

Concordia Theological Monthly

Volume 10

Article 2

1-1-1939

Pilgrims of Hope

Victor Bartling

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bartling, Victor (1939) "Pilgrims of Hope," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 10 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol10/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

their high regard for the grand old Lutheran masters, our fathers maintained a remarkable independence, acknowledging no authority but that of the divine Word. Not by blindly accepting every view which they sponsored, but by insisting on the absolute and sole supremacy of the Word of God in questions of faith and morals, shall we prove ourselves their worthy successors. If through the grace of God we shall avoid, as did our fathers, the extremes of pseudoliberalism and of traditionalism in our endeavors to promote the cause of confessional Lutheranism, an important condition for the future healthy development of our Church will have been met, and we may hope that other essentials, such as the proper differentiation between Law and Gospel and a whole-hearted devotion to the support of Christian missions, will not be lacking.

To conclude, in all these shifting scenes with their terrifying gloom there is a center of security and peace, "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning." At the century mark we look up to Him. "Lord, Thou hast been our Dwelling-place in all generations," Ps. 90:1. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever," Heb. 13:8.

W. ARNDT

Pilgrims of Hope*

A Practical Exposition of the Argument of First Peter

The Address to the Pilgrims. "Peter, the apostle of Jesus Christ," etc., 1 Pet. 1:1, 2; that means, Jesus through His duly commissioned servant writes this letter to Christians, who have their true home in heaven and so are living as aliens on earth, specifically to Christians of Asia Minor who most probably have received the Gospel, either directly or indirectly, through the Apostle Paul. They live not in an integrated, visible commonwealth as the people of God but are scattered, now here, now there, among a heathen populace. As aliens in spirit they are despised by those whose fatherland is upon earth. Before God, however, they are precious. From eternity God the Father, according to His purpose and decree of free grace, chose them as

* This paper was read before the Milwaukee College Conference as one of a series of papers being prepared by members of the conference and treating in a practical, somewhat homiletic, fashion the essential thought-content of the several New Testament books. The papers are not to require more than one hour for the reading. The treatment of the various books, of course, cannot follow a definite pattern. First Peter lends itself to a running analysis. The present paper is based on the Greek text. The writer has consented to have it appear in this journal in the hope that it may suggest a similar program feature to other conferences.

His own out of the mass of perishing humanity. In time the Holy Spirit in His work of sanctification has brought the eternal decree of election into execution, leading the chosen ones to the obedience of faith and the appropriation of Christ's redemption, "the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Thus He has brought them to the temporal goal of the eternal election, which enables them after their earthly sojourn to reach the eternal goal, the homeland in heaven.—After showing them in this introductory address their dignity and safety in the hands of the Triune God, who before the foundation of the world has chosen them as His own, the apostle adds by way of salutation the prayer that a large measure of grace and peace may be given to them. His own letter has proved a channel of grace and peace to untold Christians ever since.

In the title of "elect aliens" bestowed upon the readers we can sense the purpose of Peter's letter. *Elect*—this term holds in solution the long record of God's mercy and enshrines all the bliss bestowed upon those who stand in the state of grace. *Aliens*—this term, while implying the fixed reality of the eternal abode to which God's elect are journeying, at the same time discloses the hard struggle which they must endure during their alien state in a hostile world. God's election has separated them from the world and alienated them from the world and to the world. They have become non-conformists in belief and life. Non-conformity is a crime to all hundred-percenters. The world is always one hundred per cent. against God's chosen people. At best it will grant to them only a patronizing toleration, while only too often its cry is *écrasez l'infame*. God's gracious choice and the world's ungracious rejection go hand in hand. In the hour of trial that seems a glaring contradiction. Salvation and struggle, praise and pain, can these be coupled? Must it not rather be that, where the one is present, the other must be absent? It is to strengthen Christians who raise such perplexed questions in their "fiery trials" that Peter writes his great letter of consolation and counsel, a precious vademecum for Christians who sing: "I'm but a stranger here, Heav'n is my home; Earth is a desert drear, Heav'n is my home; Danger and sorrow stand Round me on every hand; Heav'n is my fatherland, Heav'n is my home."

