both these elements of the comparison, declaring, on the one hand, as no other religion has ever declared, the supreme sovereign, unapproachable elevation of the infinite Being above all creatures, and on the other hand, holding forth the hope, as no other religion has ever ventured to do, of the possible union of the loftiest and the lowest, and the lifting of the creature into union with God Himself. There are no gods of the heathen so far away from their worshippers, and there are none so near them, as our God. There is no god that men have bowed before, so unlike the devotee; and there is no system which recognizes that, as is the Maker so are the made, in such thoroughgoing fashion as the Bible does. The arched heaven, though high above us, it is not inaccessible in its serene and cloudless beauty, but it touches earth all-round the horizon, and man is made in the image of God.

True, that divine nature of which the ideal man is the possessor has faded away from humanity. But still the human is kindred with the divine. The drop of water is of one nature with the boundless ocean that rolls shoreless beyond the horizon, and stretches plumbless into the abysses. The tiniest spark of flame is of the same nature as those leaping, hydrogen spears of illuminated gas that spring hundreds of thousands of miles high in a second or two in the great central sun.

And though on the one hand there be finiteness and on the other infinitude: though we have to talk, in big words, of which we have very little grasp, about 'Omniscience,' and 'Omnipresence,' and 'Eternity,' and such like, these things may be deducted and yet the Divine nature may be retained; and the poor, ignorant, finite, dying creature, that perishes before the moth, may say, 'I am kindred with Him whose years know no end; whose wisdom knows no uncertainty nor growth; whose power is Omnipotence; and whose presence is everywhere.' He that can say, 'I am,' is of the same nature as His whose mighty proclamation of Himself is 'I AM THAT I AM.' He who can say 'I will' is of the same nature as He who willeth and it is done.

But that kindred, belonging to every soul of man, abject as well as loftiest, is not the 'partaking' of which my text speaks; though it is the basis and possibility of it; for my text speaks of men as 'becoming partakers,' and of that participation as the result, not of humanity, but of God's gift of 'exceeding great and precious promises.' That creation in the image and

likeness of God, which is represented as crowned by the very breath of God breathed into man's nostrils implies not only kindred with God in personality and self-conscious will, but also in purity and holiness. The moral kindred has darkened into unlikeness, but the other remains. It is not the gift here spoken of, but it supplies the basis which makes that gift possible. A dog could not become possessor of the Divine nature, in the sense in which my text speaks of it. Any man, however bad, however foolish, however degraded, abject and savage, can become a partaker of it, and yet no man has it without something else than the fact of his humanity.

What, then, is it? No mere absorption, as extravagant mystics have dreamed, into that Divine nature, as a drop goes back into the ocean and is lost. There will always be 'I' and 'thou,' or else there were no blessedness, nor worship, nor joy. We must so partake of the Divine nature as that the bounds between the bestowing God and the partaking man shall never be broken down. But that being presupposed, union as close as is possible, the individuality of the giver and the receiver being untampered with is the great hope that all Christian men and women ought consciously to cherish.

Only mark, the beginning of the whole is the communication of a Divine life which is manifested mainly in what we call moral likeness. Or to put it into plain words, the teaching of my text is no dreamy teaching, such as an eastern mystic might proclaim, of absorption into an impersonal Divine. There is no notion here of any partaking of these great though secondary attributes of the Divine mind which to many men are the most Godlike parts of His nature. But what my text mainly means is, you may, if you like, become 'holy as God is holy.' You may become loving as God is loving, and with a breath of His own life breathed into your hearts. The central Divinity in the Divine, if I may so say, is the amalgam of holiness and love. That is God; the rest is what belongs to God. God has power; God is love.

That is the regnant attribute, the spring that sets everything agoing. And so, when my text talks about making us all, if we will, partakers of a Divine nature, what it means, mainly, is this—that into every human spirit there may pass a seed of Divine life which will unfold itself there in all purity of holiness, in all tenderness and gentleness of love. 'God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.' Partakers we shall be in the measure in which by our faith we have drawn from Him the pure and the hearty love of whatever things are fair and noble; the measure in which we love righteousness and hate iniquity.

And then remember also that this lofty purpose which is here set forth is a purpose growingly realized in man. The Apostle puts great stress upon that word in my text, which, unfortunately, is not rendered adequately in our Bible, 'that by these ye might become partakers of the Divine nature.' He is not talking about a being, but about a becoming. That is to say, God must ever be passing, moment by moment, into our hearts if there is to be anything godly there. No more certainly must this building, if we are to see, be continually filled with light-beams that are urged from the central sun by its impelling force than the spirit must be receiving, by momentary communication, the gift of life from God if it is to live. Cut off the sunbeam from the sun and it dies, and the house is dark; cut off the life from the root and it withers, and the creature shrivels. The Christian man lives only by continual derivation of life from God; and for

ever and ever the secret of his being and of his blessedness is not that he has become a possessor, but that he has become a partaker, of the Divine nature.

And that participation ought to, and will, be a growing thing. By daily increase we shall be made capable of daily increase. Life is growth; the Divine life in Him is not growth, but in us it does grow, and our infancy will be turned into youth; and our youth into maturity; and, blessed be His name, the maturity will be a growing one, to which grey hairs and feebleness will never come, nor a term ever be set. More and more of God we may receive every day we live, and through the endless ages of eternity; and if we have Him in our hearts, we shall live as long as there is anything more to pass from God to us. Until the fountain has poured its whole fulness into the cistern, the cistern will never be broken. He who becomes partaker of the Divine nature can never die. So as Christ taught us the great argument for immortality is the present relation between God and us, and the fact that He is the God of Abraham points to the resurrection life.

II. Look, In the Second Place, At the Costly and Sufficient Means Employed for The Realization of This Great Purpose.

‘He hath given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might become partakers,’ etc.

Of course, the mere words of a promise will not communicate this Divine life to men’s souls. ‘Promises’ here must necessarily, I think, be employed in the sense of fulfilment of the promises. And so, we might think of all the great and wondrous words which God has spoken in the past, promises of deliverance, of forgiveness, and the like; but I am rather disposed to believe that the extreme emphasis of the epithets which the Apostle selects to describe these promised things now fulfilled suggests another interpretation.

I believe that by these ‘exceeding great and precious promises’ is meant the unspeakable gift of God’s own Son, and the gift therein and thereafter of God’s life-giving Spirit. For is not this the meaning of the central fact of Christianity, the incarnation—that the Divine becomes partaker of the human in order that the human may partake of the Divine? Is not Christ’s coming the great proof that however high the heavens may stretch above the flat, sad earth, still the Divine nature and the human are so kindred that God can enter into humanity and be manifest in the flesh? Contrariety vanishes; the difference between the creature and the Creator disappears. These mere distinctions of power and weakness, of infinitude and finiteness, of wisdom and of ignorance, of undying being and decaying life, vanish, as of secondary consequence, when we can say, ‘the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.’ There can be no insuperable obstacle to man’s being lifted up into a union with the Divine, since the Divine found no insuperable obstacle in descending to enter into union with the human.

So then, because God has given us His Son it is clear that we may become partakers of the Divine nature; inasmuch as He, the Divine, has become partaker of the children’s flesh and blood, and in that coming of the Divine into the human there was brought the seed and the germ of a life which can be granted to us all. Brethren! there is one way, and one way only, by which any of us can partake of this great and wondrous gift of a share in God, and it is through Jesus Christ. ‘No man hath ascended up into Heaven,’ nor ever will either climb or fly there, ‘save He

that came down from Heaven; even the Son of man which is in Heaven.’ And in Him we may ascend, and in Him we may receive God.

Christ is the true Prometheus, if I may so speak, who brings to earth in the fragile reed of his humanity the sacred and immortal fire which may be kindled in every heart. Open your hearts to Him by faith and He will come in, and with Him the rejoicing life which will triumph over the death of self and sin, and give to you a share in the nature of God.

III. Let Me Say, Lastly, That This Great Text Adds a Human Accompaniment of That Divine Gift:

‘Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.’

The only condition of receiving this Divine nature is the opening of the heart by faith to Him, the Divine human Christ, who is the bond between men and God, and gives it to us. But that condition being presupposed, this important clause supplies the conduct which attends and attests the possession of the Divine nature.

Notice, here is human nature without God, described as ‘the corruption that is in the world in lust.’ It is like a fungus, foul-smelling, slimy, poisonous; whose growth looks rather the working of decay than of vitality. And, says my text, that is the kind of thing that human nature is if God is not in it. There is an ‘either’ and ‘or’ here. On the one hand we must have a share in the Divine nature, or, on the other, we have a share in the putrescence ‘that is in the world through lust.’

Corruption is initial destruction, though of course other forms of life may come from it; destruction is complete corruption. The word means both. A man either escapes from lust and evil, or he is destroyed by it.

And the root of this rotting fungus is ‘in lust,’ which word, of course, is used in a much wider meaning than the fleshly sense in which we employ it in modern times. It means ‘desire’ of all sorts. The root of the world’s corruption is my own and my brothers’ unbridled and godless desires.

So, there are two states—a life plunged in putridity, or a heart touched with the Divine nature. Which is it to be? It cannot be both. It must be one or the other. Which?

