

set apart to the ministry. Nothing must stream forth now from them but the rays of His illumination : not any lights of philosophy or science ; not the poor sickly radiance of their own genius and talent ; not the refracted and reflected rays of public opinion ; not the light of their own schemes of divinity ; not anything that is theirs. But Christ alone must shine through them. And every Christian in another and perhaps deeper sense is called to the same dignity. Then let us, beloved in the Lord, resolve this day to dedicate ourselves anew to this our vocation. Let us ask of God that the Son who is our life may be more clearly than ever revealed in us : the last film of doubt being removed. Let us make it our own business to put away everything that might dim the reflection : that so our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us and through us in life and in death and for ever : to Whom be all honour eternally. Amen.

MEET FOR THE MASTER'S USE.*

“If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work.”—2 TIM. ii. 21.

AFTER all the solemnities of this day, during which you have received much divine instruction, and given your final pledges, you are invited, brethren, to hear from the apostle Paul how honourable is that service to which you are called. The dignity of the Christian ministry is nowhere more impressively set forth than in these words. They cannot be better introduced than by connecting them for a moment with the writer. St. Paul is now at the close of his career. He had known personally all the gradations of the world's dishonour and all the honours that belong to the service of Christ. Every indignity that man might inflict he had received, and no secret token of his Master's favour had been denied him. But his service on earth, with its shadows and its lights, was now all but over. He was in prison, and knew that this second imprisonment was unto death. But he is still in the house of God, on the altar of which he has his own final sacrifice to offer. Before he goes he leaves his legacy. Looking round upon

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his fellow-servants and fellow-labourers, he inspirits them by words that are new and deeply impressive in relation to the ministry of the Gospel. The whole epistle, read in this light, is most interesting ; and these words in particular have their exceeding value for you.

I.

But, though specially for you, my brethren, the words generally include you only with the congregation. The honour which St. Paul encourages us to seek is the common heritage of all who name the name of the Lord. His own service had been that of an apostle, and the crown he expected was an apostolic crown ; but this he does not say. All who belong to Christ are sanctified to His service, and this their sanctification is their honour ; for it makes them all sharers of the consecration of the Lord Himself on the one hand, and, on the other, it separates them to the service of the temple of which He is the High Priest.

Let us take the latter first. The words "purified" and "sanctified" belong to the phraseology of the altar and the temple. It is the blessed prerogative of all true Christians to be entirely set apart for God. That is the meaning of the word—including the ideas of being negatively purged and positively sanctified—everywhere, but especially here. St. Paul has been speaking of a great house, in which are many vessels, some to honour and some to dishonour. But when he says "If a man purge himself from these he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified," he has evidently passed from the figure

of the house as such to that of the temple: he would not have said that in a great house some are sanctified. When writing to the Ephesians in old time his teaching was that the church, the true church, is a temple in which every person and every thing is hallowed to God. He is now writing in a certain sense to the Ephesians again, for Timothy is the chief pastor of Ephesus, and he is faithful throughout to the thought of the temple, every word being connected with it. We may view the church variously, and our own character in relation to it varies accordingly. If it is a kingdom, we are subjects; if a polity, we are citizens; if a school, we are disciples; if a household, we are children. If it is a temple, we are sanctified; and whenever this word occurs we are regarded as belonging to the sanctified temple of God, purged and separated from all common uses for ever, and consecrated only to Him. We have that high and peculiar dignity which belongs to everything that belongs to God: with a certain something super-added that arises out of our being instruments of His service. For all that is God's is used for His glory. In the ancient temple every vessel of every kind was hallowed, and was never suffered to be used elsewhere. In the great house of the church every member is designed to be an instrument of the divine will: a vessel to receive the unction and also to diffuse it; sanctified from the world to be for ever His in the mystical fellowship of His Son. Outside of that fellowship all is dishonour; in that fellowship the sometime forfeited honour is abundantly retrieved.

