

### "Sojourners of the Dispersion."

A Sermon Delivered at Union Chapel, Manchester, by  
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"Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered."—I Peter I: 1.

The words rendered "strangers scattered" are literally "sojourners, of the Dispersion," and are so rendered in the Revised Version. The Dispersion was the recognized name for the Jews dwelling in Gentile countries; as for instance, it is employed in John's gospel, when the people in Jerusalem say "Whither shall this man go that we shall not find him? Will he go to the Dispersion amongst the Greeks?" Obviously, therefore, the word here may refer to the scattered Jewish people, but the question arises whether the letter corresponds to its apparent address, or whether the language which is employed in its course does not almost oblige us to see here a reference, not to the Jew, but to the whole body of Christian people, who, whatever may be their outward circumstances, are, in the deepest sense, in the foundations of their life, if they be Christ's, "strangers of the Dispersion."

Now, if we look at the letter we find such words as these—"the times of your ignorance"—"your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers"—"the time past may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles," all of which: as you see, can only be accommodated to Jewish believers by a little gentle violence, but all of which find a proper significance if we suppose them addressed to Gentiles, to whom they are only applicable in the higher sense of the words to which I have referred. If we understand them so, we have here an instance of what runs all through the letters; the taking hold of Jewish ideas for the purpose of lifting them into a loftier region, and transfiguring them into expression of Christian truth. For example, we read in it: "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation;" and again: "Ye are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices." These and other similar passages are instances of precisely the same transference of Jewish ideas as I find, in accordance with many good commentators, in the words of my text.

So, then, here is Peter's notion of—  
I.—What the Christian Life is.

All those who really have faith in Jesus Christ are "strangers of the Dispersion;" scattered through the world, and dwelling dispersedly in an order of things to which they do not belong, "seeking a city which hath foundations." The word "strangers" means, originally, persons for a time living in an alien city. And that is the idea that the Apostle would impress upon us as true for each of us, in the measure in which our Christianity is real. For, remember, although all men may be truly spoken of as being "pilgrims and sojourners upon the earth" by reason of both the shortness of the duration of their earthly course, and the disproportion between their immortal part and the material things amongst which they dwell. Peter is thinking of something very different from either the brevity of earthly life or the infinite necessities of an immortal spirit, when he calls his Christian brethren strangers. Not because we are to die soon, and the world is to outlast us; not because other people will one day live in our houses, and read our books, and sit upon our chairs, and we shall be forgotten, but because we are Christ's people, are here sojourners, and must regard this as not our rest. Not because our immortal soul cannot satisfy itself, however it tries, upon the trivialities of earth any more than a human appetite can on the husks that the swine do eat because new desires, tastes, aspirations, affinites, have been kindled in us by the new life that has flowed into us; therefore the connection that other men have with the world, which makes some of them altogether "men of the world, whose portion is in this life," is for us broken. And we are strangers: scattered abroad, solitary, not by reason of the inevitable loneliness in which, after all love and companionship, every soul lives; not by reasons of losses or deaths, but by reason of the contrariety between the foundation of our lives, and the foundation of the lives of the men round us; therefore we stand lonely in the midst of crowds; strangers in the ordered communities of the world.

Ah, there is no solitude so utter as the solitude of being the only man in a crowd that has a faith in his heart, and there is no isolating power like the power of rending all ties, that true attachment which Jesus Christ has. "Think not that I am come to bring peace on earth, but a sword," to set a man against his own household, if they be not of the household of faith. These things are the inevitable issues of religion—to make us strangers, isolated in the midst of this world.

