

SERMONS PREACHED BEFORE THE QUEEN AT BALMORAL.

I.—"THAT WHICH IS BEHIND OF THE AFFLICTIONS OF CHRIST."

"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church."—Col. i. 24.

"SUFFERINGS for you." What meant St. Paul by that? He could not mean that there was any sacrificial efficacy in what he himself did or suffered. In a horror of just surprise he once cried, "Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. i. 13.) And of Christ, he—or the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews—said again, "This man hath by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. x. 14). But yet we cannot fail to see, that by the expression of the first clause of my text, the Apostle teaches that his sufferings were verily borne on account of, for the good of, the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which were at Colosse.

We turn for fuller explanation of his meaning to the second clause. There we find another remarkable expression, "I fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ." What meant St. Paul by this? He could not mean that the work of the Saviour was incomplete or imperfect, so far as the Atonement was concerned. "It is finished." "There remaineth now no more sacrifice for sin." If there be anything clear and fixed in Holy Writ, it is, that whatever ransom, expiation, or atonement our sins needed, God's own Son, once and for all, once for ever, provided that on the sinner's behalf. It is to the personal Saviour, whose work needs, yea, admits of, no addition, the believer flees for safety.

"Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

Yet St. Paul speaks of filling up something that was "behind." We cannot class this expression with those others which describe Christians as "partakers of Christ's sufferings," as knowing "the fellowship of his sufferings;" for we understand them to refer to the Christian's personal conflict with sin, to his crucifying the flesh and dying daily, in imitation of his Master, and by the aid of His power. But the present passage refers to an affliction on Christ's part not yet complete: to some sorrow that He suffers still, and does not refer to what He bore for us long ago.

It teaches that there is still "behind," *i.e.*, still "lacking," some portion of the Saviour's pain. We are thus taught that Christ still

suffers, not only because He is everywhere present, as God angry with the wicked, but inasmuch as He is "the Head of his body the Church," which is yet suffering upon the earth. All His faithful people are members of Him, and if one member suffers, the others suffer with it—the Great Head and Centre of the system especially.

The meaning of the passage we take to be this: The Church is Christ's body on the earth; His divine Spirit is its life. Before that Church can reach its consummation, many sorrows and calamities await it, and Christ feels them all. He is touched with the feeling of His disciples' infirmities; He is crucified afresh by every traitor's infidelity. He is engaged in the toilsome and painful work of regenerating the world, of rescuing and raising humanity from bondage. Before the world ends, there is much suffering to be borne, not only by Christ in His own divine person, but by His Church, which is His body. St. Paul rejoiced that he was called upon to supply some of that which was "behind," to contribute somewhat to that common due of suffering. He counted that his mortal life, "his flesh," was honoured by being enabled to bear some of the burden. As he said elsewhere, "Therefore I endure all things for the Elects' sakes that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. ii. 9).

It is a wonderful thought which is thus opened up to us; that the dry tree still bears the mark of men's cruel hands as the green tree did; that Christ's Body—the Church—*must* have a lot of trial and suffering, of struggle and endurance; that every living member of that body must bear his share of it; and that there is much still lacking which must be made up ere the great conflict can come to an end. The good soldiers of the Cross will one day bring all enemies under the King's feet, but they will get many a sore wound ere the battle is done. Christ's Body has to go to and fro amid the homes of men, to undo the work of evil, to remove sin from men's hearts and lives, to blunt the keenest edge of sorrow and to extract the poisoned sting from death. That Body of Christ has to go to the publicans and sinners,

the harlots, to convince them of a Father's love and eternal salvation; to the blinded, the ignorant, the forsaken, to enlighten them with the light of the knowledge of the truth; to go out into other lands where other sheep than those of the present fold are to be found lost and forlorn, and to bring them unto the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. This will involve a great suffering; the suffering (like Christ's in his human lifetime) of toil endured, of watching and weariness; of self-denial, and patience much provoked. It will also bring the scorn and scoff of men, there will be persecution and opposition, the tongue of opprobrium and the sharp sword of death: there will be mountains of terror and difficulty to be removed and cast into the sea. There are even now in the world whole continents where the light of the Gospel only shines as one taper in a midnight city; and even in Christian lands, at the very basis and foundation of society, are there not regions which are the habitation of horrid cruelty, where gross darkness covereth the people? It falleth, therefore, to us to ask ourselves whether we be followers of Paul as he also was of Christ, whether we are teaching the ignorant, relieving the poor, trying to lessen the world's wrong, and care, and sin—whether we are thus helping to bear Christ's burden, even when the load is neither of our own causing, nor yet directly laid upon us but upon others.