I

The letter proper begins with a glowing ascription of praise to God for the pilgrims' present and future salvation, vv. 3-12. The basis of this hymn of praise is an act of God's great, undeserved mercy, His act of regeneration, bringing about a complete change of a man's heart, so that he becomes a new creature,

with new thoughts, new aspirations, new affections. Whereas before, in his natural state, the sinful world was his cynosure, he has turned a right-about. God is the new focal point of his attraction and affection. He has broken with his past, with the world. He has become an alien, an alien perhaps among his closest kindred. This new birth at the same time has transferred him into a life of changed outlook, a life of hope. He knows where he is going and that he is on the way. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," says the poet. Perhaps he is right. But the expectation of the unregenerated with regard to what awaits him beyond the grave, if he at all awaits something better than here, can be no more than a wish. His hope has no foundation either objectively or subjectively and therefore cannot at all sustain him. It is a dead, inoperative hope; and that means, finally, he is "without hope in this world." But the hope of the regenerated is a *living* hope, operative, effective, sustaining, conquering. It has a foundation unshakable, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—the pledge, the pattern, the mighty cause, of our resurrection to life. South Carolina has inscribed on its Great Seal the device *Dum spiro spero* (while I live, I hope). Such a hope may serve for a commonwealth whose existence is limited to this world, but a man needs something more enduring, something imperishable. "It is a fearful thing when a man and his hope die together." A Christian can confidently say, "When I am dying, I hope," for his indeed is a living hope, a hope that fills the future with a blessed reality.

This life of hope into which the Christian has entered through His new birth is further characterized as the life of an heir awaiting the day of his entrance upon his inheritance. The Christian's inheritance is *incorruptible*, that is, imperishable. In it there is no element of decay; it is free from all germs of death; it is unchangeable and eternal like its Author, the living God. Here on earth, as so many of us have experienced, inheritances often vanish before they are attained. We have also seen attained inheritances presently disappear, as it were, into thin air. How we must thrill at the prospect of an inheritance upon which the seal of permanence is fixed! Furthermore, our inheritance is *undefiled*, unsullied and unstained. There is no defect nor flaw in its title, nor is it stained by sin or polluted by crime, either in its acquisition or in its possession, as is so often the case with earthly inheritances. And it *fadeth not away*. It never withers; its bloom remains forever fresh; its fragrance never diminishes. Here is a uniformity of bliss which is never monotony. Finally, this inheritance is *kept safe in heaven*, where no burglars can break through, where no defalcating administrator cheats the destined heir. And while

this glorious inheritance is kept safe, the heirs, too, are kept safe for the inheritance, God's power, as it were, standing as sentinel over them, keeping them in faith and through faith to receive a salvation all ready to be disclosed *at the last time*.

Pointedly Peter affirms this preservation to salvation for the recipients of his letter, changing the "us," as the object of God's regeneration, to the "you," as the object of His preservation. The readers' faith which was being sorely tried needed this assurance. Then, Peter continues, when the salvation which even now is all ready to be disclosed has burst fresh upon you at the Last Day, you shall rejoice, after having endured trials of various kinds in this mundane stage—indeed only brief distress and suffered only when God has found it necessary in order that your faith, tested and approved as sterling, might redound unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Parenthetically Peter says, with his characteristic depreciation of what so many appreciate most, such faith refined and approved in the crucible of trials is *more precious than gold, which, though it is perishable, is tested by fire*. More precious indeed. For this faith leads into the presence of Jesus, *whom you love though you have not seen Him; in whom you now have faith while now you see Him not; and so you shall rejoice with joy inexpressible and glorious when you attain to the goal of your faith in the salvation of your soul*. The blessedness of this state of his readers, Peter goes on to show, must increase in their estimation if they recall that the faith-giving Word has come from the prophets of old and that not the prophets but *they* enjoy the fulfilment of the prophetic promises. Prophets have desired to see what they see and have not seen it. "What the fathers most desired, What the prophets' heart inspired, What they longed for many a year, Stands fulfilled in glory here"—in the Gospel which has brought the readers to faith. Moreover, the very angels of heaven eagerly desire to catch a glimpse of the salvation which God is bringing about through the Christ and the Spirit. The angels' joy is to see the glory of God reflected as in a mirror in His merciful work among men. How inestimably rich, then, the Christian, and how much reason he has to praise the abundant mercy of God!