And now let us think of

II.—SOME OF THE PLAIN CONSEQUENT DUTIES THAT ARISE

FROM THIS CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Let me put them in the shape of one or two practical counsels. First let us try to keep up, vivid and sharp, a sense of separation. I do not mean that we should with-

draw ourselves from sympathies, nor from the large area of common ground which we have with our fellows, whether they be Christians or no—with our fellow citizens; with those who are related to us by various bonds, by community of purpose, of aim, of opinion, or of affection. But just as Abraham was willing to go down into the plain and fight for Lot, though he would not go down and live in Sodom, and just as he would enter into relations of amity with the men of the land, and yet would not abandon his black camels' hair tent, pitched beneath the terebinth tree, in order to go into their city and abide with them, so one great part of the wisdom of a Christian man is to draw the line of separation decisively, and yet to keep true to the bond of union. Unless Christian people do make a distinct effort to keep themselves apart from the world and its ways, they will get confounded with these, and when the end comes they will be destroyed with them.

Sometimes voyagers find upon some lonely island an English castaway, who has forgotten home, and duty, and everything else, to luxuriate in an easy life beneath tropical skies, and has degraded himself to the level of the savage islanders around him. There are professing Christians—perhaps in my audience—who, like that poor castaway, have "forgotten the imperial palace whence they came," and have gone down, and down, and down, to live the fat, contented, low lives of the men who find their good upon earth, and not in heaven. Do you, dear brethren, try to keep vivid the sense that you belong to another community. As Paul puts it, with a metaphor drawn from Gentile instead of from Jewish life, as in our text, "Our citizenship is in heaven." Philippi, to the Christian Church of which that was said, was a Roman colony; and the characteristics of a Roman colony were that the inhabitants were enrolled as members of the Roman tribes, and had their names on the register of Rome, and were governed by its laws. So we, living here in an outlying province, have our names written in the "Golden Book" of the citizens of the new Jerusalem. Do not forget, if I might use a very homely illustration—what parish your settlement is in; remember what kingdom you belong to.

Again, if we are strangers of the Dispersion, let us live by our own country's laws, and not by the codes that are current in this foreign land where we are settled for a time. You remember what was the complaint of the people in Persia to Esther's king? "There is a people whose laws are different from all the people's that be upon the earth." That was an offence that should not be tolerated in a despotism that ground everything down to the one level of a slavish uniformity. It will be well for us Christian people if men look at us, and say, "Ah, that man has another rule of conduct from the one that prevails generally. I wonder what is the underlying principle of his life; it evidently is not the same as mine."

Live by our King's law. People in our colonies, at least the officials, set wonderful store by the approbation of the Colonial Office at home. It does not matter what the Colonial newspapers say. It is "what will they say in Downing-street?" And if a despatch goes out approving of their conduct, neighbors may censure and sneer as they list. So we Christians have to report to home, and have so to live "that whether present or absent"—in a colony or in the mother country—"we may be well pleasing unto him."

Keep up the honor and advance the interests of your own country. You are here, among other reasons, to represent your King, and people take their notions of him very considerably, from their experience of you. So see to it that you live like the Master whom you say you serve.

The Russian Government sends out what are called military colonies, studded along the frontier, with the one mission of extending the Empire. We are set along the frontier with the same mission. The strangers are scattered. Congested, they would be less useful; dispersed, they may push forward the frontiers. Seed in a seed-basket is not in its right place; but sown broadcast over the field, it will be waving wheat in a month or two. "Ye are the salt of the earth"—salt is sprinkled over what it is intended to preserve. You are the strangers of the Dispersion, that you may be the messengers of the Evangelization.

Lastly, let us be glad when we think, and let us often think of

#### III.—THE HOME IN GLORY.

This is a beautiful phrase which pairs off with the one in my text, in which another apostle speaks of the ultimate end as "our gathering together in Christ." All the scattered ones, like chips of wood in a whirlpool, drift gradually closer and closer until they unite in a solid mass in the centre. So at the last the "strangers" are to be brought and settled in their own land, and their lonely lives are to be filled with happy companionship, and they to be in a more blessed unity than now. "Fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God." If we, dwelling in this far-off land, were habitually to talk, as Australians do of coming to England, of "coming

home," though born in the colony, it would be a glad day for us when we set out on the journey. If Christian people lived more by faith, as they profess to do, and less by sight, they would often think of the home-coming and the union; and would be happy when they thought that when they realized these two blessed elements of permanence and of companionship, which another Apostle packs into one sentence, along with that which is greater than them both; "so shall we ever be with the Lord."—Baptist Times and Freeman.