A man that has got the life of God, in however feeble measure, in him, will flee away from this corruption like Lot out of Sodom. And how will he flee out of it? By subduing his own desires; not by changing position, not by shirking duty, not by withdrawing himself into unwholesome isolation from men and men’s ways. The corruption is not only ‘in the world,’ so that you could get rid of it by getting out of the world, but it is ‘in the world in lust,’ so that you carry the fountain of it within yourself. The only way to escape is by no outward flight, but by casting out the unclean thing from our own souls.

Depend upon it, the measure in which a man has the love of God in him can be very fairly estimated by the extent to which he is doing this. There is a test for you Christian people. There have been plenty of men and women in all ages of the Church, and they abound in this generation, who will make no scruple of declaring that they possess a portion of this Divine Spirit and a spark of God in their souls. Well then, I say, here is the test, bring it all to this—does that life within you cast out your own evil desires? If it does, well; if it does not, the less you say about Christ in your hearts the less likely you will be to become either a hypocrite, or a self-deceiver.

And so, brethren, remember, one last word, viz., that whilst on the one hand whoever has the life of God in his heart will be fleeing from this corruption, on the other hand you can weaken—ay! and you can kill the Divine life by not so fleeing. You have got it, if you have it, to nourish, to cherish, and to do that most of all by obeying it. If you do not obey, and if habitually you keep the plant with all its buds picked off one after another as they begin to form, you will kill it sooner or later. You Christian men and women take warning. God has given you Jesus Christ. It was worthwhile for Christ to live; it was worthwhile for Christ to die, in order that into the souls of all sinful, God-forgetting, devil-following men there might pass this Promethean spark of the true fire.

You get it, if you will, by simple faith. You will not keep it unless you obey it. Mind you do not quench the Holy Spirit, and extinguish the very life of God in your souls.

The Power of Diligence: 2 Peter 1:5

IT seems to me very like Peter that there should be so much in this letter about the very commonplace and familiar excellence of diligence. He over and over again exhorts to it as the one means to the attainment of all Christian graces, and of all the blessedness of the Christian life. We do not expect fine-spun counsels from a teacher whose natural bent is, like his, but plain, sturdy, common sense, directed to the highest matter, and set aglow by fervent love to his Lord. The Apostle paints himself, and his own way of Christian living, when he thus frequently exhorts his brethren to ‘give all diligence.’ He says in this same chapter that he himself will ‘give diligence [endeavor, in Authorized Version] that they may be able after his decease to have these things always in remembrance.’ We seem to see Peter, not much accustomed to wield a pen, sitting down to what he felt a somewhat difficult task, and pointing the readers to his own example as an instance of the temper which they must cherish if they are to make anything of their Christian life. ‘Just as I labor for your sakes at this unfamiliar work of writing, so do you toil at perfecting your Christian graces.’

Now it strikes me that we may gain some instruction if we throw together the various objects to which in Scripture, and especially in this letter, we are exhorted to direct this virtue of diligence, and mark how comprehensive its range, and how, for all beauty of character and progress in the Divine life, it is regarded as an indispensable condition. Let us then look, first, at the homely excellence that is the master-key to all Christian maturity and grace, and then at the various fields in which we are to apply it.

I. Now As to The Homely Virtue Itself, 'Giving All Diligence.'

We all know what 'diligence' means, but it is worthwhile to point out that the original meaning of the word is not so much diligence as haste. It is employed, for instance, to describe the eager swiftness with which the Virgin went to Elizabeth after the angel's salutation and annunciation. It is the word employed to describe the murderous hurry with which Herodias came rushing in to the king to demand John the Baptist's head. It is the word with which the Apostle, left solitary in his prison, besought his sole trusty companion Timothy to 'make haste so as to come to him before winter.' Thus, the first notion in the word is haste, which crowds every moment with continuous effort, and lets no hindrances entangle the feet of the runner. Wise haste has sometimes to be content to go slowly. 'Raw haste' is 'half-sister to delay.' When haste degenerates into hurry, and becomes agitation, it is weakness, not strength; it turns out superficial work, which has usually to be pulled to pieces and done over again, and it is sure to be followed by reaction of languid idleness. But the less we hurry the more should we hasten in running the race set before us.

But with this caution against spurious haste, we cannot too seriously lay to heart the solemn motives to wise and well-directed haste. The moments granted to any of us are too few and precious to let slip unused. The field to be cultivated is too wide and the possible harvest for the toiler too abundant, and the certain crop of weeds in the sluggard's garden too poisonous, to allow dawdling to be considered a venial fault. Little progress will be made if we do not work as feeling that 'the night is far spent, the day is at hand,' or as feeling the apparently opposite but really identical conviction, 'I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day. The night cometh when no man can work.' The day of full salvation, repose, and blessedness is near dawning. The night of weeping, the night of toil, is nearly past. By both aspects of this brief life, we should be spurred to haste.

The first element, then, in Christian diligence is economy of time as of most precious treasure, and the avoidance, as of a pestilence, of all procrastination. 'To-morrow and to-morrow' is the opiate with which sluggards and cowards set conscience asleep, and as each to-morrow becomes to-day it proves as empty of effort as its predecessors, and, when it has become yesterday, it adds one more to the solemn company of wasted opportunities which wait for a man at the bar of God. 'All their yesterdays have lighted' such idlers 'to dusty death,' because in each they were saying, 'to-morrow we will begin the better course,' instead of beginning it to-day. 'Now is the accepted time.' 'Wherefore, giving all haste, add to your faith.'

Another of the phases of the virtue, which Peter here regards as sovereign, is represented in our translation of the word by 'earnestness,' which is the parent of diligence. Earnestness is the sentiment, of which diligence is the expression. So, the word is frequently translated. Hence, we gather that no Christian growth is possible unless a man gives his mind to it. Dawdlers will do nothing. There must be fervor if there is to be growth. The heated bar of iron will go through the obstacle which the cold one will never penetrate. We must gather ourselves together under the impulse of an all-pervading and noble earnestness, too deep to be demonstrative, and which

does not waste itself in noise, but settles down steadily to work. The engine that is giving off its steam in white puffs is not working at its full power. When we are most intent, we are most silent. Earnestness is dumb, and therefore it is terrible.

Again, we come to the more familiar translation of the word as in the text. 'Diligence' is the panacea for all diseases of the Christian life. It is the homely virtue that leads to all success. It is a great thing to be convinced of this, that there are no mysteries about the conditions of healthy Christian living, but that precisely the same qualities which lead to victory in any career to which a man sets himself do so in this; that, on the one hand, we shall never fail if in earnest and saving the crumbs of moments, we give ourselves to the work of Christian growth; and that on the other hand, no fine emotions, no select moments of rapture and communion will ever avail to take the place of the dogged perseverance and prosaic hard work which wins in all other fields; and wins, and is the only thing that does win, in this one too. If you want to be a strong Christian—that is to say, a happy man—you must bend your back to the work and 'give all diligence.' Nobody goes to heaven in his sleep. No man becomes a vigorous Christian by any other course than 'giving all diligence.' It is a very lowly virtue. It is like some of the old wives' recipes for curing diseases with some familiar herb that grows at every cottage door. People will not have that, but if you bring them some medicine from far away, very rare and costly, and suggest to them some course out of the beaten rut of ordinary, honest living, they will jump at that. Quackery always deals in mysteries and rare things. The great physician cures diseases with simples that grow everywhere. A pennyworth of some familiar root will cure an illness that nothing else will touch. It is a homely virtue, but if in its homeliness we practiced it, this Church and our own souls would wear a different face from what it and they do to-day.

II. Note the Wide Field of Action for This Homely Grace.

I can do nothing more—nor is it necessary that I should—than put before your mind, in a sentence or two, the various applications of it which our letter gives.

First, note that in our text, 'giving all diligence, add to your faith.' That is to say, unless you work with haste, with earnestness, and therefore with much putting forth of strength, your faith will not evolve the graces of character which is in it to bring forth. If, on the other hand, we set ourselves to our tasks, then out of faith will come, as the blossoms mysteriously and miraculously do out of an apparently dead stump, virtue, manliness, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly mindedness, and charity. All that galaxy of light and beauty will shine forth on the one condition of diligence, and it will not appear without that. Without it, the faith, though it may be genuine, which lies in a man who is idle in cultivating Christian character, will bear but few and shriveled fruits. The Apostle uses a very remarkable expression here, which is rendered in our Bible imperfectly 'giving all diligence.' He has just been saying that God has 'given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, and exceeding great and precious promises.' The Divine gift, then, is everything that will help a man to live a high and godly life. And, says Peter, on this very account, because you have all these requisites for such a life already given you, see that you 'bring besides into' the heap of gifts, as

it were, that which you and only you can bring, namely, 'all diligence.' The phrase implies that diligence is our contribution. And the very reason for exercising it is the completeness of God's gift. 'On this very account'—because He has given so much—we are to lay 'all diligence' by the side of His gifts, which are useless to the sluggard.