II

Peter now explains at great length how living hope must prove itself a power. Hope which illumines the future transforms the present. Born again to hope, the pilgrim of hope must lead a life comporting with his new birth (chap. 1:13—5:5). This part of the letter may be divided into two sections: A) chap. 1:13—2:10; B) chap. 2:11—5:5.

A) The first section shows in a *general* way that the Christian hope is an operative force, right here and now producing changed lives. It is linked to the foregoing with a significant *therefore*. Because you are God's elect, God's children by rebirth, and heirs of God's salvation, prove yourselves to be what you are, living a life conformable to your new estate. Prerogatives entail obligations.—We find a series of six admonitions addressed to the pilgrims of hope.

1) In the first place, pilgrims of hope are really to live a life of hope. Fix *your hope upon the grace* (that great boon of eternal salvation) *which is brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*, v. 13. You have been born again to hope; hope is your privilege. You *have* hope; it is your possession through regeneration and in and with your faith in Jesus. But the spiritual acts which initiate and accompany the Christian state must be daily repeated. Pilgrims, keep your eyes fixed on your goal. Let hope characterize your life. Don't embitter your life by dull brooding or cold stoical resignation. Let it be irradiated by happy hope. The presupposition, however, of such hopeful lives is that you *gird up the loins of your mind and be perfectly sober*. As the Orientals gather up their loose robes with a girdle when in a hurry or when they are about to take up a task or start on a journey, so the Christian is to hold himself ready spiritually for action, for work, for battle, for stout-hearted pilgrimage. Or, with another picture, he is to be perfectly sober spiritually, in control of his inner man, free from the intoxicating influences of the fascinating sights and sounds and lures of the world; he is to keep his eyes fixed upon his duties, his goal, his road. Healthy hope has nothing fanatical in its make-up; it is free from enthusiastic wantonness and instability. Healthy hope knows its goal and is alert to ward off all that may swerve it from the road to the goal.

2) Pilgrims of hope are to live holy lives, vv. 14-16. They have become obedient to the Gospel through the call of God. The time of ignorance is ended. This must now be evidenced in the whole tenor of their lives. The passions which formerly controlled them in their heathen state must not continue to shape their lives; but the holy God, who has called them, must become their pattern, so that they reflect, however dimly and imperfectly, God's holiness. The heathen have often enough imitated their unholy gods. The Christian has seen the holiness of his God manifested historically in the life of the incarnate Son. The *imitatio Christi*, which will be enjoined later in this letter (2:21; 4:1), is *imitatio Dei*.

3) Pilgrims of hope will live a life of godly fear in the certainty of their precious redemption, vv. 17-21. "If you address Him as Father who impartially judges every one by what he has done,

live out the time of your sojourn here *in fear*, for you know that you were not ransomed with perishable things, silver or gold, from the futile life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, like that of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ, who was predestined before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of the ages for your sake who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are fixed on God." Christians must know that the God whom they call Father is an impartial Judge. When He passes final judgment on each soul, it will not avail us to say, "We have called Thee Father," if our life has not furnished proof that we have really been His children by faith. Faith is fruitful in good works. Will our works bear witness to our faith in the Judgment? We are sojourners here below. Union with God in heaven is our goal. How we must fear lest we fail of the goal! This fear is the opposite of security, not the opposite of joyful faith. It is the sister of love and hope. In this fear we say: "Abba, dear Father, how can I do what displeases Thee! Heaven is my home. Ah, then I must have that holiness without which no one shall see God." Because we hope with all our heart, we will be fearful lest by godless lives we nullify our hope. "Live in fear because you know." Know what? That you have been redeemed by a precious ransom according to the eternal will of God. The Christian fears because he knows the greatness of the price of his redemption and the greatness of that which may be lost. But all slavishness is removed from this fear because knowledge joins hands with fear, the knowledge "I am redeemed." This knowledge of ransom through Christ's blood from the past futile life is no pillow for lazy heads, but an incentive to work. The upshot of Christ's redemption is that our faith and hope are now fixed upon God. We know Him to be our reconciled Father in heaven. The redemption does not give us a license to sin, but through the gratitude it inspires it is a dynamic for action. "If after our redemption we should forget the fear of God and sanctification and fall back into the old, vain mode of life, serving sin once more, we should cancel our redemption, show contempt for the precious blood of Christ, and, as far as we are concerned, should make of no effect God's counsel of love; we should deny our Christian estate, our faith, our hope, and thus lose God's grace and eternal life. From this preserve us, dear heavenly Father." (Stoeckhardt.)

