

THE
ABIDING WORD.

A SERMON.

BY THE
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1 PETER I. 24, 25.

"For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you."

By this quotation from the prophet the apostle worthily winds up his own strain. The theme which fills his opening chapter is the immutability of the Christian economy as opposed to the fluctuation of all created things. The inheritance to which our hope is begotten is one that fadeth not away; the precious blood that bought it is not corruptible, like the ransom-price of silver and gold, but bears an eternal value; the life of which God's word is the seed is, unlike human life in the flesh, immortal; and the conversation to which it leads is not vain and transitory, but will have its issues in eternity. This is the sublime contrast that rules the strain, which, after all its impassioned changes, finds its full, appropriate, and perfect close in the cry of the ancient voice in the wilderness: *All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.*

But more than a quotation is here. It is that kind of authoritative use which an apostle may make of a prophet's words. Inspiration is quoting inspiration, and more than

interpreting itself. The Old Testament lends to the New, *to receive as much again*. In that mysterious colloquy of Isaiah one voice bade the other cry that all the glory of human power resisting the Divine decree for Israel's redemption from captivity would be but the flower of grass, which the Spirit of God should blow upon and wither. Another deeper and more comprehensive meaning that voice did not and could not disclose. But St. Peter unveils and releases the secret. Dropping the clause that for a season restricted its interpretation, he adds his own apostolical comment on the prophetic utterance. That enduring word to which prophets made their appeal was no other than the Gospel which apostles preached: the word that pledged the lower redemption redeemed its own pledge in the redemption of mankind. And as St. Peter interprets Isaiah, so is he his own interpreter: we need not travel beyond the precincts of the text to find the following illustrations of its force as a new version of an ancient oracle. The Gospel is *the word of unchanging truth; proclaims a Divine purpose for ever settled in heaven; offers a salvation whose conditions are immutable; imparts a new life that is in itself imperishable; and forms a society that shall survive all the mutations of time*. These illustrations are no more than a reflection and summary of the apostle's own thoughts. They cover a vast field; but they revolve around one central idea, while they lead our meditations onward in a profitable progression. May the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, grant us, in dwelling upon them, liberally of His wisdom.

I. THE FINISHED WORD OF GOD IS IMMUTABLE. There can be no question that the word preached in the Gospel is in the highest and deepest sense the eternal Word, who in His incarnation became at once the manifested Revealer and the manifested object of His own revelation.

St. Peter, like the two other chief apostles, uses language bordering on an identification of the Word and the words. But the term here used indicates rather the oral and written oracles which the Son of God has made the vehicle of His communications to men. And the immutability of that word has in this chapter a twofold light thrown upon it. Viewed in itself, the abiding word has lived through its changing forms, and stamped upon them its own permanence. Viewed from without, and in relation to the words of men, it has maintained its stability in the midst of all the fluctuations of human tradition.

1. It has been one unchanging word from the beginning, preserving in a wide variety of forms the unity of life.

The methods have been various by which the Spirit of revelation, to whom all the avenues of human nature are known, has found access for Divine truth to the minds and hearts of men. And the Bible, containing the history of God's education of mankind, is at once the record of that large variety and the witness of that essential unity. In its earliest pages we have the simplest revelation. We hear the voice of God speaking to His new creature in that pavilion of His presence from which sin had not yet made man an alien. Then we hear the same voice—changed, indeed, and yet not changed—at the gate of paradise and threshold of a fallen world, dooming the transgressor to the penalty of his sin, and yet preaching to him the Gospel of a glorious redemption; in His justice *turning man*, the first sinner, *to destruction*, but in His mercy crying, to him and all his unnumbered descendants, *Come again, ye children of men!* From that time for thousands of years, and throughout the entire Old-Testament Scriptures, revelation is the narrative of the “sundry times and divers manners” in which it pleased the wisdom of God to foreannounce the unuttered

secret of the cross. The word of the truth of the Gospel was long arrayed in the rich morning drapery of symbols, its Levitical coat of many colours. It was expressed and yet concealed, concealed and yet expressed, in a multitude of mysterious rites. It was uttered and illustrated in an abundant variety of typical histories. It was set to more than mortal music in the Psalms. It was proclaimed in a sphere higher than human poetry or music could reach in the visions of prophecy. Until at length, when the ancient roll was closed, and after long silence in heaven, the eternal Word came forth from the bosom of the Father, bearing a "burden" that no prophet could have borne, and sealed the long variety of revelation by giving to His church, under the keeping and interpretation of the Holy Spirit, the one perfect and unchangeable word of God. And, while He was giving His final revelation, He declared that one living testimony to Himself pervaded the ancient Scriptures. St. Peter here only echoes his Master's words. He tells us that it was the Spirit of Christ who guided the pens and excited the desires of the prophets; that they all transmitted to us one immutable Gospel which they could not themselves as yet understand. And the permanence of the living word throughout its fleeting forms was fresh in his thoughts when he wound up in the language of the text: "The methods of the preaching, and the voices of the preachers, have changed, but the word preached abideth unchangeable. The organs of revelation have passed away; but revelation has never ceased, has never been in reality suspended. The prophets died one after another, with their deep desires in their hearts, and their longing prophecies on their lips; but the word which they ministered to us, a generation more blessed and more responsible, like Him who was its end, is *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.*"

And, as that word has given the unity of life to all

methods of revelation, so it has insured the permanence of life to the vehicle of revelation. The living truth enshrined in the written oracles has preserved, and must preserve them, in their integrity, through all the generations of men.