On the one hand there are all great gifts and boundless possibilities as to life and godliness, and on the other diligence as the condition on which all these shall actually become ours, and, passing into our lives, will there produce all these graces which the Apostle goes on to enumerate. The condition is nothing recondite, nothing hard either to understand or to practice, but it is simply that commonplace, humdrum virtue of diligence. If we will put it forth, then the gifts that God has given, and which are not really ours unless we put it forth, will pass into the very substance of our being, and unfold themselves according to the life that is in them; even the life that is in Jesus Christ Himself, in all forms of beauty and sweetness and power and blessedness. 'Diligence' makes faith fruitful. Diligence makes God's gifts ours.

Then, again, the Apostle gives an even more remarkable view of the possible field for this all-powerful diligence when he bids his readers exercise it in order to 'make their calling and election sure.' Peter's first letter shows that he believed that Christians were 'chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.' But for all that he is not a bit afraid of putting the other side of the truth, and saying to us in effect. 'We cannot read the eternal decrees of God nor know the names written in the Book of Life. These are mysteries above us. But if you want to be sure that you are one of the called and chosen, work and you will get the assurance.' The confirmation of the 'call,' of the 'election,' both in fact and in my consciousness depends upon my action. The 'diligence,' of which the Apostle thinks such great things, reaches, as it were, a hand up into heaven and binds a man to that great unrevealed, electing purpose of God. If we desire that upon our Christian lives there shall shine the perpetual sunshine of an unclouded confidence that we have the love and the favor of God, and that for us there is no condemnation, but only 'acceptance in the beloved,' the short road to it is the well-known and trite path of toil in the Christian life.

Still further, one of the other writers of the New Testament gives us another field in which this virtue may expatiate, when the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts to diligence, in order to attain 'the full assurance of hope.' If we desire that our path should be brightened by the clear vision of our blessed future beyond the grave, and above the stars, and within the bosom of God, the road to that happy assurance and sunny, cloudless confidence in a future of rest and fellowship with God lies simply here—work! as Christian men should, whilst it is called to-day.

The last of the fields in which this virtue finds exercise is expressed by our letter, when Peter says, 'Seeing that we look for such things, let us be diligent, that we may be found of Him in peace without spot, and blameless.' If we are to be 'found in peace,' we must be 'found spotless,' and if we are to be 'found spotless' we must be 'diligent.' 'If that servant begin to say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and to be slothful, and to eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that servant will come in an hour when he is not aware.' On the other hand, 'who is that faithful servant whom his lord hath set ruler over his household? Blessed is that

servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing?’ Doing so, and diligently doing it, ‘he shall be found in peace.’

What a beautiful ideal of Christian life results from putting together all these items. A fruitful faith, a sure calling, a cloudless hope, a peaceful welcome at last! The Old Testament says, ‘The hand of the diligent maketh rich’; the New Testament promises unchangeable riches to the same hand. The Old Testament says, ‘Seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand “before kings.’ The New Testament assures us that the noblest form of that promise shall be fulfilled in the Christian man’s communion with his Lord here, and perfected when the diligent disciple shall ‘be found of Him in peace,’ and stand before the King in that day, accepted and himself a king.

Going Out and Going In: 2 Peter 1:11-15

I DO not like, and do not often indulge in, the practice of taking fragments of Scripture for a text, but I venture to isolate these two words, because they correspond to one another, and when thus isolated and connected, bring out very prominently two aspects of one thing. In the original the correspondence is even closer, for the words, literally rendered, are ‘a going in’ and ‘a going out.’ The same event is looked at from two sides. On the one it is a departure; on the other it is an arrival. That event, I need not say, is Death.

I note, further, that the expression rendered, ‘my decease,’ employs the word which is always used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to express the departure of the Children of Israel from bondage, and which gives its name, in our language, to the Second Book of the Pentateuch. ‘My exodus’—associations suggested by the word can scarcely fail to have been in the writer’s mind.

Further, I note that this expression for Death is only employed once again in the New Testament—viz., in St. Luke’s account of the Transfiguration, where Moses and Elias spake with Jesus ‘concerning His decease—the exodus—which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.’ If you look on to the verses which follow the second of my texts, you will see that the Apostle immediately passes on to speak about that Transfiguration, and about the voice which He heard then in the holy mount. So that I think we must suppose that in the words of our second text he was already beginning to think about the Transfiguration, and was feeling that, somehow or other, his ‘exodus’ was to be conformed to his Master’s.

Now bearing all these points in mind, let us just turn to these words and try to gather the lessons which they suggest.

I. The First of Them Is This, The Double Christian Aspect of Death.

It is well worth noting that the New Testament very seldom condescends to use that name for the mere physical fact of dissolution. It reserves it for the most part for something a great deal more dreadful than the separation of body and soul, and uses all manner of periphrases, or what rhetoricians call euphemizing, that is, gentle expressions which put the best face upon a thing instead of the ugly word itself. It speaks, for instance, as you may remember, in the context here about the 'putting off' of a tent or 'a tabernacle,' blending the notions of stripping off a garment and pulling down a transitory abode. It speaks about death as a sleep, and in that and other ways sets it forth in gracious and gentle aspects, and veils the deformity, and loves and hopes away the dreadfulness of it.

Now other languages and other religions besides Christianity have done the same things, and Roman and Greek poets and monuments have in like manner avoided the grim, plain word—death, but they have done it for exactly the opposite reason from that for which the Christian does it. They did it because the thing was so dark and dismal, and because they knew so little and feared so much about it. And Christianity does it for exactly the opposite reason, because it fears it not at all, and knows it quite enough. So, it toys with leviathan, and 'lays its hand on the cockatrice den,' and my text is an instance of this.

'My decease . . . , an entrance.' So, the terribleness and mystery dwindled down into this—a change of position; or if locality is scarcely the right class of ideas to apply to spirits detached from the body—a change of condition. That is all.

We do not need to insist upon the notion of change of place. For, as I say, we get into a fog when we try to associate place with pure spiritual existence. But the root of the conviction which is expressed in both these phrases, and most vividly by their juxtaposition, is this, that what happens at death is not the extinction, but the withdrawal, of a person, and that the man's, as fully, as truly as he was, though all the relations in which he stands may be altered.

Now no materialistic teaching has any right to come in and bar that clear faith and firm conclusion. For by its very saying that it knows nothing about life except in connection with organization, it acknowledges that there is a difference between them. And until science can tell me how it is that the throb of a brain or the quiver of a nerve, becomes transformed into morality, into emotion, I maintain that it knows far too little of personality and of life to be a valid authority when it asserts that the destruction of the organization is the end of the man. I feel myself perfectly free—in the darkness in which, after all investigation, that mysterious transformation of the physical into the moral and the spiritual lies—I feel Perfectly free to listen to another voice, the voice which tells me that life can subsist, and that personal being can be as full—ay, fuller—apart altogether from the material frame which here, and by our present experience, is its necessary instrument. And though accepting all that physical investigation can teach us, we can still maintain that its light does not illumine the central obscurity; and that, after all, it still remains true that round about the being of each man, as round about the being of God, clouds and darkness roll,

'Life and thought have gone away,

Side by side, Leaving door and window wide.’

That, and nothing more, is death—‘My decease . . . , an entrance.’

Then, again, the combination of these two words suggests to us that the one act, in the same moment, is both departure and arrival. There is not a pin-point of space, not the millionth part of a second of time, intervening between the two. There is no long journey to be taken. A man in straits, and all but desperation, is recorded in the old Book to have said: ‘There is but a step between me and death.’ Ah! there is but a step between death and the Kingdom; and he that passes out at the same moment passes in.

I need not say a word about theories which seem to me to have no basis at all in our only source of information, which is Revelation; theories which would interpose a long period of unconsciousness—though to the man unconscious it be no period at all—between the act of departure and that of entrance. Not so do I read the teaching of Scripture: ‘This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.’ We pass out, and as those in the vestibule of a presence-chamber have but to lift the curtain and find themselves face to face with the king, so we, at one and the same moment, depart and arrive.

Friends stand round the bed, and before they can tell by the undimmed mirror that the last breath has been drawn, the saint is ‘with Christ, which is far better.’ To depart is to be with Him. There is a moment in the life of every believing soul in which there strangely mingle the lights of earth and the lights of heaven. As you see in dissolving views, the one fades and the other consolidates. Like the mighty angel in the Apocalypse, the dying man stands for a moment with one foot on the earth and the other already laved and cleansed by the waters of that sea of glass mingled with fire which is before the Throne, ‘Absent from the body; present with the Lord.’

Further, these two words suggest that the same act is emancipation from bondage and entrance into royalty.

‘My exodus.’ Israel came out of Egyptian servitude and dropped chains from wrists and left taskmasters cracking their useless whips behind them, and the brick kilns and the weary work were all done when they went forth. Ah! brethren, whatever beauty and good and power and blessedness there may be in this mortal life, there are deep and sad senses in which, for all of us, it is a prison-house and a state of captivity. There is a bondage of flesh; there is a dominion of the animal nature; there are limitations, like high walls, cribbing, cabining, confining us—the limitations of circumstance. There is the slavery of dependence upon this poor, external, and material world. There are the tyranny of sin and the subjugation of the nobler nature to base and low and transient needs. All these fetters, and the scars of them, drop away. Joseph comes out of prison to a throne. The kingdom is not merely one in which the redeemed man is a subject, but one in which he himself is a prince. ‘Have thou authority over ten cities.’ These are the Christian aspects of death.