4) Pilgrims of hope will live a life of ardent brotherly love, 1:22 — 2:1. Christians have been born again not of mortal seed but immortal, by the Word of God, which lives and endures forever, while even the best that the world has to offer, all its glory, is like

the fading flower. This new life, having God as its Author, in its very inception implies a purification of soul, at least in principle though not in perfection. Selfishness has ruled in the unregenerate heart. In regeneration these selfish urges have been purified, and the heart has been renewed to unfeigned brotherly love. Because of this renewal which accompanies faith in Christ's redeeming love, pilgrims of hope now are to show this purification by loving one another from a pure, guileless heart. They are to have love not like the morning dew, which soon disappears, nor is their love to be like a slack bow-string, which does not send the arrow far enough nor deeply enough; but they are to love steadily, strenuously. Love one another. That necessitates that you put aside, as infernal weapons or defiling garments ill befitting your new nature, *all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind*, 2:1. How can these antisocial excrescences of a selfish, loveless heart agree with a life of hope, a life lived in the presence of God! If you are God's children, away with it all!

5) In connection with this exhortation to lay aside the vices of the old man, who, sad to say, is not completely eradicated by the new birth, comes the positive exhortation to pilgrims of hope to live a life of spiritual growth (2:2,3). From such a life brotherly love will naturally go forth. You are new-born babes, you are twice-born, born naturally, then supernaturally, and from the viewpoint of the final goal of hope with its perfection you remain babes during your whole sojourn. As babes, do as babes do — yearn intensely for milk, “unadulterated milk in the spiritual sense,” namely, that very Word of God which gave you birth. Yearn for it that you may grow thereby to salvation. Milk in the natural sense is assimilated by the one who receives it; it enters his substance. The Christian, on the other hand, through the Word is ever more assimilated to the nature of the milk of the Word, becomes ever purer, and thus ever maturer in Christian manhood. *If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious* (and all Christians have experienced through the Word how gracious their God and Savior is), you will long ever more for the Word which brings to you this gracious Lord.

6) Linked together with this reference to the gracious Lord, whom the Christians have in the Word, comes the final characterization of pilgrims of hope in this section of the letter, 2:4-10: by continued attachment to Jesus, the Living Stone, they build themselves up “as living stones into a spiritual house for a consecrated priesthood, so as to offer up spiritual sacrifices that through Jesus Christ will be acceptable to God.” The Jewish builders rejected that Stone on Good Friday. They still keep on rejecting that Stone to their eternal undoing. God has entered human

history in the person of His Son, calls all men to come to Him, offers them grace and salvation. It is death to close one's ears to the call, to reject the gracious offers, to refuse faith.

After this glimpse into darkness, vv. 6-8, Peter draws a free breath once more and closes this line of thought with a triumphant strain: "You, however, are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people who belongs to Him, that you may proclaim the praises [the wondrous deeds, the self-revealing acts] of Him who has called you from darkness to His wonderful light — you who once were no people and now are God's people, you who once were unpitied and now are pitied," vv. 9, 10. Moorehead says: "The descriptive titles which Peter here gathers together and places on the brow of the Christian brotherhood are of the most illustrious sort. A distinguished man, a noble, a general, a statesman, will sometimes appear in public with his breast covered with resplendent decorations which mark his rank and achievements. But such distinctions sink into insignificance alongside of this dazzling cluster. This is the heavenly nobility, the royal family of the Lord of glory, decorated with badges brighter far than ever glittered on the breast of king or emperor." How can Peter speak thus of congregations which must be repeatedly exhorted to faith and to love, which must be summoned to battle against manifold sin? Can any congregation without running spiritual risk think of itself in such exalted terms? Must this not be a temptation to pride, to Pharisaism and blasé self-satisfaction? Peter cuts all such questions short, answering them before they are put: "You are . . . , that you may proclaim the wondrous deeds of God." The Christian state is not only a gift but also an obligation; not otiose possession but forward-impelling power; not an occasion to praise men and to put on airs but a challenge to praise God and serve to honor His name. *Noblesse oblige*. God help us pilgrims of hope to be true to our calling, to serve because we have been saved.

