

their eternal destiny. We speak at present of the uppermost strata of human society, whether birth, wealth, energy, intellect or learning may have been the more immediate cause of their elevation. We speak of those who stand highest among men, without pausing to inquire what has raised them. Now, while it is true of all this upper class that they need the salvation of Christ, and get the offer of it on precisely the same terms as those who stand on a lower platform, it is also true that, over and above the temptations common to all men, some temptations peculiar to themselves stand in the way of the highest, increasing the difficulty of accepting the Gospel. They are the wisest missionaries, and the best successors of the apostles who own this peculiarity, and make allowance for it in their methods.

One of our Lord's sayings in reference to the species of aristocracy which is constituted by wealth may throw light across our whole theme: "Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (Matt. xix. 23, 24.) Of this wonderful word it is generally one side, and that the harsher, that men take to themselves or present to their neighbours. Would that we could enter into the tender spirit of the Lord Jesus when he uttered this pungent warning! Assuming that the needle's eye represents the low, narrow door through the wall of a fortified city by the side of the principal gate, for use by night or in time of war when the great entrance must be shut,—you have here a passage from danger into safety, not impracticable in its own nature, but impracticable in point of fact to a camel, because of its own huge bulk. The foe is pursuing, the fortress is near, a gate stands open, but this low door-way through the wall cannot be enlarged, and, if the fugitive who seeks an entrance carry a high head by nature, how shall he be saved? Thus the elevation of the highest class makes their entrance into Christ's kingdom more difficult. Of this difficulty Jesus speaks with tenderness. Let all His servants in this matter follow His steps. "Most noble Festus," said the preacher, observing that the habitual dignity of the Roman and the official hauteur of the governor were holding high the head of a poor sinful creature, and hindering him from bowing before the Cross of Christ;—Most noble Festus, respectfully and politely said that fervent, eloquent Jew, doing what in him lay to gratify the great man's feelings, and so get the lost man saved.

From the style of the Apostle's address at this critical moment two lessons flow; or rather in it one lesson shines, sending out its light—beams in two opposite directions, and teaching wisdom to two opposite classes of men.

For ardent Christians of every rank, and especially Christians of humble station and moderate attainments, there lies a lesson here. If you are true disciples, none will dispute the patent of your nobility. If you are born again, you are high-born, how long soever your place

may be in the registers of earth. But that is not the point in hand at present. Beware of presuming upon your place and your privilege. Be conscious of your defects, and meek in your deportment. Be all things to all men, that you may gain some. In particular beware of throwing a stumbling-block in the way of the noble, the rich, or the refined by any species of rudeness. Take care lest you mistake vulgarity for faithfulness, and your own ignorance for the simplicity that is in Christ. You have been reconciled unto God through the death of His Son; you have joy and peace in believing: well; there are some men near you who have not yet submitted to the Gospel. They stand high, some on wealth, some on birth, some on intellect: in these matters they stand higher than ever you stood. That elevation makes it harder for them to bow down and go in by the strait gate. Had you stood on an equal height, perhaps you would not have been within the gate to-day. Be tender, careful, watchful, prayerful regarding them. What if they should turn away from Christ because of some rude incrustations of character that they saw in you, and mistook for veritable features of the Gospel which you profess! Think of their peculiar difficulties; do not make them greater; take some of them out of the way if you can. He that winneth souls is wise; ay, and he must be wise that would win souls.

For the "most noble" of every class there lies a lesson here. We frankly own that there are nobles among men. We address the chiefs of our tribe as Paul addressed the Roman governor of Judæa, and in good faith we give to each the title of respect which is his due. Sirs, you cherish a high sense of honour, and hold in abomination every mean sneaking thing wherever it may appear; you have by education and habit cultivated a refined taste, and everything rude grates upon your nerves, like rusty iron rubbing on your flesh. You have exercised your understanding, and cannot pay any deference to mere assertion, when it is backed by no proof. These attributes you possess and exercise. We appreciate their worth, and extend to you our cordial sympathy in regard to them. Well, and what follows? Great and good though these attainments be, what is a man profited if he gain them all, and a whole world besides, if he lose his own soul? These are very good, but "one thing is needful"; and it is by sitting like Mary at the feet of Jesus that any man can attain that needful thing. Strive to enter by the strait gate into the kingdom, for your attainments, though in themselves good, may be so worn that they shall greatly increase the difficulty of the process.

Finally beware of allowing the rudeness and other defects of those who are or seem to be Christians to scare you away from Christ. It may be true that some are hypocrites altogether, and some who are really Christians retain many repulsive faults; but, oh, my most noble brother, it will be no consolation to you, if you are not forgiven, renewed and saved, that you are able to convict professing Christians of many faults. You are not asked to believe in Christians but to believe in Christ.