WHY SAUL BECAME PAUL.

A Sermon by Rev. Alexander Maclaren, D. D.

"Saul (who is also called Paul)."—Acts xiii. 9.

Hitherto the apostle had been known by the former of these names, henceforward he is known exclusively by the latter. Hitherto he had been second to his friend Barnabas, henceforward he is first. In an earlier verse of the chapter we read that "Barnabas and Saul" were separated for their missionary work, and again, that it was "Barnabas and Saul" for whom the governor of Cyprus sent, to hear the word of the Lord. But in a subsequent verse of the chapter we read that "Paul and his company loosed from Paphos."

The change in the order of the names is significant, and change in the names not less so. Why was it that at this period the apostle took up this new designation? I think that the coincidence between his name and that of the governor of Cyprus, who believed at his preaching, Sergius Paulus, is too remarkable to be accidental. And though, no doubt, it was the custom for the Jews of that day, especially for those of them who lived in Gentile land, to have, for convenience sake, two names, one Jewish and one Gentile—one for use amongst their brethren, and one for use amongst the heathen—still we have no reason to suppose that the apostle bore a Gentile name before this moment. And the fact that the name which he bears now is the same as that of his first convert, seems to me to point the explanation.

I take it, then, that the assumption of the name of Paul instead of the name of Saul occurred at this point, stood in some relation to his missionary work, and was intended in some sense as a memorial of his first victory in the preaching of the gospel.

I think there are lessons to be derived from the substitution of one of these names for the other which may well occupy us for a few moments.

I. First of all, this new name expresses a new nature.

Jesus Christ gave the apostle, whom he called to himself in the early days, a new name in order to prophecy the change which, by the discipline of sorrow and the communication of the grace of God, should pass over Simón Barjona, making him into a Peter, the Man of Rock. With characteristic independence, Saul chooses for himself a new name, which shall express the change that he feels has passed over his inmost being. True, he does not assume it at his conversion, but there is no reason why we should not believe that he assumes it because he is beginning to understand what it is that has happened to him at his conversion.

The fact that he changes his name as soon as he throws himself into public and active life, is but gathering into one picturesque symbol his great principle: "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away and all things are become new."

So, dear brethren, we may, from this incident before us, gather this one great lesson, that the central heart of Christianity is the possession of a new life, communicated to us through faith in that Son of God, who, is the Lord of the Spirit. Wherever there is a true faith, there is a new nature.

Opinions may play upon the surface of a man's soul, like the moonbeams on the silver sea, without raising its temperature one degree or sending a single beam into its dark caverns. And that is the sort of Christianity that satisfies a great many of you, a Christianity of opinion, a Christianity of surface creed, a Christianity which at the best slightly modifies some of your outward actions, but leaves the whole inner man unchanged.

Paul's Christianity meant a radical change in his whole nature. He went out of Jerusalem a persecutor, he came into Damascus a Christian. He rode out of Jerusalem hating, loathing, despising Jesus Christ; he groped his way into Damascus broken, bruised, clinging contrite to his feet, and clasping his cross at his only hope. He went out proud, self-reliant, planting himself upon his many prerogatives, his blue blood, his pure descent, his Rabbinical knowledge, his Pharisaical training, his externally religious earnestness, his pure morality; he rode into Damascus blind in the eyes but seeing in the soul, and discerning that all these things were, as he says in his strong vehement way, "but dung" in comparison with his winning Christ.

And his theory of conversion, which he preaches in all his epistles, is but the generalization of his own personal experience, which suddenly, and in a moment, smote his old self to shivers, and raised up a new life, with new tastes, views, tendencies, aspirations, with new allegiance to a new King. Such changes, so sudden, so revolutionary, cannot be expected often to take place amongst people who, like us, have been listening to Christian teaching all our lives. But unless there be this infusion of a new life into men's spirits, which shall make them love and long and aspire after new things that once they did not care for, I know not why we should speak of them as being Christians at all. The transition is described by Paul as "passing from death unto life." That cannot be a surface thing. A change which needs a new name must be a profound change. Has your christianity revolutionized our nature in any such fashion? It is easy to be a Christian after the superficial fashion which passes muster with so many of us. A verbal acknowledgement of belief in truths which we never think about, a purely external performance of acts of worship, a subscription or two winged by no sympathy, and a fairly respectable life between the cloak of which all evil may harrow undetected—make the Christianity of thousands. Paul's Christianity transformed him; does yours transform you? If it does not, are you quite sure that it is Christianity at all?

