

Acts
28:6

"They changed their minds."

These words record ^{in the case of certain Malting people} what occurred ~~when Paul~~
who, when Paul was shipwrecked upon their
island, and when there crawled out of the fire
their hospitality ^{was kindling} ~~had kindled~~ a venomous snake,
to fasten itself on his hand, concluded that he was
^{some} a murderer at least whom at last the fates had
overtaken and would thus destroy. But, contrary
to their ^{sure} expectation, he did not receive the ^{deadly} poison
which ^{was known to carry in its} ~~of this creature~~ ~~to~~ ~~which~~ ~~had~~ ~~in~~ ~~its~~ ready fang,
or, if ^{he did,} ~~the bite was made~~ it for once ^{unsuccessful} failed to kill: a thing
hitherto unheard of. The simple ^{souled} ~~mind~~ islanders passed therefore at once to a conclusion
^{the very} opposite of that which they had at first formed:
he was not a murderer, then: far from it: he was
a god; — for none but a superhuman being ^{might}
thus escape a doom which, to mere mortals, had

They changed their minds
Wilmⁿ
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hitherto been prompt and inevitable. And so,
 it is said of them, "they changed their minds" -
 changed them completely, although not rashly
 in the light they had - changed them, upon
 what seemed to themselves good grounds ~~for~~
~~the change~~. That is, they came to a ^{larger} ~~better~~ judgment ^{touching}
 the matter in hand - ^{or,} adopted a more enlightened
 opinion. | Undoubtedly these ~~wise~~ men are to be
 commended - ~~not~~ not because they changed, but changed
 from worse to better, so far as they could know of
 the state of the facts. | And it has occurred to me
 that some good use might be made of their example
 in our own cases: also, that a new-year's day
 is a day suitable for asking ourselves what
 use such good use may be: - ^{a day} ~~this being~~ ^a ~~the~~ time
 when thoughtful persons are accustomed to

look into themselves with an eye of more ^{Carefulness} care than ~~on~~ at other days, to see whether all is going right there in the house of their souls - and if not, to determine upon what change of mind ^{i.e. what alteration} in their way of judging ^{of} things - seems to be called for.

I have already stated my conviction - and, let me presume, yours as well, that those barbarians who gazed with surprise upon Paul's seeming superiority to that viper's sting, and who, from thinking him a criminal whom the gods had finally overtaken with their vengeance, began to think of him as himself one of ^{the words} their ruling deities - that they thus displayed wisdom for not adhering to what they at first thought, but for ^{turning} changing their minds squarely around on the hinge of ^{just} what appeared to them a sound reason: - in this recognizing a truth of wider application: of

application to all men who have wrongly set their
 minds upon what they may easily discover to be false.
 It is true that those they ^{immediate} with reference to whom
 the words of my text were spoken were just as far
 astray in their revised conclusion as they were in
 their original belief - yet still it is to be put to their
 credit that when ^{in their way of looking at things} they saw ^{proof} cause for changing their
~~belief~~ ^{belief} for this ~~other~~ conclusion, they unhesitatingly ^{yielded} ~~yielded~~
 to the new evidence. || Merely to change one's mind
 is not much ^{i.e.} to change it for no sufficient cause.
~~is still less~~ This is to be a weather-cock, | ^{reveals} ~~is~~ ^{it}
 a mind weak and unstable, when it is forever going
 about and about with each fresh wind of opinion
 that may blow upon it. | There are such minds,
 which, no two days together, are at the same point
 of certainty touching ^{matters} ~~even~~ of any importance.

They take the last push that is given them by the
 last person they ^{have} happened to meet - going hither and
 thither in a perpetual dance of changing positions
 like an ~~unstable~~ ^{uncatchable} globule of mercury upon a
 smooth table. | There is certainly a variety of sub-
 -jects upon which men's ^{minds} ought, firmly & conclusively,
 to be made up; ~~and from their hold upon~~ ^{them} ~~these ought~~
 being ~~so~~ ^{not}, that of a feather tossed ^{hither & thither} by each ^{crossing} breeze,
 but that a rock which even a storm cannot
 shake: - or, if there be any change, it ought to be
 that which is due to enlarging knowledge, widening
 and strengthening the grasping hand. This, however, takes for granted
 that the judgments formed are intelligent judg-
 -ments, not mere dogged prejudices or bull-headed
 obstinacies. Whilst, however, there are minds
 which are always ^{changeable} ~~changing~~ because always

careless, and are therefore to be regarded as so many whimsical whirligigs, only fit to be played with and even to be despised, there are others which never know how to change because they never ^{anything being} learn, fixed in their views by reason of being fixed in their ignorance.

