1 Peter - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

Handfuls of Pasture: Volume 2, Christian Priesthood, The

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We want the reader to open his bible and read 1 Pet. 2:1-9. In this lovely scripture he will find three words on which we shall ask him to dwell with us for a little. They are words of weight and power—words which indicate three great branches of practical christian truth—words conveying to our hearts a fact which we cannot too deeply ponder, namely, that Christianity is a living and divine reality. It is not a set of doctrines, however true; a system of ordinances, however imposing; a number of rules and regulations, however important. Christianity is far more than any or all of these things. It is a living, breathing, speaking, active, powerful reality—something to be seen in the every-day life—something to be felt in the scenes of personal, domestic history, from hour to hour—something formative and influential—a divine and heavenly power introduced into the scenes and circumstances through which we have to move, as men, women, and children, from Sunday morning till Saturday night. It does not consist in holding certain views, opinions, and principles, or in going to this place of worship or that.

Christianity is the life of Christ communicated to the believer—dwelling in him—and flowing out from him, in the ten thousand little details which go to make up our daily practical life. It has nothing ascetic, monastic, or sanctimonious about it. It is genial, cordial, lightsome, pure, elevated, holy, heavenly, divine. Such is the Christianity of the New Testament. It is Christ dwelling in the believer, and reproduced, by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the believer's daily practical career. This is Christianity—nothing else, nothing less, nothing different.

But let us turn to our three words; and may the Eternal Spirit expound and apply their deep and holy meaning to our souls!

And first, then, we have the word " living." " To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up."

Here we have what we may call the foundation of christian priesthood. There is evidently an allusion here to that profoundly interesting scene in Matt. 16 to which we must ask the reader to turn for a moment.

" When Jesus was come into the coasts of Cesarea Philippi, He asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?1. And they said, Some say thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets."

There was endless speculation, simply because there was no real heart-work respecting the blessed One. Some said this, some said that; and, in result, no one cared who or what He was; and hence He turns away from all this heartless speculation, and puts the pointed question to His own, " But whom say ye that I am? " He desired to know what they thought about Him—what estimate their hearts had formed of Him. " And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Here we have the true confession. Here lies the solid foundation of the whole edifice of the Church of God and of all true practical Christianity—" Christ the Son of the living God." No more dim shadows—no more powerless forms—no more lifeless ordinances—all must be permeated by this new, this divine, this heavenly life which has come into this world, and is communicated to all who believe in the name of the Son of God.

" And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood bath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I quill build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Now, it is evidently to this magnificent passage that the apostle Peter refers in the second chapter of his first epistle, when he says, " To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones [the same words], are built up," &c. All who believe in Jesus are partakers of His risen, victorious, rock. life. The life of Christ, the Son of the living God, flows through all His members, and through each in particular. Thus we have the living God, the living Stone, and living stones. It is all life together—life flowing down from a living source, through a living channel, and imparting itself to all believers, thus making them living stones.

Now, this life having been tried and tested, in every possible way, and having come forth victorious, can never again be called to pass through any process of trial, testing, or judgment whatsoever. It has passed through death and judgment. It has gone down under all the waves and billows of divine wrath, and come forth, at the other side, in resurrection, in divine glory and power—a life victorious, heavenly, and divine, beyond the reach of all the powers of darkness. There is no power of earth or hell, men or devils, that can possibly touch the life which is possessed by the very smallest and most insignificant stone in Christ's assembly. All believers are built upon the living Stone, Christ; and are thus constituted living stones He makes them like Himself, in every respect, save of course, in His incommunicable Deity. Is he a living Stone? They are living stones. Is He a precious Stone? They are precious stones. Is he a rejected Stone? They are rejected stones—rejected, disallowed of men. They are, in every respect, identified with Him. Ineffable privilege!

Here, then, we repeat, is the solid foundation of the christian priesthood—the priesthood of all believers. Before any one can offer up a spiritual sacrifice, he must come to Christ, in simple faith, and be built in Him, as the foundation of the whole spiritual building. " Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture (Isa. 28:16), Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth in him shall not be confounded."

How precious are these words! God Himself has laid the foundation, and that foundation is Christ, and all who simply believe in Christ—all who give Him the confidence of their hearts—all who rest satisfied with Him, are made partakers of His resurrection life, and thus made living stones.