If we are not doing this, then we are not merely leading idle, useless lives; we are, on the contrary, effecting much, leading very powerful lives, adding mightily to the things "which are behind," accumulating arrears for more faithful men to bear. It is a truism to say, that if only all Christians would do their part in the world, there would be comparatively little for each single man to do, and that many—most—do nothing, so that it falls to others—to the few—to do all. But it is often forgotten that *the work must and will be done*. Christ sitteth at God's right hand till all His enemies are made his footstool. Every faithless and indifferent Christian only adds to the cares of the willing; the toils of some who are better than he. Ay, it is easy to sit still at home, to take our ease, to eat, drink, and be merry, while the burden of terrible wrong grows heavier on the dear Lord we profess to serve.

It is seen in the history of nations and communities how the carelessness and evil-doing of one age leads to convulsions and struggles when Truth and Right assert them-

selves in the next. Has it not been seen in the history of our own land? Is it not true of all the Christian Church that the coldness and indifference of last century have laid upon this century far more than its own share of work and care; that, for example, the chief duty in home missions is to make up the arrears, the things which were left behind when they ought to have been done? The ecclesiastical distractions of our country in the present day may be traced in great measure to apathy and consequent neglect of duties some half century ago. May we not also venture to see in very recent history how a great nation allowed the wrongs of the slave to accumulate from year to year, until at last the barriers of national prejudice were swept away by rivers of the nation's blood?

So also with individual men. Have you never seen a good man overburdened with a work which was not of necessity his, any more than it was the work of many around him, but which he was notwithstanding left alone to do? Men had been long indifferent, had allowed things to go on from bad to worse until, in the strength of Christ, he came forward to rectify the evil-doings of generations before him and of thousands around him. Have you never seen or read of such a one, staggering beneath the agonising burden of men's carelessness—other men's undone things; calling on them for Christ's sake to come to his help, calling almost in vain, while he endured in vicarious suffering the pain of atoning for the omissions of his friends and brethren?

The situation is not realised if such workers are borne on to fame and glory, if the acclaim of thousands rewards their self-denial; but have we not seen men who wrought on—in Christ's work, not their own, in other men's share of it, not theirs—cheered by no sympathy save of that empty sort which cried "Hosanna" upon Olivet, and next day left the King of Zion to be crucified alone. What are those good men doing, but making up what is behind of the afflictions of Christ; bringing the glad day of His triumph nearer, and spreading the influence of the Holy Gospel? Shall we pity them? They ask no pity; they "rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake;" and when they mourn it is not that they have to bear so much, but that there is so much to be borne; not that they unaided have to do so much, but that they when left alone can do so little. Yet they know in their inmost hearts that they enjoy a priceless privilege; and that theirs is the true gain and glory.

"Yea, and if I be offered on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." The Sunday-school teacher may seem to have a weary round of dull monotony as she bends over her class, repeating over and over again the same simple truths of a Saviour's life and a Saviour's love, with little to cheer her save the dull affection of her pupils; but she who bears the burden of Christ's cause is not to be pitted half so much as those careless ones who do not come to her help. He who goes into heathen homes, who strives to lift up the poor inmates to Christian privileges and Christian duties, has a hard and weary task in overcoming their indifference, in maintaining his own patience, even under false promises and bitter disappointment of cherished hopes; but yet it is Christ's cause, it is a work which must be done, a suffering which must be borne ere Christ's kingdom can come. Happy they who spare Christ one pang of pain, who hasten even by one short hour the blessed glories of the millennial time!

Need we ask why a man should do all this? and why we should press before each other to be in the goodly company of them that serve the Lord? An answer might indeed be given, showing, on grounds of reason, that we owe all to Him from whom all our good things come; but the true necessity constraining us to bear Christ's burden is one that is never realised as necessity, but is acted on as nature: the necessity laid on true love to be loving and to do the works of love. To be full of the mind of Christ Jesus is to seek opportunities of doing good, and to rejoice in them when found; is to be able to say of money, time, all life, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." That man who has entered into the spirit of Jesus—rather, who is possessed by the Spirit of Jesus—sees men perishing, men in pain and need, and asks no more, for the divine impulse prompts him to come to their aid, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

This is love; love of God, and love of man. It is the true love; that which is likest God. For love is of two kinds, the lower and the higher; the love which seeks and the love which gives. There is a love which seeks God, which tries to enter into the spirit of God, to be filled with righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. It prompts the poor sinner who loves the Saviour to flee that he may hide himself in the clefts of the rock; as the little babe clings to the mother's breast, as the frightened brood

rush to the shelter of the mother's wings. We have all felt a love which seeks, which seeks help, comfort, joy, and seeks them in nearness to the beloved one. This love, which is not satisfied save in nearness to the object of its desires, brings many a one to Jesus, and enables them to learn of Him to do his will. It characterizes the first stage of the Christian life, when the young believer is engrossed with the sense of his own personal need.

