PROSPERITY, not adversity, is the foe which the Church has most to fear at the present time. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church," is an old proverb which the ages have strongly verified. "The ease of the saints is the ruin of the Church," we may add. These prosperous times in which we live have dulled spirituality, and put Christians into a fatal sleep of worldly conformity. Mr. Spurgeon takes up a proverb saying of an old Puritan, and thus comments on it:

"The moon is never eclipsed but when it is at the full. Certainly God's people are then in most danger." When all goes well with them in house and field, in basket and in store, then should they look lest they be full and forget the Lord, and so become eclipsed. For the world to come between us and our Lord is very easy but very terrible. When all is apparently prosperous as to soul matters, and neither fear nor temptation comes in, then also should the heart look well to its bearings, lest at this very moment some evil should interpose between God and the soul, and darkness should be the fearful result.

"HAVING YOUR FEET SHOD with the preparation of the gospel of peace." When God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush, he said, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." The ground on which we come to him is no less holy, and the requirements of his law are no less stringent to-day; but, through the weakness of the flesh, man has been found unable to come to God; hence God has come out to him, while he was yet a great way off, and shod his feet with "the preparation of the gospel of peace." "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God!"

With this firm assurance we move on, not hoping or fearing at the end, but having it now; not striving to keep the peace with God, but having the peace of God which passeth understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. It is this assurance of an accomplished and present peace with God that gives us a firm footing and a steady tread. The Christian life is no trial trip to heaven now; it requires no retracting upon beaten footsteps; it is as sure of its goal as it is of its starting point. Feet shod with conjecture, tracking an experiment, running in the way of some unexplored perhaps — these can leave no track for sin-blindened and truant souls to walk in. God help us, if we know not whom we believe or whither we are going, to sit down and wait till we do, rather than be blind leaders of the blind! "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness," says Jesus, and we may add assuredly that such an one will not lead others into darkness.

AN UNBIASED GUIDE. — "Take the Bible for your compass," it will be answered. True advice! And yet, do you know that if a ship's pilot should happen to have considerable metal about his person, or if he should chance to carry a strong magnet in his pocket, it might so affect his compass as to turn the ship out of its course? We believe the Scripture is the guide, and the infallible guide, of the Christian; but we know that if a Christian has some private prejudice or personal prepossession, he may so deflect the compass of Holy Scripture as to make it lead him entirely out of the way. There are Christians who have an appetite for wine, and who are running straight upon the rocks where they will be wrecked in body, soul, and estate, and who are yet steering all the time by these two texts, — that at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, Jesus turned water into wine, and that Paul exhorted Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake. The Word is a "lamp unto our feet" indeed; but when we put a porcelain shade over that lamp, tinted and painted according to our own fancy, the consequence will be that we shall be walking in our own light instead of the light of God. And therefore we want to impress this lesson upon all,— that we must seek the aid of God's Spirit to interpret God's word. The Bible is God's word, and the Spirit is God's mind; and only God's mind can fully understand God's word. Hear Paul's strong language on this point: "For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man that is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."
I. THE CHRISTIAN'S DOWNWARD GROWTH.

"Rooted in Him."—Col. ii. 7.

All of strength and fruitfulness there is in us depends on the depth with which we strike down into the life and love of God. When the apostle summons us to the vast endeavor of measuring and grasping the love of God, he begins with the downward growth: "That being rooted and grounded in love, ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth." We can only reach loftily upward, and broadly outward, as we strike deeply downward. There are so many Christians who aspire without having any depth to support them in their aspirations, and as a consequence they lose their balance and topple over. We want higher life Christians, the more the better, if we can first have lower life Christians; that is, Christians who have struck deeply down into the love and knowledge of God. And if we can get the lower life, the higher life will take care of itself, without our professing it or striving for it. For as the height of a tree is generally in proportion to its depth, the outreaching of its branches according to the down-striking of its roots, so a Christian cannot fail of attaining to a lofty life, if only he can first attain to a lowly life. We can see at a glance how much depends on this being rooted in Christ.