II. Then, again, we may take this change of name as being expressive of a life's work. Paul is a Roman name. He strips himself of his Jewish connections and relationships. His fellow countrymen who lived amongst the Gentiles were, as I said, at the beginning of these remarks, in the habit of doing the same thing; but they carried both their names; their Jewish for use amongst their own people, their Gentile one for use amongst Gentiles. Paul seems to have altogether disused his old name of Saul. It was almost equivalent to seceding from Judaism. It is like the acts of the renegades one sometimes hears of, who are found by some travellers dressed in turban and flowing robes, and bearing some Turkish name, or like some English sailor, lost to home and kindred, who deserts his ship in some island of the Pacific, and drops his English name for some barbarous title, in token that he has given up his faith and his nationality.

So Paul, contemplating for his life's work preaching amongst the Gentiles, determines at the beginning, "I lay down all of which I used to be proud. If my Jewish descent and privileges stand in my way I cast them aside." Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee, all these I wrap together in one bundle, and toss them behind me that I may be the better able to help some to whom they would have hindered my access. A man with a heart will throw off his silken robes that his arm may be bared to rescue, and his feet free to run to succor.

So we may, from the change of the Apostle's name, gather this lesson, never out of date, that the only way to help people is to go down to their level. If you want to rescue men you must identify yourself with them. It is no use standing on an eminence above them, and patronizingly talking down to them. You cannot scold, or hector, or lecture men into the possession and acceptance of religious truth if you take a position of superiority. As our Master has taught us if we want to make blind beggars see we must take the blind beggars by the hand.

The spirit which led the Apostle to change the name of Saul with its memories of the royal dignity which, in the person of its great wearer, had honored his tribe, for a Roman name, is the same which he formally announces as a deliberately adopted law of his life. "To them that are without law I became as without law . . . . that I might gain them that are without law . . . . I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

It is the very inmost principle of the gospel. The principle that influenced the servant in this comparatively little matter, is the principle that influenced the Master in the mightiest of all events. "He who was in the form of God, and thought not equality with God a thing to be eagerly grasped at, made himself of no reputation, and was found in fashion as a man and in form as a servant, and became obedient unto death." "For as much as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he himself likewise took part of the same;" and the mystery of incarnation was transacted, because when the Divine would help men, the only way by which the infinite love could reach this end was that the Divine should become man; identifying himself with those whom he would help, and stooping to the level of the humanity that he would lift.

And as it is the very essence and heart of Christ's work, so, my brother, it is the condition of all work that benefits our fellows. It applies all round. We must stoop if we would raise. We must put away gifts, culture, everything that distinguishes us, and come to the level of the men that we seek to help. Sympathy is the parent of all wise counsel, because it is the parent of all true understanding of our brethren's wants. Sympathy is the only thing to which people will listen, sympathy is the only disposition correspondent to the message that we Christians are entrusted with. For a Christian man carry the Gospel of Infinite condescension to his fellows in a spirit other than that of the Master, and the Gospel which he speaks, is an anomaly and a contradiction.

And, therefore, let us all remember that a vast deal of so-called Christian work falls utterly dead and profitless for no other reason than this, that the doers have forgotten that they come to the level of the men that they would help before they can expect to even bless them.

You remember the old story of some heroic missionary or other, that wanted to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ amongst captives, and, as there was no other way of reaching them he let himself be sold for a slave, and put out his hands to have the manacles fastened upon them. It is the law for all Christian service; become like them if you will help them. "To the weak as weak, all things to all men, that we might by all means save some."

And, my brother, there was no obligation on Paul's part to do the Christian work which does not lie on you.