For it must be remembered that what gives supreme honour to the Christian servants of God is that they share Christ's sanctification to the divine service. He consecrated Himself officially to the ministry of the great sanctuary ; being the first and the last whose consecration was only official : that is to say, who was not sanctified from sin, but only sanctified to service. Hence our union with Him makes us partakers of His holiness. He sanctified Himself that we might be sanctified. The Spirit common to Him and to us purifies our nature into conformity with His. But that is not so much referred to here as our official union with Him as the High Priest ; our religion is regarded only in the light of a consecrated service. We are joined with the Lord Jesus in His priestly office. The unction that sanctifies, the Holy Ghost, descends from Him, and we share His sanctification. This is the supreme honour of the consecrated life that it is hallowed in Christ. Since He was sanctified for us, the word sanctification has had a new meaning : it has become twice hallowed. It means that our dedication to God is not that simply of creatures brought into being to serve Him, but of redeemed creatures who are made more acceptable than ever by being found accepted in the Beloved. We are, as it were, part of our Lord. As in Him we are uncondemned, because justified in Him ; as in Him we are children, partakers of His sonship ; so we are sanctified in and with Him. We are servants in the unity and fellowship of the One Real Servant, honoured in His eternal honour !

Now, this honour have all His saints. "If any

man serve Me," said our Lord, "Him will My Father honour." The unction of consecrating oil descends from Him to the skirts of His garments, to the meanest vessel and to the humblest Christian. We are a universal priesthood: therefore I am not speaking to you alone and as ministers yet. The word rejects any limitation. There is, strictly speaking, no consecration to special office in Christianity; the threefold unction descended on Christ in three offices; but from Him no longer upon any single office. Men are set apart and ordained to this special ministry, but to no special office sanctified. This word is limited to our common, universal, individual relation to Christ, our common Lord. Union with Him is the sacred, inestimable prerogative of every individual Christian. It is his birth-right, inalienable and precious. And we must all take our place in the common congregation of the sanctified. Brethren, you will have in due time your special honour, but it is not to be found in your being consecrated persons.

II.

The same truth appears under another aspect when the apostle speaks of the unlimited variety of natural endowments which come under the common law of this one sanctification. According to human judgment the gradations of honour are endless; the talents and gifts dispensed by the Spirit are almost as various as the persons and features of the individual Christians. But the honour that comes from God, the honour of sanctified service is one and common

to all, or may be common to all, varieties of endowment. We cannot be quite sure what was the precise meaning of the enumeration here. But we may make the gold and the silver stand for many varieties in the higher order of gifts, and the wood and earth for many varieties in the lower order of gifts. This is quite in harmony with St. Paul's manner. It is usual for him to dilate on the manifold differences of the Spirit's administration of talents, as if they were necessary for the symmetry of the great body, for the beauty and variety of the furniture of the house, for the diverse probation of individual Christians, and above all for the filling up of the various functions of service and usefulness. As to genius and talent the Great Dispenser acts as He will, and gives no account why some have faculties which seem only a little lower than the angels' and others are fools, as it were, in their own right as well as for Christ's sake ; while the great majority are neither in the one class nor in the other, but entrusted with the ordinary ability that has no distinction. Suffice that all this beautiful gradation of manifold gifts is employed in the service of Jesus, and bound up with its success in the world. In the temple of our sanctification all our talents are received and sanctified and used.

Now, it is most obvious that the apostle signifies here that the common sanctification is the great equalizer. His argument, if I may so call it, demands that this should be equally within the reach of all, and of all alike. We cannot all be highly gifted, but we may all be richly graced. By no alchemy can we transmute our earthen vessels

into silver or our silver into gold. Or, supposing that we may refine the silver and make the gold of our nature more fine, it is not permitted of us to ask of God another order of talents than that which He has dispensed. We are not allowed to supplicate for or expect in our regeneration a new distribution of gifts. But we may all present our request for the honour of a perfect sanctification of what we have; to that request the Master of the house will never say "Ye know not what ye ask." The unction dignifies by sanctifying what we have; and they were not altogether wrong who changed the text so as to read "He shall be sanctified unto honour." That unction descends on the richly endowed and the poorly endowed alike. Many of the humblest instruments of the Lord's will are among the most honoured, though they may not know it; and in the book hereafter to be read off names are honourably recorded that have no record below. But the unction rests also upon the eminent. Names are written with honour in that book which men on earth delight also to honour. Some of the vessels of gold sanctified to your souls' good and mine, whose words are like the echoes of the Lord still vibrating, were in their lifetime men whom the world calls children of genius. The issue of all is that the use of the talent, greater or less, makes the honour: our honour is the sanctification of what we are and what we have.

