



“REDEEMING THE TIME.”

BY THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF RIPON.

(EPIH. v. 16.)

IN the margin of the Revised Version the translation stands thus: “Buying up the opportunity.” In this rendering both Bishop Lightfoot and Bishop Ellicott

double, treble price of effort, thought, and patience. The chance of to-day may, however, never return.

“We must take the current when it serves, Or lose our ventures.”

The lost opportunity is not only the lost venture, but it is the source of constant regret. We look back; we know now what we have lost in neglecting the happy chance, the golden hour which was within our grasp; and self-reproach sits upon the throne of our hearts.

“Miss not the occasion; by the forelock take That subtle Power, the never-halting time, Lest a mere moment’s putting off should make This chance almost as heavy as a crime.”

All this is simple and clear enough. Lost opportunities, like good intentions, pave the way to hell. The wisdom of all ages has taught us this lesson; and in all ages some men have failed to learn it. Shakespeare, Bacon, and Wordsworth, as well as the Apostle, have echoed the precept, Buy up the opportunity.

Does, then, this ancient wisdom counsel opportunism? There is a bad and good opportunism. The man of no principles and of selfish ambition is an opportunist. He is the man who is clever enough to adopt opinions at popular moments. He is ready to stand on any platform, and to give in his adhesion to any programme, so long as he feels sure that the platform will bear him, and that the programme will be popular. He can as adroitly change his creed or his politics as a skilful yachtsman turns his sail to catch the veering breeze. The bad opportunist is bound only by the occasion, and not by convictions; he is making for no port; he is intent only on a successful sail. He is the slave of the occasion, for he will sell his principles for the opportunity. This side or the other side, no matter which. It is the winning side for which he goes. Judas Iscariot was such an opportunist.

If, then, the opportunist be the man

agree. The precept is very simple. No opportunity is to be lost. Whenever there is a chance of doing or speaking good we should be prepared and alert to use it. To be wise too late, it has been said, is the exactest definition of a fool. Any one can be wise after the event. There were plenty of people found who were ready to prove that there must have been such a continent as America, after Columbus, by discovery, had shown that there was one. The wise man is the man who possesses all his faculties and powers in such order and under such control that he sees when to act. He grasps the occasion. He buys up the opportunity. He knows how to

“Seize the skirts of happy chance,”

and to climb upward till he attains some place of power and usefulness. Such a man marks the rising tide, and launches forth his little boat. He knows the danger of lingering. He knows that the only moment truly at man’s disposal is now. He has learned the lesson of Sybilline books. The chance of to-day, if it comes back to-morrow, comes back and asks a higher price. We must pay