THE SUFFERER'S COUCH.

Those members of the body which seem to be mere feeble are necessary.—1 Cor. 12: 22.

"My work is done—I lay me down to die;
Weary and travel-worn, I long for rest;
Speak but the word, dear Master, and I fly,
A dove let to use, to nestle on thy breast."
"Not yet, my child, a little longer wait,
I need thy prayerful watch at glory's gate."

"But, Lord, I have no strength to watch or pray;
My spirit is benumbed, and dim my sight;
And I shall grieve thy wakeful love, as they
Who in the garden slept that Paschal night."
"My child, I need thy weakness, hour by hour,
To prove in me, thy strengthlessness is power."

"Not for myself alone I urge the suit;
But loved ones lose for me life's pruitless bloom
And tender, patient, uncomplaining, mute,
Wear out their joyance in my darkened room."
"Enough, my child; I need their love to thee;
Around thy couch, they minister to me."

"It is enough, dear Master—yea—Amen;
I will not breathe one murmur of reply.
Only fulfill thy work in me, and then
Call me, and bid me answer, Here am I."
"My child, the sign I waited for is given;
Thy work is done; I need thee now in heaven."

—*Bickersteth.*

Visitor Pulpit.

ON LAYING FOUNDATIONS.

A SERMON BY C. H. SPURGEON.

"And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great." Luke 6: 46-49.

These parables describe two classes of hearers; but they say nothing of those who are not hearers. Their position and prospects we must infer from what is said of hearers. All hearers are builders of houses for their souls; and they are each one doing something to set up a spiritual habitation. Some of these go a considerable distance in this house-building, and even crown the structure by publicly confessing Christ. They say unto him, "Lord, Lord;" they meet with his followers, and join with them in reverence to the Master's name; but they do not obey the Lord; they hear him; but they fail to do the things which he says. Hence they are mistaken builders, who fail in the foundation, and make nothing sure except that their house will come down about their ears. Others there are, and we trust they will be found to be many among us, who are building rightly, building for eternity; constructing a dwelling-place with basis of rock, and walls of well-built stone, of which the Lord Christ is both foundation and corner stone.

I. Our first subject will be.

A COMMON TEMPTATION WITH SPIRITUAL BUILDERS.

A common temptation with hearers of the Word, according to the two parables before us, is to neglect foundation-work, to get hurriedly over the first part of the business, and run up the building quickly. They are tempted to assume that all is done which is said to be done; to take it for granted that all is right which is hoped to be right; and then to go on piling up the walls as rapidly as possible. The great temptation, I say, with young beginners in religious life, is to scamp the foundation, and treat those things lightly, which are of the first importance. The same temptation comes to us throughout the whole of life, but to young beginners it is especially perilous; Satan would have them neglect the fundamental principles upon which their future hope and character are to rest, so that in a future trying hour, from want of a solid foundation, they may yield to evil, and lose the whole of their life-building.

This temptation is all the more dangerous, first, because these young beginners have no experience. Even the most experienced child of God is often deceived; how much more the pilgrim who has but just entered the wicket-gate! The tried saint sometimes mistakes that for a virtue which is only a guilded fault, and he fancies that to be genuine which is mere counterfeit; how, then, without any experience whatever, can the mere babe in grace escape deception unless he be graciously preserved? Newly awakened, and rendered serious, earnest hearts get to work in the divine life with much hurry, seizing upon that which first comes to hand, building in heedless haste, without due care and examination. Something must be done, and they do it without asking whether it is according to the teaching of the Lord. They call Jesus "Lord;" but they do what others say rather than what Jesus says. Satan is sure to be at hand at such times that he may lead the young convert to lay in place of gospel repentance, a repentance that needs to be repented of, and instead of the faith of God's elect, a proud presumption or an idle dream. The common temptation is, instead of really repenting, to talk about repentance: instead of heartily believing, to say, "I believe," without believing; instead of truly loving, to talk of love, without loving; instead of coming to Christ, to speak about coming to Christ, and to profess to come to Christ, and yet not to come at all.

This kind of building without foundation has this advantage to back up the temptation,—it enables a man to run up a religion very quickly. He makes a splendid progress. While the anxious heart is searching after truth in the inward parts, and begging to be renewed by grace, his exulting friend is as happy as he can be in a peace which he has suddenly obtained without question or examination. This rapid grower never asks, "Has my religion changed my conduct? Is my faith attended by a new nature? Does the Spirit of God dwell in me? Am I really what I profess to be, or am I but a bastard professor after all? No; he puts aside all inquiry as a temptation of the devil. He takes every good thing for granted, and votes that all is gold which glitters. See how fast he goes! The fog is dense, but he steams through it, heedless of danger! He has joined the church; he has commenced work for God; he is boasting of his own attainments; he hints that he is perfect. But is this mushroom building safe? Will it pass muster in the last great survery? Will it stand should a tempest happen? The chimney shaft is tall, but is it safe? Ay, there's the rub. This is the question which makes an end of much of the boasting which is all around us. It is better to tremble at God's Word than boldly to presume. It is better to be fearful, lest after all we may be castaways, than to harden one's forehead with a vain confidence. When a man travels upon a wrong road, the faster he runs the further he will go astray. Remember the advice to hasten slowly, and the old proverb which saith, "The more haste the less speed." If you build quickly because you build without a foundation, your time and toil are thrown away.

