

Correspondence.

ASSOCIATIONAL SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION OF NOVA SCOTIA, IN THE NORTH CHURCH, HALIFAX, JUNE 27, 1870.

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"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." Eph. vi. 3, 4.

The Apostle Peter reminds the Christians of his days that God had called them "out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. ii. 9.) Such was Christianity. It was truly "marvellous light," both to the Jews and the Gentiles. To the former it presented new views of God, as the God of all men, and "not of the Jews only." It crushed their vain hopes, their carnal confidence and boasting. It taught them that those who worship God must worship him "in spirit and in truth" (John iv. 24), and that there is no religion where there is not a renewed heart and a holy life. The Gentiles, too, when they became Christians, underwent a complete revolution of thought, and feeling, and action. Of such love—justice—purity, as the gospel placed before them, they had never heard. They were especially astonished at the stringency of its laws, the far-reaching influence which it proposed to exercise over character and conduct. Their own moral teachings had been very indulgent. A man might be considered a good man among them whose habits of life totally disqualified him for Christian society; and practices which are now denounced as infamous were then looked upon without abhorrence, and even regarded as consistent with virtue. It is not surprising, then, that the churches found the enforcement of holy discipline an unthankful and difficult task, or that persons whose souls the sublime truths of the gospel had penetrated with wonder and joy should afterwards shrink from the moral abstinence required of them. Many passages in the Epistles illustrate these observations. The Church at Corinth was evidently much troubled in this respect. The admonitions contained in the chapter now before us, from the twenty-fifth verse to the twenty-ninth (both inclusive) indicate unholiness, even in Ephesus. The text itself implies a liability to the evil tempers spoken of, and an indisposition to submit to the restraints of the new religion.

The old depravity exists still, and the exhortations and warnings with which the first Christians were plying are found suitable to those who profess the truth in this nineteenth century. The history of the denomination to which most of us belong, and which we are accustomed to flatter ourselves is peculiarly apostolic in its doctrines and forms, furnishes records of variance and strife; and events have occurred from time to time in those provinces which render the application of our text always and everywhere appropriate. Let us therefore reverently listen to the words of the Lord. The Holy Spirit is speaking to us this morning. He says—"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour."

Two things have to be considered:—

I. A COURSE OF DUTY ENJOINED.

II. THE REASONS ON WHICH THE INJUNCTION IS FOUNDED.

I. In the first place, we have a COURSE OF DUTY ENJOINED.

It will be observed that the reference here is not so much to the outward conduct by which the power of the gospel is to be exhibited to the world, as to the behaviour of Christians towards each other.

1. What is to be avoided.

It is supposed that differences may arise—that causes of offence may show themselves—and that strife may break out. How should a Christian behave at such times?

"Bitterness" is to be "put away." If the difference relate to mere varieties of opinion on points of doctrine or practice, why should there be any "bitterness"? Are we not, as far as regards each other, perfectly free? And did not the Apostle say, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. xiv. 5.)?

Even if the fundamental truths of the gospel are concerned—truths, the denial of which requires us to avoid religious association with any one, and not to "bid him God speed" (2 John 10, 11), we may be compassionate, and sad, and prayerful, in our obedience to the divine injunction, without any admixture of "bitterness." If offence has been given or taken, are there not Christian methods of adjusting all? Cannot Christians explain to one another, and receive explanations? Why should we cherish unbrotherly feelings,—or harbour suspicion,—or nurse unkindness into dislike?—Where "bitterness" is felt, men shun each other—their evil tempers appear in their very countenances—and their refusal to act together displays their mutual aversion. All this is utterly contrary to the spirit and teachings of Christianity.

"Wrath." The word so rendered is sometimes used to indicate that kind of displeasure which is manifested towards inferiors by sovereigns and other rulers. Thus, Herod was "highly displeased" with the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon (Acts xii. 20); and Moses "by faith forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. xi. 27). It is also employed to denote the fierceness of hate, and furious passion. But it is needless to attempt to prove that passion and hatred are incompatible with the profession of Christianity, seeing that we are commanded to love our enemies, to "bless them that curse us," and to pray for "them that despitefully use us" (Mat. v. 44).