It has pleased God to commit His eternal counsels to human language, and to human language under all the penalty of Babel. From age to age he has raised up men to utter His words to their fellow-men in their own fleeting speech, and to deposit those words in documents which were not visibly shielded from the vicissitudes of all human things. He did not create for revelation a dialect that should never change, or write it upon tables that might defy the hand of man or the breath of time to destroy them. The ancient tongues of the earliest revelation are now dead languages. The original autographs are lost; nor is there a single sentence extant written by inspired fingers. God's book, like the books of men, has been transcribed and continually reproduced; it has been translated, and must be translated into all the languages of the earth, more or less suffering, *for a season if needs be*, in the process. Christendom does not remember, nor ever can now retrieve, any one central authoritative copy. Such an archetypal Bible might indeed have been preserved in the ark of the church, even as the law was long preserved in the ark of the sanctuary, from the waters of oblivion. It had been a light thing for Omnipotence to do this. But God has ordered it otherwise: and, in ordering it otherwise, He has protected His people from the danger of enshrining and worshipping a book, whilst He has given their faith in perpetuity one of its sublimest exercises.

The church's faith in the permanent integrity of the written word has every presumption in its favour, is sustained by the express assurance of Scripture itself, and is justified by the results of Christian learning.

If God has condescended to inspire holy men to an-

nounce and write His will in a book, can we suppose that He would permit their writings to be abandoned to all the chances of time and all the caprices of men? that He would suffer His holy word to see corruption? The very thought is like the first shaking of the foundations. And what man's instinct suggests, the Bible everywhere, and with express emphasis, declares, that as the word of God its every jot and tittle is under a mysterious but most certain defence: with no less assurance than it appeals to inspiration for its origin does it appeal to a special omnipotent Providence for its preservation. Sceptical criticism cannot deny that the Bible contains substantially the same documents as were received by the faith of the church before and after Christ. And reverent criticism glories in her function, as the handmaid of the Holy Ghost, gradually and surely to restore to the sight of man what to the eye of God has always existed amongst the diversified copies,—the true and faithful sayings which first sprang from inspiration. Concerning some of the jots and tittles of the word we may for a time hang in doubt; but our faith is assured that there is no uncertainty in the Holy Spirit. The foundation of God's word also standeth sure, having this seal, *The Lord knoweth the words that are His*. And we also may yet have absolute certainty. Before the holy volume is rolled up again for ever, it will shine forth in all its faultless glory. Meanwhile, its transmission and preservation, as an aggregate of holy writings running through all the ages of the world, is a phenomenon standing alone. Its enemies, confessing this, have many theories more or less plausible to account for it: to us it suffices that as the word of God, created and hallowed to be the elect instrument of the world's renewal, it must live on in its integrity until it has taught its last lesson and conferred its last blessing on our race.

2. The revealed word not only bears the evidence of its

immutability in itself: as eternal truth it also lives down the rival records of man's wisdom or folly. No attribute of that word is more constantly insisted on than its *truth*, as opposed to the vanity and delusion of all merely human thoughts. *God is not a man that He should lie*, is both a testimony to God's truth and an impeachment of man's falsehood from which there is no appeal: the Scripture itself gives us our only response, *Let God be true and every man a liar*. Wherever the strength or the weakness of man's intellect has rivalled the word of God, like the flower of grass it has been doomed to perish: the truth alone abideth for ever.

Man's rivalry of Divine revelation is twofold: he either teaches a word which is opposed to Scripture, or he perverts the Scripture itself. The *lie* is either outside the sphere of revelation or within it. But, in either case, passing away is the doom written upon all that is not God's word.

(1.) That word has always had its rivals. As the Bible has gone on from age to age accumulating its treasures and enlarging the range of its influence, the inventions of the "father of the lie," using the best flower of man's intellect, have run on their parallel course. But not with equal pace: always with fainting and failing steps. The sacred books of ancient heathenism, the philosophical systems of classical antiquity, and the infidel speculations which in modern times assume without deserving it the name of philosophy,—all have contributed, or are contributing, or will contribute their illustration of our text. How vast the multitudes of the world's religious writings that have become mere curiosities of literature, not now moulding a single human intellect, or moving a single human will, or shaping a single human life. Where are the mythologies of Greece and Rome? where the Scandinavian superstitions? These, and many others, the spectres of which still haunt the deserts of the world, have been swept from the face of the earth by the besom of truth. Or, rather, they

have faded and died out of human affairs in obedience to the inexorable law that truth alone endureth. And those which still are living forces among men betray, more slowly it may be but not less surely, their subjection to the same decree. Their tenacity of existence is not the tenacity of life. The ancient systems that still rule the East exert a sway that perpetually wanes; and, if left alone, would perish even without the aggression of the true word. The evershifting philosophies of the West—so unlike the stagnant Eastern superstitions in every other respect—agree with them in this submission to the eternal law. But how glorious is the contrast of the word of God! All the efforts of man to make his own Bible have needed, and will need, only time to convict them of their impotence. *They shall perish.* The beautiful vestures in which they clothe their inventions in due time become girdles marred and filthy rags. But *the word of God endureth for ever.*