II. Now Note, Secondly, The Great Fact on Which This View of Death Builds Itself.

I have already remarked that in one of my texts the Apostle seems to be thinking about Jesus Christ and His decease. The context also refers to another incident in his own life, when our Lord foretold to him that the putting off his tabernacle was to be ‘sudden,’ and added: ‘Follow thou Me.’

Taking these allusions into account, they suggest that it is the death of Jesus Christ—and that which is inseparable from it, His Resurrection—that changes for a soul believing on Him the whole aspect of that last experience that awaits us all. It is His exodus that makes ‘my exodus’ a deliverance from captivity and an entrance upon royalty.

I need not remind you, how, after all is said and done, we are sure of life eternal, because Jesus Christ died and rose again. I do not need to depreciate other imperfect arguments which seem to point in that direction, such as the instincts of men’s natures, the craving for some retribution beyond, the impossibility of believing that life is extinguished by the fact of physical death. But whilst I admit that a good deal may be said, and strong probabilities may be alleged, it seems to me that however much you may argue, no words, no considerations, moral or intellectual, can suffice to establish more than that it would be a very good thing if there were a future life and that it is probable that there is. But Jesus Christ comes to us and says, ‘Touch Me, handle Me; a spirit hath not flesh and bones as I have. Here I am. I was dead; I am alive for evermore.’ So then one life, that we know about, has persisted undiminished, apart from the physical frame, and that one Man has gone down into the dark abyss, and has come up the same as when He descended. So, it is His exodus—and, as I believe, His death and Resurrection alone—on which the faith in immortality impregnably rests.

But that is not the main point which the text suggests. Let me remind you how utterly the whole aspect of any difficulty, trial, or sorrow, and especially of that culmination of all men’s fears—death itself—is altered when we think that in the darkest bend of the dark road we may trace footsteps, not without marks of blood in them, of Him that has trodden it all before us. ‘Follow thou Me,’ He said to Peter; and it should be no hard thing for us, if we love Him, to tread where He trod. It should be no lonely road for us to walk, however the closest clinging hands may be untwined from our grasp, and the most utter solitude of which a human soul is capable may be realized, when we remember that Jesus Christ has walked it before us.

The entrance, too, is made possible because He has preceded us. ‘I go to prepare a place for you.’ So, we may be sure that when we go through those dark gates and across the wild, the other side of which no man knows, it is not to step out of ‘the warm precincts of the cheerful day’ into some dim, cold, sad land, but it is to enter into His presence.

Israel’s exodus was headed by a mummy case, in which the dead bones of their whilom leader were contained. Our exodus is headed by the Prince of Life, who was dead and is alive for evermore.

So, brethren, I beseech you, treasure these thoughts more than you do. Turn to Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead more than you do. I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that the Christianity of this day is largely losing the habitual contemplation of immortality which gave so much of its strength to the religion of past generations. We are all so busy in setting forth and enforcing the blessings of Christianity in its effects in the present life that, I fear me, we are largely forgetting what it does for us at the end, and beyond the end. And I would that we all thought more of our exodus and of our entrance in the light of Christ's death and resurrection. Such contemplation will not unfit us for any duty or any enjoyment. It will lift us above the absorbed occupation with present trivialities, which is the bane of all that is good and noble. It will teach us 'a solemn scorn of ills.' It will set on the furthest horizon a great light instead of a doleful darkness, and it will deliver us from the dread of that 'shadow feared of man,' but not by those who, listening to Jesus Christ, have been taught that to depart is to be with Him.

III. Now I Meant to Have Said a Word, In the Close of My Sermon, About A Third Point—Viz.

The way of securing that this aspect of death shall be our experience, but your time will not allow of my dwelling upon that as I should have wished. I would only point out that, as I have already suggested, this context teaches us that it is His death that must make our deaths what they may become; and would ask you to notice, further, that the context carries us back to the preceding verses. 'An entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly.' We have just before read, 'If these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,' and just before is the exhortation, 'giving all diligence, minister to your faith virtue.'

So, the Apostle, by reiterating the two words which he had previously been using, teaches us that if death is to be to us that departure from bondage and entrance into the Kingdom, we must here and now bring forth the fruits of faith. There is no entrance hereafter, unless there has been a habitual entering into the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus Christ even whilst we are on earth. There is no entrance by reason of the fact of death, unless all through life there has been an entrance into rest by reason of the fact of faith.

And so, dear brethren, I beseech you to remember that it depends on yourself whether departing shall be arrival, and exodus shall be entrance. One thing or other that last moment must be to us all—either a dragging us reluctant away from what we would fain cleave to, or a glad departure from a foreign land and entrance to our home. It may be as when Peter was let out of prison, the angel touched him, and the chains fell from his hands, and the iron gate opened of its own accord, and he found himself in the city. It is for you to settle which of the two it shall be. And if you will take Him for your King, Companion, Savior, Enlightener, Life here, 'the Lord shall bless your going out and coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.'

The Owner and His Slaves: 2 Peter 2:1

THE institution of slavery was one of the greatest blots on ancient civilization. It was twice cursed, cursing both parties, degrading each, turning the slave into a chattel, and the master, in many cases, into a brute. Christianity, as represented in the New Testament, never says a word to condemn it, but Christianity has killed it. 'Make the tree good and its fruit good.' Do not aim at institutions, change the people that live under them and you change them. Girdle the tree and it will die, and save you the trouble of felling it. But not only does Christianity never condemn slavery, though it was in dead antagonism to all its principles, and could not possibly survive where its principles were accepted, but it also takes this essentially immoral relation and finds a soul of goodness in the evil thing, which serves to illustrate the relation between God and man, between Christ and us. It does with slavery as it does with war, uses what is good in it as illustrating higher truths, and trusts to the operation, the slow operation of its deepest principles for its destruction.

So, then, we have one Apostle, in his letters, binding on his forehead as a crown the designation, 'Paul,' a slave of 'Jesus Christ,' and we have in my text an expanded allusion to slavery. The word that is here rendered rightly enough, 'Lord,' is the word which has been transferred into English as 'despot,' and it carries with it some suggestion of the roughness and absoluteness of authority which that word suggests to us. It does not mean merely 'master,' it means 'owner,' and it suggests an unconditional authority, to which the only thing in us that corresponds is abject and unconditional submission. That is what Christ is to you and me; the Lord, the Despot, the Owner.

But we have not only owner and slave here; we have one of the ugliest features of the institution referred to. You have the slave-market, 'the Lord that bought them,' and because He purchased them, owns them. Think of the hell of miseries that are connected with that practice of buying and selling human flesh, and then estimate the magnificent boldness of the metaphor which Peter does not scruple to take from it here, speaking of the owner who acquired them by a price. And not only that, but slaves will run away, and when 'they are stopped, and asked who they belong to, will say they know nothing about him. And so here is the runaway's denial, 'denying the Lord that bought them.' Now I ask you to think of these three points.

I. Here We Have the Owner of Us All.

I do not need, I suppose, to spend a moment in showing you that this relationship, which is laid down in our text, subsists between Jesus Christ and men, and it subsists between Jesus Christ and all men. For the people about whom the Apostle is saying that they have 'denied the Lord that bought them' can, by no construction, be supposed to be true Christians, but were enemies that had crept into the Church without any real allegiance to Jesus Christ, and were trying to wreck it, and to destroy His work. So, there is no reference here to a little elected group out of the midst of humanity, who especially belonged to Jesus Christ, and for whom the price

has been paid; but the outlook of my text in its latter portion is as wide as humanity. The Lord—that is, Jesus Christ—owns all men.

Let me expand that thought in one or two illustrations which may help to make it perhaps more vivid. The slave's owner has absolute authority over him. You remember the occasion when a Roman officer, by reflecting upon the military discipline of the legion, and the mystical power that the commander's word had to set all his men in obedient activity, had come to the conclusion that, somehow or other, this Jesus whom he desired to heal his servant had a similar power in the material universe, and that just as he, subordinate officer though he was, had yet—by reason of the fact that he was 'under authority,' and an organ of a higher authority—the power to say to his servant, 'Go,' and he would go; and to another one, 'Come,' and he would come; so this Christ had power to say to disease, 'Depart,' and it would depart; and to health, 'Come,' and it would come; and to all the material forces of the universe, 'Do this,' and obediently they would do it. That is the picture, in another region, of the relation which Jesus Christ bears to men, though, alas, it is not the picture of the relation which men bear to Christ. But to all of us He has the right to say, wherever we are, 'Come,' the right to say, 'Go,' the right to say, 'Do,' the right to say, 'Be this, that, and the other thing.'

Absolute authority is His; what should be yours? Unconditional submission. My friend, it is no use your calling yourself a Christian unless that is your attitude. My sermon to-night has something else to do than simply to present truths to you. It has to press truths on you, and to appeal not only to your feelings, not only to your understandings, but to your wills. And so, I come with this question: Do you, dear friend, day by day, yield to the absolute Master the absolute submission? And is that rebellious will—which is in you, as it is in us all—tamed and submitted so as that you can say, 'Speak, Lord! Thy servant heareth'? Is it?

