

If you wish to hang yourself, hang yourself upon a great tree; *i.e.* if you will make yourself dependent on an authority, choose for yourself a great one. The proverb, however, speaks conditionally; for is it not more advisable, is it not better, not to hang oneself at all? But enough now of gossip!

FRANZ DELITZSCH.

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

XIX.

THE NEW NATURE WROUGHT OUT IN NEW LIFE.

“Seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created him: where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all.”—COL. iii. 9-11 (Rev. Ver.).

THE limits of the former paper obliged us to break the close connexion between these words and the preceding. They adduce a reason for the moral exhortation going before, which at first sight may appear very illogical. “Put off these vices of the old nature because you have put off the old nature with its vices,” sounds like, Do a thing because you have done it. But the apparent looseness of reasoning covers very accurate thought which a little consideration brings to light, and introduces a really cogent argument for the conduct it recommends. Nor do the principles contained in the verses now under examination look backward only to enforce the exhortation to put aside these evils. They also look forward, and are taken as the basis of the following exhortation, to put on the white robes of Christ-likeness—which is coupled with this section by “therefore.”

I. The first thing to be observed is the change of the

spirit's dress, which is taken for granted as having occurred in the experience of all Christians.

We have already found the same idea presented under the form of death and resurrection. The "death" is equivalent to the "putting off of the old," and the "resurrection" to "the putting on of the new man." That figure of a change of dress to express a change of moral character is very obvious, and is frequent in Scripture. Many a psalm breathes prayers like, "Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness." Zechariah in vision saw the high-priestly representative of the nation standing before the Lord "in filthy garments," and heard the command to strip them off him, and clothe him in festival robes, in token that God had "caused his iniquity to pass from him." Christ spoke His parable of the man at the wedding feast without the wedding garment, and of the prodigal, who was stripped of his rags stained with the filth of the swine troughs, and clothed with the best robe. Paul in many places touches the same image, as in his ringing exhortation—clear and rousing in its notes like the morning bugle—to Christ's soldiers, to put off their night gear, "the works of darkness," and to brace on the armour of light, which sparkles in the morning sunrise. Every reformatory and orphanage yields an illustration of the image, where the first thing done is to strip off and burn the rags of the new comers, then to give them a bath and dress them in clean, sweet, new clothes. Most naturally dress is taken as the emblem of character, which is indeed the garb of the soul. Most naturally "habit" means both "costume" and "custom."

But here we have a strange paradox introduced, to the ruining of the rhetorical propriety of the figure. It is a new "man" that is put on. The Apostle does not mind hazarding a mixed metaphor, if it adds to the force of his speech, and he introduces this thought of the new *man*, though it somewhat jars, in order to impress on his readers

that what they have to put off and on is much more truly part of themselves than an article of dress is. The "old man" is the unregenerate self; the new man is, of course, the regenerate self, the new Christian moral nature personified. There is a deeper self which remains the same throughout the change, the true man, the centre of personality; which is, as it were, draped in the moral nature, and can put it off and on. I myself change myself. The figure is vehement, and, if you will, paradoxical, but it expresses accurately and forcibly at once the depth of the change that passes on him who becomes a Christian, and the identity of the person through all change. If I am a Christian, there has passed on me a change so thorough that it is in one aspect a death, and in another a resurrection; in one aspect a putting off not merely of some garb of action, but the old *man*, and in another a putting on not merely of some surface renovation, but of a new *man*—which is yet the same old self.

This entire change is taken for granted by Paul as having been realised in every Christian. It is here treated as having taken place at a certain point of time, namely when these Colossians began to put their trust in Jesus Christ, and as in profession of that trust, and a symbol of that change, were baptized.

Of course the contrast between the character before and after faith in Christ is strongest when, like the Christians at Colossæ, converts have been brought out of heathenism. With us, where some knowledge of Christianity is widely diffused, and its indirect influence has shaped the characters even of those who reject it, there is less room for a marked revolution in character and conduct. There will be many true saints who can point to no sudden change at their conversion; but have grown up, sometimes from childhood, under Christian influences, or who, if they have distinctly been conscious of a change, have passed through it as

gradually as night passes into day. Be it so. In many respects that will be the highest form of experience. Yet even such souls will be aware of a "new man" formed in them which is at variance with their own old selves, and will not escape the necessity of the conflict with their lower nature, the immolation and casting off of the unregenerate self. But there are also many people who have grown up without God or Christ, who must become Christians by the way of sudden conversion, if they are ever to become Christians at all.