All this we are bound to say, in fidelity to St. Paul's meaning. But no one can fail to perceive that there is a difference in his thoughts between the higher and the lower vessels; and we scarcely

do wrong in regarding him as congratulating those who have higher gifts to place on the altar. It is not in his mind to level all distinctions, even in that house the common honour of which is its sanctity. I can suppose the apostle saying: "If you have great ability, use it rather!" It is an unspeakable honour, in its own degree and measure, to be called into the service of the Church with a high order of talents and endowments; and to have a noble offering naturally provided for the altar. It is a still higher honour to have by industry and diligence improved our talents and made them as worthy as we can make them of the divine acceptance. Let us not despise this: "use it rather!" But the honour here meant is in a most blessed sense independent of the quality of the gift: it is the prerogative of the altar to sanctify whatsoever toucheth it. Its honour is in being there, not precisely in what it is. It is this, that the Lord makes it His own, and uses it.

III.

This leads at once to the central dignity of the text, and that which will go straight to the heart of all who honour as they ought that Worthy Name by which they are called: the honour of sanctified service is that it is profitable to the Lord Himself in His ministry. "Meet for the Master's use, and ready unto every good work!" there can be no higher honour than this. But here we are almost losing the figure, and the truth behind it can scarcely any longer be hid. The Master is not

indeed the owner of the imaginary house ; although it is He who once called Himself the Master of the household. But the house itself is the visible church ; and in it all kinds of vessels are put to all kinds of uses. Those are the sanctified whom He will not disdain to use and make useful to Himself. This is their honour, their unspeakable honour, that they are not only sanctified in Christ, but also to Him and for Him. And again I say: "This honour have all His saints." For even yet, my brethren, I have not come to you and your distinction.

Every true Christian may aspire to the dignity—may indeed claim it as his own—to stand immediately before his Lord : profitable to Him whether only standing in silence, or running His errands, or toiling in His presence. We do not press the words too much when we say that they bring every one of us into direct contact with the Master : not merely as in the house there are many vessels the householder never sees or hear of. Here the figure of the house is fast fading into or rather glorified into that of the temple. As there are no intermediary priests so there are no intermediary masters here. We are in the immediate presence of the Being whose will is law to the universe and whose smile is the happiness of heaven. There is no honour to be compared with this in the life that now is, and none to surpass it in the life that is to come. To wait upon the Lord Jesus is to have recovered the dignity of our being. Hear the Archangel—though he had not, like us, recovered a lost dignity—"I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of the Lord, and I have been sent to speak unto thee ;"

or St. Paul, only a little lower than Gabriel, "My Lord, whose I am and whom I serve!" Let us still remember the words, "If any man serve Me, him will My Father honour!" It is this which gives its imperishable dignity to the blessed life, and translates its commonest familiarities into "heavenly places." We must not, even in our reverence, abate our privilege. It is not merely "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," but "heartily as to the Lord and not to men; for we serve the Lord Christ." Here is your honour and mine, the common honour of the Christian congregation. You may say: "Others can give Him more learning, more eloquence, more money, more worthy service in all respects. I do not envy them. But I also can do my little. And that little He accepts." Brethren, seek this honour above all things: to live and move and have your being in the presence of the Master Christ; meet for His use.

I have been on the point of saying "necessary to the Lord." This might provoke demur, and is hardly justifiable to criticism; but our hearts accept it; and the words are not far from this meaning. We are, to quote the apostle's language a little further on, "profitable to Him for the ministry:" it is the selfsame word. Our Master has His ministry, as St. Paul had his; and we are all, or all may be, profitable to the Lord's ministry as Mark was to St. Paul's. Whatever other instruments He may have in other worlds, where our fellow-servants the angels wait on Him, we know that in this world we are His elect agents; His instruments and chosen vessels are taken from