"Anger." There is a righteous indignation against sin, coupled with pity for the sinner, and desire or effort for his reform. But it is difficult in our present imperfect state to be angry without sin. Since anger at sin is very apt to become sinful anger. The Apostle, therefore, after saying, "Be ye angry, and sin not" (verse 26), seems to recognise the difficulty, and admonishes us to avoid it by putting away the dangerous emotion. Its effects on others as well as on ourselves are such as to give force to the exhortation. The numerous references to it in the Book of Proverbs, pointing out its manifold evil tendencies, may serve to convince us that the best mode of dealing with anger is to "put it away." (See Proverbs xiv. 17; xv. 18; xvi. 32; xix. 11; xxix. 20; Eccles. vii. 9.)

"Clamour." That is, vociferation, outcry. As the Jews "were instant with loud voices," demanding the crucifixion of the Saviour (Luke xxiii. 23); and the Ephesian mob "with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts xix. 34); and the crowd that had listened to the Apostle's defence when he stood on the stairs leading to the castle, "lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live" (Acts xxii. 22). "Clamour" includes all violent interference with fair and just consideration of things;—attempts to hinder others from taking part in a discussion, or by offensiveness in word or manner to stop their speaking;—a rude, brow-beating, bearish behaviour, which is as far removed from the gentleness and the courteous as it is from the Christian. Yet so prone are professing Christians to sin that the Apostle thought it necessary to exhort them to put away "clamour."

"Evil speaking." "Speak not evil one of another, brethren" (James iv. 11). Reviling, which is the ordinary meaning of the word, does not include all that is here aimed at. We "speak evil," when we impute bad motives to our brethren,—when we injuriously magnify peculiarities or defects,—when, by insinuation or otherwise, we induce such thoughts or convey such representations as tend to lessen the respect due to others, or to lower them in the esteem of their friends. This is to be "put away."

"All malice." "In malice be ye children, but in understanding be men" (1 Cor. xiv. 20);—or, according to Dean Aford's much-improved rendering, "In malice be as babes, but in understanding be ye full-grown men." That word, "all," is emphatic. It imports the great variety of methods by which unkindness may be manifested. It is shown by wishing evil to men, as well as by doing it;—by taking any steps, or forming any plans, with a view to injure others;—by avoiding the prevention of injury, when it is in our power;—by exaggerating weaknesses or failings;—by concealing excellencies;—by rejoicing at calamities or non-success (see Proverbs xvii. 5; Obadiah 10-15);—by slander and falsehood, in their infinite forms and ramifications;—by the propagation of unfavourable reports, especially if they are not thoroughly substantiated. The modes of malice are endless. She is the prolific mother of mischiefs. How sad it is that an apostolic church should need to be admonished to put her away!

2. What is to be practised.

"Be ye kind one to another." No one can mistake the meaning of that word—"kind." It is to be friendly—generous—always ready to do a good turn, and watchful of opportunities for that purpose. It includes benevolence in its various forms, yet always without ostentation, or a patronising air. It is the very reverse of the niggardly or the compulsory charity which some mistake for it. It is resemblance to the Lord himself, of whom it is said that "gracious words proceeded out of his mouth" (Luke iv. 22), in the days of his earthly sojourn, and who is still "gracious," as multitudes can testify, who have "tasted" it (1 Peter ii. 3).

"Tender-hearted." A modification of kindness, or rather, the root from which it springs. It is a loving consideration, producing such a deportment as is adapted to endear brethren to each other, and to call forth mutual good-will.

It is to be "pitiful"—to be "courteous" (1 Peter iii. 8). It is a disposition that shrinks from all that is harsh or ungenerous, and would rather receive a wound than inflict one.