Why should such sudden change be regarded as impossible? Is it not a matter of everyday experience that some long ignored principle may suddenly come, like a meteor into the atmosphere, into a man's mind and will, may catch fire as it travels, and if I may say so, explode and blow to pieces the solid habits of a lifetime? And why should not the truth concerning God's great love in Christ, which in too sad certainty is ignored by many, flame in upon blind eyes, and change the look of everything? The New Testament doctrine of conversion asserts that it may and does. It does not insist that everybody must become a Christian in the same fashion. Sometimes there will be a dividing line between the two states, as sharp as the boundary of adjoining kingdoms; sometimes the one will melt imperceptibly into the other. Sometimes the revolution will be as swift as that of the wheel of a locomotive, sometimes slow and silent as the movement of a planet in the sky. The main thing is that the face shall be turned to God whether suddenly or slowly.

But however brought about, this putting off the old sinful self, is a certain mark of a Christian man. It can be assumed as true universally, and appealed to as the basis of exhortations such as those of the context. Believing certain truths does not make a Christian. If there have been any reality in the act by which we have laid hold of

Christ as our Saviour, our whole being will be revolutionized; old things will have passed away—tastes, desires, ways of looking at the world, memories, habits, pricks of conscience and all cords that bound us to our God-forgotten past—and all things will have become new, because we ourselves move in the midst of them, new creatures with new love burning in our hearts and new motives changing all our lives, and a new aim shining before us, and a new hope illuminating the blackness beyond, and a new song on our lips, and a new power in our hands, and a new Friend by our sides.

This is a wholesome and most needful test for all who call themselves Christians, and who are often tempted to put too much stress on believing and feeling, and to forget the supreme importance of the moral change which true Christianity effects. Nor is it less needful to remember that this resolute casting off of the garment spotted by the flesh, and putting on of the new man, is a consequence of faith in Christ and is only possible as a consequence. Nothing else will strip the foul robes from a man. The moral change comes second, the union with Jesus Christ by faith must come first. To try to begin with the second stage, is like trying to begin building a house at the second story.

But there is a practical conclusion drawn from this taken-for-granted change. Our text is introduced by "seeing that;" and though some doubts may be raised as to that translation and the logical connexion of the paragraph, it appears on the whole most congruous with both the preceding and the following context, to retain it and to see here the reason for the exhortation which goes before—"Put off all these," and for that which follows—"Put on, therefore," the beautiful garment of love and compassion.

That great change, though taking place in the inmost nature whensoever a heart turns to Christ, needs to be wrought out in conduct, and to be wrought into character.

The leaven is in the dough, but to knead it thoroughly into the mass is a lifelong task, which is only accomplished by our own continually repeated efforts. The old garment clings to the limbs like the wet clothes of a half-drowned man, and it takes the work of a lifetime to get quite rid of it. The "old man" dies hard, and we have to repeat the sacrifice hour by hour. The new man has to be put on afresh day by day.

So the apparently illogical exhortation, Put off what you have put off, and put on what you have put on, is fully vindicated. It means, Be consistent with your deepest selves. Carry out in detail what you have already done in bulk. Cast out the enemy, already ejected from the central fortress, from the isolated positions which he still occupies. You *may* put off the old man, for he is put off already; and the confidence that he is will give you strength for the struggle that still remains. You *must* put off the old man, or there is still danger of its again wrapping its poisonous rags about your limbs.

II. We have here, the continuous growth of the new man, its aim and pattern.

The thought of the garment passes for the moment out of sight, and the Apostle enlarges on the greatness and glory of this new man, partly as a stimulus to obeying the exhortation, partly with allusion to some of the errors which he had been combating, and partly because his fervid spirit kindles at the mention of the mighty transformation.

The new man, says he, is "being renewed." This is one of the instances where minute accuracy in translation is not pedantic, but clear gain. When we say, with the Authorised Version, "is renewed," we speak of a completed act; when we say with the Revised Version, "is being renewed," we speak of a continuous process; and there can be no question that the latter is the true idea intended here.

The growth of the new man is constant, perhaps slow and difficult to discern, if the intervals of comparison be short. But like all habits and powers it steadily increases. On the other hand, a similar process works to opposite results in the "old man," which, as Paul says in the instructive parallel passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians (iv. 22), "waxeth corrupt, after the lusts of deceit." Both grow according to their inmost nature, the one steadily upwards; the other with accelerating speed downwards, till they are parted by the whole distance between the highest heaven and the lowest abyss. So mystic and awful is that solemn law of the persistent increase of the true ruling tendency of a man's nature, and its certain subjugation of the whole man to itself!

It is to be observed that this renewing is represented in this clause, as done *on* the new man, not by him. We have heard the exhortation to a continuous appropriation and increase of the new life by our own efforts. But there is a Divine side too, and the renewing is not merely effected by us, nor due only to the vital power of the new man, though growth is the sign of life there as everywhere, but is "the renewing by the Holy Ghost," whose touch quickens and whose indwelling renovates the inward man day by day. So there is hope for us in our striving, for He helps us; and the thought of that Divine renewal is not a pillow for indolence, but a spur to intenser energy, as Paul well knew when he wove the apparent paradox, "work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you."