How blessedly simple is this! We are not asked to assist in laying the foundation. We are not called upon to add the weight of a feather to it. God has laid the foundation, and all we have to do is to believe and rest thereon; and He pledges His faithful word. that we shall never be confounded. The very feeblest believer in Jesus has God's own gracious assurance that he shall never be confounded—never be ashamed—never come into judgment. He is as free from all charge of guilt and every breath of condemnation as that living Rock on whom he is built.

Beloved reader, are you on this foundation? Are you built on Christ? Have you come to Him as God's living stone, and given Him the full confidence of your heart? Are you thoroughly satisfied with God's foundation? or are you seeking to add something of your own—your own works, your prayers, your ordinances, your vows and resolutions, your religious duties? If so, if you are seeking to add the smallest jot or tittle to Gods Christ, you may rest assured, you will be confounded. God will not suffer such dishonor to be offered to His tried, elect, precious chief-corner Stone. Think you that He could allow aught, no matter what, to be placed beside His beloved Son, in order to form, with Him, the foundation of His spiritual edifice? The bare thought were an impious blasphemy. No; it must be Christ alone. He is enough for God, and He may well be enough for us; and nothing is more certain than that all who reject, or neglect, turn away from, or add to, God's foundation, shall be covered with everlasting confusion.

But, having glanced at the foundation, let us look at the superstructure. This will lead us to the second of our three weighty words. " To whom coming as unto a living stone ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

All true believers are holy priests. They are made this by spiritual birth, just as Aaron's sons were priests in virtue of their natural birth. The apostle does not say, Ye ought to be living stones, and, Ye ought to be holy priests. He says ye are such. No doubt, being such, we are called upon to act accordingly; but we must be in a position before we can discharge the duties belonging to it. We must be in a relationship before we can know the affections which flow out of it. We do not become priests by offering priestly sacrifices. But being, through grace, made priests, we are called upon to present the sacrifice. If we were to live a thousand years twice told, and spend all that time working, we could not work ourselves into the position of holy priests; but the moment we believe in Jesus—the moment we come to Him in simple faith—the moment we give Him the full confidence of our hearts, we are born anew into the position of holy priests, and are then privileged to draw nigh and offer the priestly sacrifice. How could any one, of old, have constituted himself a son of Aaron? Impossible. But being born of Aaron, he was thereby made a member of the priestly house. We speak not now of capacity, but simply of the position. This latter was reached not by effort, but by birth.

And now, let us inquire as to the nature of the sacrifice which, as holy priests, we are privileged to offer. We are " to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." So also in Heb. 13:15, we read, " By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name."

Here, then, we have the true nature and character of that sacrifice which, as holy priests, we are to offer. It is praise—" praise to God continually." Blessed occupation! Hallowed exercise! Heavenly employment! And this is not to be an occasional thing. It is not merely at some peculiarly favored moment, when all looks bright and smiling around us. It is not to be merely amid the glow and fervor of some specially powerful public meeting, when the current of worship flows deep, wide, and rapid. No; the word is, " praise continually." There is no room, no time for complaining and murmuring, fretfulness and discontent, impatience and irritability, lamenting about our surroundings, whatever these may be, complaining about the weather, finding fault with those who are associated with us whether in public or in private, whether in the congregation, in the business, or in the family circle.

Holy priests should have no time for any of these things. They are brought nigh to God, in holy liberty, peace, and blessing. They breathe the atmosphere and walk in the sunlight of the divine presence, in the new creation, where there are no materials for a sour and discontented mind to feed upon. We may set it clown as a fixed principle—an axiom—that whenever we hear any one pouring out a string of complaints about circumstances and about his neighbors, such an one is not realizing the place of holy priesthood, and, as a consequence, not exhibiting its practical fruits. A holy priest is always happy, always bright, always praising God. True, he may be tried in a thousand ways; but he brings his trials to God in communion, not to his fellow-man in complaining. "Hallelujah" is the proper utterance of the very feeblest member of the christian priesthood.