(2.) It is only uttering the same truth in another form when we point to the transitoriness of all merely human commentaries on the word itself. The real and only formidable enemies of the Bible have ever been they of its own household: holding the truth, but holding it in perversion and unrighteousness. While the Divine Spirit has never wanted men who taught of God have been worthy expositors of His truth, and whose expositions, bearing in them the incorruptible seed, will live, the *tradition* of which St. Peter speaks has been in every age the fruitful source of corruption,—from the single marginal gloss of error up to the great systems of heresy that have rent and darkened the Christian church. Scarcely a text of any importance that has not been made the basis or the centre of entire libraries of false doctrine. But in these there is no continuance, and the truth is eternally safe. Like the great systems of heathenism without the borders of Christendom, the great systems of heresy within have their day

and vanish. But the central word abideth. The ancient "traditions received from their fathers," like the conversation they led to, were vain: the huge folios of rabbinical comment and paraphrase have become mere refuse, while the indestructible text has remained in its integrity. So Christian ages have been industriously accumulating another and still vaster Talmud, in the formation of which superstition and infidelity have industriously joined their forces. This has not yet passed away, but it is doomed. The Bible is outliving modern, as it has outlived ancient, tradition. That these errors fade so slowly is due simply to the measure of the truth that they contain. But, sooner or later, that residuum of truth exhales: they return to their own place. The silent finger rubs out the glosses that cumber the margin of the holy text; but *the word of God endureth for ever*.

We live in days, brethren, one element of whose *evil* is that this truth is recklessly assailed. That word which is *for ever settled in heaven* is not suffered to be settled on earth. But how good it is to turn from the vain criticism of man to the sure sayings of God, and to hear the Bible speak for itself! *The word of our God shall stand for ever*, said the ancient voice in the Old Testament: *the word of the Lord Christ endureth for ever*, is the New Testament echo. The word of the Lord in the consummate Gospel is thus made identical with the word that runs through the Bible. Our Lord hath made both Testaments one: one in the unity of eternal truth. He has not claimed Himself to utter abiding words, while abolishing or rendering obsolete the imperfect oracles of earlier times. If that had been His purpose, He *would have told us*. But, on the contrary, He has authenticated all, and made the whole Bible His own; "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He has expounded unto us in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." He has set His seal, which cannot be broken, on the whole word: on every fact of the historian,

on every strain of the singer, on every vision of the prophet. We share Simon Peter's confidence, derived from the same source as his. We too have gone up the holy mount, and listened to the higher than prophetic voice, saying, *This is My beloved Son, hear Him!* We have heard that Son saying, *This is My word, given by My Spirit, hear it!* We, like the first Apostle, rest assured that we have not followed cunningly-devised fables. *Cunningly devised*, indeed, but cunningly-devised *truth*: so cunningly devised by the finger of God, that all the efforts of our modern critics to break it, to unweave it, to reconstruct its fragments, to assign to new authors and new ages their parts, to eliminate the great masses of legend, reserving the little remainder for criticism, will prove but like the trifling of children in the market-place, equally puerile but far less innocent. *Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not one tittle of My word shall fail.*

II. The transition is easy, in the second place, to THE STEADFAST ENDURANCE OF THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN CONTRAST WITH THE TRANSITORINESS OF HUMAN THINGS. The one supreme purpose of God in Christ, which is the key to the history of the world, and the living soul of the entire Scripture, has been swaying St. Peter's thought throughout this chapter, and gives its nerve to the outburst in the text. All human glory is transitory: the Divine purpose survives. All human power is impotent: the Divine purpose must surely triumph.

1. The Divine purpose lives on through all the mutations of human things. The majestic word that heads the Psalms may be set as a superscription over the whole Bible: *I will declare the decree.* The establishment of Christ's kingdom, and the gathering of a new and glorified humanity into one in Him, was from the beginning the central design to which innumerable other ends converged. This keynote, struck by the morning stars who

sang together over the dawn of the world's new hope, has governed the ever-varying strain of Scripture through all its manifold oracles down to the visions of the Apocalypse, in which the temporal kingdom expands into universality and melts into the eternal kingdom of heaven. But St. Peter here breaks human history, waiting on the Divine purpose, into two parts: that which sometime tarried for the *suffering of Christ*, and that which now waits for *His glory*.