But it is not love in its highest form, its truest nature. It is not wholly free from all possibility of selfishness. It has often led to a very imperfect Christianity. It prompted hermits of old to go away from men that they might seek God, so as to make Him all their own—theirs to enjoy and to meditate upon, in the woodland grotto or in the convent cell. It prompts many men still throughout their Christian course to seek in devout reading and meditation all their communion with God, to mortify the flesh, to live—so far as their souls are concerned—a quiet, godly, and remote life into which other men do not enter, and which does not go out to seek them.

This, we repeat, is love, and it may lead (it ought to lead) to something higher than itself; but it is not the highest kind of love, just because it is not at irreconcilable war with selfishness.

The *higher* kind of love *gives*, and if it seeks anything, it only seeks something to give, or some one to receive its givings. It gives itself. True is the child's love, when it clings to the mother's breast; but as true and higher far the love of the mother when she clasps her child to her bosom. True love it is which draws the sinner to the Saviour; but truer, higher far, the Saviour's love when He gave Himself for our sins. That is Christ's love; and "greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." "God so loved us that He *gave* his Son;" Christ so loved us that He "*gave* Himself for us." This giving love is what the Psalmist refers to when he says "O taste and see that the Lord is *good*:" and it is of this we speak when we say that "goodness" is an attribute of God. And in the case of those who are God's children, they are nearest and likest the Father who have a love that gives itself for Him, that receives His gifts to give them out again. It may be termed self-sacrifice, but not quite correctly, for sacrifice is the giving up of something one has a conscious interest in keeping—whereas this love has no conflict, acts in the only way possible to it when it

gives itself. This love of giving and not of getting is the true source of all that is noblest. It was not love of gain which took the light of the highest civilisation to India, but love of Christ; not commercial adventurers, but Carey in the Danish ship. So it has been, so it will be; and all the best that has been done, and best done, for the stricken poor, has been done for Christ's sake, in the spirit of His Gospel.

But how shall a man give himself for God? Even as St. Paul did. Christ is in his people, and St. Paul so loved Christ that he gave himself to Christ and for Christ—Christ as dwelling in his people. "I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, for his body's sake, which is the Church." Without reserve he made it his life's work to be an apostle of Jesus; and he rejoiced that it was in his power to give himself in such a cause. "To us is this grace given, not only to believe in Christ Jesus, but also to suffer for his sake." "We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. iv. 11). As in his Master's own case, Paul's death, his daily dying, was the life of men. It might be said that Christ was no longer on the earth, but that was no difficulty to one with St. Paul's creed—that Jesus lives in his body, the Church, and that all who live, live in Him and unto Him. When Paul saw the poor and the lost in need—in awful need—of all things, he saw Jesus, and it was with joy and pride he gave himself for "Him in whom we have redemption through his blood." Let me illustrate this teaching of mystery by what I have lately seen. In one of the grandest and withal fairest scenes of Europe, the eye of the traveller is arrested by the simple inscription on a village hospital, "To Christ in the poor" (*Christo in Pauperibus*). The mind is almost oppressed with awe when around are the everlasting hills, for man feels how immeasurably far he is from the great God who hath made the heavens and the earth; but He whom we can only worship amid the glories of inanimate nature, is so near us that we can reach Him, touch Him, yea, help and bless Him in the persons of the suffering poor. "Because ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."