First, our fruitfulness. A fruitfulness that continues in spite of surrounding drought and barrenness and death: how shall it be maintained? I recently witnessed the disastrous effects of long-continued drought in the country. The growing corn stood parched and carless in the field. The disappointed husbandman was obliged to cut up the stalks without gathering any grain into his garner. Ask the most observing the reason, and they answer that it is not simply the long absence of rain in summer, but also the superabundance of rain in spring; that on this account the roots of the corn and wheat ran along on the surface without striking down into the bottom soil. The plants, in other words, had such prosperous rains in spring, that they made no provision for a dry time by going down into the rich depths. Do you not remember what the Lord says about those Christians who have "no deepness of earth," so that when the sun is up they are scorched, and because "they have no root they wither away"? It is wellnigh impossible to get a Christian who is very greatly prosperous in a worldly way, to be very deeply grounded also in the life and knowledge of Christ. He has enough for comfort, and so lets his life run to surface affections and superficial interests, to the things which are seen and temporal instead of fixing them deeply in the things that are not seen and eternal; and consequently, when affliction comes, they begin to curl and wither and blanch. Ah, it is a hard saying, but who does not see how greatly we have reason to thank God for the trials and hardships and poverty of early life? These things compelled us to go down into the power of God, to burn in the darkness of solitary commun...
props can never take the place of roots. It is not
a shoulder-brace, but a standing-place to plant the
feet upon, that he needs who is sinking in deep
waters under his burden. Maxims are man's and
given to man. The roots of faith take hold on
the changeless strength of God. Hear Paul: 'We
glory in tribulation also; knowing that tribulation
worketh patience, and patience experience, and ex-
perience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, be-
because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart.'
Don't you see how it is — a heart striking its root
deeper and deeper, through trial and patience
and experience and hope, with every stroke of affliction,
till it reaches the core and centre of all the change-
less love of God? This is no poetry, but a literal
translation of human experience. It is faith exulting
in its rooted and immovable strength, and saying,—

"My lifted eye, without a tear
The gathering storm shall see;
My steadfast heart shall know no fear,—
That heart is stayed on Thee."

And so not only fruitfulness and strength come
from the rooting in Christ, but purity.

"Consider the lilies, how they grow." I have seen
them this summer lying on the surface of a pond,
in the midst of drifted weeds and decaying rubbish
and black mud, yet themselves as white as an angel's
wing. Never do I see the sight without thinking:
So ought a Christian to be in this world,—pure
amid surrounding impurity, white amid the stain
and defilement of an evil world, exhaling the fra-
grance of Christ amid the odors of corruption in
which he lives. But how can it be? "Consider
the lily, how it grows." It does not borrow its white-
ness from the waters or from the air or from the
sky. It is in the stream, but not of it. Down deep
into the rich and nourishing earth it strikes its roots,
and so grows on the nutrient of the hidden soil.
There is nothing in this world that can supply you
with a stainless purity. But if you can reach down
into God, and feed altogether on him, you may pre-
sent the beautiful spectacle,—a life white amid all
the stains and defilements of an evil world, pure
amid all the corruption of an evil and adulterous
generation. And remember that God wants, above
everything else, that you should be pure and holy.
"The God of peace sanctify you wholly. I pray
God your whole soul and body and spirit be pres-
served blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus
Christ." And in order to this, you must strike your
roots more and more deeply into God. This is
what God is seeking to accomplish for you. Are
you astonished at the sudden blast of affliction which
beats upon you? Be not dismayed. This is sent to
fix the roots of your confidence and trust more deep-
ly in God. The sharp thrust of disappointment and
trial, does this amaze you? It is God's spade, by
which he is digging about you, and upturning the
soil of your earthiness, that your hope and reliance
may be grounded more thoroughly on him. God
wants fruit upon us above all else, and by this dis-

cipline he is grounding us in him, that we may bring
forth more fruit.

II. THE CHRISTIAN'S UPWARD GROWTH.

"Rooted and built up in Him." — Col. ii. 7.

Not built up as the house is built, with materials
gathered here and there, and wrought together
from without. The tree builds itself from the heart,
and so does the Christian. The life of God which
we appropriate through faith is little by little taken
into the heart, and from the heart fashioned into
the solid substance of character and conduct and
example and service. Here is the strong contrast
between the religion of Christ and all other reli-
gions,—that it is developed from the heart outward.
Morality seeks to overlay men with good works.
Its office is to get them to take on goodness in suc-
cessive layers, to absorb religion by contact with
good men and good books. Our gospel builds
men up from within, from the root and principle
of the divine life, which they get when they are
grafted into Christ.

How strongly the apostle brings out the contrast
between these two systems in the Epistle to the
Ephesians! You talk about being saved by works,
he would say: "Not of works, lest any man should
boast. For we are his workmanship, created in
Christ Jesus unto good works." What a difference
between working for God, and being the workman-
ship of God! What a difference between working
to be new created in Christ Jesus, and being "cre-
ated in Christ Jesus unto good works"! In one
case we work for life; in the other case we work
from life. And this is just the distinction between
Moses and Christ. Moses said, "This do and thou
shalt live." Christ says, "Live, and thou shalt do this."
Now this is the kind of upbuilding which the apostle is here urging,—"built up in him." Not built up like the house, with mortice-joints, in which part fits part without life or communion; but built up from the root, every part developed out of the central source of life. Hear how grandly the apostle describes it: "That ye may grow up in all things into Him which is the head, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Here is organic growth as against mechanical, vital increase as against artificial. It is a kind of growth in which we are not workers, but workmanship. Ask the branches of the vine how they succeed in presenting such a rich and luxurious fruitage, how they formed the grapes so symmetrically, how they tinted them so softly, how they scented them so fragrantly; and if they could answer, they would say, "Not by our work, for we are his workmanship. We simply abide in the vine, and all the growth and development took care of itself." And, Christian brethren, if you are growing up in all things into Christ, you may not be sensible of the process, and least of all conscious of superintending that process. The increase will be so quiet and unnoticed that you may not be able to note a single stage of it clearly and consciously; but, if you abide in Christ, this growth will go on night and day, so that next year you will see plainly that you are taller than last year. You can mark the stages that are past as clearly as the woodman can count the rings on the trunk of the tree, and so tell how much it enlarged each year.