"Forgiving one another." This is the very opposite to retaliation, revenge, the *serve-him-right* feeling. The reference is not to crimes, which are not supposed to exist among brethren or towards them, and must generally be left to be dealt with according to the law of the land. The apostle refers to personal offences—real or supposed injuries—cases in which the world would call for explanation, or demand satisfaction (in the technical senses in which those words are used), and would be content with nothing less. Jesus commands us to forgive, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him, and if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent: thou shalt forgive him" (Luke xvii. 3, 4; see also Mat. xviii. 21, 22). And the individual Christian must forgive, whatever may be the failure of the church in the exercise of its discipline, with which the duty of personal forgiveness does not interfere.

"Walk in love." Love is the cardinal grace of the gospel, the element in which the new man lives and moves. The converted sinner loves God; and he loves "all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" (Ephes. vi. 24). This love is many-sided. Like the mystical beings of the Apocalypse, it is "full of eyes" (Rev. iv. 8)—ever on the look-out for occasions of rendering service. It is not an impulse, a temporary emotion, but the every-day habit, yea, the very life-blood of the renewed soul. Neither is it a secret feeling; the Christian must "walk in love." It is visible—active—fruitful. "Love is long suffering, is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, imputeth not the evil; rejoiceth not at unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Cor. xiii. 4-7. Aford).

Here is a picture of practical Christianity. If, in every society professing to be a Christian church, all this were in lively, habitual operation, not only in the melting times of revivals, but in the every day history, how lovely would be the appearance of the great gospel family! How bright would be the testimony borne to truth and holiness!

Now, let no one say that such an exhibition of Christian character and conduct is impracticable. The Lord Jesus Christ prescribes no impossible duties. We read in the Old Testament that "the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psalm lxxiv. 11). The Saviour declares that his "strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. xii. 9). The Apostle Paul tells us that "God is able to make all grace abound toward us; that we, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. ix. 8);—and Peter says that "his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. i. 3).

II. We have now to consider THE REASONS ON WHICH THE INJUNCTION IS FOUNDED.

1. Our own forgiveness.

"God for Christ's sake (or rather, in Christ) hath forgiven you." Such is our position. We are pardoned rebels. Our offence was "rank." We could not make amends. We had nothing to pay. There was no remedy but forgiveness; and forgiveness, under the divine government, must be righteously bestowed, so as not to interfere with the due course of law, or lead any to think that sin against God can be lightly passed over. The problem would have been insoluble, had not the Son of God died. God freely forgives, but in order to do it the death of the divine surety must be brought in. It is "for Christ's sake," or "in Christ." It is his own gracious act; and that he might bestow the grace righteously, he gave his Son, having "so loved the world." Then, when the Son of God became the "son of man," his life was at his own disposal. He had "power to lay it down," or to retain it (John x. 17, 18). But he laid it down voluntarily; he "yielded up" his spirit to his Heavenly Father (Mat. xxvii. 50); he "chose to die"—because he "loved us." This wonderful fact, and the great truth which it involves, we commemorate in the Lord's supper, and we shall celebrate it through all eternity. We are "bought with a price." What did it cost to procure our pardon! And now, how shall so great love affect us? May it soften our hearts, and cause us to see and feel that forgiven sinners must not be unforgiving!

2. The exalted privilege of the believer.

"As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John i. 12). "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" (1 John iii. 1). Believers are God's "sons and daughters" (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18). His treatment of them corresponds with the relation. They are "dear" to him—his "beloved children." He loves them. He cares for them. He cherishes them. He provides for their education and support. He watches over all their interests. He exercises parental discipline for their good. He assures them of "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" for them (1 Pet. i. 4); and he so orders all his dispensations as to conduce to preparation for its enjoyment. He is "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. i. 3), and "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Psalm ciii. 13).