These are uniformly the same in what they call their opinions, not because they have so far examined and tested them as to be certain of their rightness, but, ^{just} because they refuse to look into their foundations and are constantly assuming their soundness.

Persons who possess such minds are as much too hard to move as ^{they} those who possess the lighter kind I have described are too easy to move. In

a word, then, ^{no} ~~every~~ man ought to change his mind as to anything of consequence unless he has good reason for so doing, and every man

if by so doing he

ought to change his mind, ~~to~~ make it larger-
viewed at least, ~~if and even to give it altogether~~
~~different views, if there be solid cause therefor.~~

Now, here we are on one of those hill-tops which
time builds ^{up upon} ~~out of~~ the past time gives to us every
twelfth month - with an outlook towards the past
with an outlook upon the future. - ~~reminding us~~ ^{We gaze}
~~of changes many in wh. backwards and behold~~
Changes, many, within the year gone - changes
that affect us personally for better or for worse
- the principal change being, however, in ourselves
although we did not produce it: ^{by the will of God,} ~~we~~ are all, one
year older - i.e., He has caused us to take another
of those long steps in life of which ~~about~~ ^{very few}
~~no man~~ ^{men} take more than eighty or ~~more~~ ^{ninety}; but
of which each of us has already taken a good many.

There is thus, \therefore , a necessity for gazing into the
 future, two:— the little future that may yet lie
~~before~~ ^{await} us before the coffin shall shut our bodies
 up, and the big future that stretches ^{into regions} beyond ~~where~~
~~which the ^{very} highest of~~ ^{hill-tops are too low} ~~living man has ever~~ ^{fails to} ~~reach~~ ^{to afford}
 much scope to the ~~searching~~ ^{searching} eye. | Well: nature
 may change her aspects— providence may change
 its allotments— our own bodies may change their
 activities, ~~and~~ ^{times} time itself may change its appearances
 whether we look behind or ahead:— but, what of our
minds, how, meanwhile, do they change? | Everything
 that touches upon our welfare turns upon this most
 important question of all:— the mind being the
man; ~~to whom~~ ^{and that} man who is lowest in the
 scale of our common humanity— is worth more than
~~his~~ ^{multiplied} years numbered by millions:— for the year are

to cease one day, but he, never is. | As the entire past was needed for the make up of each person to-day alive, so the entire future is his destination. And it is this - his own vast consequence (to himself at least) that he is to consider always: - a consequence which imparts to any changes he may make, ^{especially} in the inner being of him, ^{of very} ~~so~~ weighty significance. | But such changes he must make, seeing that he can no more stand still than can a ~~burning~~ ^{flowing} stream or a forming cloud.

The great thing is, ^{does} shall he make the right changes or the wrong; or, is he content to have them made for him, in this direction or in that, by the mere circumstances which surround and press upon him.

● Shall he be his own master in giving guidance to his current career, or allow what is not he, to do so in his stead?

It would take me long were I to attempt an ^{enumeration} ~~enumeration~~
 of the various changes which ought to be made
 by this individual or that - indeed such an ^{enumeration}
 is not possible. But, by ^{laying off into new society} ~~dividing into~~ classes
 something to the point may be said. - 1^o There are
 those who are known as professing Christians. Well,
 all of these need to have it remarked of them, "they
 changed their minds" - even such of them no. as are
 shining lights in the Church. No Christian ought
 to change with respect to the great choice he has
 made, ^{by going back from it} - nor could you, by any arguments, persuade
 him to do so. ^{For leaving} ~~He has~~ chosen Christ ^{to be his supreme}
 as well as his only Saviour, ^{master,} and having thus exhibited the wisest choice
 that ^{or that eye was made -} can be made, by a simple man, he intends
 to adhere to it, come what may of hindrance or
 of reproach. But he is resolved upon heaven even