Further, the owner has the right, as part of that absolute authority of which I have been speaking, to settle without appeal each man's work. In those Eastern monarchies where the king was surrounded, not by constitutional ministers, but by his personal slaves, he made one man a shoeblick or a pipe-bearer, and the man standing next to him his prime minister. And neither the one nor the other had the right to say a word. Jesus Christ has the right to regulate your life in all its details, to set you your tasks. Some of us will get what the world vulgarly calls 'more important duties'; some will get what the world ignorantly calls more 'insignificant' ones. What does that matter? It was our Owner that set us to our work, and if He tells us to black shoes, let us black them with all the pith of our elbows, and with the best blacking and brushes we can find; and if He sets us to work, which people think is more important and more conspicuous, let us do that too, in the same spirit, and for the same end.

Again, the owner has the absolute right of possession of all the slave's possessions. He gets a little bit of land in the corner of his master's plantation, and grows his vegetables, yams, pumpkins, a leaf of tobacco or two, or what not, there. And if his master comes along and says, 'These are mine,' the slave has no resource, and is obliged to accept the conditions and to give them up. So, Jesus Christ claims ours as well as us—ours because He claims us—and whilst, on the other hand, the surrender of external good is incomplete without the surrender of the inward will, on the other hand the abandonment and surrender of the inward life is incomplete, if it be

not hypocritical, without the surrender of external possessions. All the slave's goods belonged to the owner.

And the owner has another right. He can say, 'Take that man's child and sell him in the market!' and he can break up the family ties and separate husband and wife, and parent and child, and not a word can be said. Our Master comes, not with rough authority, but with loving, though absolute authority, and He sometimes untwines the hands that are most closely clasped, and says to the one of the two that have grown together in love and blessedness, 'Come!' and he cometh, and to the other 'Go!' and she goeth. Blessed they who can say, 'It is the Lord! Let Him do what seemeth Him good.'

Now, dear friends, this absolute authority cannot be exercised by any man upon another man, and this unconditional submission, which Jesus Christ asks from us all, ought not to be rendered by any man to a man. It is a degradation when a human creature is put even in the external relation of slavery and servitude to another human creature, but it is an honor when Jesus Christ says to me, 'Thou art Mine,' and I say to Him, 'I am Thine, O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds.' In the old Saxon monarchies, some antiquarians tell us, the foundation of our modern nobility or aristocracy is found in that the king's servants became nobles. Jesus Christ's slave is everybody else's master. And it is the highest honor that a man can have to bow himself before that Lord, and to take His yoke upon him and learn of Him. So much, then, for my first point; now a word with regard to the second.

II. The Sale, And the Price.

'The Lord that bought them.' You perhaps remember other words which say, 'Ye are bought with a price; be not the servants of men'; also other words of this Apostle himself, in which he speaks, in his other letter, of being 'bought with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.' Now notice, Christ's ownership of us does not depend on Christ's Divinity, which I suppose most of us believe, but on Christ's sacrifice for us. It is perfectly true that creation gives rights to the Creator. It is perfectly true that if we believe, as I think the New Testament teaches, that He, who before His name was Jesus was the Eternal Word of God, was the Agent of all Creation, and therefore has rights. But Christ's heart does not care for rights of that sort. It wants something far deeper, far tenderer, far closer than any such. And He comes to us with the language that is the language of love over all the universe, as between man and woman, as between man and man, as between man and God, as between God and man, upon His lips, and says, 'Thou must love Me, for I have died for thee.' Yes, brother; the only ground upon which absolute possession of a man can be rested is the ground of prior absolute surrender to Him. Christ must give Himself to me before He can ask me to give myself to Him. So, all that was apparently harsh in the relationship, as I have been trying to set it forth to you, melts away and disappears. No owner ever owned a slave as truly as a loving woman owns her husband, or a loving husband his wife, because the ownership is the expression of perfect love on both sides. And that is the golden bond that binds men's souls to Christ in a submission which,

the more abject it is, the more elevating it is, just because 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.'

I do not dwell upon any cold theological doctrine of an Atonement, but I wish you to feel that deep in this great metaphor of our text there lie the two things; first, the price that was paid, and, second, the bondage from which the slave was delivered. He belonged to another master before Christ bought him for Himself. 'He that committeth sin is the slave of sin.' Some of you are your own despots, your own tyrants. The worse half of you has got the upper hand. The mutineers that ought to have been down under hatches, and shackled, have taken possession of the deck and clapped the captain and the officers, and all the sextants and log-books, away into a corner, and they are driving the ship—that is, you—on to the rocks, as hard as they can. A man that is not Christ's slave has a far worse slavery in submitting to these tyrant sins that have tempted him with the notion of how fine it is to break through these old-womanly restraints and conventional fads of a narrow morality, and to have his fling, and do as he likes and follow nature. Ay, some of you have been doing that, and could write a far better commentary than any preacher ever wrote, out of your own experience, on the great words, 'Whilst they promised them liberty, they themselves are the slaves of corruption!' Young men, is that true about any of you—that you came here into Manchester to a situation, and lonely lodgings, comparatively innocent, and that somebody said, 'Oh, do not be a milksop! come along and see life,' and you thought it was fine to shake off the shackles that your poor old mother used to try to put upon your limbs? And what have you made of it? I will tell you what a great many young men have made of it—I have seen scores of them in the forty years that I have been preaching here: 'His bones are full of the iniquity of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust.'

There is a slavery which is blessedness, and there is a slavery which at first is delightful to the worst part of us, and afterwards becomes bitter and deadly. And it is the bondage of sin, the bondage to my worst self, the bondage to my indulged passions, the bondage to other men, the bondage to the material world. Jesus Christ speaks to each of us in His great sacrifice, by which He says to us, 'The Son will make you free, and you shall be free indeed.' The Lord has bought us. Have you let Him emancipate you from all your bondage? Dear friends, bear with me if I press again upon you, I pray God that it may ring in your ears till you can answer that question, Jesus Christ having bought me, do I belong to Him?

III. And Now, Lastly, Notice the Runaways.

Did it ever occur to you what a pathetic force there is in Peter's picking out that word 'denying' as the shorthand expression for all sorts of sins? Who was it that thrice denied that he knew Him? That experience went very deep into the Apostle; and here, as I take it, is a most significant illustration of his penitent remembrance of his past life, all the more significant because of its reticence. The allusion is one that nobody could catch that did not know his past, but which to those who did know it was full of meaning and of pathos:—'Denying the Lord, as I did on that dismal morning, in the High Priest's palace. I am speaking about it, for I know what it comes to, and the tears that will follow after.'

But what I desire to press upon you, dear friends, is just this: That in that view of the lives of people who are not Christians there is suggested to us the essential sinfulness, the black ingratitude, and the absolute folly of refusing to acknowledge the claims of Him to whom we belong, and who has bought us at such a price. You can do it by word, and perhaps some of us are not guiltless in that respect. You can do it by paring down the character and office of Jesus Christ, and minimizing the importance of His sacrifice from the world's sins, and thinking of Him, not as the Owner that bought us, but as the Master that teaches us. You can do it by cowardly hiding of your colors and being too shamefaced, too sensitive to the curled lip of the man that works at the next bench, or sits at the next desk, or the student that is beside you, or somebody else whose opinion you esteem, which prevents you from saying like a man, 'I belong to Jesus Christ, and whomsoever other people serve, as for me, I am going to serve Him.' And you can do it, and many of you are doing it, by simply ignoring His claims, refusing to turn to Him, not yielding up your will to Him, not turning your heart to Him, not setting your dependence upon Him. Is it not a shame that men, whose hearts will glow with thankfulness when another man, especially if he is a superior, comes to them with some gift, valuable, but nothing as compared with the transcendent gift that Christ brings, will yet let Him die for them and not care anything about Him? I can understand the vehement antagonism that some people have to Christ and Christianity, but what I cannot understand is the attitude of the immense mass of people that come to services like this, who profess to believe that Jesus Christ's love for them brought Him to the cross, and yet will not even pay the poor tribute of a little interest and a momentary inclination of heart towards Him. 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by,' that Jesus Christ died for you? He bought you for His own. Let me beseech you to 'yield yourselves' servants, slaves of Christ, and then you will be free, and you will hear Him say in the very depth of your hearts, 'Henceforth I call you not slaves, but friends.'

Be Diligent: 2 Peter 3:14

As we pass the conventional boundary of another year, most of us, I suppose, cast glances into the darkness ahead. To those of us who have the greater part of our lives probably before us, the onward look will disclose glad possibilities. To some of us, who have life mostly behind us, the prospect will take 'a sober coloring from an eye that hath kept watch over man's mortality,' and there will be little on the lower levels to attract. My text falls in with the mood which the season fosters. It directs our onward look to a blessed certainty instead of a peradventure, and it deduces important practical consequences from the hope. These three things are in the words of our text: a clear vision that should fill the future; a definite aim for life, drawn from the vision; and an earnest diligence in the pursuit of that aim, animated by that hope.