among men, not apostles and separated ministers only, but men and women as such. These are His angel spirits and ministering flames of fire. Of course there is much limitation. We have nothing to do with the beginning, nor have we to do with the end of His works; but during the process it is most inspiring to think and most overwhelming to feel how necessary we are to His ministry. We are His servants in all He does, and He uses our poor eyes, and hands, and feet as if they were His own. Somewhere or other He calls every one of us in; and we are amazed to find how important our little service is: "Whence is this to me!" There is a moment and there is a point in the common work when He looks round for each, and the Master calleth for thee! Woe to us if the service He expects is not rendered! It were better for us that we had never been born! Then shall we be vessels unto dishonour indeed! But happy the man, beyond all language happy, whose service offered in love is accepted in condescension, and rewarded even already with His "Well done!" How should the thought of this rejoice our hearts and invigorate our faculties and loosen our tongues and open our hands and make our feet swift to shed blessing! What an honour does this confer upon our poor human life! and how should the constant remembrance of it banish all unworthy feeling and unite us into the harmony of our common honour in the Sacred Presence common to us all. This should wither every selfish sentiment to its very roots; and translate our petty jealousies into holy rivalry. Every vessel is profitable to Him

for the ministry; even I myself am and can do some good! If I am sanctified I am 'profitable; were it only that my Lord may see His own likeness reflected as in a glass, from glory to glory. It is serving Him to give Him pleasure. In the old temple, of which St. Paul was thinking, every vessel had its use: from the laver at the entrance to the golden mercy-seat and the all but living cherubim above. In our great house we are in an infinitely higher sense profitable unto Him. The very least of us on the pavement of this house is greater than the greatest in that ancient temple: because, as we have already seen, He who is greater than the temple is here, and reflects His own honour upon all His saints. But this all means each. "If a man," says St. Paul here. Once more it must be affirmed that this honour have or may have all His saints. And still therefore I speak not to these young men only, but to all.

IV.

But this suggests the next word: "prepared for every good work." And it marks the great change that must have been wrought upon our dishonoured natures before we could become thus profitable to our Lord. It is our deep degradation that sin has taken from us our capacity to do the work for which every created being is designed. And we have found our great retrieval in Christ. It is the very definition of regeneration that it is the preparing the spirit for every good work prepared for it. This, brethren, is the process of the salvation of the servant of Christ. He has done evil and not good

all the days of his life ; he is fully and freely forgiven in the court where the Lord our Righteousness presides and administers his atoning satisfaction. He is without the capacity to do the will of God, even though forgiven, unless he is renewed in the spirit of his mind ; then he is regenerated through the indwelling operation of the Spirit of Christ who is Christ Himself. This pardoned and renewed soul is presented to God in His temple, laid upon His altar, and there accepted as ready for all the varieties of Christian service, henceforth dead to every other claim, and alive only to the sacred offices of the house of God. Until this has taken place we know not the powers and the capacities and the true dignity of our nature. But now we know it. There is nothing within the compass of religious duty as such—I mean the duty common to the Christian and not proper to the office-bearer—which we are not fitted for. Our feet being shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, we can go on any errand. Our lips touched by the mystical tongs and the live coal, we can speak the words of this life everywhere. Above all, our hearts filled with the Spirit without the symbol, we are ready for every duty of devotion. This is to be a vessel of honour ; or, dropping the figure, a man of God equipped for every service that man's need, the Church's advantage, or the divine will may demand of him. He cannot be prepared unless he is a son of God ; for the children of this world cannot serve Him in the holiest place.

But let us mark the other side of this preparation, which is made emphatic in one word, "ready."

There is nothing that stamps honour upon the servant of Christ like this alertness to every demand of duty, devotion and love. Both heaven and earth, God and men, conspire to honour the man who is always quick to respond to the claims of charity. The selfishness of human nature is its deepest degradation ; and that is gone, or going, from him. He lives for others, not for himself ; and where is honour comparable to that ? Even the world's estimates grant this ! He who sacrifices himself and all he has for his country is honoured of all men ; far higher honour in the estimation of heaven is his who, in deep humility and obscure self-sacrifice, lives and dies for the good of mankind. Great is the dignity of him who is the ready, unreluctant instrument of the divine will, being to the hand of God what his own hand is to himself ; asking no question for interest sake or for vainglory, or the desire of approval or self in any form ; simply watching the indications of the divine eye and acting accordingly. O the grandeur and beauty of such a character ! How does it shame the cold-heartedness of too many, whose works of devotion and charity are extorted from them by the fear of judgment or the calculation of expediency. This is the strain that runs through the Bible : " Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth ! " " Here am I, send me ! " in the mystical temple ; and in the new temple the word of our own St. Paul, " Lord, what shall I do ? " It is indeed better to go with a heavy heart than not to go at all ; better to help our neighbour under pressure of conflicting motives than not to help him at all. But our privilege is to be so highly strung and finely touched