- though the path ~~thither~~ lay through the fires of mar-
 -tyrdom. But yet he may have to change his mind,
 time and again, as to the efforts he is putting forth
 for getting more knowledge of the blessed path, ^{larger} ~~and broader~~
 views of the ~~land~~ ^{place} where ^{this path} ~~it~~ loses itself in endless life,
 clearer notions of daily duty, ^{truer} ~~and better~~ conceptions,
^{on every} ~~of every~~ side, of the example of his Lord: so that
 he shall be recognized as a growing believer, ^{whose}
^{increasing} ~~light~~ ~~is~~ not always ~~that~~ who, not content with
 the ^{height} ~~progress~~ he has already reached, ^{shoulders himself to a} ~~shifts his position~~
^{from} ~~to~~ on the hill he is climbing until the ^{higher & higher} ~~light~~ that
 plays about his ^{uplifting} ~~uprising~~ head shall be seen to be
~~so~~ caught from the full face of God. If he has
 ever been minded to stop in his career, thinking that
 he has now done and sacrificed enough for his Redeemer
 - let him change this mind, and think as Caesar used

to think when conquests still awaited his already-
 -victorious arms, that "nothing is done whilst any-
 -thing remains to be done." // And as for those
 Church-members about whose persons there is, al-
 -most never, seen to play the light of ^a gospel attraction
 whether at home or abroad, - whose chief concern
 is not - very visibly at least - the unplaying of trea-
 -sures in heaven; - who would rather postpone
 a Christian duty than a company-engagement or
 a commercial-barter; - who prefer the easy fire-side
 slipper to the harder shoe of ^a forth-going charity; -
 who make no conscience-scruple of a ^{neglected} sabbath-ser-
 -vice, or of an avoided week-day prayer meeting; - who,
 in short, are in danger of converting their holy
 religion into a holiday recreation rather than main-
 -tain it as a life-long regeneration. They are

not bad men - these: as we commonly use this word
 - on the contrary, are probably good men in more than
 one sense of the description. But, they are woefully
mistaken men, if their minds are made up to treat
 their religion as a mere side-issue, ^{as a merely marginal}
 affair, excellent ^{enough} ~~to~~ for a safe resort in the ^{one} hour
^{prostrating} of death, yet not so trust-worthy for imparting glory
 to the ~~every day~~ ^{many hours} of preparing life - and now is
 the time to have it said of them "they changed
 their minds" - took a better look at things - gave
 a truer push to their Christian purpose - placed
 their thoughts more fully in contact with the thoughts
 of the divine teacher - brought their hearts nearer
 to the fire that ~~and~~ melts in the heart of God - and
 began to ^{afresh} mould ~~their~~ activities in the pattern ^{which} the
 saints used who now flame ^{- suns and stars -} on the everlasting
 skies.

But there are others who need to change their minds.
 Many upright persons are to be found in every com-
 -munity which is populous enough to have a church
 in it, who, with more or less regularity, wait upon its
 ministrations - yet who care not to be ^{a portion} of its mem-
 -bership, because seeing no charm in ~~it~~ a society so
 set off from the world: no such charm, at any rate,
 as they might see were they to examine closely the prin-
 -ciples which bind it together. They have, perhaps,
 watched and weighed certain of the individuals who
 compose it, and, judging of all by some, concluded that
 they ^{themselves} are just as well off where they are. They fail,
 however, to get thus a right view of this important
 institution, else they would find cause for changing
 their minds: - that right view being taken only
 when they see ^{the Church} things, with the eye of God. As im-

- perfect as it now is, it is not more so than it
 has always been from apostolic days down to ours
 - and yet He who ordained it has evermore regarded
 (shabby as it sometimes appears, ~~chiefly~~
 it with favor, because, ~~only~~ by its means are men to
 be trained for the ^{Church} ~~spot~~ above. Thus, whilst there
 are constantly in it such as mar its beauty and
 degrade its benefits; nevertheless out of it rise to heaven
 the multitudes who have honestly accepted its wor-
 -ship, and humbly borne its burdens, and ^{heartfully} ~~stead-~~
~~fastly~~ prized its brotherly ^{Communion} ~~Communion~~, and steadfastly
 helped to bear forward its banners of conquest. The
 Church is, indeed nothing without its ^{mighty} ~~glorious~~ Head,
 but, Christ the Royal Saviour being this Head, ^{it con-} ~~she~~
~~regard~~ as-stitutes His ^{and if} Body, appointed to share His
 shames, ^{it is also} and yet destined to share His glories. Al-
 -though, ∴, the Church has no power to save, it is, ~~the~~