Now these three—a bright hope, a sovereign purpose, and a diligent earnestness—are the three conditions of all noble life. They themselves are strength, and they will bring us buoyancy and freshness which will prolong youth into old age, and forbid anything to appear uninteresting or small.

So, I ask you to look at these three points, as suggested by my text.

I. First, Then, The Clear Hope Which Should Fill Our Future.

‘Seeing that ye look for such things.’ What things? Peter has been drawing a very vivid and solemn picture of the end, in two parts, one destructive, the other constructive. Anticipating the predictions of modern science, which confirm his prophecy, he speaks of the dissolution of all things by fervent heat, and draws therefrom the lesson: ‘What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?’

But that dissolution by fire is not, as people often call it, the ‘final conflagration.’ Rather is it a regenerating baptism of fire, from which ‘the heavens and the earth that now are’—like the old man in the fable, made young in the flame—shall emerge renewed and purified. The lesson from that prospect is the words of our text.

Now I am not going to dwell upon that thought of a new heaven and a new earth renewed by means of the fiery change that shall pass upon them, but simply to remark that there is a great deal in the teaching of both Old and New Testaments which seems to look in that direction. It is, at least, a perfectly tenable belief, and in my humble judgment is something more, that this earth, the scene of man’s tragedy and crime, the theatre of the display of the miracle of redeeming love, emancipated from the bondage of corruption, shall be renewed and become the seat of the blessed. They who dwell in it, and it on which they dwell pass through analogous changes, and as for the individuals, the ‘new creation’ is the old self purified by the fire of the Divine Spirit into incorruption and righteousness, so the world in which they live shall, in like manner, be ‘that new world which is the old,’ only having suffered the fiery transformation and been glorified thereby.

But passing from that thought, which, however interesting it may be as a matter of speculation, is of very small practical importance, notice, still further, the essential part of the hope which the Apostle here sets forth—viz., that that order of things towards which we may look is one permeable only for feet that have been washed and made clean. ‘Therein dwelleth righteousness.’ Righteousness there, of course, is the abstract for the concrete; the quality is put for the persons that exhibit it. And just as the condition of being at home in this present material world is the possession of flesh and blood, which puts creatures into relationships therewith, and just as it is impossible for a finite, bodyless spirit to move amongst, and influence, and be influenced by, the gross materialities of the heavens and the earth that now are, so is it impossible for anything but purity to be at rest in, or even to enter into that future world. ‘The gates’ of the New Jerusalem ‘shall not be closed day nor night’; but through the ever-open gates none can pass except they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the

Lamb. There stand at the gates of that Paradise unseen, the repulsions of the angel with the flaming sword, and none can enter except the righteous. Light kills the creatures of the darkness.

‘How pure that soul must be
Which, placed within
Thy piercing sight,
Shall shrink not, but with calm delight
Can live, and look on Thee!’

Thus, then, brethren, an order of things free from all corruption, and into which none can pass but the pure, should be the vision that ever flames before us. Peter takes it for granted that the anticipation of that future is an inseparable part of the Christian character. The word which he employs, by its very form, expresses that that expectance is habitual and continuous. I am afraid that a great many so-called Christians very seldom send their thoughts, and still less frequently their desires, onwards to that end. In all your dreams of the future, how much space has been filled by this future which is no dream? Have you, in these past days, and do you, as a matter of habitual and familiar occupation of your mind, let your eyes travel on beyond and above the low levels of earth and peradventures, to fix them on that certainty?

Opticians make glasses with three ranges, and write upon a little bar which shifts their eyepieces, ‘Theatre,’ ‘Field,’ ‘Marine.’ Which of the three is your glass set to? The turn of a button determines its range. You can either look at the things close at hand, or, if you set the eyepiece right and use the strongest, you can see the stars. Which is it to be? The shorter range shows you possibilities; the longer will show you certainties. The shorter range shows you trifles; the longer, all that you can desire. The shorter range shows you hopes that are destined to be outgrown and left behind; the longer, the far-off glories, a pillar of light which will move before you forever. Oh, how many of the hopes that guided our course, and made our objective points in the past, are away down below the backward horizon! How many hopes we have outgrown, whether they were fulfilled or disappointed. But we may have one which will ever move before us, and ever draw our desires. The greater vision, if we were only wise enough to bring our lives habitually under its influence, would at once dim and ennoble all the near future.

Let us then, dear friends, not desecrate that wondrous faculty of looking before as well as after which God has given to us, by wasting it upon the nothings of this world, but heave it higher, and anchor it more firmly in the very Throne of God Himself. And for us let one solemn, blessed thought more and more fill with its substance and its light the else dim and questionable and insufficient future, and walk evermore as seeing Him who is invisible, and as hastening unto the coming of the day of the Lord.

II. Then, Secondly, Note the Definite Aim Which This Clear Hope Should Impress Upon Life.

If you knew that you were going to emigrate soon, and spend all your life on the other side of the world, in circumstances the outlines of which you knew, you would be a fool if you did not set yourself to get ready for them. The more clearly, we see and the more deeply we feel that future hope, which is disclosed for us in the words of my text, the more it will prescribe a dominant purpose which will give unity, strength, buoyancy, and blessedness to any life. 'Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent.' For what? 'That ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.'

Now mark the details of the aim which this great hope impresses upon life, as they are stated in the words of my text. Every word is weighty here. 'That ye may be found.' That implies, if not search, at least investigation. It suggests the idea of the discovery of the true condition, character, or standing of a man which may have been hidden or partially obscured before—and now, at last, is brought out clearly. With the same suggestion of investigation and discovery, the same phrase is employed in other places; as, for instance, when the Apostle Paul speaks about being 'found naked,' or as when he speaks about being 'found in Him, not having mine own righteousness.' So, then, there is some process of examination or investigation, resulting in the discovery, possibly for the first time, of what a man really is.

Then note, 'Found in Him,' or as the Revised Version reads it, 'in His sight.' Then Christ is the Investigator, and it is before 'those pure eyes and perfect judgment' that they have to pass, who shall be admitted into the new heavens and the new earth, 'wherein dwelleth righteousness.'

Then mark what is the character which, discovered on investigation by Jesus Christ, admits there: 'without spot and blameless.' There must be the entire absence of every blemish, stain, or speck of impurity. The purer the white the more conspicuous the black. Soot is never so foul as when it lies on driven snow. They who enter there must have nothing in them akin to evil. 'Blameless' is the consequence of 'spotless.' That which in itself is pure attracts no censure, whether from the Judge or from the assessors and onlookers in His court.

But, further, these two words, in almost the same identical form—one of them absolutely the same, and the other almost so—are found in Peter's other letter as a description of Jesus Christ Himself. He was a Lamb 'without blemish and without spot.' And thus, the character that qualifies for the new heavens is the copy of us in Jesus Christ.

Still further, only those who thus have attained to the condition of absolute, speckless purity and conformity to Jesus Christ will meet His searching eye in calm tranquility and be 'found of Him in peace.'

The steward brings his books to his master. If he knows that there has been trickery with the figures and embezzlement, how the wretch shakes in his shoes, though he may stand apparently calm, as the master's keen eye goes down the columns! If he knows that it is all right,

how calmly he waits the master's signature at the end, to pass the account! The soldiers come back with victory on their helmets, and are glad to look their captain in the face. But if they come back beaten, they shrink aside and hide their shame. If we are to meet Jesus Christ with quiet hearts, and we certainly shall meet Him, we must meet Him 'without spot and blameless.' The discovery, then, of what men truly are will be like the draining of the bed of a lake. Ah! what ugly, slimy things there are down in the bottom! What squalor and filth flung in from the houses, and covered over many a day by the waters! All that surface work will be drained off from the hearts of men. Shall we show slime and filth, or shall we show lovely corals and silver sands without a taint or a speck?

These are the details of the life's aim of a Christian man. And they may all be gathered up into one. The end which we should seek as sovereign and high above all others is the conformity of our character to Jesus Christ our Lord. Never mind about anything else; let us leave all in God's hands. He will do better for us than we can do for ourselves. Let us trust Him for the contingent future; and let us set ourselves to secure this, that, whether joy or sorrow, whether wealth or poverty, whether success or failure, whether sweet companionship or solitary tears be our lot for the rest of our lives, we may grow in grace, and in the knowledge and likeness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Make that your aim, and freshness, buoyancy, enthusiasm, the ennobling of everything in this world, and the bending of all to be contributory of it, will gladden your days. Make anything else your aim, and you fail of your highest purpose, and your life, however successful, will be dreary and disappointed, and its end will be shame.

III. Lastly, Notice the Earnest Diligence with Which That Aim Should Be Pursued, In the Light of That Hope.

Peter is fond of using the word which is here translated 'be diligent.' Hard work, honest effort, continuous and persevering, is His simple recipe for all nobleness. You will find He employs it, for instance, at least three times in this letter, in such connections as, 'Besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue,' and so on through the whole glorious series; and again, 'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.' So, then, there is no mystery about the way of securing the aim; work towards it, and you will get it.