The new man is being renewed "*unto* knowledge." An advanced knowledge of God and Divine realities is the result of the progressive renewal. Possibly there may be a passing reference to the pretensions of the false teachers, who had so much to say about a higher wisdom open to the initiated, and to be won by ceremonial and asceticism. Their claims, hints Paul, are baseless; their pretended

secrets a delusion ; their method of attaining them a snare. There is but one way to press into the depths of the knowledge of God—namely growth into His likeness. We understand one another best by sympathy. We know God only on condition of resemblance. “If the eye were not sunlike how could it see the sun?” says a great modern thinker ! “If thou beest this, thou seest this,” said an old mystic. Ever, as we grow in resemblance, shall we grow in knowledge, and ever as we grow in knowledge, shall we grow in resemblance. So in perpetual action and reaction of being and knowing, shall we draw nearer and nearer the unapproachable light, and receiving it full on our faces, shall be changed into the same image, as the moonbeams that touch the dark ocean transfigure its waves into silver radiance like their own. For all simple souls, bewildered by the strife of tongues and unapt for speculation, this is a message of gladness, that the way to know God is to be like Him, and the way to be like Him is to be renewed in the inward man, and the way to be renewed in the inward man is to put on Christ. They may wrangle and philosophize who will, but the path to God leads far away from all that. It may be trodden by a child’s foot, and the wayfaring man though a fool shall not err therein, for all that is needed is a heart that desires to know Him, and is made like Him by love. Half the secret lies in the great word which tells us that “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,” and knowledge will work likeness. The other half lies in the great word which tells us that “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,” and likeness will work a more perfect knowledge.

This new man is being renewed *after the image of Him that created him*. As in the first creation man was made in the image of God, so in the new creation. From the first moment in which the supernatural life is derived from Christ into the regenerated spirit, that new life is like its

source. It is kindred, therefore it is like, as all derived life is. The child's life is like the father's. But the image of God which the new man bears is more than that which was stamped on man in his creation. That was mainly, if not wholly, the reasonable soul, and the self-conscious personality, the broad distinctions which separate man from other animals. The image of God is often said to have been lost by sin, but Scripture seems rather to consider it as inseparable from humanity, even when stained by transgression. Men are still images of God, though darkened and "carved in ebony." The coin bears His image and superscription, though rusty and defaced. But the image of God, which the new man bears from the beginning in a rudimentary form, and which is continually imprinting itself more deeply upon him, has for its principal feature holiness. Though the majestic infinitudes of God can have no likeness in man, however exalted, and our feebleness cannot copy His strength, nor our poor blind knowledge, with its vast circumference of ignorance, be like His un-growing and unerring knowledge, we may be "holy as He is holy"; we may be "imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love as He hath loved us"; we may "*walk* in the light as He *is* in the light," with only the difference between His calm, eternal being, and our changeful and progressive motion therein; we may even "be perfect as our Father is perfect." This is the end of all our putting off the old and putting on the new. This is the ultimate purpose of God, in all His self-revelation. For this Christ has come and died and lives. For this the Spirit of God dwells in us. This is the immortal hope with which we may recreate and encourage our souls in our often weary struggles. Even our poor sinful natures may be transformed into that wondrous likeness. Coal and diamond are but varying forms of carbon, and the blackest lump dug from the deepest mine, may be transmuted by

the alchemy of that wondrous transforming union with Christ, into a brightness that shall flash back all the glory of the sunlight, and gleam for ever, set in one of His many crowns.

III. We have here finally the grand unity of this new creation.

We may reverse the order of the words as they stand here, and consider the last clause first, inasmuch as it is the reason for the doing away of all distinctions of race, or ceremony, or culture, or social condition.

“Christ is all.” Wherever that new nature is found, it lives by the life of Christ. He dwells in all who possess it. The Spirit of life in Christ is in them. His blood passes into their veins. The holy desires, the new tastes, the kindling love, the clearer vision, the gentleness and the strength, and whatsoever things beside are lovely and of good report, are all His—nay, we may say, are all Himself.

And, of course, all who are His are partakers of that common gift, and He is *in* all. There is no privileged class in Christ's Church, as these false teachers in Colossæ had taught. Against every attempt to limit the universality of the Gospel, whether it came from Jewish Pharisees or Eastern philosophers, Paul protested with his whole soul. He has done so already in this Epistle, and does so here in his emphatic assertion that Christ was not the possession of an aristocracy of “intelligence,” but belonged to every soul that trusted Him.