But we must now look, for a moment, at the third. and last branch of our present theme. This is presented in that highly expressive word " royal." The apostle goes on to say, " But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood that ye should show forth the virtues [see margin] of him who hath called you. out of darkness into his marvelous light."

This completes the lovely picture of the christian priesthood.2 As holy priests, we draw nigh to God,. and present the sacrifice of praise. As royal priests we go forth among our fellow-men, in all the details of practical daily life, to show forth the virtues—the graces—the lovely moral features of Christ. Every movement of a royal priest should emit the fragrance of the grace of Christ.

Mark, again, the apostle does not say, " Ye ought to be royal priests." He says " ye are;" and as such we are to show forth the virtues of Christ. Nothing else becomes a member of the royal priesthood. To be occupied with myself; to be taking counsel for my own ease, my own interest, my own enjoyment, to be seeking my own ends, and caring about my own things, is not the act of a royal priest at all. Christ never did so;: and I am called to show forth His virtues. He, blessed be His name, grants to His people, in this the time of His absence, to anticipate the day when He shall come forth as a Royal Priest, and sit upon His throne, and send forth the benign influence of His dominion to the ends of the earth. We are called to be the present expression of the kingdom of Christ—the expression of Himself.

And let none suppose that the actings of a royal. priest are to be confined to the matter of giving. This would be a grave mistake. No doubt, a royal priest will give, and give liberally if lie has it; but to limit him to the mere matter of communicating would be to rob him of some of the most precious functions of his position. The very man who penned the words on which we are dwelling said on one occasion—and said it without shame, " Silver and gold have I none;" and yet at that very moment, he was acting as a royal priest, by bringing the precious virtue of the Name of Jesus to bear on the impotent man. (Acts 3) The blessed Master Himself, we may safely affirm, never possessed a penny; but He went about doing good, and so should we, nor do we need money to do it. Indeed it very often happens that we do mischief instead of good with our silver and gold. We may take people off the ground on which God has placed them, namely, the ground of honest industry, and make them dependent upon human alms. Moreover, we may often make hypocrites and sycophants of people by our injudicious use of money.

Hence, therefore, let no one imagine that he cannot act as a royal priest without earthly riches. What riches are required to speak a kindly word—to drop the tear of sympathy—to give the soothing genial look None whatever save the riches of God's grace—the unsearchable riches of Christ, all of which are laid open to the most obscure member of the christian priesthood. I may be in rags, without a penny in the world, and yet carry myself blessedly as a royal priest, by diffusing around me the fragrance of the grace of Christ.

But, perhaps, we cannot more suitably close these few remarks on the Christian priesthood, than by giving a very vivid illustration drawn from the inspired page—the narrative of two beloved servants of Christ who were enabled, under the most distressing circumstances, to acquit themselves as holy and royal priests.

Turn to Acts 16:19-34. Here we have Paul and Silas thrust into the innermost part of the prison at Philippi, their backs covered with stripes, and their feet fast in the stocks, in the darkness of the midnight hour. What were they doing? murmuring and complaining? Ah, no. They had something better and brighter to do. Here were two really " living stones," and nothing that earth or hell could do could hinder the life that was in them expressing itself in its proper accents.

But what, we repeat, were these living stones doing? these partakers of the rock life—the victorious—resurrection life of Christ—how did they employ themselves? Well, then, in the first place, as holy priests they offered the sacrifice of praise to God. Yes, " at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God." How precious is this! How morally glorious! How truly refreshing! What are stripes or stocks, or prison walls, or gloomy nights, to living stones and holy priests? Nothing more than a dark background to throw out into bright and beauteous relief the living grace that is in them. Talk of circumstances! Ah! it is little any of us know of trying circumstances. Poor things that we are, the petty annoyances of daily life are often more than enough to cause us to lose our mental balance. Paul and Silas were really in trying circumstances; but they were there as living stones and holy priests.

Yes, reader, and they were there as royal priests, likewise. How does this appear? Certainly not by scattering silver and gold. It is not likely the dear men had much of these to scatter. But oh! they had what was better, even " the virtues of him who had called them out of darkness into his marvelous light." And where do these virtues shine out? In those touching words addressed to the jailer, "Do thyself' no harm." These were the accents of a royal priest, just as the song of praise was the voice of a holy priest. Thank God for both! The voices of the holy priests went directly up to the throne of God and did their work there; and the words of the royal priests went directly to the jailer's hard heart and did their work there. God was glorified and the jailer saved by two men rightly discharging the functions of " the Christian priesthood."