Now, of course, there are a great many other considerations to be brought in, in reference to the Christian man's means of becoming Christlike. We should have to speak of the gifts of a Divine Spirit, of the dependence upon God for it, and the like; but for the present purpose we may confine ourselves to Peter's own prescription, 'be diligent,' and that will secure it. But then the word itself opens out into further meanings than that. It not only implies diligence: there may be diligence of a very mechanical and ineffective sort. The word also includes in its meaning earnestness, and it very frequently includes that which is the ordinary consequence of earnestness-viz., haste and economy of time.

So, I venture, in closing, just to throw my remarks into three simple exhortations. Be in earnest in cultivating a Christlike character. Half-and-half Christians, like a great many of us, are of no use either to God or to men or to themselves. Dawdling and languid, braced up and

informed by no earnestness of purpose, and never having had enthusiasm enough to set themselves fairly alight, they do no good and they come to nothing. 'I would thou wert cold or hot.' One thing sorely wanted in the average Christianity of this day is that professing Christians should give the motives which their faith supplies for earnest consecration due weight and power. Nothing else will succeed. You will never grow like Christ unless you are in earnest about it anymore than you could pierce a tunnel through the Alps with a straw. It needs an iron bar tipped with diamond to do it. Unless your whole being is engaged in the task, and you gather your whole self together into a point, and drive the point with all your force, you will never get through the rock bar-tier that rises between you and the fair lands beyond. Be in earnest, or give it up altogether.

Then another thing I would venture to say is, Make it your business to cultivate a character like that of Jesus Christ. If you would go to the work of growing a Christlike spirit one-hundredth part as systematically as you will go to your business to-morrow, and stick at it, there would be a very different condition of things in most of our hearts. No man becomes noble and good and like the dear Lord 'by a jump,' without making a systematic and conscious effort towards it.

I would say, lastly, Make haste about cultivating a Christlike character. The harvest is great, the toil is heavy, the sun is drawing to the west, the evening shadows are very long with some of us, the reckoning is at hand, and the Master waits to count your sheaves. There is no time to lose, brother; set about it as you have never done before, and say, 'This one thing I do.'

And so let us not fill our minds with vain hopes which, whether they be fulfilled or not, will not satisfy us, but lift our eyes to and stay our anticipations on those glories beyond, as real as God is real, and as certain as His word is true. Let these hopes concentrate and define for us the aims of our life; and let the aims, clearly accepted and recognized, be pursued with earnestness, with 'diligence,' with haste, with the enthusiasm of which they, and they only, are worthy. Let us listen to our Master, 'I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh.' And let us listen to the words of the servant, which reverse the metaphor, and teach the same lesson in a trumpet call which anticipates the dawn and rouses the sleeping soldiers: 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light'

Growth: 2 Peter 3:18

THESE are the last words of an old man, written down as his legacy to us. He was himself a striking example of his own precept. It would be an interesting study to examine these two letters of the Apostle Peter, in order to construct from them a picture of what he became, and to contrast it with his own earlier self when full of self-confidence, rashness, and instability. It took a lifetime for Simon, the son of Jonas, to grow into Peter; but it was done. And the very faults of the character became strength. What he had proved possible in his own case he commands and commends to us, and from the height to which he has reached, he looks upwards to the infinite ascent which he knows he will attain when he puts off this tabernacle; and then

downwards to his brethren, bidding them, too, climb and aspire. His last word is like that of the great Roman Catholic apostle to the East Indies: 'Forward!' He is like some trumpeter on the battlefield who spends his last breath in sounding an advance. Immortal hope animates his dying injunction: 'Grow! grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior.'

So, I think we may take these words, dear friends, as the starting-point for some very plain remarks about what I am afraid is a neglected duty, the duty of growth in Christian character.

I. I Begin, First, With A Word or Two About the Direction Which Christian Growth Ought to Take.

Now those of you who use the Revised Version will see in it a very slight, but very valuable alteration. It reads there: 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior.' The effect of that alteration being to bring out more clearly that whilst the direction of the growth is twofold, the process is one. And to bring out more clearly, also, that both the grace and the knowledge have connection with Jesus Christ.

He is the Giver and the Author of the grace. He is the Object of the knowledge. The one is more moral and spiritual; the other, if we may so say, more intellectual; but both are realized by one act of progress, and both inhere in, and refer to, and are occupied with, and are derived from, Jesus Christ Himself.

Let us look a little more closely at this double direction, this bifurcation, as it were, of Christian growth. The tree, like some of our forest trees, in its normal progress, diverges into two main branches at a short distance upwards from the root.

First, we have growth in the 'grace' of Christ. Grace, of course, means, first, the undeserved love and favor which God in Jesus Christ bears to us sinful and inferior creatures; and then it means the consequence of that love and favor in the manifold spiritual endowments which in us become 'graces,' beauties, and excellences of Christian character. So then, if you are a Christian, you ought to be continually realizing a deeper and more blessed consciousness of Christ's love and favor as yours. You ought to be, if I may so say, nestling every day nearer and nearer to His heart, and getting more and more sure, and more and more happily sure, of more and more of His mercy and love to you.

And if you are a Christian, you ought not only thus to be realizing daily, with increasing certitude and power, the fact of His love, but you ought to be drinking in and deriving more and more every day of the consequences of that love, of the spiritual gifts of which His hands are full. There is open for each of us in Him an inexhaustible store of abundance. And if our Christian life is real and vigorous there ought to be in us a daily increasing capacity, and therefore a daily increasing possession of the gifts of His grace. There ought to be, in other words, also a daily progressive transformation into His likeness. It is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus,' not only in the sense that He is the Author and the Bestower of it to each of us, but also in

the sense that He Himself possesses and exemplifies it. So that there is nothing mystical and remote from the experience of daily life in this exhortation: 'Grow in grace'; and it is not growth in some occult theological virtue, or transcendent experience, but a very plain, practical thing, a daily transformation, with growing completeness and precision of resemblance, into the likeness of Jesus Christ; the grace that was in Him being transferred to me, and my character being growingly irradiated and refined, softened and ennobled by the reflection of the luster of His.

This it is to 'grow into the grace of our Lord and Savior'; a deeper consciousness of His love creeping round the roots of my heart every day, and fuller possession of His gifts placed in my opening hand every day; and a continual approximation to the beauty of His likeness, which never halts nor ceases.

'Grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior.' The knowledge of a person is not the same as the knowledge of a creed or of a thought or of a book. We are to grow in the knowledge of Christ, which includes but is more than the intellectual apprehension of the truths concerning Him. He might turn the injunction into—'Increase your acquaintance with your Savior.' Many Christians never get to be any more intimate with Him than they were when they were first introduced to Him. They are on a kind of bowing acquaintance with their Master, and have little more than that. We sometimes begin an acquaintance which we think promises to ripen into a friendship, but are disappointed. Circumstances or some want of congeniality which is discovered prevent its growth. So, with not a few professing Christians. They have got no nearer Jesus Christ than when they first knew Him. Their friendship has not grown. It has never reached the stage where all restraints are laid aside and there is perfect confidence. 'Grow in the knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.' Get more and more intimate with Him, nearer to Him, and franker and more cordial with Him day by day.

But there is another side to the injunction besides that. We are to grow in the grasp, the intellectual grasp and realization of the truths which lie wrapped up and enfolded in Him. The first truths that a man learns when he becomes a Christian are the most important. The lesson that the little child learns contains the Omega as well as the Alpha of all truth. There is no word in all the gospel that is an advance on that initial word, the faith of which saves the most ignorant who trusts to it. We begin with the end, if I may say so, and the highest truth is the first truth that we learn. But the aspect which that truth bears to the man when, first of all, it dawns upon him, and he sees in it the end of his fears, the cleansing of his heart, the pardoning of his sins, his acceptance with God, is a very different thing from the aspect that it ought to wear to him, after, say forty years of pondering, of growing up to it, after years of experience have taught him. Life is the best commentary upon the truths of the gospel, and the experience teaches their depths and their power, their far-reaching applications and harmonies. So, our growth in the knowledge of Jesus Christ is not a growing away from the earliest lessons, or a leaving them behind, but a growing up to and into them. So as to learn more fully and clearly all their infinite contents of grace and truth. The treasure put into our hands at first is discovered in its true preciousness as life and trial test its metal and its inexhaustibleness. The child's lesson is the man's lesson. All our Christian progress in knowledge consists in bringing to light the deep meaning, the far-reaching consequences of the fact of Christ's incarnation, death, and glory. 'God so loved the

world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ The same truth which shone at first a star in a far-off sky, through a sinful man’s night of fear and agony, grows in brilliance as we draw nearer to it, until at last it blazes, the central Sun of the Universe, the hearth for all vital warmth, the fountain of all guiding light, the center of all energy. Christ in His manhood, in His divinity, Christ in His cross, resurrection, and glory, is the object of all knowledge, and we grow in the knowledge of Him by penetrating more deeply into the truths which we have long ago learned, as well as by following them as they lead us into new fields, and disclose unsuspected issues in creed and practice.

That growth will not be one-sided; for grace and knowledge will advance side by side—the moral and spiritual keeping step with the intellectual, the practical with the theoretical. And that growth will have no term. It is growth towards an infinite object of our aspiration, imitation, and affection. So, we shall ever approach and never surpass Jesus Christ. Such endless progress is the very salt of life. It keeps us young when physical strength decays. It flames, an immortal hope, to light the darkness of the grave when all other hopes are quenched in night.