B) It is not difficult to grow enthusiastic for a moral ideal as long as, in abstract beauty, it stands aloof from actual life or moves in the circle of generalities. But when the general command to live to God's glory is centered upon concrete cases, when the "I exhort you" lays hold on me in the particular phases of my life, then a struggle ensues, and decision is demanded. In the rest of the hortatory sections of our letter the pilgrims of hope are thus exhorted to manifest the living power of hope in the concrete situations and divinely appointed institutions of life with their obligations, 2:11 — 5:5.

1) The theme is given in the two opening verses: "Beloved, as sojourners and aliens, I appeal to you to abstain from fleshly

passions which campaign against your souls, living a noble life among the pagans, in order that by reason of the very thing for which they malign you as bad characters [namely, your Christianity], they may glorify God on the day of visitation, when they regard your Christianity in the light of your good works." One can use plain language toward sojourners and pilgrims; one can expect from them decision and energetic struggle—they are ready for it and looking for it. The content of the appeal to them is twofold—negative and positive: abstain from fleshly passions (v. 11), live a noble life (v. 12). Every one knows from personal experience what fleshly passions are. Regeneration has not eradicated them. But resolute warfare must be waged against them, because they campaign against the soul and threaten to carry it off to destruction as the prize of conquest. These passions that arise out of the realm opposed to God must be subdued, or they will be our undoing. The best way to remove filth is to flush it away by pure streams. To the fleshly passions a noble life must be set in opposition. "Among the pagans!" The Christians are aliens indeed in a hostile world. From the very beginning, Christianity met with suspicion, vilification, hatred. The Christians were maligned as depraved characters, dangerous to society. To enter the Church meant to enter an *ecclesia oppressa*. Is it really otherwise today? Would it not, then, be the best counsel for Christians to lead sequestered and cloistered lives? No; such is not God's will. Their alien state has a missionary design. Their life among the pagans is to be a sermon, a proclamation, of God. Their life of good deeds should silence all vilifications of Christianity as a depraved religion and rather be a recommendation of its excellence and thus be the occasion of the pagans' praise of God when His day of gracious visitation opens their eyes. The Christians cannot convert the heathen. Conversion is God's prerogative. The Christians can only proclaim the wondrous deeds of God. It is God alone who determines the day when He will reveal Himself to souls. Christians can but sow the good seed by word and deed. That is what they are here for. The Lord of the harvest makes the seed sprout in pagan hearts. Pilgrims of hope, attend well to the sowing!

2) Following upon the theme thus stated, Peter gives specific directions to pilgrims of hope for their conduct with respect to the ordinances of God that regulate the social life of man, 2:13—3:7. Here Peter speaks first of the state (2:13-17) and then of the home (2:18—3:7), giving directions for the household slaves (2:18-25), for wives, especially those who have infidel husbands (3:1-6), and, finally, for husbands (3:7). Submission to these ordinances is submission to God's will. Submission then

becomes a part of that freedom to which pilgrims of hope have been brought by conversion, a freedom which those only know who have become slaves of God. The purpose of such submission is to muzzle the ignorance of foolish men who babble that Christianity is politically and socially subversive. The Christians, as model citizens, model slaves (we may include employees in general), model wives and husbands, are missionaries for their faith by reason of the lives they live in their calling.

