

for this time; when I have a convenient season I will send for thee."

The text presents to us two points for consideration: first, the topics of discourse selected by the apostle; and, then, the PRACTICAL EFFECT of the discourse on the mind of his principal hearer.

I. In considering the TOPICS OF DISCOURSE selected by the apostle, you will bear in mind the peculiar circumstances of his two principal hearers, Felix and Drusilla. The former as you remember, was originally a slave of the Emperor Nero; but, being raised to the dignity of procurator of Judæa, he exercised the imperial functions with such a mercenary soul, and by such open unfairness disgraced his judicial administration, that he compelled the Jews at last to petition for his removal. The other principal hearer, Drusilla, was the wife of an insignificant heathen king, who was then living, and who, after the most painful sacrifices to obtain her hand, found himself basely supplanted by his more powerful neighbor, the procurator of Judæa.* Such were the apostle's auditors: a ruler hated for his injustice, a woman enthroned in unblushing sin; and yet both evincing a strange and curious anxiety to hear this "ambassador in bonds" discourse "concerning the faith in Christ."

And now observe with what holy skill this "workman that needed not to be ashamed" proceeded to "divide the word of truth." The first thing that cannot fail to be observed is, that he does not direct his reproofs against what he knew to be the vices of his noble hearers, but that he is wholly taken up in ex-patiating on the blessedness of the contrary virtues. It was from no want of faithfulness to the terms of his high commission, "boldly to rebuke vice," that the apostle did not arouse the moral indignation of the assembled courtiers, by one of those graphic delineations of character which sometimes gave to his pictures the attributes and vividness of things of life. Easily could his vast mental resources have evoked a spectre of tyranny, of which the living counterpart sat before him,—of an oppressor, seated on a purchased throne, ruling with a rod of iron, and pampering his mean soul, from day to day with the wages of unrighteousness." We should then have seen the pale wrath gathering on the monster's brow, and revenge choking all his powers of utterance, as he sunk under the withering details of the hireling crying out for his defrauded wages, and the widow suing for her alienated portion, and the orphan, with no advocate but his miseries, and no weapon but his tears, pouring forth his disregarded suit to a Father that dwelt in heaven. But this holy preacher acted upon the spirit of his Master, and therefore resolved to prove that, though he hated the sin much, yet he loved the sinner more; that if, he kindled

coals of fire, it was not to consume, but to melt, to soften, to fuse into a mould of penitential humbleness the iron soul of the transgressor; and, for this end, he knew how worse than useless would be any irritating exhibitions of those judicial frauds, the cry of which had so long and so loudly entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabbath. He adopted, therefore, the wiser, and, as the event proved, the more effectual course of reasoning on topics, which, while they disarmed his hearers of all hostility against himself, would yet pierce, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, the guilty pair before whom he had been desired to preach.

Accordingly he opened his discourse by reasoning in favor of *righteousness*; taking that term first, perhaps, in its most comprehensive meaning, as denoting moral rectitude, or whatsoever is due either to God or man. All irreligion is essentially unjust, as withholding from God his rightful due in the affections of our hearts, and in the obedience of our lives. It involves, also a want of rectitude to our fellowmen, in the violation of the claims of justice and benevolence. But, more particularly, and pointedly, he would reason of righteousness in a public magistrate; of the benefits to a nation, of the acceptableness to God, of the calm satisfaction to a judge's own mind when, unawed by threats, and inaccessible to a bribe, he weighed all causes in an even balance, and ruled his people in the fear of God: and thus he would show this imperial favorite how he might have that which would be far more ornamental than his purple, and raise him much higher than his throne; that the noblest kingdom was the empire over the hearts of his subjects, and a people's love the brightest jewel in his crown!

By the same spirit was the apostle influenced in the selection of his second topic of discourse. He reasoned of *temperance*; of the habit of self-control, of the blessedness of keeping all our appetites under a holy and self-denying restraint, and of the moral benefits to a nation, when those who sat in high places threw a fresh lustre over their dignities by their unblemished purity of life. The occasion had not been unfit for the preacher to have discoursed of the griefs of an injured husband, basely supplanted in his affections, his house left unto him desolate, and his wife polluting God's holy altar, that she might bind round her dishonored brow the diadem of borrowed loyalty. But the apostle knew, that, though this might be the best way to arouse the passions, it was the worst way to win the heart. He chose, therefore, to enlarge on that wise and beautiful subordination of the natural affections, described in Scripture as temperance, which makes up the spiritual harmony of the soul, which is the essence of all gospel liberty, which lays the foundation for a holy life, and thus educates the soul for a future companionship with God. "Lord, who is he that shall ascend unto thy

* Josephus, lib. xx. c. 1.