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 1, All-Sufficiency of Christ: Part 1

When once the soul has been brought to feel the reality of its condition before God, the depth of its ruin, guilt, and misery, its utter and hopeless bankruptcy, there can be no rest until the Holy Spirit reveals a full and an all-sufficient Christ to the heart. The only possible answer to our total ruin is God's perfect remedy.

This is a very simple, but a most important truth; and we may say, with all possible assurance, the more deeply and thoroughly the reader learns it for himself the better. The true secret of peace is to get to the very end of a guilty, rained, helpless, worthless self, and there find an all-sufficient Christ, as God's provision for our very deepest need. This truly is rest—a rest which can never be disturbed. There may be Borrow, pressure, conflict, exercise of soul, heaviness through manifold temptations, ups and clowns, all sorts of trials and difficulties; but we feel persuaded that when a soul is really brought by God's Spirit to see the end of self, and to rest in a full Christ, it finds a peace which can never be interrupted.

The unsettled state of so many of God's dear people is the result of not having received into their hearts a full Christ, as God's own very provision for them. No doubt this sad and painful result may be brought about by various contributing causes, such as a legal mind, a morbid conscience, a self-occupied heart, bad teaching, a secret hankering after this present world, some little reserve in the heart, as to the claims of God, of Christ, and of eternity. But, whatever may be the producing cause, we believe it will be found, in almost every case, that the lack of settled peace, so common amongst the Lord's people, is the result of not seeing, not believing, what God has made His Christ to be to them, and for them, and that forever.

Now what we propose, in this our opening paper for the year 1876, is to show the anxious reader, from the precious pages of the word of God, that there is treasured up for him in Christ all he can possibly need, whether it be to meet the claims of his conscience, the cravings of his heart, or the exigencies of his path. We shall seek, by the grace of God, to prove that the work of Christ is the only true resting place for the conscience; His Person, the only true object for the heart; His word, the only true guide for the path.

And first, then, let us dwell for a little upon

THE WORK OF CHRIST AS THE ONLY RESTING PLACE FOR THE CONSCIENCE.

In considering this great subject, two things claim our attention: first, what Christ has done for us; secondly, what He is doing for us. In the former we have atonement; in the latter, advocacy. He died for us on the cross. He lives for us on the throne. By His precious atoning death, He has met our entire condition as sinners. He has borne our sins, and put them away forever. He stood charged with all our sins—the sins of all who believe in His name. “Jehovah laid on him the iniquities of us all.” (Isa. 53) And again, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, 1 Pet. 3:18.

This is a grand and all-important truth for the anxious soul—a truth which lies at the very foundation of the whole christian position. It is impossible that any truly awakened soul, any spiritually enlightened conscience, can enjoy divinely settled peace until this most precious truth is laid hold of in simple faith. I must know, upon divine authority, that all my sins are put away forever out of God's sight; that He Himself has disposed of them in such a manner as to satisfy all the claims of His throne, and all the attributes of His nature; that He has glorified Himself in the putting away of my sins, in a far higher and more wonderful manner than if He had sent me to an everlasting hell on account of them.

Yes, He Himself has done it. This is the very gist and marrow, the heart's core, of the whole matter. God has laid our sins on Jesus, and He tells us so in His holy word, so that we may know it upon divine authority—an authority that cannot lie. God planned it; God did it; God says it. It is all of God, from first to last, and we have simply to rest in it like a little child. How do I know that Jesus bore my sins in His own body on the tree? By the very same authority which tells me I had sins to be borne. God, in His marvelous and matchless love, assures me, a poor guilty, hell-deserving sinner, that He has Himself undertaken the whole matter of my sins, and disposed of it in such a manner as to bring a rich harvest of glory to His own eternal name, throughout the wide universe, in presence of all created intelligence.