employed by
 great instrument in the hand of Him who does possess
 this power, to as His chief instrument of salvation.
 Union with Him is everlasting life, and union with
His people is that life's feeder and helper. It is His
 nursery and school and workshop. Let them ^{change} ~~accord~~
 their minds, then, who have been accustomed to esteem
 the club as ^{an association,} ~~a mere means~~ of man's device, and hence
 of man's ~~own~~ ^{blamless choice} to stay out of it if he will. The very
 same law that commands ^{the heaven-ascended} His allegiance to ~~Jesus~~
^{the King} ~~the King~~ ^{earth-welcoming} His ~~earthly~~ ^{living} kingdom.
 commands alliance with ^{the} His ^{living} hearts
 The same grace that asks us to give to ~~it~~ ^{our} hearts
 invites us to give to His followers ^{our} hands. Identity
 with Him is identity with His.

I have ^{thus} confined my illustrations ^{to the matters of} ~~thus far~~ religion - and you will at once perceive the reason. It is because these are the important matters and include all else, just as a ^{great bank draft} ~~dollar~~ includes the thousand items it may purchase. Let a man effectually change his mind so far as to make it right in ^{the} religious direction - so far, i.e., as to have it accord with the Mind of ^{Christ} God - and, without an effort, without a wrench or a jar, his mind that has gone wrong in other directions, will swing to its true place. The God of grace being his pole-star, the needle of his life-compass will invariably ^{direct} point him in the path of safety, even thro' darkness and tempest. But if he be not this fixed and guiding star, all yr changings will avail but little, for you are still like those

ancient mariners who shipwrecked Paul on
 the isle of Mallā, who led to trust to treacherous
 winds and unseen undercurrents and ~~secret~~ ^{deceptive}
 guessings, in order to make their hazardous trip.

It was ~~only~~ Paul ~~himself~~, who, ^{alone} was able to act as
 Captain ~~plot~~ ^{ordnance} when all ^{seamanship} failed; and he, looking
 to ~~the~~ ^{that} Sun which to his soul never set, saw clearly
 what to do - and not a man was lost even ^{when}

the despair was devouring with its black jaws: -
 and he became that enlightened Commander of
 himself and others ^{which} that he so conspicuously was
 on this and many occasions, because, once, he
 saw reason for changing his mind - that time
 when he beheld his Saviour and heard His
 appeal from the skies - the same Saviour who
 appears to us as truly if not as shimmeringly, and ap-

- speaks to us as loudly, if not ^{as marvellously} ~~with~~.

And what does he say with that gospel-tongue
of his which ^{utters} the wisest and the sweetest coun-
sels we know: "Seek ye first the kingdom
of ^{God and His righteousness} ~~heaven~~ and all ^{those} other things shall be added
unto you." Turn to the higher and all lower

things will turn on the same hinge. Get the ^{greatest}
^{thing} and the smaller will take care of themselves. Be

right Christianly and you will be right worldly.

And now, ^{I repeat,} is the time to think of changing ^{where} ~~this~~
changing is needed - this new year's Day. For ~~the~~ now
it is that the ^{very} sun himself ^{seems to} ~~teach~~ us the lesson.

The 1st of January begins the year, because it marks
the period when the great orb ^{full} whose beams bring
us summer and whose partial beams make our
winter, has fairly begun his journey back

again from his farthest stop towards the south
 to in the direction of his mighty swing towards
 the north - and as he proceeds, he reawakens the
 sleeping earth ^{gradually} that, ⁱⁿ response to his cheery call,
 re-opens ^{by degrees} ~~her~~ the treasures of her spreading verdure,
 renews the bloom in her ~~slowly~~ maturing gardens,
 and ~~restores~~ ^{repeats} the growing promise of her great
 harvest-fields. ~~A such a change in us~~

from Let us imitate the sun - and change
 what is cold in our ^{pride} hearts as towards God or in our
 benevolence as towards men, being sure of ^a ~~the~~
 better life, and, when it must come, of a
 gladder death.