

that bears upon it the seal of immortality ; it comes to stay, and it gives permanency to its happy possessor, filling him with a hope and promise and anticipation that connects itself with the long vista of eternity. When we leave this world there will be an inevitable surrender of material possessions, such as money, and houses, and lands, but there is one thing which we will and must take with us, and that is our characters. And not only will our characters abide with us, but they will also determine our destiny. Whether we shall spend eternity in the everlasting habitations of the blest, or in the place of unending woe, will depend entirely on what we are. If we bear the image of God, and are saved by the washing of regeneration, heaven will be our home and God our eternal portion ; but if we unresistingly submit ourselves to the moulding influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil, then we will be vessels of wrath fitted for destruction.

Well now, when we thus apprehend the unique value of personal righteousness over every other earthly good, are we not also in a position to recognize, in some measure at least, the corresponding worth and practical utility of all such experiences as will promote the development of the heart and sanctification of the nature ? We cannot possibly regard as a calamity that which tends to make us better men and women. In the providence of God and in the economy of grace this is just the office of sorrow and affliction. They are appointed by God for the enlargement and expansion of the spiritual life ; they assist in the building up of Christian character. Now this is a distinctly Christian conception. You do not find it in the religious systems of heathenism. The wisdom of ancient philosophy failed to find any purpose of kindness or any tendency to spiritual growth in the bitter trials of life. They could see no bright side to these hard experiences. They regarded them as essentially disastrous ; and instead of trying to lighten the burden, they pointed out to the poor sufferer that there was at least one sure way of escape, and that was by suicide. Even such a noble-minded man as Marcus Aurelius deliberately gives this advice : " When the chimney of your house smokes, move out ; " that is, when you get into trouble, use your will to get out of it, and if you can't do it in any other way, why, get out of the world in which you live. There is a sample of the consolation which the wisdom of the world affords. But how different is this from the method endorsed by Paul in our text. And bear in mind that Paul was no stoic ; he was a man full of tenderness, full of sympathy, full of love. He did not regard the griefs of