We have no time now to enter upon a fuller discussion of this important section. (2:11-20 is the Epistle-lesson for Jubilate, 2:21-25 the lesson for Misericordias Domini, and 3:1-7 is almost entirely incorporated in the Table of Duties of our Catechism.) Let us, however, note how beautifully Peter honors the poor despised slaves above all their fellow-Christians by presenting to them, as their Example in a special manner, Christ as He suffers innocently, patiently, trustfully, leaving an example, a ὑπόγραμμον, that is, a perfect writing copy of the master for the pupils to reproduce until their imitation begins to look like the example set before them. Or with another metaphor, suffering pilgrims are to follow "in the footsteps" of their suffering Lord. In one respect indeed, His suffering cannot be reproduced by us. His suffering is substitutionary redemptive suffering. However, gratitude for that redemption will enable us to suffer innocently as He did. "He bore our sins in His own body on the cross that we might die to sin and live for righteousness, and by His stripe you have been healed. You were astray like sheep, but you have now turned to the Shepherd and Keeper of your souls." The pilgrim's vision of Christ Crucified for his sins gives him the strength which enables him to walk in Christ's footsteps.

3) The section which now follows, 3:8—4:6, speaks of the general conduct of the whole body of pilgrims over against the pagan world in which they sojourn. I avail myself gratefully of the excellent summary of this difficult section contained in George Lillegard's careful study *The Idea of a Probation after Death in the New Testament (Theological Quarterly, XXIII, p. 212 ff.)*. Peter exhorts the Christians, 3:8-14 "to do all in their power to keep on good terms with their heathen neighbors, to repay evil with good and reviling with blessing, and to remember that the Lord will punish all those that do evil. This does not mean that they shall cringe before their enemies in servile fear or be afraid to defend the truth as they have learned it, 3:14-16, but that they must not let themselves be driven by persecution into doing evil deeds but rather strive to conquer their enemies by showing themselves blameless, thus keeping a good conscience in all things, and putting their persecutors to shame. Then, in the

rest of this section, 3:17—4:6, Peter shows why it is better to suffer even while doing only good and seeking to win others for the faith than to suffer as the result of their own evil-doing in the attempt to defend themselves against their persecutors, thus but giving their enemies added reason for reviling them; or than to suffer the condemnation of God by seeking to gain the favor of their enemies by joining in their sinful excesses (cf. 4:3-5). For when they suffer for well-doing, they are following in the footsteps of Christ, who also suffered, 'the Righteous for the unrighteous,' in order that He might bring such sinners as they are to God. But Christ's suffering did not last long. For . . . after being put to death in the flesh, He was quickened again in the spirit and then began His triumphal reign in His Kingdom of Glory, vv. 17, 18. First, He descended to the place where the wicked generation destroyed in the Flood was confined, and announced to them His victory over sin and death and the establishment of His glorious kingdom, v. 19. Then He showed Himself as the resurrected Lord to His disciples, ascended to heaven, and took His place on the right hand of God, where 'angels and authorities and powers' were made subject unto Him, v. 22. But now, when Christ, their King, thus had conquered all His enemies and after a brief period of suffering had gained such great honor and power, those who followed His example could also be certain of gaining victory through Him, saved out of the present evil world by the miraculous grace of God working through Baptism, even as Noah and his family were by the grace of God saved out of the ruin of the world in the days of the Flood. The enemies of God and His Church, on the other hand, would now, as in the days of Noah, meet with due punishment and be forever made powerless to harm the Christians.

"But the Christians must also beware lest they fall away from the faith or in any way yield to the temptations of their own flesh and their heathen surroundings, thus becoming subject to the condemnation of the heathen, 4:1-6. For Christ shall judge all men and call to account all those who have sinned, at the same time as He justifies all those who have believed the Gospel, whether those who have already died or those who live at the time of His coming, vv. 5 b. 6."