This is to share, yea, to complete, the sufferings of Christ. This is to hasten the coming of the latter day when all His burden shall have been borne. We are all ready to

take one part of that great truth that Christ dwelleth in His people—the part, namely, that He dwelleth in *us*. We use this to encourage our souls in their conflicts with Satan, so that we may be strong against the fear of sin and death and hell. But it is as true of others as of us. Christ dwelleth in all His Church, in every poor believer throughout the world, in every struggling soul that groans under hard oppression, that cries for rest and light and peace. Their pain is His pain, their woe is His woe, their trials are His trials, their need is His need, and how comes it that we think of them—of Him—so lightly? His burden is the sustaining of them one and all; and His burden brings Him pain. Yes, and more. His burden, too, are the heathen that know Him not, and the people that have never been called by His name; and that burden can only be lightened when they are brought into His Church—when those wild olives are made trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord. What burdens Him burdens His true Church, and it is our part, our privilege, to lighten it. Is not life all too short, are not our means all too scanty, to enable us to lighten much of His continued suffering? And yet of that life how many hours, of those means what fraction, has the selfishness of our very love allowed us to devote to bearing the burden of the Redeemer? Sometimes we are compelled, as was Simon the Cyrenian, to bear the cross of Christ. But which of us goes forth willingly to take it up, counting its shame our glory?

What then does all this practically mean? What are we to do? It means that we should seek the lost, and not wait till they seek us; that we should seek for charities and missions, and not have them ever beg, begging at us; that our money should be made to find channels of beneficence, instead of being kept until we are implored to let a little of it go. It means that if we are living members of Christ's body, we are, we must be, suffering because of the miseries of the poor, the darkness of the heathen, the shameful sins of Christ's professing people. It means that our constant anxiety should be to guard against deadness and carelessness; against being contented with selfishness; against taking the world's misery easily, when we know how it wounded the heart of our Saviour. Oh, for that mind in the body, which was and is in the Head: oh, for that mind in us which was in Christ Jesus!

Perhaps we have hoped that our religion would be a matter of taking, not of giving.

But that cannot be. To take Christ, to win Christ, is to take the noblest and most unselfish love into our souls; is to be identified with Him on whom the world's sin and the world's wrong lies like a heavy burden;—and have we done this in any measure? Do we feel as a burden the woe and weariness of all this world—the poor heathen—the oppressed believers, the superstitious saints, the wranglings and imperfections of Christ's own people? Never a dead church but it lies, like the heathen cross, heavy on Him; never a falling Christian but Christ feels a member lopped off; never a quarrel among His people, but the Blessed Body is rent again. He scorned the seekers after loaves and fishes who loved Him not, but sought to profit by being in His company. Do you think He is so changed that He will much care for those who seek blessings but give none; who make Him bear their cross, but will not help Him to bear His?

How passing strange that the burden of the world's sin should be so little lightened all those eighteen hundred years, when during them so many good and godly souls have gone away to join the General Assembly and Church of the First Born; so many have fought their own fight, and won it by his grace! Comes not this because, in their fighting and in their suffering, most of them sought so much more than they gave again? And yet He saved them, welcomed them, crowned them! How hard it must have been for Christ to help those who did not help Him! What a drain must His sympathising help have been on that fountain of exhaustless sympathy and unselfish love! How like His suffering still is to what it was so long, long ago! "Simon," he said on the eve of his own dark agony, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not;" but when that agony was come He was constrained to cry out, "Simon, couldest thou not watch with me one hour?"

And yet is it not true that He said, "Greater works than these shall ye do because I go unto my Father?" In what sense greater? They have been actually vaster and more

marvellous in their results on men; for the rapidity with which His religion has spread has increased tenfold since His ascension. But still more marvellous are the works when we remember that the disciples who did them were not pure and perfect beings like their Master, but frail and sinful men. He did not, could not, know the sense of guilt nor the weariness of despair, nor the anguish of remorse; and when His work was done, He commended into the Father's Hand a spirit unsullied at the last as at the first. How different has been the case of those to whom He entrusted His cause in the world! So burdened were His first disciples with personal sinfulness, so burdened are all His people still, that even if He had done no more than enable them to work out their own salvation the universe might well have adored the riches of His grace. But the work which believers are strengthened to do is greater far than the accomplishment of their own deliverance. Christ makes us "fellow-workers with God" so that we can draw others unto purity and everlasting life. They who have passed from shore to shore as messengers of mercy; they who have gone down to the lowest depths of human need and raised up those who are now of the white-robed throng, were not incarnations of God, not angels, not even sinless men, but men once weak as the weakest, and far from God's blessed Grace, who in Christ's strength out of weakness were made strong, and in Him could do all things. It may indeed be objected that those works are not done by the disciples but by the Master—that all the works are His own. And this is true—to Him therefore be all the praise and honour and glory—but He Himself spoke of those works as ours, and we may justly so regard them. Greater works than His own have His people done in His name. And yet with all these possibilities, with all the power to do such things abiding in His Church, how much is there still "behind"—still to come—of the sufferings of Christ!

O Lord our God, make Thy Son's Kingdom speedily to come!

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