And so let me strongly urge upon you, under this head, the duty of habitual aspiration after the highest attainments in grace. I remember that God in the prophet Ezekiel speaks of his people as "a spreading vine of low stature." Alas, that is an apt symbol of too many of us,—content to creep upon the ground when we ought to be mounting up day by day into the sunlight and warmth of his presence! Jesus Christ has come down to earth and gone back to heaven for this very purpose, that, fastening our own creeping affections upon self, he might lift them up.

He stands between heaven and earth as a divine trellis, on which our thoughts and aspirations and affections may climb higher and higher till they fasten themselves on the throne where he is. How constant the exhortation on this point! "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth." If we would do this, if we would live a heavenly life on earth, we should in turn lift up others by furnishing a support for their affections and aspirations. "It is because there are so few high saints in the world," some one has said, "that there are so many low sinners."

Let me, then, affectionately urge upon you, my brethren, that you aim for the highest attainments in grace. The nearer you get to God, the greater the blessing you will be to the world. I am often struck with the way in which natural things—animate and inanimate—rebuke us on this point. A gentleman recently described an experiment which he made on the growth of plants. He placed a vessel of water near a squash-vine which was suffering from the drought, and left it over night. In the morning he found that the vine had advanced several inches towards the water. He changed the vessel to another portion, and next morning, lo! the vine had bent out of its course, and moved perceptibly in that direction. He moved it once more, and next day the vine was found turned once more to find the fountain. Then he let the vessel remain in one position, and in two or three days he returned, and found that the vine had climbed over the sides of the vessel, and was dipping its leaves in the water, and drinking from it. Oh, my soul, art thou so athirst after God that thou wilt turn away from every human path to find him? In a dry and thirsty land where no water is, dost thou reach out to him in eager longing, saying, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him?" Instead of this, hear the Lord's awful rebuke: "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

Yet all our springs are in God; and if we are to rise to any higher planes of devotion and Christ likeness above that of the world, it will be by reach
ing up to God and drinking at the fountain of his eternal life. We evangelical Christians are accustomed to tell men that they cannot be saved by the example of Christ. We repeat it. They cannot be. But they can be sanctified by that example. If you ask, What shall I do to be saved? we point you to Christ on the cross, and say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” If you ask, What shall I do to grow in grace? we point you to Jesus on the throne, and say to you, Seek to come unto the perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the perfect man.

It has been said that no man can gaze on the marble statue of the Apollo Belvedere without standing more erect, and dilating his form in unconscious imitation. If the perfect physical form produces such impression, how much more the man who is perfect in spiritual stature and in moral greatness, — the man Jesus Christ! Consider this apostle and high priest of our profession. Consider him, and, as you gaze, God grant that you may every day be rising into the height and grace of his stature!  

III. THE CHRISTIAN’S OUTWARD GROWTH.

“Abounding therein with thanksgiving.” — Col. ii. 7.

This is the branching out into all service and fruitfulness and praise.

Now, the one significant fact concerning the gifts of God to us is their exceeding abundance. Do we hear of the grace of God which bringeth salvation? We are told that “the grace of God was exceeding abundant.” Is it the mercy of God that is set before us? The saying is, “God who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.” Is the Holy Spirit spoken of? It is “the Holy Ghost which he shed forth abundantly.” Is pardon promised? It is “our God who will abundantly pardon.” Is a heavenly reward set before us? It is, “So shall an entrance be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of God.” And, as though to sum up all, the apostle writes of him who is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

Now, what is the abundance bestowed for, except that it may flow out in abounding blessing to others? There is a most unworthy and demeaning notion in vogue, that the great end of our faith and obedience is to get our own souls saved. This is not the end. It is rather the beginning which looks towards the great end of fitting us to save other souls. Personal salvation is not the goal, but the starting-point, of the Christian life; and the believer who always closes his prayer with, “and save us at last in thy kingdom,” ought to be reminded that he is putting the roots of his tree in the air, instead of planting them in the ground. He ought to say, “Save me now, and crown me with much fruit at last.”