4) One aspect of the pilgrim's sojourn still remains, his relation to his fellow-pilgrims. And so we find that the following admonitions deal chiefly with the intracongregational life of the Christians, 4:7—5:5. Three lines of exhortation are pursued.

a) First, we have exhortations with respect to the general activity of the congregation in view of the impending Judgment, 4:7-11. "Now the end of all things is near. Therefore be self-

controlled and sober, so that you can pray" (4, 7). "God stands ready to judge," was the closing note of the previous section. "That day is not far distant," is the opening note of this section. The nearness of the consummation of all things is the thought which pervades all that follows. The certainty of the imminent end is not merely a comfort in the face of the trials and persecutions to be endured by the pilgrims; it is, above all, a powerful influence on their life. Because the Day of the Lord is near, the pilgrim will journey on self-controlled and sober. So only can he be in a condition for a life of prayer. Praying, and through prayer united to God, he walks forward to meet the end of all pilgrimage. Such prayer-life is, however, combined with diligent activity inspired by earnest love and the holy purpose to make the most of one's God-given talents in faithful service to the brethren for the glory of God.

b) In the second place, we have exhortations with respect to the persecutions which the company of pilgrims must expect 4:12-19. This is the second special treatment of this acute problem. At first glance it might seem to disturb here the progress of thought, for immediately after these verses we again find admonitions with respect to the life of the congregation, 5:1 ff. But this reference to persecution is not at all out of place here. As he thinks of the congregation as a whole, Peter envisions its hostile surroundings. And he seems to hear voices arising, both from the ordinary members of the congregation and from the called leaders, objecting that the pressure from the outside makes it hard to live a full life of Christian service. Against such objections Peter now raises his voice in gentle warning and at the same time in ample consolation. "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which has come to test you, as though a strange thing were happening to you. But rejoice in the measure that you are sharing in the sufferings of Christ, in order that you may also rejoice and exult when His glory is revealed. If you suffer abuse in the matter of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of Glory and of God rests upon you. No one of you must suffer as a murderer or thief or criminal or as a meddler in things alien to his calling. But if a man suffer for being a Christian, he must not be ashamed of it, but glorify God on that score (reading μέγαι with KLP). For the time has come that the judgment should begin with the household of God. And if it begins with us, what will be the fate of those who are disobedient to God's Gospel? And if the righteous barely is saved, where will the impious and sinful appear? So, then, let those who are suffering by the will of God commit their souls to Him, their faithful Creator, while pursuing a course of well-doing." Suffering may have the effect

that the child of God becomes a victim of temptation and sin and thus falls away. It need not have this effect. Peter gives a number of powerful aids to those who suffer. First, he points out that suffering is meant as a test. It is a comfort for the pilgrim to know that the ordeal is not an accident of fate without rime or reason but that he may believe it to be a part of God's loving discipline, however unable he may be to unravel the knotted strands. Secondly, by suffering for Christ's sake Christians share His lot. And if they suffer with Him, they shall also share His glory. Thirdly, it is better to suffer innocently and remain in union with God than to suffer deserved punishment and be separated from God, vv. 14, 15. Finally, the collision between the Church and the world and the resulting suffering are a sign of the approaching end. The final Judgment has its precursor already in the present, sifting the wheat from the chaff. The household of God must be the first to feel the painful process. But the child of God can calm his troubled soul. He has the assurance that God's Spirit is hovering over him, protecting and sustaining him. He can confidently deposit his soul into the hands of Him who has created and renewed his soul. There it is safe from all harm. Meanwhile let him do what God's will has assigned to him as his task; let him do good and trustfully, hopefully, continue his pilgrimage.

c) Peter now resumes his instruction on congregational life, with special exhortations to the elders, to the younger, and to all in general, 5:1-5. "I appeal, therefore, to such among you as are *elders*. (I who am their fellow-elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ and also a sharer in the glory which is going to be revealed), I appeal to them: Be shepherds of the flock of God that is among you, not as though it were forced upon you but of your own free will, as God would have it; not from base love of gain but with self-sacrificing eagerness; and not by way of tyrannizing over the charges assigned to you but proving yourselves models for your flock. And so, when the chief Shepherd shall make His appearance, you shall receive the unfading crown of glory. You *younger members* must also submit yourselves to the older ones and *all* to one another. And all put on the slave's apron of humility [which is always disposed to render whatever service it can to any one in need of service]. For God opposes the proud, while He gives grace to the humble." The apostle has shown in the previous section that, however grievous the situation of the pilgrim band may be amid a world of pagans, who have no use for such as do not identify themselves with them, there is no reason at all for growing slack in Christian activity or to feel

despondent. "Therefore" let old and young, pastor and people, do their duty in love and humility, as men who have an eternal hope and a supreme invisible Lord.

