

THE CHARACTER OF PAUL

Paul, in his natural character, before his conversion, resembles Bonaparte more than any other man – I mean both in his intellectual development and energy of will. He had the same inflexibility of purpose, the utter indifference to human suffering when he had once determined on his course, the same tireless, unconquerable resolution; the same fearlessness both of man's power and opinions, and that calm self-reliance and mysterious control over others. But the point of greatest resemblance is in the union of a strong, correct judgment, with rapidity of thought and sudden impulse. They thought quicker, yet better than other men. The power, too, they possessed was all practical power. There are many men of strong minds, whose forces nevertheless waste in reflections, or in theories for others to act upon. Their thought may work out into language, but not into action. They will plan better than they perform. But these men not only thought better, but they could work better than other men.

The same perfect self-control and perfect subjection of his emotions to the mandates of his will are exhibited in his conduct when smitten to the earth, and blinded by the light and voice from heaven. John, when arrested by the same voice on the Isle of Patmos, fell on his face as a dead man, and dared not to stir or to speak till encouraged by the language, "Fear not." But Paul (or Saul) showed no symptoms of alarm or terror. The voice, the blow, the light, the glory, and the darkness that followed, were sufficient to upset the strongest mind; but he, master of himself and his emotions, instead of giving way to exclamations of fear, simply said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" With his reason and judgment as steady and strong as ever, he knew at once that something was wanted of him, and ever ready to act, he asked what it was.

From this time on, his track can be distinguished by the commotion about it, and the light above it. Straight back to Jerusalem, from which he had so recently come with letters to legalize his persecutions, he went to cast his lot in with those he had followed with violence and slaughter. His strong heart never beat one quicker pulsation through fear, when the lofty turrets of the proud city flashed on his vision. Neither did he steal away to the dark alleys and streets, where the disciples were concealed, and tell them secretly his faith in the Son of God. He strode into the synagogues, and before the astonished priests preached Christ and him crucified. He thundered at the door of the Sanhedrin itself, and shaking Jerusalem like an earthquake, awoke a tempest of rage and fury on himself. With assassins dogging his footsteps, he at length left the city.

But, instead of going to places where he was unknown, and where his feelings would be less tried, he started for his native city, his father's house, the house of his boyhood, for his kindred and friends. To entreaties, tears, scorn and violence, he was alike impervious. To Antioch and Cyprus, along the coast of Syria and Rome, over the known world, he went like a blazing comet, waking up the nations. From the top of Mars' Hill, with the gorgeous city at his feet, and the Acropolis and Parthenon behind him – on the deck of his shattered vessel in the intervals of the crash of billows, in the gloomy walls of a prison, on the borders of the eternal kingdom, he speaks in the same calm and determined tone. Deterred by no danger, awed by no presence, and **[R1232 : page 6]** shrinking from no responsibility, he moves before us like some grand embodiment of power. The nations heave around him, and kings turn pale at his presence. Bands of conspirators swear to neither eat nor drink till they have slain him; rulers and priests combine against him; and people stone him; yet over the din of conflict and storm of violence his voice of eloquence rises clear and distinct as a trumpet call, as he still preaches Christ and him crucified. The whip is laid on his back till the blood starts with every blow, and then his mangled

body is thrown into a dungeon. But at midnight you hear that same calm, strong voice, which has shaken the world, poured forth in a hymn of praise to God, and lo! an earthquake rocks the prison to its foundations; the manacles fall from the hands of captives, the bolts withdraw of themselves, and the massive doors swing back on their hinges.

One cannot point to a single spot in his career where he faltered a moment, or gave way to discouragement or fear. Through all his perilous life, he exhibited the same intrepidity of character and lofty spirit. With his eyes fixed on regions beyond the ken of ordinary mortals, and kindling on glories it was not permitted him to reveal, [R1233 : page 6] he pressed forward to an incorruptible crown, a fadeless kingdom. And then his death, how indescribably sublime. Napoleon, dying in the midst of the midnight storm, with the last words that fell from his lips a battle cry, watching in delirium the torn heads of his mighty columns, as they disappeared in the smoke of the conflict, is a sight that awes and startles us. But behold Paul, also a war-worn veteran, battered with many a scar, though in a spiritual warfare, looking not on the earth but on heaven. Hear his calm, serene voice ringing over the storms and commotions of life: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course. There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

– *J. T. Headly.*