In these days we do not meet with many christians who err by dealing too severely with converts; the shot strikes the other target. Our forefathers were possibly too suspicious and jealous; but now-a-days we nearly all err in the opposite direction. Let us beware lest we cry, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace. I warn you against any peace except that which comes from doing that which Jesus commands.

II. A WISE PRECAUTION WHICH SAFE BUILDERS NEVER FORGET.

They dig deep, and never rest till they get a good substantial foundation. They are glad to get to the bottom of all the loose earth, and to build on the rock. Let me commend this wise precaution to all of you.

Follow the text, and learn to see to your sincerity. The Lord Jesus says, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Be afraid to say a word more than you feel. Never permit yourself to speak as if you had an experience of which you have only read. Let not your outward worship go a step beyond the inward emotion of your soul. If Christ be truly your Lord, you will obey Him; if He be not your Lord do not call Him so. It is a great point in all your religious thoughts, beliefs, words and acts, to have the heart moving in all. Be true! Be true! If truth will carry you no further than despair, better that you stop in despair than gain a hope by a lie. Do not live on fiction, profession, presumption. Eat ye that which is good, and feed only upon the truth. Remember that when you build with the wood, hay, and stubble of mere notion, you are only gathering materials for your own funeral pile in that day when the fire shall devour all lovers and makers of a lie. Be true as steel!

The next thing is thoroughness. The wise builder digged deep. You cannot do a right thing too well. Dig deep if you do dig a foundation. If it be repentance, let it be an intensely earnest repentance, including a vehement hatred of every form and sin. If you make confession before God, confess with your very soul, and not with your lips only; lay bare your spirit before the glance of Diety. If it be faith that you talk of, believe right up to the hilt. Do not go in for that kind of skeptical believing which is so common now-a-days. If thou believest, believe; if thou repentest, repent. In the purging of the soul there is nothing like sweeping out every particle of the old leaven of falsehood; and in bringing in the good things into the heart, there is nothing like bringing in everything that Christ prescribes, that of His fullness we may receive, not only grace, but grace for grace, grace upon grace, all the grace that is needed. Be down-right in everything. The wise builder dug through the earth, and continued his digging till he reached the rock; and then he dug into the rock, and struck out a trench wherein he might lay his foundation; for he could not be content unless he made sure and thorough work of it. Sincerity and thoroughness are fine building materials.

Next to that add self-renunciation; for that is in the parable. When a man digs a deep foundation he has much earth to throw out. So he that builds for eternity has a great deal to get rid of. Self-trust must go at the beginning: love of sin must follow; worldliness, pride, self-seeking, all sorts of iniquity,—these must be cast aside.

Then must come solid principle. The man who is determined that if he does build he will build securely, digs down to the rock. He says, "I believe in God, He is my helper. I believe in Christ Jesus, and on His atoning sacrifice and living intercession I build my eternal hopes. I also build on the doctrine of grace, for the Lord hath said it, "By grace are ye saved, through faith. I build on Scripture; nothing but the warrant of the world will do for me." What God has said is a rock; what man teaches is mere shifting sand. What a blessed thing it is to get down to the eternal principles of divine verity! You that pick up your religion from your mothers and fathers; you that follow it because it happened to be in the family! what are you worth in the day of trouble?

The man in the second parable did not build as he should; what may I say of him? I will say three words. First, he was a man who had nothing out of sight; you could see all his house when you looked at it. If you can see all a man's religion at a glance, he has no religion worth having. Godliness lies most in secret prayer, private devotion, and inward grace. The wise builder had the most costly part of his house buried in the ground; but the other man showed all that he had above ground. He is a poor tradesman who has no stock but that which he puts into the window. He will not last long who has no capital. He can not long stand who has no backbone within. Beware of a religion of show.

Next, this man had nothing to hold to. He built a house, but it stood upon the loose soil, he easily dug into that, and stuck up his house; but his walls had no hold-fast. Beware of a religion without hold-fasts. But if I get a grip upon a doctrine, they call me a bigot. Let them do so, Bigotry is a hateful thing, and yet that which is now abused as bigotry is a great virtue, and greatly needed in these frivolous times. I have been inclined lately to start a new denomination, and call it "the church of the Bigoted." Everbody is getting to be so oily, so plastic, so untrue, that we need a race of hard shells to teach us how to believe. Those old-fashioned people who in former ages believed something, and thought the opposite of it to be false, were truer folk than the present time-servers. The teachers of doubt are very doubtful teachers. A man must have something to hold to, or he will neither bless himself nor others.