The living faith of this must tranquillize the conscience. If God has satisfied Himself about my sins, I may well be satisfied also. I know I am a sinner—it may be the chief of sinners. I know my sins are more in number than the hairs of my head; that they are black as midnight—black as hell itself. I know that any one of these sins, the very least, deserves the eternal flames of hell. I know—because God's word tells me—that a single speck of sin can never enter His holy presence, and hence, so far as I am concerned, there was no possible issue, save eternal separation from God. All this I know, upon the clear and unquestionable authority of that word which is settled forever in heaven.

But oh! the profound mystery of the cross!—the glorious mystery of redeeming love! I see God Himself taking all my sins—the black and terrible category—all my sins, as He knew and estimated them. I see Him laying them all upon the head of my blessed Substitute, and dealing with Him about them. I see all the billows and waves of God's righteous wrath—His wrath against my sins—His wrath which should have consumed me soul and body in hell throughout a dreary eternity; I see them all rolling over the Man who stood in my stead; who represented me before God; who bore all that was due to me: with whom a holy God dealt as He should have dealt with me. I see inflexible justice, holiness, truth, and righteousness dealing with my sins, and making a clear and eternal riddance of them. Not one of them is suffered to pass! There is no connivance, no palliation, no slurring over, no indifference. This could not possibly be, once God Himself took the matter in hand. His glory was at stake; His unsullied holiness, His eternal majesty, the lofty claims of His government.

All these had to be provided for in such wise as to glorify Himself in view of angels, men, and devils. He might have sent me to hell—righteously, justly, sent me to hell—because of my sins. I deserved nothing else. My whole moral being, from its profoundest depths, owns this—must own it. I have not a word to say in excuse for a single sinful thought, to say nothing of a sin-stained life from first to last—yes, a life of deliberate, rebellious, high-handed sin.

Others may reason as they please as to the injustice of an eternity of punishment for a life of sin—the utter want of proportion between a few years of wrong-doing and endless ages of torment in the lake of fire. They may reason, but I thoroughly believe, and unreservedly confess, that for a single sin against such a Being as the God whom I see at the cross, I richly deserved everlasting punishment in the deep, dark, and dismal pit of hell.

I am not writing as a theologian; if I were, it would be a very easy task indeed to bring an unanswerable array of scripture evidence in proof of the solemn truth of eternal punishment. But no; I am writing as one who has been divinely taught the true desert of sin, and that desert I calmly, deliberately, and solemnly declare, is, and can be, nothing less than eternal ex-elusion from the presence of God and the Lamb—eternal torment in the lake that burneth with lire and brimstone.

But—eternal hallelujahs to the God of all grace!—instead of sending us to hell because of our sins, He sent His Son to be the propitiation for those sins. And, in the unfolding of the marvelous plan of redemption, we see a holy God dealing with the question of our sins, and executing judgment upon them in the Person of His well-beloved, eternal, and co-equal Son, in order that the full flood-tide of His love might flow down into our hearts. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” 1 John 4:10.

Now this must give peace to the conscience, if only it be received in the simplicity of faith. How is it possible for a person to believe that God has satisfied Himself as to his sins, and not have peace? If God says to us, “Your sins and iniquities I will remember no more,” what could we desire further as a basis of peace for our conscience? If God assures me that all my sins are blotted out as a thick cloud—that they are cast behind His back—forever gone from His sight—should I not have peace? If He shows me the Man who bore my sins on the cross, now crowned at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, ought not my soul to enter into perfect rest as to the question of my sins? Most assuredly.

For how, let me ask, did Christ reach the place which He now fills on the throne of God? Was it as God over all, blessed forever? No; for He was always that. Was it as the eternal Son of the Father? No; He was ever that—ever in the bosom of the Father—the object of the Father's eternal and ineffable delight. Was it as a spotless, holy, perfect Man—One whose nature was absolutely pure, perfectly free from sin? No; for in that character, and on that ground, He could at any moment, between the manger and the cross, have claimed a place at the right hand of God. How was it then? Eternal praise to the God of all grace! it was as the One who had by His death accomplished the glorious work of redemption—the One who had stood charged with the full weight of our sins—the One who had perfectly satisfied all the righteous claims of that throne on which He now sits.