that a look or a hint shall sway our whole being : "trembling at God's word," as it were like the aspen-tree quivering through all its leaves to the breath of the air that none but itself can feel. But no figure will express it; not even the electric current which responds to a touch and runs round the world. "Behold thy servant, ready for all. I desire not to live to myself, but to Thee! O that I could do it worthily and perfectly!" Ask of God this precious gift! If you would know the bliss and dignity of life never rest until all that hinders is removed, and from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot, in body, soul, and spirit, you are able to say, "Lo, I come to do Thy will!"

V.

Now then, at length I can come to you who are ordained this day. There is in your case a preparation and a readiness which is peculiar to your office. I must again forsake the figure. There is no mention here of vessels set apart from the other vessels by a vocation to a separated ministry. That is, there is no express mention; indirectly it appears in the context, where the apostle has false teachers in view; and we may quote his words, "ready unto every good work and word," with his own addition for your sake.

You are marked out as agents of the Redeemer's will. There are many workers whose service is very subordinate, whose usefulness is chiefly in removing obstructions from others' usefulness, or in quiet functions without a name, necessary but never again

to be heard of. There are multitudes of sanctified Christians whom the Lord knows but not man. It is our joy to be assured that He does know them, and never forgets them.

But there are some also whose every moment is exacted for the service of the temple: vessels of the sanctuary literally, or rather men who bear the vessels of the Lord. And the readiness expected from them is a very peculiar one, even as their offices and duties are special. Their honour is—though I may seem to contradict myself—to be sanctified in a double sense, and to be meet for the Master's use in services much more like His own. Their honour is to be in readiness for the highest functions of the Lord Himself. They must be quick to catch every accent of human need and alert to fly to the help of every man in distress. Their life must be ministration to souls. I could fain ask you to stand up, and lift your right hand, and say, "From this moment will I make it my one sole care to be useful to my Lord!"

But here we have one of these most special responsibilities. Antichrist has his vessels of gold and silver and wood and earth in his service, the abomination of desolation which he brings into the sanctuary. The faithful minister must be ready to this good work: that of counteracting heresy. While there is one common honour of sanctification, they will be counted worthy of double honour who have laboured in the teaching of the saints and in the suppression of error. On this special occasion, and while your ministerial vows are fresh upon you, I am led naturally to the note with which the apostle begins;

that the honour of our sanctified service is to be most jealously guarded by us as something that we gain and keep at a great cost. You see plainly that there is a sort of condition appended here. "If a man shall purge himself from these he shall be a vessel of honour." We must take a swift glance at the floor of the great house in order to understand this. There are false teachers, corrupters of the faith and morals of the church, propagating their pestilent errors. There are men doing what they think the work of God without His preparation; the preparation of their heart and the answer of their tongue is not from God. The house is never without these unsanctioned, unqualified practitioners in divine things. These men, the apostles of Antichrist, sent out "two and two" as here, and all who defile the temple, St. Paul calls vessels unto dishonour. As to the church, that is eternally safe; its firm foundation standeth. Its seal is twofold; the two inscriptions read together attest its stability, and one confirms the other. "The Lord knows His own and His own depart from iniquity." But that is not the final test; for what is this departing from iniquity but the purging ourselves from these; it is the same thing translated into the phraseology of the temple. The sifting process will be suddenly and perfectly despatched one day; the church will be sanctified for ever from all its defilement. But now each must separate himself! And from what kind of heretics? Their error might seem venial; they did not deny the God of heaven, or the Lord of earth. Only an ideal speculation that the resurrection was past!