III. Further, this change of name is a memorial of victory.

The name is that of his first convert. He takes it, as I suppose, because it seemed to him such a blessed thing that at the very moment when he began to sow, God helped him to reap. He had gone out to his work, no doubt, with much trembling, with weakness and fear. And lo! here, at once, the fields were white already to the harvest.

Great conquerors have been named from their victories: Africanus, Germanicus, Nelson of the Nile, Napier of Magodala, and the like. Paul names himself from the first victory that God gave him to win; and so, as it were, carries ever at his breast a memorial of the wonder that through him it had been given to preach, and that not without success, amongst the Gentiles "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

That is to say, this man thought of it as his highest honour, and the thing best worthy to be remembered about his life, that God had helped him to help his brethren to know the common Master. Is that your idea of the best thing about your life? What would you like to have for an epitaph on your grave, professing Christian? "He was rich; he made a big business in Manchester." "He was famous, he wrote books." "He was happy and fortunate." Or, "He turned many to righteousness?" "This man flung away his literary tastes, his home joys, and his personal ambition, and chose as that for which he would fain be remembered that he should bring dark hearts to the light in which he and they together walked."

His name is the commemoration of his first success would act as a stimulus to service and to hope. No doubt the Apostle, like the rest of us, had his times of indolence and languor, and his times of despondency when he seemed to have labored in vain, and spent his strength for naught. He had but to name himself to find the antidote to both the one and the other, and in the remembrance of the past to find a stimulus for service for the future, and a stimulus for hope for the time to come. His first convert was to him the first drop that predicts the shower, the first primrose that prophesies the wealth of yellow blossoms and downy green leaves that will fill the woods in a day or two. The first convert "bears in his hand a glass which showed many more." Look at the workingmen in the streets trying to get up a piece of railway. How difficult it is to lever out the first paving stone from the compacted mass! But when once it has been withdrawn, the rest is comparatively easy. We can understand Paul's triumph and joy over this first stone which he had worked out of the strongly cemented wall and barrier of heathenism; and his conviction that having thus made a breach, if it were but big enough to get the end of his lever in, the fall of the whole was only a question of time. I suppose that if the old alchemists had only turned one grain of base metal into gold they might have turned tons, if only they had had the retorts and the appliances with which to do it. And so, what has brought one man's soul into harmony with God, and given one man the true life can do the same for all men. In the first fruits we may see the fruits whitening to the harvest. Let us rejoice then, in any little work that God helps us to do, and be sure that if so great be the joy of the first fruits, great beyond speech will be the joy of the ingathering.

IV. And now last of all, this change of name is an index of the spirit of a life's work.

"Paul" means "little;" "Saul" means "desired." He abandons the name that prophesied of favor and honor to adopt a name that bears upon its very front a profession of humility. His very name is the condensation into a word of his abiding conviction. "I am less than the least of all saints." Perhaps even there may be an allusion to his low stature, which may be pointed at in the sarcasm of his enemies that his letters were strong, though his bodily presence was "weak." If he was, as Monsieur Renan calls him, "an ugly little Jew," the name has a double appropriateness.

But at all events, it is an expression of the spirit in which he sought to do his work. The more lofty the consciousness of his vocation the more lowly will a true man's estimate of himself be. The higher my thought of what God has given me grace to do the more I feel weighed down by the consciousness of my unfitness to do it. And the more grateful the remembrance of what he has enabled me to do, the more shall I wonder that I have been enabled, and the more profoundly shall I feel that it is not my strength but his that has won the victories.

So, dear brethren, for all hope, for all success in our work, for all growth in Christian grace and character, this disposition of lowly self-abasement and recognized unworthiness and infirmity is absolutely indispensable. The mountain-tops that lift themselves to the stars are barren, and few springs find their rise there. It is in the lowly valleys that the flowers grow and the rivers run. And it is they who are humble and lowly in heart to whom God gives strength to serve Him, and the joy of accepted service.

I beseech you, then, learn your true life's task. Learn how to do it by identifying yourselves with the humbler brethren whom you would help. Learn the spirit in which it must be done; the spirit of lowly self-abasement. And oh! above all, learn this, that unless you have the new life, the life of God in your hearts, you have no life at all.

