

diligent preparation for them. It is the part of christian wisdom to foresee by faith the certainty of their approach, and take shelter in the refuge which the word of God reveals. They may not, or they may, be calamities to overwhelm us, according as we use or do not use the precautions divinely prescribed and placed within our reach, to meet them. When death and judgment come we will fall amid surrounding ruin, or rise to yet greater security, just as we improve or misimprove the day of mercy and salvation. The wise builder will escape the storm of fiery indignation which will overtake the wicked; and the Lord, with the breath of his nostrils, will scatter the foolish and all their devices, as chaff is driven before the wind.

But now we come to the one great distinction between the conduct of the wise man and that of the foolish. The exposure to wind and weather is taken notice of by one, but overlooked by the other. The wise man's observation teaches him the necessity of a good foundation, as the one prime condition of security, without which the best materials and the most excellent workmanship are of no avail. The fool will not be taught. The example which he sees and the instruction which he hears are unheeded. The one founds his house upon a rock; the other builds upon the sand. In the first case the right beginning is made, and the superstructure is likely to be sound: in the second, the initiative, the most important step is neglected, and every stone and timber which is laid increases the hazard of a downfall. Here is the essential difference between folly and wisdom. There are many things in which the one may mimic the other. The out-works of folly may seem to be substantial. The proportions of its building may be faultless. There may be an air of finish without and a look of comfort within, to attract the spectator's eye and elicit the visitor's commendation. But a radical mistake has been committed, and that mistake endangers at every moment the lives of the inmates.

In religion, progress in which is *edification* or the process of spiritual building, the general principle thus inculcated is an important one. In the school of Jesus we must humble ourselves to the status of intrants, before we can advance to the higher ranks of discipleship. We must be content to begin at the beginning. The rudiments of the Gospel must be acquired. We have to go down upon our knees; we have to sit patiently at the feet of the Great Teacher, that we may receive his words and imbibe the principles of his holy doctrine. It is not the building, but the building erected upon a good foundation, which is to afford a comfortable habitation and a sure dwelling. In like manner it is not the word, but the ingrafted word received with meekness, which is able to save our souls.

The root of the matter on its human side is

a willing mind, a teachable spirit, and a believing heart. If that be not in us, we may yield the showy leaves, but not the good fruits, of profession.

Nor is the firm footing in religion attained but by expenditure of effort, energy, and labour. Without these the beginning may be easier, and the work may advance more rapidly; and herein may be the inducement of the foolish one to build his house on the sand. He saves time and trouble, at least so he thinks. But the truly wise, who with much toil digs deep and cuts his foundation into the rock, is far more effectually redeeming time and averting trouble. This is the very point at which a man's religion costs him most, when it is sincere and real. It is no easy thing to divest the soul of its natural pride, to make it give up its inclination to self trust and its love of selfrighteousness, to wear it from its corrupt affections and lusts. It is easy to abstain from some sins, but not to die unto sin; easy to think of God betimes, but not to preserve always a sense of his fatherly presence; easy to commend religion by our words, but not to maintain the spirit of religion in our souls. It may take the whole of a most trying effort, and it may be the very hardest kind of religious work to begin to follow Christ, in that way of daily crossbearing and rigid self denial whither he leads. But the progress which results from such a commencement is the only real and healthful progress in the divine life. The religion which is thus rooted in the affections of the heart, like the house which is built on a rock, will stand. By the grace of God it will yield the calm of untroubled peace and the security of a comfortable hope, when the worst afflictions arise and the greatest dangers threaten.

To such spiritual building two things are represented as necessary; and he only is a wise builder who makes them the beginning of his religious career, the means of acquiring fitness for eternal life. These things are first,—*hearing*, and second,—*doing*, the sayings of Christ. Hearing *and* doing are likened by our Lord to the wise course of building upon a rock; hearing *and not* doing, to the foolish course of building upon the sand. The object in building at all, is most desirable, most commendable. It is the enjoyment of shelter, protection, safety, and comfort. This corresponds, no doubt, to what the Lord has already, in various ways expressed—laying up treasure in heaven, seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, keeping to the narrow way, which leadeth unto life. It is a course which is the dictate of the highest wisdom, and the object of it is the greatest good which can be attained or conceived. The words of Jesus reveal the excellence of the object to be gained. These words the Lord addresses to the faith of his followers, and the true reception and faithful keeping of them at once determine the certainty of success, and