III. A SET OF ARGUMENTS, URGING US TO TAKE CARE OF THE FOUNDATION.

I will glance over these arguments, wishing much that I had time to enforce them. The first is this. We ought to build with a good foundation at the beginning, because otherwise we shall not build well in any other part of the house. Bad work in the foundation influences all the rest of the courses. In the Revised Version at the end of the forty-eighth verse instead of, "For it was founded upon a rock," we read, "Because it had been well builded." The house was built well at the bottom, and that led the workman to put in good work all the way up, so that all through "it had been well builded." The other man built badly underground, and did the same up to the roof. When you get into the habit of slovenly work in secret, the tendency is to be slovenly in public too. If the underground part of our religion is not firmly laid upon Christ, then in the upper part there will be rotten work, half-baked bricks, mud instead of mortar, and a general scamping of everything. When a great Grecian artist was fashioning an image for the temple, he was diligently carving the back part of the goddess, and one said to him, "You need not finish that part of the statue, because it is to be built into the wall." He replied, "The gods can see in the wall." He had a right idea of what is due to God. That part of my religion which no man can see should be as perfect as if it were to be observed by all. The day shall declare it. When Christ shall come, everything shall be made known, and published before the universe. Therefore see to it that it be fit to be thus made known.

The next argument is, build deep, because of the ruin which will result from a bad foundation. The foolish builder's house was without a foundation. Notice that word, "without a foundation." Write down the expression, and see whether they apply to you or not. What happened to this house without a foundation? The stream beat vehemently on it. The river's bed had long been dry but suddenly it was flooded, and the torrent rolled with tremendous power. Perhaps it was persecution, perhaps it was prosperity, perhaps it was trouble, perhaps it was temptation, perhaps it was prevalent skepticism, perhaps it was death; but, anyhow, the flood beat vehemently upon that house; and now we read the next word,—"And immediately it fell." It did not stand a prolonged assault, it was captured at once. "Immediately it fell." What! in a minute, all that fair profession gone? "Immediately it fell." Then it is added, "And the ruin of that house was great." The house came down with a crash, and it was man's all. The man was an eminent professor, and hence his ruin was all the more notable. It was a great fall because it could never be built up again. When a man dies a hypocrite, certainly there is no hope of restitution for him. O men, if you lose a battle, you may fight again and win another; if you fail in business, you may start again in trade and realize a fortune; but if you lose your souls, the loss is irretrievable. Once lost, lost forever. There will be no second opportunity. Do not deceive yourselves about that. Therefore dig deep, and lay every stone most firmly upon the foundation of rock.

THE AVERAGE MINISTER.

There is no class of men for whom I have so much respect and affection as for average ministers of the Gospel. They are not sustained in their labors by popular applause and newspaper puffs, but by the love of Christ and the souls of men. They are patient, persevering, self-denying.—They endure as seeing Him who is invisible. They lay the foundations for others to build upon. They do not estimate themselves at so many thousands a year, but are willing to work even though poorly paid and not highly esteemed of men, knowing that their reward is in Heaven. It is these average ministers who have extended the Church over this broad continent and established missionary stations around the world. Let us honor them as God does. Let us not provoke Him to anger by treating them with indifference or contempt. And if we ourselves are but average ministers in the estimation of the world, let us rejoice that God has counted us worthy; for to be his ambassador in some frontier settlement is nobler than to wear the crown of an Emperor.—*Dr. Rabb.*

STRONG IN HIM.

BY A. D. WALKER.

The great Dr. McLeod was once called in to see a sick and dying boy. "My little fellow," said the doctor, how do you feel?

"Oh, I am strong in him," replied the child.

And the great man kneeled down and thanked God that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings he had perfected strength.

Blessed indeed is it to be strong in the Lord when death draws near; but we equally need his strength in the activities of life. We may well sing, "I need thee every hour," for truly we can not take a step without God-given strength.

Said one Christian gentleman who resided in one of the cities near New York, and who had his place of business in the latter, "I never go over the ferry in the morning without asking God to help me to control my temper."

He felt that a quick temper was his besetting sin, and that he had no strength of his own to control it.

We all have our besetting sins; and oh, how much divine strength is needed to overcome these. They are often as thorns in our flesh; and yet, in our hours of discouragement, we feel that we have no power to overcome them. But God said unto Gideon, "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites."

And though these tempers and other sins rise up like the host of Midian and confront us, we need not be discouraged, for if we go in the same strength as did Gideon, we shall overcome. God's strength was his might.

In all the little duties that often appear so trifling and yet so annoying, we need God's strength. To do, then, well, is as much walking with God as is praying and reading the Word, if they are done with a desire to please God.

And we often find it harder to do right in little things than in great. And why? Because in the hour of, to us, some great event, we feel our need and weakness, and look up to our God as a refuge and strength; but in our ordinary life and duties we are prone to forget our need, and then we fall.

Let us seek the Lord and his strength for the duties, the little duties of to-day, and then at the hour of death we shall, like the dying boy, be ready to exclaim, "I am strong in him."

Let us ask for this strength, study the Word to gain or increase in it, and let us especially beg that we may not be depending on self, that worse than useless dependence.

"Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."—*American Messenger.*

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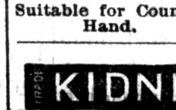

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