Have you, my brother, that faith by which we receive into our spirits Christ's own Spirit to be our life? If you have, then you are a new creature, with a new name, dimly perhaps visible, and faintly audible, amidst the imperfections of earth, but sure to shine out on the pages of the Lamb's Book of Life; and to be read "with tumults of acclaim" before the angels of heaven. "I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it."—*Christian Commonwealth.*

A Living Sacrifice.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

John Short read the passage with a new light this morning. "A living sacrifice." A strange paradox, and yet was it not quite true? It followed him all day at his toil; he could not get it out of his mind as he fitted the windows and doors to Lawyer Howe's new residence. He had an eye for beauty, and he had delighted in this lovely structure with all the modern appointments. He had put himself into it as master workman, having a care that everything should be honest and perfect. It was nearly completed, and he had pictured to himself how the owner would bring his bride to this modern villa in the suburb of a large city. They had come out to see it the last week, and John had heard them planning and contriving with subdued laughter and half playful differing for the furnishing. Somehow it made his heart sore. He felt rebellious. And how prettily the lady (she was but a girl) had asked him to make a little change, with a blush in her cheek, and a little tremor in her voice. He envied this prosperous, successful lawyer, who could give his sweetheart such a royal nest.

But this fragment of a verse seemed like a divine voice to John. Was there not a meaning in it that he could understand better than another? was not his life the fulfillment of his text? John Short had "got religion" years ago as he thought. He was a member of the church, had a class in the Sabbath School, and had been an elder for quite a while. But he found the plummet of his thought had not reached the bottom of this well. He knew how the martyrs had died for the faith, and his heart has been stirred as he had read of cruel tortures and agonizing deaths, but all that had an end. What was a *living* sacrifice?

John Short had a widowed mother and two sisters to support. It had been his dying father's request that he should care for them. Almost the last movement he made was to place their hands together and look beseechingly to John. That was ten years ago, and most religiously he had fulfilled his pledge. To provide a home for his mother and these younger sisters had been his sole object in life. The father had left a house well furnished, but that was all. John had determined that they should keep it if possible, and live together there where their whole life had been spent. He had been prospered in business remarkably, having become master carpenter; but one sister was an invalid, the other taught in a young lady's seminary, and it took all he could earn, economically applied, to provide for their needs. The contractor by whom he was employed gave all the details into his hands, so that every house was under his supervision, from the receiving of the plan until the key was delivered to the owner. It was a great responsibility, but he fulfilled it well, winning golden opinions from all.

But he was a young man, not yet thirty, for so confined a life. He had little rest, night or day. Those under him, when the day was ended, could rest in peace, but for him plans and adjustments and appropriations must be considered, often until late at night. He was ageing under it; now and then a gray hair was seen; his forehead was too wrinkled for a young man. But he was determined to keep a happy home for his mother and his sisters.

It was a self-sacrificing life. Many pleasures and enjoyments must be given up; it was a narrow path set before him, and there seemed no turning. Five years before John Short had met the girl whose love he craved above everything else. He had not known her long before he felt his love was returned. But she lived in a luxurious home; he could not marry now, and he was too honorable to place any bands upon her. But if John thought his love alone could be enduring he was mistaken. Agnes Place had been born in affluence, but she had a sensible mother. From poverty her parents had risen to large wealth, and they did not look with displeasure upon John Short. They honored his noble integrity and filial devotion.

Through all these years she had waited for him, although there was no engagement between them. She had had before her all her life the affection of her parents, gracious and lovely. She knew that real affection was not of a day, and must bear adversity. She had her leisure, although she was not by any means an idle society girl. There was the mission class, her poor families, and other benevolent interests; but the summer brought rest and change. She was still young and hopeful.