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### Some Mental Characteristics of our Lord.

BY S. C. MITCHELL.

It is my purpose to make mention only of some of the less familiar aspects of the mind of Christ. I shall dwell neither upon the originality, boldness and graciousness of his teaching nor upon the profound spirituality that marked his life. That his grasp of truth was intuitive, that his mind grew in the matrix of Scripture, that his mind reveals a purposefulness, a dependence on God, a spirit of self sacrifice and love unknown in history, these are traits of Jesus patent to all.

OUR LORD PROGRESSED IN HIS THINKING.

Luke tells us: "Jesus advanced in wisdom." Elsewhere the same writer observes: "The child grew and waxed strong, becoming full of wisdom." Progress is also traceable in Jesus' teaching. We may be sure that the mind which gave forth the sermon on the mount had a wider horizon than that of the child in the temple talking with the doctors. There is also a great step from "Repeat ye"—the gospel with which Jesus began, a gospel taken from the lips of the Baptist—to the cardinal truth "that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead." The inspired Paul thus describes his own mental growth: "When I was a child, I thought as a child; now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things."

Such intellectual progress was natural. The soul is activity, not an entity. The body sleeps, the mind works ever, keeping an eternal vigil. Of the various faculties of the mind, it is the intellect particularly which keeps marching on. The emotions are more or less stationary, today the mother's feeling for her child differs not much from that of Eve. But compare the initial fulness of a mother's love with the advance of the intellect from the savage of Terra del Fuego, who cannot count three, to Isaac Newton, before whose vision the heavens were spread out as a scroll.

Our Lord likewise intended for his followers to progress in a knowledge of divine truth. Only gradually did he reveal the truth to his disciples, and he declared that his own teachings needed supplement. "The Holy Spirit," said he in departing, "shall teach you all things," and "shall guide you into all truth." He was careful to give them the clue to getting the truth: "If any man willet to do his will, he shall know." Doing right brings light. This truth-conquering principle is also found in an older writing:

"The path of the righteous is as the light of dawn,  
That shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

The words "more light" are befittingly the instinctive utterance of the Christian rather than the dying cry of the great pagan of the nineteenth century

OUR LORD WAS TOLERANT.

"John said unto him, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followed not us. But Jesus said: Forbid him not. He that is not against us is with us." The Saviour rebuked John and James when they wished to call down fire on a village of the Samaritans. To Peter, who had drawn the sword in his Lord's defence, the words were spoken: "Put up again thy sword." What large tolerance is shown in the remark that God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."

Dean Stanley somewhere speaks of an Arabian sheik who most kindly received at his tent door an aged guest. His courtesy continued until he observed that the venerable stranger began to eat without washing his hands or asking a blessing on the meal. Then the sheik, in holy horror, cast him out of the tent and called at him. The voice of God came to the sheik, saying: "I have borne with that man ninety years; canst thou not bear with him an hour?"

When a certain Roman, charged with blasphemy in having sold a statue of the deified Augustus, was dragged before the Emperor Tiberius, the latter remarked: *Deorum injurias dis curae*—"Let the gods look after their own wrongs." Had Christendom acted upon the principle thus laid down by the pagan sovereign the martyr-fires of Smithfield would never have been lighted and no Holy Office of the Inquisition would have preyed, vulture-like, on the vitals of humanity.

OUR LORD LOVED LIBERTY.

At the very beginning of his ministry he asserted a larger freedom. Returning to his home at Nazareth, he read to his neighbors the announcement:

"He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,  
And recovering of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty them that are bruised."