See how this twofold life is perpetually contemplated in the Scriptures. “I am come, that they might have life,” says Jesus, “and that they might have it more abundantly,” — life for personal salvation, and abundant life for the blessing and enrichment of others. Observe the same double blessing in the water of life of which Jesus discourses at the well. “Whosoever drinketh this water shall never thirst; and the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up,” — salvation and service, life flowing into us to quench our thirst, and flowing out from us to quench the thirst of others. And the Apostle Peter sums it all up when he says, concerning the gifts and graces of the gospel, “If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of God.”

How vital a matter, therefore, is this of Christian fruitfulness! “I am the vine, and ye are the branches.” Unless fruit is found on the branches, it can be found nowhere. The roots cannot bear fruit; the trunk cannot bear fruit. This is the solitary and peculiar function of the branches; and no matter how wide those branches stretch in benefaction and shelter over men, unless they hold up abundant fruit to God, in token of thanksgiving for the life they have received from him, what shall it profit? “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” We are saved by our roots of faith, which strike down into him. We praise and honor God by the branches of our faith, which lift up to God the service and thanksgiving and fruit of a consecrated life.

How, now, shall we attain this blessed life which I have sketched? There is one word of the Master which contains the whole comprehensive secret,
"Abide in me." If we be rooted in Christ, in continual and unbroken fellowship, all else will follow,—growth, symmetrical development, and prolific fruitfulness. Therefore I say our Lord has compressed the whole blessed secret in one word, "Abide in me."

But you will say, "Tell us the secret of this secret. Tell us, plainly and practically, how we may abide in Christ." Before all else, I place the diligent, humble, prayerful study of the Word of God. This Bible is not God, but I aver that it contains more of God than is found within any other limits on earth. "God is a spirit," and Jesus says, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." "God is a spirit," and the apostle writes, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," or, all Scripture is God-inspired. As the life of nature is in the soil, to be sucked up by every root and filament and bulb which comes into contact with it, so the life of God is in every word and letter and sentence of this Holy Writ. And if we come into living contact with it, we shall be perpetually drinking it in, and living it out.

And, to be vital, such contact must be immediate and direct. I have sometimes thought that our danger is, that, instead of being meekly rooted in the Word, we may overshadow the Word by the spreading foliage of our wisdom and philosophy and tradition and exegesis, that so it shall be rendered unnostrous to our souls. Michael Angelo wore a lamp on his head, that he might not throw his shadow upon the picture which he was painting. Let us bear the lamp of the Word always before us, to aid our communion with the Word, lest the shadow of our learning, or the shadow of our tradition, or the shadow of our unbelief, be thrown upon its face. "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." The word in the heart, and the heart in the Word,—Christ in us, and we in Christ,—such is the secret of communion, of growth, and of fruitfulness. May the Spirit teach us to know this great secret, and to live it gloriously out in our lives!

PRE-MILLENNIALISM AND MISSIONS.

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BY THE EDITOR.

In a report of the Northfield Conference, held last August under the direction of Mr. Moody, a prominent religious newspaper said in its summing up: "We are extremely sorry, however, to see the growing tendency among evangelists and active Christian workers to adopt pre-millennialism,—a scheme of doctrine dishonoring to the third person of the Trinity, and tending to cut the nerve of all missionary and evangelistic enterprises." In a recent letter in "The Independent," it is reported that the junior secretary of the American Board had just read an essay before an association of Congregational ministers, deprecating the spread of pre-millennial ideas, on the ground of the hindrance which they present to missionary operations.

Certainly these are very serious charges, which if true ought to lead the adherents of the doctrine in question to an immediate revision of their opinions, and if false ought to be distinctly shown to be so. We accept the challenge which the latter alternative presents.

Pre-millennialism holds, that, in the New Testament, the second coming of Christ is made the great hope of the Church and principal motive to Christian consecration and endeavor; that this second advent will be followed by the first resurrection, the destruction of Antichrist, the conversion of Israel, the ushering in of the millennium, and the establishment of the reign of Christ over the whole earth; that the purpose of preaching the gospel in the present dispensation of the Spirit, as set forth in Scripture, is the gathering out of an elect body called the Church ("God did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name," Acts xx. 14); that, while the Scriptures predict the universal proclamation of the Word before the return of Christ ("And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached

1 "The second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is set before us as the supreme hope of the Church, that great and glorious event towards which all is leading up or for which all is preparing. The Church is at present in a bereaved condition; the children of the bride-chamber mourn because the bridegroom is not with them. Through the long hours of the weary vigil the bride of Christ waits for the bridal morning, the moment when Christ himself, her heavenly bridegroom, who loved her and gave himself for her, shall come once more to claim his own, and to take her to himself forever. And to this grand and supreme event the eyes of all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ will ever be turned."—Rev. W. H. Atkins.]