III

The last thought, of humility, leads over to the close of the letter, in which Peter summarizes in words of matchless charm and force the leading thoughts of the entire letter, 5:6-11: "Submit humbly, therefore, to God's strong hand, so that He may lift you up when it is time, flinging all your anxiety upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober! Watch! Your enemy, the devil, is prowling about like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in the faith, learning to pay the same tax of suffering as your brotherhood throughout the world. And the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself, after you have suffered a little while, make you perfect, strong, powerful, and stable."

1) The Christian life is a life of hope, of certain expectation; a glorious day is the pilgrim's goal. God has fixed that day and is preparing His children for that day. Often His discipline uses the rod of suffering. Pilgrims must humbly submit also to the discipline of pain. They can do so confidently because they know that God's powerful hand will not crush them but will eventually (certainly on that great day) lift them up. This submission is to be accompanied by a trustful flinging of all anxiety upon God, in the knowledge that He is not above concern for even the least care of His children.—That sums up one great theme of the letter: the pilgrim's hope is a power enabling him to triumph over all pain and sorrow.

2) Furthermore, such hope is not an intoxicant cutting loose all inner control in a wanton wave of enthusiasm but rather makes the pilgrim sober and watchful. He who journeys toward the eternal goal in faith and hope experiences this hope as a solemn obligation to holiness. He knows the magnitude of what may be lost. He does not underestimate the dangers confronting him. Like a roaring lion the great adversary, the devil, especially in days of persecution, prowls about seeking to make God's children his prey. Pilgrims must resist him. They can succeed only if they are foot-firm in the faith. It is a comforting thought for the suffering pilgrim to know that the brotherhood all over the world is having the same experience of suffering. But the exact force of Peter's words seems to imply more than a knowledge of the universal suffering of Christians. They rather call upon all pilgrims to learn to pay the same tax of suffering as the brotherhood throughout the world must pay (ἐπατελείσθαι). The sufferings

behind which the tempter lurks are spared no pilgrim. They are the alien's tax which he must pay. He can refuse to pay it, but then he is a pilgrim no longer. (Cf. Matt. 10:38; Luke 14:27.) — This is a second great theme of our letter: the pilgrim's hope is a call to battle.

3) The third great theme is set forth in the words "And the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself, after you have suffered a little while, make you perfect, strong, powerful, stable." The God who in His Word shows us the great goal in Christ, who has begotten us again to this hope, who calls us to battle, is a God of all grace: He gives what He demands; He gives strength to hold fast our hope to the end, strength to fight on to final victory. He has called the pilgrim to His eternal glory in Christ; but before entrance into this glory there will be suffering, — suffering, however, only for a while. Life is short. The glory is endless. And when the suffering and battle has ended, He will make His pilgrims "perfect, strong, powerful, and stable." (The future tense forms of the four verbs in the Greek, following upon the aorist participle which precedes, are to be interpreted eschatologically, although, of course, we have prelibations of eternal life right here and now and may therefore apply the fourfold promise also to our present state.) He will make them "perfect," will amend all that is amiss in them so that they lack nothing. The promise takes in above all the resurrection at the Last Day. God will make them "strong and powerful," strong inwardly and outwardly: inwardly, so that they can nevermore fall away nor yield to despair; outwardly, so that pain and sickness and death can have no more power over them. And He will make them "stable," will settle them, give their life a firm, solid, unshakable foundation. We think of the promise to the victor in Rev. 3:12: "He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God and he shall go no more out." And never doubt, pilgrims, that God's grace which has called you to this glory has power to bring the work which it has begun to this glorious close. "For to Him belongs the power for ever and ever," v. 11.

With this triumphant note the letter closes. A brief postscript is added, vv. 12-14, containing chiefly personal matters. The last sentence is a prayer which recalls the prayer in the salutation: "Peace to all of you who are in Christ."

May "the God of all grace" keep us all in union with the blessed company of those that "are in Christ," elect aliens, inheritors of unspeakable glory, wards of the Father's tender care, pilgrims of hope sustained in every trial on their journey to the everlasting home!

Milwaukee, Wis.

VICTOR BARTLING