But John chafed sometimes under the yoke placed upon him, his heart would cry out as he questioned the reason of his life, and his closet often witnessed some severe battles as he pleaded for grace and patience. But "a living sacrifice," was not that what God was requiring of him? The old martyrs by rack, dungeon, and fire went into glory, but it was a narrow threshold, and they soon were at rest; but this was a living trial; every day he must take it up and bear it, and then it was "acceptable" to God. He had thought sometimes God did not care anything about it, that it was too trivial for him to regard; but this verse seemed to put a different look upon it. Perhaps, after all, this was a reasonable service, and he might make it holy; and as he looked upon the faces of his mother and his sisters, and how much sunshine he provided for them, he could not but rejoice that he could bear the burden for them.

These living sacrifices are more common than we think; many a one is offering them to God, a sweet smelling savor. They come up as holy incense to the Master. They are the alabaster box of precious ointment broken upon the blessed feet. They have no chronicler, no recital; behind prayer and sermon, they reach the very springs of life. The apostle seemed to John to have had him in mind; the Spirit sent home the words, "I beseech you."

But God uses the chisel only long enough to shape the stone. When we bear the image we receive the crown. When John Short accepted the sacrifice with no more complainings, the light broke, and blessing came. One sister went to a home of her own; his employer died, and by the help of his friends he took the business. It had become a valuable interest. He has practically been at the head of it for years, and now he would have no more responsibility, with large returns. The future looked brighter. Love might yet have its reward.

Two years had passed since John Short read that verse in Romans; his body had been a "living sacrifice" since his father had died, and he had not known it; he had done his duty, but it had been all dark until it was flashed to him that he was offering "a reasonable service" to his Lord, and then he went on patiently with larger hope and lighter burden. The business prospered, he made some unusually good contracts, he found his Master with him in the fire, and he was not consumed. God accepted him and was well pleased. And the home came at last, blessed and sweetened by the consciousness of duty done, sacrifices met, the inevitable conquered. He knew now what "a living sacrifice" meant, his body had been offered to God for this. Ten years of hard toil, self-denial, sweet hopes held in abeyance, and now the victory and reward.

"Agnes," said John, as they entered their new home, beautiful in design and appointment, "I believe it will be all the more precious for the waiting, for we have built into it the faith and patience and love of all these years."

"Yes, John, and altar, board and fireside will have his blessing, because we have given him both obedience and sacrifice."

Some may read these lines of whom God is asking just such sacrifices. You cannot understand it, and the yoke bears heavily upon you. The fire and torture are past, but God asks for heroism, faith, obedience now. This nineteenth century has its martyrs. I have known them, they make no outcry, they are still, but God is watching them. When the dross is removed, they will be fit for the Master's use.—*Observer.*

Two Views of School Days.

"Finished at last! No more study—study—study. No more practicing of scales and chords and arpeggios unless I want to. No more drills of classes and living by the sound of a bell."

Katherine was rejoicing in the few last days of school with the enjoyment which comes only to those who have faithfully performed their school duties. When we add that to this faithful performance she brought an intelligent mind and quick perceptions, it needs not to be said further that the closing of her school life was a kind of triumph which she had had a full right to enjoy heartily.

She stood highest in most of her classes, and in addition to a good grounding in the solid part of a modern education, had given careful attention to such lighter accomplishments as are usually sought after by young girls of taste. The final days of examination were not looked forward to with dread, but entered into with assured feeling given by days and months and years of conscientious preparation, and passed without undue effort. Her bright, frank young face and graceful, simple manners won for her a host of admirers among those who came to the graduating exercises. She was going away to meet many dear old friends and hoping to meet many new ones. Life had a very bright outlook for her.

"But I'm sorry, after all," she said, when the wishing good-bye came. It had been pleasant, the busy school life with all its strivings and successes. The companions who had become so dear to her, were all to be left behind, the broken circle never to be united, and tears came fast to her eyes as she felt that on many accounts she would gladly come back for another year among them, and a further delving into the books which had brought her so much real delight.

But, once past the trying hour of parting, she looked forward with such glowing anticipations that the regrets were soon forgotten, as she went first to make a long promised visit to the house of an uncle who was very dear to her.

"You see," she said to some of her school friends, "Uncle David isn't a bit like some persons I've heard of. He thinks mouths were given to us to smile and laugh with, and voices to sing with, and folks were intended to look as if they thought the Lord loved them and they were glad of it. Some folks, you know, look as if they thought he was frowning at them all the time."

