

mature, when he was not a mature Christian? Granted this, then we have a fixed quantity, which we can take up and examine and define with some hope of arriving at definite, positive knowledge concerning this state of grace.

But this is just where the writers about maturity fight shy, and seem disposed to deal only in generalities; and, in place of facing the matter squarely with the evident intention of abiding any issue the legitimate outcome of close analysis, they betray the signs of conscious weakness which are exhibited when the tendency is rather to fall back on the presumed meaning of the word maturity when used by writers of a former generation.

Place the word maturity among its true synonyms, as *experienced, exercised, advanced, established, ripe*, and it at once feels at home amongst its real relations. To our mind it belongs to that class of terms which we may at times use with reference to another, but which shock our sense of modesty when one either directly or indirectly assumes as self-descriptive. It simply becomes a term expressive of growth in Christian grace when that growth has gone on through a considerable length of time.

### EXPOSITION.

"Say not thou what is the cause that the former days were better than these."—ECCLES. vii. 10.

It is quite possible that the primary meaning of this proverb is secular in its character, and is aimed especially at political croakers.

But it suggests a spiritual application which may profitably arrest the attention for a little.

Say not that the former days of Methodism, of Presbyterianism, were better than these, because, in so doing, you condemn yourself. That is, you unconsciously imply that you yourself fall short of what you think they were, and, therefore, of what you admit to yourself and others you ought to be.

Again, say not that the days of the early Church in the apostles' times were better than these, for this also condemns

you on your own testimony of living beneath your privileges in the Gospel.

If the fact exists in your history, tell it only to yourself and to God, until you yourself, by the grace of God, measure up to these standards, when you will at once become so busy in helping others into like precious experiences that you will have no time, let alone desire, to play the croaker.

But, again, the words suggest the fact that many, very many Christians look back to the time of their conversion or some particular epoch in their Christian experience with special delight, and declare to all that their former days were better than these.

This, also, is not wise, for it proclaims the fact that there has been lack of growth, or positive backsliding.

The man of the world, who has drifted away from the innocence of childhood's days, may, in his hours of semi-remorse, sigh for the former days as better than these, even as rare Tom Hood put the thought in rhyme:

"I remember, I remember  
The fir trees dark and high;  
I used to think their slender tops  
Were close against the sky."

"It was a childish ignorance,  
But now 'tis little joy,  
To know I'm farther off from Heaven  
Than when I was a boy."

But the Christian, with an Almighty Saviour who has promised to do for us exceedingly abundant above all we ask or *think*, the case ought to be vastly different, and such language ought not to be true in his case. No experience of the past ought to shadow the present, for the mark of true health is "changed from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord." "In whom, though seeing Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." How can the joy be *unspeakable* when we can call up the earlier days of our discipleship as superior to the present fulness of joy?

Say not, then, with reference to past experience the former days were better, for you at once expose your present spiritual poverty to all. The rather confess it to God, and cry unto Him, till He again entrusts you with the well of