(1.) For thousands of years after the Divine government of a sinful world began, the redeeming death of Christ was the common horizon of Divine purpose and human hope. The word of God at the outset of revelation decreed that an incarnate Redeemer should by suffering and death destroy the empire of Satan and of sin. This was that *will of God*, written above in the book unread by mortals, which Christ came *to do* by suffering in the *body prepared for Him*. But how many slow generations came and went, with the infinite variety of their changing history, while that body was a preparing, and that decree was suspended! Ages rolled on, empires rose and fell, dispensation followed dispensation, and all things continued as they were! Meanwhile the Spirit of Christ never left the world without a witness and a prophet of the coming day. While the seers saw and wondered and waited; while angels shared their dread curiosity, desiring to look into the unsealed mystery; *known unto God from the beginning* was this, the crown and consummation of all His works. While heaven and earth mused in awe, *He Himself knew what He would do*. How gloriously did He confirm the immutability of His counsel, and check the impatience of His saints, by awful oath of final appeal to His own unchangeableness! "*My righteousness is near: lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old as doth a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner; but My salva-*

tion shall be for ever." "*By Myself have I sworn.*" "I the Lord will hasten it in His time." At length the Father's hour, the fulness of time, was come; and the sacrifice of the cross gave its eternal ratification to that dread oath, the first great pledge that *the word of the Lord endureth for ever.*

(2.) No sooner did one mystery of the Divine purpose cease than another began. "It is finished" sealed the accomplishment of the first decree; but the "glory that should follow" became a new horizon of the Divine promise and of human hope. Already when St. Peter wrote, that mystery—the delay of Christ's final manifestation and universal supremacy—had begun to tax the patience and the wonder of the saints. Already did the apostle find it needful to utter his apology for the slackness, as some men counted it, of God's promise; and to make his appeal to the timeless patience of Providence, with whom a thousand years are as one day. The watchword of our chapter for the waiting church is *Hope to the end*, or rather *Hope on to perfection.* And still the labouring ages groan on, under their unchanging burden of change, while the decree is yet suspended. We also, like the ancient prophets, search both what and what manner of time the testimony of Jesus, the Spirit of prophecy, still points to. We see the earth now, nearly at the close of a second great millennial day, greener with the grass of human culture, and more glorious with its secular flower, than with the herbage of the garden of the Lord. We see other empires founded and flourishing: not the kingdom we long for. Of other battle-fields we hear: not yet of Armageddon the last. Still our cry is, *What of the night?* and still the response is, over all the waiting earth, only *The morning cometh.* But the word of our Lord endureth for ever. *He* shall not fail nor be discouraged; and we must enter more deeply into the fellowship of Christ's patience, as well as of all else that is His. We must

watch with Him yet. *To-day* is gone; *to-morrow* is all but spent; *the third day*, the third great millennial day, the King shall be perfected in His august kingdom, and we, His subjects, shall reflect His perfection. Then cometh the end of the "things concerning Him." Created nature shall yield its supreme illustration of its vanity; and time shall expire with the last great proof that the *word of the Lord endureth for ever*.

2. But so far our application of the text has been only negative: it has also a positive side. Not only does the Divine purpose survive the mutations of human things; it also vanquishes the opposition of the perishable creature. The prophet, who gave the word to the apostle, had that great truth especially in view. The voice in the ancient wilderness breathed out its defiance against the people confederate in all their glory to resist the redemption of Israel; and in that cry there was an undertone of defiance against the enemies, human and spiritual, of the world's greater redemption. The voice not only uttered the prophecy that all human combinations against the decree would pass away; it also blew upon and blasted all their glory. So now, also, the same Spirit of the living God, whose influence breathed upon the people of God is their strength and their joy, blows upon the greatness and glory of the enemies of God, withers the sap of their strength, and parches them into utter impotence. At their best estate they are but vanity; and, left to themselves, would soon come to nought. But they are *not* left to themselves: the full and steady current of the wrath of God is for ever turned upon the enemies of His church; and, however slow may seem its withering effect, it is absolutely sure. *The wind passeth over it, and it is gone.*

The history of the world, as read by a believing eye, is one great and manifold commentary on this text. From the time when the Spirit of God first strove with rebellious

man, and rescued the little church from the whole confederate world by unloosing with His breath the fountains of the deep, through all the diversified drama of human history, one great law has ruled all the Divine dealings with the world: the vindication and defence of His holy decree against its enemies. It is not only that the Supreme has upheld His purpose throughout the boundless mutations of human things; but at all the great crises of rebuke and blasphemy the mockery of His derision in heaven has been followed by swift and sudden catastrophes on earth. Are not these things most plentifully written "in the book of the wars of the Lord?"

And there is another history, containing the deeds and destinies of higher enemies than man, that will be found hereafter to have been equally full of the truth of these words. God's great decree for mortals has been studied and withstood by beings more than mortal. When the Redeemer defied the gates of hell, He saw more than the glory of man confederate against His church. So also His holy apostles perpetually open the eye of our faith to see principalities and powers of spiritual wickedness in high places set in array against the truth. In the sight of God, human enemies are subordinate to angelic: while all flesh is grass, spiritual powers are the flower of grass. But the opposition of the invisible and the visible worlds is, whether separate or combined, alike of no avail. Hell and earth together have never yet thwarted one single purpose of the Divine will. Heaven and earth, and earth and hell, may pass away: but the word of God shall stand for ever.