But turning from this we note the peculiar phrase: "purify from these." The whole process of our sanctification to God and His service demands that we do our own part to the best of our ability. There is always something for us to do. Before the unction descends and hallows our vessels they must be emptied of their corruption and vanity; or at least they must be entirely withdrawn from the service of sin. In many places we are commanded to do what seems the function of the Spirit alone: "Cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit;" "Cleanse your hands, ye sinner; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded!" Not only must we leave the company of loose and corrupt Christians, but throw out of our vessel everything that defileth. Then, when we have done, or while we are doing, our part He will sanctify us to Himself. He will fill the waterpots with the wine, new wine that never came from human vintage, and fill them, if you please, to the brim. Then will He also add—then, certainly, but not till then—Draw out now for the Master's satisfaction and for the good of men! Brethren, there are too many vessels in the great house that are not sanctified, because they have not been emptied and cleansed of the dregs of other and baser service. The Master can neither fill them to the brim nor draw the good wine from them for the church's refreshment, because they are not purged from these things and fit for the touch of His hand.

VI.

It is time, however, to remind ourselves that all

this honour is the honour of the deepest humility. Whilst we are thinking of our good and acceptable service to our Master, the irrepressible question springs to our lips : " Can a man be profitable to his Maker ? " The reply we give must be a careful one. There are two opposite errors we have to guard against. Our text in its phrase and structure is meant to convey at once an inspiring and a humbling truth. On the one hand, the word honour must have its full force. St. Paul knew the difference between the dishonour of the reprobate and the honour of the saints. We must not undervalue the importance of Christian service, or the high dignity that is stamped upon human nature regenerate and sanctified. The Lord Himself is responsible. He has constrained us to glory by making us sharers of Himself and His Spirit. But it is still more important that we guard our lowliness. We may reject the figure and say that we are redeemed spirits who shall yield Him for ever the service of sanctified, free intelligence. But it is better to retain the figure and learn all its meaning. When the question was of God's honour the apostle called himself with lowly emphasis an " earthen vessel. " And we must strive to combine the loftiest sense of the honour of our service with the profoundest humility as servants. " I am only a vessel, carved out of nothing, filled naturally with sin and the emptiness of vanity, and having no good in my soul that was not poured in ! Only a vessel ! " It may be pressing the figure too far to suggest how insignificant the utensils are in the great house in comparison of what they hold and the persons whose pleasure or need they sub-

serve. But if we drop the figure, it is impossible to exaggerate the unspeakable lowliness that becomes us all in the great temple of God, from the least even to the greatest. What am I on the pavement of this great house, when looked down upon from above: and we are all beheld from above! What am I among so many multitudes of nobler and better servants who now and in ages past have filled these courts! And, with the Lord and Master of all in the midst, though invisible, where is all our boasting! Brethren, I have said much, been obliged to say much, of the high honour of Christ's service; that is the theme of the text. But we know nothing of true honour unless we are seeking with all our heart and mind and soul and strength to annihilate ourselves and give all the glory to Him who makes us what we are! Before honour is humility; humility is ever with honour; and humility and honour are one.

VII.

But there is a wider application of this. The apostle thinks of the doom of the vessels of dishonour, which will be also vessels of wrath. The whole process of sanctification in this life is our separation from these for ever. We may hope that we shall be worthy to be translated to the higher service of the upper house, and thus be vessels of eternal honour. I may paraphrase the text: "If a man be sanctified from all sin in time he shall be found prepared for every good work in eternity." We shall be as useful to the Master there as here; not merely the jewels of the Eternal King, the orna-

mental furniture of heaven, or stately vessels laid up like the remembrancers of the past laid up in Zerubbabel's temple. Let us drop the figure, however. This life is a preparation for other and nobler service, such as eternity alone shall reveal. As time is witnessing the development of germs long hidden in human nature, so eternity will develop in inconceivable future manifestations the faculties sanctified here in germ. What they will be we must die—yea, rise again, for the resurrection of only One is past already—to know. In virtue of our former profitableness we shall be profitable again to our Master, in all His future ministry above. Whatever the Son of God shall do in His own house above, be sure that we shall be His elect and chosen agents. Our prerogative shall never be taken from us. And that will be our final honour, received from Him, and reflected back on Him, to Whom be the glory for ever!