Is it so? What, then, is the dictate of grati-

tude? Does it not enforce love—obedience—submission? Must not the Heavenly Father's will become supreme law? And as the Saviour himself "did always those things that pleased his Father, will not the same spirit, dwelling in his people, produce likeness to him, so that pleasing God shall distinguish them from all others? Now, our Father's will, in reference to one class of duties, is specially revealed to us in the text. The evidence of sonship is to be found in our obedience. If we are the children of God, we must be like God. If the Father forgives, the children must be forgiving. An unforgiving man is no Christian. The Lord has taught us to say, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Luke xi. 4); and he has solemnly affirmed that "if we do not forgive, neither will our Father which is in heaven forgive our trespasses" (Mark xi. 26).

The Lord speaks to us in the words which we have contemplated this morning. How applicable they have been to the state of Christian society in every age, the student of ecclesiastical history very well knows. A striking illustration is contained in a letter from Clement of Rome to the Church at Corinth, where divisions and disorders, similar to those referred to by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to that Church, continued to spread their baleful influence. The letter was written about twelve years after the apostolic document. It is an ecclesiastical gem of the highest value. Sharply rebuking the Corinthians for the continuance of strife among them during so many years, Clement says—"Wherefore are there among you contentions, anger, dissensions, divisions, and war? Have we not one God, and one Christ? Is there not one Spirit of grace, which has been poured upon us, and one calling in Christ? Why do we rend and tear the members of Christ, and divide his own body, and proceed to such an extreme of madness as to forget that we are members one of another?" And again:—"Who, therefore, among you is generous? Who is merciful? Who is full of charity? Let him say, 'If sedition, and discord, and divisions have arisen on my account, I will depart;—I will go away;—I will do whatever you will, whatever the Church may direct: only let the flock of Christ live in peace, with its appointed elders'" (Ch. 46, 54).

But "it must needs be that offences come" (Mat. xviii. 7). They have broken out continually ever since. Perhaps there is scarcely a church to be found, in which, at some period of its history, disorders have not arisen, occasioned at first by individual quarrels; these, if not speedily settled, have involved member after member, till the whole society has been split into parties. Nor is this evil confined to any one denomination. All are exposed to it, and all, at times, fall into the snare, and suffer accordingly. The melancholy effects are, the withdrawal of the divine presence and the decay of the cause, while the ungodly world look on and gleefully exclaim, "Aha! so would we have it!"

Brethren, these things ought not so to be. Wherever they exist, they paralyse the church's energies, and hinder the progress of truth. Of this we must all be painfully conscious. Let us, then, here resolve, as in the presence of the Heavenly Master and Lord, that we will give more earnest heed to the admonitions of his holy word on this point. Let us renew our words of consecration, and yield ourselves to his blessed will, that by the help of grace we may hereafter exemplify the "meekness and gentleness of Christ." And finally, let us once more reverently listen while he speaks to us by the mouth of his inspired servant, and says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour."

For the Christian Messenger

IN MEMORIAM.

MRS. CATHERINE MANNING.

The subject of this notice was the widow and relict of James E. Manning, Esq., of Bridgewater, who departed this life, after a few weeks of severe illness, on the 22nd of March last, in the 65th year of her age. She was a person of a remarkably reserved and quiet disposition, and of very amiable and peaceable character, and is said to have scarcely ever been known to exhibit anger in her life. She had, however, never made a public profession of religion. In early life she had been instructed in the principles of the Church of England, but during the greater portion of her mature years was strongly attached to the principles of the Baptists, and was an attentive and earnest listener to the word of God whenever opportunity offered and circumstances permitted her to attend. In her last days she was a patient sufferer, never repining at her affliction, but expressing her willingness to endure whatever her Heavenly Father laid on her; adding "God has been very good, indeed, to me, far beyond what I deserve." She was a lover of secret prayer, and is known to have constantly maintained it. The visits of her pastor and other christian friends afforded her great solace, and seemed to lighten her spirit. Her beloved children and other friends were unremitting in their affectionate attention upon her, and all that medical skill could devise was attempted to seek to relieve her pain and prolong her life; but she gradually sank. At length feeling her end was near she resigned herself into the care of her Saviour, and with scarcely a struggle passed