3. It is the prerogative of the Church of Christ to be co-workers with God, in the accomplishment of His high and holy designs. As His servants we are the agents and the guardians of His high decree: the representatives upon earth of His unslumbering Providence in heaven. Whilst we are working out our own salvation, and promoting all lesser objects of the Divine philanthropy,

this is our highest honour, that we are, with reverence be it spoken, the essential and indispensable instruments of the eternal purpose of God with respect to the world. The will, and word, and oath of God—that Christ's Gospel shall sway the world, and His kingdom rule over all—is not more sure than that His people, confederate as we are confederate, must be His agents in accomplishing that design. This is the mystery of our vocation; but it is also its strength. That we, in our mightiest combination no better than the grass which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, should be carrying out plans conceived from eternity in an infinite Mind, to whom the past, the present, and the future are one eternal now, is a thought which amazes while it tranquillises the mind, and comforts while it subdues. By exhibiting the infinite contrast between the vanity of His instruments and the eternal immutability of His own Being, God has strengthened His servants in every age. So in the beginning Abraham's faith was made firm by the lesson taught him under the steadfast heavens, emblem of the unchangeableness of the all-sufficient God who called him. So Moses recoiled with trembling from his vocation, until the dread *I am* entered and steadied his soul, and sent him on his unfaltering career. So Elijah, with all his Carmel grandeur, never knew stability, until amidst the awful convulsions of Horeb the still small voice spoke to his dejected spirit the lesson of God's calm and immutable power. And so we read throughout all the Divine records, and pre-eminently in the Psalms and the Prophets, that God's sovereign remedy for His servants' feebleness and vacillation has ever been the exhibition by word and symbol of His own unchangeableness.

Let us then, brethren, strong in a sense of the irresistible necessity of our triumph, labour on in our sacred Master's cause, surrendering ourselves wholly to so high and so holy a vocation. It is ours to go everywhere through-

out the land and throughout the world, *declaring the decree*. A decree vaster and more authoritative than its humble type, the Median's, we must publish it in every language, and enforce it upon every soul. As a Society, whether at home or abroad, essentially Missionary, we must co-operate with our holy Master in proclaiming His supreme authority; and help Him to execute His blessed vengeance upon the heathen, to bind their kings and their nobles with spiritual chains and fetters of grace, to execute upon them the judgment of mercy written in the unchanging counsels of the word of God. Let us not think too much of our own weakness, or our past failures, or even our past unfaithfulness. To dwell on our own wavering attributes would be to encourage despondency, and send us with our too great burden to Elijah's juniper tree. Let us rather go to Horeb, the mount of God, and dwell on the immutable attributes of Him who gave us our commission, and whose word, that to Him every knee shall bow, *endureth for ever*.

III. St. Peter suggests to us a third illustration of his own text. THE ENDURING WORD OF GOD IS AN IMMUTABLE PROMISE PREACHED IN AN IMMUTABLE GOSPEL. The decree which outlives and lives down all the changes of human things works out its accomplishment through the publication of a message of unalterable mercy to man. That word which, in regard to Christ, has the eternal kingdom for its subject, is in regard to man a revelation of grace and salvation. The preaching of glad tidings to mankind is based upon a mediatorial work established from the foundation of the world and immutable; it is adapted to those relations of men which know no change; and it may therefore be offered with absolute confidence to all men everywhere and for ever.

1. We are taught in this chapter that the redemption of the world is an eternal redemption: not only, as the

Epistle to the Hebrews teaches, eternal in its issues, but eternal in its origin; and, between these two eternities, unchangeable through all the generations of time. The text is a not distant inference from those great words: "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world." Silver and gold, the most enduring things in nature, and all that they represent, were created in time and with time shall perish; but the ransom of mankind was not found in created riches. The price of human redemption—that *goodly price at which He was valued*—was settled in heaven before the earth was defiled with sin. The atonement rounds and enwraps the whole destiny of man. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God," receives a new close in the New Testament,—“from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God in Christ.” Holy Scripture in sundry places and by sundry hints transfers the sacred scenery of redemption into a sphere beyond the threshold of time. It erects the cross on that side of the river of human life; and makes redemption anticipate the fall, the saving purpose prevent the act of sin. The Gospel is traced back by successive apostles from age to age: it shows us before the law, before the flood, before the fall, the I AM of our eternal redemption. Christ was the Lamb slain, the King crowned, the Priest interceding for a guilty futurity, before the foundation of the world: the Alpha before our history began, as He will be the Omega when it shall end. Well, therefore, might the apostle exult in the word of the Lord, preached in the Gospel, as enduring for ever through all the mutations of human things.

It follows, as a consequence, that this Gospel has been in some sort preached in every age. Not only as

a prophecy brightening the pages of revelation, lighting up every corner of it and leaving no part dark, but also as a power of life and salvation has the grace of God been preached from the earliest day of the world's sinful history. While the Spirit revealed to the ancients that they were ministering their prophecies to a future and more privileged generation, He did not leave them without their own portion in the truths they understood not. Although *His hour was not yet come* to take of the things of Christ and show them plainly of the Redeemer, He gave them also their heritage in the everlasting consolation and the *good hope* through grace. Their hearts too burned within them in their Old-Testament way while the unknown Saviour talked with them. In all times penitent faith, even without the manifestation of its great object, received the atonement. Christ was the Desire of all nations; and in every age those who have feared God and wrought righteousness—whether patriarchs, or Jews, or Gentiles—have been debtors to the blood of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Surely our Lord was with them though they knew it not; and His mediation made this earth to many more than Jacob the gate of heaven. Unto us indeed they ministered: but it is our joy to believe that they ministered something also to themselves. Through all the changes of time one note of mercy hath endured for ever.