And Katherine took great pleasure in telling the good man all about her late triumphs, sure of his full sympathy in all which had made her happy, and not at all afraid to let him see that she took a very natural pride in the successes she had fairly earned.

"I wish you could have been there to hear my essay, Uncle David. Of course I'm going to show it to you, and I'm sure you'll read every word of it and not do as Aunt Ruth does, just look at a line or two here and there and then say: "Yes, my dear, I'm sure its a charming production. But your reading it won't be as if you had been there to hear me, uncle—the great hall, lighted up and trimmed with evergreens, and the band, and all the little girls so beautifully dressed—and they did say mine was the prettiest dress there. And the applause, you know!—and the flowers. And Madame introduced me to some of her friends when it was over—they're all very stylish people!—and told them that for years I had been one of her best scholars—wasn't that pleasant?"

"Very pleasant indeed, dear," said her uncle, taking the opportunity given by the first pause in her overflow of words to offer her a more comfortable seat than the low stool she had taken at his feet. And Katherine, in the midst of all her innocent fulness of herself, watched with eyes grown more appreciative with the growing years, the beaming affection of his smile and the gentle benignancy of his manner, wondering within herself if there is anywhere to be found such beauty and sweetness and dignity as she always found in the manners of those who add the character of the Christian minister to that of the gentleman.

"Yes," she went on, "all my marks were high, some at the maximum, that is one hundred you know—and all well up in the nineties. You'll be pleased to see how far I got in Latin, uncle—I always liked languages. And how I did plough into those dreadful mathematics! Father wanted me to give a good deal of attention to them, although I had no taste for them myself."

"You'll be sure to find the benefit of it some day, Katherine."

"So father says. I've brought you some pictures I painted, uncle, and I'm going to have them framed to hang up in your study. And I want to sing to you. I learned a great many of the old Scotch songs because you and mother like them. Yes, Yes," said Katherine, with a thoughtful shake of the head, "Madame said I had left a good record as a scholar."

"I'm glad to hear it, dear. It will be a great satisfaction to you all your life to remember that you have made such good use of the opportunities with which you have been blessed. I hope Katherine," the old man laid his hand affectionally on her head, "that the other side of your record is as good."

"I do not quite understand you, uncle."

"We are all leaving a double record behind us as we pass through life. The record you speak of is shown in the high marks you received in school as the result of your hours of hard study, in the cultivation of your mind by what you have gained by acquaintances with languages and sciences. All these things show in some way or other. But how has it been with your silent record on the hearts of others? How many people are better, more conscientious, more Christian-like because of these years you have spent in their midst?"

"Uncle, I haven't thought of that."

Katherine's face wore a more thoughtful look as he went on.

"The memory of your thorough scholarship and your brilliant accomplishment will soon fade out. Very few will long remember who graduated this year with the highest honors. But if in your daily life you quietly showed that you were filled with the spirit of the Master, and were aiming to live by the guidance of that spirit you have exercised an influence upon those who have been about you, which will never pass away. If you have set an example of conscientious performance of duty with a higher motive than mere self-improvement or the seeking of worldly approval, as you have striven to do everything as unto the Lord, bearing always a meek and lowly spirit, your school life will be blessed to others beside yourself, and you may earnestly hope to have down seed which, watered by the Master's hand, may spring up into eternal life."

"Oh, Uncle David," said Katherine, with tears in her eyes, "I have not done it. I have thought very little of such things. And now my school life is past and gone and I can never do what I might have done. I wish somebody had told me years ago."

"Never mind Katherine," her uncle said, kindly. "Your school days are past and you cannot recall them. But the best part of life is still before you, and you can make it beautiful for yourself and others."

Yes, tell it to the boys and girls who still have the blessed opportunities of life's morning. Tell them that, far more distinctly and indelibly than to-day they write essays and exercises are they writing silently upon the hearts of those about them. That none of their careful calculations in figures and problems will work out results more sure than the results of their daily walk and conversation. That the influence of their carelessly spoken words will endure long after their tongues are no longer cunning in languages.—*N. Y. Observer.*

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