Necessarily, therefore, surface distinctions disappear. There is triumph in the roll of his rapid enumeration of these clefts that have so long kept brothers apart, and are now being filled up. He looks round on a world, the antagonisms of which we can but faintly imagine, and his eye kindles and his voice rises into vibrating emotion, as he thinks of the mighty magnetism that is drawing enemies towards the one centre in Christ. His catalogue here may

profitably be compared with his other in the Epistle to the Galatians (iii. 28). There he enumerates the three great distinctions which parted the old world—race (Jew and Greek), social condition (bond and free), and sex (male and female). These, he says, as separating powers, are done away in Christ. Here the list is modified, probably with reference to the errors in the Colossian Church.

“There cannot be Greek and Jew.” The cleft of national distinctions, which certainly never yawned more widely than between the Jew and every other people, ceases to separate, and the teachers who had been trying to perpetuate that distinction in the Church were blind to the very meaning of the Gospel. “Circumcision and uncircumcision” separated. Nothing makes deeper and bitterer antagonisms than differences in religious forms, and people who have not been born into them are usually the most passionate in adherence to them, so that cleft did not entirely coincide with the former. “Barbarian, Scythian,” is not an antithesis but a climax—the Scythians were looked upon as the most savage of barbarians. The Greek contempt for the outside races, which is reflected in this clause, was largely the contempt for a supposed lower stage of culture. As we have seen, Colossæ especially needed the lesson that differences in culture disappeared in the unity of Christ, for the heretical teachers attached great importance to the wisdom which they professed to teach. A cultivated class is always tempted to superciliousness, and a half cultivated class is even more so. There is abundance of that arrogance born of education among us to-day, and sorely needing and quite disbelieving the teaching that there are things which can make up for the want of what it possesses. It is in the interest of the humble virtues of the uneducated godly as well as of the nations called uncivilized that Christianity wars against that most heartless and ruinous of all prides, the pride of culture, by its pro-

clamation that in Christ, Barbarian, Scythian, and most polished thinker or scholar are one.

“Bondman, freedman” is again an antithesis. That gulf between master and slave was indeed wide and deep; too wide for compassion to cross, though not for hatred to stride over. The untold miseries of slavery in the old world are but dimly known; but it and war and the degradation of women made an infernal trio which crushed more than half the race into a hell of horrors. Perhaps Paul may have been the more ready to add this clause to his catalogue because his thoughts had been occupied with the relation of master and slave on the occasion of the letter to Philemon which was sent along with this to Colossæ.

Christianity waged no direct war against these social evils of antiquity, but it killed them much more effectually by breathing into the conscience of the world truths which made their continuance impossible. It girdled the tree, and left it to die—a much better and more thorough plan than dragging it out of the ground by main force. Revolution cures nothing. The only way to get rid of evils engrained in the constitution of society is to elevate and change the tone of thought and feeling, and then they die of atrophy. Change the climate, and you change the vegetation. Until you do, neither mowing nor uprooting will get rid of the foul growths.

So the Gospel does with all these lines of demarcation between men. What becomes of them? What becomes of the ridges of sand that separate pool from pool at low water? The tide comes up over them and makes them all one, gathered into the oneness of the great sea. They may remain, but they are seen no more, and the roll of the wave is not interrupted by them. The powers and blessings of the Christ pass freely from heart to heart, hindered by no barriers. Christ founds a deeper unity independent of all these superficial distinctions, for the very conception of

humanity is the product of Christianity, and the true foundation for the brotherhood of mankind is the revelation in Christ of the fatherhood of God. Christ is the brother of us all; His death is for every man, the blessing of His Gospel is offered to each; He will dwell in the heart of any. Therefore all distinctions, national, ceremonial, intellectual or social, fade into nothingness. Love is of no nation, and Christ is the property of no aristocracy in the Church. That great truth was a miraculous new thing in that old world, all torn apart by deep clefts like the grim cañons of American rivers. Strange it must have seemed to find slaves and their masters, Jew and Greek, sitting at one table and bound in fraternal ties. The world has not yet fully grasped that truth, and the Church has wofully failed in showing it to be a reality. But it arches above all our wars, and schisms, and wretched class distinctions, like a rainbow of promise beneath whose open portal the world shall one day pass into that bright land where the wandering peoples shall gather together in peace round the feet of Jesus, and there shall be one fold because there is one Shepherd.

ALEXANDER MACLAREN.

THE REVISED VERSION OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT.

THE SECOND BOOK OF THE KINGS.

iv. 10. Marg., *a little chamber with walls*. So the Genevan: cf. Coverdale (after Luther), *a little chamber of boordes*: "which" (as the Genevan note explains) "should be separate from the rest of the house, that he might more commodiously give him selfe to study and prayers."