

NOW

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Now by Alexander McKenzie

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ALEXANDER MCKENZIE

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The Day's Work Series

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NOW.

2 Corinthians vi. 2.

THIS is again the new year. The good wishes of our friends are constantly reminding us that we have passed from the old into the new. We enter with hope and purpose upon the waiting months. All which they contain we cannot tell. Exploration and discovery will attend our steps; but we shall live, and in that is the fact which encircles all that we shall do. Life in this world, or some neighbouring world, is prepared for us. Our duty we know in advance, and conscience is already enthroned. We shall go nowhere from the presence of God, and in his presence is fullness of joy. We may avoid the pleasure if we wish; but it fills the air in which we have our being. The events which shall enter the annals we have already begun to write we can only describe as we reach them, while there may be some confident forecasting. Duty will come and strength to match it.

We may look for weariness, but for rest also. If we fall upon disappointment and sorrow, it will be where the Comforter offers his solace. The year is already endowed with opportunity. To keep our heart and to be friendly is within our reach. To fear God and keep his commandments, to hold the faith and bear witness to it, to serve the town, to help the country, to assist the world, this we can do. Such things are not subject to vicissitudes. Life has less uncertainty than some imagine. The great interests can be depended on. There will be surprises in order that time may maintain its freshness and variety, but we can form our plans with assurance, and move into them with a steady tread.

The uncertainties lie among the less important things, or relate chiefly to matters of detail. We cannot tell what kind of weather we shall have a week hence. But we can rely upon having some kind of weather, and can make our plans in this confidence. We do not know what particular things may assert their claim upon our time and strength. But we know as well now as we shall in the future that it will be our duty to be honest and honourable, generous and helpful. No change will pass upon the two commandments which include our life. We can say, with Robertson when the darkness gathered about him, and his heart was heavy, and his faith trembled, that there is one thing to be depended

upon,—“it must be right to do right.” “Be true,” he said, “be true.” Nothing can affect this duty, and upon it we may construct our plans with intelligence. We do not know where we shall be a year hence, or a day hence. But we do know that we shall be for a hundred to-morrows, and that wherever we are we shall be with the divine love, with the same principles for the fashioning of our life as we have in this world. The place may change at any moment. It is certain to change before many days. But the change does not involve a reconstruction of our motive and a new arrangement of our affections. I do not know that any event is so greatly overrated as the passing from one world to another. Life is not subject to its control.

We must allow room in our expectations for the unexpected, though our thoughts have the element of prophecy. Nor should we desire more liberty in our anticipation, for we do not know what we shall want after twenty years have passed by. It would be foolish to attempt to lay a heavy mortgage on the coming time, and to insist that then everything should be as we now think we should like to have it. Our desires may well change with our growth. We are to live with others, and what they may choose to do will have its effect upon our own desires. We cannot tell what we shall want until the day when we want it. Nor is it for us alone to determine the events and condi-

tions of our future. A higher wisdom is over our life. An all-embracing mind holds all men in its interest, and makes all things work together toward a common end. It is enough for us to know that which is vital and essential, and for the rest to live by the day whose evil and whose good are sufficient unto it. Even the divine promises, certain as they are, leave much to be found out only in their fulfilment. In the classic chapter on faith the unknown writer does not hesitate to say that the heroic men whom he presents "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar." What does this mean, but that even the promises which are given for our guidance and encouragement, and which are to be utterly trusted and held precious, are not in all cases to be limited to the letter, or confined to our ability to understand them and appreciate their meaning? In the obedient mind they are enlarged, and with this is a grateful contentment. I am not willing to say, with Robertson, that "God's promises never are fulfilled in the sense in which they seem to have been given." But this at least is clear, that they are fulfilled beyond the sense in which they seem to have been given. We must allow our Father in heaven to do for us larger and better things than with our imperfect vision we could foresee. The surprise will always come upon that side.