2. The word preached in the Gospel is immutable as adapted to those universal conditions of mankind which are independent of change. Amidst the endless fluctuations of human things there are a few characteristics that never vary: a few touches of nature that make all the world kin, and all the generations of mankind absolutely one. For these few elements the Gospel was prepared: it meets the sin and misery of the world with an unchangeable remedy, the counterpart of man's immutable disease. Infinite is the catalogue of the effects of sin;

but the cause of all is ever and everywhere the same. Guilt, defilement, death, are the three woes which in sin, their central unity, rule the world with terrible unchangeableness. The Gospel, by its triple antidote, pardon, renewal, life,—one in their central unity, grace,—delivers us from the hand of the enemy that hated us. It preaches a forgiveness full, perfect, and for ever the same; it preaches a living Spirit of grace, whose sanctifying power cleanses the defilement of our nature; and it preaches a full and eternal redemption from all the penalties of sin, from Satan, from sorrow, and from death.

Therefore, the Gospel cannot change. “For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven.” A new Gospel will never be devised of God; a new Gospel will never be needed by man. The word of God, preached as St. Peter and St. Paul preached it, endureth for ever. With what unspeakable recoil of abhorrence did St. Paul deprecate the thought of another Gospel: whether man or angel preached it, let him be consigned to a curse! But that tremendous anathema has never been sufficient to restrain the licentiousness of free thought from perverting the Gospel of Christ. According to the apostles’ teaching, every change in the simple condition of the atonement is publishing an alien Gospel. Hence, all wilful developments, all additions, all adaptations of the simple truths of the Church’s first heritage, are the perversions which he denounced. Whether superstition on the one hand overloads those truths, or rationalism on the other seeks to tone down their offensiveness to unregenerate reason, both are mere perversion: if not the lie direct, the shadow of the lie. Known unto God were all the deep necessities of human nature when He pressed into one sentence the terms of salvation. Those deep necessities are not among the things that change; and the word of God that meets them with its relief will endure for ever.

With what calm confidence, brethren, may we proclaim

it throughout the world! Its first preachers, strong in the assurance that it was the power of God to save man in every extremity of his weakness, went through all the zones of humanity proclaiming their one message, and were never ashamed of their confidence. Rejection they often encountered; they never met with failure. They triumphed everywhere; never finding a single tribe or a solitary soul on whose willing mind the Gospel spent its strength in vain. And their successors, although without the apostles' supernatural endowments and preaching the word to races unthought of by them, have never found their word powerless to save. We can add our own testimony. By multitudes in our day is the Gospel rejected; but none receive it perfectly without being perfectly made whole. We have no doubt that the word we preach can cure, and will cure, man's universal disease. We send it abroad without any distrust to every region of our enterprise. Fears and anxieties we may have on other grounds,—as to ourselves, as to the men we send, as to our resources for sending them, as to our subordinate equipments and agencies,—but not the faintest doubt about the Gospel message and its universal sufficiency. It is still worthy of all men to be received, and will endure for ever.

And with what confidence may we all, brethren, cast the burden of our present and everlasting salvation upon it! Creatures of a day, but of a day pregnant with eternity; passing through swift probation to an unchangeable state; we are brought by our Saviour to take refuge in His eternal mercy. We are sinners, but the justice and the mercy of God are alike and together pledged to our forgiveness. We are unholy, but the fountain for sin and uncleanness flows unsealed to all generations. We are beset by enemies, and exposed to endless temptations; but One ever liveth to make intercession for us and save us to the uttermost. This is the accepted time: now—between the two eternities—is the

day of salvation. You cannot have placed yourself *yet* beyond the pale of the covenant of immutable grace. Remember the countless multitudes of those who have—since Paul made himself the pattern of all the saved—proved his Gospel a *faithful saying*: “whose faith follow, considering its end, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” If you refuse and rebel, the judgments of God’s word, the sanctions of His Gospel, are equally eternal with its mercies. If you will not be a monument of His immutable grace, you shall be a monument of His changeless justice. But this part of the dread alternative is not St. Peter’s theme, nor ours. It is the mercy of God, from everlasting to everlasting to them that fear Him, that we now proclaim. We plead with you by the heavenly chorus that runs through the Bible: by that *mercy* which—like His word—*endureth for ever*.

IV. Once more, the truth of the text is illustrated by the NEW AND IMMORTAL SPIRITUAL LIFE TO WHICH WE ARE BEGOTTEN AGAIN BY THE ABIDING WORD. This is another of the sublime applications of his theme that fill the opening of St. Peter’s Epistle. “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth:” man’s life is fragility itself, and the glory of his life is more fragile still; but the Divine life in the Christian man *endureth for ever*. Here the apostle presents to our thoughts the indestructible dignity of spiritual life, as maintained by the abiding Word; and its eternal continuance, in contrast with the transitory life of human generation.