This is a grand, cardinal point for the anxious reader to seize. It cannot fail to emancipate the heart, and tranquillize the conscience. We cannot possibly behold by faith the Man who was nailed to the tree, now crowned on the throne, and not have peace with God. The Lord Jesus Christ, having taken upon Himself our sins, and the judgment due to them, He could not be where He now is if a single one of those sins remained unatoned for. To see the sin-bearer crowned with glory is to see our sins gone forever from the divine presence. Where are our sins? They are all obliterated. How do we know this? The One who took them all upon Himself has passed through the heavens to the very highest pinnacle of glory. Eternal justice has wreathed His blessed brow with a diadem of glory, as the Accomplisher of our redemption—the Bearer of our sins; thus proving, beyond all question, or possibility of a question, that our sins are all put away out of God's sight forever. A crowned Christ, and a clear conscience, are, in the blessed economy of grace, inseparably linked together. Wondrous fact! Well may we chant with all our ransomed powers the praises of redeeming love.

But let us see how this most consolatory truth is set forth in holy scripture. In Rom. 3 we read, “But now the righteousness of God, without law [ ], is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom. God hath set forth a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission [or passing over] of sins that are past [in time gone by], through the forbearance of God; to declare at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

Again, in chapter iv., speaking of Abraham's faith being counted to him for righteousness, the apostle adds, “Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him: but for us also to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised tip Jesus oar Lord from, the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification.” Here we have God introduced to our souls as the One who raised from the dead the Bearer of our sins. Why did He do so? Because the One who had been delivered for our offenses had perfectly glorified Him respecting those offenses, and put them away forever. God not only sent His only-begotten Son into the world, but He bruised Him for our iniquities, and raised Him from the dead, in order that we might know and believe that our iniquities are all disposed of in such a manner as to glorify Him infinitely and everlastingly. Eternal and universal homage to His name!

But we have further testimony on this grand fundamental truth. In Heb. 1 we read such soul-stirring words as these: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners [or in divers measures and modes] spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by [his] Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Our Lord Christ, blessed be His name, would not take His seat on the throne of God, until He had, by the offering of Himself on the cross, purged our sins. Hence a risen Christ at God's right hand is the glorious and unanswerable proof that our sins are all gone, for He could not be where He now is if a single one of those sins remained. God raised from the dead the selfsame Man on whom He Himself had laid the full weight of our sins. Thus all is settled—divinely, eternally settled. It is as impossible that a single sin can be found on the very weakest believer in Jesus, as on Jesus Himself. This is a wonderful thing to be able to say, but it is the solid truth of God, established in manifold places in holy scripture; and the soul that believes it must possess a peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

(To be continued if God permit)

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 92. On Dress

1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3-4.

“Mary.” Your second communication has come to hand. We specially note what you say in your postscript, “Dress is, I fear, a snare to me.” Alas! dear friend, it is a snare to many as well as to you. We confess we are, at times, alarmed to see the strong tendency in Christians to get away from true Christian simplicity in their style of dress. It is not that we desire to see Christians adopting a certain livery, or falling into habits of slovenliness or eccentricity. Quite the reverse. We believe that true spirituality would ever suggest and secure habits of neatness, cleanliness, and order. Moreover, a spiritual mind will keep clear of the glaring inconsistency of shabbiness in dress, and splendor in the house and furnishings. Worldliness is multiform. It varies in individuals. In some it shows itself in the wardrobe; in some, in the table; in some, in the furniture; in some, in the library; in some, in the furnishings. You may sometimes see a man with his clothes threadbare, and yet his table laden with plate, and vice versa. Now, we believe that true Christianity would regulate all these things. If I am walking habitually in the presence of God, my dress and habits will be duly ordered as in His sight. This is the true method of settling all these questions. If the heart is full of Christ, the habits will be Christian. The kingdom of God is not in dress any more than in meat or drink; but then meat, and drink, and dress, will all be regulated by the spirit and principles of the kingdom. The less is always included in the greater. We cannot suppose, for a moment, the existence of true spirituality in connection with an extravagant style of dress. “Modest apparel” is strictly enjoined. “Costly array” is expressly forbidden. Why should we neglect these things? Will not an obedient child attend to every precept of his father? May the Lord make us attentive to His Word, in all things! May He enable us to watch against the earliest buildings of worldliness in all its varied and delusive forms!

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