II. Now, For A Moment, Look at Another Thought, Viz., The Obligation.

It is a command, that is to say, the will is involved. Growth is to be done by effort, and the fact that it is a command teaches us this, that we are not to take this one metaphor as if it exhausted the whole of the facts of the case in reference to Christian progress.

You would never think of telling a child to grow any more than you would think of telling a plant to grow, but Peter does tell Christian men and women to grow. Why? Because they are not plants, but men with wills, which can resist, and can either further or hinder their Progress.

... and there

‘Lo! in the middle of the wood,

The folded leaf is wooed from out the bud,

and there Grows green and broad, and takes no care.’

But that is not how we grow. ‘In the sweat of thy brow,’ with pain and peril, with effort and toil, and not otherwise, do men grow in everything but stature. And especially is it so in the Christian character. There are other metaphors that need to be taken into consideration as well as this of growth, with all its sweet suggestions of continuous, effortless, spontaneous advance.

The Christian progress is not only growth, it is warfare. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is a race. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is mortifying the old man. The Christian progress is not only growth, it is putting off the old man with his deeds and putting

on the new! 'First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear,' was never meant for a complete account of how the Christian life is perfected.

We are bidden to grow, and that command points to hindrances and resistance, to the need for effort and the governing action of our own wills.

The command is one sorely needed in the present state of our average Christianity. Our churches are full of monsters, specimens of arrested growth, dwarfs, who have scarcely grown since they were babes, infants all their lives. I come to you with a very plain question: Have you any more of Christ's beauty in your characters, any more of His grace in your hearts, any more of His truth in your minds than you had a year ago, ten years ago, or at that far-off period when some of you grey-headed men first professed to be Christians? Have you experienced so many things in vain? Have the years taught you nothing? Ah! brethren! for how many of us is it true: 'When for the time ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one teach you which be the first principles of the oracles of God'? 'Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior.'

And we need the command because all about us there are hindrances. There is the hindrance of an abuse of the evangelical doctrine of conversion, and the idea that springs up in many hearts that if once a man has 'passed from death unto life,' and has managed to get inside the door of the banqueting-hall, that is enough. And there are numbers of people in our Nonconformist communities especially, where that doctrine of conversion is most distinctly preached, whose growth is stopped by the abuse that they make of it in fancying if they have once exercised faith in Jesus Christ they may safely and sinlessly stand still. 'Conversion' is turning round. What do we turn round for? Surely, in order that we may travel on in the new direction, not that we may stay where we are, There is also the hindrance of mere indolence, and there is the hindrance arising from absorption in the world and its concerns.

If all your strength is going thither, there is none left to grow with. Many professing Christians take such deep draughts of the intoxicating cup of this world's pleasures that it stunts their growth. People sometimes give children gin in order to keep them from growing. Some of you do that for your Christian character by the deep draughts that you take of the Circean cup of this world's pleasures and cares.

And not unfrequently, someone favorite evil, some lust or passion, or weakness, or desire, which you have not the strength to cast out, will kill all aspirations and destroy all possibilities of growth; and will be like an iron band round a little sapling, which will confine it and utterly prevent all expansion. Is that the case with any of us? We all need—and I pray you suffer—the word of exhortation.

III. Now, Again, Consider the Method of Growth.

There are two things essential to the growth of animal life. One is food, the other is exercise; and your Christian character will grow by no other means.

Now as to the first. The true means by which we shall grow in Christian grace is by holding continual intercourse and communion with Jesus Christ. It is from Him that all come. He is the Fountain of Life; He gives the life, He nourishes the life, He increases the life. And whilst I have been saying, in an earlier part of this discourse, that we are not to expect an effortless growth, I must here say that we shall very much mistake what Christian progress requires if we suppose that the effort is most profitably directed to the cultivation of specific and single acts of goodness and purity. Our efforts are best when directed to keeping ourselves in union with our Lord. The heart united to Him will certainly be advancing in all things fair and lovely and of good report. Keep yourselves in touch with Christ; and Christ will make you grow. That is to say, occupy heart and mind with Him, let your thoughts go to Him. Do you ever, from morning to night, on a week-day, think about your Master, about His truth, about the principles of His Gospel, about His great love to you? Keep your heart in union with Him, in the midst of the rush and hurry of your daily life. Are your desires turning to Him? Do they go out towards Him and feel after Him? It will take an effort to keep up the union with Him, but without the effort there will be no contact, and without the contact there will be no growth. As soon may you expect a plant, wrenched from the soil and shut out from the sunshine to grow, as expect any Christian progress in the hearts which are disjoined from Jesus Christ. But rooted in that soil, smiled upon by that sun, watered by the perpetual dew from His Heaven, we shall 'grow like the lily, and cast forth our roots like Lebanon.' The secret of real Christian progress and the direction in which the effort of Christian progress can most profitably and effectually be made, is simply in keeping close to our Lord and Master. He is the food of the Spirit. 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.'

Communion with Christ includes prayer. Desire to grow will help our growth. We tend to become what we long to be. Desire which impels to effort will not be in vain if it likewise impels to prayer. We may have the answer to our petition for growth in set ways; we may be "but partially conscious of the answer, nor know that our faces shine when we go among men. But certainly, if we pray for what is in such accordance with His will as 'growth in grace' is, we shall have the petition that we desire. That longing to know Him better and to possess more of His grace, like the tendrils of some climbing plant, will always find the support round which it may twine, and by which it may ascend.

The other condition of growth is exercise. Use the grace which you have, and it increases. Practice the truth which you know, and many things will become clearer. The blacksmith's muscles are strengthened by wielding the forge-hammer, but unused they waste. The child grows by exercise. To him that hath—truly possesses with that possession which only use secures—shall be given.

Communion with Christ, including prayer, and exercise are the means of growth.

IV. Lastly, Observe the Solemn Alternative to Growth.

It is not a question of either growing or not growing, and there an end; but if you will look at the context you will see that the exhortation of my text comes in a very significant

connection. 'Behold! beware, lest being led away ... ye fall from your own steadfastness.' 'But grow in grace.' That is to say, the only preventive of falling away from steadfastness is continual progress. The alternative of advance is retrogression. There is no standing still upon the inclined plane. If you are not going up, gravity begins to act, and down you go. There must either be continual advance or there will be certain decay and corruption. As soon as growth ceases in this physiology disintegration commences. Just as the graces exercised are strengthened, so the graces unexercised decay. The slothful servant wraps his talent in a napkin, and buries it in the ground. He may try to persuade his Master and himself with 'There Thou hast that is Thine'; but He will not take up what you buried. Rust and verdigris will have done their work upon the coin; the inscription will be obliterated and the image will be marred. You cannot bury your Christian grace in indolence without diminishing it. It will be like a bit of ice wrapped in a cloth and left in the sun, it will all have gone into water when you come to take it out. And the truth that you do not live by, whose relations and large harmonies and controlling power are not being increasingly realized in your lives; that truth is becoming less and less real, more and more shadowy, and ghostlike to you. Truth which is not growing is becoming fossilized. 'The things most surely believed' are often the things which have least power. Unquestioned truth too often lies 'bedridden in the dormitory of the soul side by side with exploded error.' The sure way to reduce your knowledge of Jesus Christ to that inert condition is to neglect increasing it and applying it to your daily life. There are men, in all churches, and there are some whole communions whose creeds are the most orthodox, and also utterly useless, and as near as possible nonentities, simply because the creed is accepted and shelved. If your belief is to be of any use to you, or to be held by you in the face of temptations to abandon it, you must keep it fresh, and oxygenated, so to say, by continual fresh apprehension of it and closer application of it to conduct. As soon as the stream stands, it stagnates; and the very manna from God will breed worms and stink. And Christian truth unpracticed by those who hold it, corrupts itself and corrupts them.

So, Peter tells us that the alternative is growth or apostasy. This decay may be most real and unsuspected. There are many, many professing Christians all ignorant that, like the Jewish giant of old, their strength is gone from them, and the Spirit of God departed. My brother, I beseech you, rouse yourself from your contented slothfulness. Do not be satisfied with merely having come within the Temple. Count nothing as won whilst anything remains to be won. There is a whole ocean of boundless grace and truth rolling shoreless there before you. Do not content yourselves with picking up a few shells on the beach, but launch out into the deep, and learn to know more and more of the grace and truth and beauty of your Savior and your God.

But remember dead things do not grow. You cannot grow unless you are alive, and you are not alive unless you have Jesus Christ.

Have you given yourselves to Him? have you taken Him as yours? given yourselves to Him as His servants, subjects, soldiers? taken Him for yours as your Savior, Sacrifice, Pattern, Inspirer, Friend? If you have, then you have life which will grow if you keep it in union with Him. Joined to Him, men are like a 'tree that is planted by the rivers of water,' which spreads its foliage and bears its fruit, and year after year flings a wider shadow upon the grass, and lifts a

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sturdier bole to the heavens. Separated from Him they are like the chaff, which has neither root nor life, and which cannot grow. Which, my friend, are you?

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