1. The Gospel has given us a new and nobler life. “I am come,” said the Redeemer, “that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly,” literally, that they might have it *more*: a life nobler, deeper, richer, fuller than man could ever otherwise have enjoyed; a life derived from union with Him the Living Word, communicated by His indwelling Spirit, and

sustained by His neverfailing word. "Thou hast," said the same Simon Peter, in his first ever-memorable confession, "the words of eternal life;" and his doctrine here, like the doctrine of the whole New Testament, is that regeneration confers, not new strength upon the old life, but a new and more noble life from above,—a gift which, in his own *very bold* language, makes us "partakers of the Divine nature."

Thus born again, we should glory alone in our new being. How utterly unworthy of the name of life is that mere existence, doomed to worse than annihilation, which man unregenerate spends in the *vain show* of this world! How miserable is the career of human life, at its best state and under its best possible conditions, if not revived from above! How vain is every flower that springs not from the eternal seed: the flower of strength, the flower of beauty, the flower of youthful joy, the flower of family delight, the flower of wealth, yea, every flower into which the grass of human life may bloom! This has been the very commonplace of the moralist in every age; yet how few there are in any age who act as if they believed it, and who refuse to be content with their heritage in the life that now is! But let those who are born again by the Spirit rejoice in that they have died to self to live in Christ. Let us rejoice, brethren, together: we have found that which we had lost, and more than we had lost,—our true and imperishable life; and can exult in the possession of that immortal secret which makes existence, even amidst the conditions of this changing and sorrowful world, matter of infinite joy.

And how diligently should we seek the sustentation and vigour of this life. As it was the word of God that gave us our new being, so it is His word alone that can sustain it unto perfection. The seed of that life is incorruptible; but, like all seed, it demands its nourishment. "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that pro-

ceedeth from the mouth of God doth man live." As the natural life depends for its continuance upon the word of God making bread the nourishment of life, so the life spiritual depends upon the continual impartation of the Spirit in the word. "If ye abide in Me, and My word in you," is the great condition of perfect and perfected life, uttered by lips from which there is no appeal. "Severed from Me ye can do nothing," because ye *are* nothing. The blessed Spirit of the new life is indeed incorruptible: He can never, and therefore it can never, perish in our nature. But *He*, like Christ, may leave us: *it* may be withdrawn, and in this sense too *the spirit may return to God who gave it*. But so great a calamity shall not be to us. We will remember the terms of our new and higher immortality, and keep our renewed spirits for ever in communion with Him who hath the words of eternal life, and who gives those words to us for our sanctification as freely as He gave the drops of His blood for our redemption.

2. Thus imparted and thus sustained, the new life will survive the mutability of mortal things. "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man is the flower of grass." The grass does not more surely wither, nor the flower fade, from season to season, than man succumbs to change, decay, and death. Not more surely will the earth's present beautiful scarf, woven by the cunning hand of spring, wither, than the brightness of our mortal life will depart: "we all do fade as a leaf." But, in opposition to this life *appointed to death*, that new life endureth for ever.

We carry about in ourselves the present illustration of this truth, and the earnest of its eternal fulfilment. We have two lives within us, not indeed struggling together, but each taking its own calm course to its full development: the one, the natural life, tending surely to decay; the other, the life spiritual, tending to perfection. The gloomy side of the text has its illustration in ourselves, even as we see it affectingly illustrated in others: with

most of us the flower has already fallen away, and our little stem of life shall never again put forth its blossom. But we know, we feel, that there is another life within us that holds on its steady upward course through all the stages of physical delay; and, feeling that, while our physical energies are daily failing us, our spiritual vigour increases day by day, we rejoice in the earnest that our life, like the word that gave it to us, will endure for ever.

Then with what calmness may we confront our coming change, and death, its once dreadful representative! How clear and blessed the prospect to the regenerate believer! Death to him is already swallowed up, if not in victory, yet in hope; and the very word is sanctified and ennobled. Since that moment when, as the darkness rolled from the cross, the voice of Jesus cried, *Father, into Thine hands I commit My spirit*, the ministry of death has been changed: not utterly abolished, but translated into the ministry of an angel of light. The apostle's words concerning it are few, but always serene. They are governed by that sacred paradox uttered at the only grave before which we have seen the Redeemer stand: "He that believeth in Me, though he die, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die;" and by that other word, uttered when the Lord intercepted the retreating spirit of the child, "Not dead, but sleepeth." To Simon Peter, indeed, it is hardly sleep. He at least knew that he must die, and had his inverted cross for ever suspended before his eyes; yet he speaks of his death but once, and then terms it his *departure*. That word he heard on the holy mount, spoken there of the Lord's *exodus* out of life: it lingered in his ears, and he dared to make it his own. And now the word stands in the Bible twice concerning death,—once for Christ, and once for you and me. Full of his own text, St. Peter speaks of putting off his tabernacle with the same solemn tranquillity as he put off erewhile his fisher's coat, to go to Jesus. Let us arm

ourselves with the same mind, and comfort our hearts, as the great change draws near, with the thought that the eternal life within us shall never see death.

V. Lastly, THE SOCIETY FORMED BY THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL IS AN ETERNAL SOCIETY. Here once more we have the apostle's own application of his great truth : " Born again of incorruptible seed, to an inheritance incorruptible, and destined to an eternal fellowship of glory, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." But the thought is still more in the spirit and the tone than the words. Simon Peter, having strengthened his brethren through life, strengthens them to the last ; and, knowing that the end of all things,—the end of all changes too,—was at hand, writes with the glorious anticipation of an eternal fellowship. All earthly conversation or citizenship is vain : the Christian society is redeemed from vanity. All human confederations are transitory, and must be dissolved : the Christian church shall endure eternally.

1. Vanity is written upon all human confederations ; but the brotherhood of the Christian Church is redeemed from vain conversation. Earthly societies have indeed their glory and their beauty ; but when compared with the society formed around the cross of Christ their best glory fades away. The family bond, with its tender grace and unutterable joy, we all too surely know has no continuance in this life ; and it cannot in every respect be renewed hereafter. Earthly political confederacies, the unions of nations and states, have their dignity ; and, as appointed by God, must not be lightly disparaged. But noble as they are in human estimation, and magnificent as their annals are in human history, in them there is no continuance. In due time there is or may be an historian of the decline and fall of every empire. And the destiny of that last empire, the history of which no human historian will survive to write, has been forewritten in the night visions of

Daniel, and in the day visions of St. John the Evangelist. Over all the glory of the kingdoms of this world there is no defence. But the kingdom of the Son of Man is an everlasting kingdom, and of His dominion there shall be no end. The multitudinous grass of His subjects shall be green eternally, and their flower, His sacred self, the true and restored glory of man: ah, what shall ever dim His lustre! Other confederacies there are in human things. The great fellowship of literature, science, and art is the most beautiful representative of collective humanity, viewed only as such. But its dignity and beauty are only mortal. It is based on man's perishable word, and its institutions change from age to age. The treasures of literature pass into dead languages: one generation is busy in disinterring the remains of another, until human knowledge shall vanish away, and the day come when all *man's thoughts shall perish*. But the Christian church,—the church founded when human history began,—has gone on, through the fluctuations of time, from strength to strength, with its immutable government, its undecaying literature, its immortal hope.

2. But while the Christian fellowship is already redeemed from vain conversation, it is only in the future state that its immutability will be absolute. The society of its people is now more or less subject to vicissitude and change. While the mystical body of Christ is in itself incorruptible, and enjoys a life which is as inaccessible to death as that of its Head, who dieth no more, yet is that living body clothed at present in vestments that decay and change. The immutable church assumes among men a variable form; bears a multitude of badges that vary from age to age; changes from time to time her congregations and services and many of her lesser usages and laws. The eternal society is also more or less subject to temporal vicissitudes, and shares largely in the general doom. To name no other proof, she is constantly burying the genera-

tions of her dead: an immortal Rachel weeping for her mortal children, not because they *are not*, but because she sees them no more, and *not* indeed refusing to be comforted. While hasting to the coming of her Lord with songs, and everlasting joy upon her head, there is for ever the sound of weeping and lamentation in her company,—sad proof that she is not yet altogether redeemed from vanity and change, and the sorrow that cometh of change. “All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass,” is the cry of a voice sounding within the church as well as in the *desert* of this world; and how mournfully has that cry been heard within the chambers of our own bereaved community since the year began!

But all this will soon be over. The time shall come—if time it may be called—when the church shall lay aside for ever every vestment of earth, and enter upon the eternal possession of an inheritance that fadeth not away. As her inheritance will be unchangeable, so she shall enter upon its enjoyment as an unchangeable society, into which no element of variation shall ever enter. Sin, the great disturber, shall be no more. Time shall be no more; and mutability, the fleeting shadow of time, shall be no more. And, in the prospect of that tranquil and eternal communion of unchanging glory and unchangeable service, St. Peter bids his own generation of Christians, and every generation, to love one another fervently as those who are united for eternity, to labour together heartily as those who will share together the everlasting recompense, and to wait patiently together until the great change shall come,—that change which will end all change for ever.

Let us, brethren, in conclusion, sum up and hear St. Peter’s full interpretation of the ancient cry, as it is a voice sounding not now in the wilderness but within the courts of the Lord’s house. It tells us that in this book we have the eternal word of truth: let us make it in its

inviolable integrity our heritage for ever. It tells us of a Divine purpose that shall stand through time, and be glorified in eternity : let us renew our pledges of devotion to the service of that great decree. It tells us of a saving Gospel unchangeably preached : let us cast our own souls' eternal care upon its immutable promises, and count it our supreme vocation to proclaim it to the ends of the earth. It tells us that we have the seed of imperishable life within us : let us rejoice together in the earnest of our immortality. And it assures us of an eternal fellowship in heaven : let us take to our hearts the everlasting consolation, and cry with St. Peter's Easter song, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

